

Could a book end peer pressure?

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Peer pressure is an immense issue in teens today. Many harmful things such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, violence, and shoplifting are brought on by peer pressure. Whether one's motivation to do these things is to make friends, fit in, become popular, or avoid being bullied, the main force causing him/her to act in this way is peer pressure.

The “cool kids” tell someone to do these things, and for whatever reason, he/she obeys. Many people have tried to come up with a way to eliminate the issue of peer pressure entirely; however, this is not possible. There will always be those “cool kids” trying to convince innocent teens to partake in unacceptable activities and take up inappropriate behaviors. Although stopping these “cool kids” or completely isolating oneself from them is unachievable, there are still ways to help reduce the number of teens who fall into bad habits. Teaching students not to conform to the foul ways of their peers is the best realistic solution.

Yes, people are trying to do this already; Above the Influence commercials are shown very frequently on almost every TV channel, teachers and mentors talk about the negative effects of certain behaviors, and there is, of course, that ever popular slogan, “Just say no”. You would think that being constantly surrounded by these messages would cause teens to start following them, yet many teens do exactly what they are discouraging. Increasing the number of commercials and lectures will just cause teens to learn how to better ignore the omnipresent warnings. This important message must be shared in a different way – by making the book Anthem by Ayn Rand required reading in all schools. Anthem blends a futuristic story and Rand's governmental beliefs with a subtle theme of individualism.

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Set in an extreme Collectivist society, Anthem is the tale of a boy who risked punishment by daring to be different from everyone else. This boy, Equality 7-2521, lives in a world that has taken selflessness to a new extreme. People have no choices they can make; they are assigned names comprised of a number and a word promoting unity, their jobs are chosen for them at age 15, and having kids is a shameful, humiliating process. Mothers are separated from their children at birth, and interaction between males and females is forbidden. Everyone is taught that something can only be good if done all together, and anything done alone is evil, no matter how helpful it may be.

Everything is done for the common good, and the whole group mentality is so intense that speaking the word “ I” just once is punishable by death. Equality has always been smarter than everyone else, and his curiosity has gotten him into trouble countless times. A rapid series of events cause Equality to reevaluate his society. Ultimately he decides to use his own judgment and live his life the way he believes is right instead of what society has preached to him since his birth. Peer pressure is currently a major issue that causes teens to do things they would not normally do. People have put lots of time and money into trying to teach kids to not give into peer pressure, yet their efforts are not working.

Anthem teaches people of all ages about the importance of being an individual and making your own choices while also teaching about government and, most of all, entertaining the reader. Requiring teens to read Anthem in school won't solve the problem of peer pressure, but it will

help teens decide what they themselves think is right and encourage them to follow their personal morals and beliefs.