

Construct comparisons of coming of age stories



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Compare & Contrast the Ideas and Techniques explored by 2 authors in their construct of a Coming of Age Story

Stephen Chbosky, the director of the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and Becky Albertalli, the author of *Love Simon* teaches the audience the process of coming of age. Chbosky's film follows Charlie's journey as he enters his first year of high school and encounters his first experiences with relationships, drugs and alcohol, bullying and love while also discovering his sexuality. In a similar way, Albertalli's novel follows sixteen-year-old Simon through all his high school struggles, particularly as he is gay. Both texts include the ideas of relationships, sexuality, school, and love through the employment of many techniques such as characterisation, imagery, colour, sound, dialogue.

Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film both convey experiences that occur during school, such as being exposed to alcohol and drugs for the first time. Chbosky highlights every aspect of high school life especially for those who are introverted. Charlie struggles with social skills as Michael, his former best friend, committed suicide. This led to Charlie not leaving the house all summer, so as his first day of high school approaches, he struggles to make friends. After a few weeks, he meets Patrick and Sam who becomes his first friends at his new high school. Patrick begins to expose Charlie to the world of girls, drugs and alcohol. Albertalli symbolizing the coming of age process by displaying alcohol and drugs in her novel *Love Simon*. Simon clearly displays himself as someone who is not interested in alcohol. As Simon attends his first party where alcohol is present, he feels immediately isolated. He is offered a beer and feels obligated to take it as he narrates, “

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My heart is doing some noticeable thumping” (Page 43) The presence of alcohol straightaway marks that Simon is coming of age as this is contrasting to Simon’s typical parties with games and junk food. Similarly, in Chbosky’s film, Charlie was offered a brownie which included illicit drugs, he begins to say bizarre sayings. Sam then asks” So I’m guessing you’ve never been high before?” (22. 21) explaining that is new to the idea of drugs as this is his first time being placed in this environment. Simon in Albertalli’s novel feels discomfort being present at this party, also how he dislikes the beer emphasizes his discomfort with the changes he’s undergoing as he comes of age. Simon continues to drink the beer even though he despises the taste as he feels pressured to do the actions that his peers are partaking in. Bullying is also an aspect which is covered throughout both texts. Bullying is well known issue in today’s society especially relating to those who suffer from mental illnesses and to those who are homosexual. During both these scenes when alcohol and drugs are present, the setting appeared to be very dark and dull, creating a very dramatic setting and showing that the character has reached a dark time in their life. Charlie clearly displays that he has a mental health issue as he struggles to find happiness throughout the film Chbosky emphasizes the physical and mental harm that is caused by bullying. In the scene where Patrick is punched by Brad in front of the cafeteria as he attempts to reveal their relationship, Patrick then reveals how unhappy he is to Charlie. Charlie also becomes isolated from the group when he kisses his crush Sam even though she has a boyfriend, this causes him to spiral back into depression and escalating the visions he has of his traumatic past. Albertalli’s novel also features aspects of bullying, present when Simon was bullied and discriminated for his sexuality “ White shouldn’t be the

default any more than straight should be the default. There shouldn't even be a default." (pg. 269). Simon thinks it's unfair that certain races or sexualities are the default. School is a major setting in both Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film to convey the idea of coming of age.

Sexuality is a reoccurring theme in Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film, especially *Love Simon* where the protagonists develop sexuality during the story. Simon, from Albertalli's text, is gay but is too afraid to come out and has kept it a very well-hidden secret for an extended period of time.

Chbosky's film explores various aspects of love relationships, which include both homosexual and heterosexual. These two aspects are issues that teenagers deal with during their transition to adulthood. This is shown during the movie when Charlie walks in on Patrick kissing a person of the same gender (23. 21). Charlie doesn't know how to respond as he has never been placed in this situation before. Albertalli's text mainly focuses on homosexual relationships with Blue and Simon, " Being secure in your masculinity isn't the same as being straight." (p 65). Whereas, Chbosky shows how Charlie struggles to deal with his love for Sam. Charlie tries to distinguish between love for her as a friend or as a romance. As Charlie explores these types of love, it helps to display the challenges that relationships can have. Albertalli reveals through the novel the struggles Simon has, which is that he is hesitant to come out as gay to his family as they battle to adapt with change even though it's an expected part of growing through adolescence. After many exchanges of messages to Blue, Simon begins to understand himself making him more confident " I guess I didn't really think of myself as interesting until I was interesting to Blue." (pg. 19). Similarly, in Chbosky's

film, Charlie and Sam begin a romantic journey together. Chbosky presents their relationship during the scene where Charlie and Sam together perform “ Touch-a Touch-a Touch Me” from The Rocky Horror Picture Show. During this scene, Sam plays the character “ Janet”, who presents very flirtatious actions, however, Charlie is quite clueless on how to react to Sam’s sexual energy, due to his personality being so introverted. This scene helps demonstrate Charlie’s dilemma with Sam throughout the film. Sexuality is a major theme in both Albertalli’s novel and Chbosky’s film which successfully conveys the idea of coming of age.

Relationships are a major theme throughout both texts. Characterisation is a technique which tells the audience about the character which is relevant to the storyline. Chbosky has created Charlie in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to show the characteristic of shyness and is socially awkward as he enters his first year of high school, making it difficult to make friends or have a connection with anybody. On Charlie’s first day of school, he was friendless and lost all social skills after not socializing with anyone over the summer break due to his friend committing suicide. This is similar to the situation in Albertalli’s text. Simon immediately insists he has several best friends- Leah, Nick and Abby. While he has known them for years, he knows little about their life outside of the friendship. He thinks that they don’t need to connect on a deeper emotional level as he struggles to express his feelings.

Comparing the major characters in Albertalli’s novel and Chbosky’s film, they both are socially awkward and struggle to understand their friends, but most importantly themselves. Charlie in Chbosky’s text, first relationship occurs at a high school football game, where he meets Sam and his stepbrother

Patrick. The trio began to become closer as at a high school party where they toast Charlie to welcome him as their new friend. Charlie appears as if he is about to cry as for the first time, he feels as if he belongs somewhere as he said, " I didn't think anyone noticed me" (25: 20). This contrasts to Albertalli's text where Simon builds a strong intimate email-based relationship with another gay student as his high school who is also closeted, and sends him messages anonymously. It all began with Blue posting on an anonymous social media app that he is gay, Simon immediately messages him saying he knows exactly how Blue feels. While Simon doesn't know who Blue is, he builds a strong connection with him, as he becomes very trusting of him, feeling like he has a sense of belonging. The theme of relationships is a major aspect of Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film to convey the idea of coming of age.

Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film both focus on the theme of love and situation arising from the relationships turn into experiences of love. Characterisation is present in Chbosky's film which was developed throughout the entire film. This technique allows the reader to view the different love relationships that become formed throughout the film with Charlie and his friends. This shows their personalities and how Charlie interacts with each of them individually. Albertalli has constructed her novel so each chapter switches between the story narrative and emails to and from Simon and Blue; keeping the audience engaged. This shows how their relationship and love is developing for each other. The majority of the story is told from the first person, in present tense, by Simon. His narrative voice is defined by the character, his perspective as well as the situation. The text

written in first person shows his love for Blue from his perspective. However, in Chbosky's film, it focuses on Charlie, the main character as he enters high school for the first year and all the struggles that he may encounter. Using the first-person narrator helps to develop inner thoughts and emotions; making this effective as it adds extra details to the story. An example can be seen through Charlie and Sam. With the use of the first-person model, the audience can see from Charlie's perspective how socially awkward Charlie is. He begins to feel emotions towards Sam " I would really like to ask Sam on a date someday. I really would" Charlie shows genuine emotion towards Sam throughout the novel, expressing realism. As Simon in Albertalli's novel is a closed off, introverted person, he struggles to find someone to trust, however Blue allows him to open up and be more himself. " There's something about you that makes me want to open up, and that's slightly terrifying for me" (pg. 61). Similarly, in Chbosky's film, Charlie is very introverted until he meets Patrick and Sam. Charlie later opens up to Sam saying, " I love you too" (49: 00). This is his first time expressing his feelings and his characterisation has developed greatly throughout the film. The theme of love is developed through the technique of characterisation in Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film to successfully convey the idea of coming of age.

Albertalli's novel, *Love Simon* and Chbosky's film *Perks of Being a Wallflower* both explore the idea of coming of age well through the use of themes of school, relationships, sexuality and love. The setting of school is very comparable in both texts as each author used the idea of alcohol and drugs to show the coming of age process once the characters become exposed to

new environments. The main characters in Albertalli's novel, *Simon* and Chbosky's film, *Charlie*, both struggle to create and maintain relationships with both genders due to their personality traits of socially awkward. Sexuality is a major theme explored through both texts as the two authors explore homosexuality and heterosexuality. Love is another frequently reoccurring theme which occurs in both Albertalli's novel and Chbosky's film seen clearly in their main characters. Overall, both texts illustrate the process of coming of age very well in similar ways as well as contrasting ways.

Word Count: 1903

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