

the glass castle: life should be taught somehow

Literature



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BUSTER**

After several years of keeping her childhood a secret, Jeannette Walls decided it was time to write a memoir, *The Glass Castle*. Walls and her siblings experience a childhood that consists of hardships and struggles that most children do not have a clue about today. *The Glass Castle* assesses Wall's struggles as a child and as a young adult living in extreme conditions. Walls always managed to keep her head up throughout her harsh childhood. For example, " What I did know was that I lived in a world that at any moment could erupt into fire. It was the sort of knowledge that kept you on your toes" (Walls 34).

On a day to day basis, Walls never knew what to expect because her family had numerous conflicts in their lives such as alcoholism, selfishness, poverty, homelessness, and much more. *The Glass Castle* should be open to readers of any age because the elements that are considered " controversial" are vital to Wall's storyline of her childhood. Elements that are considered " controversial" for banning of the novel are the profanity used by the characters, violence the Wall's family goes through, and the alcoholism which is a huge part of who Wall's dad is.

In order to understand Wall's reasoning for deciding to write *The Glass Castle*, it is important to keep these elements in the text. The excessive amount of profanity used in the novel is vital to help readers understand the storyline because the profanity is an enormous part of Wall's childhood. When Walls was three years old, she was burned in a cooking accident. Ever since then, Walls liked to play with fire. " I lit pieces of paper and little piles of brush and held my breath until the moment when they seemed about to blaze up and out of control.

Then I'd stomp on the flames and call out the curse words Dad used, like ' Dumb-ass sonofabitch' and ' Cocksucker'" (Walls 15). These words are important to have in the text because it helps you get a better grasp on the characters' personalities. These swear words also help you understand the lack of good parenting skills that Walls and her siblings deal with on a day-to-day basis. Rex is considered the " Mr. Tough Guy" in the book. Wall's parents progress in several screaming fights throughout the novel.

For example, " Dad stuck his head out the window as he drove, hollering at mom, called her a ' stupid whore' and a ' stinking cunt' and ordering her to get back into the car" (Walls 43). This profanity is necessary for this situation because it displays Rex's character and how he deals with verbal fights. If this profanity were missing, readers would not understand how intense Rex becomes in verbal fights, especially under the influence of alcohol. After having to flee once again, the Walls family moves in with Grandma Smith for a while.

Grandma Smith is trying to comb through Wall's hair, but it was not working. For instance, " Doesn't that goddamn lazy-ass mother of yours ever comb your hair? " (Walls 91). The profanity in this scene is key to help you analyze other perspectives, such as Grandma Smith's. You learn that Walls and her siblings are not the only ones who believe they are growing up through a rough childhood. Jeannette Walls and her family experience several incidents of violence in the novel. Violence is vital to the novel because it is a part of the person Walls is today.

One night, Walls thought there was something under her bed and it scared her. She immediately went to Rex and told him about it. Rex told Jeannette

to go grab his knife for him. " I got dad his knife with the carved bone handle and the blade of blue German steel, and he gave me a pipe wrench and we went looking for demon" (Walls 36). This situation is significant to have in the storyline because it confirms how Rex is irresponsible by letting his little girl get a knife for him when he could have got the knife. Also, it makes you think that Rex could be taking the situation too far by getting a knife.

An accident could cause something bad to happen in result of Rex using the knife. Jeannette, herself, experiences violence in the novel. After moving to a town called Battle Mountain in the desert, Jeannette met a kid named Billy Deel. One afternoon, Walls was playing hide and seek with neighborhood kids. After hiding in a small tool shed, Billy, who was not playing hide and seek opened the door. Walls knew she was in trouble when Billy started to get close to her. " Billy smushed his face against mine, then grabbed my hair and made my head bend sideways and stuck his tongue in my mouth.

It was slimy and disgusting, but when I tried to pull away, he pushed in toward me. The more I pulled, the more he pushed, until he was on top of me and I felt his fingers tugging at my shorts" (Walls 86). This passage from the novel is an experience of sexual violence. It is important for this scene to be in the text because it gives readers a better clutch on Wall's rough experiences during her childhood and how she has grown to be a well-off independent person. Not only did Walls and her siblings go through hard times themselves, but also they watched their parents go through extreme violence.

Rex and Rose Mary were having a violent fight. Rose Mary thought she needed a knife to protect herself. Walls describes the situation, " Dad leaned

back. ' A knife fight, eh? ' He grinned. ' Okay, if that's what you want. ' He picked up a knife out of Mom's hand, dropped his own knife, and wrestled her to the floor. We kids pounded on Dad's back and begged him to stop, but he ignored us. At last, he pinned Mom's hands behind her head" (122). The violence in this scene is crucial to the readers because it helps you learn why Jeannette and her siblings had different views on their parents.

It is also crucial to the storyline because it confirms why Jeannette and her siblings want to move and get away from their parents in the end of the novel. With that being said, Wall's Mother was not the only person who Rex abused in the novel. Rex and Jeannette got into an argument that led to violence. " I expected him to turn and walk away, but there were six stinging blows on the backs of my thighs, each accompanied by a whistle of air. I could feel the welts rising even before I straightened up" (Walls 220). Wall's father was whipping her with a leather belt.

This violent act is essential to have in the novel because it helps you see how strong and stable Walls became after her childhood years. Without these examples, the novel would have its readers questioning why Wall's had such an extreme childhood. Alcoholism is vital to the storyline in the novel because alcohol is an enormous part of Rex Wall's life. If alcohol were not mentioned in the novel, then readers would not understand why Rex is angry and violent majority of the time. Rex becomes more violent than he already is when he is under the influence of alcohol.

Rex becomes angry with Rose Mary because they disagree on how many months Rose Mary has been pregnant for. " Dad, who had fixed someone's transmission earlier that day and used the money he'd made to buy a bottle

of tequila, said she probably lost track somewhere” (Walls 42). This information is imperative to have within the text because it shows how Rex purchases alcohol when he is frustrated with a certain situation. The family is in extreme poverty and in need of food, yet Rex still spends the only money the family has on alcohol. Rex is selfish in this case by not putting his family before his alcoholic needs.

After moving to a new run-down house, Rex Walls tries repairing one of the holes. Rex could not do the job without a beer. “ He told me to fetch him his wire cutters, a hammer, and some roofing nails. He finished off the beer he was drinking, snipped the can open with his wire cutters, hammered it flat, and nailed it over the hole. He needed more patches, he said, so he had to go out and buy another six-pack. After he polished off each beer, he used the can to repair one of the holes. And whenever a new hole appeared, he’d get out his hammer, down a beer, and do another patch job” (Walls 101).

This alcohol scene is important to have in the text because it indicates how serious Rex’s alcohol problem really is. He cannot fix things without having multiple beers. Rex drinks on a regular basis, not just a special occasion. After moving to a new town and attending a new school, a classmate named Dinitia bullies Walls. Walls felt like she has nobody to talk to about the situation; “ I thought of discussing the fighting with dad, but I didn’t want to sound like a whiner. Also, he’d rarely been sober since we had arrived in Welch, and I was afraid that if I told him, he’d show up at school snockered and make things even worse” (140).

This information is obligatory because Rex gets angry when he is drunk and it shows how Walls feels about telling Rex problems that she is having at

school because he is always drunk. In another case, Rex asks Jeannette for money so he can purchase beer and cigarettes. Walls gave him the money and she knew it was a bad idea. “ That was two days worth of food. A half gallon of milk, a loaf of bread, a dozen eggs, two cans of jack mackerel, a small bag of apples, and some popcorn” (Walls 209). This scene is important because you learn how Rex truly does become dependent on his alcohol.

Even worse, Rex puts alcohol before his children and his wife. In an article written by Hattie Bernstein, several different people within the article disapprove of the elements such as, profanity, violence, and alcoholism. A high school English teacher taught this novel to the class and received several emails from parents regarding the novel. Mr. and Mrs. Pucci’s daughter claimed that she felt uncomfortable reading the book, so she brought it home for her parents to read it. Mr. and Mrs. Pucci thought that their daughter could not read the book because of the level of difficulty.

The Pucci’s took a look at *The Glass Castle*. “ She showed it to us and we read it and we were shocked. The language was very offensive” (Bernstein 2013). The Profanity in the book can be offensive at times, but it is important that it is in the novel because it would not be a memoir if Walls left the profanity out. The Profanity tells the true story of Wall’s childhood and readers need to be aware of it because not everyone has an easy childhood. In another case, a person from the article agrees with this repute. “ I think controversial things in a book are a good opportunity for discussion,” Kulvete said.

“ You can’t shelter your kids from what happens in life, and the pages of a book are a heck of a lot better for learning than on the street” (Bernstein <https://assignbuster.com/the-glass-castle-life-should-be-taught-somehow/>

2013). With that being said, *The Glass Castle* can teach its readers a life lesson and make them realize that their childhood is not as bad as they think it is. On the other hand, parents may not want their kids to ever learn profanity, violence, or alcoholism. A school board member has a different thought on *The Glass Castle*. Dr. James O'Shea recalls there being controversy over several books including human sexuality and explicit violence.

Dr. James O'Shea believes that academics are the most important thing to learn about. For example, "As a school board member and a parent, I think more academic challenge, more learning about the world is a better thing" (Bernstein 2013). Academic challenge is important in life, but it is not the only thing that is important in life. Reading a book like *The Glass Castle*, can make the readers learn to appreciate their lives more. On the other hand, Walls speaks out about her reasoning for writing *The Glass Castle* after receiving letters from young readers.

In the article "Doing The Right Thing" a critic mentioned that the novel articulates a good story but questioned whether it was art. After receiving letters and hearing about the critic, Walls became frustrated. "I don't give a rat's behind whether it's art or not," Walls says, "I don't need to be called creative or a genius--in fact, I would sort of reject that" (Netzer 2013). There is no way to prove that the novel is a true story, but Walls anticipated for several years to talk about her childhood.

She did not want anyone to know the harsh conditions she grew up in as a child and it was hard for her to get it down on paper. Walls justifies that she aims to do what all great writers do--to communicate an emotional truth.

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Walls states, " To me, that's what it's all about," she says. " It's not about awards or getting on the best-seller lists, it's about hitting this emotional chord with your readers and having them say, 'Huh,' and opening an emotional and intellectual and verbal dialogue where people just start sharing things.

It's about storytelling" (Netzer 2013). Even though Walls does not care about her books being on the best-seller lists, readers may choose not to read her books because of the style of her writing. After years of hiding her intense childhood, Walls finally decided to let it out on paper, which eventually turned into a novel, *The Glass Castle*. Profanity, violence, and alcoholism are vital elements to have in *The Glass Castle's* storyline. The profanity in the novel helps its readers understand the characters' personalities better.

The profanity is also a vast part of the environment Wall's and her siblings grew up in. The violence allows readers to get a better perception on Wall's childhood and the strong, independent person she has become today. Rex's alcohol addiction reflects what kind of a parent he is to his kids. His addiction also informs readers why he is angry and violent throughout Wall's childhood. Without these elements, the storyline would not only be misunderstood, but it would not affect its readers the same.