

Blue shades of hope



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

To add an element to a story, authors tend to use colors to allude to specific details, thoughts, or feelings of characters. Judith Guest's novel, *Ordinary People*, is a coming of age tale which forces readers to analyze the different characters while they experience loss, depression, and anger. The story takes place through the eyes of a father and a son, Calvin and Conrad, as they share their views on living in suburbia after the loss of a beloved family member and a suicide attempt. The color blue is mentioned repeatedly, but when the main character perceives it as anxiety, it seems the author has intended otherwise. Throughout the book, Judith Guest uses the color blue to signify hope since it is the blue shade of Jeannine's skirt, the blue in Berger's eyes, and the blue car and outfit of the woman Conrad meets at the library. To start, hope is signalled through the color blue by how the author mentions the color of Conrad's girlfriend's skirt.

On Conrad's first day back to school he notices a new girl. Guest writes, "A small, neat looking redhead in a blue skirt, tan jacket is hurrying along the street, her books in her arms" (17). Literally, he is observing this unfamiliar girl, Jeannine, on his first day by noticing the colors she is wearing. On a deeper level, the blue of her skirt could be symbolizing hope for the future, hope to come because they mutually help each other get better. The author could be partially foreshadowing or symbolizing hope because later in the story, Jeannine and Conrad are dating. Conrad admits that she makes him feel stronger and needed. Due to Guest's purposeful inclusion of the blue pigment in Jeannine's skirt, it shows one way how blue represents hope.

Secondly, Judith Guest uses the color blue to signify hope through Berger's eyes. After some thinking, Calvin decides he wants to visit Dr. Berger for

himself. Calvin's first description of him is, " His hair is a dark and fuzzy halo about his head; his eyes, a sharp, stinging blue" (Guest 145). Right off the bat, Calvin notices Dr. Berger's eyes and uses adjectives like " sharp, stinging" to describe their bright nature. Below the surface, " sharp, stinging" are adjectives normally used when describing the sun, which gives light and life to everything. When the sun is out, people tend to be in a happier mood and Guest was trying to show the happiness that is to come for Calvin. For Calvin, he sees this hope (the sun) within Berger's eyes. By the the bright blue eyes of the psychologist, Guest was able to show hope through the color.

Lastly, Judith Guest has the color blue denote hope when Conrad encounters a woman with a blue car. When at the library, Conrad is being watched by a strange woman. After leaving the building, she comes up and compliments him on his good looks. After returning home and looking in the mirror Conrad thinks to himself, " What will he have to pay for all of this, for thinking well of himself?... Whatever the price, it is worth it" (Guest 134). After Conrad is complemented by the woman in the blue car, he ultimately assumes the worst is to come if he thinks fondly of himself. But in depth, even though he feels guilty at first for thinking well of himself, he realizes that it's okay to feel self confident. This confidence is a huge step for Conrad. It show's how he is improving by getting away from depression and his mental state is becoming more positive; the fact that the lady had a blue car was just hinting at this event. The lady with the blue car gave Conrad the confidence to admit that he is good looking. Judith Guest has hope signified by the color blue since it was the color of the woman's car.

To wrap up, Guest subliminally hints that hope is conveyed through the color blue throughout the story by the different events that occur. When first seeing Jeannine, Conrad notices her blue skirt which symbolizes hope for the future; consequently, later in the book she helps Conrad to grow stronger. Also, blue applies to Calvin when he notices it in Dr. Berger's eyes. This hope lets Calvin know that things will get better. In addition, the strange woman with the blue car allowed Conrad to actually feel good about himself and accept that he's making progress by working through his depression. Overall, the way Guest uses to the color blue shows that there may be subliminal signs that others haven't noticed, but have been there all along. Through analysis, authors love to use colors (blue) to create shades of layers of shades throughout.