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Definition of a Good Book

By Austin Reese

Critically acclaimed books are collectively missing one crucial factor: my interest. I do not believe the latest book that “saved” a friend group of elite personas is indicative of literacy genius. I am sorry, Oprah; I think self-help books are boring. Alas, Reese Witherspoon; I do not want to read about how using the bathroom in the woods helped mourn the loss of a parent. Forgive me *Grey’s Anatomy* fans, but Shondra should stick to producing. For me, the best books have an active voice, relatable characters, and originality.

An active voice is imperative for a good book. My favorite types of books use language to describe the action happening, not the setting and its implications. For example, in *Percy Jackson*, Rick Riordan wrote, “I nodded, looking at Rachel with respect. You hit the lord of the Titans in the eye with a blue plastic hairbrush.” Compare this to *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald: “She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless and with her chin raised a little as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall.” One of these is considered an American classic and is taught in school curricula across the country. I’ll give you a hint, it is the example you had to reread. When using active dialog to keep the plot moving, the book maintains the reader’s attention and curiosity. A good book should not feel like they are trying to meet a certain word count while overusing passive adjectives and adverbs.

Along with this, relatable characters give a good book the foundation it needs to build upon. For instance, an amazing book by Adam Silvera, *They Both Die at the End*, follows two average eighteen-year-olds: Mateo and Rufus. Mateo is a middle-class Latinx teen who enjoys

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video games, while Rufus is a white survivor of the foster care system. Compare this to the ever-popular *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer, which follows Bella and Edward's tumultuous love spiral. Both characters are well-off financially, both white, and the only conflict they have is centered around their star-crossed love life. Give me a break. The only character that is built upon realistic struggle is Jacob, who is a racist stereotype about Native Americans. Still, *Twilight* sold billions of copies, received a blockbuster movie deal, and was translated into many different languages. This is a blemish on the face of literacy because it does not encapsulate most readers. I enjoyed Silvera's book leagues beyond Meyer's because the characters were people I could and would want to know.

Lastly, a good book needs originality. Depleting the stock of useful tropes is a byproduct of the commercialization of literature. Still, it is important that the story can stand on its own. For example, Stephen Chbosky's book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a truly original work. The story plays on coming-of-age tropes so well that the realization of Charlie's molestation astounds the reader as it is outside of the realm of normativity. By contrast, pop goddess Taylor Swift swears by *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. This book is a carbon copy of the best-selling books in the "women between thirty-fifty age range." The entire story diffuses into a love story within the deep South that does not differentiate itself from the millions of cotillion novels. The "manic pixie dream girl" is chased after by men for her fetishized difference from the norm. I have read this before, and I know where it will go. I do not want to waste my time reading a different shade of the same hue; I deserve more than that as a reader.