

Family Literacy Night is intended to enrich students' experiences by the student and parent read the same book; meet at the school and share with others what they felt were important points in the story that they had read. My son brought home a book titled "Uglies". My first thought after reading the cover about a society "where being pretty was everything"; was, "Couldn't he have found something less superficial than a book about models?" But, as I began to read; I was quickly reminded of the old lesson, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

It wasn't more than a ½ page into the book that I realized that this was no 'pretty-face' modeling story. This book, by Scott Westerfeld; has substance and a real message woven into the 400 plus pages of "Uglies". I was so engrossed in the story, the characters, and the messages that it took me less than one day to read it.

The book is about a post-apocalyptic society that attempts keep society from things like violence, resource wastes, and prejudice that come with skin color, shape, by giving 16 - year olds a physical (and a secret mental) surgery to make them all 'pretty'. The book also addresses the drawbacks of trying to control such natural human characteristics as individualism and opinions.

One positive aspect of this society, that is cut off from the rest of the 'wild, unknown' world by the security force; are that they found ways to not kill, waste, or destroy natural things like water, animals, and other resources. They recycled all of their water with filters; never having to go outside of the city for more water. They didn't kill animals for furs or food; they never used electric or gas or oil. All of it had been replaced by magnetic energy, solar and water power. Nothing was thrown

away; everything was recycled and every dwelling had a 'closet' that was a recycle bin.

There were flaws in the plan; there were no pets, no hikes to the mountains, no seaside trips to watch the sunset... This society shut them selves off from most every aspect of nature. Food and clothes were replicated at will.

Another positive aspect was that there were no violent crimes. Every member had a wrist band that was hooked into the mainframe computer. This, the people were told; was for their use to freely contact anyone in the city that they wanted to, at any time; or in case they needed instructions on how to use something; they could ask the computer. They did not realize that this was how security and the city officials kept track of everyone in their efforts to keep people from wanting to leave the city and see the outside.

Of course, this effort to keep the population within the city limits was helped by the 'pretty' operation that occurred when one turned 16. The way this society eliminated prejudice was to use the 'pretty' surgery; in which they made everyone's face look practically the same. Unknown to the patient, surgery did something to the brain that virtually eliminated free thought. All of the 'Pretties' tended to think alike and act alike and did exactly what was expected of them, exactly what they were instructed to do with themselves during the first 15 years of their lives.

From the time they had memories, the 'Uglies' – those who were no longer small children living with their parents, but were pre-operation kids who were taught in school and by their parents that they were nobody as people until their 'pretty' surgery.

In this book however, one ‘Ugly’ girl – named Tally - finds her way out of the city limits and to a place called, “The Smoke”. The Smoke utilizes nature, but does not take without putting back. The society exists because someone discovered what the operation did to the brain and tried to resist; their only option was to leave the city and hide – and then try to save as many youths as they could convince to come to The Smoke.

The book is one of a trilogy. The second and third books build upon what the reader has already knows from the previous book; continuing to develop and expand on the social, psychological, governmental, and personal challenges that are taking place within the pages.

Reading this book opened my mind more to consequences of our actions; regardless of how small it seems at the time. This futuristic society had good ideas about wanting to eliminate violent crimes, prejudice, waste, destruction, and greed. But the story reminds us that such prolific ideas are not fixed with so simplified solutions. These negative, but real aspects of humanity require multifaceted answers in order to have any hope of ridding our society of them. Those of us who are motivated, like myself – after reading this book – to try to change the negatives; can not jump in, head first. We have to carefully consider what we propose and the ripple effects thereafter.

This book more than touched me; it motivated me to try to inspire change. I hope to open people’s minds; to educate and enlighten people to see what is possible – for good or bad – and motivate the people individually and collectively to make changes; personally, politically, socially, and environmentally.

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The 'Uglies' society calls ours 'Rusties'. The remnants of our civilization were rusty ruins and a legacy of nearly destroying ourselves and all living things on Earth because of our own greed and self-righteousness. The idea is not too farfetched. Something has to change to save us from ourselves – from our greed, hate, and arrogance. I am no cult leader; I'm just a mom who wants to leave something better for our children. I am taking opportunities to educate people, to get them to open their minds and think, and finally to act. If we don't change something, who will? If nothing else, I hope I left you with something to think about.