

Book Café

Narrator: At Kannik Junior High School in Stavanger, the 10th graders have a book café in their English class twice a semester. At the café, the students are grouped in threes and discuss the novels they have been reading. Oscar, Eva and Rachel have each read different books when they meet for the first book café of the year.

(sound of tea being poured and cookies being munched, small-talk around the table)

Oscar: Yeah... Who should begin?

Rachel: Well, should I go first?

Oscar: Yeah, Rachel.

Rachel: I've read this really great novel by John Green called *The Fault in Our Stars*. Have any of you read it?

Oscar: No, but I have read another book by Green, I don't quite remember... something about Alaska... about a girl getting into all kinds of trouble at a boarding school. It was really cool.

Eva: What was *The Fault in Our Stars* about, Rachel?

Rachel: Well, the main character is Hazel, and the story is told from her point of view. She has terminal cancer and goes to a support group. There she meets Augustus and soon they're flirtatious friends and talk to each other about everything.

Eva: Sounds like a book I would like. So, what happens?

Rachel: There's quite a bit going on. Hazel is obsessed with a book called *An Imperial Affliction*, and soon Augustus also shares this obsession.

Oscar: Obsessed with a book, I mean...?

Rachel: See, the ending in this book within the book, is unresolved and Augustus actually writes to the author in Amsterdam to make him reveal the ending.

Oscar: Oooh, in Amsterdam?

Rachel: Yes, the author lives in Amsterdam. To cut a long story short: Hazel and Augustus travel to Amsterdam to visit the author, who turns out to be pretty awful and Hazel is devastated. But then, that doesn't really mean much when Augustus tells her that his cancer has returned.

Eva: Oh, no. This sounds like a very sad story.

Rachel: It is. Green always seems to have these horrible twists of fate in his stories. And yes, I did get something in my eye at the end.

Oscar: Right, I remember that from the book I read too. In class, we discussed whether Alaska died in a car accident, or if she actually committed suicide?

Eva: Suicide? Seems like Green is writing books about challenging, hot topics. Suicide?

Rachel: He does, but his characters are always so real. They become like somebody you can relate to, like friends. They think, speak and act like teenagers.

Oscar: Rachel, I bet you wrote down some quotations? Seems like a book about young love and terminal cancer demands some kind of philosophical discussion on the meaning of life and death?

Rachel: Must admit I did. I have a book where I write down “words of wisdom”. Let me see... here’s what Green writes: “You don’t get to choose if you get hurt in this world...but you do have some say in who hurts you. I like my choices.”

Oscar: Wow, that’s deep. But... I’m not sure I get it. Theme is about choices too, then?

Rachel: Sure, among other things, of course.

Eva: So, what are the other themes then? What is the story really about? I wish for once that we could just read without analyzing every little detail: Plot, characters, setting, theme and what have you.

Rachel: That’s why I like these café-classes. We can actually discuss what literature means to us. How we understand the books. I think this book made me think about choices and how uncertain everything is in life. Also, I think the book made me realize what it can be like to be different from other kids, and how awkward and lonely that can be. “The world is not a wish-granting factory,” says Augustus.

*Oscar: But why is the book called *The Fault in Our Stars*?*

Rachel (*laughing*): Thought you’d never ask. See, the title comes from a line in Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*; “The fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars/But in ourselves”. Another quotation on my list. This seems to imply that we can only blame ourselves for the bad things that happen in our lives. However, Green toys with the quotation omitting the “not”, and in this way, the title seems to convey almost the opposite. Sometimes the bad things are *not* our fault. Sometimes they just can’t be avoided. Right? It wasn’t Hazel or Augustus’ fault that they had cancer. Perhaps the Norwegian translation of the title, explains it better: *Faen, ta skjebnen*. Not much to do about fate.

Eva: Oh, I think I want to read that book!

*Oscar: Well, I think your book sounded almost as interesting as mine. Let me tell you about *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. But first some more tea and cookies. Would you pass me the sugar, please?*

Eva: Yes, of course, my dear!