

All the Ugly and Wonderful Things Study Guide

All the Ugly and Wonderful Things by Bryn Greenwood

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Contents

[All the Ugly and Wonderful Things Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....3](#)

[Part 1.....6](#)

[Part 2.....10](#)

[Part 3.....14](#)

[Part 4.....17](#)

[Part 5.....21](#)

[Characters.....26](#)

[Symbols and Symbolism.....31](#)

[Settings.....34](#)

[Themes and Motifs.....36](#)

[Styles.....40](#)

[Quotes.....42](#)

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Greenwood, Bryn. *All the Ugly and Wonderful Things*. Thomas Dunne Books, August 9, 2016. PDF version on eBook.

Bryn Greenwood pieces this entire piece together by tethering every character's personal, first person account of events. As one event comes to an end, a different character takes over the conclusion and moves forward. This provides the feeling that the story is being told by an omniscient narrator, although every section is from a first person limited point of view. The entire story is told in present tense with few flashbacks. *All the Ugly and Wonderful Things* tells the story of an abused girl named Wavonna "Wavy" Quinn. Wavy is described as being born in the backseat of a car because her mother, Val, did not care enough to even ensure they had a working car. Val is a drug addict who married Liam, a meth manufacturer and dealer. The novel spans from Wavy's life at age five to her life at roughly age 22.

The novel begins with Wavy's cousin, Amy, describing her experience living with Wavy. She has been put into state custody because both of her parent's have been arrested. Wavy rarely speaks and is afraid to eat in front of people. As the novel progresses, each of the chapters switch to a different character's perspective, which is why we learn about Wavy's mother's tendency to threaten her daughter with the idea of germs. Val has trained Wavy to believe that everything is dirty, from food to other people to Wavy herself. As a result, Wavy is afraid to eat in front of people and she refuses to be touched or to touch anyone else.

Eventually, Wavy settles back in with her mother and father in a farmhouse just outside of a town called Powell. Shortly after arriving there, Wavy develops a fascination with the night sky and frequently sneaks off in the middle of the night to look at constellations. It is on one of these nights when she hears the strong engine sound of a motorcycle speeding along the road to her farmhouse. She runs to see the bike, but frightens the driver enough to cause a crash. A man by the name of Jesse Joe Barfoot Jr. (Kellen) crashes and needs Wavy's help getting help. The eight-year-old Wavy calls her father for help, which is when we discover that Kellen is one of Liam's drug pushers.

Despite the nearly 15 years between them, Kellen and Wavy are instantly drawn to one another. Kellen gives her rides to school and cleans up the farmhouse while she is studying. Wavy makes him elaborate dinners and drags him off into the meadow where she teaches him about constellations. Their friendship quickly develops into romance, but Kellen is not sure if what he is doing is wrong. Almost everyone else thinks that he is taking advantage of a young girl, but in his heart Kellen knows that they truly and genuinely love each other. Wavy is happy to finally have someone who is hers, a person to take care of her and that she can take care of in return. They're outings are sweet and delicate with the cuddling and sense of belonging each of them craves.



Kellen grew up as Jesse Joe Barfoot Jr., a member of the local reservation with a well-known abusive alcoholic father. His childhood was rough and he has never developed a sense of belonging anywhere or to anyone. Similarly, Wavy is growing up in near a meth lab with a mother who is either sleeping or emotionally abusing her and a father who despises her. Kellen and Wavy need each other's non-judgmental love, and they do not care what others think about their age difference. In Wavy's mind, their relationship is natural, but Kellen struggles with how young she is. He wants nothing more than to take care of her and to protect her from any further abuse. He constantly worries that he is taking advantage of her, which makes him try to avoid any sexual contact for as long as he can.

The majority of the novel centers around how each character interprets their relationship. Wavy's mother does not seem to care one way or the other because she is far too busy sleeping her depression away. Brenda, Wavy's aunt, on the other hand believes that Kellen is abusive for being with such a young girl. The two have to fight and claw their way through acceptance and decide to get engaged around the time that Wavy is 13.

The story takes a sharp turn on Wavy's fourteenth birthday in 1973. In the span of one day, Wavy's parents, Val and Liam, are murdered; Wavy has her first sexual encounter with Kellen, and her relatives walk in on her having an intimate moment with Kellen in his auto shop. This is Wavy's crisis. This is the time in her life when her mother is taken away and she must leave Powell without Kellen. He is imprisoned for 10 years for having sex with a minor under the age of 16. During this time Wavy is forced to move in with an overbearing Brenda who takes control of all the financial assets Kellen gives her while he is in jail. Wavy not only loses her fiancé, she also loses her brother, who is taken away by, what turns out to be, his biological father, Sean. Wavy is sent spiraling into depression. Everything important in her life is taken away from her and she is forced to come to terms with feeling alone in a cold world. She tries to stay in contact with her brother, Donal, and Kellen, but all of her letters are rejected.

Wavy manages to graduate high school and make her way into university. She still refuses to talk on most occasions and does not allow people to touch her. She begins to make friends while studying Astrophysics, a way to get closer to the stars, when she learns that Kellen has been released on parole. He has had two hearings, both of which Brenda attended to request that he remain in prison for raping her niece. Wavy is never told about these parole hearings, so she never attends them. Her absence there causes Kellen to despair and wonder if the now college-aged Wavy considers him to be a rapist who took advantage of her at a young age. Kellen leaves prison and tries to set up a life as a registered sex offender. Wavy fights to find him and the two of them reunite in a passionate sex scene. But Kellen rejects her, reminding her that he is violating the terms of his parole by seeing her. The court demands that he never speak to or interact with Wavy in any way. She returns to her university where she researches ways to change the terms of his parole, and she fights long and hard until the judge allows her and Kellen to be together. The story ends with Wavy surrounded by family members at a Christmas dinner. She is married to Kellen and lives with her brother,

Donal. Even Brenda becomes a believer in the connection between the two long-term lovers.

Part 1

Summary

Part 1 spans from March 1975 to July 1878, or from Wavy's life from the age of five to roughly age eight. Wavy is carted around from a temporary foster family to her Aunt Brenda's home, to her grandma's house, and finally back to her mother after she is released from jail. At Brenda's home, Wavy meets her two cousins: Leslie and Amy. Amy is instantly drawn to Wavy. She is different from any of the other children Amy has ever met before. This excites her and makes her want to be a part of this different world where Wavy comes from. They sneak out at night to have their own private adventures, and Wavy does not seem to mind allowing Amy to see her steal food from the neighbors. Amy is described as passing no judgment onto Wavy, which is another reason why Wavy trusts Amy so much. When she leaves her Aunt Brenda's house, Amy is the only person Wavy hugs goodbye.

While Wavy is able to talk, she regularly refuses to engage in any conversations. Wavy does not bond with any of her caretakers except "Grandma," who sticks up for her at school and earns her trust. Wavy grows to trust and care for her grandma until she eventually dies from cancer. On her deathbed, Wavy traces the constellations on her grandma's arm as both a form of affection and a sign of great respect. Wavy is forced to move back in with her mother, Val, shortly after her grandma dies.

Val is depicted as an unstable, and often vindictive, mother who disallows Wavy to eat in front of her and warns Wavy about all the dirty things in the world. Val seems to be very concerned with germs, a fear which is carried down to Wavy. At home, Wavy eats food from the trashcan at night while everyone sleeps, and she helps raise Val's second baby, Donal. Val is not really staying on track with her recovery. The moment Val's husband, and Wavy and Donal's father, shows up, Val immediately agrees to move to a farmhouse in Powell with Liam and abandon her recovery program.

Wavy enjoys spending time in the meadow by the farmhouse. She knows almost all of the constellations because a neighbor by the name of Mr. Arsenikos would look after her when there were bad fights at her previous home. He knew the constellations and he taught Wavy all about them. One night, a motorcycle speeds past Wavy in the meadow. They link eyes and the motorcyclist crashes. The rider's name is Jesse Joe Kellen, and he works as a drug runner for Liam.

Kellen feels an immediate closeness to Wavy and he wants to take care of her. He begins taking her to school on his bike and cleans the farmhouse while Wavy is in class. He wants her to have a clean and happy home to return to. He enters her life quickly and he is the only person Wavy allows to touch her. Their friendship is quite intimate and the two of them depend greatly on one another for comfort and partnership. Wavy often takes Kellen into the meadow, where the two of them enjoy private time and strengthen their relationship from friends to confidants to lovers.



Analysis

Wavy is at the forefront of the story. She is pictured as a strong-willed yet highly damaged little girl. To begin, her mother has spent Wavy's entire life telling her that she is dirty and that all other people are dirty. She frightens Wavy and causes her to think that personal contact with other people will cause her to both give her own filth and receive the filth of the other person. Wavy rejects affection from both her Aunt Brenda and her grandma. Wavy uses her few words to tell her grandma that she has a problem with the fact that her teacher tries to hug her. Actually, Wavy does not use the word "hug." Instead, she complains to her grandma by demonstrating what the teacher is doing to her to make her upset. This could definitely be yet another one of Wavy's tricks to avoid speaking, but there is a high chance that Wavy does not know the word "hug." Readers get no sense of any physical affection between Val and Wavy, and it is apparent that Val is quite germaphobic as well.

As Wavy arrives at her Aunt Brenda's home, Greenwood immediately places a stark juxtaposition between Wavy and her cousins. Brenda's family is described as being a rather cookie cutter happy suburban family. Both Leslie and her sister Amy have had sheltered, happy childhoods. This develops the girls to be trusting and open and relaxed enough to sit around and distract themselves while playing dolls. But Wavy does not participate. While she does not have a problem with her cousins, Wavy is far too serious and removed to enjoy the pleasures of Barbie dolls. Instead, she sits and stares into the distance. It is only at night when Wavy becomes active, and this activity is what brings Amy and Wavy close to one another. These two have a stronger connection than anyone else has with Wavy but we do not clearly know why. Amy is depicted as being slightly bored and extremely curious, which is why she never wants to miss out on any of the adventures Wavy goes on in the nighttime. This is the very first time we see her give affection to anyone. It is not until Wavy trusts her grandma that she begins to touch her. Readers begin to see a pattern develop in Wavy that she speaks and touches the people who do not pass judgment and do not give her a reason to distrust them.

Kellen arrives in the story in Chapter 4. Wavy is magnetically drawn to him before she even sees him. At first, she is drawn to his motorcycle and she comes running to the road to take a look. Likewise, Kellen seems drawn to Wavy enough to cause him to crash when he sees her. Wavy immediately touches him without thinking twice. She even touches his drying blood on a makeshift bandage he uses for his wound. This is a clever approach for the author to set the scene early on for Wavy and Kellen's attraction to one another. Wavy has always rejected touching and talking when it comes to other people. However, Kellen is different for her. Kellen is a person who Wavy wants to touch and tries to talk to. This makes Kellen very special to her, but it also gives him a great deal of responsibility.

We cannot help but wonder what this magnetic attraction will lead to. We know that Wavy is 8 years old, so it is difficult to imagine what a grown man working as a drug runner might need Wavy for. However, the two seem rather adorable together. Kellen takes on a caretaker role instantly when he drives Wavy to school and cleans the



house. This portrays Kellen as the parental figure Wavy has been waiting for. There is a nonverbal agreement between the two of them that they will take care of each other. This care-taking goes both ways because Kellen is described as a sad and lonely young man with a dark past. Wavy is helping him just as much as he is helping her. They seem to depend on each other almost instantaneously.

It is rather fortunate that Kellen wants Wavy around. He is the first person to wholeheartedly have the desire to be with her. Brenda does not really want her, and Brenda's husband demands that Wavy leave to stay with her grandma. Even Wavy's grandma is not overly thrilled to be inconvenienced by taking care of a child while she is aging and in remission. Val shows no signs of wanting Wavy or desiring to take care of her. That is why it is such a relief for Wavy when she meets Kellen and feels the warmth of intimacy with another person. Kellen does not try to change her and he does not judge her. We know that this will encourage Wavy to open up much faster than normal.

We learn that Wavy has a love for stars and constellations. These will eventually develop into a symbol for finding one's bearings and getting centered. Wavy learns about constellations while hiding from violent fights between her mother and men. She develops an understanding of the stars while she is in a safe place with a person she feels comfortable with. Later, we see Wavy use the constellations to soothe her grandma while she lays on her deathbed. This is Wavy's way of soothing her grandmother as she dies. Wavy wants to help her grandmother find her way into the afterlife peacefully. Another time we see Wavy talk about constellations is when she is alone with Kellen. She feels close to him, and she wants to share an intimate part of herself with him. Wavy's way of doing this is by sharing her deep love for something. Kellen is responsive to these star-driven conversations and this becomes a grounding point for the two of them. Wavy uses her attraction to the open night sky as a way to encourage alone time with Kellen. The two of them can be alone in the meadow, where Wavy can relax and experience human contact.

No one notices the amount of time Wavy spends in the meadow. She is not parented by either Liam or Val because Liam is busy making and distributing meth while Val is preoccupied with sleeping her days away and avoiding her life. This fact does not seem to bother or upset Wavy. Instead, she seems fine with her mother's absence. Wavy comments that her mother's unstable nature is frustrating and difficult to deal with. She refers to her mother as either "good mommy" or "bad mommy"—two very different parents who provide very different treatment. Wavy seems happy with the stability of her life without Val being an active participant. Wavy also makes it very clear that she despises being around Liam. She fears Liam, although we do not know why. Wavy makes a meal for Kellen in Chapter 8. However, Wavy's entire outlook on the dinner goes downhill when it is confirmed that Liam will be attending. He is rough with Wavy. He judges her and tries to change her. Liam cannot accept Wavy for who she is, so Wavy has zero trust in him. Meanwhile, Liam is sharing a table with Kellen who learns how Wavy has been raised. Kellen is highly disappointed and infuriated to learn that Wavy has been mistreated. Kellen further proves to Wavy that she can trust him when he physically stops Liam from stabbing Wavy in the face with her own fork for not eating. This brings Wavy and Kellen even closer together. He has now seen what her



life has been like without him, which leads him to strive for making a change in her life from then on.

Discussion Question 1

How does each character cope with their discomfort related to Wavy's quiet nature?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Wavy display her kindness and concern for others?

Discussion Question 3

How is Wavy's interaction with Kellen different from how she interacts with anyone else in the novel?

Vocabulary

loping, skittered, claptrap, bedraggled, raucous, maudlin, chenille, clod, hackles, contemptuous, diatribe, thrall, clattery, leer, calumet

Part 2

Summary

Part 2 describes events that take place from December 1979-August 1982. Kellen and Wavy are attached at the hip. As their friendship and trust deepens, Kellen starts to struggle with the definition of their relationship. He gets very drunk on his birthday and visits Wavy. She invites him to stay in her bed, an action he is not sure if he should take. Kellen lies in bed with Wavy, and she tells him that she loves him, a sentiment Kellen quickly returns.

Kellen kills a man on a drug run for Liam in August 1980. He is spooked from his actions. He returns to Powell and is so scared by Wavy's presence in his home that he draws a gun on Wavy. She has almost no reaction to this. Wavy shows the same lack of surprise when Kellen tells her the truth about why he is so tense.

Kellen registers Wavy for school because she asks him to. Mrs. Norton, Wavy's teacher, writes her name on the board as being insubordinate due to her lack of verbal participation. Kellen learns about these claims of behavioral problems and visits Mrs. Norton to discuss Wavy's special case. The teacher knows Kellen and his family. She judges him and calls him "Mr. Barfoot," his name on the reservation. This embarrasses Kellen and he apologizes for going to Wavy's school.

People begin to notice that Wavy's body is developing curves as she ages. She is close to age 12 in July of 1981, which is when Kellen starts to see attractive curves develop as well. He takes Wavy to street race in the next county over. There, Kellen wins just about every race he enters. After his last race of the night, the losing driver runs over claiming that Kellen won because he cheated. Things turn physical and Wavy gets in the way, getting punched in the face by the losing driver. Kellen sees this happen and beats the driver and his car. They leave the race, but police approach Kellen shortly thereafter. Kellen is accused of assaulting someone at the race. The police are suspicious as to why a young girl like Wavy is out with a man like Kellen that late at night. They take Wavy to the police station until one of her parents can come and confirm that everything is okay.

Wavy and Kellen are now to the point where they cuddle, kiss, and hold hands most places. They continue to spend nights stargazing in the meadow. This location becomes a safe space for Wavy to share her passion for stars while Kellen falls more and more in love with her and with the intimacy she allows while they are there. However, Kellen is an adult who spends time with Liam's friends down on the ranch. This causes Wavy to feel separated from Kellen and jealous of the exploits Kellen has with other women when she cannot be there. She knows that she cannot attend all of the parties Liam hosts, but she does not like Kellen spending time with other women. This makes Wavy feel confused because she does not know their level of commitment to each other yet she wants Kellen to be hers.



One night they witness Val's car speed off from the farmhouse and crash into a ditch. Kellan and Wavy run to the accident. They call an ambulance for Val, who is taken to the hospital with serious injuries. Donal is in the car but is not seriously hurt. Earlier that night, Val got into a huge fight with Sean, which is what led to her speeding off in distress. The farmhouse has been completely torn apart from the fight. Liam feels responsible for this drama. He does not want Val or the kids to be alone. Wavy and Donal show up at the ranch to move in with Liam, but Liam tells Wavy that he only wants to take care of Donal. Wavy walks back to the farmhouse to live alone until Val is released from the hospital. Wavy asks Kellan if she can move in with him, but Kellan thinks that people will find that living situation inappropriate. Then Wavy suggests that they should get married. Kellan laughs because he thinks she is joking. He explains to Wavy that she is far too young to get married. Wavy becomes very upset and accuses Kellan of lying to her about the love he feels for her. Kellan quickly enters the farmhouse and spends hours apologizing to Wavy.

Analysis

Part 2 focuses heavily on the subtle changes that take place in Kellan and Wavy's relationship once Wavy begins to enter into womanhood during puberty. Wavy's physical descriptions change from princess-like blond hair to sexy long legs and soft hair over bare shoulders. Kellan notices this physical change, which makes it difficult for him to express his love for Wavy. His logic tells him that Wavy is too young for all the things Kellan wants to do with her. However, he cannot stop himself or Wavy. When we experience the story from Kellan's point of view, it is clear that he spends a large chunk of his time and energy on self-control. He has seen how Liam and Val treat her, and Kellan does not want to do anything to Wavy that may traumatize her any further. He wants to protect her and keep her an innocent child as long as he can. On the other hand, it is obvious that Kellan is sexually attracted to Wavy. Each time he notices her hard nipple or the curve of her hips he tries to stop himself and think of something else. This change in Wavy's body also causes others to judge the relationship and Kellan's intentions. Butch is a drug runner for Liam. Even he comments that, "I could see [Kellan] doing that kind of thing to his own kid, but she wasn't. She was somebody else's little girl" (122). People are beginning to pay attention to the two of them and what they do when they are together.

Wavy seems to be the only character that does not question the relationship. She never thinks about whether or not their actions are appropriate or acceptable by society's standards. Wavy never stops to think about what is right or what is wrong. She trusts Kellan more than any other person she has ever interacted with. He makes her feel safe and cared for. She knows how she feels and she never considers either of their ages to be a barrier. Wavy is definitely aware of the age difference, though. She spies on Kellan at one of the many parties they have down at the trailers. She sees Kellan getting a hand job from a strange woman and she knows that Kellan occasionally gives other women rides on his motorcycle. This turns to jealousy. The fact that Kellan is getting sexual favors from other girls does not bother Wavy very much. She is still far too young to fully understand how to sexually please Kellan. What Wavy becomes jealous of is



that this is a stark reminder that Kellen, like everything else in her life, is not actually hers. Kellen has a separate life from the one he has with Wavy. He has a job and goes on runs for Liam. Kellen goes to parties that Wavy is not allowed to attend. This separation bothers Wavy much more than the hard job she sees him receive.

Wavy desperately wants something or someone to belong to her. Val raised Wavy with the main rule that nothing belongs to her. This quote is seen three times in Part 2 alone (Pages 124, 135, and 145). We see this idea throughout much of Wavy's life. Even food is not considered to belong to Wavy. Val frequently throws it out and chooses not to feed Wavy anything. She feels as if her friendship with Amy is not truly hers and that she is only a person passing through to play with the occasional doll. However, her relationship with Kellen changes all of those feelings. After commenting that nothing belongs to her, Wavy thinks that, ". . . the rule didn't keep me from wanting Kellen to be for me only" (145). Wavy wants one thing and one thing only. She wants an exclusive relationship with Kellen and she wants him to reserve a large spot in his life for her. What Wavy might not be old enough to realize is that Kellen wants the exact same thing from a relationship. He needs an intimate connection and he wants a person to cuddle with all the time. Each of them provides this feeling of love and belonging, which is something they have each desired for quite a long time. Kellen displays his commitment to Wavy when he paints his fender with accurate depictions of constellations. In a way, the bike is converted into being both of theirs since it encompasses the thing each of them loves in life: stars and bikes. We can see evidence of this symbolizing ownership in their relationship because Wavy takes this moment to request that Kellen disallow any other woman from riding on the bike with him. She wants Kellen's heart to belong to her and she wants that seat to be saved for her as well.

In Part 2, we begin to see signs that Kellen feels stuck in Powell. We know that he was born and raised there, but he does not seem particularly happy in his life. Before Wavy, he did not have much to look forward to. Kellen even comments that, "Wavy. She kept me there. More than that, she kept me tethered, not just to Powell, but to being alive" (101). It seems as though Kellen is wholly dependent on the support provided by Wavy. That is why he has such a deeply horrifying reaction to Wavy calling him a liar when he refuses to marry her and move in together. Kellen feels that he had, ". . . been kicked in the stomach. Not like she'd kicked me, but life had. Kicked her, too, while it was at it" (139). The idea that he may lose her on any level, that he might lose a connection with her somehow, makes him feel as if life is attacking him.

Again, this situation displays Kellen's deep concern for what others might think combined with his own understanding of how Wavy's age makes their current relationship something that teeters on the border of a thing that may be damaging Wavy somehow. Wavy sees nothing wrong with living together. She cooks and cleans because she knows these things will keep Kellen coming back. His laughter at the idea that they should get married cuts Wavy deeply. She feels betrayed and confused by the man she loves, and she cannot understand why he thinks she is too young. Wavy thinks that loving each other means they can do these things. She does not consider her age to be a barrier of any kind. Kellen's refusal to move in together and get married feels like betrayal. Wavy cannot comprehend what they are doing together if Kellen does not want



to marry her. She is unable to understand why Kellen thinks they should wait, and she takes it as a sign that he has been dishonest about his feelings and intentions.

Wavy's entrance into puberty changes how people see her, but it also changes how Donal is treated within the community. He seems to be adopted into the male group that works for Liam. Donal is accepted by Liam and is treated nicely. Uncle Sean visits and accepts him as well. The only problems occur between Liam and Wavy. In fact, Wavy notes this difference in their treatments when she thinks, "That scared me. What if it wasn't dangerous for Donal to be with Liam and Sean, because he was one of them?" (116). She already fears that her brother will grow into a person she needs to fear, into a person who might make her dirty.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Wavy not seem to think anything is particularly wrong with her relationship with Kellen, while Kellen spends so much energy trying to avoid being inappropriate?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the deeper meaning behind the following quote, "What if it wasn't dangerous for Donal to be with Liam and Sean, because he was one of them?" (116).

Discussion Question 3

Why does Kellen reject the surname "Barfoot" so much? What does it represent to him?

Vocabulary

baptistery, trundled, behemoth, tufted, lamentable, rule the roost, rapt, permeated, mussed, yokel, silt

Part 3

Summary

Part 3 details events from September 1982 to June 1983. It is not too long after Wavy asks to live with Kellen that he buys Wavy a very expensive engagement ring with the promise that they are not getting married any time soon. The jewelry store clerk who sells Wavy her engagement ring is unable to fathom how a child as young and small as Wavy would need an engagement ring. She hides her judgment because she sees the true love between Kellen and Wavy. This acceptance is rewarded with a \$100 tip and sincere thanks from Kellen. He went into the situation expecting judgment, and was thankful not to encounter it. Wavy begins telling everyone that Kellen is her fiancé. He explains himself to his boss, Mr. Cutcheon, who passes no judgment. He explains that he married his wife when she was only 14 years old and that they have lived a long and happy life together. Kellen comments that he has no intention of marrying Wavy because he believes she will never grow up and still want to marry him. He assumes that she will leave him and date other, more attractive and appropriate boys instead.

Wavy is lonely in the farmhouse. Val lives there with her, but she is on bed rest from her car accident. There are nurses there 24 hours a day, but they do not interact with Wavy. One night, Wavy visits Sandy's trailer to play with her makeup. Sandy decides to help teach Wavy how to apply the colors. She encourages Wavy to dress in sexier clothing in order to get Kellen's attention. Val calls Wavy into her room one night to talk. She wants to warn Wavy that she believes Kellen's intentions are dishonorable. She reminds Wavy about being dirty and giving her germs to people while teaching Wavy that Kellen only wants sex from her. Val knows about the engagement ring and she does not want Wavy to get stuck with him for any reason. Shortly after Val gives her talk Wavy and Kellen have sex.

It is Kellen's birthday. Wavy takes him out for a nice dinner and a movie. She wears a sweet yet sexy dress and she does her makeup and hair. After the date, Kellen takes Wavy to his house where she gives him a hand job. As soon as Kellen orgasms he is overtaken by guilt for allowing her to do that to him. He says that it was a dirty thing to do. The use of the word "dirty" upsets Wavy so much that she runs out of Kellen's house to walk home. Kellen chases her down and finds her bathing in cold water and bleach at the farmhouse. She is trying to make herself clean again. She feels terrible about making Kellen dirty because she touched him. Kellen assures her that she did nothing wrong and that she did not make him dirty. However, Wavy cannot get over the fact that her entire relationship with Kellen has changed as a result of her actions.

Analysis

We know that both Kellen and Wavy need to feel owned and cared for. Buying the engagement ring is Kellen's way of providing that comfort for Wavy. Engagement rings



are a common symbol for a commitment to a loving relationship. It is no different for Wavy. She sees this ring as hers. For the first time in her life Wavy feels as if this is hers, which also makes Kellen hers. She is now a woman walking around town with a person who loves her and cares for her. This ring solidifies the closeness and stability she has needed for a long time. However, for Kellen, this ring symbolizes something else. For him, he sees the ring as a short-term solution to make Wavy happy. He has no intention of marrying Wavy but wants to make her happy by buying her something she wants. Kellen's strong belief that Wavy will grow up to leave him is the first time we see him doubt their commitment to one another. Kellen is very much aware that the woman he loves is too young for him, but now it is apparent that he feels as if he is a childhood phase for Wavy.

Kellen thinks very little of himself. He believes that he is unintelligent and unsuccessful. He has often thought about leaving his hometown of Powell but never does. He finds Wavy to be such an amazing person that he cannot understand why anyone like her would stick around and actually marry him. This is truly a sad reveal for Kellen. We have to wonder how long he has been feeling like he is a temporary solution for Wavy. It seems as though he does not believe that they have true love after all, or at least he thinks Wavy does not. This also reveals just how aware Kellen is that Wavy is developing into her own person. He feels that she does not know her wants and needs because she is too young to fully understand them. However, there is still no doubt that Kellen is truly and genuinely in love with Wavy. All of his concerns are related to the fact that he does not want to hold Wavy back in any way.

A similar concern for Wavy appears after she gives him a hand job on his birthday. Kellen fights his urge to let Wavy pleasure him. He knows it is wrong and he knows that it will have a lifelong effect on Wavy. He is not strong enough to resist. His remorse after the fact is entirely aimed at his own shameful behavior. He feels that he has taken advantage of Wavy and he thinks he has wronged her severely. Kellen has always seen himself as Wavy's protector. He strives to support her happiness and development and to keep every bad feeling out of her life. However, allowing her to give him a hand job is something Kellen feels will contribute negatively to Wavy's memories. He cannot believe that he has let Wavy down because of his own selfish sexual impulse. "I'd had plenty of time to put a stop to it," Kellen remarks, "and I didn't because I liked kissing her. I like all of it, no matter how messed up that was" (180).

What is unfortunate about how Kellen words his feelings of self-loathing is that he uses the word "dirty." He does not know it at the time, but this is a trigger word for Wavy. She immediately calls herself a dirty whore and then laments about the fact that Val was right, saying, "Mama was right. I am dirty" (179). All of Wavy's piled up fears have come to fruition. This is not due to putting a penis in her hand. These fears are brought to light because the man she loves, the man she is engaged to, calls her, and the act she just did, dirty. Kellen has made Wavy feel like everything her mother taught her was wrong and abusive. Now she feels as if everything Val told her was right. Wavy feels ashamed for changing her relationship with Kellen and she is sure that she has ruined their love, saying, "I broke everything that made me happy" (187). Wavy does not know how to be a girlfriend or a fiancé. The only thing she knows about relationships is what she has



observed and the woman she seems to look up to most is Sandy. Previously, Wavy witnessed Sandy giving Liam a blowjob to make him happy. She assumes that giving Kellen a hand job will make him happy. When the result is not what she expected she assumes that she has ruined something. This is a subtle portrayal of Wavy's struggle on her path to learning how to be a girlfriend in a loving relationship because she has no examples to model her actions after. Wavy thinks the best possible relationship is between Sandy and Liam, a relationship based solely on sexual favors.

Discussion Question 1

Why are Mr. Cutcheon and Kellen so well suited to be one another's friends? How are they compatible?

Discussion Question 2

Kellen's greatest goal in life is to protect Wavy from any more of the abuses she has already encountered. What evidence is there that Kellen is successful with this? What evidence is there to prove he is unsuccessful in protecting her?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways has Val taught Wavy useful and helpful life lessons?

Vocabulary

harangued, irked, crow, lassitude, chignon



Part 4

Summary

(July 1983 - June 1987) Shortly after their small fight, Wavy visits Amy, Leslie, and her Aunt Brenda at their home. Wavy is upset to be away from Kellen, and she still believes that Kellen thinks she has sullied the relationship. Wavy becomes very upset when she learns that she is scheduled to spend her fourteenth birthday with her Aunt Brenda. She hollers and complains until Brenda agrees to drive down to the farmhouse in Powell so the whole family can celebrate together. Wavy directs Brenda to Mr. Cutcheon's auto shop, where Kellen is working. She hops out of the car and runs off. Brenda questions her daughters about Wavy's recent changes. Leslie informs Brenda that Wavy is having sex with Kellen and that they are engaged to be married. In shock, Brenda turns the car around in order to return to Powell and tell Val about the situation. However, when Brenda and the girls reach the farmhouse, they find Liam and Val dead on the floor of the home.

They return to the auto shop where they walk in on Kellen and Wavy having sex on a desk. There is blood everywhere and a gun lying on a workbench. Brenda calls the police for both the murder and for Kellen raping her niece. Kellen is taken in for questioning and Wavy is taken to the hospital for a medical exam to check for rape. Wavy becomes very nervous and she runs away from the hospital. Donal also runs away. Brenda takes Amy and Leslie to a hotel to wait for her husband to pick up the girls and take them home. Brenda stays behind to help however she can, but she is insistent that what Kellen was doing with Wavy was rape. Wavy is asked to give a deposition in order to serve as an alibi for Kellen during the time of the murders. She describes every sexual moment between her and Kellen in great detail to the point that everyone in the room feels bashful. At the end, Wavy declares, "He never raped me. I love him. I want to marry him" (231). This alibi is important because the police are anxious to pin someone for the meth lab, the murders, and now the rape. Their hope is to find enough evidence to blame Kellen for most or all of it.

Kellen pleads guilty to Criminal Sexual Penetration of a Minor under Sixteen. He receives a ten-year sentence. He leaves every single possession of his to Wavy: the motorcycles, the cars, his house, and his shares in Mr. Cutcheon's auto shop. Brenda forces Wavy to sell everything and put the money in a trust. Wavy allows this to happen but refuses to get rid of the bike Kellen customized with constellations. Wavy keeps it in Brenda's garage and takes perfect care of it. She pays for the maintenance herself by getting an after school job and using her earnings for mechanics. Meanwhile, Brenda's husband is extremely unhappy about living with Donal and Wavy. He leaves the family and divorces Brenda. There are frequent interruptions in the home. Liam's mother shows up and wants to take the kids with her, and Sean sues for custody claiming that he is the biological father of the children not Liam. The court rewards Sean custody of Donal. After Donal leaves, Wavy retreats back into herself and all of her old habits. She does, however, write letters to both Donal and Kellen each week. Kellen never writes



her back because the letters are marked as, “UNAUTHORIZED CORRESPONDENCE” (237). Eventually Donal’s letters are also returned with the message, “NOT AT THIS ADDRESS. NO FORWARDING ORDER” (237). Although Wavy interacts with no one, she tries to keep herself busy and distracted by joining committees such as the Prom decoration committee.

Wavy attends church because Brenda forces her to. She becomes closer with Amy because they share a room. One night, Wavy admits that she is a virgin and that Kellen only inserted his fingers inside her. They have still never had sex. Shortly after this reveal, Amy loses her virginity to a boy but reveals to Wavy that she is in love with a girl in her graduating class. Kellen is up for a parole hearing, which Brenda attends to request that his parole be denied. When Wavy does not show up at the hearing, Kellen begins to wonder if he really did damage or hurt Wavy.

Analysis

Kellen and Wavy’s relationship has been a very confusing one for outside parties. As readers, we are privy to the inner workings of their relationship, but people such as Brenda and the police have little to no information about how the two of them work together. Wavy’s deposition is shocking. The words she uses are extremely explicit for a 14-year-old child to use. She seems to have rehearsed a shocking yet believable and mature way of wording their actions together. The thing is, we are so normalized to their relationship that what we find shocking about the deposition is the vocabulary not the act. We are not surprised to learn that Kellen and Wavy had sex, nor are we surprised to encounter it at the auto shop on top of a desk. We are used to this grungy yet delicate relationship advancing towards intercourse. What is shocking however, is when Wavy admits that she has actually never had sex with Kellen. She lied, very convincingly, in her deposition. This leaves us wondering why Kellen pleaded guilty if they never actually had sex. Some possibilities for Kellen accepting a guilty plea may be that he does not want to drag the hearing out in a painful way for Wavy. Another option may be that getting a ten-year sentence for having sex with a minor is a much less sentence than a murder charge or a guilty plea for being involved in Liam’s drug manufacturing and dealing business.

In Part 4, Kellen spends roughly five years in prison. During that time, there is no communication between Wavy and himself. This leads to each of them doubting the other’s loyalty and commitment. Kellen has been afraid that Wavy will grow up and move on without him. This is a huge fear of his, so being locked up and left to think about all the places Wavy is going without him and all the people she is meeting while he is away is a minor form of torture for him. On top of the personal hurt and paranoia, Wavy’s lack of presence at his parole hearing makes Kellen wonder if Wavy thinks he took advantage of her. Kellen is well aware that other people think he took advantage, but Wavy has always assured him that she was comfortable with doing the things they did together. Her absence at the hearing makes Kellen begin to think, “I’d done a terrible thing” (251). On the other hand, Wavy wonders if Kellen will feel the same way about her when he gets out of prison. She is aging and changing and unsure about whether



he will still want her. Both of them are aching for the other. They became so dependent on having the other one there to provide stability and closeness. Without one another, each of them feels unwanted by the world and by the people surrounding them.

Wavy not only loses Kellen, she also loses her brother Donal. “Uncle” Sean has been a strange character related to Val. Previously, Val has alluded to the fact that she once had a sexual relationship with Sean, but the reveal that Sean is Donal's biological father is a bit strange. We are left to wonder what Sean wants with Donal. What good is Donal for Sean? It is obvious that Sean wants to keep the siblings apart but we are not sure why yet. Wavy is equally depending on Donal as she is on Kellen. Donal's departure officially places Wavy in a position where she feels entirely alone in the world with no one to support her. There is no longer any reason for her to open up or to communicate with anyone. She has had her heart broken and now she is entirely alone for everything.

Throughout the novel Wavy has repeatedly reminded herself that nothing belongs to her. We can see signs that this changes in relation to Kellen. Wavy is willing to give up the house and the shares in Mr. Cutcheon's auto shop. However, she refuses to give up the motorcycle because it is a symbol of their love for one another. This motorcycle was a labor of love for Kellen and it has a physical picture of his commitment and love for her. Wavy has a deep connection to constellations. They are her guiding lights, her means of centering herself. Kellen's willingness to paint the constellations on the motorcycle cemented his commitment to her. Wavy will not give up the motorcycle because she will not give up Kellen yet. She cares for the bike in the same way she cares for Kellen.

This section leaves us confused about Brenda's character. On one hand, she is an overly protective mother who has suffered a trauma and wants to keep her niece safe. She is now a divorcee and raising several children on her own. However, she is seemingly vindictive towards Wavy. She hates Kellen so much that she takes away many parts of him Wavy wants to hold on to. Wavy has gone from one extreme to another. Previously, she was treated as a fully functioning adult. No one cared for her. Now Brenda cares too much and in ways that hurt Wavy's feelings.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it important to Wavy that Kellen hears her deposition?

Discussion Question 2

What factors negatively influence Wavy's confidence in her relationship with Kellen?
What factors have a negative impact on Kellen's belief in their love?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Kellen plead guilty to Criminal Sexual Penetration of a Minor under Sixteen?

Vocabulary

retroactive, alluring, grody, hinges, deposition, restitution, indigent, indignant, dismal, consumptive, sordid, predations



Part 5

Summary

(September 1987 - December 1990) Wavy is now in college. She is studying astrophysics. She keeps a photo of Kellen in her dorm room and she continues to wear her engagement ring. She becomes close friends with her roommate, Renee. Wavy goes home with Renee for Thanksgiving and is honest about her parents being murdered and her fiancé being in prison. Wavy studies constantly, but she enjoys school. She wants to move out of the dorm and into an apartment but Brenda controls her trust money from Kellen's assets when he went to prison.

Kellen is granted parole in June of 1989. Again, Brenda attends to discredit him and, again, Wavy does not come. This worries Kellen. Once he is released he has a hard time finding a job, but he manages to get hired at another auto shop. The people in the neighborhood harass him for being a sex offender. Two guys attack him and a woman named Beth helps him out. She is much older than him and is described as being in her fifties. The two move in together and develop a sexual relationship, despite the fact that Kellen does not really like her very much.

Wavy successfully convinces the lawyers of her trust to allow her to move into an apartment. She lives with Renee and is more social than before. Renee finds one of the usual rejected letters Wavy always sends to Kellen in prison. However, the letter is marked that Kellen has been released. The two immediately drive to Wellburg, where Kellen's address is listed. They find him quickly. Wavy leaves Renee and knocks on his door. The two of them immediately begin to have sex until Beth walks in on them. Kellen leaves with Wavy and drives her to the nearby university where Renee is waiting. Kellen shares with Wavy that he cannot be with her. He cannot touch her or have any form of communication with her because it violates his parole. Wavy sobs with convulsions for the two-hour drive home.

She eventually falls asleep from exhaustion but wakes up to draft a letter to the lawyer assigned to her trust. She would like Kellen to take his motorcycle back. Wavy then rushes out of the apartment and comes back with law reference books. In them, she is researching how to get a no contact order reversed during parole. Wavy's request form is rejected so she writes a letter to the judge every day requesting that she have a private meeting with him. The judge is very condescending in the meeting, which angers Wavy so much she actually shouts at him. The judge denies her request. On her way back, Wavy stops in Powell and revisits the farmhouse from her childhood. The house was left unlocked for all these years and various vandals have destroyed her childhood home.

Wavy returns to her apartment. Renee greets her at the door with a message from the judge: "Tell Miss Quinn that she was right. She is just as real as I am" (313). Wavy writes a letter to Kellen asking him to meet her at her Aunt Brenda's home. Kellen does



and discovers that Wavy wants to give him back his motorcycle. Now that the no contact stipulation of his parole has been reversed the two of them are able to kiss and hug and jump on the motorcycle to ride off together.

A few years later, Wavy and her family (including Kellen and Donal) come to a Christmas dinner with Leslie, Amy, and Brenda. This is the first time anyone has seen Donal and they are shocked to see him enter the house. We learn that Sean is the person who killed Liam and Val. He coached Donal about what to say to the police and he threatened Donal that he would hurt Wavy if Donal ever told anyone. Sean died of a heroin overdose and Donal spent two years in juvenile detention. He has psychological issues and is unable to talk about his recent experiences. All of this information about Donal is shared at the family Christmas dinner. After hearing this dramatic news, Brenda says that she is happy people protected Wavy. The novel ends with a comment that Wavy had grown almost up to Kellen's armpit.

Analysis

In the fifth and final section of this novel, Greenwood really tries her best to provide closure for as many characters as possible. Starting with the very final scene of the book, all of the main characters from Wavy's childhood are collected in Leslie's home for a Christmas dinner. This event is usually the picture of American holiday tradition. The family gathers in a warm home and shares a happy meal together. Only this family is far from traditional. There are several layers of guilt and anger circling the dinner table. We can see that Brenda, Amy, Leslie, Wavy, Kellen, and Donal have a largely complex and almost inexplicable past with each other through the opposing descriptions of the Newlings and the in-laws who married into the family. Donal, Wavy, and Kellen all interrupt the dinner to share or display troubling news. Brenda is deeply invested in learning who actually killed her sister. Amy and Leslie are trying to be equally concerned for all parties involved. However, Amy's girlfriend and Leslie's husband are described as sitting outsiders—people on the fringes who are quietly observing the drama. They are not a part of this tangled history and no one tries the daunting task of filling them in. This is the first time that the Newling family is shown as a unit committed to Wavy and Donal. Throughout the novel, Brenda has cared about Wavy but not really cared for her. Amy has always talked to Wavy but they have not been consistent confidants. It is at the dinner table when everyone finally displays a common concern and an acceptance. Wavy has gone through hell and made it out alive. Each of them has suffered trauma from knowing one another. They are a strong family unit because of it, and the people invited to the dinner through relationships are not a part of it.

Kellen, on the other hand, is also an in-law who is invited to the dinner. However, his presence in the family discussion proves that he has been a closer part of the family than Brenda has ever been able to admit. In the final chapters of the book, Amy describes Wavy as, "She hadn't come to rub my mother's nose in it. She'd come to make up with mom" (326). Kellen is in the same boat as Wavy. They have no desire to punish Brenda. They simply want to continue expanding Wavy's family. While Kellen is described as being resentful towards Brenda, he is still rather light-hearted about



wanting to establish an accepting relationship with her. Somewhere deep inside Wavy cares for her aunt and the care she has provided for her. Wavy wants to be surrounded by Kellen and Donal the most, but she also desires a family unit she can cook for and listen to.

She shows us this care for Brenda when she chooses to share Donal's letter about Sean being Val's killer. Brenda has never had closure in her sister's death, and, while they did not appear very close, they were still siblings. Wavy wants to provide as much closure for Brenda as she can. She wants to help Brenda learn the truth and move on from there. This is a great sign of respect from Wavy. She does not have to share this information with Brenda, but she chooses to because she wants to be open and honest with her. Wavy's maturity in this matter is greatly different from the last time she saw Brenda, which was when she was reunited with Kellen after the terms of his parole allowed Wavy and Kellen to be together. In this scene, we see Wavy as vindictive and wanting to punish Brenda. Wavy wants Brenda to know that all of her efforts to keep them apart were for nothing. They still ended up together and there was not a damn thing Brenda could do about it. Flash forward to Wavy at the Christmas dinner and she seems to have an entirely different goal in mind with Brenda. Perhaps Wavy needed to wait until she was safely reunited with her own family until she could focus on mending things with Brenda.

Brenda seems a bit defeated at the Christmas dinner. She no longer fights Kellen or Wavy, despite her obvious disapproval. Donal's presence seems to shift her emotions from hatred to guilt. Brenda has wanted to take care of the Quinn children since Wavy was five. Donal is simply the child who got away. This guilt is because she worries what happened to Donal during his time with Sean, but Brenda also feels guilty about letting Wavy down on yet another level. She wanted to rid Wavy of Kellen while keeping her with her brother. She was unable to do both, and, as a result, Brenda feels as if she has failed Wavy, Val, and Donal. She was unable to save most of the people or relationships she wanted to help. With Wavy, Brenda's desire to protect her was misguided. Brenda was unable to save her sister Val from both drugs and a life of violence and abuse. Her own marriage failed when she learned that her husband was leaving her. Going all the way back to her mother, or "grandmother" as Wavy called her; Brenda was unable to save her mother from cancer. Throughout the novel, Brenda is seen as the tragic loser. She never seems to accomplish any of her goals, and she is left with the empty feeling that she has failed in too many ways to count.

Brenda's failure to break up Kellen and Wavy means that Wavy won. From childhood, Wavy has been a tragic child. She was born into a meth lab family in poor living conditions and was bounced back and forth between various homes. However, Wavy still manages to get a great education, make lifelong friends who are loyal to her, and be in a loving relationship. She is victorious in attaining a marriage with the man she loves, she succeeds in getting her brother back and reuniting her family, and, most important, she is a fast victor in convincing the judge to change the terms of Kellen's parole to include being with Wavy. She is a rather victorious character despite her difficult challenges. This is something many readers tend to overlook about Wavy. She fights to get what she wants. She fought for her registration in school and she fought for Kellen.



Resiliency is a common theme in this book. Characters are either depicted as having it or not having it. Val, for example, is a character who lacks resiliency. She is unable to bounce back from most things, resulting in her constant sleeping and lack of showers. Wavy, on the other hand, is the most resilient character in this book. She is steadfast and has very few moments of despair that keep her down. One of the only moments when we see Wavy truly crumble in despair is after her meeting with the judge. She revisits the farmhouse in Powell as a way of getting closer to Kellen. Wavy feels as if she has lost the battle and Kellen. She seems to lose her desire to live or fight. She comments that, "I was moving forward into space, but I would never come home again" (312). In this case, Kellen is her home and she thinks they will never be together. We think this may be the end for Wavy. She has finally been knocked down to a place she cannot recover from. However, within less than a day after this event, Wavy learns that the judge has changed his mind and she bounces back quickly. This is a huge difference between Wavy and her mother. Each woman lives in the same conditions but only one finds her way out with a soul mate.

Kellen admits that his love for Wavy was instant. The two of them have had a deep connection to one another since they first met. However, their relationship goes through the massive hardship of being apart while Kellen is in prison. Each of them wants to remain loyal to the other. Both Kellen and Wavy are steadfast in their love. However, both allow their own self-doubt to creep in and make them wonder if the other one has moved on. Kellen has always feared that Wavy would grow up and change her mind about loving him. His time in prison gives him many hours alone to consider the fact that Wavy no longer wants him. Wavy also wavers in her belief that Kellen will always want her. Each of them needs the other yet does not trust their own luck enough to feel confident that they will end up with the person they want. Kellen begins to seriously doubt his actions with Wavy. He begins to think that Brenda truly is speaking on behalf of Wavy. This causes him to feel as if he really raped Wavy. He thinks that he harmed and abused her without meaning to. Kellen even remarks, "I knew I ought to let go of her. I couldn't" (266). He wants so badly to allow Wavy to live her life away from him because he worries about what Wavy thinks of him now that he is older.

Surprisingly, Amy seems to be the person who understands Wavy's love for Kellen the most. She observes that, "The day [Wavy] stood in our driveway and screamed, "Mine!" she wasn't talking about the motorcycle" (317). She knows that what they have between each other is true love-- love that has been misinterpreted by most and judged by all. This may be because Amy is a lesbian who also feels like her love is judged. In both cases, Amy and Wavy are judged for the person they want to be with. This allows them a special kinship and understanding. It is Amy who pushes Kellen's bike to the street when Brenda threatens to call the cops. It is Amy who understands Wavy's loyalty to Kellen.

Going back to the day when Wavy refuses to give up Kellen's bike is a great metaphor for her stance on their relationship. The motorcycle is a symbol for Kellen and Wavy's relationship. He paints it with constellations in order to make the bike Wavy's, and Wavy keeps the motorcycle as a way of waiting for Kellen to return and take her away. She cares for the bike as well as she would care for Kellen if he were able to be there with



her. Wavy wants the bike to remain pristine and ready for Kellen just as her heart remains waiting for him to return to her. We see that Wavy is ready for closure with Kellen when she decides to tow the bike to Kellen. Their reunion did not go as planned and Wavy does not hear back from Kellen about the change to his parole. At this point, she is wondering if it is Kellen who has moved on from her. This does not stop the resilient Wavy, however, who decides to either meet Kellen at Brenda's house or ship it back to Kellen and never see him again. Wavy is ready for a decision to be made. She is at the age where she wants to know if Kellen is hers forever or if she needs to move ahead in her life without him. She knows she will be fine either way because she knows she can survive anything. What Wavy wants is a final answer. Kellen gives her that final answer when he shows up and they ride off on the bike together.

Discussion Question 1

Use evidence from the novel to support your opinion of which character is the most tragic character in the story.

Discussion Question 2

What is the author's purpose for rooming Wavy with a girl like Renee? How does their relationship change the story? How does Renee affect Wavy?

Discussion Question 3

In what way does Wavy show she cares for people, despite the fact that she does not speak often?

Vocabulary

expletive, blurt, titillating, fickle, callous, indifference, ethereal, exuberant, keening, histrionic, belligerent, rescind, discomfited, prodigal, maligned



Characters

Wavy (Wavonna) Quinn

Wavy is the main character and the focus of the entire novel. She is described as being much smaller than average and always looking much younger than she is. She has soft, wispy blond hair that hangs on her shoulders and she loves wearing summer dresses with tough motorcycle boots. Wavy is the picture of quiet strength and resiliency. She lives with both her Aunt Brenda and her grandma when she is a child, but she moves in with her biological parents, Val and Liam, once they are released from prison. She grows up in a farmhouse in Powell, Oklahoma, where she spends her nights gazing at constellations in the sky while lying on the ground in a nearby meadow.

She does not allow people to touch her and she rarely speaks to anyone. This makes many people nervous, but it is also one of the reasons why Kellen falls in love with her. Wavy begins dating Kellen when she is eight years old. He is the only person she touches or talks to. Wavy is madly in love with him and she fights to keep him every step of the way.

She always requests to go to school and she loves studying. At college, she studies to be an Astrophysicist because she hopes to get closer to the stars. Wavy's body never fully develops. She remains small and thin with few curves. She is much shorter than other women her age, yet her quiet and calculating personality make up for her small stature.

This novel centers around Wavy's journey through childhood and into the beginnings of being an adult.

Kellen (Jesse Joe Barfoot Jr.)

This character prefers to go by the name of Kellen, and he is Wavy's friend, confidant, and soul mate. He is 15 years older than Wavy, which makes it difficult for him to come to terms with his attraction for her.

This character was born with the name Jesse Joe Barfoot Jr. This was the name of his father, an abusive alcoholic who beat his mom until the point when Kellen was big enough to beat his father into the hospital. He is a drug pusher for Wavy's father, Liam, and he has a long criminal history. After the blow out with his father, Jesse decided to go by his mother's name, Kellen. When people call him Barfoot, it makes him angry because Kellen rejects any similarities between himself and his abusive father.

Kellen is a large man. He is described as having a tall and thick frame with many tattoos. He wears heavy denim jeans, leather jackets, and loud motorcycle boots because he loves bikes. In fact, it is the sound of his motorcycle that draws Wavy's



attention to the road, which is when they meet. Kellen is so astonished to see Wavy on the side of the road that he wipes out and crashes his bike.

Kellen describes his attraction to Wavy as being love at first sight. At first, he wants to take care of her by cleaning the house and driving her to school, but his love for her eventually deepens into something sexual. Kellen realizes how young Wavy is and he is constantly battling his attraction to Wavy against her young age.

Kellen is arrested in 1973 after Brenda catches them in the middle of a sexual act. He pleads guilty to having sex with a minor under the age of 16 and is sentenced to ten years in prison. He is released on parole after six years, but is still not allowed to see Wavy. He wants Wavy to be happy and successful, and he thinks she has the best chance of this apart from him.

Val Quinn

This character is Wavy's emotionally abusive yet absent mother and Brenda's sister. She is in and out of prison for drug abuse. Val goes to prison for possession when Wavy is five years old. While in prison, Val gives birth to a son she names Donal. She is released and given custody of both her children under a court agreement that she will have regular visits from a case worker to monitor her sobriety. Val's husband visits her at the new home and easily convinces her to leave the rehabilitation program and run away with him to Powell where he manufactures methamphetamine.

Val spends every day and night sleeping alone in a farmhouse on the property. Liam spends his time living in a trailer down by the lab and leaves her alone while he cheats on her. Val knows this, which is another factor in her depression and drug binges. She never showers or cares for baby Donal who cries all the time. She constantly tells Wavy and Donal that they should not eat anything because food is dirty. She threatens her children not to touch anyone because they can get germs from other people and they can make other people dirty as well. As a result of her obsession with dirty things, Val throws most of the food in the house away, causing her children to learn how to eat small portions of scraps at night from the trashcan.

Val is hopelessly in love with Liam. She wants to impress him and she wants him to love her, yet she is deeply hurt knowing that he cheats on her all the time. Val sleeps in her own filth until she learns that Liam is coming up to the farmhouse, which is when she bathes and puts on sexy clothing to entice him. It is not until after Val gets into a terrible car accident when Liam decides to spend more time with Val. This desire changes, however, leaving Val back alone in the farmhouse once again.

She is murdered by her ex-lover, and the father of her son, Sean.



Brenda Newling

This character is Wavy's aunt and Val's sister. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Brenda has two daughters named Leslie and Amy. She lives in the suburbs and she is a traditional mother who tries hard to provide a guided and wholesome childhood for her daughters.

Brenda decides to bring Wavy into her home when her sister, Val, is put in prison. Her husband disapproves of her involvement with Wavy and Donal.

Brenda strongly opposes Wavy and Kellen's relationship. She walks in on Wavy and Kellen in a sexual act when Wavy is 14 years old and she believes Kellen raped Wavy. Brenda never gives up this idea. She houses Wavy again after Val and Liam are murdered. This time, Brenda's husband is so disapproving that he divorces her and leaves her in Tulsa with Amy, Leslie, Wavy, and Donal.

Brenda wants to keep Wavy away from Kellen. She sends Wavy to college and does not tell her when Kellen has parole hearings. Brenda attends each of Kellen's parole hearings to remind the court that he raped Wavy.

Liam Quinn

Liam is Wavy's father. He is married to Val Quinn, and he is the person who encourages Val to leave her rehabilitation program and move in with him to Powell. Liam chooses a farm area in Powell to open his meth lab. He is the boss of the lab, which keeps him busy. He uses his free time to cheat on Val with one of the many women who live on the ranch near the lab. He is described as being a very handsome man with blonde hair and blue eyes.

Liam dislikes Wavy. He is frightened of her and even more worried about giving her any affection. He attends dinner with the family at the farmhouse one night and is annoyed that Wavy will not eat at the table. He slams a fork into her mouth, giving Wavy a scar above her lip.

Liam ignores Val and the children until Val gets into a serious car accident. He laments about his lack of involvement with Val and Donal. He is more involved for a short time before rejecting her again and returning to his girlfriends at the ranch. He never attempts to welcome Wavy into his life.

Sean murders Liam in the farmhouse on the same day he murders Val.



Amy Newling

Amy is Wavy's cousin and Brenda's daughter. Wavy lives with her when she is five years old. At this age, Wavy goes out in the middle of the night to steal food from neighbor's houses. Amy always comes with her on adventures in the nighttime.

This character is the closest friend to Wavy in the Newling household. She does not judge Wavy and she is drawn to her as something new and interesting.

Mr. Cutcheon

This character is an elderly man who co-owns an auto shop with Kellen. He is a quiet man who does not judge Kellen for his relationship with Wavy. He served abroad during WWII and married a 14-year-old girl from Italy in order to remove her from the war torn country.

When Kellen goes to prison, he buys Kellen out of the auto shop and gives the money to Wavy. He is the only person who attends Kellen's parole hearing to defend his character.

Renee

This character is Wavy's roommate in college. She is described as being overweight and chatty with a natural curiosity for drama. She is not uncomfortable around Wavy's silence, which helps Wavy open up about her past with Val's murder and her engagement to Kellen.

Leslie Newling

This character is Wavy's judgmental and unaccepting cousin. Leslie is Amy's sister and Brenda's daughter. She does not get along well with Wavy because Wavy's silent nature and unique personality make her feel suspicious. Leslie never opens up to Wavy and she never fully accepts her either.

Sean

We are never told who this character really is or why he comes around the house. We know that Liam knows him, but we are never told how they know one another or if they are friends. He has a very long history with Val. In fact, it is revealed that Sean is Donal's biological father.

Sean takes custody of young Donal shortly after Val and Liam's murder because he is Donal's biological father. He is a heroine addict who does not take great care of Donal.

After he dies, Donal reveals that Sean is the person who murdered Liam and Val at the farmhouse years ago.

Symbols and Symbolism

Constellations

Constellations symbolize being grounded in the novel. Wavy's life is highly unstable. She has a drug addict mother and is bounced around from Brenda's home, to her grandma's, to a halfway house to the farmhouse in Powell. While her life may be unpredictable, the stars are constant. Every night they can be seen shining in predictable patterns. Wavy finds comfort in this because they make her feel grounded and centered. As she opens up to Kellen, she includes him in this feeling. Kellen quickly becomes an avid learner and uses constellations to to be part of Wavy's life.

Kellen's Panhead Motorcycle

In this story, Kellen's panhead motorcycle symbolizes Wavy and Kellen's relationship. The day Kellen reveals his custom paint job of constellations on the fender is the day when Wavy requests to be the only person allowed on the bike. This is the moment when the two of them really commit to one another. When Kellen goes to prison it is the one thing Wavy refuses to give up. She shouts at Brenda that the bike is hers. Later in the novel Amy points out what we already know about this comment: "The day [Wavy] stood in our driveway and screamed, 'Mine!' she wasn't talking about the motorcycle" (317). Wavy refuses to allow Brenda to take Kellen away from her.

Wavy loves the bike like she loves Kellen. While he is prison, Wavy cares for the bike just as she would be caring for Kellen if he were there. However, the longer Kellen is in prison, the shakier Wavy feels about her relationship with him. Wavy decides to give the bike back to Kellen when she learns that Kellen has chosen to adhere to his parole and never see her again. By giving him the bike back Wavy is releasing him for good. However, they do not break up because Wavy gets the terms of his parole changed and is able to ride off on it with Kellen.

The Farmhouse in Powell

The farmhouse symbolizes Wavy's personal status because of Kellen's efforts. We are first introduced to the farmhouse as a ramshackle and filthy place. There are dirty dishes everywhere and the place is disgusting. Kellen cleans up the house after he drives Wavy to school. This is the first time he is caring for her. As they continue to develop their relationship and each of them feels more stable the farmhouse is described as getting cleaner and cleaner. Over time, the farmhouse is close to perfection just as their relationship has cleaned up and feels close to perfection for them.



Wavy's Engagement Ring

Wavy's engagement ring symbolizes the commitment between Wavy and Kellen. Like most engagement rings, this one represents the commitment Kellen and Wavy have to one another. However, what is interesting is how differently each character views that commitment. For Kellen, the ring symbolizes short-term love before Wavy grows out of him. For Wavy, the ring represents a love that will last forever.

Barfoot

Kellen's original legal name of Barfoot symbolizes his father's abusive nature. Kellen takes offense when people call him Barfoot. To him, the name represents alcoholism, addiction, and abuse. His father went by the name of Barfoot and he was all of those nasty things. Kellen decides to go by a different name because he strives to be different from his father in every way possible. When Wavy's teacher, Mrs. Norton, refers to Kellen as Barfoot he becomes enraged at the thought that someone sees him in the same light as his siblings and father.

Powell

The city of Powell symbolizes small town judgement. Kellen frequently refers to his hometown as a place he would like to leave. However, he never does leave. Meeting Wavy ensures he stays even longer. Wavy's second grade teacher attends a party one night. She tells Kellen that she does not like living in Powell, and Kellen tells her to learn how to live here or get out.

Powell is not always an easy city. Many people watch each other and talk about what they see. It is in Powell where Wavy and Kellen are scrutinized for their interactions.

Val's Car Crash

Val's car crash symbolizes her willingness to harm herself and her children. We have seen Val's careless mothering habits throughout the story. The car crash reinforces the idea that Val is self-centered. She does not put her children first, and she thinks of only herself. Val makes many rash decisions that harm her children. She leaves her rehabilitation program, putting Wavy and Donal close to a meth lab. Again, she puts Donal at risk by driving him off while she is hysterical after a fight with Sean. This crash is the physical reminder that Val is the person who is harming Wavy and Donal the most.



Grandma's Cookbook

Grandma's cookbook symbolizes family. Each time Wavy uses a recipe from the cookbook she feels as if her grandmother is right there cooking with her. Even Liam is excited to learn that someone is making the famous and hearty green olive loaf. Food brings the family together.

Wavy uses the cookbook as a way to keep Kellen around at first. She loves preparing delicious meals like her grandmother used to make. Later in the book, Kellen comments that he misses the greasy yet delicious food Wavy used to make. He misses the food when he misses the familial feelings of being with Donal and Wavy (and, yes, even Liam and Val).

Dirtiness

The vague idea of germs and dirtiness symbolizes human connection. Val often warns Wavy not to touch people so that they do not exchange each other's germs. The way Val words it is that she does not want anything to get inside of Wavy. Val has already allowed Liam to get inside her. She is addicted to him and dependent upon the tiny scraps of affection Liam shows her. He has infected her and her life. Val does not want Wavy to be infected by a man who will ruin her just as Val has been ruined.

Grandma's Quilt

The quilt made by Wavy's grandmother symbolizes Wavy's possessions. Actually, the quilt symbolizes the one thing that actually does belong to Wavy. Val always tells Wavy that nothing belongs to her. However, the quilt seems to be the one thing Wavy can call hers. She keeps it in her bedroom and she cares for it until Brenda takes it away from her. This is Wavy's way of holding on to her grandmother after she has passed away.



Settings

The farmhouse in Powell

Liam moves Val and the children here after they are released from prison. However, while Liam moves the family to the farmhouse, he does not live with them. This location is where Val lives with Wavy and Donal. It is a remote location up the hill from Liam's meth lab and trailer.

This is Wavy's home where she has a private bedroom upstairs from everyone else. It is her home base and where she meets Kellen for the first time. Kellen and Wavy spend a lot of time in this house, and Wavy cooks many meals for him.

Val and Liam are murdered in the kitchen, which is the last day anyone in the family lives there.

The meadow in Powell

This is the location where Kellen and Wavy develop their relationship into something more than friendship. They frequently visit this location to watch stars at nighttime. They talk about constellations and spend many nights cuddling under the stars.

No one else visits this location with them, making it their special place to spend time.

Mr. Cutcheon's auto shop

While Kellen co-owns this auto shop, it is mostly run by Mr. Cutcheon. This is where Kellen works. He fixes up his beloved panhead motorcycle, which is the bike he paints constellations on for Wavy.

This is also the location where Wavy and Kellen spend their last moments together before Kellen goes to prison.

Kellen's house

Kellen will not officially allow Wavy to move in with him, but he does allow Wavy to have a key to his home. Kellen says that his house not much, but it is his because he owns it. The two lovers spend much time here. Wavy cooks him many dinners and the two use this as a private place to be a couple.

This is also the location where Wavy gives Kellen a hand job. This causes him to feel ashamed of himself, which makes Wavy feel as if she is dirty and that she did something wrong.



Brenda's house (Tulsa, Oklahoma)

Wavy moves into Brenda's home when she is five years old. She only lives here temporarily, but Wavy spends many weeks throughout her childhood as a visitor.

During her visits she often tells Leslie and Amy about her experiences dating Kellen. As she gets a bit older, her stories become much more scandalous, causing Leslie to invite friends over to hear Wavy's stories.

This is the location where Wavy keeps Kellen's panhead motorcycle because he leaves it to her and Wavy is forced to live with Brenda. Later on, Wavy uses this home as the location where she and Kellen are legally allowed to be together since the terms of his parole are changed.



Themes and Motifs

Love

Greenwood uses a controversial pairing to prove that love is felt by people of all ages and that it transcends the boundaries of societal approval. Wavy is only eight years old when she meets Kellen for the first time. He is already a young adult yet very sexually inexperienced. Their connection is instantaneous. The night they meet, Wavy does not seem to be bothered by Kellen's blood or by touching him. However, prior to this event she rejected all forms of physical touch. This is an innocent and instant feeling of camaraderie.

Their love blossoms slowly throughout the novel. Wavy seems to push sexual acts because she observes the women in her life showing their affection for Liam through sexual acts. To Wavy, this is how adults show their love. But Kellen knows better. Kellen wants romance and cuddling and intimacy. He longs to smell Wavy and to feel her weight against him. He wants to love her soul more than her body. The two of them never give up on one another. While apart for six years, both Kellen and Wavy try their best to believe that they are each committed to each other. They know that their love will be forever.

Greenwood does a masterful job presenting the tired theme of love in a fresh and new way. Readers experience Wavy's perspective on the relationship. She is depicted as being strong and intelligent, fully aware of what she is doing and what it means. Between Kellen and her, Wavy is the most confident person about the long-term nature of their relationship.

The theme of love can be seen in more characters than just Wavy and Kellen. Val is a character who longs for Liam's love. She wants him to want her, but he will not give her attention. Val regrets being married to Liam and she does not want Wavy to end up like her. When Val realizes that the man she loves will never treat her well, she retreats into hibernation and does not bother trying to connect with anyone else around her.

Resilience

The author uses the seemingly young and frail Wavy as the paradigm of resilience, and uses Wavy's personal victory over her life's obstacles to remind readers of the power a person has when he or she is resilient to their hardships. On paper, Wavy's life is hopeless. She has no support system and no stable home. She is unwanted and neglected. Most stories with characters such as this are the tragic losers, the people readers pity. However, Wavy rises above every challenge. She is not soiled by any hardship, and she succeeds with brilliance.

When Val takes away her food, Wavy quickly adapts to scrounging for food at night from trashcans. She never complains about this and seems perfectly happy in her lifestyle.



She listens to Val's advice but usually does not let it affect her. Wavy demonstrates that nothing can stop her.

Readers only get two brief moments when Wavy feels defeated. She is hopeless after she loses both Donal and Kellen. Wavy stops talking to people and she retreats to her bedroom for a while. However, even through this difficult time, she observes people suffering at school and want to help them. She does not want anyone to suffer like she is. Wavy does not let these losses ruin her. Instead, she continues forward and enrolls in college where she has a semblance of normalcy.

The next time we see Wavy falter in her resilience is after the judge refuses to alter the terms of Kellen's parole. She visits the now abandoned farmhouse in Powell and laments at how untethered she feels in the world. It does not take her more than a day to return home in a fury. Wavy quickly bounces back and fights with poise in order to get what she wants. The parole terms are changed and Wavy immediately springs into action once more.

Kellen is also quite resilient. He has a dark past. His childhood is something that could have crushed him into a life of despair. While he cannot be described as a happy person when he meets Wavy, Kellen allows himself to open his heart and believe in the goodness of people again.

Each of them fights to get a happy life even when they are not sure that they deserve one.

Family

The theme of searching for family is something almost every character yearns for in this novel. Each person feels alone in their own way and needs a familial connection in order to feel grounded and whole.

We see this desire early on when Wavy becomes close with her grandma. Grandma is described as feeling lonely ever since her husband died, and, while she does not have the energy to raise a child as young as Wavy, she is so happy to have a human connection with someone. The two of them develop a close relationship built on grandma nervously filling the silence while Wavy listens patiently. As grandma is on her deathbed, Wavy shares two special things with her as a sign of love: she touches her grandma and she does so by tracing constellations on her arm. Grandma has lost a connection with her daughters for different reasons, but she dies knowing that she has found a small family with Wavy.

Brenda struggles to keep her family together. She rarely speaks to Leslie although she feels incredibly loyal to her. Her husband never accepts Wavy as an addition to the family and he leaves Brenda after she chooses her niece and nephew over him. Brenda wants her family unit to remain strong and she urges Wavy to accept being a part of hers.



Wavy is the strongest advocate for family connection. She repeatedly mentions that Donal and Kellen are her family. She depends on these deep connections to open up and talk. Wavy needs those connections in order to function happily and to feel motivated. Donal and Kellen understand her. They do not judge her for her silence or her distant looks. Wavy is a person who does not feel lost until Donal and Kellen are forced to leave her. Once the separation occurs, Wavy comments that she feels like a satellite that will never return home.

Wavy also fights hard to keep her family together. Luckily, she succeeds in doing this. The final chapter of the book leaves us with Wavy living with both Donal and Kellen. She has what she has wanted all along. She has her family and for Wavy that means she has finally found happiness.

Addiction

The theme of addiction is displayed as a tragic circumstance that eats away a person's ability to function normally and healthily in society. Some characters have addictions, such as Liam and Val. Val in particular is the strongest example Greenwood uses for what happens to a person when they allow their addiction(s) to overtake their lives. Val has two strong and healthy children, yet she is unable to get out of bed because the man she is addicted to does not pay attention to her. We know that Val is addicted to drugs, but we never get a complete description of exactly what she is addicted to or how often she uses drugs. What Val is most addicted to is Liam. She needs to be near him. She cannot reject him. It does not take long for her to leave the rehabilitation home after Liam visits her and entices her to leave. It is difficult to understand why Val is so addicted to Liam. He does not treat her well and he cheats on her. Val knows that he is a destructive choice in a husband yet she does not consider divorcing him. She needs him and she does not even know why. Val allows her two addictions to control everything about her life, leaving her close to a comatose state while other characters like Wavy thrive.

Just like addiction itself, Greenwood allows the characters' various addictions to creep in slowly and never leave. Liam's addiction to sexual attention from females started off slowly. After marrying Val, Liam slowly began to pull back from her and lean in to others who would make him feel special. He cannot see that Val needs him and loves him. Liam does not care that his children could benefit from having a father around. Instead, he is addicted to the women who flock around him because of his looks and his successful drug business. He uses his status within the drug-using community to score several different girlfriends. However, because he needs so much attention, he never stops to consider getting a considerable amount of it from Val.

Val and Liam are the two characters who Greenwood portrays as most villainous due to the fact that they are the most addicted. Greenwood wants readers to understand that addictions take away the humanity of a person. That person then becomes so dependent on fulfilling his or her addiction that they do not benefit anyone or anything else around them.

Education

Education is used as a theme to remind readers just how powerful and beneficial it is to be well educated. Wavy has no chance for an education. It is her grandmother who initially enrolls her in school, and Wavy desires learning new things. She enjoys the freedom that comes from knowledge. This knowledge pays off big time towards the end of the novel when Greenwood cleverly makes the path for Wavy to reach Kellen through research books. Wavy's great education is what makes her able to fight Kellen's parole terms in a way that courts respond to: academically. She visits the library, she gets the law books, she does the heavy research, and she drafts the letters that ultimately lead to her ability to reunite with Kellen. Readers can understand that her education is what has allowed Wavy to get the life she wants.

Kellen is depicted as an uneducated character, whose lack of academic knowledge hurts him at times. This is a sharp contrast to his partner Wavy's level of education. When Kellen visits Wavy's school to discuss Wavy's inappropriate labeling of troublemaker simply because she is quiet, the teacher calls Kellen "Mr. Barfoot" and accuses him of amounting to nothing because he is not smart enough. This makes Kellen feel very embarrassed. However, we can also see in this scene that the teacher easily beats Kellen due to his lack of knowledge and non-existent self-confidence. Kellen feels powerless while talking to another adult who happens to be a teacher. This is not a comfortable person to converse with. Kellen quickly folds and apologizes to Wavy on the way out. We learn that Kellen earns his GED while he is in prison. He wants to learn more and to earn the diploma he missed out on in the first place, but he does not have the same support system Wavy had with both her grandma and with Kellen.

While Donal grows up with Wavy, Sean pulls him out of his home before he can fully reap the benefits of schooling. If Wavy is the example of the power of higher education and Kellen is the example of little-to-no education then Donal can be considered a happy medium. Yes, he attends school early on. However, he stops attending classes after Sean takes him. Donal does not feel that he is strong enough to beat Sean nor does he feel that he is wise enough to outsmart him. Donal succumbs to the power Sean tries to place over him, and we are left to wonder if he would have fought harder if he had more confidence in his knowledge. Donal winds up in juvenile detention. Like Kellen, both spend time in prison and both are not very highly educated. We are left alone to see the connection between school and either staying out of trouble or solving one's problems.



Styles

Point of View

Every chapter in this novel is told from the first person limited point of view. However, every chapter is told from the personal perspective of various characters, making readers feel like they are experiencing the story without missing any information. Much of the book is the internal thoughts and personal observations of each character.

The vast majority of the chapters are told from Wavy or Kellen's perspective because they are the main characters and the people who cause all action in the story. This provides readers with a complete understanding of every event described in the novel.

Language and Meaning

Most of this novel follows standard English conventions. The range of vocabulary used is not particularly difficult. This is mainly do to the fact that much of the novel is told from the perspective of children or characters who did not complete high school. The simplicity of sentence structure and the ease of vocabulary helps readers get lost in the internal dialogues of the characters.

Wavy, in particular, has chapters where her thoughts are complex yet the sentence structure and language is uncomplicated. Wavy's verbal communication is purely pragmatic as is her internal dialogue and yet Wavy sometimes wishes she could be able to say more. For example, on page 126, Wavy thinks to herself, "If I kept my eyes closed, would it be easier to send Kellen a message?" Only a few lines later, Wavy's complex internal thoughts come out verbally as one word, "Yours." Kellen overlooks this silence, remarking that, "Waking up in the meadow was Wavy's favorite thing. She was more likely to talk first thing in the morning, too. I might get a whole dozen words out of her before the sun came up" (126). There are other times throughout the book when Wavy's thoughts are complex yet the words she speaks are simple. With her roommate, Renee, Wavy uses the words, ". . . in two months I'd heard her speak about a hundred words, mostly things like yes, no, laundry, library, shut up, I'm sleeping" (253). Readers are treated to the inner mind of Wavy's complex wants and needs, but outsiders hear only simple occasional words.

Structure

Every chapter in this novel is chronological and spans from March 1975 to December 1990. The majority of the chapters are labeled with the month and year the events of the chapter take place. This helps the novel feel more in touch with the chronology of the events. The topic of Wavy's age and her maturity is constantly mentioned in the story, which is why the fixation on timing is appropriate in chapter headings.

There is a total of five parts in this novel with each part containing roughly 12 chapters with the exception of a 21 chapter Part 5. The chapters are not named and are marked with numbers instead. However, each chapter is labeled with the character whose point of view will be the focus of that particular chapter. The settings of each chapter follow Wavy's treacherous and challenging journey to gaining independence and the ability to fully be with Kellen.



Quotes

Nothing belongs to you. I knew the rule, but I didn't like it. My stuff was mine.
-- Donal (Part 2, Chapter 12)

Importance: Val repeatedly teaches her children that nothing belongs to them. She takes food and toys away from them and expects them to learn that they do not have the right to anything. This has a negative effect on both Wavy and Donal. Wavy feels as if relationships do not even belong to her. When she meets Kellen she is constantly struggling between her desire to have him all to herself and her understanding that nothing belongs to her. Likewise, Donal grows up in a household where he has no actual possessions. He does not have one caretaker in particular and is shown as being passed around from one semi-responsible adult to another. What is interesting about the idea of nothing belonging to either one of them is that they belong to each other. Wavy and Donal are each other's loyal family unit. They belong to one another and they are steadfast in their partnership.

Girl that age ought not to have so many troubles, but she did. Looking at it that way, them two was about made for each other."
-- Mr. Cutcheon (Part 3, Chapter 4)

Importance: Many people in the novel recognize that Wavy is living in poor conditions. Many people observe that she has had a rough childhood and that it shows in her distant looks. However, while many people observe this about Wavy, Kellen is the only person to step in and actually help Wavy in ways she needs. Brenda's help is misguided, although she means well. Donal helps Wavy by being her loving brother. However, Kellen's dark past gives the two of them a great bond that no one else can understand.

In another three thousand years, Voyager 2 might reach as far as the star Sirius, but it would never come home. That was how I felt, as I walked down the driveway to my car. I was moving forward into space, but I would never come home again."
-- Wavy (Part 5, Chapter 16)

Importance: Wavy has always used the stars as her foundation. No matter where she is and no matter what is happening around her the stars remain steadfast. Orion always comes out in Autumn and the evening star always shines at dusk. These are how she centers herself, how she tethers herself to her own reality. Shortly after Wavy is defeated by the judge, she visits the farmhouse in Powell. This is where she spent so much time with Kellen and Donal, yet, upon returning, she learns that there is nothing holding herself to the earth. She has no place where she belongs and no people who keep her returning. She has lost her home because she has lost her family.

I liked learning things. How numbers worked together to explain the stars. How molecules made the world. All the ugly and wonderful things people had done in the last two thousand years."



-- Wavy (Part 4, Chapter 11)

Importance: This quote is directly tied into the title of the novel. Wavy might be a quiet girl, but that does not make her oblivious. She is constantly observing and soaking up information. Her first encounter with studying the inner workings of people is with Val. Wavy learns the patterns and behavior of good mommy and bad mommy so that she can stay safe in her home. Throughout her schooling Wavy is described as being an excellent student who is happy to learn and willing to put in the work. As a character, Wavy never shies away from the ugly things that happen to her. Instead, she looks at them and learns from them. She accepts the good with the bad, the ugly with the wonderful.

I could have told him there was no sense in rushing toward being dead. It would find you soon enough, and before it did there were pleasures to make your heart hurt less."

-- Wavy (Part 4, Chapter 11)

Importance: Wavy is a constant helper. She is a girl who strives to improve the lives of the people around her despite her own struggle for a comfortable life. After she loses both Donal and Kellen, Wavy feels as if her life has ended. She no longer feels like she has anything good to live for. The two people she considers to be her family, and the two people she feels like she belongs to, are gone. She sees other sad people at school and she wants to help those people by sharing her experiences with them. In a way, she wants to impart her wisdom of living through tragic events.

You make people interested in you by keeping secrets, not by passing them out like Halloween candy."

-- Renee (Part 5, Chapter 1)

Importance: Renee is Wavy's roommate and very much the opposite of Wavy. At school, Renee struggles to find friends and to get attention. However, Wavy does not try at all yet receives a lot of attention. This does not anger Renee. Instead, she looks to Wavy as a role model for how to get people to like her. Throughout her life Wavy has had only a few choice words to say to people. However, Wavy is always surrounded by people who care very deeply for her and her well-being.

Whatever you want to be true, it is."

-- Wavy (Part 5, Chapter 2)

Importance: Wavonna is a dreamer. She loves to escape into the fantasy of distant constellations and she enjoys drifting off into her own imagination. Her own personal difficulties also mean that she must choose which version of reality she will allow to stick with her.

No woman had ever looked at me the way she did, or touched me that way. Like she wanted me, like I was worth wanting."

-- Kellen (Part 5, Chapter 14)



Importance: Kellen's childhood is only referred to in the novel. We never actually experience Kellen's abusive father or abused mother. However, we know that he did not grow up in a happy household. Kellen is desperate to have a sense of purpose and belonging. He wants someone to want him because his own parents did not want him very much. Wavy provides this feeling for him. She gives him a reason to wake up and get dressed in the morning-- the motivation to be a good person.

He took me to school. For six years. Paid my school fees. Dropped me off. Picked me up. Six years. No one else cared. His money pays my tuition now. He gave me this opportunity."

-- Wavy (Part 5, Chapter 16)

Importance: Wavy is grateful for Kellen. She is thankful to have a person she can call her own and to spend time with a person who makes her feel safe. Not everyone sees their relationship as the protective and nurturing connection she feels it is. The judge for Kellen's case assumes Kellen is a bad person who does bad things. He assumes Wavy is like every other case he has worked on in the past. This is the first time Wavy openly discusses the long and steady support Kellen has provided for her all these years. She sees him as being as much as a protector as a lover.

. . . you would both be better serving your respective futures, rather than dwelling on the past."

-- Judge C.J. Maber (Part 5, Chapter 16)

Importance: This is a question perhaps many readers have as they read the second half of this novel. Wavy is now a well spoken college student with a bright future and nothing holding her back. Kellen is now a convicted sex offender with a record and a freshly earned GED. Readers and characters alike are left to wonder if it is better for them to be together or to drift apart and live out their potential futures. Wavy seems pleased to be studying astrophysics. Kellen seems fine working at an auto shop and focusing on repetitive tasks. Are these two actually suited for one another now that their lives have gone by apart?

Your family is real, but mine isn't? Real people with real feelings, but my family isn't real to you. You think. I'm a character. A story. Those women you talk about. Not real people to you. Stupid women. Stupid photo albums. But you. You're smart. You make smarter choices. For us."

-- Wavy (Part 5, Chapter 16)

Importance: The key to this quote is the final sentence, "For us." Wavy rejects the idea that a stranger with no personal knowledge of her long-standing relationship with Kellen will tell her what her relationship was based on. Wavy is older at this point in the book. She can stand up for herself. She knows about rape and abuse, and she knows that she does not feel that way about her relationship with Kellen. She has never felt mistreated and she rejects the claim that Kellen took advantage of her in the past. Wavy will not accept a stranger barging into her life and doling out judgments. She will not



accept this for herself and she does not accept it for the many other women the judge assumes he is protecting.

If I was going to help Wavy look like an adult, we had to start from scratch."
-- Renee (Part 5, Chapter 15)

Importance: This book focuses on whether or not Wavy is old enough to experience the things she does. Readers know Wavy's deep and thorough knowledge of situations because we are allowed a peak into her thoughts. However, outsiders see Wavy as a quiet, shy, and detached presence in conversations. In this example, even her peer and roommate, Renee, sees Wavy as a meek and immature looking little girl. People are fooled by her small stature and assume that her brain is as undeveloped as her body.