

Trash Study Guide

Trash by Andy Mulligan

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was sued to create this study guide: Mulligan, Andy. *Trash*. New York: Ember, 2011.

In an unnamed third world country, Raphael, Gardo, and Rat (Jun-Jun) are three trash boys, living in squalor and spending their days picking through hordes of garbage in the hopes of finding something salvageable. Their section of the city is known as Behala, and despite the presence of the Mission School, a charitable attempt to provide education to the children of the slum, the boys are urged into working as a means of supporting their limited families, as Raphael lives with his aunt, Gardo with his uncle, and Rat lives alone, having come from outside the city, and unknown with no family who is constantly picked at by other children. One day, Raphael finds a leather wallet with eleven hundred pesos, two pictures of a small girl in a school dress, an ID belonging to a Jose Angelico, a folded map, and a key. Splitting the money with Gardo, Raphael attempts to get on with his life until the police visit, looking for the wallet. His aunt accidentally reveals that Raphael found something, which he attempts to dance around when questioned by the police. While the police offer ten thousand pesos to any who might have found the wallet, Raphael and Gardo keep their secret close, asking Rat to hide the wallet since he is never visited by anyone. Rat reveals that the key belongs to a storage locker at the railway station, where he lived for a while. Despite the danger of the police lurking around, who have commissioned the entire Behala populace to help them with their search, the boys go to the railway station to retrieve the package, which turns out to be a letter addressed to a Gabriel Olondriz and a slip of code.

The boys then turn to the Mission School, using the computer there to research Olondriz, keeping their search a secret from Father Julliard, the head of the school. When they return to Behala, their homes are ransacked by the police and Raphael is arrested and taken to the police station. While there, he is beaten viciously, threatened with death if he did not reveal the whereabouts of the wallet. Despite the threat, Raphael does not divulge and is eventually let go, managing to find his way home. After his return, the boys agree that they cannot stay in Behala longer, and move on to solving the puzzle of the letter. With the knowledge that Angelico had been murdered by the police for stealing six million dollars from the vice-president's house, where he worked as a houseboy, they approach Grace Olive, a foreign volunteer at the Mission School, and trick her into taking Gardo to the main prison to see Gabriel Olondriz, by feigning that Gardo needs to see his grandfather in order to save his house. Grace takes Gardo with her, spending her money on buying him new clothes and bribing her way Olondriz. While there, Olondriz reveals Gardo's lie and speaks at length about his crime. He was imprisoned for bringing corruption charges against Senator Zapata, the vice-president from whom Angelico had stolen the money. When Gardo reveals the contents of the letter addressed to Olondriz, the latter becomes excited, saying the code is familiar to him and that he needed his Bible. Before he can retrieve the Bible, the visit is cut short by a guard named Marco, who agrees to give them the book later.



While Gardo is at the prison, Raphael and Rat travel across the city, sneaking into Senator Zapata's house, where they learn from a gardener that Angelico stole the money and took it out in a broken refrigerator. Rat reveals to the other two that he has some significant savings, which he wants to use to return to his home in Sampalo, a distant city where he had grown up fishing. With his money, the boys run away from Behala before the police can catch them, as Gardo was photographed at the police station. Realizing that they need Olondriz's Bible to solve the code. Gardo returns to the prison and follows Marco, striking an agreement with him for the Bible in exchange for money, which Rat steals from the Mission School, leaving a note with his name on it. During the meeting, Marco attempts to grab Gardo as part of the set up, but he manages to escape. Returning to their temporary apartment, they stay up all night, finally solving the riddle. The code turns out to be a book code, the numbers corresponding to pages and letters, and leads to a grave in the city's cemetery. The following morning, they manage to escape just as the police try to surprise them, hiding amongst a group of street boys before hailing a cab to the cemetery, just in time for the Day of the Dead festivities.

While there, they realize that the grave belongs to Pia Dante, Angelico's daughter, who turns out to be alive and waiting close by. While they feed her, the boys break open the gravestone and find the six million dollars packed in. Instead of keeping all the money, they come up with an alternative. They return to Behala, and Rat returns the amount he stole to the Mission School safe, taking some school uniforms and school bags with him in the process. They stuff money into their bags and throw the rest into the wind, for anyone in Behala to retrieve. Blending in with other school children in uniform, the three boys and Pia Dante manage to find their way to Sampalo, finding happiness in fishing and the simplicity of their life.



Part One (1-6)

Summary

The novel begins with Raphael Fernandez as the narrator, as he introduces himself as a dumpsite boy, someone who sifts through trash in an unnamed Third World country and lives among the mountains of waste. He previously lived at a dumpsite called Smoky Mountain, but after it became overfilled, he and the rest of the garbage pickers were forced to go to Behala. Raphael had been a trash boy since he was three years old, looking through the hordes of garbage for salvageable material such as glass, plastic, paper, and rubber. One day, Raphael stumbled upon a leather wallet while working with his best friend, Gardo. In it were 1,100 pesos, an ID card belonging to a Jose Angelico, photos of a young girl, a map of the city, and a key with the numbers "101" on it. After spending the money on food, Behala was visited by the police, who were looking for the leather wallet. When his aunt confessed that he had found something, Raphael was forced to lie to them, saying that he found a shoe instead of a wallet. After the police left, Raphael and Gardo visited Rat, an isolated dumpsite boy who is friendly with Raphael. They asked him to hide the wallet in exchange for money, but he revealed that he knew where the key could be used, saying it belonged to a locker at the train station where he used to work and live.

The story then switches to Gardo's perspective, who illustrates how he managed to reign in the childish tendencies of Raphael. While Raphael wanted to visit the train station, Gardo convinced him to stay at Behala and assist the police with their search for the wallet, so as to not look suspicious. The police offered one hundred pesos to anyone who helped in the search and ten thousand if anyone came forward with the wallet. Despite pressure from his aunt, Raphael did not come forward, and he and Gardo spent the day looking through the trash and pretending to be innocent. After the police left, Raphael, Gardo, and Rat went out to the train station, where they tried to blend in, paying off the station boys with money so as to have time to search the lockers. While Raphael and Gardo ambled about, Rat went in and retrieved the package, a brown envelope with a stamped letter inside addressed to a Gabriel Olondriz at the Colva Prison, along with a slip of paper with a line of numbers on it.

Analysis

The novel begins with Raphael identifying himself as a dumpsite boy, and this immediate identification points to his inability in letting go of his status as a dumpsite boy, pointing to the strict socio-political lines that are drawn in this society. Social mobility is limited for him, especially for an orphan who was born and raised to only sort through garbage. This introduction is something to take note of, as it is an identification that seems to have stuck with Raphael despite the events of the novel, as events are being narrated by the characters from the past.



Despite his status among the lower rungs of society, Raphael is still a child and able to draw out some measure of enjoyment from his life, as he finds some contentment in the prizes he finds while sorting through the trash. His relationship with Gardo is a source of strength too, as the boys look out for each other in a world that is full of rough and tumble. The strength of their relationship is evident when Raphael finds the leather wallet, as he immediately shares his prize with his best friend, without even thinking twice. The discovery of the leather wallet serves a showcase of Raphael's character, since his immediate concern is to share the money with his friend and then buy a decent meal for his auntie and loved ones. Despite the ugliness of the world he inhabits, Raphael can draw on small measures of kindness and humanity to instill a sense of stability and hope in his world.

In this section, the novel's shifting point of views are introduced, which are a mainstay throughout the rest of the text and allow the reader to glean information of the same events from different perspectives, creating a multidimensional narrative not reliant on the subjectivity of just one character. While they were all complicit in the events that transpire, Gardo's perspective offers a different take on the events, as he is more responsible and more calculated in how he sees the world. This is clear when he judges Raphael's auntie for disclosing to the police that Raphael had found something in the trash, which serves as foreshadowing for events that come later. Gardo is the one who manages to control Raphael's wild impulses, forcing him to stay at Behala and act as if he is just another dumpsite boy, pretending to go along with everything to throw the police off their scent. The terror the police conveys is obvious through the character's reactions to their arrival, as it is implicit that these are people not to be crossed, and the threat of them finding Raphael's secret is so intense that it begins to create friction between him and his aunt. Despite the difference in their temperaments, both Raphael and Gardo react to the police's arrival with wariness and are gripped with the same measure of the fear.

The strict lines of existence that the dumpsite boys live within are obvious in the way they traverse the railway stations on their way to the storage locker. They are out of place, and the station boys are a threat until they are paid off. The novel presents a world in which everyone is concerned with their his or her survival and anyone intruding on someone's territory is faced with consequences. But is also money that solves everything, as the boys are able to accomplish what they were looking to do by giving the station boys money.

Discussion Question 1

How do the boys find ways of joy in their bleak occupation?

Discussion Question 2

Does Raphael do a good job of covering his tracks? How does his escape build dramatic tension?



Discussion Question 3

How do Raphael and Gardo compare to Rat? In what ways are they similar and in what ways different?

Vocabulary

battered, sling, squatting, thrashing, bramble



Part Two (1-4)

Summary

Father Julliard begins the section, talking about his post as the head of the Pascal Aguila Mission School, named after a national hero who fought against corruption. Father Julliard had been running the school for seven years, having come initially only for one year. But he fell in love with the children of the Behala and stayed on. The Mission School is constructed of large, metal containers that exacerbate the heat of the summer. He remembers Rat, who he called Little Jun, as someone who he treated with special attention. While talking about Raphael and Gardo, he mentions it was better off that children like them did not attend the school regularly, as the education would not do them much good if all they were going to do was sift through trash. Father Julliard talks about the day the boys came into the school in order to use the computer. Rat offered him forty pesos but he turned it down. When he asked them why they needed to use the computer, they mentioned they needed to research some history for a quiz. They used the computer while he made them sandwiches and gave Rat some money before he left. Father Julliard mentions how he later found out they had deceived him, having used the computer to learn more about Jose Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz.

The perspective shifts back to Raphael, who reveals that he was arrested when he returned to Behala, despite attempts by the community to prevent him from going. He was roughly dragged to the police station and thrown into a cell before being taken to a room, where different men interrogated him about the whereabouts of the leather wallet. Knowing that they could not find the wallet at Rat's police, Raphael stood his ground, despite being struck repeatedly. He was then held by the ankle and suspended out of a window, being threatened with a steep drop if he did not talk about the wallet. He confessed to having discovered money but nothing else. After being insulted about his life as a trash boy, he was let go and ran out of the police station and into the rain. On his way back, he thought about what he had discovered on the computer at the Mission School, learning that Jose Angelico, a boy adopted by the son of Gabriel Olondriz, had been accused of robbing the vice-president of six million dollars, and had been murdered at the police station. The section ends with a short testimony by Grace, a housemaid at the vice-president's house, who, on the insistence of Father Julliard, speaks about the character of Jose Angelico, who had worked as a houseboy with her. She reveals that his daughter, Pia Dante, was boarded with some relatives and he had a wife and son who had passed away. She thought him a good man and her opinion did not change regardless of what he did.

Analysis

As someone who had an indirect influence on the course of events in the novel, Father Julliard provides an outsider's point of view, as he is a foreigner who works through a charitable organization at the Mission School. While Raphael, Gardo, and Rat are used



to their surroundings, Father Julliard is able to convey to the reader the horror that the children have to live through, while also highlighting their innocence and purity that made him fall in love with Behala and the Mission School in the first place. His physical description of the Mission School as a collection of metal boxes is poignant, as it clarifies the harsh conditions that children of Behala have to suffer in order to have access to an education, if they even make it that far. Despite his sincerity, he has a dose of realism in his character, as he acknowledges that a formal education could only do so much good to children who are limited by their society, as they most likely would never be able to leave the stifling conditions of the dumpsite. Yet, he is kindhearted when Rat, who he calls Jun, arrives with Raphael and Gardo. He offers the children food and access to the computer that they need, eventually giving Jun some money before he departs.

Upon returning to Behala from the Mission School, the reader is exposed to the power dynamics at play in the society, as people on the lower rung of society, such as Raphael, are devoid of basic human rights, and subject to excessive force and strong-handed tactics by a police force that is not accountable to anyone. Living in a corrupt society, Raphael is at the whims of a powerful and corrupt police force who can take him away whenever they so desire without any concern of repercussions. Despite the attempts by the people of Behala and Raphael's own pleas, the police drag him off to the police station. Along the way, Raphael narrates the horror he feels, and his first-person perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how and what he is feeling. He is paralyzed with fear as he goes through the police cell and into the interrogation room, surrounded by men who are larger than him and are bent on taking the truth out of him no matter what. While at the police station, the different men toy with Raphael's fears, first trying to soothe him into a confession before unleashing the brunt of their force, physically and verbally. They remind him of his status as a dumpsite boy, saying he smells like one. Their assertion of power instills tremendous fear in Raphael but he can withstand the assault, as his strength of character comes to his aid. Despite being hung out of a window and threatened with death, he can hold on to the belief that he is innocent and not reveal that he came across the wallet, offering up a partial truth about finding the money. The irony of the situation is laid bare for the reader, as a dumpsite boy was able to outwit the powerful police, which he did in the same police station where Jose Angelico had been murdered.

Discussion Question 1

Is Father Julliard in a position to have a strong positive influence on the lives of the dumpsite boys? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does Raphael's upbringing inform the strength of character he displays in the police station?



Discussion Question 3

In what ways does Raphael's arrest reveal the social hierarchy of Behala?

Vocabulary

handover, stifling, evidently, shanties, boarded



Part Three (1-5)

Summary

The section starts from the perspective of Olivia Weston, who had been a "temporary house-mother" at Behala's Mission School. She is a twenty-two year old, who, after graduation and a vacation, decided to stay at Behala as an unpaid volunteer after falling in love with the children. She was especially smitten by Jun, who used to call her "Mother," and she always gave him small bits of food and money here and there. She recalls the day Jun brought Raphael and Gardo with him, asking for her help. They said Gardo's grandfather was at the Colva Prison and they needed her help to get inside, and since she was a foreigner, she would have easier access than just a dumpsite boy going by himself. The boys tell her that if they did not go immediately, Gardo would be evicted from his house. She agreed and took Gardo with her, who tricked her into buying new clothes for him, which she charged on her credit card.

Father Julliard interjects and says that if he knew what Olivia was about to do, he would have prevented her from doing so. He mentions that despite their social status, the children of Behala are some of the best liars in the world, something he assumes they have learned as a means of survival. Olivia arrived in the area of the town where the prison was located and was struck by its depravity, noticing the future of the boys in the faces of the citizens there. They were allowed into the prison and their photographs were taken. where They were greeted by a Mr. Oliva, a social worker, who is polite and remarked that they had the wrong prisoner number, while also mentioning the need for a ten thousand pesos fee for a security clearance. Olivia obliged and her and Gardo were led inside the prison area, where she was struck by the horror of people stuck within stifling hot cages, including children, who all tried to reach for her and begged for some ailment. They met a very sickly Gabriel Olondriz, who revealed to Olivia that Gardo had used her to bribe his way into the prison. When Olivia revealed her ignorance, Olondriz mentioned that he tried to expose the theft of thirty million dollars of U.N aid by Senator Zapanta, and in the process, he was counter-sued and ended up in prison.

Analysis

With Father Julliard having been introduced, the section relies heavily on the testimony of Olivia Weston, the second foreigner employed at the Mission School in Behala. Her introduction reveals a lot about her character, as she comes from a privileged foreign background, where she was able to take time off after university and travel the world at her father's expense. Just like Father Julliard, she fell in love with the sweetness of the children at Behala, and especially Jun, who she treats with preferential treatment. As a foreigner, her love for the children is a weakness, which is exploited by the boys when they arrive to ask for her help. They do not directly ask for money but instead spin a tale about Gardo needing to meet his grandfather at the Colva Prison. Being in a position of



power, Olivia allows herself to be flattered into submission, as she goes along with the plan. Despite worrying about expenses, there is a certain security in the way she finances the trip with Gardo, as she is able to use her credit card, a luxury the children do not have access to.

Father Julliard's interjection is telling, as he stops Olivia's story to offer his opinion on her naivety. Despite his love for the children of Behala, he feels it important to point their ability to lie and be effective tricksters, as they are well versed in manipulating the sympathies of people like him. This speaks to the length of experience that Father Julliard has compared to Olivia. His observation is not sinister, but realistic, something that came up when he was mentioning the relative need for education for the children of Behala. Instead of claiming that the children have sinister intentions, he attributes their lying ability to their need for survival.

While visiting Colva Prison, the outsider perspective of Olivia is integral for the reader, as she is able to shed light on the horrors of the society that someone like Gardo would not be able to, since they would be used to the conditions of their life. There is an almost dystopian element to the conditions of the prison, as both Gardo and Olivia are photographed and processed, unable to move on without offering a bribe. Her shock is amplified when she is forced to walk through a hallway containing inmates, where her status as an outsider and Gardo's as a native are juxtaposed. While Olivia reacts with horror at the conditions and imprisonment of children, Gardo shrugs it off as something that he is used to. When Gabriel Olondriz reveals that Gardo had lied to her so as to use her for her money, Olivia does not react with anger or contempt towards Gardo, instead being preoccupied with the tale of corruption that Olondriz relates to her. This section is also the first where the language differences are mentioned, as Olivia is an observer at times when Gardo and Olondriz interact in their native language.

Discussion Question 1

What does Olivia's description of Behala reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 2

Is Father Julliard right to point out the lies of the boys in the manner that he does?

Discussion Question 3

Does Olivia serve more of a purpose than simply as a source of bribe money?

Vocabulary

scrubbed, ingrained, bisected, decompression, mopped



Part Three (6-10)

Summary

Gardo interjects to apologize for what he did to Olivia, having used her to get to Colva. He did what he did because he knew he would be leaving Behala laong with the other boys, and did not want to involve anyone else in their plan. Olivia begins her part of the story again, as she learned about Gabriel Olondriz's past from him. Working as an unpaid volunteer, he had discovered evidence that Senator Zapanta had siphoned thirty million dollars of aid from the UN, and he had found copies of false contracts. In reaction, his house was lit on fire, his driver and maid killed, and all the evidence destroyed. He was then accused of financial malpractice, defrauding the government, and orchestrating the murder of a prominent banker. When Gardo revealed that Jose Angelico had been murdered by the police, Olondriz reacts strongly, and Olivia found herself unable to help him.

Raphael, following the clues from Jose Angelico's letter, made plans with Rat to visit the vice-president's house. In a show of faith, Rat revealed his stash of saved money, more than twenty thousand pesos, which he wanted to use to go back home to Sampalo and purchase a fishing boat. Raphael sensed the urgency to leave the city, as he noticed his Auntie wanting him gone, along with his inability to sleep at night, waking up in nightmares. The story shifts to Rat (Jun-Jun), who relates the part where he and Raphael went to the vice-president's house. Raphael led the way, since Rat would not be allowed on a bus, and he was ecstatic about it, laughing and smiling at everybody along the way. Rat led Raphael, who was having second doubts, and they found their way onto the vice-president's property, where they learn from a groundskeeper that Jose Angelico used a faulty fridge to take the six million dollars outside the compound, through the heavy security. The groundskeeper revealed his contempt for the corrupt senator, wishing hell on him since he stole the money of the poor.

The story switches back to Olivia, who relates the last of her part. Gabriel Olondriz revealed that his Jose Angelico was his grandson, as he had been adopted by his son, Dante Jerome. Jose had always been eager to succeed but along the way lost his passion, lost his patience. Olivia noticed the exchange between Gardo and Gabriel in their native language, unable to understand what they were saying. Gardo recited the entirety of the letter, having memorized it, and Olondriz is baffled at the knowledge that Jose Angelico said it had been accomplished. When pressed by Olondriz, Gardo revealed the existence of the code, Olondriz exclaimed that it was a book code, to be solved with his Bible. Before he could retrieve it, a prison guard came to tell them the visit was over. The guard agreed to bring the Bible back later, but never arrived while Olivia and Gardo waited outside. She returned home, and the next morning, was taken to the police station, where she was interrogated about her visit. Due to her father's connections, someone from the British Embassy came to argue on her behalf and had her released, after which she flew back home. Her final passage contains a farewell, as



she says she learned more in Behala than she did in university and she wished that she could have said goodbye to the boys.

Analysis

Olivia's privilege further becomes apparent in these chapters, as the aftermath of her visit to Colva Prison is revealed. Having been photographed along with Gardo, she is able to leave the country without consequences after being taken to the police station the following day. Despite facing scrutiny from the corrupt authorities, her father's connections with the embassy intervene and she is able to leave the country without being prosecuted or punished for what she had done, which is in sharp contrast to what Jose Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz had suffered, and the young Behala boys would suffer after her departure. While she acknowledges that she learned a lot, more than any formal education could have taught her, she still chalks up the experience to an interesting journey. Her good intentions notwithstanding, the only true positive affect she had on the children's lives was when she was able to help them get into the prison, which she did unwittingly.

Gabriel Olondriz's narration of his past reveals the true depths of corruption that plague his society, as she was falsely prosecuted and imprisoned for attempting to expose the insidious dealings of Senator Zapanta, who would later become vice-president. While researching the corruption that has prevented the benefit of children such as Gardo and Raphael, Olondriz's life was threatened, as his house was lit on fire, killing his maid and driver, along with destroying all the evidence that had been used to build up the case up to that point. Instead of pursuing the corrupt senator, Olondriz was then imprisoned and committed of defrauding the government, the very crime for which he was trying to prosecute the senator. The absurdity of this society is made clear through the turn of events that Olondriz had to suffer through, as he was forced into a grave injustice when trying to bring justice to the poor and defenseless of his country. Like Olivia, he was an unpaid volunteer, but unlike her, he is a native, and has to deal with a different set of consequences than her, suffering imprisonment, and death, as Angelico did.

The intelligence and resourcefulness of the boys are brought through this section, as they use their wits to navigate the corrupt bureaucracy that envelops them. Fearing being searched, Gardo memorizes the entirety of the letter that Jose Angelico had written to Olondriz, which the latter remarks on with wonder. Gardo significantly reduces the risk he faces by not bringing the letter with him, which in turn reduces the risk for Olivia as well, as she could have been declared complicit if they were caught with the letter on them. The revelation of the book code points to the attempts one would have to take to circumvent a corrupt society where all the powers are aimed against justice. The use of the Bible as the source of the book code points to the divinity of the justice that people like Olondriz and Angelico are working towards. The Bible serves as a symbol of not just justice, but revelation as well, as the book code located within it will eventually reveal the secret that everyone is after. Raphael and Rat begin their investigation of the case as well, venturing out of the city to where the house of the senator is located. Along the way, Raphael is needed to take Rat, as the latter would not be allowed on any



transportation because of his appearance. While at the compound, the boys are met by a groundskeeper, who, instead of turning them in, entertains them, and reveals his contempt for the corrupt senator. He also serves as a source of confidential information, telling them the rumors of how Angelico used a broken fridge to take the money out of the compound when the senator was not around.

Discussion Question 1

What does Olivia's reaction to Olondriz's story say about her character, her place in Behala?

Discussion Question 2

How does Zapanta's groundskeeper shed light on social issues through the story of Angelico's theft?

Discussion Question 3

Has Olivia learned anything useful or has her journey been for naught?

Vocabulary

defrauded, luminous, sidled, shrivel, drought



Part Four (1-7)

Summary

Rat begins the narration of the section, talking about their escape from Behala. As soon as Gardo came back from the prison and met with them, the police arrived and they made their escape, Rat realizing that they were on the run like men. Taking charge, he led the boys to the tourist area, so as to hide in big numbers. He sewed his money into his pants, living off it, and found a small room for rent on a roof where the boys could rest. Gardo returned to the prison so as to follow Marco, the prisoner who had promised Olondriz's Bible. Gardo returned with the information that Marcos wanted twenty thousand pesos. With no other options, Rat returned to the Mission School, and stole the money from Father Julliard's safe, having known the different combinations of the safe the Father noticed, and left a note with his name while he was at it. He felt guilty but decided he would return the money once they had found Angelico's six million. At the arranged meeting, Marco tried to arrest Gardo in a set-up, but he cut the guard and managed to escape, though Raphael later realized that they may have followed him since he was slower than the other two.

Returning to the room, the boys stayed up all night trying to solve the code with the Bible. After a few tries, they realized how the numbers and slashes represented a book code, and they figured out how to correspond with the map that was in the wallet. Feeling the spiritual heft of the following days Day of the Dead, the boys solved the code and realized it led to the Navaro graveyard, and that the prisoner number they had thought belonged to Olondriz was actually referring to a lot number in the graveyard. The following morning, Rat heard the police attempting to creep up the stairs to the room, before they called out for Gardo, pretending to be his cousin. The boys silently crept out through the roof but were spotted before being chased across rooftops by the police. They ran into a group of children who shielded them before they were able to hail a cab to the Navaro graveyard. A Federico Gonz offers his part of the story, as he makes grave memorials. He mentions that the poor are not buried but put in coffins that are sealed in boxes that are stacked up on each other. The stones he creates go outside the boxes, and he did work for Jose Angelico's son's grave and was approached for his daughter as well. Having been paid the deposit, he set to work on the stone, with his son doing the chiseling. The coffin was placed in its box the same day and he never heard from Angelico again.

The section ends with four clippings from different newspapers, offering their take on the Zapanta burglary. The first is a simple reportage following the events of the case so far, while the second is a satirical piece that highlights the contradictions of the vice-president campaigning for education while the education dwindled, and there is a cartoon at the bottom which shows the senator standing in front of an empty fridge looking befuddled. The third piece is a column piece that questions the veracity of the senator's claims in face of the burglary inquiry. The fourth is an attack by students on the reelection prospects of the senator, calling for new blood to be elected.



Analysis

The extent of the dangers the boys face becomes fully apparent in this section, as they find themselves being chased by the police multiple times. Having been photographed at the Colva Prison along with Olivia, the police are able to connect Gardo with Raphael and arrive at Behala with a large arresting force that the boys barely manage to escape. While both Raphael and Gardo are strong-willed, Rat becomes the primary leader of the group, reflected in his more prominent role as a narrator and voice. Since he has money saved, he is able to look after his friends while living on the streets. His resourcefulness is what saves their lives repeatedly. Needing money to acquire the Bible from Marcos, the Colva prison guard, the boys are faced with limited options. Rat's ingenuity is evident, as he visits the Mission School and extracts money from the safe. In a sense he is validating the earlier claims by Father Julliard regarding the potential for slyness, since he is able to recognize the pattern of codes that Father Julliard uses despite not knowing how to read or write. But his theft is not just that, as he feels truly guilty about taking the money, vowing to return the money, and leaving a note with his name on it, the only thing he knows how to write.

During the exchange with Marco, the boys are once again faced with the threat of imprisonment and death, as Marco is revealed to be part of a sting to arrest the boys. Gardo is able to use his quick reflexes, born from living on the streets his entire life, to escape from Marco and the rest of the police force. They were able to follow Raphael back to their room but Rat hears them arriving, their heavy footsteps giving them away. The police's deceitfulness is evident in their attempt to draw out the boys by pretending to be Gardo's cousin. But the boys are much more intelligent and are once again on the run, using the cover the street children to make their escape. But the night prior, their ingenuity is at play, as they sit around all night in an attempt to figure out the book code. Despite lacking any formal education, Raphael and Gardo have the basic knowledge of reading and writing, and they use it to figure out the code, realizing that the numbers correspond with page numbers and letters. Facing immense pressure to crack the code, they manage to do so under the auspice of the Day of the Dead. They feel they have been aided by the ghosts of Gabriel Olondriz and Jose Angelico, their spirit for truth and justice uniting them beyond the grave with the boys.

The poverty of the people of the city is illustrated through the testimonial of Federico Gonz, who reveals that poor people in the city are not buried in graves but instead, their coffins are placed in boxes that are sealed with a gravestone and then stacked upon one another. These boxes also require maintenance fees, and if the fees are not paid, the contents of the coffins are emptied out. Gonz mentions being approached by Angelico about a gravestone for his daughter, Pia Dante, which he then constructed. He witnessed Angelico put his daughter to rest and offers his amazement at what ended up really happening, which serves as foreshadowing of events that are about to happen, and also point to Angelico not being truthful, instead having a plan that he kept hidden from people around him.



The inclusion of journalistic pieces offers a different perspective, and shows a society reacting to the scandal of a senator stealing millions of dollars. They raise questions that are not raised earlier and show their mirth and anger towards a corrupt bureaucracy that has been stealing money from the poor for so long. The articles from newspapers are also a break in the form used by the author up to this point, going from more personal narrators to a more general appraisal of the events transpiring.

Discussion Question 1

How do the characters of the boys grow through their close calls with the police?

Discussion Question 2

What significance is there to Jose Angelico creating a gravestone for his daughter?

Discussion Question 3

How do the newspaper clippings reveal the different reactions to the Zapanta burglary?

Vocabulary

barge, raked, sly, bucked, muddling

Part Five (1-6) & Appendix

Summary

The section begins with the three boys, Raphael, Gardo, and Jun-Jun, having thrown off "Rat" as his primary name, as narrators, telling their story together. With the Day of the Dead being a bigger holiday than Christmas or Easter, the boys pushed through the traffic clogging the highway and arrived at a bustling cemetery, where people from around the city had arrived for the celebrations of the day. Rat recalls the legends of ghosts that he had heard of growing up in Sampalo, noting that what he was about to witness was in a league of its own. After a long wait, the boys were able to find a location that matched the clues provided in Angelico's letter. However, they realized they were looking in the wrong direction, as the cemetery was divided in two by a wall, separating the rich and the poor. They noticed some of the empty graves whose contents were thrown out after payments were not made. When they reached the Angelico graves, they tried to understand the clues and where the money would be hidden, noticing the grave of Pia Dante. Before they could come upon a decision as to how they could approach the grave, the boys are stunned when they are approached by Pia Dante, whose name they had just seen on a grave.

Recovering from the shock, the boys found shelter for Pia and set to working on the grave. As a typhoon picked up around them, they worked through the coffin and opened it, finding the six million dollars inside. Despite being overwhelmed with all the money, they made a conscious decision that they could not keep all the money. Feeling the support of the spirits of Gabriel Olondriz and Jose Angelico on the Day of the Dead, the boys decided to go back to Behala for unfinished business, with Jun narrating the rest of the way. Still feeling guilty, Jun stopped by and replaced the money he had taken previously from the Mission School. While inside, he took four uniforms and matching school bags as well, which the children fill with money. Climbing the highest hill of garbage in Behala, the children threw the money into the wind, hoping that the poor of the dumpsite were able to acquire some of the money that had been taken from them through corrupt politicians over the years. Wearing the school uniforms as disguise and left Behala, making their way to Sampalo, where they purchased boats and lived their life peacefully.

Appendix:

The final section contains a letter left by Jose Angelico with the six million dollars he had stolen. He provides details about his frustrations with Senator Zapanta, who had prevented aid from coming through his corruption over the years. As the trusted houseboy, he had access to the safe where Zapanta kept his money. While the senator never thought Angelico intelligent enough to memorize the movements of the safe, Angelico was able to figure out the combination as it related to Zapanta's five sons. He picked an opportunity when the senator was abroad and cleaned out the vault, using a



faulty fridge to take out the money. He hopes that whoever found the money would take care of Pia Dante, who he promises he will meet again.

Analysis

There is a shift in the point of view in the final section, as the three boys decide to tell their story together instead of separately, with Rat shunning off his old street name and going forward with being called Jun. The importance of the Day of the Dead is emphasized implicitly, as the crowd of people serves primarily as cover for the boys to reach the Navarro cemetery, where they are to solve the final piece of the puzzle. But the Day of the Dead is also symbolic, as it signals a certain end for the boys. They have left their old lives behind and are about to embark on a new journey that will hopefully treat them better than the previous one. There is an element of superstition as well, as the boys feel the presence of Gabriel Olondriz and Jose Angelico guiding their way. However, their quest for the six million dollars is hindered by the geographical positioning of the cemetery, which further illustrates the gap between rich and poor. There is a wall dividing the cemetery, with the poor on one side and the rich on the other. While walking to the poor side of Navarro, they notice the remains of the poor whose bodies were thrown out after payments were not made. The atmosphere has a haunted feel to it, as they are surrounded by an impending typhoon, while also confronting an alive Pia Dante, whose name they see on her gravestone, only to realize that she is still alive.

The typhoon marks nature changing as well, especially as the boys work through the coffin that has Pia Dante's name on it, hoping to find the six million dollars inside. They work their way through and find the money there but instead of claiming it all for themselves, they have an implicit understanding that the money does not belong to them. This speaks to the nobility of their character, compared to someone like Senator Zapanta, who took the money for himself rather than spend it on the poor who need it more than him. Jun keeps his promise and returns the money to the Mission School that he had previously taken, while also grabbing some uniforms. The uniforms serve as symbols of transition and change, as the children change into the clean clothes while beginning their new journey to a better life. While not taking all the money, the children do take some of it, fitting as much would go into the school bags that Jun takes from the Mission School. The rest of the money, they throw into the air, which is amplified by the typhoon, the symbolic wind of change. They do so while climbing the hills of trash at Behala, trying to reach as many people as possible who had been affected by the corruption of people like Zapanta. The children say their farewell together, noting that they live a happier and simple life. Unlike the senator, they did not do anything nefarious with their money but just tried to improve their lives a little bit.

Jose Angelico's letter, which was left in Pia Dante's coffin, is included at the end of the book. The letter highlights the brunt of Senator Zapanta's corruption, as Jose Angelico serves as a primary witness to the politician's attempts to hoard money. He feels indignant and the desire to render some measure of justice is more important than his own life. Just like the boys, his socio-political status provides him with the status of the



underdog, as the senator did not consider him intelligent enough to recognize the patterns through which he hid his money. But Angelico reveals his wit and intelligence, outsmarting the Senator on his way to exposing the corruption that plagues his society.

Discussion Question 1

What significance does the Day of the Dead have as the events of the end of the novel transpire?

Discussion Question 2

Did the children earn the right to keep all the money?

Discussion Question 3

Do the children truly have a happy ending?

Vocabulary

weepy, scorch, stoked, bundled, ablaze,



Characters

Raphael

The primary narrator of the novel, Raphael is a dumpsite boy, and despite the events of the novel, continues to identify as such. He spent his entire life leading up to his discovery of the leather wallet in Behala, where he was picking through garbage since he was three years old. He has a strong bond with his best friend, Gardo, and is always nice to Rat, who the other children mistreat. Having lived in Behala his entire life, he is used to his bleak existence but still manages to find some measure of contentment in it, not forgetting to enjoy as much life he can as an adolescent. Despite being pushed to brink for his survival, he is considerate and looks out for the people around him, as evidenced by him immediately sharing his found fortune with Gardo and then spending money to feed his family a good meal.

Despite not having a consistent education, Raphael is literate, and is able to converse in English with Father Julliard and Olivia Weston. Along with his reading and writing abilities, he is also cunning, realizing that he has to hide the leather wallet when the police arrives, and approaching Rat as a result. He does a good job of acting like a wild, innocent kid during the police search, and manages to suppress his secret deeper when being tortured by the police. Despite the ever present threat, Raphael never gives up his pursuit for justice. The allure for money becomes secondary for him, and after finding out about the history behind Jose Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz, his primary pursuit becomes to find the money so Angelico's dream does not go to waste.

Going through the ordeal of his life, Raphael possesses great emotional sensitivity, as he reacts to everything around him strongly. While in the police station, he feels great fear but is able to maintain a clear mind throughout his interrogation. His desire to protect the people he cares for and the need for justice gives him strength. However, the event leaves him traumatized and he does not admit to his friends that he is bothered by nightmares and unable to sleep at night, which frightens the people around him. He notices peoples reactions, too, as he can feel his auntie wanting him gone after the police search their house. Despite this, he does not express any animosity or contempt towards her.

Gardo

Gardo is another one of the dumpsite boys and Raphael's best friend. Growing up, he is described as occasionally being mean, which is attributed to his toughness which developed while growing up in Behala. Despite his perceived hard shell, he is kind to Raphael and has a brother-like bond with him. He is also more calculated than Raphael, orchestrating the design where they stick around Behala and pretend to be enthusiastic when the police arrive.



When the time comes for the children to enact their plan at Colva, Gardo pretends to be a troubled child to convince Olivia to go along with him. He uses some of the deception that is required to survive on the streets, but despite its use, he is genuinely apologetic for deceiving Olivia. Unlike the corrupt politicians, if he is to lie or cheat, he does so out of pure necessity. His realistic view on life is reflected in when he visits Colva with Olivia and they see the prisoners in cages, to which his reaction is minimal, as he is used to the conditions of his world.

Gardo is a survivalist, and it shows in how he navigates the world. He does not panic under pressure, even if his life is under threat. When retrieving Olondriz's Bible from Marco, he does not hesitate to attack the guard, even when the latter is trying to catch him in a sting. Gardo's timely actions help the group set off with the book and they are able to solve the puzzle of Jose Angelico.

Rat (Jun-Jun)

The youngest of the three boys, Jun-Jun, commonly referred to as Rat, is unique in that he did not originate from Behala. Unlike Raphael and Gardo, Jun was born in Sampalo, a distant beach city. As an outsider, he is treated with disdain by most of the Behala community, with the exception of Raphael and Gardo. Due to this treatment, he keeps people at a distance and lives deep inside the garbage hills of Behala, where most people do not venture off to. He is more emotionally withdrawn as well, but is more open with Raphael, who has always treated him with more kindness than the other children. He keeps his secrets from people, only divulging his stash of saved cash to Raphael when the latter has earned his trust.

Because he has no guardian or relative in Behala, his sources for food are limited, and his body reflects that as well. He also lives among rats in his shack, and his hygiene is not the best, as Raphael has to accompany him on public transportation or he would not be allowed on. But he is kind and sweet, which is why Father Julliard and Olivia Weston both treat him with special attention, giving him food and extra money whenever they can. He is good at exciting other people's sympathies, which he uses when he needs to, such as when the boys need to use the Mission School computer. He also flatters Olivia when they are trying to convince her to accompany Gardo to Colva. Despite his social status, he is able to use his charm to his advantage and better his situation.

While he is physically smaller and weaker, Jun is not afraid to take charge and action when needed. When Raphael is still reeling from his interrogation and torture at the police station, Jun pushes him forward supporting him and making sure he does not crumble under the emotional stress he is enduring. He always makes sure there is a contingency plan, including have a significant amount of savings that he sews in his clothes and keeping the roof open in case of an emergency, both of which help the boys survive on the streets. And while needing money for the final stage of their adventure, Jun does not hesitate to take money from the Mission School, for which he feels guilty. He keeps his word and returns the money, making sure to note that it was him who took the money in the first place. Despite needing to take action, Jun does not forget the



humility that makes him who he is, and he always makes sure to acknowledge anyone that has ever been kind to him, including Raphael and Father Julliard.

Father Julliard

Father Julliard runs the Mission School, and has been doing for seven years. He was originally called in for a year to help stabilize the finances of the school, but ending up staying after falling in love with the children. He is particularly kind to Jun, whom he provides extra attention with food and money. While a foreigner, he is more cognizant of the realities of the world he inhabits, acknowledging that the children are not likely to benefit from the education the school provides, hoping to provide a more soothing presence for them instead. He provides important resources for the boys as they go along their journey, including access to a computer, and the money in his safe, which he provided without his knowledge.

Sister Olivia

The temporary house-mother at the Mission School in Behala, Olivia Weston had recently graduated from university in the UK and had fallen in love with the children of the dumpsite while on vacation. While her intentions are honest and genuine, she is privileged, and it shows in her financial reliance on her father. She serves as a tool for the boys, who use her and her finances to get access to Gabriel Olondriz. While visiting Colva Prison, she is exposed to the true horrors of the world she lives in, which the natives shrug off as usual. Unlike the boys, she does not have to suffer the consequences of visiting Colva, instead leaving the country with the support of the British Embassy.

Jose Angelico

The godson of Gabriel Olondriz, Jose Angelico worked as a houseboy for Senator Zapanta for over twenty years and gained his trust enough to go with him to his vault. He was an orphan, adopted by Dante Jerome, Olondriz's son. Growing up, he is said to have had great dreams for the future and a passion to succeed, eventually tiring and settling for his life. Yet, the burn for justice remained in him and he enacted his final revenge on Senator Zapanta, exposing his corruption and justifying Olondriz's plight.

Pia Dante Angelico

The daughter of Jose Angelico, she is orphaned after his death. He creates a gravestone in her name as a distraction and stores in the six million dollars he stole in their, giving her instructions to arrive. When she is introduced, she is meek and quiet, having had limited food since she was waiting for her father for a week. She is relatively quiet and goes along with the boys as they go through the final stages of their journey.



Senator Regis Zapanta

The vice-president of the country, Senator Zapanta is a corrupt politician who has stolen millions of aid money over the years and added it to his personal wealth bank. He uses his political might to ensure that his opponents are not able to take action against him, including people like Gabriel Olondriz and Jose Angelico. He underestimates Angelico's intelligence, trusting him more than anyone and eventually leading to his burglary. While he tries desperately to cover his tracks, his corruption is exposed and he is embarrassed throughout the country. Unlike the other characters, he is only mentioned by name and never makes an appearance.

Gabriel Olondriz

A former volunteer lawyer, Gabriel attempted to expose the corruption of Senator Zapanta. Instead of succeeding, he was prosecuted and thrown into prison for defrauding the government, the exact same charge he was leveling against the senator. He is considered a legendary figure who inspires people across generations, including Jose Angelico, with whom he had a close relationship. Despite being near his death when Olivia and Gardo visit him, he possesses a strong mind and is still hounding for justice.

Auntie

Raphael's auntie is his only guardian in the world after the deaths of his parents. She has children of her own but cares for Raphael as her own child. While referring to her as "Auntie," Raphael addresses her as "Ma." She is the one who reveals to the police that Raphael had found something while going through the trash, and is eventually notes as wanting Raphael to go away due to all the attention he had attracted.



Symbols and Symbolism

Trash

Trash serves as a symbol that represents the existence of the children in the novel. As people who grow up in the dumpsite, their lives are difficult to disassociate from the trash they pilfer through, and their lives revolve around what they find and do not find. Trash is how people outside Behala perceive them as well, with the police reminding Raphael that his existence is nothing more than that of a dumpsite boy, while Father Julliard realizes the same thing but still shows compassion.

Stuppa

The word for human waste, stuppa, represents the condition of the city as a corrupt place in the third-world. Since the majority of the city does not have access to modern toilets, they dispose of their waste through the trash that ends up in places like Behala. But it also points to the corruption of the city, as the rich sit on the money that could be used to provide citizens with running water and a sewage system.

Leather Bag

The leather bag belonging to Jose Angelico serves as a symbol of both fortune and misfortune at the same time. It provides misfortune in the sense that it brings great danger upon Raphael and his friends, but it also changes their lives for the better in the end. It does not just change their lives, but is also serves as an instigation that finally brings justice in a society where injustice and corruption is the norm, as the events the occur after its discovery finally unveil the corruption of Senator Zapanta to the public.

Rats

That rats that are common in Jun's section of Behala serve as a microcosm for the entirety of Behala. Symbolic of filth and disease, that is how the residents of Behala, including the children, are treated by the rest of the world.

School Uniforms

School uniforms present socio-economic divisions and the consequences of those divisions. While escaping the city at the end of the novel, the school uniforms serve as a disguise for the children as they escape the city and leave forever. The school uniforms were provided by a charity and while blending in with other school children, the children are able to finally experience the alternative life, one that the charity might have hoped to provide them with but one which they are now embarking on in their own way.



Dollars

Despite not being the native currency, dollars are present throughout the novel and symbolize the height of corruption in the country, as politicians such as Senator Zapanta do not steal the public's money in pesos, but they funnel the aid money in dollars to their own accounts. There is an awe associated with the dollar and the power that it brings, since it is supposed to bring change for the poor in the country.

Graveyard

The graveyard is where the children finally find the six million dollars the Jose Angelico had stolen from Senator Zapanta. The place symbolizes rebirth, a chance for the children to start anew as their old world crumbles behind them.

Sampalo

The distant beach city where Jun originally hails from, Sampalo, with its simple life, is the symbol of a new life for the righteous. Having gone through so many personal trials and dangers, the children use the money they acquired to travel to Sampalo, where they live in peace and harmony. It is a reward for all that they have suffered and someplace where they can exercise their innocence as children.

Fridge

The fridge Jose Angelico uses to steal Senator Zapanta's six million dollars encapsulates the intelligence of the poor, which they possess despite not having access to the same education that the rich do. Despite his social stature, Angelico uses his ingenuity and funnels out the money through the senator's house, despite being underestimated the entire time.

Police Station

The police station serves as a symbol of institutional corruption throughout the novel, as this is where Raphael is brought and tortured. Despite being a child, he is dragged there and imprisoned without due process or access to any measure of justice. Justice goes to the police station to meet its end, as in the case of Jose Angelico, who was murdered while being interrogated.



Settings

Behala

A dumpsite that also serves as a residence for the central characters of the novel, Behala is where Raphael finds the leather wallet containing the eleven hundred pesos and the key to the station locker. In a sense, the children are tied to Behala in a socio-political sense, and it defines what their reality is, and ought to be, which they end up defying.

Rat's Shack

Since he is so isolated from the rest of Behala socially, Rat has a shack that no one bothers to visit because it is located so deep within the mounds of trash. Despite being dumpsite boys, both Raphael and Gardo how he can live among the rats that surround him. The shack serves as a place where Raphael can hide the wallet so that the police would not find it, since they would never visit the shack.

Police Station

The center for corruption, the police station is where Raphael is taken to be interrogated and where he is tortured and threatened with death. Within the same police station is where Jose Angelico is shot and murdered during an interrogation by the police.

Mission School

A foreign intervention in Behala, the Mission School is a charitable attempt to provide some semblance of an education and relief for the children of the dumpsite. Run by Father Julliard and volunteers such as Olivia Weston, the Mission School is a source of shelter and support for the boys. Raphael, Gardo, and Jun use the computers at the Mission School to learn about the Jose Angelico case and later take money to help them finance their way to solving the Jose Angelico's puzzle.

Naravo Graveyard

This is the graveyard where members of the Angelico family are placed after their death. There is a wall that runs through the middle and divides the poor and the rich. The poor are not buried in the Naravo graveyard, with their coffins instead sealed in large metal containers, which are stacked high on top of each other. The disparity in income is evident in the way the poor have to pay fees for their boxes, the contents of which are discarded if the payment is not up to date.



Colva Prison

The main prison of the city, Colva is located in one of the crumbling parts of town, a place that even puts Behala to shame. The prison requires bribes to enter and is full of people stuffed into cells in stifling hot conditions, including children. Gabriel Olondriz was imprisoned here after he tried to convict Senator Zapanta for corruption and he died in the prison as well.

Sampalo

A distant city by the beach, Jun originally hails from there and wishes to return as well. Fishing is the primary driver of the economy, and the children go there to live their lives out peacefully after the events of the novel, fishing and swimming along the beach with contentment.



Themes and Motifs

Trash

Throughout the novel, trash is symbolic for a number of things, including human beings, and how people transcend the socio-political barriers erected by their association with it. Raphael, Gardo, and Jun are synonymous with trash, as they are dumpsite boys who have been confined to that role by society and they are not expected to be able to transcend that role in their life. As such, they are certain expectations that go along with being trash, as someone who spends the entirety of their life, from childhood to adulthood, sifting through garbage and trying to find something worthwhile. Despite the presence of charitable organizations, such as the Mission School, dumpsite children are not expected to accomplish anything of note in their life, nor are they considered to be intellectually capable of competing against more powerful, more socially robust individuals and institutions.

Yet, despite the position prescribed to them, the children find ways to upset the expectations and rise to the occasion. Their value lies in their humanity, as both Father Julliard and Olivia Weston point out their innocence as children and the beauty they possess as children. Even though they do nothing but comb through trash, the children are able to extract small joys out of their existence. They have good relationships with each other, looking out for one another when others do not provide that. They might not possess much capital, social or financial, but they are able to muster through their difficult lives by being strong and reliant on each other through difficult times. Gardo keeps an eye out for Raphael when the latter loses himself in his exuberance, while Jun uses the money he has been saving so as to help his friends survive on the street. Despite being labeled as trash by the entirety of society, the children are able to fight through the label and make a better life for themselves by the end of the novel.

The trash is also where Raphael finds Jose Angelico's leather wallet, which begins the journey of his life. The wallet has more value than its surrounding items, and is able to transform the life of the person who finds it. For Raphael, the wallet is a treasure found in trash, an object that propels his life forward in unexpected ways. Just like the children defy their surroundings, the wallet serves as a symbolic object. Even if they come from low beginnings, the children have value as human beings.

Money

Money serves a character test, as various individuals come across large sums of money, each reacting in different ways that informs the kind of person they are. The first person who sees a large amount of money is Raphael, as he finds eleven hundred pesos in a leather wallet. His immediate reaction is not to hoard it, but to share it with his best friend and then treat family and friends to a good dinner. Had he not taken the money, and instead taken the wallet to the police, him and his family could have been



spared the entirety of their ordeal. But he did not take the money because of greed, doing so out of the necessity that comes from living a difficult life. Later, his aunt tries to persuade him to be honest to the police, as she looks forward to the ten thousand pesos they promise. But doing so would only jeopardize the family further. Raphael continues on to solve the puzzle left by Jose Angelico for the money, but because he has been forced into the situation and the desire to acquire some measure of justice for the deceased is important to him.

For someone like Senator Zapanta, money brings out all the negative elements of his personality. Despite his position of responsibility, he uses that perch to steal money from the public who needs it, instead hoarding his own personal bank. Whenever his corruption is threatened, he responds with extreme aggression, labeling Gabriel Olondriz a traitor and then having Jose Angelico murdered. He is also a social elitist, as he never considers that Jose Angelico, a houseboy, could be capable of stealing from him.

With Jun, the issue of money and trust go hand in hand. Since he does not have many friends and is always mistreated by others, he tends to keep his secrets close to his chest. He never reveals to anyone that he has been saving up money so he could return home. But he does eventually share this information with Raphael, since his friends need his help. He then uses that money to take care of Raphael and Gardo while they are on the run from the police. Later, he needs to steal money from the Mission School safe in order to fund their purchase of the Bible. While Father Julliard did not expressly trust him, he did let his guard down around Jun when opening the safe. Jun takes the money but not for personal use, which he could have done all along, instead taking it so he could eventually return it, which he does.

Lost Innocence

Despite being children, Raphael, Gardo, Jun, and Pia Dante suffer ordeals that rob them of their innocence but contribute to the development of their characters in profound ways. Even though they live on the dumpsite in Behala, the boys manage to have fun amongst themselves, extracting joy from their existence. They take pleasure in the small things that life throws their way, and have good relations with one another. After the discovery of the wallet, however, they are subject to the injustices of the corrupt political institutions of their country. Despite being children, the police does not hold back on their brutal interrogation methods, verbally and physically torturing Raphael in an attempt to extract information from him on the orders of the corrupt vice-president. Later, the boys are shot at when being chased by the police. Their lives are drastically changed, and they can never be innocent children after the ordeal they suffer through. But the trials and tribulations are not for naught, as they learn the strength of their character and bond with each other.

Pia Dante and Jose Angelico suffer the loss of their innocence as well. As an adopted child, Jose had great plans and hopes for the future. According to Gabriel Olondriz, Jose had dreams of being successful in life. But along the way, he became disillusioned



with the system and settled for a position as a houseboy. The system failed him, and the unbridled dreams and passions that are associated with the innocence of childhood are wasted due to the corruption of people like Zapanta. He tries to create a better life for his daughter, Pia Dante, but he ends up losing his life in the pursuit of justice. Pia Dante is left with no parent in the world, and has to grow up quickly. She nearly starves after waiting for her father for a week after she leaves her relatives. While she should be in school, she is left to tend to her survival. The same system that put her godfather, Olondriz, in prison, kills her father as well, and she is left with no guardian in the world.

Corruption

Even though there is constant danger associated with the pursuit of justice, various characters take up the mantle and fight against corruption, which allows the reader to witness their growth from simply dumpsite children to individuals who display remarkable courage in the face of death and subjugation by the system. Despite being dumpsite boys, Raphael, Gardo, and Jun do their utmost to continue the battle that began with Gabriel Olondriz, and was continued on with Jose Angelico. There are consequences to fighting for justice in a corrupt society, as Olondriz found himself falsely accused of crimes and then thrown in jail, while Jose Angelico lost his life trying to expose the corruption of the vice-president. But their example is enough to inspire the poor children who dig through garbage to strive for a better life and fight against the system that devalues them as human beings. Even though it comes with the threat of death and imprisonment, they find a way to pull through at every turn.

There is backlash for fighting against corruption, as the system is set in such a way so as to suppress the voice of the just, as various individuals are faced with systematic hurdles such as imprisonment or death by the police. Gabriel Olondriz was an unpaid volunteer who attempted to expose Senator Zapanta's corruption. Instead of being facilitated, he was imprisoned, with his driver and maid perishing in a house fire instigated by the senator. Even from prison, however, he urges the need for justice, a spirit that he passes along to Jose Angelico, and then the boys from Behala. When Raphael has his first exposure to the corrupt system while being tortured in the police station, part of what keeps him going is the need to continue the fight initiated by Olondriz, the fight for which Angelico lost his life and which left his daughter an orphan. They might not be educated and in a strong position to take on the system, but the dumpsite boys have the courage and desire to take on corruption in a society that never offered them any opportunity in the first place.

Similarly, Father Julliard and Olivia Weston try to create a better life for the poor children, but their efforts are mitigated by the depth of corruption. The system is set in such a way, and social mobility so restricted, that despite having the power of a foreign charity behind them, they are unable to improve the lives of the Behala children. Father Julliard's resigned confession points to his understanding of the system, as he understands the limited impact someone like him could possibly have. Olivia is manipulated into helping the children since she can open doors as an outsider, but her



effectiveness is limited, as even she cannot the system of bribes and corruption that are endemic in this society.

Charity

The novel presents charity not only as a potential alleviation of poverty for scores of disadvantaged, but also as something that is routinely manipulated to increase the profits and political might of the powerful. The Mission School established in Behala is a charitable endeavor aimed at providing the children with some semblance of education. It also attempts to provide some shelter and basic amenities to the children, as the children can take baths and use the computer on occasion. While it may not do much, the gesture originates out of a genuine intent to improve the lives of the children. Both Father Julliard and Olivia Weston truly care for the children and do everything they possibly can to help them, even if on occasion they are manipulated into doing so. The computer at the Mission School is how the boys find out about Jose Angelico and the safe there is where Jun takes the requisite funds to purchase Olondriz's Bible. It may not always be effective in its purest form, but the charitable Mission School offers value and service to the children of Behala.

Senator Zapanta's corruption is evident in the source of his power and wealth, as he diverted charitable money to his own accounts, using the accompanying might to ensure the system remains favorable to him. As Olondriz reveals, the vice-president redirected U.N aid for infrastructure projects to his own accounts, which then forced any further aid from not coming into the country. While charity is meant to help people, there are always bureaucratic hurdles and corrupt politicians that attempt to hold the positive elements back. Had the charitable aid been used to improve the country, someone like Jose Angelico would not have to resort to being a houseboy, and the children of Behala would live better lives. But the reality of the world is otherwise, and despite the good intentions of organizations, people are not always able to benefit from the aid directed at them. Charity is just another tool for the corrupt to enlarge their coffers but the world has a way of restoring the balance, as the children release the money the vice-president stole into the winds at Behala, so that everyone who had been robbed could share in some of the wealth.

Charity can be a means of helping the less unfortunate, but always in an unorthodox manner. While the Mission School exists for the sake of providing resources to the children of Behala, its effectiveness is limited in improving their lives, but individuals such as Jun can manipulate the resources and maximize them to their own benefit. Jun can excite the sympathies of Father Julliard and Olivia Weston, and he uses this to acquire more money, which he uses later to aid the boys during the search for Angelico's treasure. The money from the Mission School safe and the uniforms are another example of the indirect way this charity helps the characters in the novel, as Jun takes money from the safe to help finance the purchase of Olondriz's Bible, and the school uniforms serve as a perfect disguise for the children as they escape the city.



Styles

Point of View

There are multiple narrators in the novel, as different characters jump in to add their unique perspectives to the events occurring. The novel is told with first-person, past-tense narration. All the characters are relating from the future, and are aware of what occurred and how action unfolded. Each narrator provides the story from a first person point of view, and their roles and lengths vary as well. Most of the narrators are primary actors in the novel, such as Raphael and the other Behala boys, while people like Grace make one-time appearances, offering testimonials that supplement a small aspect of the novel.

With Raphael being the primary narrator, the other voices come and go, some becoming prominent as the novel goes on. Jun in particular has a bigger role and voice when he becomes embroiled with the activities of Raphael and Gardo directly. Olivia Weston and Father Julliard are introduced in the middle of the novel and then fade away as the events of the novel go past them. The plot is revealed in a linear fashion, and the narrators mirror the movement of action as well. The different parts are arranged so the characters speak when they fit the portion of the story that is relevant to them.

Language and Meaning

Despite being set in a third-world country, English is the primary language of the novel. On occasion, the foreign characters will highlight that the natives are speaking in their own language but the distinction is never made in the language, with no foreign words inserted in the text. The tone of the language changes with the narrator throughout the novel. With the child narrators, such as Raphael and Gardo, the language reflects their age, as they are children and more exuberant in how they relate their stories. However, Father Julliard is particular in how he differentiates himself through the way he speaks, as he is more articulate and deliberate in how he narrates. Despite the shifts in tone, the diction and prose are simple throughout the text.

Structure

The novel is structured into five major parts divided in smaller chapters. While the three parts serves as the overall structure of the plot, the individual chapters in the parts allow for shifting perspectives. Sometimes a different narrator offers insight into the same event that a previous narrator covered, which allows for more multiple dimensions to the story.

The first part of the novel introduces the central characters and takes the reader until the children discover the letter and package at the railway station. The second part



introduces Father Julliard and leads up to when Raphael is released from the police station. Olivia Weston begins the third part, which ends with Grace's testimonial after Gardo and Olivia return from Colva. The fourth and fifth parts cover the children as they run from the police and attempt to solve the final puzzle in the quest to find the six million dollars left behind by Jose Angelico. The division of parts allows for a tiered approach that creates suspense at each ending, serving as mini cliffhangers that bring the reader along slowly.



Quotes

I was a trash boy since I was old enough to move without help and pick things up.
-- Raphael (Part One, Chapter 1)

Importance: In the beginning of the novel, Raphael illustrates the reality of his life, including the fact that him and children around him pick up trash for a living from their earliest days. As soon as they are able to physically do it, they work as dumpsite children, pitching in to survive.

He can be mean, it's true- but then again he's taken more beatings than me so maybe he's grown up faster.
-- Raphael (Part One, Chapter 2)

Importance: Here, Raphael talks about his best friend, Gardo, who has a very hard outer shell. While acknowledging the truth of Gardo's occasional meanness, Raphael points out that surviving in their particular world requires Gardo to be the way he is.

Raphael is my best friend but he's like a kid, always laughing, playing, thinking everything's fun, thinking it's a game- so I said they have to see us working and looking, and that way maybe they leave us alone: and so we waited.
-- Gardo (Part One, Chapter 5)

Importance: Gardo is calculated and reasonable, and it shows when he is attempting to reign in the wild tendencies of Raphael, which could possibly get them in trouble with the police. Gardo is the one who provides the plan that will hopefully protect them from the prying eyes of the corrupt police.

They had all got what they wanted, and had deceived me beautifully.
-- Father Julliard (Part Two, Chapter 1)

Importance: While he eventually becomes aware of the events that occur, Father Julliard is originally unaware of what the boys have set out to accomplish. He remarks on the ingenuity of the children, who orchestrated their plan without letting on to anyone, including Father Julliard.

And the truth is, no, I did not. It sounds crazy, but there was a part of me sure I'd never found it, and some other part of me begging me not to give up-maybe for Jose Angelico, because we knew more about him now.
-- Raphael (Part Two, Chapter 2)

Importance: When being tortured in the police station, Raphael finds a reserve of strength that allows him to face his fears. He is able to convince himself of his truth so as to protect him from the police, while also being driven by a sense of righteousness in regards to what he is hiding from the police.



I had expected cells, but all I saw was cages.
-- Olivia Weston (Part Three, Chapter 4)

Importance: Olivia faces the harsh reality of her surroundings for the first time, and her shock is overwhelming as she walks through Colva Prison. There are children among men in the cells, and they are all packed together in the heat, inspiring a dreadful awe in her.

We ran, me laughing like we were just kids out having fun- little kids that nobody gets suspicious of- and we kept going, following the walls.
-- Rat (Jun-Jun) (Part Three, Chapter 9)

Importance: While leaving the confines of Behala, Rat and Raphael work hard to not arouse the suspicion of people around them. They put on an act of being innocent children having fun, which is ironic, because what they have set out to do endangers their lives.

Because of my father, somebody from the British Embassy arrived, and argued very strongly that I was naive and innocent.
-- Olivia Weston (Part Three, Chapter 10)

Importance: Here, Olivia's privilege comes into play, as she is being questioned by the police after having been photographed at the Colva Prison. But instead of facing a punishment or arrest, her status as a foreigner allows her the help of somebody from the British Embassy, which is in sharp contrast to the what Gardo would have to face in that situation.

I'm just so used to keeping what I do private, I could not share what I was going to do- nor the fact I had to do it before the end of the month, which was coming up fast.
-- Rat (Jun-Jun) (Part Four, Chapter 1)

Importance: An important aspect of Rat's character is revealed here. As someone who is used to being mistreated by people around him, Rat is a very isolated figure, and as such, does not easily divulge information. He is also quite decisive, and decides to take action quickly without consulting with his friends, especially considering the urgency of their situation.

What do I know, though? I'd seen nothing like this.
-- Rat (Jun-Jun) (Part Five, Chapter 1)

Importance: Rat provides a certain sense of foreshadowing, as he draws on certain supernatural tales of his childhood to create a sense of foreboding for what the children are about to face in the graveyard.

We knew the money wasn't ours, because even though I never met the man, Gabriel Olondriz- the way Gardo had told us about him, I knew he was a good man, through and through.



-- Raphael (Part Five, Chapter 5)

Importance: Despite all their trials and tribulations, the boys do not feel worthy of the six million dollars that they have uncovered. This reflects on their character, as their sense of morality is strong enough to prevent them from taking all the money and consider sharing it with the world.

Yes. You walk far enough and the earth does turn to soft sand, and now we are in a place more beautiful than creation.

-- Raphael, Gardo, Jun, Pia (Part Five, Chapter 6)

Importance: Having faced so much danger, and a bleakness to their existence that was forced on them by society, the children finally find a future that is better than their past. They have left the garbage behind them and are ready to live in Sampalo, where they will fish and live a peaceful life.