

My Favorite Book Is...

A good book is filled with moments of joy that makes a person smile or sigh of relief as he or she reads it. It is also filled with sparks of pain or heartbreak that every soul can relate to. Every story has to have challenges or feelings that the characters try to conquer, but a good story takes the challenges and supports them with inspirational lessons or messages that one could use later in life. I have found only a couple of novels that share such qualities, and one has struck me as most effective. The name of the novel is somewhat of an understatement of the great story that lies inside of it. Yet, that seems to be the beauty of it; the story is defined by this modest title, but it is so much more. The name of the book is What's Eating Gilbert Grape, a story of the coming-of-age of a young man who seems to be trapped by the overruling walls of his family, friends, and the society of Endora, a small town in Iowa. Yes, the story is told by Gilbert Grape, a twenty-four year old man who struggles with his life in ways that I could relate to. I think it is beautiful that I, a fifteen year old girl, can relate to this man-child. It is very different to see a man's point of view of his small town life, but in some ways it is so similar. Living in the forever-growing town of Mt. Juliet, there are still hidden corners of the place where everyone knows my name. This can help a person out at times, but it could also haunt him or her, as if people may know too much about one's life.

The book is based upon the Grape family, a very dysfunctional bunch that has its quirks and qualities about it. The family lives in an old, beaten house that seems a little more unstable as the story progresses. It holds five people: Gilbert, Amy (the cook of the family), Ellen (the typical teenage girl), Arnie (a mentally challenged eighteen year old), and Mama, the woman who looked so beautiful a few years back, until her husband committed suicide. After that tragic incident, Mama let herself go and gained more than four hundred pounds within years. Yes, I would say that the Grape family is quite unique, but that is what keeps them tugging at the heartstrings of many readers.

Gilbert's ways of coping with problems was getting out of hand, until a new girl named Becky came to Endora and changed his life forever. Becky is one of my

favorite characters because she is a gorgeous young girl who is inspirational with her ways of thinking. For example, she hates it when guys fall in love with her because of her looks. She wants to be more than a Barbie doll, and I admire her morals. Throughout the book, she always says, "Insides count," implying that a person should not be defined by his/her outer beauty because a person's inner soul is what really matters most. She is a deep, meaningful character who expresses herself openly, much different from Gilbert, who shies away from any feelings he has.

This novel let me escape the noisy classrooms and busy places and reminded me of the possibilities that could occur in my life. It has encouraged me to never give up hope, even when things are down-right ugly or intimidating. A book like What's Eating Gilbert Grape shows more than a lesson learned, but a heart that has been lifted from an uneasy life. It brings pain as well as peace within readers, and an author who writes books like that should definitely receive recognition for his/her phenomenal piece of work. Thank you, Peter Hedges, for a wonderful adventure that I got to become a part of!