



Shattered

Sarah N. Harvey

Reading level: 3.0

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Book Summary

When March catches her boyfriend, Tyler, cheating on her at a party, furious she pushes him down. He hits his head, passes out; March checks his pulse, calls 9-1-1, but then leaves him lying on the pool deck. When she finds out the next morning that he is in a coma and might not live, March reacts by methodically attempting to ruin her “perfect” life. She cuts and dyes her hair, quits her great job and finds a dead-end one, dons her mother’s clothes, discards her contacts and replaces them with her old glasses, and estranges herself from her friends. March punishes herself for making Tyler suffer, but, in the end, even she realizes that no punishment can change the truth of what has happened, especially her involvement.

Prereading Idea

Ask students to investigate the causes, symptoms, cures and recovery rates of individuals who have an acute subdural hematoma. Students might also find case studies of patients who have been in a coma as a result of these types of brain injuries. Have students create, post and share with their classmates a mini-poster of their most important findings.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Imagine the conversation between March and her mother when March convinces her mom to let her use the car if she only drinks one beer. Ask students to recreate that conversation with a partner, writing the scene as a skit to be performed by two people. Then ask students to volunteer to perform their skit for the class.
- Hazel recites a sextina (sestina) by Elizabeth Bishop for March in chapter 9 and a haiku by Basho in chapter 11. Ask students to locate and read the poems online and then to write a sextina or a haiku of their own to share with the class based on one of the main characters' experiences feelings or reactions to the story events.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Theme

Theme is not the subject of the work, but instead is an insight about life or human nature. Based on this definition of theme, ask students to determine the theme of *Shattered*. Clues to the theme can be found in chapter 14 in the conversation between March and her parents, as well as in March's description of the "new and improved" Tyler in chapter 15. Ask students to read these passages and write a thematic statement. As a class, create a bulletin board for these and other themes found in classroom readings.

Setting

Set in the summer, the plot could have occurred almost anywhere, while the characters are typical teenagers on "summer break," an almost universal experience for youth. Ask students to think about alternative setting details if the story had evolved in their community. Then have students set the story in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s, choosing a scene to rewrite using both place- and period-specific details. Have students share their rewrites with the class.

Point of View

This story is told from March's point of view, so the reader knows only what March is thinking and feeling, but not any of the other characters. For example, what is Nat feeling when March doesn't return her calls? What is Tyler thinking when March catches him with Kayla in the hot tub? Have students write a retelling either from Nat or Tyler's point of view of one of these events or another of the student's choosing. Have students share their retellings with the class. In both the writing and the sharing, the students should focus on assuming the true voice of the character.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Why does March neglect to tell her brother, Augie, or her parents that she pushed Tyler and left him before the ambulance arrived?
2. Why does March transform her life after she learns that Tyler is in a coma? How does her transformation help her cope with what she did to Tyler? Does it help her?
3. When March “runs away” from her life, why don’t her friends come over to see why she doesn’t answer her phone or hang out with them anymore?
4. Why is March drawn to Hazel, the Poetry Girl? What does she gain from their relationship?
5. Tyler is angry and unforgiving when March confesses that she left him at the party. What is so ironic about his reaction?
6. What does March learn from her transformation experience? What changes does she make in her life? How does Tyler change as a result of the coma?
7. After March tells Natalie and her parents what really happened, how do they help March accept the changes in her life?

Writer’s Craft

Imagery

Sarah N. Harvey uses a variety of techniques to allow the reader to visualize the scene she is writing, producing writing full of imagery. For example, in chapter 4, “I scrambled down the far side of the hill and tucked myself into a spot...” and “Moss covered boulders sheltered me from the wind off the sea and hid me...” These powerful verbs show the reader something vivid about the scene. In chapter 6, the use of a simile helps the reader to see the dried-up contacts: “They’d be as dry as cornflakes soon.” Ask students to find other examples of imagery and then to find a situation in the book about which they can write their own imagery using powerful verbs, metaphor, simile or personification. Have students work with a partner to “swap” rewrites and “draw” the images created by the rewritten passages. Post both the rewrites and the resulting drawings.

Author Biography

Sarah N. Harvey comes from a family that honors books and reading. Her mother was an avid reader; her father, a neurosurgeon; one brother an English professor, and the other, a writer. With a life so filled with books and a love for reading, it is no wonder that Sarah’s first job was in a bookstore. After she earned her degree in English, she was the trade book buyer at the University of Victoria Bookstore for fifteen years. In 1988 she wrote review columns, and in 2001 she published her first essay. Sarah lives in Victoria, British Columbia.