
The Use of Foreshadowing in Ordinary People by Diana Evans

Foreshadowing is a literary device that is used many times in the novel Ordinary People.

One example of foreshadowing is when Conrad lets out his feelings with his mother, Beth, when she gets angry at him for not telling her that he had quit the swim team. Conrad, who struggles with depression, has previously kept all of his feelings bottled up inside him. He then unleashes all of his anger at Beth which essentially ruins their relationship for the rest of the novel. This massive blow up that Conrad has with Beth, foreshadows another instance in which Conrad completely lets out his feelings. Later in the novel, Conrad overhears one of his so-called friends, Stillman, talking insensitively about his dead brother at a swim meet. After the meet is over, Stillman says a few more nasty comments to Conrad. Conrad then completely loses it and punches him. They get into a fight and both of them are bloodied up in the end. Conrad letting out his feelings with his mother most definitely foreshadowed him doing it again later in the book with Stillman.

Another example of foreshadowing is when Karen and Conrad hang out a little while after they both get out of the hospital. When Karen claims to be late and has to leave, Conrad is hurt by this and asks Karen to hang out again sometime soon. Karen responds with, "Sure. Call me, I'd like to see you. But just not real soon. We should both be careful about who we see. It isn't good for either of us to get down.... It's contagious, you know that". When Karen refers to depression as contagious and flat out says that she doesn't want to see Conrad soon, it shows that she has not yet completely worked through her mental condition. This foreshadows when she commits suicide at the end of the book.

Throughout the novel Ordinary People, there are several instances that demonstrate how Conrad is healing and growing into his new identity. One example of this is when he quits the swim team. After talking to Dr. Berger about how his timing is poor, and how he hates coach Salan, Dr. Berger encourages him to quit. However, Conrad is concerned that it will make him look bad after he quit last year. Eventually, he realizes that the swim team is truly no longer right for him, and tells Salan that he is quitting. Salan is angry of course, but Conrad was able to stand up for himself, and make an important decision in the right direction, which is a major improvement. A second example that shows how Conrad is growing into his new identity is when he makes a list of new goals. His list reads, "1. Finals, 2. Exercise, 3. Friends, 4. Job, 5. Guitar, 6. Books, and 7. Girls". When Conrad sets goals for himself, he creates guiding

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purposes. At the start of the novel, Conrad felt as though he didn't really have an identity. He felt worthless, hopeless and had no reason to get out of bed in the morning. These new goals hold immense worth and create a new identity for him. This is a huge step towards overcoming his depression.

Beth left Calvin and Conrad because her relationship with them came to a breaking point. Beth hadn't gotten along with Conrad for many months. She was unable to forgive him for attempting suicide and was in denial about the fact that he had depression. She also got extremely angry at Calvin when he told some their friends that Conrad had been seeing a psychiatrist. She could not wrap her head around the fact that Conrad couldn't be perfect like his older brother Jordan was. After Conrad didn't tell Beth about quitting the swim team, they had a big fight over Christmas break, and their relationship kind of went downhill from there. After that, Beth hardly ever talked to Conrad one on one or checked on him when she came home late. She would also often criticize Calvin for asking him questions and being overly concerned with what was going on in Conrad's life. In my opinion, it was appropriate and fitting for Beth to leave the house. Calvin and Beth have always had very different personalities. Beth was always a perfectionist and put an extreme amount of effort into her looks and image. Calvin always wanted to do what was best for the family and raise his kids the right way. He tackled his problems head on, whereas Beth tended to run away from them. Beth put an extreme amount of pressure on Conrad and Calvin to be perfect all the time. This would always cause a lot of tension between them. Without Beth in the house, Conrad can just be himself, without having to live up to unrealistic expectations.

Throughout the entire novel, Beth seems to be in denial. At first, Beth is in denial about Jordan's death. When Conrad is the only one found on the boat when the sailing accident happens, Beth is convinced that they would find Jordan. In the book she says, "They'll find him, They'll find them both". It is also revealed that she didn't cry during his funeral. She just sat still, calm and stone faced next to Conrad. After the funeral was over she cried, "How did this happen?" over and over again. However, as we reach the middle of the novel, Beth's denial kind of shifts. She now can't accept the fact that Conrad isn't perfect like Jordan was. She is unable to come to terms with Conrad's depression, and after he attempts suicide, she never truly forgives him. This puts an immense amount of tension on their relationship. This is part of the reason why Beth leaves the house at the end of the novel.

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