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A Glimpse into the Writing Style of Markus Zusak

“I had to decide what I was going to do, and what I was going to be. I was standing there, waiting for someone to do something, till I realized the person I was waiting for was myself”— Cameron Wolfe, *The Underdogs.* In the novel, *The Underdogs,*Cameron comes to the realization that he is responsible for his life, and if he wants something he has to take charge. No one will do it for him. Markus Zusak sprinkles these important life lessons throughout all of his novels. Zusak is a master of leading his readers to lessons that are easily applicable to everyday life while presenting the attitude that failure is acceptable, with the new perspectives he offers from his life experiences, and with the connectivity between characters and readers.

Markus Zusak is a firm believer in failure and never giving up. Before and during his writing career, he faced many setbacks. Zusak worked several odd jobs – janitor, house painter, and high school English teacher. He once said, “When you really stop to think about it, you realize success and failure kind of live side by side. Failure gives success meaning.” Despite struggling with procrastination and the ability to sit down and write, Zusak crafted the best-selling novel, *The Book Thief*, after three years of hard work, determination, and thousands of failures. The goal was not easily accomplished, but with each setback he faced, Zusak was closer to the end goal or the “prize” of finishing his novel. Each setback or failure taught him something. The final product was not easily accomplished, but it was well worth the hard work. In an interview Zusak stated, “We don’t value things that come easily. The very reason you’re failing is because it’s not easy. It should be difficult and that’s what makes the whole thing worth it.”

Based on his personal experiences Markus Zusak is able to offer his readers a variety of new perspectives and incites from a plethora of different backgrounds. Zusak’s parents were both living in Europe during World War II. His mother was German and living in Munich. She can recount Jews marching through her town to Dachau and a bombing in Munich. His father was an Austrian house painter. In Zusak’s book, *The Book Thief*, he describes Leisel and her family in a bunker during a bombing in Munich, her father—Hans—as a house painter, and Leisel and Rudy feeding Jews bread as they marched through Himmel Street. In his trilogy, *The Underdogs*, the relationship between Cameron and Rube is loosely based off of his relationship with his brother. In using his personal experiences, Zusak is able to perfectly paint a picture of the characters struggles, accomplishments, joys, and also allows readers to easily connect with characters. Cameron and Rube are trying to find their niche in the world, and have a rough but loving family life. They do not have two dimes to rub together, so they turn to boxing to make money. Zusak shows readers the boys’ struggles to find self-worth, and their fight to create a path in life that leads to happiness. He shows readers what it is to come from a poor family and the journey everyone faces to find meaning in life. Markus Zusak’s writings beautifully portray everyday life in a realistic fashion that everyone can connect with and relate to.

“She leaned down and looked at his lifeless face and Leisel kissed her best friend, Rudy Steiner, soft and true on his lips. He tasted dusty and sweet. He tasted like regret in the shadows of trees and in the glow of the anarchist's suit collection. She kissed him long and soft, and when she pulled herself away, she touched his mouth with her fingers...She did not say goodbye. She was incapable, and after a few more minutes at his side, she was able to tear herself from the ground. It amazes me what humans can do, even when streams are flowing down their faces and they stagger on...” Markus Zusak allows readers to feel and connect with the characters’ emotions. The readers feel pain, sorrow, happiness, et cetera when the characters experience each emotion. He allows readers to feel a connection with each character. In the quote above, from *The Book Thief*, Leisel is kissing her best friend good bye after a bombing in which he is killed. Zusak uses characters’ emotions to connect with the readers’ emotions. Once again in *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* Cameron is fighting to find his place in the world. Zusak demonstrates each person’s internal struggle, as a teenager, to fit in and shows Cameron’s struggles and triumphs. He will have readers rooting for Cameron. Also, in *I Am the Messenger,* Zusak uses Ed Kennedy’s mission to illustrate the beauty and complexity of life through choices and helping others. Ed must deliver a “message” to everyone on his list. He helps everyone, but what he does not realize is that he is discovering who he is along the way. He must make difficult decisions and is put into difficult spots, but he always finds a way to solve every obstacle thrown at him. In life everyone is trying to roll with the punches, find their way in the world, and everyone is faced with decisions. Zusak shows readers how even the smallest choice to help someone can make an impact in a big way. He offers readers the knowledge of what the everyday person is thinking, and he shows readers they are not alone in their struggles. He allows readers to connect with the everyday choices life offers. Zusak gives readers the opportunity to look at life in someone else’s shoes.

Markus Zusak presents many themes and life lessons in his writings. He believes failure is beneficial always, and in order to succeed one must never give up, even when the going gets tough. Zusak has had unique opportunities in life that allows him to write from a variety of different backgrounds and offer new perspectives. He has powerful statements that will leave readers thinking for days after they finish a novel. Markus Zusak demonstrates this through his writing in one of his novels, “It's impeccable how brutal the truth can be at times. You can only admire it. Usually, we walk around constantly believing ourselves. ‘I'm okay,’ we say. ‘I'm alright.’ But sometimes the truth arrives on you, and you can't get it off. That’s when you realize that sometimes it isn’t even an answer - it's a question. Even now, I wonder how much of my life is convinced.”

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