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Literary Analysis of *Mexican Whiteboy*

Mexican Whiteboy Character Analysis Essay

You have just completed the novel *Mexican Whiteboy*, by Matt De La Pena. In the novel you are introduced to a number of different characters that have evolved throughout the novel. Select a specific character from the novel to analyze. While analyzing this character be sure to include:

- The character's personality traits:
 - What are they like?
 - What are some strengths and weaknesses of your character?
 - How does your character present him/herself to others? How may that presentation differ when they are alone?
 - How does your characters appearance affect their presentation to others?
- What motivates your character?
 - What are your character's goals, dreams or aspirations?
 - How is your character working to achieve these goals?
- What conflicts does your character face?
 - Does your character face person v. person, person v. self, person v. society or person v. nature conflicts?
- The basis of the novel relies heavily on different cultures and identity struggles within those cultures, thus what is your character's family background?
 - How does your characters family or background affect their personality?
 - Is your characters identity struggle significant in their quest to achieve their goals?

Once you have included all these aspects of your character analysis discuss the progression that your character has made from the beginning to the end of the novel. Discuss whether or not their conflicts were resolved and whether they achieved their goals and how.

Mexican Whiteboy Scenario Based Prompt

Scenario: Your classmates have just been required to read *Mexican Whiteboy* by Mathew De La Pena. You are extremely enthused by the way in which De La Pena has presented his characters within the novel. You and a few of your classmates begin comparing the characters in the novel to some others in popular films who had to face the same struggles culturally or internally. After these discussions, you feel as though De La Pena's character portrayal should be brought to the Silver Screen!

Task: Consider some of the following films listed below. View one to compare and contrast the character(s) within the film to those in the novel *Mexican Whiteboy*. Be sure to consider: character conflicts, personality traits, identity struggles, cultural concerns and family background.

Write a carefully worded memo to the author of the book,

- persuade him to write a script, or sell the rights of his novel to a production company
- explain why you feel as though this novel would make for a great movie
- include your character comparison from another popular film with a similar subject
- express how the popular film may have been inspirational for others and why De La Pena's book would possibly be as well

- A) [Save the Last Dance](#)
- B) [Freedom Writers](#)
- C) [Footloose](#)
- D) [Coach Carter](#)
- E) [Glory Road](#)
- F) [Remember the Titans](#)

The Ins and Outs of Uno: A Character Analysis from Matt De La Pena's *Mexican Whiteboy*

While reading Matt De Le Pena's *Mexican Whiteboy*, the reader is immediately immersed in the lives of characters within the novel. From the beginning we are able to get to know many different characters and the intricate details about their lives. Two of the characters De La Pena spends a significant amount of time covering are the titles main inspiration, Danny Lopez, and what we originally assume as his antagonist, Uno. The reader may feel him or herself wanting to take a side in the beginning as to which character they enjoy the most, and who they may want to see succeed; however, as the story unfolds the two make a tremendous progression in the most unlikely way possible. Uno, who is very complex makes great strides throughout the novel and the many conflicts and adversity he faces only helps the reader to become a supporter of his, ultimately rooting for him succeed.

The character Uno is introduced fairly early in De La Pena's *Mexican Whiteboy*. We should realize that he will be a driving force within the novel after reading the chapter: "Home Run Derby: Uno's Time Has Come." There is a very carefully crafted dual stream of consciousness between the novels title character Danny Lopez and Uno. The reader is able to see the stark contrast between the characters when De La Pena states: "Not only is Uno the only black kid in the neighborhood- or negrito, as the old Mexicans call him (even though his moms is Mexican, too)- he's also stronger, quicker, taller, a better fighter"(9). This allows readers to see the immediate difference between the two. Danny who has a Mexican father and a Caucasian mother differs vastly from Uno who has a Mexican mother, and an African American father. The picture one could draw of Uno would probably have him significantly darker than all of his friends. He stands out, and it makes you consider whether this difference makes him more troubled. Would Uno still be the best fighter had he not been mixed with African American? Does the fact that he stands out

make him more vulnerable? He is probably constantly approached in National City because he is different. Often times when people are susceptible to injustice or criticism from others they have to find a way to be intimidating themselves. Uno is a character that is always in some sort of conflict. He benefits tremendously from his superior strength and ability to intimidate. Uno often states that he is not afraid of anyone; however, there is one person who can crack Uno's tough exterior, his father Senior.

Another difference that Danny and Uno share is the presence of father figures in their lives. Danny longs for a relationship with his father, who remains absent throughout the entire novel. Uno, on the other hand, has a pretty decent relationship with his father although his parents are divorced. Senior, Uno's father seems to be the most influential figure in his life. Although he lives with his mother it is clear to see that the bond that Uno and his mother share is not very strong at all. When Uno had gotten into some trouble with the law, he overheard his mother while at the precinct to pick him up saying, "Lemme ask you this, officer: what if I refuse to take my son back?"(31). This among many other incidents within the novel helps the reader to see that Uno's relationship with his father is ultimately the driving force for his progression. Senior had his fair share of trouble as well with the law, but he was able to make a turn in his life and he is now reformed. He is a man of good, is remarried, and has another son with his new wife. Senior makes sure that he takes time away from his family every week to meet with Uno and have discussions providing life, and evolution advice. He knows that his son has been getting into trouble lately and would like for him to come and live with him. Senior tells Uno that he is "His gift to the world,"(36). He wants his son to be able to make the changes necessary to become a productive member in society. Senior expresses this when he says to his son: "You wanna evolve, son? Or you wanna stay the same? It's on you, man. I could serve you spaghetti every night, right? Seven days a week, plain old tired spaghetti. But say one night I throw some meatballs in the mix. That's a change son.... That change is in *you!*" (35).

This resonates deeply within Uno. He realizes that he must make the proper changes necessary so

that he is able to stay on a straight and narrow path. Senior suggests that Uno come stay with his family in Oxnard. Uno is to raise five to six hundred dollars as a deposit to “show good faith,”(36). This in turn motivates Uno to make some changes within his life and provides him with goals to try to achieve. He sees his dreams coming together and enlists Danny for help attaining them.

Uno is a complex character that had to overcome many conflicts. Uno was often conflicted with his mother and stepfather, who were constantly making things significantly difficult for him. His mother often times lets his stepfather talk to him any way that he wants. Uno was never truly afraid of what his stepfather would do to him, but more so concerned about what he would do to his stepfather. After hearing his mother ask whether or not she had to take him back after he was in trouble with the police, readers could pretty much assume that if any issues were to break out between Uno and his stepfather that his mother would more than likely not support Uno. Uno also has conflict within his environment. He is described as being the only black kid in National City, and because of this Uno may feel as though he must be prepared to defend himself. The fact that he is not fully Mexican like many of the other people in the neighborhood, he is prepared to be the toughest. That attitude puts him in the position to be in trouble often. Uno is also conflicted internally. Wanting better for himself, but being in a position where he is often expected fail makes things more difficult. The move to Oxnard with his father is Uno’s way out of a difficult situation; however, unsuccessful job searches and trouble at home with his mother and stepfather seem to hinder his ability to achieve his dream. Uno must enlist in some help from the most unlikely of places to help him resolve the conflicts that he faces being the only Mexican and African American in his community.

The very first time Uno and Danny encounter one another it seems clear that they are going to be adversaries throughout the novel. Danny who is an avid baseball player impedes on Uno’s success. Uno who is the best athlete in the neighborhood comes into the home run derby with his sights set on an easy win. Then enters Danny, a scrawny, surfer looking “white-boy,” hitting home-runs further than anyone has

seen before. This infuriates Uno and is definitely a blow to his “macho,” ego. When Danny accidentally loses the grip of the bat and hits Manny, Uno’s little bother, Uno loses it. He attacks Danny severely beating him up. Uno outwardly uses the incident as a means to hurt Danny, but inwardly it’s his bruised pride that is the reason for his actions. Danny, who is quiet but lethal when it comes to his skills on the diamond, impresses at a pitching booth at the Del Mar Fair. The boys challenge each other to a pitching duel and Danny blows the competition out of the water, throwing a scorching 92mph. This is when Uno devises a plan. In a stunning “if you can’t beat em, join em,” turn of events, Danny and Uno become fast friends, working out daily with one another. Uno decides to use Danny’s skills as a way to hustle and earn the money he needs to move with his father to Oxnard. Uno is the brains and muscle behind the scheme, while Danny’s pitching is the most important cog to the machine. Throughout this experience Uno’s character makes a tremendous amount of progression.

Although Uno’s scheme is a way for him to get closer to his goals, he becomes a very selfless individual. When Uno and Danny go for their first hustle against a boy named Carmelo, Danny freezes and Uno loses the money that he puts up. The Uno that readers are introduced to in the beginning of the novel who absolutely obliterated Danny after the accident with Manny would be sure surface again after Danny put him further away from reaching his dream. However, the Uno that we actually see is completely different. Uno goes to Danny after they lose the hustle and asks, “What happened man?” After Danny apologizes for losing the money and putting Uno deeper into a hole Uno surprisingly responds, “You ain’t gotta be sorry, just tell me what happened”(131). Danny explains how his loss of control is common in pressure situations and here is where one would expect the “sure fire,” plan to end. Uno, on the other hand, continues to put all of his faith within Danny. He continues to practice with him daily and even sets up more opportunities for them to hustle for more money. Uno’s selflessness ultimately leads to Danny’s success and this is when readers are able to see this tough character open up and become a mentor. Uno was beginning to make the changes that his father was asking him to make rapidly. The

friendship that he formed with Danny had allowed him to defeat some of his own inner demons. He no longer had to be the tough guy, but could be someone who was supportive, selfless and eventually the shoulder for someone to lean on when needed.

Matt De La Pena should absolutely be commended for the crafting of his character Uno. The many struggles this character has to face, as well as the conflicts he encounters with his family, his community as well as internally allows him to evolve immensely. Uno is able to change from a tough urban kid, who has to fight his way through life, to a selfless mentor and friend that someone can depend on. Uno could have used Danny for his own personal gain and when it was unsuccessful for him he could have just dropped Danny to the side and moved on to his next hustle. However, he decided to stick with Danny when times were hard, and helped him to decipher what was holding him back as well. The two boys who struggled with their identities were able to come together and make their dreams realities. Uno was not successful at the end of the summer. He did not obtain the amount of money that was necessary to move to Oxnard with his father, but the growth and progression that he was able to make as a young man made him far richer than money ever could.

While completing the Literary Analysis of *Mexican Whiteboy*, I realized that there were many challenging parts for me on this assignment. With the first three parts of the assignment there were definitely many different ideas that I had and it was difficult trying to compress them all into one thing. The assignment was definitely a great way to challenge us to use different avenues as opposed to the traditional writing prompt or essay completion. Here is where some of my difficulties and triumphs arrived within the assignment.

The first difficult part of the assignment for me was the freedom. While in this class we have had the opportunity to read a variety of great literature. Out of all of the novels that we have read there was only one that I truly found painful to get through. This is probably one of the first times where an assignment was so open and there were not one or two books to choose from. I thought that the freedom would be refreshing; however, I became overwhelmed. I found it hard to select the piece of literature that I wanted to work with. Should I work with one of my favorites, or something that was fresher in my mind? I decided to work with *Mexican Whiteboy*, not only because it was the last novel that we completed, but also because the story and the characters were so interesting. The plot reminded me of many films that I have seen that dealt with multiculturalism and the way in which your surroundings can affect you and the decisions that you make. Once I selected the novel that I wanted to work with the next part of the assignment that I had to tackle was the writing prompt that I wanted to create.

Creating the writing prompt for the Literary Analysis was definitely refreshing for me. Working with first graders, I am never able to create writing prompts that require much thought and depth. *Mexican Whiteboy* was a novel that could invoke many different topics to discuss. The plot was rich with many different themes, such as mixed-races/multiculturalism, identity struggle, family, domestic violence, and self-mutilation. The structure of the story is also very significant as well. When you are first introduced to Danny, who is Mexican and Caucasian, you feel as though the novel will be solely about him, especially if you take heed to the title of the novel. However, Uno's character is just as important in the plot as

Danny's. We find ourselves going back and forth between two streams of consciousness and this makes the novel work. De La Pena's story would not have been as powerful had the reader not been able to get a deeper glimpse into the life of Uno. Ultimately I believe that the way in which the characters were represented within the novel definitely made for the best writing prompt. When we first meet both Danny and Uno we do not think that they will make the type of progression that they do as characters. I felt that this was most worthy of being discussed. Two complex characters, dealing with many of the same issues although they are fairly different makes for an extremely interesting topic of conversation. I felt that one of these characters should be analyzed. After the character analysis the writer should be able to explain how this has allowed the character to grow throughout the novel. This very traditional writing prompt took a lot of thought and consideration, now it was time to move forward to the scenario based writing prompt.

While creating the scenario based writing prompt I went back to what I had originally thought while reading this novel. Matt De La Pena's, *Mexican Whiteboy*, reminded me of many coming of age films. It is the kind of film that teens could watch and truly could relate to. There are many children who are struggling with their identities. There are also teens that may be in a situation where they feel as though they are out of place. I thought that it would be a cool experience for a kid to read this novel and watch a movie that had characters that were dealing with the same situations as those in the book. After doing this perhaps the reader would write to De La Pena asking him to turn his book into a script or to sell the rights to his book to a production company so that a film could be created. Perhaps analyzing the characters of the book, and then comparing them to the characters in the film would allow the student to come up with many ideas as to why making the book into a motion picture would be a seamless transition. Students are often times trying to take the easy way out, and wondering when they can watch the film adaptations to novels that they are reading in the classroom. Allowing them the opportunity to create this project would make them have to really break down the novel and explain why it is silver

screen worthy.

Completing a writing prompt that I was able to create was probably the most beneficial part of this assignment for me. Personally I was able to realize quickly what I was missing in the prompt once I had to complete it. When completing the assignment it gave me the opportunity to analyze the characters within the novel, but also the prompt that I created. The prompt needed to cover everything that I felt should be discussed within the essay. Selecting the character to write about also allowed me to see how much Uno and Danny were dependent on one another. They were very different; however, I could not successfully answer the prompt without including the significance one had on the other.

All in all the Old School: Variations on Literary Analysis Essay assignment was one that was truly challenging and made me go completely out of my comfort zone. Often times I think teachers expect students to complete assignments that they do not really put much thought into, or they create writing prompts that make sense to them, but not to their students. Having to not only create but complete the assignment allowed me to really pay attention to the prompt and make sure that it was understandable, and had the proper amount of thought put into it. I believe that true essence in creating the prompts was having to complete one as well. That part was the element that brought this assignment where it needed to be for me.

Works Cited

De La Pena, Matt. *Mexican Whiteboy*. New York: Random House, 2009.

Print.