TANGERINE
Concept/Vocabulary Analysis

Literary Text: Tangerine by Edward Bloor

Organizational Patterns

Paul Fisher, the protagonist of the novel, narrates the story through a series of journal entries. These journal entries are broken up into three parts. Part 1 of the novel introduces Paul as his family moves to Tangerine, Florida. We find out that he damaged his eyes at age 5—they say by a solar eclipse—but Paul doesn’t remember that. We also learn about Paul’s bully brother, Erik and the Erik Fisher Football Dream, which is his father’s obsession to get Erik into a top football college. Part 2 focuses on Paul’s move to Tangerine Middle School and his success as a soccer player there. He makes a new set of friends, who show him what it means to be fearless. Part 3 resolves Paul’s memory about his eyes, his brother’s criminal behavior, and the lack of communication with his parents.

Issues Related to this Study of Literature

THEMES

Seeing the Truth/Appearance vs. Reality
Although things on the surface look great in Lake Windsor, they are falling apart underneath: a muck fire burns underground, termites infest the large, luxurious houses, and the middle school falls into a sinkhole. This theme extends to Paul’s life as well. Even though he is legally blind without his glasses, he is able to see much more than his parents. He sees that his brother Erik is a bully and a criminal. He sees that adults lie. And he sees the superficiality of the people who live in his community.

Fear
Paul struggles with lots of fears: fear of being different, fear of failure as a soccer player, and most of all fear of his brother Erik. However, as the novel progresses, Paul learns about the other side of fear as he plays on the undefeated soccer team:

There is fear in their eyes when we come charging off our bus, whooping our war cry. They are beaten by their own fear before the game even begins. This is a feeling that I have never known before. Anyway, I have never known it from this side of the fear. . . this is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me. (170)

By the end of the novel, Paul overcomes his fears by telling the truth about Luis’s death and confronting his parents about they way they treat him and his brother.

Sheranian, BYU, 2008


**Communication**
Throughout the novel, Paul struggles to say what he really thinks and feels to the people around him. Because of the structure of the novel, we see what Paul knows and the disconnect between this and what he shares. Communication is especially a problem in Paul’s family: between his parents, between Erik and his parents, between Paul and his parents, and between Paul and Erik. There are multiple scenes where Paul rides in the car with his mom in silence, when there should have been critical conversations taking place. In the end, Paul finds the most freedom, release, and identity reformation as he communicates to his parents about their disinterest in his life, about his brother’s assault (which resulted in the loss of sight), and his testimony about what happened to Luis.

**Heroism**
Throughout the novel, Paul questions what it means to really be a hero. Even though he helps rescue students from the school sinkhole, he feels like a failure because he is unable to defend his friends from his brother. However, as Paul stands up for the truth, he becomes a hero. And because of his courage (and impulsiveness), he earns a fearful reputation at school.

**SETTING**
The story takes place in the fictional county of Tangerine, FL. Once the tangerine capital of the world, the old groves have been leveled and burned to make way for housing developments. Paul’s family moves into one of these brand new developments, called Lake Windsor, only to find that the neighborhood isn’t as quaint as it seems. A large muck fire, which cannot be put out, burns underground outside the development, filling the air with smoke; termites attack many houses because they thrive where they old tangerine trees were buried (underneath the houses); and lightening has struck one house so often that the homeowner installed not one, but ten lightening rods on top of his house.

A large portion of the novel also takes place at the two middle schools of Tangerine: Lake Windsor Middle and Tangerine Middle. Lake Windsor Middle is a newer school made mostly of portable classrooms which fall into a sinkhole in Part I of the novel. Tangerine Middle, is a much “rougher” school with older looking facilities and a mostly Hispanic population.

The last important setting of the novel is the Tomas Cruz Groves. This grove is owned by Teresa and Tino’s family and is where their older brother, Luis develops and grows a new strain of tangerines—the Golden Dawn. Paul gets a chance not only to work and learn here, but also becomes somewhat a part of the Cruz family.
POINT OF VIEW, NARRATIVE VOICE

The book is told from Paul Fisher’s point of view. He is a 7th grader, first at Lake Windsor Middle and then later Tangerine Middle. He is a skilled goalie despite his vision impairment, is intrigued by girls, and loves working in the tangerine fields. Even though he lives in a housing development at Windsor Lake, he feels much more at ease in Tangerine, where he finds friends with common interests. Because the story is told from Paul’s point of view, we see Paul’s memories from the past slowly return. We also see his thought process as he watches the “Erik Fisher Football Dream” go on, even when he knows his brother is downright evil.

SYMBOLISM

There are many important symbols in the novel. These reoccurring symbols are a key to the novel’s themes.

Koi: The pond at the Windsor Lake housing development is stocked with Koi fish that seem to be disappearing. Paul sees an Osprey, a large bird of prey, carry a fish away from the lake, but when adults in the community complain about the disappearing fish, Paul says nothing. The adults blame the missing fish local thieves, but Paul knows the truth.

Lightening: Tangerine experiences thunderstorms almost every day. Lightening strikes so often, that there are more deaths in Tangerine due to lightening than anywhere else in the U.S. In fact, one of the star football players, Mike Costello is killed by lightening in Part 1 of the novel. This is just one of the natural elements in the novel that no one can control. It shows that some things can’t be stopped, but they can be avoided.

Muck Fire: Outside the housing development, a fire burns underground. When the Fishers first move to the community, Paul’s mom calls the fire department because she thinks her house is on fire, the smell of smoke is so bad. But the fire department tells her casually that they can’t put the fire out and that she will have to deal with it. The muck fire symbolizes the problems that can’t be solved—even by adults.

CHARACTERIZATION

Even though the characters in the novel follow archetypes—the evil villain (Erik), the neglectful parents, and the kind mentor (Luis)—most of the characters are quite round. This characterization is revealed through detail and dialogue. For example, although Paul’s mom doesn’t stop the “Erik Fisher Dream” from happening, she does support Paul in his efforts to excel in soccer. She is the one that “loses” his IEP when he changes middle schools, and she is the one that drives him back and forth from practice every day. We also see multiple sides of Paul’s father as we learn about his unfulfilled childhood dreams and see him break down when
Paul yells at him for not telling him about how he lost his sight. The only flat character in the novel is Erik. We never learn about the motivation behind his actions. But for the rest of the characters, there is clear detail that reveals their motivation and how their fears influence their actions.

IMAGERY

Bloors’ imagery and description through Paul powerfully guides the reader’s emotions. Beautiful passages describing tangerines, the school falling into a sinkhole, and the soccer team’s victories make the novel very memorable. One passage that hit me quite powerfully describes Paul’s emotions after he stands by to watch his brother Erik punch one of his friends. This experience prompts him to reflect again on what might have happened when he lost his sight:

I stared at that gray wall, waiting. Waiting for some long-dead, long-forgotten scene to come back to life. But none did. Nothing came—no answers, no remembrances, no insights—only the choking white waves of the fog. (207)

CONFLICT—INTERNAL/EXTERNAL

There are both internal and external conflicts in the novel. Internally, Paul deals with his parent’s neglect and emotional abuse. Externally, he deals with potential bullies at school and his brother Erik’s hostility. Externally, Paul also witnesses conflict between adults in the home owner’s association, and football parents who are concerned about the safety of their children practicing during thunderstorm hours. The external conflicts in the novel foil the internal conflicts, thus the external conflicts are keys to understanding the internal ones.

Affective Issues Related to the Work

There are many ways students can relate to the characters and situations in this novel.

--Moving to a new place. The novel begins with Paul’s family moving to a new city. Paul faces the loss of leaving his old home and the worries of facing a new neighborhood and school. Many students will have experienced this same thing. For those students who have never moved to a new neighborhood, they can at least relate to going to a new school.

--Troubled family relationships. Many students will be able to relate to the conflicts Paul has with his parents and brother. This is especially true because his relationships represent two types of conflict—one that is overt and violent and another which is silent and internal. He experiences physical, verbal, and emotional abuse to some extent.

--Friendship fluctuation. As Paul moves from school to school and as he gets to know his friends better, her realizes that he has more in common with some than with others. Because of
this, he changes friends during the novel. This is, no doubt, something that most adolescents can relate to as they have seen friends come and go.
--Team unity and sportsmanship. One of the most exciting and fun aspects of the novel is the sports competitions. Many students will be able to relate to Paul’s excitement in competing and the thrill of winning a championship. They will also be able to relate to his personal fumbles and the feelings that come from being part of a team.

--Dealing with Disability and Discrimination. At Paul’s first school he is given an IEP because of his vision impairment. Although Paul can see just fine with his glasses, this IEP prevents him from playing on the soccer team for insurance reasons. There are many students that will be able to relate to the stigma and consequences of having an IEP, as well as some of the other challenges of being “different.”

Vocabulary Issues

The vocabulary in this book is not difficult for an average reader because most of the difficult words are explained in the text. If students can learn to pick up context clues, they should have no problem with the vocabulary. However, some vocabulary to be aware of is: koi fish, Quonset hut, osprey, sinkhole, and muck fire.

Background Knowledge

Because this book is a sports novel, it’s important that students have some background knowledge of soccer and football. Students need to know about the positions in the different games like quarterback and kicker in football, and fullback and forward in soccer. Although most teachers may approach this knowledge as a given, I know personally that I didn’t really understand these two games until I got to high school.

There is also some knowledge about upper-middle class culture that students may need to know, like what a home owner’s association is and why anyone would every be worried about the color someone painted their house.

In addition, it would be helpful if students had background knowledge about vision impairment. Some questions to discuss in class are:
--Can looking at a solar eclipse actually make you blind?
--What are some other causes of blindness?
--Can eyes heal after they are damaged?
--What does “legally blind” mean? And can these people see?
--What are the differences between being literally blind and being figuratively blind?

Implications for Students of Diversity

This book is perfect to teach in almost any classroom because students of almost any background will be able to relate to the characters. Bloor sets up his novel in a way that recognizes diversity,
yet makes it difficult to generalize and stereotype. The main two groups of people in the novel are the rich, mostly white, football-loving community of Lake Windsor; and the poorer, mostly Hispanic, soccer-loving community of Tangerine. However, two groups are broken as Paul, from Lake Windsor, plays on the Tangerine Middle soccer team, and Antoine Thomas (who is black), from Tangerine, plays on the Lake Windsor High football team. There are star players from all races and backgrounds, including Hispanic, black, and Filipino. And there are good guys and bad guys from both communities. Paul doesn’t choose his friends on the basis of ethnicity, but is confronted with the issue when his friend, Tony, and his brother Erik make racist comments about his friends. This is a novel that especially recognizes Hispanic culture and the importance of soccer in Latino culture. At the same time, it also confronts some of the difficulties in upper-middle class culture.

The book also addresses some of the issues related to students with special needs. Paul, who is labeled “disabled” and is given an IEP because of his vision problem, is the hero. It doesn’t take long to realize that his “coke-bottle glasses,” do not define who he is or his potential as a soccer player, leader, or love interest.

**Gender Issues**

*Tangerine* directly addresses gender roles as Paul plays on a champion soccer team with three girls. Maya, one of the girls, is also the top-scoring soccer player in the whole county. Paul is surprised when he finds out that girls are on the team, but he is never ashamed to play second-string goalie behind Shandra, a very skilled goal tender. He admires the girls for their skill and helps publicize their success. Paul’s mom also emphasizes this gender issue as she is impressed and pleased that Paul plays on a co-ed team and tries to give the girls support.

I will approach this topic by talking about whether this novel is a “boy’s” book or a “girl’s” book and asking my students to confront the issue of whether or not we can label books this way. In connection with this, we can talk about how soccer is not a girl or boy’s sport and the role of women in the novel—both on and off the field.

**The Central Question/Enduring Issue**

SEEING THE TRUTH

From the very beginning of the novel Paul says that although he is visually impaired, he can see what others can’t. He can see that Erik is a bully without a conscience. He can see that his parents care more about Erik’s football playing than anything else. And he can see that adults can’t fix every problem and sometimes even lie—to themselves and others. But there are some things even Paul can’t see. He can foresee his school falling into a sink hole, the death of Mike Costello, or making friends with the toughest kids at Tangerine Middle. Most of all, Paul can’t
see what happened in his past that led to his vision impairment, and yet he is unable to communicate this with his parents. Through learning to communicate this feelings and tell the truth, Paul is able to see the difference between appearance and reality. Paul learns that he can turn personal tragedy into triumph by facing the truth.

Research Issues/Project Ideas

Appearance vs. Reality Essay: Think about the differences between appearance and reality. What are the consequences of focusing on appearance and ignoring the reality? Write a personal essay in which you describe a time where you realized that the appearance of something was much different that its reality? How did you come to the realization? How did this realization change your behavior/attitude?

Symbol Display: Throughout Tangerine, Edward Bloor uses symbols to help us understand what is happening. Some of the symbols in this novel are lightening, koi, the tangerine trees, the muck fire, etc. Choose one symbol in the novel to research extensively. Find out as much as you can about this thing. Then make a collage that demonstrates connections between information about the symbol and its meaning in the novel.

Motives: In life, the experiences of our past often influence the present. In order to help you see the connection between past experience and present reality, analyze one character (other than Paul) in Tangerine. Research this character’s past and evaluate his or her motives throughout the text. Then prepare an FBI Case File which reveals the experiences and feelings of this character that have contributed to his or her motive and therefore behavior.

Information/Functional Texts

AUTHOR BACKGROUND/INFORMATION

Biography: http://www.edwardbloor.net/ibio.htm

Interview on Book Browse: http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=1388

INFORMATIONAL BOOKS:

Sinkholes by Sandra Friend
--A informational book about sinkholes: what they are, how they form, where they happen, etc.

Out of the Blue: A History of Lightning: Science, Superstition, and Amazing Stories of Survival by John S. Friedman
--A guide to the science and history of lightning, with some good stories too!