

Title: *Al Capone Does My Shirts*
Author: Gennifer Choldenko
Perspectives Category: Different Abilities

Response Submitted By: Owen M., 9th Grade

Date Submitted: October 12, 2020

1. What is the main plot of this book?

The book, “Al Capone Does my Shirts” is a novel by Gennifer Choldenko about a young boy living in the time just before the second World War, during the era of gangsters and rum runners. The main character, Moose, and his family move to Alcatraz Island after his sister is admitted to a special help school in the area, his dad also has to find a new job as a security guard and electrician on Alcatraz which has the added bonus of free lodging on the island. The sister is sent to a school called Esther P. Marinoff, it is not actually on Alcatraz Island, but a little ways away. Moose is forced to uproot his entire life in order to do this, because his mother wanted help for his sister. Throughout the story, you see the mother become more and more desperate as she tries to “help” her daughter by torturing her through special schools that are supposed to help her. A large portion of the story is centered around Alcatraz and the inmates there. On the island the inmates do the chores including dishes and laundry, one of the children on the island decides to run a scam operation to have the convicts do the laundry of other school children for money.

2. Which character did you most identify with and why?

The main character, moose is the easiest to identify with, in my opinion. Moose just wants to make friends and not have to deal with his mother but after his sister is rejected from the special school, all his hopes of being normal are crushed when his mother tells him he has to drop everything to watch his sister because she can't. In the past his mother has ignored and neglected him because she believes her daughter needs all the attention. As the book progresses you see that his sister, Natalie is not as mentally deficient as his mother was making her out to be.

3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?

The main idea of this story is that a person doesn't need to be sheltered. All Moose's mother does is try and help her daughter by sending her away to schools and taking away what she likes.

4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too “preachy”?

This main message was integrated perfectly. It wasn't all in your face or anything, just subtly there.

5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?

During the reading of this book, my opinions were not changed in any way because my beliefs already lined up with what was occurring, or my ideals went directly against others and I did not

see any reason to change my standpoint, such as the idea of taking from mentally disabled children in the hopes to cure them.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about the topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

My opinions were not changed while reading this book, only reaffirmed. While I did not think anything that was done to Natalie was right, they were only products of their time and there was no reason for me to call them out on it. I know that we have a much better idea of helping people with mental disabilities and in ninety years those will probably seem cruel and crude themselves. Everything is a product of its time, what is important is seeing the difference between keeping it in that time and bringing it forward with you.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

The way the book was written meant it only had a few viable viewpoints which were touched upon and perfectly used.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topic further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

This book made me want to do substantial research on Al Capone to find out as much as possible about him, for instance Al Capone was the first person to create a soup kitchen during the great depression.

9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?

I would recommend this book to anyone over the age of 12, who is into historical fiction. This is a really good book, but some may find it dull if they aren't interested in history.

10. What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?

This book is in its own category, one that I have not ventured into yet. I will look forward to reading further into this subject matter.