The Holes in Our Lives: A Brief Look at Pete Hautman

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As a youth, I did a fair amount of reading, but it wasn’t until becoming a parent that I really began to read. My four children loved books, and I spent a good deal of my life reading to them during those early years. It was after reading Natalie Babbit’s *Tuck Everlasting* that I had an epiphany of sorts. I realized that children’s literature was much more fulfilling than adult literature. I also realized that much of children’s literature deals with themes that are difficult, even for adults. These difficult themes tend to expand the mind, reaching areas that, when confronted, help children deal with the reality of life in an imperfect world. I have been a fan of children’s literature, particularly fantasy, ever since, for two reasons:

First, I feel that in a cynical and somewhat negative world, it is important for children to feel they have something to look forward to. Much of children’s literature deals with the struggle between good and evil. The feeling that one is part of the good, and that good can triumph over evil, tends to elevate the human spirit and create hope and faith, increasing an individual’s capacity to endure and succeed.

Second, I feel that it is important for children to believe that the impossible can become possible. Good fantasy literature is not unbelievable; on the contrary, it gives one the feeling of endless possibility. Much that would have seemed like fantasy to earlier generations is now mundane reality. Without this upward reach, new inventions, new technology and new ideas would smother and die.

A good example of this second reason is Pete Hautman’s *Hole in the Sky*, which is mostly realistic but also brings in fantasy elements near the end.

Set in 2028, a very realistic time frame for a young reader today, the book deals with a deadly flu that ravages the world. The survivors of this deadly virus are now immune to it, but they suffer effects ranging from sensory impairment to delusion. Pockets of survivors, Kinkas, have formed a cult dedicated to infecting others, thus bringing more into their group who have felt the “judgment of the divine.” Along with the survivors, there are others who have not been exposed to the disease. Ceej Kane and his uncle belong to this group. Ceej also has a sister (a no longer contagious survivor), and together they live in an abandoned hotel by the edge of the Grand Canyon. Though isolated, they are visited by Tim and his father, who is the area’s roving trader. Tim’s father, Ceej’s uncle, and his sister leave to investigate the valve gates of the Glen Canyon Dam in order to prevent a massive flood, but they fail to return. Tim and Ceej go in search of them, only to encounter a group of Kinkas who have lured Ceej’s sister into their cult. They meet a Native American girl, Isabella, who is looking for the Sipapuni, “the place of emergence” into a new world where there is no disease and where there is happiness and peace. The book is exciting in its narrative and full of interesting philosophical and spiritual insights into human nature. *Hole in the Sky* is recommended for grades seven through twelve. This book seems very relevant for today’s world and would hold the interest of readers of all ages.

Mr. Hautman has an interesting personality. When asked where he gets his ideas, he replies that ideas come from everywhere and form the building blocks of his stories. He often asks himself the questions “What if?” and “What would it be like?” in order to get thoughts flowing. Mr. Hautman’s writing tends to make his readers think, producing real growth within the individual and also building their strength of character, enabling them to endure hard experiences.

Now that my children are adults and I have become a grandmother, I still feel that “books that make you think” are one of the best ways to
help children prepare for whatever challenges they may meet in their lives. It is especially good when parents read with their children and can discuss books with them.

Pete Hautman is a good example of an author who isn’t afraid to tackle the really hard subjects, some of which are already the reality of children today. Mr. Hautman also has an unusual sense of humor, which sends a message to children that along with all the serious parts of life, one needs to try to find fun along the way. Hautman seems to care about many things. Among these is helping children think and teaching them to find meaning in life despite sad or unexplainable losses they must sometimes face.

Bibliography:


