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Language Arts 2A

11 September 2023

Symbolism In the Monster Calls

In the story “The Monster Calls” by Patrick Ness, the yew tree represents everything and anything. The Yew represents change and truth, the ability to give one the power to face pain and struggles, the ability to face struggles. But most of all, when the Yew tree comes walking, it represents an overwhelming strength, one not too different from a god; it is neither good nor evil “There is not always a good guy. Nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere in between.” – Patrick Ness, but... When it comes to walking, although he himself is a truly omnipotent being. It is the one he comes walking for that the strength shows itself.

Once, there was a boy whose name was Conor. Conor was going through a remarkably difficult time that very well could be too much for a normal person; maybe it was too difficult for Conor as well. Conor’s father had left him at a young age; his relationship with his grandmother couldn’t be worse, and now his mother is fighting against cancer. This was what finally tripped Conor. Conor had begun having nightmares so terrible he was afraid of telling anyone; keeping this to himself only made it worse. If he does not tell anyone, his life could metaphorically end. To stop this, the Yew tree came walking. At first, Conor thought the tree had come to help his mother, but that was not the truth; the tree had come for him. “Your mind will believe comforting lies while also knowing the painful truths that make those lies necessary. And your mind will punish you for believing both.” – Patrick Ness

Conor refused to understand the meaning of the tree coming for him and continued with the idea that it had come to help his mother. This idea lasted until the third story, where the tree told the story of the invisible man, who felt the same way Conor had felt: invisible. Conor realized after beating the life out of his bully for telling Conor the way he believed to feel, but it was really the opposite. Normally, Conor could not have won this fight, but the tree physically helped Conor, giving him the strength, he needed and more, resulting in unbelievable destruction. This was a couple days after he had obliterated his grandma’s living space, destroying all the furniture, including his grandma’s favorite clock, in which she told him, under no circumstances, to touch the clock, which Conor then focused his anger on.

In all these incidents in which Conor was involved, the tree had helped Conor push through, either by giving him the physical strength or mental strength he needed to succeed. To do this, the tree will tell Conor stories such as the one of the *Invisible Man “It is not what I want from you, Conor O. Malley; it is what you want from me."* Another story was *The Prince.* In this story, the Yew explains that there was a king who had four children; they were all slain except for one. This last prince, though, was not old enough to exceed when the king was slain, leaving only the queen for succession until the prince was old enough. The queen ended up liking her newfound position so much that she wanted to keep it. This led to her proposing to the prince to stay queen; this prince did not like this, so he fled in fear, believing the queen to be an evil witch. He found himself a woman whom he loved and proposed marriage to, but he ended up slaying the woman and blaming the queen, believing he had enough trust from the citizens of the kingdom. They believed him. In the story, this caused the Yew Tree to come walking, but not for the prince; instead, for the queen, he saved her and took her to new lands, believing she would be safer. In “The Monster Calls”, Conor believes the queen to represent is grandma, whom he resented at the time. He also believed that he needed saving from his grandma, and maybe that was why the tree came walking; it was not.

Only in the final story does Conor tell the Yew Tree of the Yew’s request or demand. Only then does Conor realize why the tree had come walking; it wanted Conor to tell him the truth about his nightmare. Finally, after almost accepting death, he tells the Yew his nightmare and his truth. Conor only ever wanted it all to end—for his mother to give up fighting cancer, even if it meant her death. “Conor held on tight to his mother. And by doing so, he could finally let her go” – Patrick Ness The Yew Tree came and walked only once to make Conor face his truth and accept it. But even after all of this he still believed the Yew Tree could help his mother, after all, the Yew Tree was a healing tree, while would the Monster, a formless beast come in the form of a healing tree. Conor still had *hope.* Then, after Conor had awoken from his nightmare for the final time, his grandma had come running, begging Conor to come with her, momentarily forgetting what he had done to her favorite possession. They had put aside their differences because all they were both thinking about was the mother.

The Yew Tree had finished the goal of his walking. He had made Conor face his truth and tell the Yew Tree his story. Conor had been avoiding the truth because he feared what would happen if he did. This is a real lesson many people must learn; it is often what makes them grow up and have their place in the world; otherwise, they are held back from their potential. Maybe this was the yew tree’s real reason for walking. The nightmare had caused Conor to throw everything away—to push away his only friends, to push away his only family, to throw away the grades he had worked so hard for, to throw away his entire life—all because he was afraid to be *brave*.

The yew tree represents bravery, truth, and the power to face pain and push through it. The monster comes walking to give people the opportunity to achieve these, stop hiding from the truth, reach their potential, and put behind them their past.