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The Harmful Impact of *Ready Player One* on Classroom Instruction

In 2018, the up-and-coming *Ready Player One* film directed by the one and only Steven Spielberg was the talk of the movie industry. Now, school boards are considering adding the critically-acclaimed novel the hit movie found its inspiration into the high school English curriculum. Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* follows a group of teenagers trying to complete an online "egg hunt" for a large sum of money. The main focus of these "gunters" is Wade, followed by his love interest Art3mis, his best friend Aech, and his acquaintances Daito and Shoto. These few find the balance between comradery and competition as they rally against a larger-than-life corporation doing anything it can to get to the prize before they can. While *Ready Player One* is an interesting piece of fictional literature, high school curriculums should not include it; Cline's book only follows an elementary level of the damage done by internet addiction, promotes e-dating—which is commonly dangerous, and displays a character writing style that is against the current curriculum.

An important topic found in many English classes is the acquisition of internet addiction. With this in mind, the progression of Cline's protagonist does not realistically portray the reality of healing from internet addiction, and such misconception would directly harm the

current efforts to properly educate young students about the subject. As with any addiction, taking steps towards progress against internet overuse is a long and strenuous process. At first, Wade's poor self-image and state of being was well-written. The motivation that fuels Wade to focus on his physical health are realistic concerns many people face. However, his quick and sudden physical transformation is not accurate to real life—nor is it helpful to display it as so. Recovering and changing habits is a long and painful process. While Cline did justify how Wade changed his schedule so quickly, it is a misleading viewpoint to present to young readers. Presenting transformations that are quick and easy, no matter how unrealistic in our reality, misses a chance to add real character development to Wade and share awareness of the effort self-improvement takes. The oversimplification of internet addiction recovery is seen once again in Wade's concluding decision to not log into the OASIS anymore. An opportunity to further address Wade's struggle to engage himself more in the real world was lost by the abrupt ending of the book. Further writing, such as an epilogue, could have added a more intentional and fleshed-out message about the additional social and cognitive struggles internet addiction imposes on a person. While explaining Wade's choice to take charge of his health, the book states, "I made a snap decision and enabled the voluntary OASIS fitness lockout software on my rig... The lockout software also monitored my dietary intake... The pounds began to melt off, and after a few months, I was in near-perfect health" (Cline 196-197). Exercising and improving diet are great steps to take. However, the timetable of his improvement is completely inaccurate. For someone of Wade's size, the road to maintaining a healthier weight would be a slow process. The cause of such slow progress is because of the existence of weight set point, which is a homeostatic process that mitigates fat storage to maintain a certain BMI. Over time, exercise and a balanced diet can gradually reduce a person's set point. The lifestyle change to healthily

complete a set point adjustment is not something that can happen in only a few months. Presenting the idea of a quick fast change through excessive exercise and dieting is unhealthy to present to impressionable high schoolers. After the Egg Hunt resolved, Wade explains, “We [Wade and Art3mis] sat there a while, holding hands, revelling in the strange new sensation of actually touching one another... for the first time in as long as I could remember, I had absolutely no desire to log back into the OASIS” (Cline 372). Wade’s interaction with a real-life friend and his diminished desire to use the OASIS is critical to his personal resolution. Despite this, the OASIS was a critical part of Wade's life since childhood. Wade may not have an intrinsic desire to log onto the OASIS, but breaking the habit of doing so will not be an easy feat. Even though Wade found motivation to spend time in real life, he will most likely still struggle with subconscious urges to go back to the OASIS. Spending more time in the real world will force Wade to confront and overcome his ineptness at in-person social interaction. He will also need to rebuild his attention span and self-awareness outside of an avatar. Wade already struggles with accepting reality as it is, which will only make his recovery harder, “The hour or so after I woke up was my least favourite part of each day, because I spent it in the real world... I hated this part of the day because everything about it contradicted my other life” (Cline 195). The physical world Wade lives in is still a mess, regardless of his plans to fix it. The real world will never compare to his experiences online. An excellent discussion topic may have been found in the disparities between Wade's initial view of reality, how he adapts to becoming more active in his own life, and his view after. The book lacks this, which discards any true meaning behind Wade’s concluding change in heart. The presence of eating disorders and other unhealthy weight-loss behaviour is present in teens, and the way Wade's transformation is written may encourage such behaviour. In addition to this, internet addiction is downplayed, which may

encourage a mindset that believes no matter how reliant students find themselves on social media, it will not be hard to pull themselves out of it. Unrealistic portrayals of such an important topic in modern teen life isn't fit to be included in a high school curriculum. The stereotyped portrayal of internet addiction and its recovery isn't the only poorly-covered aspect of teen life Cline narrates.

Another important part of teen life—romance—is important for high schools to cover. Support programs covering relationship violence, toxicity, and safety are becoming more and more normalised. Contrary to reinforcing the importance of a relationship's healthy boundaries, Cline's romance objectifies the female lead and ignores her concerns. Curriculums shouldn't include *Ready Player One* because not only does the writing provide a skewed view to romance, but also ignores valid concerns about the dangers of modern 'e-dating', a phenomenon many teenagers turn to already. To begin, Art3mis' appearance is prioritised over her intellect. Wade portrays his interest in Art3mis almost solely through admiration of her physical appearance. Additionally, Art3mis' uncomfortableness with Wade's pushiness about their relationship is ignored, and he continues to pressure her anyways. Wade's pushiness is then painted in the right, and Art3mis' boundaries as overdefensive. Wade's overjustification of his continued ignorance, as well as never reflecting on why Art3mis was so firm, provides a poor example for high school students. As the novel comes to an end, Wade and Art3mis' reconciliation displays inappropriate relationship progress to high school readers. Lastly, the writing regarding Art3mis is oversexualised and uncomfortable. The framing of Wade and Art3mis' relationship as ideal provides unhelpful influences to teenage perceptions of romance. As Wade is first introducing his 'cyber-crush' on Art3mis to the reader, he explains, "She posted these great rambling essays about her search for Halliday's egg... She wrote with an endearing,

intelligent voice, and her entries were filled with self-deprecating humour and witty, sardonic asides.” (Cline 34-35). Later, he continues, “We seemed to have everything in common. We shared the same interests. We were driven by the same goal... She changed the way I saw the world.” (Cline 174). Admiration of her in this manner is important to show to young readers; online crushes based off of pure conversation are common in such an internet-heavy era.

Art3mis’ focus on the dangers of this are crucial to online safety. She lays a clear boundary against online romance for both her and others’ safety. “You only know what I want you to know. You only see what I want you to see. This isn’t my real body, Wade. Or my real face” (Cline 186), she explains. “Everything about our online personas is filtered through our avatars, which allows us to control how we look and sound to others. The OASIS lets you be whoever you want to be... That was just one side of me. The side I chose to show you” (Cline 171). If there had been more focus on her reasoning on these decisions, it could have been a great educational experience for high school readers. However, Wade consistently bypasses Art3mis’ opinions and makes her out to be paranoid. Wade oversteps these boundaries repeatedly, painting her to be the bad guy. “She always adamantly refused to reveal any details about her own life. All I knew was that she was nineteen and that she lived somewhere in the Pacific Northwest. That was all she would tell me,” Wade complains after explaining he revealed all of his personal information to her. He then justifies this behaviour, claiming, “I’m in love with your mind—with the person you are. I couldn’t care less about the packaging” (Cline 186). Even though he makes such claims, Wade then emphasises his physical attraction over his emotional one. Upon his first meeting with her, he acts strangely, “She was so charming... I felt a sudden urge to kiss her... I wanted to propose marriage” (Cline 92-93). He describes her as hot and attractive primarily, “Art3mis’s frame was short and Rubenesque. All curves... I found her unbearably attractive”

(Cline 35), with little mention of her personality besides previously mentioned evidence. Wade's infatuation with her appearance is accompanied by oversexualised writing, as seen in this sentence: “She abruptly locked into the beat, bobbing her head, gyrating her hips” (Cline 184). Art3mis is only nineteen, and she is already overly portrayed as someone who is strange and overbearing. Oversexualised writing such as odd word choices or unnecessary mentions of her body type unwarranted for appropriate character development. Wade and Art3mis’ relationship is incredibly unhealthy and realistic concerns about e-dating are left unaddressed. Displaying romance that ignores most common logic is definitely not a great idea to show to teenagers who are already poor at navigating relationships.

Lastly, modern English class curriculums focus on teaching their students to direct character growth in their narratives through action, not statement. *Ready Player One* is unsuitable for curriculum integration, because at its core, Cline’s writing displays a technique students are urged against. Cline poorly places his judgement into only fully developing plot-important character interactions, resulting in bland character relationships and stated emotions—an unsuitable writing technique to present to those learning to write proper narratives. In total, *Ready Player One* severely overshadows opportunities to develop relationships between characters. Instead of providing written out, developed scenes that would help bring a deeper understanding of the nuances of competitive relationships, Cline instead chose to have Wade paraphrase what happened between him and other characters. Providing emotionally intimate scenes is important for analysis and full understanding of characters and motivation—one of the most important things to cover in books seen in high school curriculums. Cline’s characters severely lack depth. Cline displays his incapability to display crucial mundane relationship-building scenes at many points in the novel. Summarised relationships are primarily

seen in character relations directly relating to Wade, such as with Daito and Shoto. Wade explains, “I’d contacted them [Daito and Shoto] to ask if they were interested in teaming up with me, just for this one quest” (Cline 204). Fully writing out and explaining the growth of trust and friendship between these three could have improved impact later in the story, but also would have provided an educational perspective of how competing for the same goal does not need to create hostile rivalry. This same phenomenon branches past Wade however, and it occurred once again between the ‘Daisho’ brothers as Shoto explained he and Daito’s relationship after Daito’s passing, “He [Shoto] was silent for a moment; then he cleared his throat and began to talk about Daito... He told me how he and Toshiro [Daito] had met...” (Cline 242-243). The following paragraph very well could’ve been a long, personal quote from Shoto detailing intimate moments and feelings about their relationship. Instead, their closeness is stated instead of shown. Not only does this style of writing lack any details to give students details to discuss about the relationships between characters, but it also promotes bad narrative writing. The novel includes many cases of similar writing, such as Wade simply mentioning the way his relationships deteriorate instead of taking the time to properly show the progression of such through the book, “When I began to spend most of my time with Art3mis, Aech and I began to grow apart. Instead of hanging out several times a week, we chatted a few times a month. Aech knew I was falling for Art3mis, but he never gave me too much grief about it” (Cline 178). It may be tempting to assume that paraphrasing smaller aspects of character relations which are not direct effects on the plot is a clever choice of writing. This style of narration creates a disparity between the intended character relation and the presence of said relation projected onto the reader. Cline’s strategy of writing shouldn’t be promoted in a curriculum whose goal is to teach students not to state what characters are feeling and rather to show it.

The integration of *Ready Player One* into high school curriculums is undesirable because it underestimates the roughness of recovering from internet addiction, ignores the dangers of dating strangers online, and utilises poor writing strategies to describe character relationships. The amount of negative conclusions high schoolers may draw from this book directly displays why another book may be better suited for curriculum inclusion. If teens are to learn about the topic of internet addiction, utilising well-informed and credible articles covering both the positive aspects of internet use and the negative ones would be a better option.

Works Cited

Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*. Crown Publishing Group, 2011.