**EXTENDED ESSAY**

Research Question: *“How does the character Samantha Kingston develop throughout the novel “Before I Fall” by Lauren Oliver?*

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF SAMANTHA KINGSTON THROUGHOUT THE NOVEL “BEFORE I FALL” BY LAUREN OLIVER.

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**INTRODUCTION**

A character’s development in a story is the key to making a realistic plot- a component which is often missed by the readers. It refers to the advancement of a character’s personality and mindset which ultimately leads to changes in the way a character makes decisions. It is often obtained through complications that the character faced in the plot. It causes the character to study previous choices which might affect the way they deal with a certain situation in the future. Thus, the chain of causes and effect might affect how the character develops throughout the story. This topic is an important study as a character development is a prominent intrinsic factor behind constructing a believable character.

This essay examines how a character development is achieved throughout the story, specifically on the character Samantha Kingston in the novel “Before I Fall” written by Lauren Oliver. The novel follows the life of Samantha Kingston - a girl who seems to have it all: popularity, a loving boyfriend and a possibly perfect future. Everything was picture-perfect until one ordinary day, she died in a car crash, only to find out that she magically woke up finding herself repeating the same day over and over again. Since then, her life changed. Samantha then tried to unravel secrets of those closest to her and discover how much a single day could make a difference. As the story progresses, she gains new perceptions, leading to changes in her behavior. Hence, the research question: “*How does the character Samantha Kingston develop throughout the novel “Before I Fall” by Lauren Oliver?”*

The research of this extended essay will be qualitative of both primary source and secondary source. The primary source that provides the foundational data for this essay is the novel “Before I Fall” itself, written by Lauren Oliver. Annotations will be included to give evidence of character development in the character of Samantha Kingston. The secondary resource from the internet provides the background theory.

By doing qualitative research through the internet, some techniques regarding character’s development are found. According to Now Novel(2018), Jenkins(2018), and Meyer(2018), to build a good character development, the author must first decide the character’s motivation. A character’s motivation is a crucial factor in a story as it will create a reason for the character to act. Now Novel(2018) and Meyer(2018), suggested that a character’s motivation is the beginning of a character’s development. It can be shown by adding a brief background on what affected the character (the cause) in a way that triggers his/her motivation (effect). For example, “Sarah was John’s everything, but one day he lost his other half to his love for gambling. So, he threw away his old life to start over a new leaf to regain his lover’s trust,” the fact that John lost his lover to gambling is what sparked his desire to start a new life and get his soulmate back. Because John now has a motive, he will start acting out differently to achieve his goal in the story. From that, it can be seen how a character’s motivation can cause him/her to undergo changes in their personality or how they will respond to a certain situation.

Additionally, the three sources agreed that another technique to build characterization is to show how they react differently to a situation through their action and dialogue. Now Novel(2018) and Jenkins(2018) stated that using action and dialogues of a character is a way of showing the reader how the character had changed throughout the storyline. For example, “John is driving past the casino. But he no longer craved the adrenaline and the bright neon lights,” although John’s action of not taking a glance at the casino while he drives is subtle, this quote shows how the former gambler addict had changed. From comparing what the character chose to do previously and presently in similar cases through their action or dialogue, it can be an indication of how the character has grown throughout the story.

With the utilization of the background theory and annotations in preliminary reading on the novel, the character development of Samantha Kingston in the fictional story will be discovered and analyzed .

Before discussing Samantha Kingston’s character development, an overlook of the main character’s initial behavior will be laid out. Then, the evolution of the character’s demeanor will be identified and analyzed every time Sam repeats a day in each chapter by diagnosing the causes and the effects that results in the growth/change of the character.

**Day 1 - Determining Samantha Kingston’s initial character**

The novel opened the story with a prologue chapter where the author gave a glimpse of Samantha Kingston’s character and motivation. Using the first person point of view the narrator directly illustrated the final moments of her life where she is in a car with her friends and then everything went crashing. Interestingly, she did not have a flashback like what she expected. Instead, a person’s face - one who apparently was a bully victim - appeared. This can be identified through the following illustration:

*“It’s not like Vicky was traumatized or anything. That’s just the kind of thing that kids do to each other. It’s no big deal. There’s always going to be a person laughing and somebody getting laughed at.”(Oliver,2017,p.9)*

This extract clues that Vicky is a victim of abuse. Through the phrase “it’s no big deal”, it is evident how the main character views bullying as something normal. Moreover, she added “The whole point of growing up is learning to stay on the laughing side,”*(Oliver,2017,p.9)* This suggests that Samantha’s motive is to secure her reputation and how she values her position in the social ladder. Her motive in this story is important as it will be the foundation of the character’s action in the story, according to the source.

The first chapter of the story reveals the story’s setting as well as introducing Samantha’s background. Some information includes her having a younger sister, being friends with Lindsay, Elody and Ally, having been bullied before, and most importantly, how she has authority because she is a member of the most popular group in Thomas Jefferson high school. The first chapter tells us that the story took place on the 12th of February, which marks Thomas Jefferson’s Cupid Day.

Then, the author reveals Samantha’s negative attitude towards others. The protagonist was often showcased with inconsiderate actions. This is shown at the beginning of the story, when an 8-year old girl named Izzy, who appears to be her sister, came up to her to give her a pair of gloves. The protagonist then harshly dismissed her by saying “Don’t touch my stuff”*(Oliver,2017,p.16)* even if her sister intended to help. Another example is found in school where Sam was said to neglect Kent, who gave her flowers for Cupid’s day and refused Lauren with disgust when she offered Sam to keep the pen. The fact that Sam effortlessly rejected other people depicts how she takes other people's’ effort of pleasing or simply helping her for granted. This example explains Sam’s mentality of thinking that she holds power above others, being one of the most popular girl in school. Nevertheless, the fact that the author presented Sam’s flaws shows a potential for a great character development.

The chapter continues as the girls went to Kent’s party, where they shamed a girl named Juliet and decided to go home after having their time in the party. Not long after that, they got into a car crash, which was a repetition from the scene already described in the prologue.

**Day 2**

After dying on the way home from a car crash, Sam woke up in her bed and became aware of the events that are repeating after waking up. Although the day repeats, different actions were done, which causes things to unfold differently. Firstly, as a result of her oddly realistic “dream”, she woke up late for school. Due to that, they missed their parking spot and allowed Sarah to be qualified in the swimming team since she got the spot and was not late to school. Another difference she made was when she walked to the smoking lot with Lindsay. Instead of approaching Alex and Anna, she decided to tell Lindsay to keep walking. Subsequently, Alex and Anna did not get caught and Alex then did not have to break up with Bridget. Samantha’s realization about how her actions affect people’s life around her were shown through the following quote:

“*All of a sudden things, start clicking into place. I can’t deny it anymore. Sarah got the parking space because we were late. That’s why she’s still in the semifinals. Anna and Alex didn’t have a fight because I convinced Lindsay to keep walking. That’s why they weren’t caught out at the Smokers’ Lounge. And that’s why Bridget is hanging off Alex instead of crying in a bathroom*” (Oliver, 2017, p.259)

This extract suggests how Sam had now understood the effects of her different choices. She is aware of how her actions could make a difference. Compared to “yesterday”, she was able to unintentionally help other people.

Then identical events unfold like previously. They went to Kent’s party and shamed Juliet Sykes by calling her psycho as the whole room followed. Then a car crash happened on the way home.

**Day 3**

This time, Samantha came to a realization, “That maybe the accidents-both of them-were real.”(Oliver,2017,p.297) Considering that she is aware of her death, she focuses on trying to survive this time, “I make a vow: there’s not going to be an accident tonight”(Oliver,2017,p.306) This is why Sam decides to convince her friends not to go to Kent’s party tonight and to sleep over at Ally’s to avoid dying. Before they went to sleep, Ally’s mother informed that Juliet Sykes committed a suicide. Due to that, the girls regretted that they should have been nicer to Juliet. Then, Sam’s curiosity drew her to investigate why Juliet Sykes was hated, specifically by Lindsay. She then found out that it was a problem during childhood between Lindsay and Juliet. The fact that not going to the party did not stop Sam from repeating a day might mean that there is another underlying problem.

Despite that, Samantha behaves and thinks differently that day as she knows the consequences of her actions. She started to be slightly more considerate towards others. For example, that day, she accepted Laurens pen and said “Thanks”(Oliver, 2017, p.313), which seemed like it meant a lot of Lauren. Other than that, Sam also “looked more carefully”(Oliver,2017,p.315) at Kent’s note to show appreciation for his effort. Nevertheless, these subtle actions had marked a slight change in the character’s behaviour. It showed how she acts somewhat nicer to the other characters unlike the usual.

Moreover, she also started to notice things that would be insignificant in her life before the car crash. It is shown in the quote:

*“I love her*(Lindsay)*, I love the ugly mustard yellow bricks of Thomas Jefferson and the magenta tinted halls. I love Ridgeview for being small and boring, and I love everyone and everything in it. I live my life. I want my life”* (Oliver, 2017, p.348)

This shows how she became more grateful of what she has in her life, even the unappealing parts. These discoveries and a new perspective might alter her decisions and actions in the future.

**Day 4**

Today, she woke up with a jolt of frustration when she discovered Lindsay’s relationship with Juliet. Thus, due to her outrage, Sam made irrational decisions throughout the day. Firstly, in the morning, she decided to wear almost-explicit clothes even in the winter. After getting into a car with Lindsay and Elody, she picked a fight with them, complaining about Lindsay’s driving and how all Elody does is follow Lindsay. “How come you never stand up for yourself? Samantha said,” (Oliver, 2017, p.461) This angered Lindsay to the point where she furiously kicked Sam out of her car. As can be read, she bends her anger to her actions and does things that she would not usually do. This is because she no longer cared for her actions, she knew that no one would remember her actions the next day. “I remember that it doesn't matter, none of it matters tomorrow.” (Oliver, 2017, p.442)

As a result of her frustration, it was shown in this chapter how she cares less about her initial motivation, which is maintaining her popularity. Because she is currently in a fight with her friends, she decided to go to the bathroom during lunch. Sam spoke to Anna Cartullo in the bathroom whom she admitted to never spoken to “in the life I had before the car crash”(Oliver, 2017, p.488) because she is labeled as a freak. She ended up having fun with Anna. Asides from that, she also had dumped all her roses into the trash can. The way the author portrays Samantha’s thoughts and action reflects how not only her personality but her motivation changed too after learning new perceptions. Now, she does not care about the roses which define a person’s popularity in school. She also no longer care about who she hung out with. However, knowing the different course she is taking, the decisions she made that day made positive impacts mentally. After having a talk with Anna, the character had experienced a whole new experience of being free of people’s expectation. One example is shown in the quote, “So, this is what it is like to be in the sun”(Oliver, 2017, p.503). This could mean that Sam learned that she can also hang out with people like Anna if it were not for Lindsay’s hatred for them.

Despite the growth the character achieved, she is still searching for a solution to prevent herself repeating another day. Along the way, she actually realized her feelings towards Kent. “Yesterday”, she did not come to Kent’s party and avoided the car crash. But after hearing that Juliet committed suicide, she ended up repeating the day. Then she realizes that in either scenarios, Juliet dies. This causes the character to conclude that Juliet’s death is connected to her case. So this time, she tried getting to know Juliet, hoping to find clues to resolve the problem. However, Juliet still ended up being shamed and escaped from the party like previously. Not giving up, Sam went after Juliet, meeting Kent in the process. She then apologized for whatever she had done to hurt him and had a long conversation. This illustrated how Samantha was becoming more aware of her feelings for Kent. Instead of going home, she asked Kent if she was allowed to stay for the night. This event shows that Samantha is getting attached to Kent because she felt comfortable around him. Rather than being disgusted by Kent, she was willing to throw away her pride and apologize about her attitude. Her actions showed how she actually appreciated Kent instead of disregarding him like usually. This indicates how the character had a change in their personality.

**Day 5**

Chapter five was distinctive compared to the other days. Yet, it proved how the protagonist had made massive changes from her initial character. Although it began the same way - an alarm blasting Sam’s ear off, she made a simple goal that day: To spend the day with her sister, Izzy. Sam also gives positive responses towards her mother that made her bewildered. “This doesn’t sound like the Samantha Kingston I know.”(Oliver, 2017, p.624) Then, Sam answered by saying “Yeah, well, maybe I’m changing.”(Oliver, 2017, p.624) Her action indicates how Samantha wants to appreciate her family and noticed that she needs to spend more time with them. Previously, she would act annoyed by her family bugging her about her day. Her former manners towards her family were depicted in the following extract:

”*Want some dinner? I’ll bring it up to my room. Where are you headed? Just want to be alone. Can i come in? Just leave me alone. Stay out of my room. Don’t talk to me when i’m on the phone. Don’t talk to me when I’m listening to music. Alone, alone, alone*” (Oliver, 2017, p.632)

As was shown, Samantha tends to be very isolated from her family. But unlike what she used to do as shown in the quote, that day she said, “Today I’m not so annoyed at her for asking,”(Oliver, 2017, p.625) when her mom asked her about her friends. Hence, her actions during the day marked a big shift from her old character.

During her day out with Izzy, she met Juliet’s sister, which sparked a new desire to help her sister. So, she decided to resolve this situation by visiting Juliet’s house, intending to talk to her. However, Sam then found out that Juliet was not home yet. So Mrs. Sykes invited her into her house. There, she found out how Juliet used to love drawing, and how broken her family is. Looking at Juliet’s life, the main character contemplates the reason behind her having to re-live one day forever. She came to a sudden realization that she had never done anything good just because she could. Then, a thought crossed her mind “Maybe I have to prove that I am a good person. Maybe I have to prove that I deserve to move on”(Oliver, 2017, p.705) So, Sam was determined to do something nice, and save Juliet Syke. This had become her new motivation in the story and ultimately resolve her problems.

And so, with her newfound goal, she went to Kent’s party to find Juliet to save her. This time, she ran after Juliet out in the rain and into the woods. Finally, Sam found her in the side of a busy road in the outskirts of the woods. Sam approached Juliet and discovered her intentions to jump in front of a car. Although Sam tried to talk Juliet, it did not stop Juliet from taking her own life. Astonished, Sam was then comforted by Kent who arrived just in time and peacefully slept in his arms.

**Day 6**

Today, she dreamt differently. On the other days, she always dreamt of “falling” (Oliver,2017,p.4 & p.184 & p.418) and “tumbling” (Oliver, 2017, p.959), which is described with a negative intonation. But now, she realized that she was floating.

Today, instead of describing the alarm sound as “blaring” or “screeching”, she wrote “The alarm that wakes me is the sweetest sound I’ve ever heard.”(Oliver, 2017, p.786)

From the comparison, it can be seen how Samantha sets to see the bright side unlike at the beginning. Today, Samantha focused on really appreciating every little thing she had in her life. For example, she wrote, “I never eat breakfast at home, but my mom still asks me every day.”(Oliver, 2017, p.791), then she continued “and in that moment I realize how much I love the little everyday routines of my life”(Oliver, 2017, p.791). She also added “So many things become beautiful when you really look.” (Oliver, 2017, p.792) This illustrates the clear contrast between her behaviour on Day 1 and the present. It showed just how much the character had developed throughout the story plot in terms of mindset, personality, and motivations.

In school, she also tried her best to be better. For instance, she tried making up to Kent by conversing and even attempted to convey her feelings. Other than that, she also tried to give Juliet dozens of roses to tell her that she is just as important. But turns out, Juliet misinterpreted the roses Sam gave her and thought that the roses were sent as an insult. Although she was disappointed by that, Sam is quite satisfied with her progress of putting effort to everything make everyone happy.

Then, once again, the girls went to the party and Sam went searching for Juliet in the woods and into the road. Again, she attempted to convince Juliet to prevent her from her suicide. But nothing is working for her. “It’s too late,” (Oliver, 2017, p.1077) Juliet said before jumping in front of a truck. After that, Kent went up to Sam to comfort her. This time, Sam managed to convey her feelings, which made both sides really happy for their mutual feelings.

**Day 7- And on the Seventh Day**

Today, Samantha came to a further realization: that everything was falling and dark in her dreams because she was closing her eyes all this time. Now, she opened her eyes to find everything full of life.

*“A hundred thousand butterflies take off around me, and the air around me is clear and blue and sweet smelling, and I’m laughing, laughing, laughing as I spin through the air because of course, I haven’t been falling all this time. I’ve been flying.”* (Oliver, 2017, p. 959)

Then she added, “I know now. It was never about saving my life. Not, at least, in the way that I thought.” (Oliver, 2017, p.960) Her dream in this extract showed a deeper comparison of her perspective in the beginning and now. Now, she no longer yearns putting herself before others.

Today, she is resolved to end her problem once and for all. With that, she tried to leave her best impression on her very last day. Some examples include her giving positive responses to her parents, hugging Izzy and giving her treasured necklace to Izzy before leaving the house one last time. In school, she let Sarah get her parking lot, saved Anna and Alex from getting caught, kept Lauren’s pen as a token of appreciation, and finally conveyed her feelings to Kent. Sam understood now how “complex and connected everything is, all threaded together like some vast, invisible netting--,” (Oliver, 2017, p.978) This evidence again, showed how the character has grown to understand how her actions influence other people’s life. Ultimately, Sam grew to be a considerate and appreciative person.

Now, all that is left is saving Juliet Sykes. Again, she went to the road during Kent’s party to see Juliet. She really tried to convince Juliet not to commit suicide and apologized to her. Sam told Juliet she needed a second chance to prove she has changed. In the end, Sam had perceived that Juliet will not listen to her. In a split second, she pulled Juliet away from an oncoming car and thus, traded her life for saving Juliet’s. This action showed Sam’s new side of unconditional selflessness. It showed how she really wanted to redeem herself, by saving Juliet, even if it meant that she is sacrificing her own life. Thus, it justified just how much Samantha Kingston had grown out of a selfish character. In the end, Sam was truly satisfied, as she felt she accomplished her purpose. “You saved me,” (Oliver, 2017, p.1079) Juliet said.

**CONCLUSION**

Altogether, it can be seen how the character development shown by the author through the novel “Before I Fall” were deliberately constructed, thus was able to turn the protagonist into a realistic and dimensional character. First, the author lays out the character’s motivation, and initial perceptions as the foundation of the character’s actions and decisions in the story. Then, with the help of unfolding conflicts, the protagonist was able to develop new qualities. All the flaws and strength of the character had been integrated into the conflict in the plot to allow the emergence of new perspectives and behaviour. Throughout the storyline, the author used literary tools such as descriptions of actions, thoughts and dialogues between the characters to display the character growth.

In the novel, Samantha who was depicted selfish and arrogant character was slowly exploited by new discoveries about the people around them and realized how her actions impacted other people after re-living the same day over and over again. The character then continued to notice new information and started to develop new perspectives. She started to change her behaviour including being more considerate towards the people around her and even started to be grateful of every little things in her life that would otherwise be insignificant in her previous life. By this time, the author indicated that the old Samantha Kingston had developed so much that she had grown to be a whole new person and even found a new goal which portrays selflessness-something that contrasted with her initial selfish character.

In the future , a research regarding character development can be extended further by finding the correlations between the character development with other literature elements such symbolism, point of view or even the use figurative languages. For instance, relating the points of view to the character development to the character development will be a great new angle for research as the character development is relative to different point of views. A character growth can be viewed as something positive to a certain person’s point of view but can also be viewed as negative to another. Other than that, correlating symbolisms used by the author might also be an interesting research. Some author would explicitly show the changes of the character while others prefer to ambiguously show the character development through symbolisms. Additionally, figurative language is another factor that can help determine character changes. As the author would often use figurative language to describe the atmosphere or the character’s thoughts, the character development can be shown through negative or positive connotations used by the author to describe the difference in the character’s reaction. These are some suggestions to broaden future researches regarding character development in a novel.

My investigation has led me to a realization that there is as complex of a character development in contemporary novels as it is in classic novels. This might prompt more studies of contemporary/modern novels in literature classes.

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