

Title:

The Mentally Fractured World Of "Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei"

Word Count:

576

Summary:

The Japanese show "Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei" tells the story of a man named Nozomu, who is suicidal, depressed, and possibly borderline psychotic. His family members and students are no less odd than he is, each one displaying a psychological disorder, with varying degrees of intensity. Some fans have gone on to describe the show's cast as needing antidepressants, anti-psychotics, and whatever other psychoactive medication is available.

Keywords:

antidepressants

Article Body:

The main difference, between Western and Japanese animation, some fans believe, is that the Japanese are willing to use even the most dangerous or complicated concepts as central themes. "Welcome to the NHK!" dealt with the social problem the Japanese call hikikomori. "Gunslinger Girl" touched upon the subject of government-sponsored assassination squads, as well as the psychological trauma of such operations might cause to the psyche of an orphaned girl of 14. So it is no surprise that a fairly recent show, "Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei," revolves around a high school teacher and his students, all of whom are in serious need of counseling, antidepressants, and therapy.

The show revolves around Nozomu Itoshiki, a high school teacher and member of a rather sizable family. The Japanese characters of his name, when written horizontally (as opposed to the normal Japanese way of writing vertically) can be translated as "despair." The term is a rather fitting description, because Nozomu displays a number of problems that are related to the word. The first time we actually see him on the screen is on a tree, attempting to commit suicide by hanging. We later on learn that he tends to have one or two things that cause him depression and great despair, though he does not seem to let that interfere with his work. He is also known for carrying a so-called "suicide kit" around with him at all times, which is the most visible reminder of his paranoid, pessimistic, personality. It is notable that he does not take any sort of medication, such as antidepressants, to help lift his mood and alleviate the possible mental health issues he has.

Nozomu's students are no better off than their teacher. One, Kafuka (derived from Kafka, the writer) is the exact opposite of her teacher. Endlessly optimistic, cheerful, and positive, Kafuka is the character responsible for saving Nozomu at the start of the show. However, her cheerfulness is one that is taken to an extreme form, such as consistently viewing even obviously negative things in often far-fetched positive explanations. For example, she justified Nozomu's suicide attempt by hanging as his attempt at growing taller. It is hinted that she firmly believes this, despite the fact that the explanation is clearly ludicrous. Also, there appears to be some hidden violence to her, as one of the other students could only feel blood lust coming off her when making eye contact. Some fans have argued that while Nozomu himself needs antidepressants, Kafuka might require anti-psychotics.

One of the students, Chiri Kitsune, displays symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder, insisting that everything be done with near-mechanical precision. Another, Kaere Kimura, has displayed two distinct personalities: Kaede, a lawsuit-happy foreigner, and Kaede, a meek Japanese girl. Kiri Komori is a hikikomori that was convinced to leave the house, though she seems to have just displaced herself from her room and into the school, never leaving the premises. One of the more entertaining cases is that of Matoi Tsunetsuki, who alters her personality each time she finds a man to become the object of her affection, though she typically goes around stalking them.

The show itself combines elements of the "slice of life" format and mixes in the eccentricities and oddities of the students, along with their teacher. Bits and pieces of the show also focus on Nozomu's family, who all have names that, when written horizontally as opposed to vertically, translate into an apt description of their personalities and natures.