The Book Thief
Literature Circle #4 – Literary Luminary and Vocabulary Enricher

Literary Luminary

Passage #1: Character Development: Michael Holtzapfel

“So many people chased after me in that time, calling my name, asking me to take them with me. Then there was the small percentage who called me casually over and whispered with their tightened voices. ‘Have me,’ they said, and there was no stopping them. They were frightened, no question, but they were not afraid of me. It was a fear of messing up and having to face themselves again, and facing the world and the likes of you. There was nothing I could do. They had too many ways, they were too resourceful and when they did it too well, whatever their chosen method, I was in no position to refuse. Michael Holtzapfel knew what he was doing. He killed himself for wanting to live.”

Analysis: Michael’s situation was interesting and grabs the reader’s attention because of the different reasoning behind it as well as the difficulty to decipher. Michael’s lack of sadness and hope to live drives himself to give his life up. This is confusing because the regular suicide during that time and situation would be because they couldn’t stand to live without their loved ones but Michael’s opposite thoughts made him feel so guilty that he could not bear his will to live by giving it up. According to this passage, Death reveals that there were so many that wanted to leave the world and cried out for Death to take them away. This shows the state of world during the war and how much pain it caused. Not only were people taken away during battle, but this caused their loved ones to give up their lives as well, creating the abundance of souls that Death had to deal with.

Passage #2: Archetype: Death as The Herald

“Again, I offer you a glimpse of the end. Perhaps it’s to soften the blow for later, or to better prepare myself for the telling. Either way, I must inform you that it was raining on Himmel Street when the world ended for Liesel Meminger.”

Analysis: Through this passage, it can be seen that Death is the narrator and already knows the events of this story. He foreshadows the future in his own way, which lessens the suspense of the story but also allows for anticipation. Death takes away many of Liesel’s loved ones; however, this provides the experience that Liesel needs to grow from. The reader learns throughout the book that Death does not take souls forcefully or with pleasure but only as a task that he must accomplish. At the end of the book, we discover a new friendship between Liesel’s soul and Death; even though Death has brought so many hardships, he has allowed for Liesel’s growth up until her death.

Passage #3: Stage of Monomyth: Freedom to Live

“Liesel Meminger lived to a very old age, far away from Molching and the demise of Himmel Street. She died in a suburb of Sydney. The house number was forty-five the same as the Fiedler’s shelter the sky was the best blue of the afternoon. Like her papa, her soul was sitting up. In her final visions, she was her three children, her grandchildren, her husband, and the long list of lives that merged with hers. Among them, lit like lanterns, were Hans and Rosa Hubermann, her brother, and the boy whose hair remained the color of lemons forever.”

Analysis: “Mastery leads to freedom from the fear of death, which in turn is the freedom to live. This is sometimes referred to as living in the moment, neither anticipating the future nor regretting the past.” After the experience of the war, Liesel Meminger grows strong and lives to be an old woman with grandchildren. The death of Liesel is important because it directly correlates with one of Death’s opening statements: “It’s the leftover humans. The survivors. They’re the ones I can’t stand to look at, although on many occasions I still fail.” Liesel is the ultimate leftover human, the only one who is spared by luck on the day all of her loved ones are taken from her. As the reader finishes the book, there is a sense of peace because the reader understands that the unity of Liesel and her storyteller is harmonious and not forced. When Death points out that Liesel’s soul is sitting up like her papa’s, it allows the reader to connect the father and daughter through their shared wisdom. Papa’s gentle soul understands the meaning of life and how he had already achieved it, allowing him to be ready to fall into the arms of Death whenever the time came. In the same way, Liesel leaves the world with wisdom and having accomplished all she needed to accomplish.
1. **innocuous** (p. 464)
   a. definition: not harmful, or injurious, harmless
   b. context: “If he hadn’t despised him, he might not have taken his place a few weeks later on a fairly innocuous road.” Reinhold Zucker’s death on the car after switching spots with Hans Hubermann. Understanding this word helps the reader realize that Reinhold did not take Hans’ place on the journey thinking he was at risk, as the road seemed “innocuous” or “not harmful.” Perhaps if it had seemed less innocuous, Reinhold would have stayed behind, and Hans would have been killed instead. The irony becomes clear when the reader understands this new word.

2. **wrested** (p. 485)
   a. definition: forcibly taken or snatched from a person’s grasp
   b. context: “all brutality and reprimand were wrested from her face.”
   Here the reader is able to understand that brutality and reprimand have been quickly and forcibly taken from her face – it suggests an almost violent nature to the removal of something bad.

3. **pendulum** (p. 502)
   a. definition: weight hanging from a fixed point, swinging freely.
   b. context: “He [Michael] was hanging from one of the rafters in a laundry up near Frau Diller’s. Another human pendulum.”
   This word is significant for at least two reasons. First, understanding that a pendulum is a weight hanging from a fixed point, swinging freely helps the reader to visualize the scene and to imagine Michael in a metaphorical sense as a pendulum. It also expands the readers’ understanding when Michael is described as “another human pendulum,” meaning death by hanging suicide is quite common within the context of Germany at this time.

4. **bellows** (p. 537)
   a. definition: an instrument or machine that by alternate expansion and contraction draws in air through a valve or orifice and expels it through a tube
   b. context: “Papa was an accordion! But his bellows were all empty. Nothing went in and nothing came out.”
   Comparing Papa to an accordion (a metaphor) makes more sense when the reader understands what bellows means. The bellows of an accordion draw in and expel air to make noise or “come to life.” Here, Papa, who loves his gifted accordion, is no longer drawing in nor expelling air, made clear and more vivid with this use of language.

5. **trepidation** (p. 549)
   a. definition: a feeling of fear or agitation about something that may happen
   b. context: “With great trepidation, she [Liesel] opened The Book Thief and turned the pages.”
   Understanding the meaning of trepidation helps the reader to realize that Liesel is very hesitant about opening the book because she is worried or concerned about what she might read or see, and how it might make her feel.

**Bibliography:**
