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The Book Thief

What do words mean to you? How are words important to you? Every minute of the day people use techniques to get their feelings across. These techniques apply to the novel The Book Thief by Markus Zusak, which tells a story about a young girl whose life changes when she picks up a single object, partially hidden in the snow. The power of words in this novel show the true meaning of what a word can do to a person. Words can inspire a person, motivate somebody to do what they wish to accomplish, damage a person’s feelings, or affect how they perceive certain things. The power of words impact Liesel Meminger’s life as she is adjusting to a new home and finding ways to love new people who enter her life. They also impact her best friend Max Vandenberg’s life as he gains strength. Finally they impact Adolf Hitler’s life as he spreads his words throughout Germany.

Words have had an impact on Liesel Meminger’s life in positive ways throughout this story. First, when Hans Hubermann, Liesel’s adopted father, is helping teach her how to read and write, he is in fact helping Liesel cope with the loss of her little brother who died. After they finish reading their first book together, which is a book that she associates with the loss of her little brother, she looks out the window and imagines him sitting their peacefully. “Liesel still held the book. She griped it tighter as the snow turned orange. On one of the rooftops, she could see a small boy, sitting, looking at the sky” (Zusak 87). This shows that after her experience reading with Hans that reading is starting to put her in a peaceful state of mind. She begins a love affair with books and words, as Liesel, with the help of her accordion-playing foster father, learns to read. Words connect her with the world. More importantly the power of words helps her to survive a very serious bombing on Himmel Street. “She survived because she was sitting in a basement reading through the story of her own life, checking for mistakes” (Zusak 498). Words have had an impact on Liesel’s life in altering ways in which she learns how to love and accept the people who walk into her life.

The power of words also has an impact on Max Vandenburg’s life. First, words save Max’s life. Though the word Jew is used against him, he uses the power of Hitler’s word against him by escaping to Molching with Hitler’s memoir as a decoy to protect him. “Mein Kampf. Of all things to save him” (Zusak 151). This shows irony because Max being Jewish and using Hitler’s book Mein Kampf to escape the opposite of what one would expect from a book written by Hitler. Words also give feeling to Max and provide him with an imagination of the outside world because he is not able to go outside. “The sky is blue today, Max, and there is a big long cloud, and it’s stretched out, like a rope. At the end of it, the sun is like a yellow hole. . . .” (Zusak 249). Liesel’s description of how the sky is looking provides imagery for Max so that he could go draw the words that she is describing, both in his mind and on the basement wall. The power of words saves Max’s life and leads him to a new beginning.

The power of words gives Hitler great amounts of power throughout this story in which he leads the Nazi Party and controls Germany. Words give Hitler the strength and power to take the nation and cause the people of Germany to want to be a part of the Nazi Party, side with him and obey his commands. In his story The Word Shaker, Max highlights Hitler’s power: “Yes. The Führer decided that he would rule the world with words. I will never have to fire a gun” (Zusak 445). This is an act of Nazi Propaganda in which they use the power of words to turn casual Germans against the Jewish community. Hitler’s rules and propaganda drive the people of Germany to hate the Jewish community along with the Kommunists. This is reinforced at the book burning in which they burn all books that aren’t Pro-Germany. “We put an end to the disease that has been spread through Germany for the last twenty years. . . The Kommunisten, Die Juden-the Jews” (Zusak 110). Hitler’s reign of power through words fills the Germans with hatred towards Jewish people and the people of the Kommunist party.

Throughout the novel The Book Thief, Markus Zusak shows readers that words play a very important role in the way people live their daily lives. Words have an effect on the young girl who loves to steal books; Liesel Meminger, her best friend Max Vandenburg, and the man she hates; Hitler. Imagine if you were put through the events that took place in Liesel Meminger’s and then realize why words are so important and valuable for this little girl.