



The Casual Vacancy

By: J.K. Rowling

J. K. Rowlings is best known for her series of Harry Potter books aimed at teens and children. The Casual Vacancy has been touted as her first offering for an adult audience. So, whether you are a Harry Potter fan or not, it is best to approach this novel with no preconceived notions. The story begins in the small (fictitious) town of Pagford, England, when a member of the local council drops dead on his way to the country club to celebrate his wedding anniversary. His death is what causes the casual vacancy.

The vacant position is one of power and prestige and several men begin to jockey for the post. None of these candidates are ideal and all have their own stories, including skeletons to hide. One is a dormant pedophile, one is mentally and physically abusive to his family (plus a liar and a cheat), and one is a momma's boy whose father is a prominent council member.

Rowlings has a keen sense of how teenagers think, cope, and act out their lives. Consequently, much of the book focuses on the teen characters and how they cope with the stresses they are faced on a daily basis. The cruelty of teen taunts (also known as "bullying") is one of the storylines. Another is of a girl living in squalor and poverty with her drug addict/prostitute mother. They all struggle and stumble, learning how to cross social barriers to help each other survive. When one teen retaliates against an abusive father by divulging incriminating information on the council website under the name of the ghost of the dead council member, it starts a chain of events.

THE CLUB WOULD GIVE MAINE, BY J. COURTNEY SULLIVAN



READ BETWEEN THE WINES BOOK CLUB IS AN INFORMAL GROUP OF WOMEN WHO GATHER ONCE A MONTH TO DISCUSS A BOOK THEY HAVE READ WHILE SHARING A MEAL, WINE AND FRIENDSHIP.

Recommendations: For the American reader, the heavy use of British slang and vocabulary can be distracting, as is an overabundance of Cockney dialogue spelled out phonetically. Therefore, a book such as this is best read using an e-reader so that you can frequently look up meanings without losing too much momentum. Our other recommendation is to visit the Lumos website at www.wearelumos.org (We are Lumos) to find out the impetus for some of Rowling's storylines. Rowlings founded this charity to help the 8 million children who are living in institutions around the world. Ninety percent are not orphans -- most are from impoverished homes, have disabilities, or are separated from their families due to other social issues, resulting in life-long problems of mental and physical harm for these children. Sales of her book *The Tales of Beedle Bard* (2008) go toward this charity to help the world's troubled youth.

After our gathering, we rated this book 3 stars for literary content and 4 stars for its social awareness impact. We also anticipate an eventual prequel or sequel. So, until next time



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