

Level 4: Advanced Writers

Winner: Sarah Kim
Newport Beach Public Library

Book: *What to Do When I'm Gone*

Author: Suzy Hopkins and Hallie Bateman

December 4, 2019

Dear Suzy Hopkins & Hallie Bateman,

I appreciate that I got to read your beautiful book WHAT TO DO WHEN I'M GONE.

To be honest, I hesitated for quite a while before reading it even though my daughter insisted that we should read it together. That's mostly because I guessed your book would be a sad and touching story about the death of beloved ones. And I am dreadfully reluctant to speak about death as it is always accompanied by grief of loss. Besides that, I was sick and tired of everything that happened to me so I deemed if I had to read something with her then I would rather choose a funny and humorous book that can comfort me.

However, I have found that your book is not only about the sadness of loss but also about the continuous joy and value of life brimmed with all diversities of life lessons.

Lately, I seemed to be lost not knowing who I am, what I want to do, and how I want to shape my life. I felt like I was all alone and left behind. I was not able to appreciate what I had and could not enjoy my life here as huge responsibility overwhelmed me. I was cynical about everybody while easily faltered with any criticism toward me. So I put countless efforts not to make any mistakes even tiny ones just to make myself look flawless.

I only cared about how others hurt me but did not enough care about how I hurt the people near me. I even built up an invisible high barrier around me letting no one enter in the name of self-defense. I just kept creating excuses and vindications for myself.

All my situations were deteriorating not to mention my relationship with family. I was demotivated and just wasting my time sinking deep down.

While reading this book, it seemed like you're patting my shoulder and giving me a warm encouragement saying that "it's okay if you cannot stand firmly. It's okay you are flopping down and crying. That's all part of life and rite of passage" and "you are doing great."

I paused and looked back at the time when I was self-centered, narrow-minded, pessimistic, and shortsighted. I realized that I could have expressed and shared my fear/anger and asked help instead of grumbling. I could have made as many trial-and-errors as I need to adapt here. I could have taken a detour for looking around and considering others' thoughts and feelings.

Your optimistic attitude on life showed me how I can pleasantly deal with and confront every situation that I am faced with. You taught me that it is more important to have a happy life with others than trying my best without purpose.

Above all, I have learned that respecting and loving myself would be the first step for admiring others.

I will definitely read it again whenever my heart is so full of desolation and loneliness that I need consolation.

Thank you so much,

EDITORIALS

EDITORIAL: Literacy is crucial to prosperity

By [SOUTH PLATTE SENTINEL](#) | southplattesentinel@dfmdev.com |
September 15, 2020 at 4:58 p.m.

It's something we use every single day, whether its to celebrate a victory, express sorrow, debate our opinion on something or enhance our knowledge of a topic. As we celebrate National Literacy Month this September it can't be understated how important the ability to read and write and do basic mathematical computation is.

Yet, it's a skill not everyone is fortunate enough to have. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 21% of adults in the United States (about 43 million) fall into the illiterate/functionally illiterate category. They also report that nearly two-thirds of fourth graders read below grade level, and the same number graduate from high school still reading below grade level.

For the illiterate, the simple task of understanding information on a job application or comprehending directions on a pill bottle is a challenge. Simple tasks become paralyzing obstacles when trying to navigate the world.

But, why should it matter to those of us reading this? Health, employment, crime. Every important social issue is impacted by low literacy.

- The American Journal of Public Health reports that the inability to read and understand health information accounts for \$232 billion spent in health care costs each year.
- The National Council for Adult Learning points to annual costs of \$225 billion in nonproductivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment tied to low literacy.
- The National Institute of Literacy says that 43% of adults with the lowest literacy levels live in poverty. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the official poverty rate in 2018 was 11.8%, down slightly from 2017. But 17.6% of Hispanic people and 20.8% of African Americans were classified as being in poverty, much higher than the average, and both groups saw an increase from 2017.
- The U.S. Department of Justice has data showing that 75% of state prison inmates are either classified as low literate or did not complete high school. The Literacy Project Foundation reported that three out of five people in prison can't read, and 85% of youth offenders struggle to read.

When individuals learn how to read, write, do basic math, and use computers, they have the power to lift themselves out of poverty, lower health care costs, find and keep sustainable employment, and ultimately change their lives.