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1st Annual BC Central Writing Contest

Topic: *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore

Category: Analytical

The following writing is a short critical essay addressing the use of juxtaposition in the novel *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore. It discusses the effectiveness of Moore's writing method as well as the drawbacks to such a method.

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Analytical Division

Critique of Juxtaposition in *The Other Wes Moore*

The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore utilizes an experimental writing structure of the memoir genre that relies heavily on the use of juxtaposition. Moore uses this concept in multiple ways. For one, he uses juxtaposition for dramatic effect within the passages themselves, particularly at the end of paragraphs for extra "oomph." He also presents the story in short snippets that intertwine his life story and that of the Wes Moore that is in jail. The passages run parallel to each other chronologically, alternating between each Wes Moore.

Juxtaposition is used as a tool to develop individuals and make them more dynamic, as seen on page 21 in the following example, "Kenneth, usually a gregarious and fun-loving person, also fought the demons of alcoholism." Rather than just state that Kenneth struggled with an alcohol addiction, Moore couples it with the information that he is usually a "fun-loving person" (21) to paint a more realistic picture of Kenneth. He is a person with strengths and flaws, and this especially comes through in the writing by tying both thoughts together.

Moore is successful with this technique when used within the text itself. There were many impactful moments that were just that much more forceful due to the coupling of ideas. The line "Your father wasn't there because he couldn't be, my father wasn't there because he chose not to be. We're going to mourn their absence in different ways," (3) is a prime example of juxtaposing two ideas together for effect. The reader is drawn in to sympathize with both Moore's due to the direct contrast for the absence of each father, which adds a depth to each individual that is unique but equally important.

The entire memoir is organized in a flip-flopping manner that allows the stories of each Wes Moore to run parallel to each other. This tactic in story-telling has the positive effect of allowing the reader to compare the life stories of each Wes Moore side by side, which is very

effective in showcasing the critical points where each of the boys' stories begin to diverge from one another. The author does this by separating segments about himself from the other Moore with a page break in the form of a solid horizontal grey bar that transverses the entire page.

Unfortunately, there are several problems with the use of this grey bar. For one, the grey bars not only separate the story of each of the young boys, but they also mark chronological jumps to the history of the parents as well as marking the beginning of each part of the book and each individual chapter. Thus, a new chapter with a grey bar becomes disorienting for the reader where the memoir continues speaking about the same Moore, as seen on pages 25-26 as well as pages 45-46. Instead of using the grey bar universally as a page break, Moore should have used a different form of break to signal the change between the stories of each Wes Moore.

While there are positives to this style of writing, the drawbacks are severe and cause significant confusion. Had this not been required reading for an assignment, I would have most likely stopped reading due to the necessity of rereading entire passages to understand what was going on in the story. While Moore's use of juxtaposition was successful within the novel itself, its application to the structure made for a confusing read. I feel this structure works quite well to successfully speak about two individual narratives simultaneously, but the lack of specificity in the page breaks makes reading quite difficult. The use of a unique page break to differentiate between each Wes Moore and another form of page break to indicate chronological jumps would have helped tremendously with clarity in the story.

Works Cited

Moore, Wes. *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*. NY: Spiegel & Grau-Random House Publishing Group, 2011. Print.