



Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children

Book Review



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As far back as ancient Greece people were utilizing books as methods for working through various ailments. The term, bibliography, is what we pair with the phenomenon of using media, specifically books, to help people suffering from trauma or psychological issues. While the Transfiguring Adoption is NOT claiming to be professionals in the psychological or mental health arena, we do believe that families can glean from this concept in using movies, video games, and, naturally, books, to help foster or adoptive children process their story.

Section I

Why are we using books, movies, and video games to help children?

- **Partially disengage mind from fear/problems**
Immersing yourself in media helps you to escape from reality for a bit. This can give our minds a partial break from the worry and stress so that we have more energy to attach the issue when we come back to it.
- **Introduced to new solutions**
We might discover new solutions to problems as we experience a character in media conquer an issue.
- **Emotional vocabulary**
Discovering more ways to express how we feel and think can help us to communicate our own thoughts and feelings. Overall, more effective communication allows us to ask for better assistance with our feelings and issues.
- **Identify with characters/stories**
You have heard the saying, “no man is an island.” No person wants to feel like they are alone in their thoughts, feelings, or experiences. When we discover a character in media struggling with similar issues as our own, it helps to “normalize,” our life situations and feel comforted. This can also help us to discover our own identity as a character goes through a process in their life.

Section II

This Only Works TOGETHER - Parent & Child.

Here is why it is IMPERATIVE that a parent or trusted adult walk through these questions and media with a child:

- **Trauma Triggers**

An event or language in a piece of media might remind our children of past events in their lives which were traumatic. If we are to assume that they have not yet had enough life experience to successfully walk through these situations and make sense of them, then they will need a safe adult to be able to process feelings and emotions.

Some caregiver might be nervous or scared to discuss the details of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and so on. Our children are also scared but have no choice but to live through it. Our children need an adult who can help them process through issues by listening. They need an adult who knows when information needs to be given over to a trusted therapist and other professionals.

- **Reliving Trauma**

Some media might not simply suggest or bring up past trauma but could expose a child to a similar situation as what they have experienced. If a child is exposed to such media, it goes without saying that they will need a safe adult to help them process their thoughts and emotions. They will even need a safe adult who may not have the right answers but can get the child to a professional who can help.

- **Living in a Dream World**

As much as negatively living through trauma can have a devastating effect on our children, too much of a good thing can also have a poor effect when it is experienced on their own. Some children who have come from traumatic backgrounds may have trouble separating fantasy from reality. When given media where the main character is always rescued in the nick of time, the waif always marries royalty, or all problems are solved in a neat package, our children could be given over to considering this is how the world operates and that the solutions of the characters will produce similar fantastical results. It is important to have a trusted adult on duty who can applaud the fun of a tale but also bring everyone back down to reality.

- **Never Really Find Results**

Again it can be a pitfall for caregivers to be nervous about a topic and simply hope that children will learn by experiencing a book or movie on their own. The problem is that many of our children lack the life experience to be able to connect the dots to see how a character's struggles and life solutions could be compared to their own life.

A trusted adult can help a child to glean solutions and conversations from a piece of media to make real life change begin.

Section III

How To Use Our Discussion Packets:

1. **Exposure as a Family**

Watch, read, or play the respective media this packet discusses together before you begin the conversation. It is important that parent and child experience things together. Natural bonding and teachable moments come about when we experience things together.

2. **Wait for the Right Time**

As foster and adoptive parents, many of us want to help our children so badly that when we get a new resource we want to try it out faster than a child wants to open up presents on Christmas. However, it is important to judge when your child is ready to talk about issues brought up by media.

If your child is struggling with habitual lying and just reprimanded earlier in the day at school, there might be intense feelings of guilt and embarrassment. It may not be the correct time to point out that Pinocchio gets in trouble when he lies and try to begin a discussion about how lies can harm your life. Instead wait a day or two when everything is going right in your family's world, and then try to begin a conversation.

People who are hurt, angered, frustrated or depressed due to a topic are not going to be open to having a dialogue about the issues.

3. **Nudging Toward Identification**

If we look at this conversation as a swimming pool, "Nudging Toward Identification" is going to be the shallow end of the pool. The goal is to simply notice - just notice - similarities you might see in a character's life and your child's life. This step is helping our children to see that they might be able to relate with a character. The media is going from merely a source of entertainment to something we possibly - POSSIBLY - could connect with in some manner.

This might come in the form of phrases such as:

- "Hey, did you notice that in the book Sally had to figure out how to make friends at school too?"
- "Tom's brother in the movie was really good at soccer just like you, right?!"
- "Too bad you're not in the story with Samantha, because you like learning about science as much as she does, right?"

4. **Emotional Involvement**

In Step 3 we helped our child to consider that they might be able to connect with a character. During this step, if the atmosphere is still good for conversation, we are going to push the similarities with the media character a bit further. We are going to take a look at specific situations and emotions. We are going to take a look at issues that characters confronted and discuss solutions and emotional outcomes. Hopefully, through this step our children will be able to more deeply and emotionally be able to identify with a character.

We might ask questions such as:

- "Sally made up stories to try and make new friends. Do you think this was the right way to make friends? Why? What should she have done differently?"

- “How do you think Tom felt when missed the goal and lost the soccer game for his team? What would you tell him? Do you ever feel like Tom?”
- “Which do you think made Samantha feel better, winning the science fair or making new friends at school? Do you ever feel like that? Why?”

5. **Continued Conversations**

Always remember that helping children walk through trauma is not a sprint but a marathon. Do not get discouraged if the right time to talk about themes in a piece of media don't turn up right away. Do not get discouraged if your child doesn't want to talk about anything “deep” or life changing.

Some people have reported that their children might watch a movie, lightly discuss it, and then a month later begin asking deeper questions about a theme or topic in the media.

As parents our job is to create an atmosphere where learning and growth can happen AND CAN CONTINUE HAPPENING. We need to equip ourselves with the tools to be ready for those small windows of time that our children are ready to discuss and learn from us.

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Comprehensive Review

Transfiguring Adoption's Overview:

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children is the first book in this series and is intended for older teen/young adult audiences. There are some more mature themes in this book, and some of the action might be frightening for younger readers. However, I think this can be a good book for foster and adoptive families because many of the main characters have, as the title implies, been taken under the wing of Miss Peregrine, who serves as an adoptive parent.

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children was released in June 2011 and is the first book in a series that currently has five books with a sixth book to be released in February 2021. The story follows Jacob, a teenager who lives in Florida with his parents. Jacob has always wanted to be an explorer and is bored by his life in his town. When something happens to his grandfather, he ends up going on an adventure that he never imagined. I really enjoyed this book, and I thought some of the themes explored are very relevant for foster and adoptive care.

**** Spoilers Could Be Ahead ****

How is this Relevant to Foster and Adoptive Care?

Family, both biological and adopted, is a topic explored throughout the book. Jacob's grandfather, Abe, is Jewish and lost his whole family in World War II. He is taken in by Miss Peregrine, along with numerous other peculiar children whose parents either couldn't or wouldn't take care of them. Many of these children felt abandoned by their parents. For example, Emma, a young girl who can create fire in her hands, was abandoned at a circus after her parents tried to sell her to the circus. Many of the other peculiar children have similar stories. They are taken into the care of Miss Peregrine, a caregiver who cares for peculiar children in her home in Wales, and create a new family who care for each other deeply. Jacob ultimately joins this family as well because he doesn't feel that his parents understand him and are in some ways neglectful to his needs. This book could spark a great discussion about the nature of adoptive and foster families, as well as how to deal with feelings of abandonment.

Discussion Points:

- **Diversity**

The peculiar children, as well as Miss Peregrine, are in hiding because of persecution by both non-peculiar children and wights. Peculiar children have a long history of persecution because they are different. In the book, this is compared with World War II and the Holocaust because Abe, Jacob's grandfather, is both peculiar and Jewish, and lost his whole family to the Nazis. This also is quite relevant today, however, and can be a great time to talk about celebrating differences in culture. You may want to discuss current events as they relate to diversity and discuss strategies for building others up instead of tearing them down due to differences.

- **Identity**

Adolescence is a time when children are figuring out who they are, and this can be really challenging. Jacob has never felt like he fit in where he lives. He doesn't have many friends and doesn't find that he enjoys the same things as the people at his school. When he discovers that he is peculiar like his grandfather, and that all of his grandfather's stories were real, he feels like he has discovered something about himself that makes sense. This can be a good starting point for discussing with your teen changes they may be going through and learning more about their interests and abilities.

- **Dealing with Grief and Loss**

Jacob witnesses his grandfather's death, which is violent and not the kind of death he expects from a grandparent. Throughout the book, he struggles to deal with this loss and the associated trauma. He experiences many emotions related to this, including sadness, anger, and guilt. Jacob's parents are not understanding of his reaction to this trauma. This is a great opportunity to talk about loss and grief. You can discuss how it is normal to experience many different emotions, not just sadness, and how each of those emotions is valid in its own way. You may also want to discuss how to cope with these emotions to help your teen reader develop healthy coping skills.

Cautionary Points:

- **Death of a Grandparent/Sibling**

Jacob's grandfather is killed in a violent manner, and Jacob witnesses this death. Bronwyn's brother, Victor, is also killed.

- **Abandonment/Parental Neglect** --There are a lot of instances of abandonment that may be upsetting in this book. Jacob's dad feels abandoned by his father (Abe, Jacob's grandfather) who was absent for much of his childhood. The peculiar children who live with Miss Peregrine, especially Emma, feel abandoned by Abe because he left to live in America. Many of the children were also abandoned by their parents for being peculiar, thus ending up in Miss Peregrine's care.

- **Animal Death**
Several animals (mainly sheep) are killed during the course of the book, with evidence that these were violent deaths.

- **Bullying** -- It's mentioned that Jacob is bullied at school and has been for many years. Enoch also engages in some bullying of the younger peculiar children.

- **Violence**
The loop that Miss Peregrine's home is in is set in 1940, in the midst of World War II. Additionally, there is a fair amount of violence and death that occur due to the wights and the hollowgasts. Some of these scenes are fairly graphic.

Discussion Questions

Prologue:

1. Why do you think Jacob told his grandfather he didn't believe in his grandfather's stories anymore? Do you think he really stopped believing them?

Caregiver Note: Jacob grows up hearing his grandfather's stories of adventure and the peculiar children and believes them, but gets bullied at school for this belief. He tells his grandfather that he doesn't believe in the stories anymore because he was bullied and feels hurt and betrayed. His grandfather doesn't try to convince him that the stories are real, he just stops telling them.

Chapter 1:

2. Have you ever regretted not telling someone something?

Caregiver Note: As Abe (Jacob's grandfather) is dying, he tries to give Jacob information about Miss Peregrine and the children. He says he should have told Jacob years ago. Because he didn't tell Jacob, Jacob now doesn't know anything about being peculiar or the dangers that he faces because of his abilities. This may be a good time to discuss why we might not always tell people the information they need (e.g., out of protectiveness) and that there are consequences to this.

Chapter 2:

3. Tell me about a nightmare you have had. How did it make you feel?

Caregiver Note: After Abe's death, Jacob has recurring nightmares about the monsters that killed Abe that give him so much anxiety that he can't leave the house. Everyone has nightmares from time to time and it can help to talk about them and how they made you feel.

4. What do you think Jacob will find when he goes to Cairnholm?

Caregiver Note: Jacob, along with his psychiatrist, convince Jacob's parents that it's a good idea to go to Cairnholm, the island where Abe stayed in Miss Peregrine's children's home as a child. We know from the title that Miss Peregrine's home is for peculiar children, but we don't know what that means yet. It can be fun to predict what will happen later in the book based on what you already know, and can help hone critical thinking skills.

Chapter 3:

5. Would you have continued on to the house by yourself?

Caregiver Note: When Jacob gets to Cairnholm, the rumors are that Miss Peregrine's Home is abandoned and also haunted. Everyone, including Jacob's dad, tells Jacob not to go up there by himself. He finds two teenagers who accompany him for a ways, but when they realize that Jacob is serious about going into the supposedly haunted house, they refuse to go any farther. Jacob is understandably afraid of going to the house by himself, but he goes anyway because he is determined to find information about his grandfather's life. This can be a good opportunity to talk about how doing things that are scary is sometimes necessary.

Chapter 4:

6. What do you think Jacob's dad means when he says "when someone won't let you in, you eventually stop knocking"?

Caregiver Note: Jacob's dad is talking about his relationship with his own father (Abe) and recalling that his father was often absent and didn't share much of his life with his son. We learn later that there is a reason for this, but it is clear that Jacob's dad feels a great deal of pain as a result of this behavior. He wanted to be included but wasn't, and so eventually stopped trying. This is an experience that many children, particularly foster and adoptive children, may be familiar with, and so this can be a good time to talk about how they feel about those experiences with their own families.

Chapter 5:

7. If you found yourself in the past, what would be the first thing that you would want to do?

Caregiver Note: Jacob finds himself in 1940 unexpectedly (and unknowingly!) and is very disoriented. Have fun with this question!

Chapter 6:

8. If you were peculiar, what ability would you want to have? Why? What special skills do you have already?

Caregiver Note: In this chapter, we finally learn what peculiar children are. They are children born with special abilities. There are a wide range of peculiarities and we see some of them here—super strength (Bronwyn), invisibility (Millard), the ability to produce fire (Emma), among others. This can be a fun question, but also a good time to talk about what makes your child special and what skills they already have.

Chapter 7:

9. If you met someone from the future, what would you ask them?

Caregiver Note: The peculiar children have been stuck in a loop in 1940 for around 70 years, so they have no idea what is going on in the 21st century. They ask Jacob questions about what happened over the past 70 years and are especially interested in the technology. You can use this question to talk about what your child expects for the future.

Chapter 8:

9. Why do you think Miss Peregrine was so upset that Jacob told the others about his life in the 21st century? Would you want to stay in the loop? Why or why not?

Caregiver Note: In the previous chapter, Jacob tells the peculiar children all about his life in the 21st century. In this chapter, we find out that Miss Peregrine is upset that he told them because she wants them to stay in the loop where it is safe. It may be safer in the loop, but they are also stuck living the same day over and over for years and have very little contact with the outside world.

Chapter 9:

10. Have you ever discovered something about yourself that helps you understand who you are?

Caregiver Note: Jacob finally realizes that his peculiarity is that he can see the hollowgasts. This makes him realize that he really did see what killed his grandfather and he isn't delusional or having an acute stress reaction. He feels that discovering this about himself makes the last several months, and even most of his life, make sense. Some people have similar reactions to learning that they have a specific diagnosis or learning about trauma reactions, or even just finding something they are really good at.

Chapter 10:

11. Do you think Jacob and the others were right to leave to look for the hollow?

Caregiver Note: Upon discovering that there is a wight and possibly a hollowgast on the island, Miss Peregrine puts the whole house on lockdown and insists that no one leave. Jacob and a few of the older children, not wanting to be stuck in the house because of fear, come up with a plan to leave the loop and find the hollow before it finds them, directly disobeying Miss Peregrine's orders. They do end up finding and killing the hollow, but they also lead the wight to the loop which results in Miss Peregrine and Miss Avocet being captured. There's no concrete answer to this question, but it can be a good time to talk about how all actions have consequences, and you have to weigh the pros and cons.

Chapter 11:

12. What do you think about Jacob's decision not to go back to his life in Florida?

Caregiver of Ne: Jacob decides to go with the peculiar children in search of Miss Peregrine, even though doing so means that he can't go back to his parents and his life in Florida. This is a very difficult decision for him. He realizes that instead of feeling free, he has to carry the memory of his old life with him, but he also feels like having learned about Miss Peregrine and the children, it would be impossible to return to his old life, especially considering the threat posed by the wights. You may want to talk about difficult decisions you have had to make in life and how you came to those decisions.

About the Reviewer

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Julie is a Central Virginia native who currently resides in Rochester, New York. She received her Masters of Arts Degree in Psychology from the College of William and Mary in 2012 and is currently a PhD candidate in Epidemiology at the University of Rochester. Julie has worked in various mental health research positions since 2012 and is passionate about researching how physical health, mental health, and trauma experiences interact. When not working, Julie enjoys reading, cooking, spending time with her cats, and watching videos about otters (her favorite animal).