



OWWL LIBRARY SYSTEM

BOOK CHALLENGE REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING: PEOPLE KILL PEOPLE BY ELLEN HOPKINS

INTRODUCTION

Item Reviewed



Title: People Kill People

Author: Ellen Hopkins

Publisher: Margaret K. McElderry Books (September 4, 2018)

Copies Owned: 13 physical copies are available in the OWWL catalog at member libraries.

Shelving Location(s): The physical copies available at member libraries are shelved in the “Teen Fiction,” “YA Fiction,” and “Teen Corner” sections.

Book Description

“[People Kill People by Ellen Hopkins] follows six teenagers as they are brought into close contact over the course of one tense week, in a town with political and personal tensions that build until one fires a fatal gunshot.”¹

Reason for Review

This title was included in a list of challenged books brought before a school board within the System’s service area.

¹ People Kill People (Book), OWWL Library System Aspen Catalog, <https://search.owwl.org/Record/585643>

COMMITTEE REVIEW

Committee Charge

A six-member committee comprised of Member Library Directors, a System Staff member, a System Trustee, and the System Executive Director met on September 28, 2023 to discuss the book's content and identify any actions to respond to challenges to this particular title.

Committee Discussion

People Kill People by Ellen Hopkins proved to be a violent story (emotionally and physically) that employed verse to provide an insidious voice to the negative inner thoughts of the characters. The nature of this story can make it a hard book for readers sensitive to violence.

The difficult themes expressed in this book are intentional. Hopkins' point is to make readers understand that when put in difficult situations and given the right circumstances, anyone could make a poor decision or turn to violence.

"The characters you'll meet in these pages have powerful life situations driving them in negative directions. Any one of them, in a precise moment in time, might decide to pick up a gun and fire it. If they seem familiar it's because they are, at least in some small way, inspired by stories that pop up in news feeds every day. They are fictional, but real²."

This story also highlights how an individual's actions can have a devastating ripple effect on the people around them. This can be instantaneous, as seen with the gun violence, or ongoing, as displayed through the characters involved with the white supremacy movement and the terror they bring to other characters.

Because of the violence in this story, the committee acknowledges that some individuals may feel uncomfortable reading (or having their children read) this book. Considering this acknowledgment, the committee recommends that readers consider the professional reviews below and their own feelings on how descriptions of gun violence may impact their reading. Librarians may want to read this book for themselves to provide better reader advisory to younger readers interested in this book.

PROFESSIONAL REVIEWS³

Booklist - June 1, 2018

"The perennially popular Hopkins returns with another timely novel about an urgent issue; this time it's the violence that threatens the lives of her ensemble cast of six young adults. Indeed, it is Violence itself that tells their stories in a combination of Hopkins' signature

² People Kill People by Ellen Hopkins, Author's Note.

³ All professional reviews were retrieved on August 31, 2023 from Syndetics Unbound, a catalog enrichment service connected to the OWWL.org online catalog, https://search.owwl.org/Record/585643#unbound_reviews

verse and straightforward, unornamented prose. There is Rand, filled with rage at the man who abused him as a child; Cami, his wife, a small-time drug dealer; Silas, a white supremacist; Noelle, brain damaged in a car accident and secretly in love with beautiful Grace; Daniel, a homeless boy who also loves Grace; and Ashlyn, whose father stabbed her mother to death. The lives of all of the teens are interconnected, sharing the common potential that violence might change or even end their lives. Hopkins does a fine job of avoiding the didactic while creating a compelling, page-turning story. Yes, there are guns, but it is made obvious that death can come in other ways, for violence never takes a vacation. Librarians should expect a large demand for this one.--Cart, Michael Copyright 2010 Booklist”

From Booklist, Copyright © American Library Association.

Kirkus Reviews - July 4, 2018

“Violence narrates a tale of intersecting lives. A gun used in an accidental domestic shooting ends up in the hands of one of six Tucson teens whose feelings about guns and violence, immigration and racial superiority, love and sex are explored. Their urges for power over their own lives or others' tempt them to consider violent acts. As the day of a pro-immigration rally and counterprotest nears, readers are left guessing which character will kill and which will die, as Violence promises. Violence alternates between free verse omniscient third-person narration and switching to second-person present tense to invite readers into the mind of each major character. Silas finds a sense of belonging in a white supremacist group and is disgusted by his mother's Jewish boyfriend and father's Mexican girlfriend; Daniel is left feeling bitter when his Honduran mother is deported and his white father dies, leaving him to live with the white wife and son who were not aware of his existence; and Noelle is a depressed, white, closeted teen, suffering seizures following a tragic brush with gun violence. This structure effectively illustrates how otherwise normal people can become killers. The book avoids glamorizing gun violence and bigotry as the characters are difficult to empathize with. The final revelation, though surprising on a plot level, lacks the emotional impact that the subject matter deserves. An interesting thought experiment. (Prose/fiction hybrid. 16-18) Copyright © Kirkus Reviews.

Publishers Weekly - August 6, 2018

“Writing via an omniscient narrator called Violence, which also slips into the minds of characters, Hopkins (The You I've Never Known) tackles issues of immigration policy, racism, gun control, and the idea that "Given the right circumstances,/ any person could kill someone." The book introduces a network of teens and shows how "each possesses an incentive/ to pick up a gun, pull the trigger." There's new father Rand, itching for revenge on his former scoutmaster, who was recently released from prison; Rand's wife, Cami, also a new parent, who's secretly dealing drugs to make extra cash; Ashlyn, who wants power on her own terms, and her boyfriend, white nationalist Silas; and Daniel, a homeless teen whose love for a girl is growing desperate. Tempers simmer and suspense builds as the characters make plans to attend or protest a pro-immigration rally. Someone will die on the day of the rally, and the explosive and highly ironic event asks questions about the phrase "Guns don't kill people. People kill people." Set in Arizona, a state with an open-carry gun

policy, this powerful story will spark controversy and prompt passionate debate. Ages 14-up. Agent: Laura Rennert, Andrea Brown Literary.”

School Library Journal - September 1, 2018

“Gr 10 Up-This novel-in-verse illuminates the potentially powerful and dangerous allure of guns but ultimately lets the message overpower the story. Set in Tucson, AZ, Hopkins's latest follows six teens who have all been witness to or victim of violence in their lives. Over the course of several days, their relationships are tested and ideologies clash. Readers are warned that someone will shoot a gun and someone will die, and as tensions build, it becomes clearer that each character has an incentive for pulling the trigger. Although this novel's themes are timely, the story often comes off as sensationalized, and its characters' traumatic experiences seem forced rather than organic. The alternating verse and second person prose narrative, which switches focus among the six protagonists, makes connecting with each individual especially challenging. Were it not for direct references to age, readers might assume they were in their 20s or 30s by the way they act and speak. This characterization, combined with the story's difficult subject matter-including physical and sexual violence, explicit language, drug use, and racially motivated hatred-makes this novel best suited for a new adult audience. Hopkins has a talent for creating tension and apprehension, and the dramatic ending will no doubt leave readers talking. VERDICT Sure to be a divisive novel, both for its storytelling and themes, this offering spotlights critical social issues but misses the mark on its delivery.”

APPROPRIATE AGE LEVEL

The publishers recommended age sets *People Kill People* by Ellen Hopkins as a Young Adult novel for ages 14 and up (Grades 9 and up). From the professional reviews above, the recommended ages ranges from the suggest 14 and up to “Gr 10 and up” (School Library Journal) and ages “16-18” (Kirkus).

OWWL Library System does not offer a recommended age range or title restrictions. We encourage parents and guardians and their children to discuss their reading habits in the context of their goals to determine if this title is appropriate.

Topics to consider that are associated with this title include guns, white supremacists, violence, prejudice, murder, and crime⁴.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Item Copy Actions

People Kill People by Ellen Hopkins is available at 13 libraries in our System, additional copies are

⁴ Topics retrieved on October 6, 2023 from https://search.owwl.org/Record/585643#unbound_bookprofile

not needed at this time.

The eBook version will be purchased by OWWL Library System to include in the System-wide OverDrive collection.

No audiobook version is available to purchase through OverDrive.

Concerned Parent Actions

A minor's access to materials is the responsibility of that minor's parents or guardians. According to the American Library Association:

The mission, goals, and objectives of libraries cannot authorize libraries and their governing bodies to assume, abrogate, or overrule the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians. As "Libraries: An American Value" states, "We affirm the responsibility and the right of all parents and guardians to guide their own children's use of the library and its resources and services." Libraries and their governing bodies cannot assume the role of parents or the functions of parental authority in the private relationship between parent and child. Libraries and their governing bodies shall ensure that only parents and guardians have the right and the responsibility to determine their children's—and only their children's—access to library resources. Parents and guardians who do not want their children to have access to specific library services, materials, or facilities should so advise their own children. Libraries and library governing bodies should not use rating systems to inhibit a minor's access to materials.⁵

To aid parents and guardians in addressing title access in OWWL Library System's OverDrive collection, the default collection can be changed under account settings.

To accomplish this, log in to an OverDrive account at <https://owwl.overdrive.com/> › click on My Account › Settings › Content Preferences › Audience(s). An account can be limited to All Audiences, Juvenile, Young Adult, General Adult, and Mature Adult.

Physical collections cannot be changed to restrict a minor's access to materials. Instead, please follow the American Library Association's recommendation noted above.

CONCLUSION

Future Reconsideration Requests

This report shall appropriately respond to any challenge or request for reconsideration of *People Kill People* by Ellen Hopkins until November 8, 2025. At that time, should a formal challenge or request for reconsideration be received by the OWWL Library System, the Executive Director shall

⁵ Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/minors>

once again form a committee to review the title and use this documentation and all other professional material as the foundation of that discussion.

System Policies and Resolutions

For additional information on the selection of System materials, please review the Selection and Reconsideration of Materials Policy and the Resolution on the Freedom to Read by visiting <https://owwl.org/freedomtoread>.

Report Approval

OWWL Library System's Board of Trustees reviewed and approved this report on November 8, 2023.

Approved: November 8, 2023