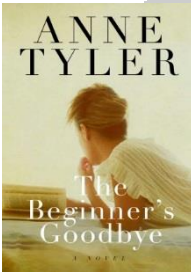




Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



The Beginner's Goodbye, Anne Tyler
Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, Marh 20th, 2013.

When people grieve over the death of a loved one, perhaps the biggest hurdle is dealing with the concept of finality. You will never see that friend again. You will never hold that child in your arms again. You will never kiss that spouse again. Perhaps it is the longing for the person which leads to so many people claiming to have seen their loved ones, after they have died.

The protagonist of this novel, a quirky editor in a family run vanity-publishing company, is such a person. The right side of his body is paralyzed and he has lived under the wing of a protective older sister for most of his life. With unexpected love, comes a newfound sense of identity and stability in his life. All of this comes crashing down around him when his wife dies in an accident. He feels some degree of responsibility for her death and finds himself adrift, once more, in his life. Aaron spends his days editing beginner book guides to every conceivable subject in the world and the reader begins to place him in an imaginary beginner's book on how to cope with loss.

The author has been a prolific writer in the last few decades and her novels are always filled with characters who must face some kind of dysfunctionality in their lives. They seem to live on the outside of what is considered normal, yet they are completely believable and will, indeed, remind readers of people they know in their own lives. What is constant in these characters is their essential courage in living authentic lives. The sad reality of the book is that Aaron recognizes he must let go of his wife and her presence in his day to day life, before he can move on with his own life. The novel is about losing a loved one and letting go of the loved one, while at the same time honoring their memory, in order to achieve peace of mind. It is a balance, difficult to achieve, in the beginner's stage of grief.

There is a very happy ending to this sad journey, the light at the end of the tunnel promised by so many grief counselors. The book has a great deal of potential to inform readers about the process of grieving, while at the same time offering comfort to those who have lost their own loved ones. It also provides an insightful look inside the workings of a marriage, the give and take of compromise.