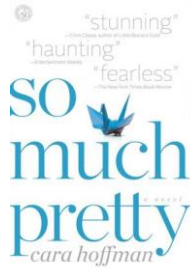




Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



So Much Pretty, Cara Hoffman

Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, May 21st, 2013.

Thirteen hundred women are killed every year in the United States by boyfriends or husbands. This alarming statistic is presented by the author of this week's book, a highly unconventional murder mystery. The body of the victim, a popular young woman from a small town, is discovered along the side of the road, six months after she has disappeared. The autopsy reveals that nineteen year old Wendy White died within twenty-four hours of her body being discovered. The search is now for a sadistic kidnapper and murderer and there may be multiple suspects involved.

There are two main characters in the book – the younger Alice Piper, whose parents, both physicians, have moved to the small town of Haeden, New York in order to raise their only child in a simple and safe rural setting and Stacy Flynn, the local reporter who has moved to the small town expecting it to be like its inhabitants, not what it appears to be. This is far from a classic murder mystery and the author expects the reader to move within a shifting timeline encompassing flashbacks, as well as multiple narrative perspectives. These come in the form of interview transcripts, letters, diary entries and even high school essays gathered as evidence against a person later revealed as a suspect in a related crime. In this book one murder investigation leads to another murder investigation as the author explores the relationship between justice and revenge.

It is a difficult book to read because of the nature of the crimes and the evidence presented through multiple perspectives. It feels a bit like completing a jigsaw puzzle, where the picture on the box is only partially revealed and the pieces are given in small groupings, over an extended period of time. There is a point where it all comes together, though, and what keeps you reading is the sheer power of the author's writing – the brilliance of her prose and the complexity of her characters. Her message is as disturbing as her crime statistic. We, as a society, are reaching a point where we are becoming immune to the horror of the frequency of violent crimes against women and it must stop. Either we think such crimes will never happen to us and those we love or we think the incidents of violence can't be as bad as the media reporting suggests. The author

was asked what message she would like the novel to send to the readers. Her answer was simple. She responded, “Self-delusion kills.”

Not all books are intended to make readers feel good. Some are written to not only promote critical inquiry but change, as well. The written word, through fictional literature, has that power and I am constantly amazed by it.

