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Metamorphosis

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Metamorphosis

Power of place. Definition: A suggestion that place somehow has the potential to influence behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. As we start our journey at Illinois Wesleyan University, we have opportunities to create the best version of ourselves through guidance, leadership, and connections. This does not mean a sense of superiority, but rather a concept that people can positively develop their character by influencing the lives of others through individualized experiences. Delia Owens, in her book, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, demonstrates the “power of place” through the main protagonist Kya. Hardship and loneliness forced Kya to mature faster than those around her. Her differences in lifestyle, such as trading for food, writing books, and drawing about the marsh, altered the perception that she was unfit to live on her own. Isolation does not mean that we are expected to mature faster, but it allows us to understand how growth can adapt within different experiences. Being alone is not a detriment to the overall success of an individual, but rather creates an environment in which one can thrive. A new “power of place” supports the reality that isolated surroundings can be a home to thrive.

Discovering “power of place” through isolation was present within the recent events of the Covid-19 Pandemic. For two years, we have had to rethink the ways of maintaining connections, sanity, and friendship. It is important to understand that times of struggle can oftentimes have the most rewarding outcomes. For example, it was incredibly difficult to stay connected with my friends, even with modern technological advancements such as Zoom or Facetime. I missed the realities of personal interaction. Sharing my life through a screen made it difficult to have meaningful discussions; as most conversations were brief or redundant. My

friends and I found that talking about our lives became a chore; for we all lived the same day over and over again. For Kya, she always longed for a purpose, preserving the hopes that her parents and brother, Jodie, would return. She realized that this modification to her lifestyle, her held-on strength, was the foundation for a newly developed character. “Sometimes she heard night-sounds she did not know or jumped from lightning too close, but whenever she stumbled, it was the land who caught her. Until at last, at some unclaimed moment, the heart-pain seeped away like water into sand” (pg. 34, Owens). New social dynamics can also be described as “character development.” In a comparable way, we get to experience our own unique “character development.” Change impacts the way that people view themselves. If one person creates change, there would be endless opportunities for others to find their own place in the world; inspiring them to develop as well.

One could say that the Pandemic allowed opportunities for us to discover what infinite bathroom and lunch breaks looked like. Or, how it felt to sleep in between classes. Many found that the lack of outside interaction made their “character” weaken; introducing heightened insecurities and worries. The Pandemic allowed people to keep within their own security bubble and challenged others to “think outside the box.” Personally, I would have never written 100 new songs or learned that I love thriller movies. My mother would not have realized her passion for French macarons that would turn our kitchen into a French bakery. Additionally, I never understood the importance of making memories and relationships until I allowed myself to prioritize personal interaction with those around me. Each prioritization introduced various life lessons; which made me realize that my own turmoil was valid. I had a new appreciation for the world around me because I was able to put myself into another’s perspective. Had I kept within my own “security bubble,” I would have limited my mindset about the expense of life.

In society today, people “connect” through social media. Opportunities for personal interaction face-to-face created difficult transitions from screens to real life. We were left with a saddened new reality of poor social interaction. I felt as though people had ZERO clue how to talk to one another. Everyone found methods for new hobbies and responsibilities. My friend Richie picked up piano lessons and is now playing Mozart. Seeing the turnaround in my friends made me realize that we do not have to conform to our created safe-space, but allow ourselves to branch out of our comfort zones. Transforming ourselves does not necessarily require the influence of a global Pandemic. We can alter the narrative of our story to work toward our aspirations. Being confident in one's progress opens the ideas of making, preserving, and inspiring growth. Exploring our passions and discoveries encourages diverse perspectives. In the case of Kya, “She knew the years of isolation had altered her behavior until she was different from others, but it was not her fault she had been alone. Most of what she knew, she had learned from the wild. (pg. 363, Owens). Personal growth is a continuous process that provides space for development. The more energy invested in improving ourselves, the greater the impact has on the individual and society. Isolation allowed us to thrive with a purposeful mindset without changing our moral character. Moments to flourish are possible without limiting personal success because balance is not determined by one factor alone. Having security in all decisions, exciting or intimidating, are tools to discover brand-new goals.

Kya inspires each one of us to live authentically. She became an expert at discovering her surroundings by taking her passions and creating art and stories people could relate to. She demonstrated that the “marsh girl” challenged others to explore their own passions. If we allow ourselves to fully be in the moment, and take in the world around us, we too can become experts

in our “character development.” and discover the true “power of place.” My commitment to my story will not finish when my time is up at Illinois Wesleyan, but to shine light on future generations after me. Leaving my mark is the start of a bright future for many. The opportunity placed before me is uniquely mine, and that in itself is powerful.