

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Young Adult Literature Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

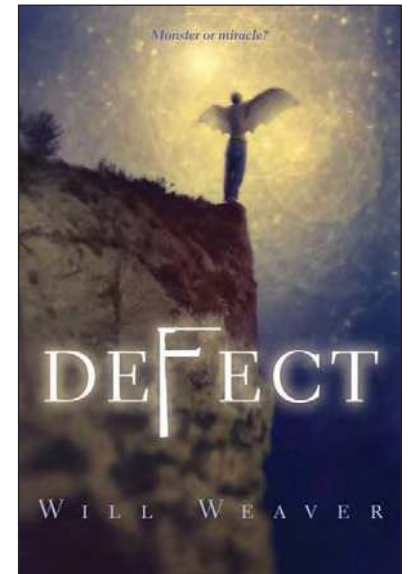
Defect by Will Weaver

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Fifteen-year-old David was born defective. His bug eyes, pinched face, and “hearing aids” are obvious, but there is a secret David keeps from everyone, even his foster parents. Terrified of doctors, wary of letting his guard down, David is determined to hide his secret at any cost. But then he meets Cheetah, a girl with a defect of her own, and suddenly his life in a small southern Minnesota community begins to change dramatically.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. The author has identified religious themes as an important part of the book. What is your understanding of the book's religious themes?
3. Is David's defect plausible? Could it be real?
4. What is meant by “normal?” Is David a normal boy?
5. Do you believe David should have the operation? Why or why not? If you had David's defect, would you choose to have the operation?
6. What will David's life be like after the book's conclusion?
7. In what ways does Cheetah facilitate change in David's life? What is the significance of her name?
8. As a teen, what was your experience of “defects” among your circle of peers? Did you feel defective?
9. Do you believe in angels? In what ways, if any, do you believe David is an angel? Who have been the angels in your life?
10. In what ways does the book make the case that some blessings can be a curse, and some curses a blessing? How has this been true in your own life?

A CONVERSATION WITH WILL WEAVER:

Q. What inspired you to write *Defect*?

A facial injury which took me to the Mayo Clinic at age 11 and the urban legend of batboy inspired my writing of *Defect*. What resulted in my writing of this book is an edgy mix of realism that tilts toward sci-fi, myth and fantasy.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

My research for *Defect* involved going back to Rochester, Minnesota, and the Mayo medical complex. I am a “method” researcher, which means I need to be immersed in my subject. I also spent time researching birth abnormalities at the University of Minnesota Medical Library.

Q. How long did it take you to write *Defect*?

I spent three months on the rough draft, then most of the remaining year back and forth on the revisions. It was a problematic novel for me to write, and I needed serious editorial help. Luckily I have a great editor at my publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux in New York.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

My biggest challenge was balancing realism and fantasy elements. I wanted David’s “miraculous” defect to be extreme yet plausible.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from your book?

In *Defect* there are strong themes of self-image and courage, along with philosophical and religious questions. I want my reader to encounter something very different in terms of plot, and very stimulating in terms of ideas. Above all, I want my readers to think beyond the ending. A good ending is never the end.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I grew up on a small dairy farm, and had no inclination that I would be a writer. However, a good high school English teacher encouraged me, and I became an English major at the University of Minnesota.

Q. What are you currently writing and/or what’s an inspiration you have for a future book?

I am currently focused on literature for young adults. In particular, I want to keep boys reading, and I have a new series based on stock car racing. I also have a race

car that is driven by a teenage driver. You can read more about this at <http://www.motornovels.com/>.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you’re not writing?

I love being outdoors hunting, fishing, birding, canoeing, and hiking. I also enjoy playing the piano.

ABOUT WILL WEAVER:

Will Weaver, writer for adults and young adults, lives in Bemidji, Minnesota. He grew up on a small dairy farm in Minnesota where he enjoyed history and English classes



in high school, along with lots of outdoor and team sports. After graduating from the University of Minnesota with a BA in English at the height of the Vietnam period in 1972, Weaver went to California to

clear his head and figure out what to do about the draft. He was grateful to land in the Stanford University writing program where he focused on writing short stories. Weaver taught writing and literature at Bemidji State University for 24 years, and is now a full-time writer. His work has won many awards, and he is the author of *A Gravestone Made of Wheat* – the short story on which the acclaimed movie *Sweet Land* was based. Weaver’s recent young adult books include:

Saturday Night Dirt, 2008

Full Service, 2005

Claws, 2003

For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.willweaverbooks.com/.



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