

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course

Date

The Struggle of Feeling the World in *Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

People have different ways in which they understand and interpret the world around them. For some, with supernatural abilities like Rose and her family, it can be unbearable, especially when no one else can be able to understand what one is going through. It becomes challenging to understand whether these powers are curses or gifts because they help Rose and her family members feel other people's emotions, but at a higher cost. The pain is too much to bear for Rose and her brother Joseph. Bender, in her text *Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*, depicts the struggles and pain that Rose and her family go through with the supernatural powers of feeling other people's emotions through the food that they cook, which does not only betray the inner feelings of the cooks but also shows their emotional state.

First, Bender depicts the struggles of Rose that she has to go through as she tries to understand the world around her. The text begins when Rose is turning nine years, and it is her birthday that the supernatural power that has been running through her family for generations gets to be revealed. Rose is just a young girl who wants to celebrate her birthday as any other child would do. But, this birthday does not turn up normal as she would have wished or as it has happened in the previous years. Rose gives a vivid description of her birthday that depicts her high expectations of how the day would have turned for her. She says that "I associated my birthday with the first hint of summer, with the feeling in classrooms of open windows and lighter clothing....and a few months of no homework" (Bender 9). From this description, the

reader is able to get the optimism and the positive energy that Rose possesses and looks towards her birthday. She did not know that it would turn as horrible as it did as the text advances. As soon as her mother cooked the birthday cake for her, she got the conundrum experience that she never knew or had before. The cake gives Rose the feelings of the cook, her mother Lane, who does not even understand her emotions.

Bender places a lot of value on food in this text to help understand the struggles that Rose had to go through to interpret the world around her. For Bender, the use of food is a tool that she uses to address the struggles that Rose is going through. The struggles begin with Rose tasting her mother's cake. Even though it has not been said directly, but Rose seems to have been celebrating her birthdays before. From her statements about the birthday, the reader can understand that she has had some other birthdays in the previous years. For example, she says that "my birthday is in March, and that year it fell during an especially bright spring week" (Bender 9). However, it is until her ninth birthday that the feelings emerge regarding her ability to taste and feel emotions of the cook. The cake that her mother cooks for her gives her the experiences that later changes her entire life. Bender uses some specific dishes to depict Rose's ability to sense people's emotions through taste. At first, it is the cake that helps Rose identify her abilities. She later takes a bite of a pie that her mother cooked, and she collapses. Other foods that Bender has used in the story include roasted beef that confirms her powers as she is able to feel strong feelings of guilt and romance, which assures her that Lane has an affair. Bender also uses some dishes like a cookie made by the angry cook and sandwich made by George's girlfriend.

Bender further depicts the struggle of feeling the world of Rose's brother, Joseph, who has to keep the pain of transforming into a chair. Joseph's struggle also begins at the same time

that Rose's powers started to manifest. Joseph's abilities also separated him from the rest of the students. Rose narrates that "inside the bus, he sat several rows ahead of me....kids around snapped bubble gum.... but Joseph held himself still (Bender 17)." Joseph, like Rose, is struggling with his condition that he does not understand, but he has kept quiet for a while until he could not hold on anymore. Joseph is not like Rose because he cannot feel other people's emotions through tasting the food that they cook. But, instead, he has a different ability that also exposes him to struggles and pain of having to go through the transition. Joseph does not relate directly with the role that food plays in the text, but he indirectly relates to Rose's experiences in the sense that through Rose's story, the audience gets to discover his supernatural abilities like her sister's. For example, when he is admitted to a hospital, he admits to Rose that he rather keep being a chair than being human because of the pain that he feels whenever he transforms.

Also, not all of Bender's characters are struggling to understand the world around them because of the supernatural powers they possess. Lane, Rose's mother, also seems to be struggling with her emotions even though she does not understand them. At first, when Rose refuses to eat the cake and criticizes the food, she thinks that it is her cooking that is wrong. Rose kept complaining about the food. Bender has used food in this text on many occasions, which means that food plays a central role in the development of the plot. The readers get to understand the character and other events through the use of food. Rose keeps complaining about the food, which helps the reader understand her abilities. For example, for the cake, she said that "it tastes empty," and the mother kept quiet. Later, during dinner, Rose further provided a negative comment about the food that "the chicken tastes weird," and also, the mom swallowed the issue (Bender 13-14).

Furthermore, the struggles of Lane are revealed through Rose's ability to detect people's emotions through the taste of their food. She is sorrowful and sad. She seems isolated because it is only in the family that does not have the abilities. In this family, the father and the children have abilities, though different they all have something that they are dealing caused by the supernatural abilities. The way she hugs her son, Joseph, when he walks in shows her isolation and loneliness. Rose says that she "hugged him like he'd been gone for a year (Bender 13)." Lane is unlike the other members of her family, and it appears that the struggles of her family isolate her and make her feel lonely. Everyone on this seems to be going through struggles, but each of them keeps it to themselves.

Rose's abilities make it impossible for her mother to understand her, further setting a gap between her and Lane. As the abilities become stronger, Rose's relationship with her mother becomes vague, especially after realizing that her mother might be having an affair. However, Lane is also dealing with her struggles even though she tries to deny them. She is unable to understand Rose's complaints about the food. Rose can see that her mother is troubled; she narrates that "she smiled at me; I could still see the headache in her, pulsing in her left eyebrow, but the smile was real (Bender 12)." One could say that Lane is pretending, but even Rose is convinced that her mother is genuinely appearing to be happy. Lane keeps wondering what may be wrong with her daughter, and since she could not understand it, she ends up taking the blame that maybe she is the one who has made a mistake in the kitchen.

The struggles to understand the world draws people away, even those one considers closest friends. Bender depicts this through the life of Rose, who has grown fond of his brother's friend, George, but she is unable to keep him because she is dealing with issues. George is the only person who seems to understand what Rose is going through. After realizing that something

is wrong with Rose, he plans to help her. For example, he makes a plan that “the first item on the agenda: discover what is going on with Rose” (Bender 26). However, as they grew close, George becomes attracted to Rose, but she hesitates because she is not ready to be in a relationship, and this leads George to marry someone else. The struggles also draw the family apart; for instance, Joseph kept disappearing from the family members. Joseph thinks that running away from and disappearing is helping him deal with the problem, but this draws him apart from the family. The whole family is disintegrated because everyone tries to deal with his or her problem in an isolated manner. In the end, when everyone comes to understand the situation that each of them is going through, they come to accept what they are going through. Through the experiences of Rose, her brother, father, and grandmother, Bender provides comfort to the readers about the struggles of each individual. Bender shows to the readers that the inner working of each character’s life is not their own.

In conclusion, people have different abilities that enable them to have a clear and simplified understanding of the world around them. However, sometimes, it is difficult to imagine that these different ways can be painful and causing so much struggle as depicted in the life of Rose and her family in Bender’s text *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*. This essay has highlighted instances that the author has depicted characters struggling with their abilities and inabilities to understand their environment and the people around them. Rose, the main character and narrator in the story, reveals how abilities can be very painful when all one wants is to interpret and understand what they are going through. Through the use of specific dishes like cookies, pie, roasted meat, and sandwich, Bender reveals how Rose can understand people’s emotions through the food that they cook. The reader can understand Rose’s world through her vivid description of the events and experiences she goes through together with her family. One

would think that having such powers like Rose, the ability to know what people are feeling through their cooking, can be fun, but Rose's experiences seem to suggest a different thing. It makes the reader wonder whether these abilities are gifts or curses.

.

Work Cited

Bender, Aimee. *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake: A Novel*. Anchor, 2010.