

Dialogue: “I Just Wanna Be Average” by Mike Rose

Discussion Group: Marty, Shay, Lu, Tiny

Marty: Hello everyone and welcome back to another edition of “On The Spot.” Today, our group will discuss “I Just Wanna Be Average” by Mike Rose. Let’s hit it.

Shay: This story was...

Lu: (interrupts) Essay, not story. Sorry, go ahead!

Shay: (smiles and tries not to look annoyed) This ESSAY was interesting. Something about that bus ride stayed with me. I can really picture the interior of the bus, as if it were a movie scene.

Marty: Not me. I just couldn’t get into this.

Tiny: What do you mean?

Marty: I don’t know.

Tiny: I was really struck by the fact that Rose got placed in the wrong class and then got switched and everything changed.

Shay: Yeah, it pretty clearly showed that people don’t get an equal education.

Tiny: I know, with those racist teachers.

Marty: That part was tight.

Shay: Not for me. It made me furious.

Tiny: What part stood out for you, Lu?

Lu: Well...

All: (Silence – they give Lu a chance to think...)

Lu: Can I read a line I thought was interesting?

Marty: (Nods) Yeah.

Lu: On page 333, there was the fight, remember? And it says, “Mr. Montez’s tenuous authority was finally ripped to shreds, and I think everyone felt a little strange about that...They had pushed and pushed and bullied their way into a freedom that both scared and embarrassed them.” I felt this part because I’ve been there.

Marty: I remember my 8th grade class made our Spanish teacher cry once...Well, I made her cry...and then afterwards it’s like, now what?

Shay: I think we should talk about the moment that is also the title.

Tiny: (Looks at her) OK.

Shay: They are talking about their talents in class and this kid says, “I just wanna be average.” What do you all think about that?

Marty: I get that. Everyone’s always all “Reach for the stars!” But sometimes you just want to hang out.

Tiny: I liked how Rose tried to explain it. (Checks his notes.) It's right on...page 336. He said, "Ken Harvey was gasping for air...If you're a working-class kid...you're defined by your school as "slow"; you're placed in a curriculum that isn't designed to liberate you but to occupy you." I like that: "occupy you."

Lu: What does it mean to you?

Tiny: Well, it's like George Orwell was part of the occupying force in Burma, right? And when one country occupies another, it imposes it's language, it's idea, it's culture. School does that too!

Shay: Exactly. You say MLA formatting, I say mind control!

Marty: What's MLA formatting?

Lu: Oh my god.

Marty: Just kidding.

All: (Laugh)

Marty: Now I'm actually getting interested, though. Shay's saying this kid is saying he's average and you're saying this kid is being occupied. It's like a coping strategy, you know? Like when you throw up a wall so they can't see how they hurt you.

Tiny: That's true! You mind if I steal that for my essay?

Marty: That's plagiarism. That's all mine!

Lu: There's another part I want to get to. It's when Rose's dad dies and he meets this new teacher, MacFarland.

Shay: Oh, I have a quote on that! Hold on...page 340. "MacFarland's lectures were crafted, and as he delivered them he would pace the room jiggling a piece of chalk in his cupped hand..." I don't know. I just liked how descriptive this was.

Marty: Could you read that again?

Lu: I'll do it. "MacFarland's lectures were crafted, and as he delivered them he would pace the room jiggling a piece of chalk in his cupped hand..."

Marty: That makes me picture my Geometry teacher, Mr. Sherrill. Tall, skinny guy with a white beard.

Tiny: Yeah, I like how he didn't just talk about the lecture. By being so descriptive and setting the teacher in motion, he gave us a scene.

Shay: Now I totally get why I was remembering the bus scene so vividly. It must be the descriptive writing. Thanks, Tiny!

Lu: That's beautiful.

Marty: And we are out...of...time!

All: Peace out! (Exploding fist bumps)