

Hugh Spagnuolo Writing Award

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Learning to Stand Tall:

Analyzing Patty Lovell's *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon*

The power of children's literature comes in its ability to convey basic truths in a simplified way that speaks to all ages. Picture books are able to take the same messages that are woven into more complex novels and present them to a younger audience. Patty Lovell's story *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* is able to share the powerful message of self-pride and self-worth in a mere fifteen pages. The piece is able to combat the epidemic of self-image related issues sweeping today's society as well as defying traditional gender roles. It does these things in a way that can relay these important messages to elementary level students.

Never before has bullying and cyber-bullying been such a problem in the world. School shootings and teen suicides plague the world as a result of the cruelty of others. This issue is dealt with in Lovell's work. Molly Lou Melon, a first grader, has several quirks that might otherwise cause her to have low self-worth, but with the advice of her grandmother, she believes in herself and accepts the things that make her who she is. Still, even little Molly Lou Melon is no stranger to bullying as Ronald Durkin teases her at her new school. However, Molly Lou does not result to bringing a gun to school or killing herself. She instead takes heed of her

grandmother's advice and shines bright enough to impress even the school bully, Ronald Durkin. This is an important message to share with young readers because children are learning that in the face of adversity, it is always important to have confidence and pride. This could help these same students have a different mindset going into high school because of the story's ability to reject the familiar responses to bullying.

Throughout life, many, if not all, people will face their own Ronald Durkin—or even a few. People will encounter someone who picks on the very characteristics that they are most self-conscious of. In today's society, some respond to their Ronald Durkins with violence of others or themselves. Some respond with substance abuse. Some respond by shutting down and stop functioning in their daily lives. Molly Lou Melon helps to show that people *can* respond to their Ronald Durkins in none of these ways, but by continuing to be themselves and shine brightly despite the adversity they may face.

If someone were to go up to any young girl in the world and ask her what she thought of her physical appearance, a large majority of females would express their distaste of themselves. Many young girls view themselves as ugly or fat, trying to live up to impossible standards of beauty set by the media. As a result, eating disorders plague young teens who starve themselves in attempts to look photo-shop skinny, but never will. As the years roll on, younger and younger girls are seen wearing make-up in order to try to appease the opinions of a society with a horrid mindset. Molly Lou Melon is definitely not stereotypically beautiful by the standards of today's society. She stands "just taller than her dog and [is] the shortest girl in the first grade" (Lovell 1). She has buck teeth and a voice that sounds "like a bullfrog being squeezed by a boa constrictor" (Lovell 6). Many girls in today's society would view such characteristics as horrid and would have a terrible self-image. It would not be too absurd to imagine Molly Lou Melon

and the importance of self-acceptance so that these students will enter middle and high school more confident in themselves.

Lovell is not the first, nor the last author to deal with bullying. She is not the first author to reach out to young girls in hopes of defying standardized beauty and gender roles. She is not the first author to feature a strong female protagonist. The concepts within her piece are not what make it special. Many current pieces deal with bullying and the results of it and will continue to as the issue continues. However, these works are directed at a much older audience. Lovell's story is special in that it begs the question, Why not begin teaching children about the importance of bullying at a younger age? If this is done, then by the time students reach an age where school bullies have developed, they will be better equipped to deal with such problems. If young children are able to grasp and process what Lovell is attempting to share in her story, then they will go through life having no trouble with standing tall against Ronald Durkin and the world.

## Works Cited

Lovell, Patty. *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001. Print.