

Crank
Ellen Hopkins

Introduction

Ellen Hopkins' 2004 story follows the experiences and emotions of high school junior Kristina as she becomes addicted to methamphetamines, known by the slang "crank." Previously considered a good student and daughter, not a risk taker or possible drug user, Kristina struggles to understand what is happening to her and why she has such a need for the drug. Loosing herself to crank Kristina renames herself Bree and discovers new side to her personality. However, neither Kristina nor Bree can control the drug and the consequences it has for her and her family's lives.

What sets this story of drug addiction apart from others is the personal nature of the story and the means used to tell it. Hopkins' writes as a mother whose daughter became addicted to meth. She hoped through writing she could begin to understand the "whys behind my daughter's decisions, and what part I might have played in them."¹ *Crank* is also unique for the way it is told, in what the author calls novel-in-verse.² This is not traditional, formal poetry but free form in both its language and the way it moves about the page. The verses often form shapes on the page related to what they discuss or can be read in multiple ways in order to glean a secondary meaning.

Hopkins' novel, in dealing with such difficult subjects has been challenged and banned on multiple occasions. In 2010 *Crank* was the 4th most challenged and/or banned book in the country.³ In 2010 due to the subject matters of her books she was 'dis-invited' to a teen book festival.⁴ All of the author's books have taken on uncomfortable and controversial topics. And while they may be written for teens, Hopkins does not gloss over the truth of these desperate situations. *Crank* is an example of how Hopkins' work is not exclusively 'teen-lit' but can reach out to individuals of any age.

Discussion Questions

1. The novel-in-verse format is a particularly interesting means of telling a story. How did it affect your reading of the book and your reactions to it? Did you think of yourself a poetry-type of person before? Do you consider this style of writing to be poetry or something else? Was anything lost or gained for you as a reader by the format?
2. A number of the poems in *Crank* have a particular shape to them. They move from side to side in order to create a conversation (I Tried To Be Cool, page 112; Somehow She Didn't Notice, page 506) make shapes related to the topic (Paydirt!, page 312; I Won't Bore You, page 527) or can be read multiple ways to gain a second meaning to the story (Choices, Choices, page 83; You Bet I Did, page 337). Did you notice these shapes in your reading? What other poems stood out for you which used shapes to enhance the story?
3. Kristina and Bree are the same person, yet two very different personalities. Why do you think Kristina had to give herself a new name? What is Kristina's relationship with Bree? What are Bree's views on Kristina?
4. Throughout the book meth is named the "monster." Do you think this impacts Kristina's relationship with her drug addiction? Is she trying to deny her responsibly because, after all, who can fight off a monster?

5. Ellen Hopkins has spoken openly about writing this novel after watching her daughter suffer with drug addiction and wanting to know what role she might have played in her daughter's struggle. In *Crank* how do Kristina's family handle her addiction? What role might they have played in what happened to her?

6. Vermont has struggled these past few years with an outbreak of drug addiction in the state. Did reading this book change any of your views about the epidemic or those who suffer from addiction?

Additional Readings

Glass Ellen Hopkins

Fallout Ellen Hopkins

Go Ask Alice Anonymous

She's Come Undone Wally Lamb

Tweak Nic Sheff

¹ Ellen Hopkins website. <http://www.ellenhopkins.com/Crank.html>

² Ellen Hopkins website. <http://www.ellenhopkins.com/Poetry.html>

³ American Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>

⁴ The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/literary-smackdown-humble-vs-hopkins>