

Two Parts:

- Part One: a short plot summary of the book
- Part Two: interesting style elements (point of view, structure, crazy details) that make the book cool

In *White Crow* by Marcus Sedgwick, 16-year-old Rebecca moves to Winterfold, England, after her father, a police detective, is blamed for the death of a young girl. It's just one of the many mysteries of this story. Here's another: Rebecca meets a local girl named Ferelith, who has no parents, comes and goes as she pleases, and seems to have a penchant for the dark, disturbing, and dangerous. And this: Winterfold Hall, a dilapidated, abandoned mansion where a few hundred years earlier, scientific experiments were performed on the locals involving a mysterious French doctor and a paranoid priest. And there's a chair in the Hall that's bolted to the floor. With a guillotine just above it. It just happens to be the setting for the end of the story when Rebecca and Ferelith find that chair, during a storm, in the very, very dark. And then, all secrets are revealed. All the terrible, gruesome secrets.

White Crow is a classic, gothic novel. The story runs on two tracks--Rebecca and Ferelith's point of view in the present and the crazed priest's diary entries from the past. By the end, both tracks collide. As cool as that is, the best part of the book is the philosophical aspect--that at the core of the black heart of this novel is the question of what happens when we die. Is it heaven or hell or simply nothingness? Which is where the white crow comes in: If all you've ever seen are black crows, what would happen if you saw a white one? Here's the answer: It would shake your core beliefs, make you question everything. And that's Ferelith's role in the book--she's the white crow. Better yet, at the end of the book, Sedgwick reveals his real-life inspirations for the story: Dunwich, an English coastal village swept away by the sea in a 13th century storm surge and a real doctor who, in 1905, performed experiments on people to see if he could determine what happened to them post-mortem.

Very cool. Very creepy.

Second Person

- detail the major events of the story through the eyes of “you,” placing the listener right in the thick of things

The year is 1941, the place is Lithuania, and you’re Lina, a 15-year-old girl enjoying the safety and security of your childhood with your mom, dad, and little brother. But that’s all about to change. One night, without warning, Soviet soldiers arrive at your door and tell you you’ve got 20 minutes to pack as much as you can carry. Why? Because you’re leaving.

Still wearing your nightgown, you’re herded into a crowded cattle car with a bunch of other townspeople. Your mother and brother are there with you, but your father’s nowhere to be found. You’ll never see him again.

As the train starts moving, you’ll see a veritable carnival of horrors: a woman who gives birth only to see the baby starve to death before being discarded through the toilet hole like human waste and several others shot in the head by the guards who don’t consider you human.

Eventually, you end up in a small farming village where you learn to work the land in exchange for barely edible scraps of food. At this point, you’re not sure what you’re living for, but at least you’ve got your mother and brother.

But then, your mother gets sick, your brother gets scurvy, and you’re on the move again. To Siberia. Your final stop. The place from where, even if you survive, you’d have to find a way back home. Not that you have a home to return to; the Soviets have already claimed it as their own and they’re not giving it back. Ever.

Like hundreds of thousands of others, you’re the victim of Josef Stalin and his Soviet reign of terror. You are a part of history most Americans don’t know anything about.

Read *Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys and, by the end, you will.

A Reading

- share a short, extremely powerful section of the book with a little bit of context at the end

Roland is fifteen minutes in.

The medical staff that buzz around him wear scrubs the color of a happy-face.

His arms and legs have been secured to the operating table with bonds that are strong but padded so he won't hurt himself if he struggles.

A nurse blots sweat from his forehead. "Relax, I'm here to help you through this."

He feels a sharp pinprick in the right side of his neck, and then in the left side.

"What's that?"

"That," says the nurse, "is the only pain you'll be feeling today."

"This is it, then," Roland says. "You're putting me under?"

Although he can't see her mouth beneath the surgical mask, he can see the smile in her eyes.

"Not at all," she says. "By law, we're required to keep you conscious through the entire procedure." The nurse takes his hand. "You have a right to know everything that's happening to you, every step of the way."

"What if I don't want to?"

"You will," says one of the surgical assistants, wiping Roland's legs down with brown surgical scrub. "Everybody does."

Already, Roland feels his limbs starting to go numb. He swallows hard. "I hate this. I hate you. I hate all of you."

Roland's being unwound, his body parts about to be harvested and sent to the highest bidder. Why? Because in the America created by Neal Shusterman in *Unwind*, abortion has been outlawed, but unhappy parents can send their unruly teenagers to be unwound--as soon as they turn 13.

A Series of Events

- using repetition, hit on the major events of the story or focus on the point of view character (or both)

Where does it all start for Kidd?

Technically, it starts on a cliff with a rickety fence and Devon getting a little too close to Olivia, the girl Kidd has come to love. And Kidd has to find a way to stop Devon from ruining the life he's started to make for himself, especially after everything that's happened. So, he pushes Devon. Through the fence. Over the cliff. Down to the beach--a beach shimmering with silvery grunion, digging into the sand, circling one another, and scurrying. Over Devon's motionless body.

Or maybe it starts at Horizons, the facility where Kidd is housed after his mother took two lives to ensure that they'd never be hurt again.

Or maybe it starts at the beach, where Red, an old surfer dude, gives Kidd a job. Becomes the father Kidd never had and desperately needs. Has needed for a long time.

Or maybe it starts on the cliff where Olivia, the girl who never takes off her hat, takes off her hat. For Kidd. Revealing the port-wine stain on her face. Right before kissing Kidd with enough sincerity to make him believe--for the first time in his life--that he might just turn out okay.

Or maybe ... it doesn't matter, because what's most important is how it ends--with Kidd surviving, saved by people very nearly as broken as he is.

Because maybe, as we're shown by Matt de la Pena in *I Will Save You*, we're reminded that as bad as life can get--and it can get downright horrifying--with love, support, and second chances, everyone, all of us, like Kidd, can be saved.