

The Poet X

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The theme of *Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo is relevant to coming of age as it has strong roots to self-acceptance, sexuality, religion and rebellion, all of which everyone can relate to at some point of their life.

The first thing to notice about this book is that it is written in verse; this is interesting as straight away we are thrown into unusual forms and introduced to Slam Poetry. The definition of slam poetry combines elements of performance, writing and competition; the poets are high energy and are passionate. Slam poetry does not have a traditional structure any rules or rhyme scheme.

The main protagonist is Xiomara, also known as X, we read about her growing up in Harlem and being exposed to gang life and little prospects. Her family have emigrated from the Dominican Republic Xiomara's family are strict Catholic's and enforce their religion and beliefs onto the whole family, trying to force X to church every week and play an active role in the community.

X loses herself in music and a genre of poetry called 'Slam Poetry', this is an integral part of the story as it plays such an essential role in her life.

We find out X has a twin brother although his name is only mentioned a few times he is always referred to as 'Twin' who is favoured by the parents, regardless of this X and her twin are very close, and they call this relationship 'Twin Thing'. X's best friend is Caridad who is the opposite to X and keeps X calm and knows how to make her feel better, Caridad does not like some of the things X does but always supports her, even if it is covering for her from her parents when she goes to the poetry slam.

We see X starting to develop feelings for boys and start a romantic relationship with her biology partner. This infuriates her mother, who starts cursing X in her mother tongue that is translated to 'Slag', 'Ho'.

Slam poetry brings X's confidence and strong character. We find this has a significant impact on her life. X is starting to become her own person and defying the rules her religious parents set out to give her. Her passion for this subject is encouraged by her high school teacher who hosts the poetry club and signs her up to her first competition. X hides this part of her life from her family; she must lie to them that she is doing church duties. X's relationship with her mother is at breaking point when her mum finds her poetry notebook and burns it, and she believes her mum would choose religion over her.

This book was well received and won the 2019 Youth Media Awards. Acevedo has drawn on her own experience growing up as she bears a strong resemblance to the main protagonist in regard to religion, that she no longer practises. This was an interesting book to read as the writing style is uncommon. Acevedo quotes "religion is empowering but sometimes makes women and young girls question their selves."

Bibliography:

Acevedo, Elizabeth, *The Poet X*