

Suicide Notes

Michael Thomas Ford

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Despite the bandages indicating the stitches on his wrist, fifteen year-old Jeff believes himself to have been woefully misdiagnosed when he wakes up in the psychiatric ward of a hospital. Insisting that his admittance into a forty-five day therapy program is a mistake, Jeff deems himself the only normal person in the den of crazy kids whose problems range from depression to abuse to eating disorders. His days in the recovery program consist of group activities with the four other residents alternated with personal time with his psychiatrist Dr. Katzrupus, who he nicknames Dr. Cat Poop. At first, Jeff dismisses his suicide attempt as being an impulsive act, and refuses to cooperate with Dr. Cat Poop. He is satisfied with counting down the days until he can leave, taking comfort in his isolation from the rest of the world. However, as much as Sadie, a girl who also tries to commit suicide, and the combined force of the staff and patients in the ward distract Jeff from the world he had been abruptly pulled out of, he cannot forget how he secured his spot in the hospital. Jeff remembers everything that led to the razor opening his wrists, but he does not fully comprehend his own actions. Then, when another member of his group, Rankin, approaches him in an intimate manner that Jeff readily responds to, Jeff realizes that part of his problem involves being in denial. He also realizes that there are people willing to listen and help him who have been patiently waiting the entire time.

Organized into daily journal entries document each day of the forty-five day program, the individual chapters of the novel *Suicide Notes* captures the self-realization and self-acceptance of a teenage boy. Despite turning his stay into an entertaining comedy, Jeff, through this book, provides a voice for the author Michael Thomas Ford to tackle delicate identity issues while inspiring people like Jeff to choose a different path- one that consists of love and support. Through subtle hints offered in Jeff's actions and thoughts as well as his startling, more deliberate interactions with other patients, Jeff leaves a trail of clues that reveals the vulnerable, confused character underneath the sarcastic, unconcerned demeanor. The flippant, casual tone that sharply contradicts the grave situation gives voice to those who are afraid to acknowledge their differences like Jeff in a powerful message that encourages seeking help from others. Even the levity does not force a lesson onto its readers. Each of the characters in the book play a role in Jeff's decisions, directing the rollercoaster representing Jeff's story. *Suicide Notes* is not a therapy book or a true account, but it can relate to so many other real stories through its believable characters, the emotion, and the experiences the characters undergo.

I would recommend *Suicide Notes* by Michael Thomas Ford to older kids and adults, due to the mature content, but to young people especially. The topics grappled in this book, including social image and self-acceptance through, in this case, sexual orientation, reflect the battles within many teenagers who must deal with how they are viewed by friends, family, and society in general. Furthermore, Ford does not gloss over the ending of the story, but insinuates a long progress of recovery and making peace with oneself being different from others, the consequences of being different, and the potential negativity it may bring. Other books that are just as commendable include *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *If I Stay* by Gale Forman, and *Cut* by Patricia McCormick.