

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of The Study

*We Are Okay* is a novel written by Nina LaCour, which gives its readers a good portrayal of human emotion when one is in a grieving state. This novel was first published in America by Dutton Books for Young Readers in 2017. Numbering 150 pages, this novel brings the readers to the story of Marin, who is in a grieving state after she lost someone she loved. In the novel, the author portrays what stages a grieving person goes through, from the earliest stage until the final stage.

This novel tells the story of Marin, a college student who remains deep in grief months after the death of her grandfather. Choosing to isolate herself during her winter holiday, Marin stays alone in her dormitory in New York, far from her home in California. Her decision to remain distant from California, where she spent the first 18 years of her life, stems from a desire to escape painful memories associated with her grandfather's death. By cutting off all connections to her past, including her closest friend, Mabel, Marin attempts to protect herself from the emotional weight of her loss. Her actions—isolating herself and distancing herself from anything related to her former life—are a clear manifestation of her grieving process. This portrayal of grief, avoidance, and emotional disconnection piqued the writer's interest in studying Marin's journey.

In addition to examining how Marin processes the death of her grandfather, this study also seeks to explore how she overcomes her grief. As the novel unfolds,

Marin slowly reconnects with her past and begins confronting the pain she has long been avoiding. Her healing process—marked by re-engagement with Mabel and an eventual reconciliation with her memories—presents a powerful narrative of emotional resilience. This journey from isolation and denial to reconnection and acceptance captivated the researcher and generated an interest in analysing Marin’s coping mechanisms and her ultimate path towards healing. By exploring the stages of grief that Marin experiences and how she gradually overcomes her sorrow, this study aims to contribute a deeper understanding of grief in literature.

This study intends to identify the stages of grief that Marin experiences after the death of her grandfather. By examining Marin’s emotional journey through the lens of stages of grief theory by Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, this study seeks to illuminate how Marin navigates her loss. The analysis will explore how Marin’s grief is depicted throughout the narrative, considering the psychological and emotional complexities that accompany her grieving process. This analysis will provide an overview of how adolescents behave when they are grieving and provide an in-depth understanding of the complexities of loss as portrayed in contemporary young adult literature. This analysis also aims to explore how Marin overcomes her grief by applying James William Worden’s Task of Mourning theory. Through a close examination of Marin’s actions, thoughts, and emotions in *We Are Okay*, this study will assess how she navigates these tasks, shedding light on her journey through mourning and the ways she ultimately works towards healing. By employing this framework, the analysis will provide a structured understanding of Marin’s grief and her path towards emotional resolution.

The writer applies library research in this thesis to identify Marin's stage of grief and how she overcame it. A thorough review of academic journals, books, and other scholarly sources is employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of grief and its literary portrayal. This comprehensive library research approach ensures the study is grounded in established knowledge and theoretical frameworks.

The writer's analysis follows a three-stage process to provide a comprehensive understanding of Marin's grief in *We Are Okay*. The first stage focuses on an in-depth examination of the novel's intrinsic elements, specifically character, characterization, setting, and conflict. This foundational analysis sets the context for Marin's emotional journey and the narrative's overall structure. The second stage involves analysing the stages of grief Marin experiences, using Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler's Stage of Grief theory as a framework. This analysis will explore how Marin navigates the emotional phases of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Finally, the third stage applies James William Worden's Task of Mourning theory to examine how Marin overcomes her grief. By identifying how Marin processes her loss and eventually moves towards healing, this analysis aims to reveal the psychological mechanisms that help her cope and rebuild her life. These three stages of analysis work together to offer a thorough and structured exploration of Marin's journey through grief and recovery.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

1. What are the five stages of grief that Marin experienced in the novel?
2. How does Marin overcome her grief?

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the five stages of grief that Marin experienced in the novel.
2. To explain Marin's way of overcoming her grief.

### 1.4. Previous Studies

There are some previous studies with the same object and some book reviews, which the writer will provide to prove this research's originality. The first is a book review entitled "*Book Review: We Are Okay by Nina LaCour*", published in 2017 and written by Samantha Krysten on her blog Samsara Parchment, which discusses the detailed character portrayal, particularly focusing on Marin's anxiety and emotional struggles. She also mentions the setting of the novel, which the author well displays, making it believable.

The second one is a book review entitled "*Book Review: We Are Okay*", published in 2017 and written by Kathie Monthie on The Quindecim website, which highlights how the novel beautifully explores grief's impact on people and their relationships with others. She mentions how LaCour weaves the present-day tension between Marin and Mabel with vignettes of Marin's relationship with her grandfather, using stunning prose and first-person narration to depict the complexities of grief, trust, and healing. She also adds that the book avoids dramatizing its themes, instead offering hope through Marin's gradual acceptance and Mabel's supportive presence.

The third is a book review entitled "*Teen Review: We Are Okay*", published in 2018 and written by Amy Laughlin on Greenwich Library website, which

emphasizes Marin's journey as she navigates feelings of loneliness and denial after leaving her hometown. The reviewer notes that the novel resonates with readers of all ages, particularly those who have experienced feelings of isolation or fear. The emotional depth of Marin and Mabel's relationship is a focal point, showcasing the importance of friendship and support during difficult times.

The fourth is a book review entitled "*Mars Reviews We Are Okay by Nina LaCour*", published in 2018 and written by Danika Ellis on her blog The Lesbrary, which highlights the paradox of Marin's loneliness, which fosters an expansive internal world filled with reflection and growth. The reviewer also praises LaCour's ability to capture profound themes of grief and personal transformation, making readers empathize deeply with Marin's journey.

The fifth is a book review with the title "*We Are Okay by Nina LaCour — Book Review & Summary*", published in 2021 and written by Krina on A Maze of Words website, that reflects on the emotional rollercoaster of the book, highlighting Marin's journey as she confronts her buried grief and loneliness. The reviewer found the writing simple yet effective in conveying deep emotions, although they felt somewhat distanced from the characters at times.

The sixth is an undergraduate thesis by Ilham from Universitas Andalas, which was published in 2022, titled "*Anxiety and Self-Defense Mechanism of The Major Characters in Nina LaCour's We Are Okay*". This study found that Marin and Mabel suffered from three types of anxiety: realistic, neurotic, and moral

anxiety. To cope with the anxiety, the characters used some defence mechanisms: avoidance, denial, repression regression, intellectualization, and rationalization.

The seventh is an article by Saputri and Hartanto titled "*A Portrayal of Main Character's Interpersonal Behaviour in Nina LaCour's We Are Okay*", published in 2022 in UNCOLLCS: Proceeding of Research on Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Studies. The article analyses the interpersonal behaviour of the main characters in the novel. This study finds inclusion, control, and affection in Marin and Mable's friendship.

The eighth is a book review titled "*We Are Okay Book Review*", published in 2022 and written by Amy Buckle on her blog, Amy's Bookshelf. It emphasises LaCour's portrayal of grief and the raw emotions experienced by the protagonist, Marin. Buckle also mentions that although there is little storyline, LaCour successfully depicts the raw emotions of grief, love, and hope.

The ninth is a book review entitled "*Book Review: We Are Okay*", published in 2023 and written by Devon Trevarrow Flaherty on The Starving Artist website, which discusses the slow, character-driven plot and highlights Marin's relatable struggles with mental health and personal choices. The reviewer expresses a desire for a deeper exploration of mental health themes but acknowledges the authenticity of Marin's voice and experiences throughout the narrative.

The last one is a book review with the title "*Book Review: We Are Okay by Nina LaCour*", published in 2024 and written by Dini on her blog, Dini Panda Reads, which describes the novel as a "short, well-paced and fast read" focusing on

Marin's journey of acceptance and healing. The reviewer notes the profound sadness and loneliness in the story yet emphasizes the hope that emerges towards the end. The writing is appreciated for its simplicity, which effectively conveys the atmosphere of grief.

The previous studies and the book reviews do not delve deeply into the specific stage of grief experienced by Marin or the process of her healing journey. Therefore, a research gap exists in the analysis of Marin's stage of grief and her journey towards healing, which is the primary focus of the proposed study.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

This study analyses the psychological state of Marin, the main character of *We Are Okay* by Nina LaCour, who is grieving. This study's analysis is divided into intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The intrinsic aspect examines elements such as character, characterization, conflict, and setting. Meanwhile, the extrinsic aspect focuses on analysing the main character's psychological state through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler's stages of grief theory and James William Worden's task of mourning theory.

### **1.6. Writing Organization**

This study consists of four chapters that divide into:

#### **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains the background of the study, research problems, objectives of the study, previous studies, scope of the study, and writing organization.

## **CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL AND METHOD**

This chapter contains the theoretical framework applied by the writer in her research. The theories consist of intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements consist of character, characterization, conflict, and setting. In extrinsic elements, the writer will use the stages of grief theory by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler and the task of mourning theory by James William Worden.

## **CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS**

This chapter explains the results of the analysis, which consists of intrinsic and extrinsic elements in Nina LaCour's novel *We Are Okay*.

## **CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION**

This chapter contains conclusions from the research conducted by the researcher.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**