

STRAIGHT AND FAST IS THE ONLY WAY OUT.
LOOKING FOR ALASKA

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY JOHN GREEN
 MAXEIRONS

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EVENT SLIDE:

Sam Mattes - Alaska Young's Funeral

P.g. 151-152 "Her mother had an open casket, and Alaska told me, 'Don't ever let them see me dead, Daddy', and so that's that. Anyways, son, she's not there. She's with the Lord." -Mr.Young



Six days after Alaska Young's tragic death, Pudge, the Colonel, Takumi, and Lara muster up the strength to attend their beloved friend's funeral in her depressing hometown of Vine Station, Alabama. While the rest of the students of Culver Creek Boarding School travel by bus, those closest to Alaska chose to arrive earlier, and take Takumi's SUV instead. In the tiny A-frame chapel Pudge meets Alaska's distraught father. Within seconds upon arriving, Pudge notices that the casket is closed, preventing him from ever seeing the one he loves again; preventing him from closure. The novel "Looking for Alaska" discusses layers several times throughout the plot, and in this particular scene the theme is brought up once again. Left alone with the Colonel and Alaska's soulless body, Pudge thinks to himself "too many layers between all of us, too much keeping us from one another". I believe the author meant more than just the dark mahogany wood of the casket separating Pudge from Alaska, but the two worlds dividing life and death. Pudge openly admits his love for Alaska, the love that is still so passionate and real for him. So *present*. Pudge is in love with rotting flesh, no longer in love with a *person*, and that's when he finally realizes that she's gone, and can no longer feel her presence. The funeral scene in this novel was so touching, yet vital to the plot. It represents the first time that Pudge and the Colonel can really accept Alaska Young's death and begin to move forward, instead of living in a constant state of denial and regret.



"Is it so hard to die, Mr.Lewis? Is that labyrinth really worse than this one?"

Death is inevitable for every human being born into this world, as is planning our funeral and making our wishes known for when we pass over into another life. For your funeral, would you wish to have an open or closed casket? Would you want your loved ones to have closure, or rather let them remember you alive and healthy?

For me personally, I think the importance of a final goodbye outweighs the final memory someone has with their loved one. People who are truly an actor in your life often know you for many years, and have countless beautiful memories with you. If they see my lifeless body while saying their goodbyes to me they gain closure and acceptance, and the few seconds they see me, pale and motionless, won't change those memories. It won't change the endless times I've laughed until our sides hurt with my friends, or spent holidays filled with love and jokes with my family, or played pranks on my co-workers in the summer. In the end, the people I have loved and have been loved by should smile and giggle out of sheer happiness when they hear my name. I want my loved ones to have been grateful we were apart of each other's lives, and not dwell on the unfortunate circumstances separating us. I believe that when someone is a big enough part of your existence, not even life or death itself can be a thick enough layer to separate one another, because they are a part of you, and memories live on forever.



TAKE HOME QUESTIONS:

Key Theme:

Loss of Innocence (Coming of Age)

Innocence: "lack of guile or corruption; purity."

Symbolism:

- **Cigarettes (Marlboro Lights)**-self-destruction, foreshadow, rebellion, attempt to fit in, defiance of authority
- **Alcohol (Strawberry Hill)**-recklessness, committing a misdemeanor, more inclined to abandon morals when under the influence, guilt
- **Death**-rips innocence away, makes Pudge discover a new side to him filled with regret and bitterness
- **Nicknames**-"Pudge", represents clean slate, whomever he was before and his innocence vanishes along with the fresh start
- **Layers**-walls are broken down, first sexual encounter, boundaries crossed for the first time, separates life from death
- **Pranks**-requires being devious and pushing envelope and authority, disregard for education or consequences, search for independence

Key Events that Prove That Chosen Theme is Apparent in the Novel:

1) Miles Halter decides to attend Culver Creek Boarding School, moving away from his parents and all that he's ever known. This alone is a huge step in growing up and adulthood, and requires an immense amount of maturity and responsibility.

2) Pudge is offered his first cigarette, unaccustomed to it he chokes on it. With the assistance of his friends he begins to become familiar with alcohol, and starts making drinking a habitual act. Prior to his time at Culver Creek, Miles was uninterested and an amateur when it came to smoking and/or drinking. Boarding school made him oblivious to the legal, health, and emotional consequences of cigarettes and alcohol, thus capturing his innocence.

3) Miles Halter had his first sexual experiences with two of his fellow classmates, Lara Buterskaya and Alaska Young. Within the first page of "Looking for Alaska" it's evident that Miles was an unpopular, geeky student and lacked knowledge and experience with woman. With age comes different experiences and maturity; his encounters, and perhaps even unrequited love for one of the woman, forced him to socially and emotionally grow as a person, and lose that innocence that comes with inexperience.

4) Throughout Pudge's journey of self-discovery he participated in several pranks with his friends and roommate. Although none of the pranks were primarily his idea, his involvement proved his willingness for rebellious and dangerous acts. Had Pudge refused to be negatively corrupted and influenced by his friends and circumstances, would he have gambled with his enrollment and more so his education at Culver Creek so recklessly? No. Peer pressure corrupts one's innocence, as it did so easily with Miles'.

5) One of the major themes of the novel "Looking for Alaska" was death; one could argue that that was the center of the entire plot. Loss in and of itself breaks you as a person, and is perhaps the greatest offender of stealing someones innocence. Alaska's unexpected death jolted Pudge and the Colonel into an impenetrable period of regret, and misery. Losing a loved one forced Pudge to learn to move on and

accept situations that are out of his control, perhaps becoming the greatest lesson of all from his coming of age story.

Short Responses:

1. In what ways is the swan representative of Alaska? Why does she smoke?

Swans are known as beautiful, romantic creatures and are often associated with grace and love. Throughout "Looking for Alaska" protagonist Pudge comments on Alaska's appealing physique and features. He admires her sparkling green eyes, and blonde hair; her beauty. Alaska is the angelic love interest, and is continuously romanticized upon, much like how a swan would be. The elegant white of the swan and the purity of the white tulips is too much of a coincidence not to assume that both metaphors are directly linked. The tulips are a tribute and remembrance of Alaska's beloved mother, the ghost (also ironically white), perhaps the colour itself is an unpretentious symbol. In the beginning of the novel the Colonel warns Pudge to never get close to the swan to prevent getting torn to bits and pieces, for it has "issues with people" because of its abusive past. Both Alaska Young and the swan seem to have dark pasts in common. Alaska has been mentally abused for nearly a decade by the tortuous thought of killing her mother when she was just a child. Living with that kind of morbid notion every day mentally and emotionally destroyed her, forcing her to build up walls and prohibit anyone from getting too close to her. Alaska's mood swings, mystery, and manipulative games eventually ripped Pudge to "bits and pieces" and left him in an infatuated but confused state. The swan bit Miles in the buttocks, and Alaska Young broke his heart, but both hurt him in the end. The swan is a metaphor that embodies Alaska just discreetly enough to be beautiful, and was written quite brilliantly on John Green's behalf. In "Looking for Alaska" Alaska states "Y'all smoke to enjoy it. I smoke to die", and whether that was meant to be taken literally or not remained unanswered. Although Alaska was bright-she got into Culver Creek on full scholarship-charming, and clever she lacked drive and inspiration. The loss of her mother destroyed her; smoking was a self-destructive act that provided her a brief escape from her tortured labyrinth.

2. Explain the meaning of the book's title "Looking for Alaska". How does the name relate to Pudge's journey?

"Alaska" can be interpreted as many things. It's a broad, mysterious title-but that's what Green wanted. At first glance one would assume the book title is referring to the geographical location, or the meaning of "Alaska" which is "that which the sea breaks against". As you embark on the literature that is Miles Halter's coming of age story you witness him fall into a deep, intense infatuation with female protagonist Alaska Young. Pudge is blatantly mystified and captivated by her and her world, and desperately searches for answers to explain why Alaska is so enthralling. Midway through the novel Alaska's sudden passing completely alters the mood, and overall direction of the entire book. What was an average romantic-teen novel now touches on serious themes such as death, regret, and forgiveness. The Colonel and Pudge's grief and remorse for their beloved friend fuels their search for answers regarding the circumstances of Alaska's suspicious death. Determined to find out if Alaska's car accident was truly an "accident" the Colonel and Pudge go to great lengths for any clues about Alaska's mind set on the night of the accident. From questioning witnesses such as the cop who'm she'd hit, researching suicide symptoms, to even concocting a plan to steal private property from the dean of students, they stopped at nothing. Losing Alaska left them lost, and looking for her was the only thing keeping them from the reality of having to find themselves. Miles was looking for a ghost, and was in love with someone in an unreachable universe, an abundance of layers separating her from him. When Pudge finally forgave himself for letting Alaska leave that night he realized that Alaska wasn't missing anymore. Alaska would be a part of him forever; in the Bufriedos at Culver Creek, in the smoking hole, in Strawberry Hill wine. Perhaps the .24 alcohol level in her veins and the craze of forgetting her mother's anniversary was too much and prevented her from swerving. Perhaps the sea broke one too many times against Alaska and she snapped, deciding that straight and fast would be the easiest way out. Either way, Miles Halter looked for Alaska, and learned more about himself in the love and loss that this one girl brought him, than anything else he'd ever experienced in his lifetime.

