



Child abuse as seen through social conflicts in Kaye Gibbons' *Ellen Foster* (1987)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the issue of child abuse as seen through social conflicts experienced by the protagonist in the novel *Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons. The novel itself tells the story of Ellen, a little girl who grows up in a dysfunctional family. After her abusive father drives her mother to commit suicide, Ellen is forced to move from one relative's house to another's in search of a new home that can give her the affection she needs. However, Ellen continues to experience abuse every time she stays with her own family. In the end, she finds the affection she needs in a foster family. Child abuse is a significant worldwide problem that still occurs today, where children are violated in their own homes. This study aims to show how child abuse affects children's lives negatively, as reflected in the novel. This study employed a qualitative method using the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breau (2019). The analysis shows that the root of the conflicts between Ellen and her family is the abuse she receives from them. This leads to the conclusion that a family, which is expected to be a place where a child can receive love, care, and affection, may sometimes fail in this role. The novel can thus serve as a reminder that child abuse remains a serious and ongoing issue, which requires sustained and collective attention.

Keywords: child abuse; dysfunctional family; foster family; Kaye Gibbons; social conflict

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INTRODUCTION

According to a report released by the United Nations, millions of children around the world are victims of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Children's vulnerability to violence is a global problem, transcending geographic and socio-economic boundaries (UN News, 2024). Child abuse itself is described as all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development, or dignity (Daley et al., 2025). In proven cases of child abuse, 76% of children are victimized by their parents or legal guardians (National Children's Alliance, 2026). The issue of violence against children by their own family is also depicted in the novel *Ellen Foster*, a work by Kaye Gibbons.

Kaye Gibbons, born Bertha Kaye Batts, is a well-known American author who has made significant contributions to literature. She has been honored as a part of the Fellowship of Southern Writers and the YWCA Academy of Women (North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, n.d.). Gibbons grew up in a difficult childhood situation, and it inspired her to create her novels (Childs, 2012). When Gibbons was ten years old, her mother committed suicide by consuming one full bottle of pills, and her alcoholic father ended up drinking himself to death. As a result, Gibbons had to search for a home that could accept her by moving from one relative's house to another's. Eventually, Gibbons found that loving home with a foster mother after she experienced a lot of abuse by her cruel and uncaring relatives (SparkNotes Editors, 2005). Gibbons draws

on this childhood experience in her debut novel, *Ellen Foster* (1987).

Ellen Foster (1987) is a novel that was honored in London as one of the Twenty Greatest Novels of the Twentieth Century (Harris, n.d.). Critics were impressed by Gibbons for her remarkable skill in creating the narrative voice of Ellen, the novel's protagonist, "acknowledging its accuracy in representing a child's point of view" (Encyclopedia.com, 2026). The novel itself tells the story of Ellen, a little girl who grows up in a dysfunctional family. Her mentally ill mother commits suicide as she cannot stand living with her abusive husband. After her mother's death, Ellen is forced to live only with her father, who constantly abuses her and even nearly rapes her. As a result, Ellen inevitably has to search for a home that can accept her and give her the affection she needs by moving from one relative's house to another's. However, instead of getting the affection she needs, Ellen continuously experiences abuse whenever she stays with her own family. In the end, Ellen goes to a foster family's house and gets the affection she needs from these family members, who are not biologically related to her.

One of the most important intrinsic elements of this novel is the conflict between the protagonist and her own family. Thus, this study focuses on analyzing the conflicts presented in the novel. Conflict itself is a literary device that presents the struggle between two sides due to a disagreement in values, desires, motivations, etc. (StudySmarter, 2023). Moreover, the type of conflict shown in this novel is social conflict, which refers to a type of conflict where two characters are in direct opposition to each other (Craiker, 2022). To further analyze the social conflicts in this novel, this study uses the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019). Based on this theory, child maltreatment includes physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect. These forms of abuse (i.e., physical, emotional/psychological, or sexual) are harm that is inflicted on the child by the parent or caregiver (Robinson & Breaux, 2019).

Although the novel was published in 1987, it remains highly relevant to contemporary discussions. This study intentionally selects this work instead of a more recent novel to highlight that the issue of child abuse is not a new phenomenon, but a longstanding social problem that has

persisted across time. By examining this earlier text, the study emphasizes the continuity of the issue and demonstrates that child abuse remains relevant and urgent in present-day society.

In addition, there have been several research studies conducted on this novel. For instance, Monteith (1999) examines the representation of cross-racial friendship through *Ellen Foster*'s monologic formulation. The result shows that the bildungsroman form, which focuses on the protagonist's personal development, influences how the cross-racial friendship is reflected in the novel. Meanwhile, research by Gearhart (2003) discusses *scotosis*, or the act of selective blindness, that is employed in the novel. This research suggests that Ellen's perspective causes the readers to form a negative impression of Nadine, a character in the novel, as an unfavorable person, even though in reality, Nadine is shown to make several efforts to help Ellen on different occasions. Another study by Moifek and Abdelaziz (2017) examines the concept of race and class in *Ellen Foster* by relying on its historical and social background. This study takes a comparative research approach by contrasting the white protagonist, Ellen, and her community with her black best friend, Starletta, and her community. This study reveals how Ellen's white skin color and her social background help her overcome her hardships and contribute as effective means to accomplish her dream of a better life. Meanwhile, her friend, Starletta, who is black and belongs to the lower social class, continues to experience various forms of dehumanization and exploitation.

It appears that there has not been any research that discusses social conflict in *Ellen Foster*, although it is a significant intrinsic element of the novel through which the issue of child abuse is raised. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the social conflicts experienced by the protagonist to raise the readers' awareness of the topic.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method, which refers to a type of research method that involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Bhandari, 2020). The non-numerical data analyzed in this study is a

novel entitled *Ellen Foster* by an American novelist, Kaye Gibbons.

Apart from the intrinsic element of the novel, which is the social conflict, the researcher analyzed the data further by using the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019). In an article entitled "Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Child Maltreatment," Robinson and Breaux (2019) explain that child abuse is any recent act or failure to act on the part of the parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation. Moreover, there are four main types of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

According to Robinson and Breaux (2019), physical abuse is physical injury that results in substantial harm to a child, and physical abuse also includes the threat of harm. Sexual abuse is defined as sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of continuous sexual abuse of a young child, indecency with a child, sexual assault, or aggravated assault. Examples of sexual abuse of a child are failure to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child, encouraging a child to engage in sexual acts, such as trafficking or prostitution, as well as child pornography. Emotional abuse or psychological abuse is mental or emotional injury to a child that results in observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning. This includes humiliating a child in a public setting, constantly threatening a child, or ignoring/limiting physical contact with a child. This type of abuse is also considered the most common type of child abuse that happens all over the world (Berry Street, 2026). Lastly, neglect is defined as acts or omissions by the person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare. Neglect itself can include placing a child or failure to remove a child from a situation that could result in bodily injury or risk of harm to the child, failing to provide food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain life, and leaving a child in a situation where the necessary arrangements for care of the child are absent, with the intention of not returning by the parent or caregiver.

With the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019) as the framework, the researcher thus conducted this study by taking several steps. First, the

researcher read the novel multiple times to understand the story and determine the most significant intrinsic element of the novel to be analyzed, which is the social conflicts. Then, the researcher proceeded to identify several scenes in the novel that show the social conflicts between the protagonist and her family, which highlighted the issue of child abuse. After that, the researcher analyzed the social conflicts as well as the resolutions to the conflicts while connecting them with the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019). Lastly, the researcher drew some conclusions from the overall results of the analysis and connected them with the issue of child abuse that is raised in the novel.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the social conflicts in Kaye Gibbons' *Ellen Foster* to examine the issue of child abuse raised in the novel. This novel talks about a girl named Ellen who grows up in a dysfunctional family. She has an abusive father, and her mother commits suicide because she cannot bear living with her husband. After her mother's death, Ellen is forced to live only with her father and continually receives abuse from him. Thus, to avoid her father, Ellen moves from one relative's house to another's in search of a new home that can give her the affection she needs. However, instead of getting that affection, Ellen gets further abuse from her own family members, who are supposed to take care of her. This abusive treatment from Ellen's family can be seen from the six social conflicts that she experiences throughout the story.

The first social conflict happens between Ellen and her father when Ellen's mother eats a large amount of her heart pills. Ellen is scared that her mother will die because of overdosing, and she asks her to vomit the pills. Nevertheless, her mother does not listen to her, so Ellen wants to go outside the house to search for help by going to the store nearby to call an ambulance or other medical help. However, Ellen's father does not want her to leave the house. He tells her that he will kill both Ellen and her mother if Ellen tries to leave the house. Moreover, he says that her mother only needs to sleep, and he believes that the pills will not hurt her mother. This conflict can be seen in the quotation below:

Well I'll just go to the store and use the telephone.

But my daddy says he will kill me if I try to leave this house. All the time I knew he was evil and I did not have the proof. He would kill me and my mama both with a knife. He looks at the two of us and rubs her pocketbook, patient, like he sits and waits for folks to die all the time. He wants me to put her back in the bed. (Gibbons, 1987, p. 11)

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that, on the one hand, Ellen wants to help her mother by going outside the house to search for help. On the other hand, Ellen's father does not want Ellen to help her mother and does not let her go outside the house by threatening to kill her if she tries to leave.

In the end, this conflict is resolved because Ellen decides to obey her father and not help her mother. She lets her mother sleep just like her father wants, but when Ellen lies beside her mother, she realizes that her mother's heart stops beating, indicating that her mother has died:

I always want to lay here. And she moves her arm up and I push my head down by her side. And I will crawl in and make room for myself. My heart can be the one that beats.

And hers has stopped.

Damn him to the bottom of hell damn him. (Gibbons, 1987, p. 12)

According to the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019), the type of child abuse that happens in this conflict is emotional abuse. This abuse is committed by Ellen's father on Ellen because he gives threats to Ellen by saying that he will kill Ellen and her mother if Ellen tries to leave the house to save her mother. This threat successfully makes Ellen feel pressured and scared, so she fails to save her mother.

The second social conflict also happens between Ellen and her father. The conflict occurs when Ellen's father is drunk and brings his similarly drunk friends to their house. One of his friends provokes him to commit a sexual act, so he tries to rape Ellen. He starts searching for Ellen and calling her by another woman's name because he is drunk. Ellen then hides in the closet because she is scared of her father. However, Ellen's father manages to find her and gropes her. After that, Ellen immediately tells her father that she is Ellen – not the woman her father is calling– to make him realize that she is his child because she

does not want to be raped by him. This conflict can be seen in the excerpt below:

They stayed there for a while so I got in the closet.

...

You want to see a light so bad that it comes to guide you through the room and out the door where a man stops you and the light explodes into a sound that is your daddy's voice.

Get away from me he does not listen to me but touches his hands harder on me. That is not me. Oh no that was her name. Do not oh you do not say her name to me. That was her name. You know that now stop no not my name.

I am Ellen.

I am Ellen. (Gibbons, 1987, pp. 30-31)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen that, on the one hand, Ellen's father wants to rape her because he is drunk and imagining Ellen as another woman. On the other hand, Ellen does not want to be raped by her father, so she reminds him that she is Ellen to make him sober and let her go.

In the end, this conflict is resolved because Ellen successfully makes her father realize that she is Ellen, his daughter, so he does not rape her. Then, Ellen immediately runs away to her best friend Starletta's house to avoid her father:

He pulls the evil back into his self and Lord I run. Run down the road to Starletta. Now to the smoke coming out of the chimney against the night sky I run.

Down the path in the darkness I gather my head and all that is spinning and flying out from me and wonder oh you just have to wonder what the world has come to. (Gibbons, 1987, p. 31)

Based on the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019), the type of abuse that Ellen's father does in this conflict is sexual abuse. This is considered sexual abuse because, instead of protecting Ellen, Ellen's father tried to sexually abuse her by grabbing her hand harshly to gain control over her.

The third social conflict happens between Ellen and her aunt from her mother's side, Betsy, when Ellen stays at Betsy's house. Ellen is actually happy to live with Betsy as she can be away from her father. Thus, she

hopes that she can keep living with Betsy and believes that Betsy will allow her to do so. Nevertheless, Betsy suddenly asks Ellen who will take Ellen back to her own house. She asks Ellen that question because she does not want Ellen to stay in her house for a long time. Betsy also tells Ellen that she can only stay with her on the weekends. Betsy does this to Ellen because she is used to being alone and she does not have a family of her own, so she does not want to take responsibility for Ellen. This conflict can be seen in the excerpt provided below:

Then she wants to know who is coming to take me back.
She must have forgot.
Take me back where? I wonder.
Home, she says.
I say I told you I wanted to come stay with you and you said fine. Now I am here and I got all my stuff that I brought from the other place back in the bedroom closet.
She says no and laughs at the same time. I meant you could stay for the weekend and then go back to your own home.
(Gibbons, 1987, p. 33)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that, on the one hand, Ellen wants to stay and live with Betsy in Betsy's house. On the other hand, Betsy does not want Ellen to live with her and Ellen can only stay at her house on the weekends.

The conflict is eventually resolved because Betsy insists that Ellen return to her own house, and Ellen can only comply with her decision. Betsy then takes Ellen back to her house, and Ellen no longer stays with Betsy: "Aunt Betsy lets me off at the end of the path just like I ask and I walk the rest of the way to the house" (Gibbons, 1987, p. 34).

According to the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breau (2019), the type of abuse carried out by Betsy toward Ellen is neglect. This is considered a form of neglect because Betsy knows Ellen's father is abusive, and she continually receives abuse from him. However, she refuses to give Ellen what she needs, which is a place to stay where she can be far from her father. In this case, Betsy fails to give Ellen a shelter where she can be safe from her abusive father.

The fourth social conflict happens between Ellen and her father when he comes to her school. Ellen's father searches for Ellen because he wants to make her return to their

house. He calls out her name so loudly in an attempt to find her that everyone in the school building can hear him. He even throws out some money in front of the school and tells her that he will pay her if she returns to their house again. However, Ellen tells her father that she wants him to leave the school and take his money back. Ellen says that she no longer wants to live with him and asks him to leave. This conflict can be seen in the quotation below:

He stepped out of the truck waving some cash money and telling Ellen dammit to come back he would pay for it.

...

I told the teacher I could make him stop. Just give me a pistol and then go out there and scoop him up.
It does not even make me squint to see that in my head anymore.
I yelled for him to put his dollars on the ground and go back home. There was no sense in him leaving with the money.
(Gibbons, 1987, p. 42)

The excerpt above shows that, on the one hand, Ellen's father wants Ellen to go back to their house, so he comes to the school searching for her. On the other hand, Ellen does not want to go back to their house and live with her father anymore, so she tells him to leave the school.

In the end, this conflict is resolved. Ellen manages to make her father leave as she gets help from the police, who arrest her father. Thus, her father is no longer able to force Ellen to live with him: "The police came in a while and slapped the bracelets on. We all watched him go away" (Gibbons, 1987, p. 43).

According to the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breau (2019), the type of abuse that happens in this conflict is psychological abuse. This psychological abuse happens because Ellen's father forces Ellen to go back to their house even though she does not want to live with him anymore. He also shouts at her in front of her school and makes everyone shocked, which causes Ellen to feel embarrassed.

The fifth social conflict happens between Ellen and her maternal grandmother when Ellen stays at her grandmother's house. Ellen's grandmother keeps showing hatred towards Ellen because she believes that Ellen is the same as her abusive father and that Ellen reminds her of Ellen's father's abusive

behaviors toward Ellen's mother whenever she sees her. Ellen's grandmother thinks that Ellen does nothing to help her mother when her mother overdoses, leading her mother to die. However, Ellen can no longer bear the hatred that her grandmother shows her. As a result, Ellen expresses her anger and asks her grandmother why she has to hate Ellen. Ellen believes that she is different from her father and that she is not the cause of her mother's death. This conflict can be seen in the excerpt below:

Well I know why you hated my daddy but what about me? Why can't you see I am not like him?

All I know is when I look in your face I see that bastard and everything he did to my girl.

...

Why you little bitch. You set up in that house like the world owed you a living. In cahoots with your damn daddy. I know all that went on. You laid up all in that house with your daddy's buddies. I'm surprised you don't have some little nigger baby hanging off your titty.

But you left before I could get the both of you at one pop. You and your daddy let her take them pills or more than likely drove her to it. And then you left her to die. And then somebody comes to my house and tells me how they found you all laid up next to her like a little idiot. But hi ho I got you now. You might have run out before that bastard got what was coming to him but I swear you will never stop paying for your part. (Gibbons, 1987, pp. 58-59)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen that, on the one hand, Ellen's grandmother hates Ellen because she believes that Ellen is the same as her father. On the other hand, Ellen does not want her grandmother to hate her because she believes that she is different from her father.

This conflict is not resolved because both Ellen and her grandmother still stick to their own beliefs, even until Ellen's grandmother dies not long after their conflict happens:

But I did not kill her just like I did not kill my mama or my daddy.
She died in spite of me. (Gibbons, 1987, p. 59)

The type of abuse that Ellen's grandmother does to Ellen is psychological abuse. This is considered psychological abuse because Ellen's grandmother shows hatred toward Ellen, as she believes Ellen reminds her of Ellen's cruel father and blames Ellen for her child's death, even though Ellen is not responsible for the problem. This, of course, negatively affects Ellen's mental state, which is why she cannot accept the fact that her grandmother hates her.

The last social conflict occurs between Ellen and Nadine, who is Ellen's second aunt from her mother's side. The conflict happens when Ellen stays at Nadine's house. Ellen tries to be nice to Nadine and her daughter, Dora, even though Ellen does not really like living with them. On Christmas Eve, Ellen gives Nadine and Dora a present: a painting that Ellen makes herself. However, after giving them the painting, Ellen hears Nadine and Dora mock her painting behind her back by saying that it looks cheap and that they will take it down after Ellen leaves their house. Therefore, Ellen becomes angry and decides to take revenge by mocking Dora back.

After Nadine hears Ellen mocking Dora, she becomes mad. Nadine believes that Ellen is ungrateful and arrogant, as she dares to mock her daughter even though they have accepted her to stay with them. Nadine degrades Ellen by telling her that she is an ungrateful little bitch who needs to be beaten by her. Nadine also tells Ellen to get out of her house, as she believes that she will be damned if she still allows Ellen with her superior self to live with her another day. However, Ellen does not think she is ungrateful and arrogant; she just wants to stand up for herself because Nadine and Dora mock her painting first. Ellen then tries to defend herself by degrading Nadine, saying that Nadine is the one who is crazy because both Nadine and Dora have told so many lies to each other about how the world works and end up believing them. Ellen also states that Nadine and Dora are both lost and foolish over each other. The conflict between Ellen and Nadine can be seen in the excerpt below:

Nadine said I was a ungrateful little bitch and I needed to have the hell beat out of me.

And then when she got up and walked toward me I told her flat out not to touch me or I would kill her. I said that low and strong as my daddy said it to me. I said it with my eyes evil so she would think

about how I had been found in a house with two dead women and she might see herself just for one second as number three.

She just said for me to get out. To find my evil little self some hole to crawl in. That she didn't want me to begin with. That Betsy didn't want me either. That all she and Dora wanted to do was to live there alone and she would be damned if she would tolerate me or my little superior self another day.

That is when I told her I thought she was the crazy one. That she and Dora had told each other so many lies about the way the world worked that they believed them. You two are bumping around in this house lost and foolish over each other. You two are the same as the people who would not believe the world was round. That is exactly what you are like! (Gibbons, 1987, pp. 82-83)

It can be seen from the excerpt above that, on the one hand, Nadine believes that Ellen is ungrateful and arrogant because she dares to mock Dora. On the other hand, Ellen does not think she is ungrateful and arrogant; she just wants to stand up for herself because they mock her first. That is why Ellen defends herself when Nadine tries to hurt her.

In the end, this conflict is not resolved because both Ellen and Nadine still stick to their own beliefs, even until Ellen leaves Nadine's house after Nadine tells her that she will call the judge to make Ellen leave. Therefore, Ellen goes to the Foster family's house to find a new home where she can be accepted:

So I packed that afternoon. I had not planned on leaving in a huff like that but when you have to go you just have to go. I had not even had time to do my research on where the Foster lady lived or her telephone number.

...

And when I finished packing I walked out of their house and all the way to my new mama's. All the way past the school. On the other side of the store but just this side of the colored church. (Gibbons, 1987, pp. 83-84)

According to the theory of child abuse by Robinson and Breaux (2019), two types of abuse happen in this conflict: psychological abuse and neglect. First, Nadine commits

psychological abuse against Ellen by saying that Ellen is an ungrateful little bitch, which is a harmful sentence that can negatively impact Ellen's mental state. Second, Nadine also neglects Ellen as she fails to give Ellen a place where she can get the affection she needs and instead forces Ellen to leave her house even though she knows that Ellen does not have parents or a house of her own anymore.

At the end of the story, it is shown that Ellen arrives at the Foster family's house and meets the mother of this family. Ellen explains to her about her struggles –that she has no place to live and no family to stay with. Ellen is then allowed to live in the Foster family's house, and she manages to get the affection and care she needs when she stays with them.

The uplifting conclusion of the novel, in which Ellen's life slowly gets better with the Foster family, sharply contrasts with the intense trauma she experiences during the remainder of the story. Before discovering this secure home, her daily life was filled with intense conflicts with her family, and she often suffered relentless emotional abuse and verbal attacks. These damaging interactions directly support the main finding of this research, which is that social conflicts are the primary sources of the overwhelming psychological abuse Ellen faces. In the end, by revealing how these adverse social settings lead to significant mental anguish, this research emphasizes that psychological abuse is a traumatic form of child suffering that requires far greater attention.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the six social conflicts experienced by the protagonist of the novel, there are some points of conclusion that can be drawn. First, it can be seen that all of the conflicts happen because of one reason, which is the abuse from a child's own family. In the first, fourth, fifth, and sixth conflicts, Ellen experiences psychological abuse from her father, her grandmother, and her aunt, Nadine. In the third and sixth conflicts, Ellen is neglected by both of her aunts, Betsy and Nadine. Lastly, in the second conflict, Ellen receives sexual abuse from her father. From this analysis, it is shown that the most common type of abuse depicted in the novel is psychological abuse, which is also the most prevalent type of abuse experienced by children in reality.

Thus, from all the social conflicts that happen between Ellen and her family, it is

proven that child abuse can actually be carried out by the child's own family members. It also shows how a family, which is expected to be a place where a child can receive love, care, and affection, may sometimes fail in this role and instead be the one who subjects the child to abuse. This conclusion is gained through the fact that Ellen does not get the love and affection she needs whenever she stays with her family. Instead, she is continuously mistreated and gets abused by them.

This study differs from previous research on the novel as it focuses on social conflict and the issue of child abuse, which is a central experience of the main character throughout the story and is significant to examine. In contrast, other studies primarily address the issue of racism depicted during the novel's time period, as illustrated through the friendship between the main character and her friend. Therefore, this study contributes by offering a new perspective on the novel through the lens of child abuse and social conflict, rather than focusing solely on racism as explored in previous studies. It highlights how child abuse is portrayed as a central issue that shapes the main character's development and experiences.

This novel acts as a wake-up call for readers all over the world, reminding us that child abuse is a significant problem that must be handled comprehensively. If child abuse remains widespread and many people continue to be unaware of the issue, even more children will suffer and experience its harmful effects on their mental and physical condition. Therefore, this makes the novel a significant medium to raise the readers' awareness about child abuse and its negative impacts on children.

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