

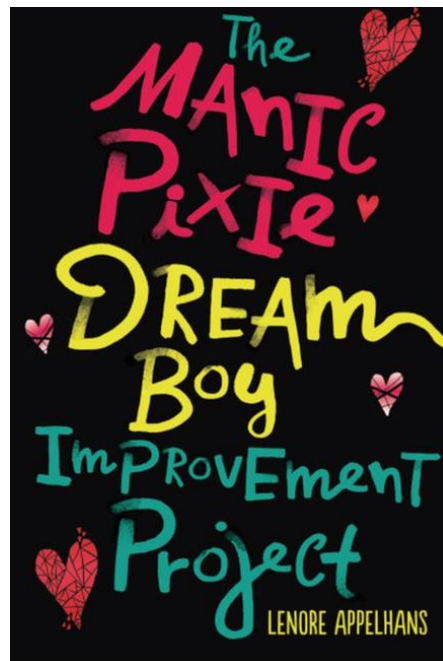
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Review of *The Manic Pixie Dream Boy Improvement Project* Written by Lenore Appelhans

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Amanda Brady Deaton
Stephens County High School, Toccoa, GA

Student Reviewer: Faith A. Comeau, 11th Grade



Appelhans, L. (2019). *The manic pixie dream boy improvement project*. Minneapolis: MN: Carolrhoda Lab.

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Adult Review: Amanda Brady Deaton

Riley resides in TropeTown, a city in which all the archetypal characters live and play until they are called upon by an Author. “Authors” live in the Real World and are trying to write the next great book, yet they must rely on predictable archetypes in their novels so that they can spend more time on their Developeds, the fleshed-out characters that their books are, ultimately, about. Riley is the only “Manic Pixie Dream Boy,” a subgroup of the “Manic Pixie Dream Girl” trope, and his role in a story is to support the protagonist on her individual journey. But what about what he wants? Riley starts to question his existence, wondering if he can function outside of his one-dimensional trope.

“Manic Pixie Dream Girl” is one of the more modern archetypes, and interesting to analyze through a feminist lens. Prominent in films since the 1970s, characters in this trope are typically female, fun, creative, and free-spirited, and they help the male protagonist learn how to enjoy life instead of being serious all the time. A criticism of this trope is that, firstly, it is almost always a female in this role, and secondly, this character does not exist except to support the protagonist on his quest. This book is thoughtful and exciting because it pulls the reader into a fictional world dedicated to the survival of tropes, all the while forcing its audience to critique a particularly troublesome trope.

It would benefit young readers to have an understanding of archetypes and why they are both convenient and problematic. However, this is an excellent book for students to begin to consider some of these issues and what they mean for socialization. Otherwise, there is no explicit language or mature content, but be prepared to answer some tough questions about how popular tropes affect our expectations.

Student Review: Faith A. Comeau

In *The Manic Pixie Dream Boy Improvement Project* by Lenore Appelhans, the author unfolds an astonishing story about TropeTown and its inhabitants. Such is the story of the members of the manic pixie dream girls (and boy) and their adventure to try to live authentic lives. But the council of TropeTown decides that they are a problematic trope to keep around. They fight for the right to exist, in fiction and in their own lives. But will they be able to succeed in doing as they plan?

First and foremost, I must inform you about what TropeTown is. It is a place where literary devices, situations and characters come to life. Moreover, the characters of TropeTown are to define themselves as their genre or trope as they are called. This is where we meet the main character Riley, who is one of the few manic pixie dream boys.

Riley has been sent to behavioral therapy for deviating from the expected quirky fun he is supposed to bring to a novel. There, we meet the other main character of the book, Zelda, and other whimsical Manic Pixie Dream Girls who have been sent to therapy in order to learn to embrace their trope. As a group, they would like to be taken seriously. However, since the TropeTown Council has decided their type is problematic, they may be retired. With only a few days till their demise, they work hard to show the Council how charming, creative, and vibrant they are. Their plan is complicated by other potential futures, such as planting in a novel (staying for good), seeing where the Termination Train may really lead, or accepting the small bit of freedom that being a trope in TropeTown allows them.

All in all, I would definitely recommend this book to high school students because Riley’s quest is seen beyond the labels and stereotypes and his desire for freedom to be who he wants to be; these are feelings

with which many readers in reader world will relate. I feel as if once you enter high school, you are now under the consent scrutiny of your society and peers as well as under the pressure that you have to perform under a certain stereotype to succeed in life.

This is why I greatly enjoyed reading this novel; it shows what you can do if you break out of the stereotype you have been placed in and the great things you can do without conforming to stereotypical rules of your society.