

Koertge, Ron. **Strays** 167pg.

Recommended for Grades 9-12

Realistic Fiction

Ron Koertge's bildungsroman novel, Strays, is the narration of a boy named Ted O'Connor who is plunged into the orphan world after both his parents die in a car accident. Over the next year, Ted grows from an introvert who survives the bullying he received because of the animals protecting him, to a confident, self-assured man. Along with his new foster parents, the Rafters, Ted forms two valuable relationships upon his arrival at their house. CW, who entered at the same time as Ted, is a self-proclaimed gangster who bounced around nineteen houses in six years. Although CW comes off as a counterpart to Ted, he is a voice of reason throughout the novel. The other boy he meets is Astin, whom after one year will age out of the house. Astin is bold and fearless, built his own motorcycle, and is as comfortable in public as can be. He goes out of his way to socialize Ted, having him stray from his wardrobe of corduroys, dress shirts, and combat boots, to something more fashionable. Ted values this relationship as it gives him more friendships than he ever had before. Throughout the novel, Ted's bond with animals is always a source of solace, but as he finds relationships with other people, his connection to these animals becomes strained and a cause of major conflict in his life.

Koertge utilizes a style of writing easily comparable to that of J.D. Salinger, a first person narrative without the use of difficult language. Koertge emulates many signature Salinger lines further showcasing the influence he had on the author. The book is most easily characterized as a bildungsroman, or a coming of age story, so it is targeted for any kind of young adult transitioning into an adult.

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