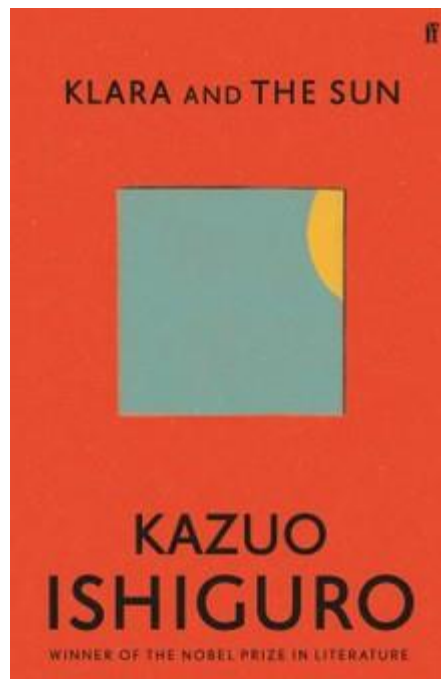


Champion of English Section  
Senior Division  
Name of Winner : Lee Kwan Yeung  
Name of School : Hong Kong University Graduate  
Association College  
Book Title : Klara and The Sun  
Author : Faber and Faber  
Publisher : Kazuo Ishiguro

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### **In the Eyes of Klara**

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### *Introduction*

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Loneliness is a feeling that we've all experienced, especially in quarantine. But what if we could erase this feeling of isolation by the use of technology? The idea of eliminating children's solitude is explored in *Klara and The Sun*, by Kazuo Ishiguro. The delicately crafted speculative-fiction novel captures the fundamentals of human loneliness, abandonment as well as moral and ethics regarding Artificial Intelligence, all in the perceptive eyes of our AI protagonist, Klara.

Taking place in an unknown city in the near future, society is filled with technology we can imagine in decades time. Children in this semi-fictional world need to go through genetic modifications to become more intelligent, however, the alterations cause children to become sick or even die. This resulted in the birth of Artificial Friends (AFs), artificially intelligent robots who accompany these children in their daily lives, anywhere, anytime.

The plot follows our protagonist, Klara, on her journey as an AF of a sick child named Josie. We view the world through the curious eyes of Klara, accompanying her as she learns about the world like a human child. She learns to decipher human emotions and concepts: love, kindness, anger, sadness, empathy, to fulfill her role as an AF. However, when Josie's health takes a turn for the worse, Josie's Mother, Rick (a childhood friend of Josie), and Klara all have different plans to save her, cherish her or to prepare for the worst. In desperate times, Klara turns to worship The Sun, Klara's 'God' who provides her with solar power, as a supernatural force to save her dying friend.

As someone who isn't a fan of sci-fi nor speculative fiction, *Klara and The Sun* is a brilliant entry into these genres and to broaden the range of books I read. Unlike regular sci-fi books, the novel doesn't contain loads of complex terminology and overwhelming worldbuilding, instead the science of the world is subtle and ambiguous, leaving readers to analyze the world at their own pace. Also unlike dystopian fiction, the world isn't very dark or disturbing, instead the futuristic world is presented neutrally, for readers to decide for themselves, whether it is a utopia and dystopia.

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### *Narrative Style*

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One of the most charming elements of the novel is the narrative style adopted by Ishiguro. The narrator of the story is our main protagonist, Klara. As a reader, we almost feel like an AF ourselves, following Klara's perception and understanding of the world.

The story is narrated by Klara in the first person, it is as if we are reading Klara share the story of her entire life in diary journals or conversations. From her descriptive analysis of characters' tone and actions, she identifies and interprets characters' emotions and personalities, dissecting the human heart: the "wish to escape loneliness" or "what it means to love".

Klara's philosophical reflections of her world is authentic, for example, when Klara is on the window display of the AF store, she sees an old couple reuniting at a crosswalk, noticing the tears of joy as they embraced each other, Klara tries to understand the irrationality of human emotions, "'Sometimes,' she said, 'at special moments like that, people feel a pain alongside their happiness.'"

In another example, Klara interprets happenings as The Sun's godlike miracle, "The Sun was pouring his nourishment onto the street and into the buildings, and when I looked over to the spot where Beggar Man and the dog had died, I saw they weren't dead at all—that a special kind of nourishment from the Sun had saved them." Klara is unable to process ambiguous situations, assuming that supernatural power was at play. Klara's behavior reflects the importance of religion in human civilization, and reveals a sense of humanity under her robotic skin.

Klara also shows unnatural language patterns in her narration, subtly hinting at her artificial qualities. Throughout the story, Klara always refers to characters using their names or titles, instead of using pronouns. For example, 1st person pronouns when talking about herself, using 'Klara' instead of 'I'. Towards other characters, Klara instead calls them 'Josie', 'Rick', 'the mother' or "the father" instead of 'you', even in direct conversation. This demonstrates how AI may remember and discern people like data, or remember them according to their importance in the AI's operation, while we remember and address people as individuals.

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### *Character Development*

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In *Klara and the Sun*, characters evolve naturally, via the contrasting thoughts and actions of characters in earlier and later chapters casts a shadow of growth in personality, relationships and their views on past events.

The character development of Klara is especially evident and captivating.

Klara is almost baby-like in the exposition, having to learn the world by observation. From how a child makes their AF follow them like a servant, and doesn't even turn back while talking to him; to how an old pair of united lovers stare at each other across at a crossroad, feeling both love and pain in their expressions, Klara develops her own thinking, and learns the spectrum of emotions from watching the world.

Gradually in the rising action of the story, Klara matures and starts to experience emotions of her own. When she first meets Josie, a girl who soon promises to buy her from the store, Klara gains a sense of attachment towards Josie, and anticipates becoming Josie's AF, going as far as ignoring a customer who wants to buy her.

However, when the Manager and the other AFs start to doubt Klara, and tell her that claiming that "children make promises they can't keep", we see the seed of doubt sow in Klara's mind, and her hope starts to waver.

Days pass by and Josie is still yet to appear, Klara feels disappointed and begins to accept the possibility that Josie may never return. But at the same time, she holds onto her memories of meeting Josie to relight her hope. Highlighting on how Klara has learned to cling on to hope, and to reassure herself that Josie will eventually return and take her home.

This is only a brief example of Klara's growth, not to mention the changes in other characters. Characterization in this novel feels smooth and gradual, weaved into the plot, narration and dialogue. Yet, the character development is still distinct and noticeable to readers, showing the exceptional craftsmanship of the Nobel-prize-winning author.

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## *Conclusion*

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All in all, *Klara and The Sun* is a brilliant read, exploring human nature through the eyes of an AI. Leaving readers with lingering questions and thoughts on ethics, human loneliness, and more. The book helped me understand my alienation during quarantine, hence, I would recommend this novel to anyone interested in exploring the emotion of loneliness. People who are interested in the development of AI, or people who enjoy books with a plot twist, would also enjoy this book.