

“I’m Not Scared” Essay

In the novel “I’m Not Scared” by Niccolò Ammaniti, the protagonist, Michele, learns that loyalty and trust are far more valuable than money or objects. Set in the small, secluded Southern Italy town of Acqua Traversa in the scorching summer of 1978, the novel tells the tale of a nine year old boy’s terrible discovery and loss of innocence. Michele stumbles upon a young, innocent, kidnapped boy chained up in a hole and living in the most squalid conditions. Through events and experiences that erase his innocence, which include the realisation of the real life monsters in Acqua Traversa, his selling of Filippo for a Subbuteo table soccer team and Pino’s attempt to buy him over, Michele comes to learn that loyalty and trust are far more valuable than money or objects.

Michele first learns that loyalty and trust are far more valuable than money when he discovers the villagers’ involvement in Filippo’s abduction. Prior to the kidnapping, Michele confidently trusted all the adults of Acqua Traversa – especially his own parents. At the beginning of the novel he proudly considers his father to be the “boss” of Acqua Traversa, but later comes to the conclusion that “Papa was the Bogeyman” (pg 87). Ammaniti includes this metaphor in the text as it effectively communicates Michele’s new feelings towards his father and how much his opinion and views have changed. Michele perceives the Bogeyman as the scariest and most authoritative monster of all, so when he describes Pino as this terrible fiend the reader knows that Michele no longer trusts him. It also shows how much more valuable he believes the trust and loyalty between him and his parents is compared to the ransom money that his family is wanting from Filippo’s abduction. As soon as Michele learns the people around him are cold-hearted and greedy, his trust in them vanishes. Unlike his fellow townspeople, Michele can see that money is not a sufficient excuse for such immense cruelty towards a human being. Although, during the novel Michele is similarly tempted by and drawn into doing the wrong thing due to something that he desires.

Through sharing his secret about Filippo, Michele learns that loyalty and trust are far more precious than any object. The Amitrano’s are an extremely poor family who are only able to supply Michele with necessary items. The food he eats can barely sustain his growing body with the lowest-quality meat only able to be consumed once a week. Due to the Amitrano’s financial position, they are incapable of providing their son with the toys he desires. Michele’s best friend, Salvatore, comes from a wealthy family and has many of the popular Subbuteo table soccer teams. The reader is told that Salvatore is “stingy” and won’t let Michele have even one of his numerous teams. When Michele makes the discovery of Filippo down the hole, he betrays the innocent boy’s trust to trade him in for a Subbuteo team, asking Salvatore “If I tell you a secret will you give me one?” (pg 133). This shows how envious and desperate for a team Michele is and how easy it was for him to throw away his loyalty to Filippo. Ammaniti has used the subbuteo team that Michele covets as a symbol of greed. Salvatore’s father, the Avvocato and local landowner can afford to buy countless gifts for his son, whereas Pino cannot afford gifts for Michele. Ammaniti has used the subbuteo game to represent material wealth, something Pino aspires to and apparently this is rubbing off on Michele. Michele feels empty and horrible once the deal is done and like he “wasted” his secret because Salvatore didn’t even care about Filippo’s situation. Michele is then betrayed himself by his own best friend, telling the reader “Salvatore Scardaccione had sold me for a driving lesson” (pg 147). This time he suffers the hurt and betrayal, learning from these two experiences how easily objects can tempt you into breaking promises and losing people’s loyalty. He also learns that without trust relationships cannot function properly and therefore how much more valuable this quality is, as compared to any possession he may or may not have.

Michele realises that money and objects have no value when compared to his loyalty to Filippo. Making a promise to Filippo that he will return for him, Michele is soon after forced to take an oath in the presence of his father, saying that he will never revisit the hole again. Pino buys his son a new bicycle to bribe him, as well as try to win him over. Ammaniti has used the bike as a symbol for ‘hush money’ and at first Michele loves his new toy, although soon enough he begins to see through the red paint and down to the evil scheming surface. The bike suddenly means nothing to Michele while his loyalty to Filippo still means everything to him. Ammaniti has used constant religious allusion throughout this novel. Ammaniti compares the “red dragon” to Judas’ thirty pieces of silver, that ultimately possessions and material wealth are no comparison to moral values and doing the right thing. Riding his old Croc, he repeats the words “Filippo...I’m coming...Filippo...I’m coming...” (pg 198) as he nears closer to the feeble boy’s new location. This simple example successfully demonstrates to the reader how committed and loyal Michele is to Filippo and how he cannot be bought over with expensive gifts from his father.

During the sustained heat wave of 1978, Michele Amitrano learns that loyalty and trust are far more valuable than money or objects through events and experiences he comes into contact with. His knowledge and understanding form the basis of his moral decisions and guide him to help the innocent boy, Filippo, escape from the villainous adults of Acqua Traverse.