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I am the Messenger Characters

Ed Kennedy

- “epitome of ordinariness”
- self-deprecating
- single; 19 years old
- cab driver, lives alone
- secretly loves Audrey



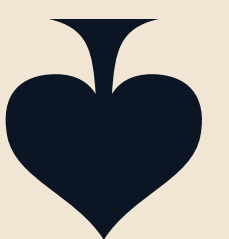
Marvin Harris

- Ed’s best friend
- brash and miserly, yet loyal
- argumentative
- owns a dilapidated Ford Falcon; refuses to replace it even though he is financially capable



Audrey O’Neill

- guarded and conflicted internally
- sleeps with men she does not care about
- cab driver, 19 years old
- feels safe and comfortable with Ed



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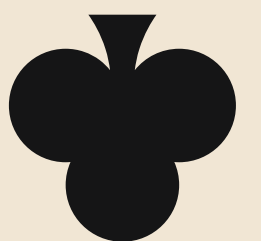
Dave Sanchez (aka Ritchie)

- provides comic relief
- his good humor hides his heavy heart
- lacks purpose and self-drive resulting in shame
- unemployed; stays up listening to his parents' radio



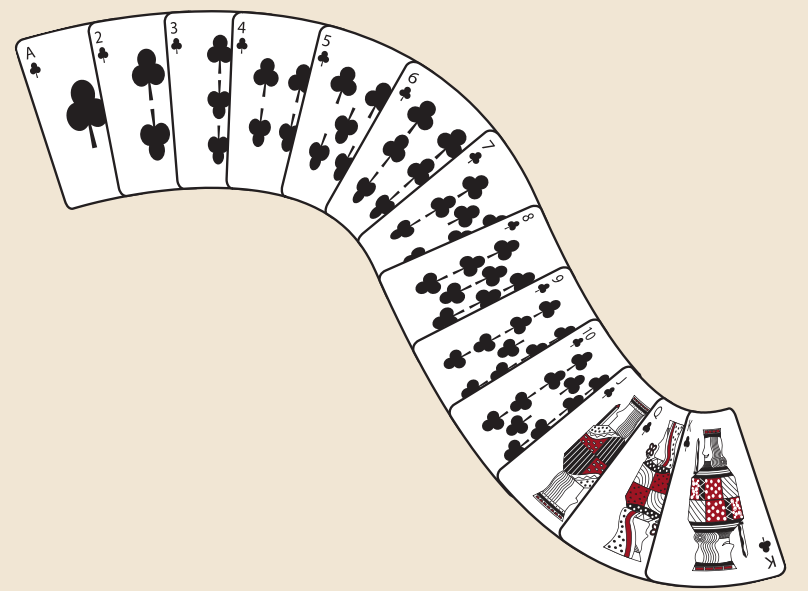
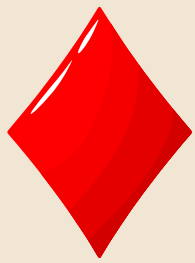
Beverly Kennedy

- Ed's mother ("foulmouthed ma") and key contributor to his self-loathing
- consistently criticizes Ed but not her other two children
- widow; treated her husband the same as she treats Ed - bitter about never getting out of the town



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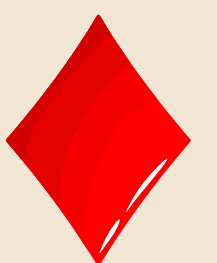
Potential for Personal Growth

Ed goes from feeling like a “local loser” to someone with purpose. Reflect upon the stages of Ed’s growth throughout the novel and then upon your own life. What are key moments in your life that forced you to stretch yourself, resulting in personal growth?

What character(s)’ personal growth story was most relatable to you?

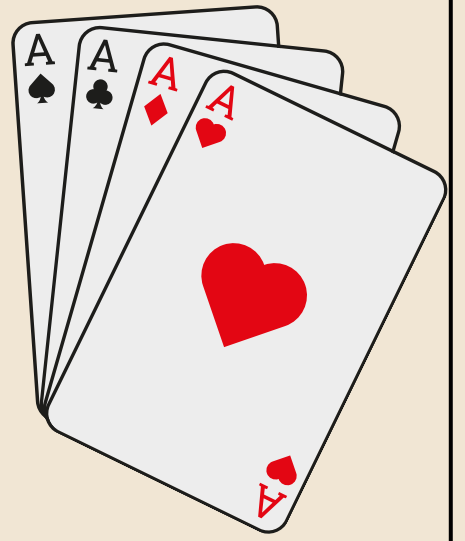
Choice vs. Circumstance

Ed’s description of his bad community suggests he believes that the circumstances one grows up in influence their future success. He also speaks of laziness as if it is an inherent trait beyond his control. This suggests he believes that individuals are set up by fate to be either successful or unsuccessful. If you could address this with Ed, what would you say?



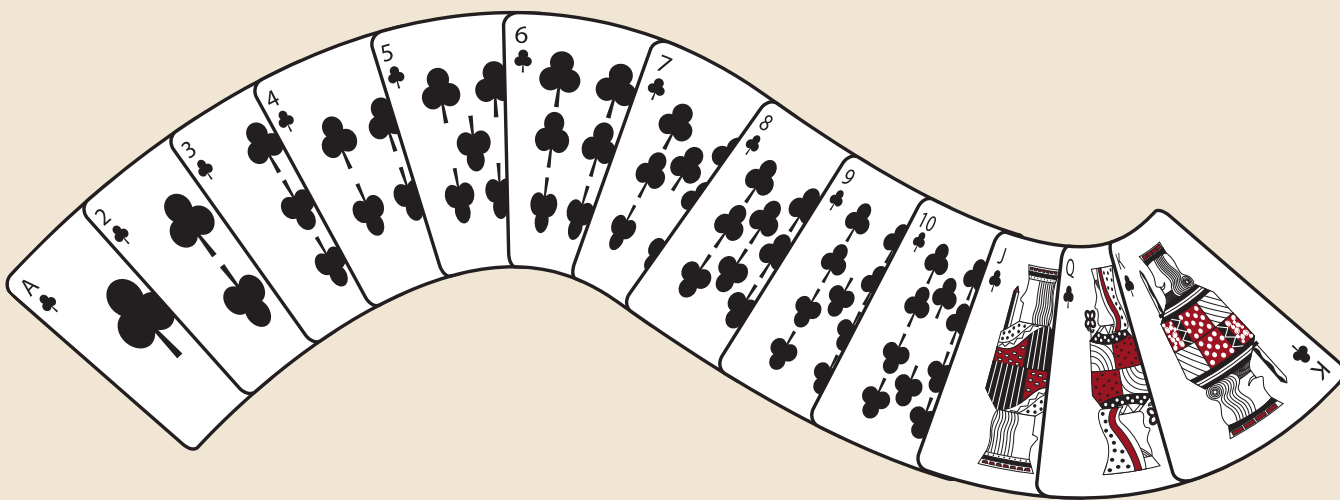
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Finding Meaning in Suffering

Is suffering required for personal growth?
What are different levels of “suffering”?

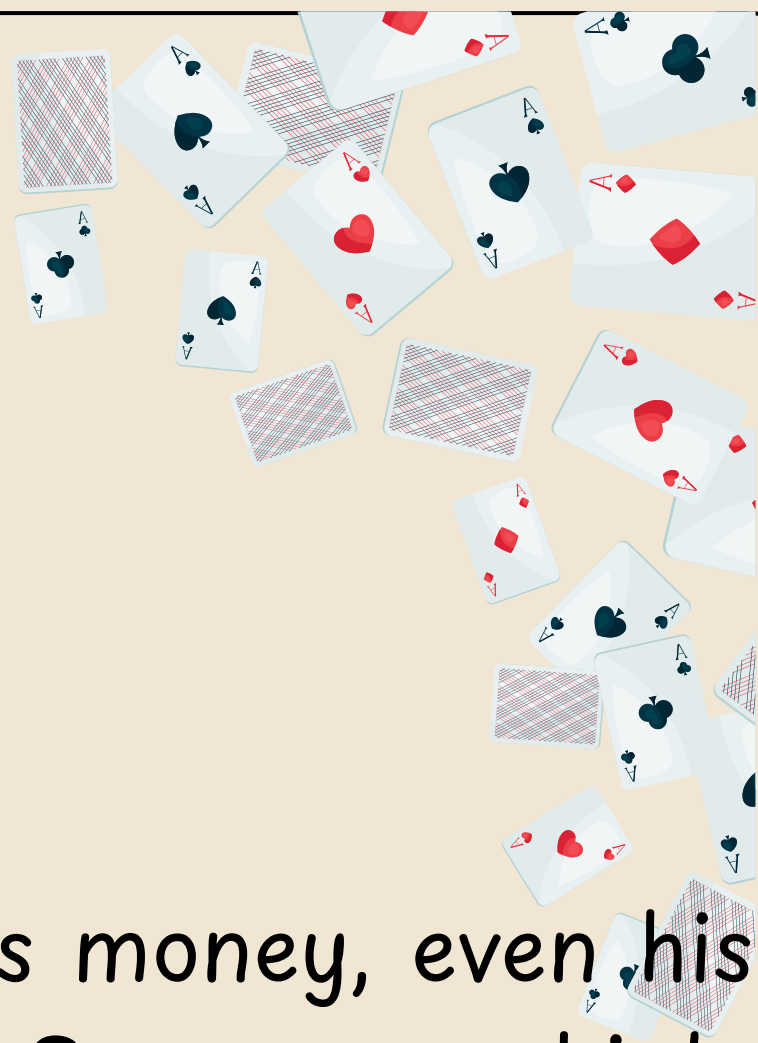


Power of Human Connection

Human connection is both powerful
and complicated. Each character is
both a loner and a social being.
What relationships did you find most
moving and which (if any) did you
find troubling?



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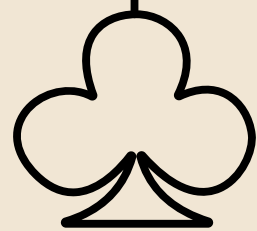
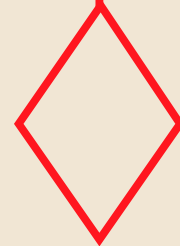
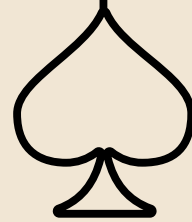
1. Ed risks so much—his safety, his money, even his blood—for others, even strangers. Some may think his actions are self-destructive, while others call it genuine compassion. Did you find Ed's sacrifices inspiring or reckless? In life, is there a line between helping others and losing yourself?

2. Audrey keeps her heart guarded and avoids love to protect herself from pain, even when it hurts Ed. Do you sympathize with her self-protection, or do you think she's being unfair to Ed and herself? Is it better to risk heartbreak for connection or stay safe and lonely?

3. Marv hides his past and insists on privacy, only revealing his secret when forced. Was Marv right to keep his pain private, or does true friendship mean being open and honest, even when it hurts? Would you have acted the same or differently if you were in his place?



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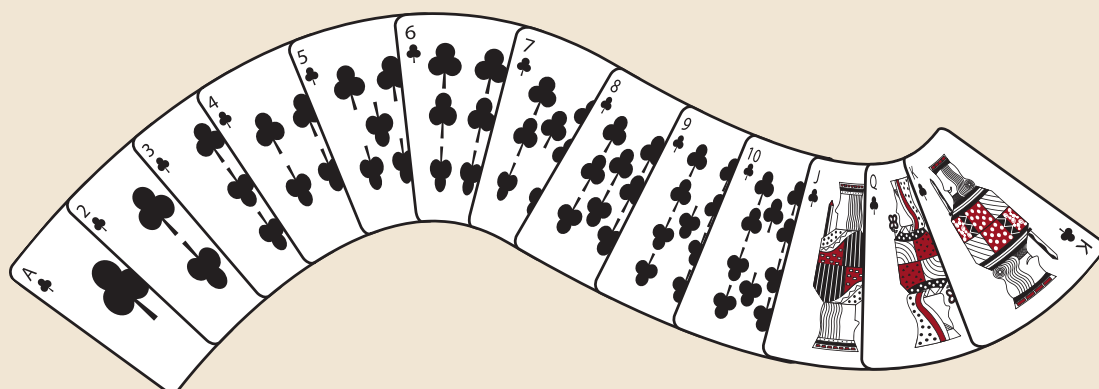


4. Ed's mother is openly critical and harsh, claiming it's "love" that makes her act this way. Do you believe tough love can motivate someone to improve, or does it do more damage than good? Did you understand—and maybe even like her at any point, or was she irredeemable to you?

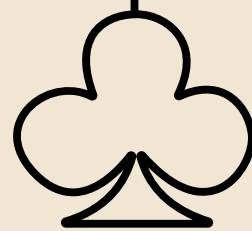
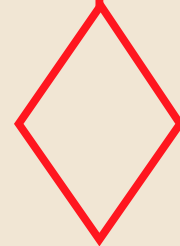
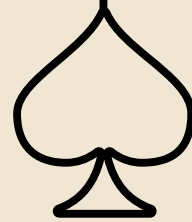
5. By the end, Ed learns that ordinary people can make extraordinary differences. Some readers find this hopeful; others feel it's unrealistic in a world stacked against people like Ed. Does the story convince you that small acts matter, or does it gloss over how hard real change is for people stuck in tough circumstances?

6. Ed realizes "I'm not the messenger at all. I'm the message." What does this mean to you? Did you find this to be an empowering takeaway or does it induce feelings of pressure to be a good example for others?

A bit of both, perhaps?



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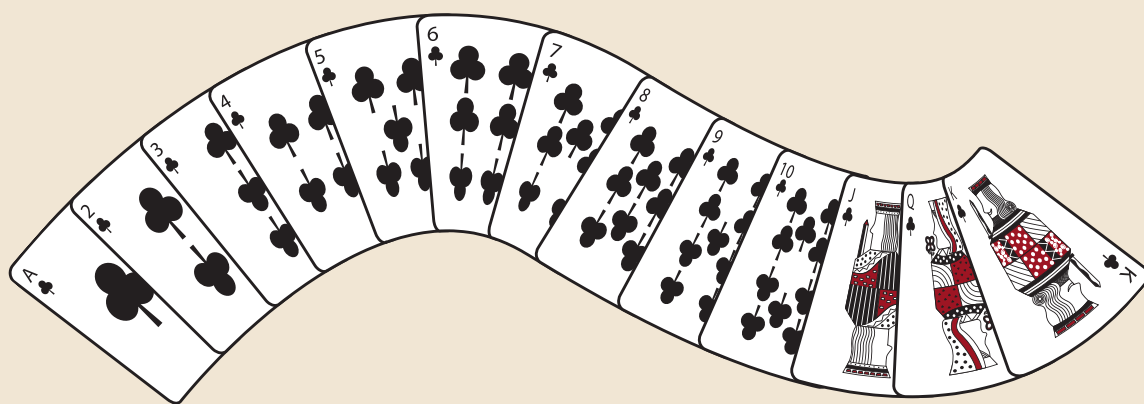


7. Ed started delivering the messages because he wanted to cast off “the old Ed Kennedy” and become “this new person who’s full of purpose rather than incompetence.” He never anticipated, however, that leaving behind his old self would also create distance between himself and the person he most wishes to be close to—Audrey. Can personal growth put distance between loved ones?

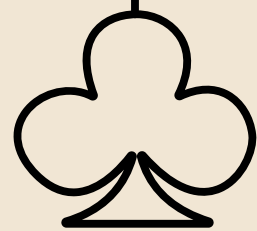
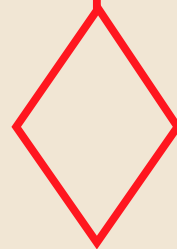
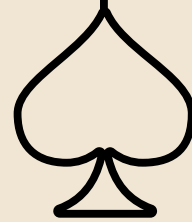
8. In what way does Ed face **more** jeopardy when delivering messages to people who are already part of his life? (starting with his Mom and then his three closest friends)

9. How did Ed’s relationships with his friends change over the course of the novel?

10. What does it mean for a person to reach their **full** potential? Is it even possible??



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“My full name’s Ed Kennedy. I’m nineteen. I’m an underage cabdriver. I’m typical of many of the young men you see in this suburban outpost of the city—not a whole lot of prospects or possibility. That aside, I read more books than I should, and I’m decidedly crap at sex and doing my taxes. Nice to meet you.” (p. 6)

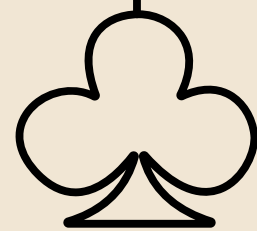
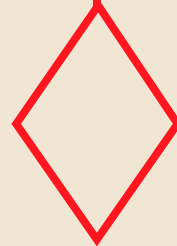
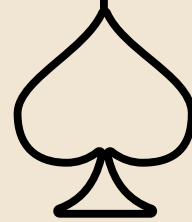
Ed’s painful honesty and scathing self-deprecation typify his voice as a narrator and demonstrates his room for growth. Could it be that Ed’s impulsive decision to intervene in the bank robbery is what kicks off his growth journey?

“There’s an aura to this card, and it’s been given to me. Not to Dickhead Ed. To me—the real Ed Kennedy. The future Ed Kennedy. No longer simply a cab-driving hopeless case. What will I do with it? Who will I be?” (p. 28)

Ed’s mother calls him ‘Dickhead Ed’. As he imagines the possibilities that this unexpected message may offer, he envisions himself becoming someone different, “the real Ed Kennedy.”

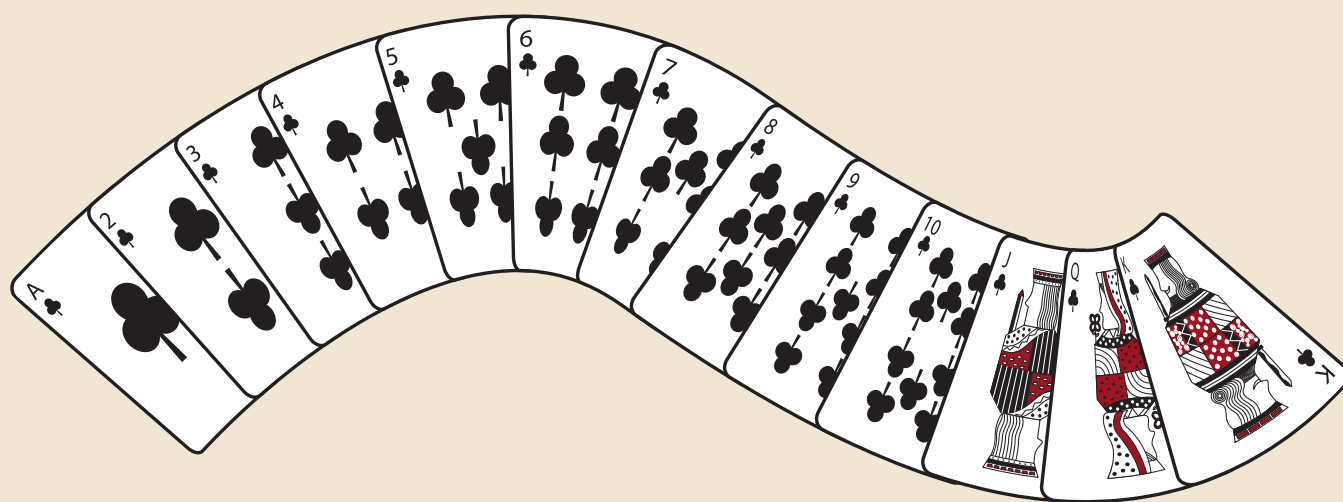


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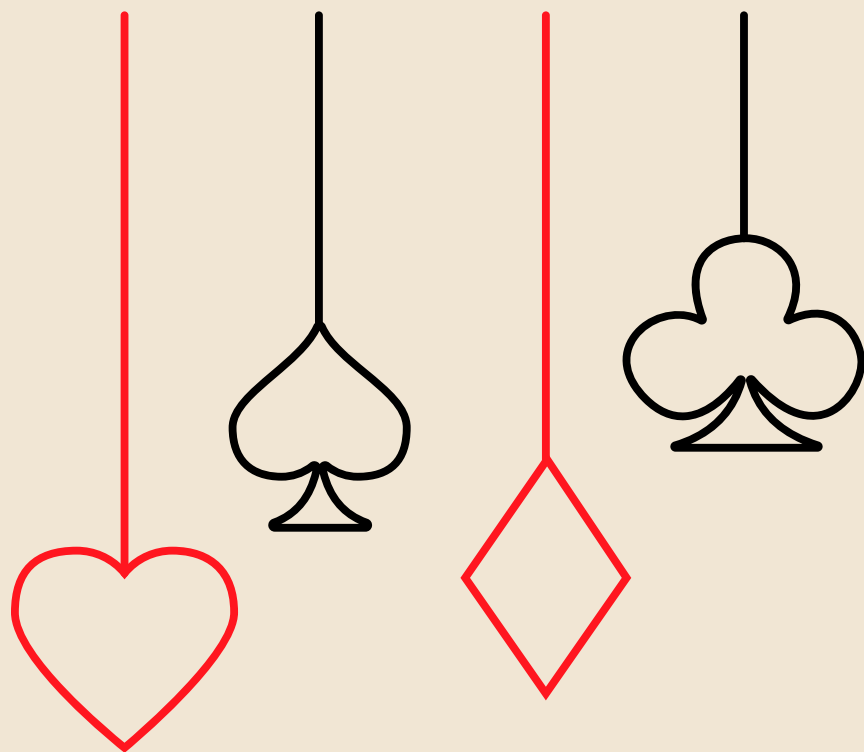


“Why can’t the world hear? I ask myself. Within a few moments I ask it many times. Because it doesn’t care, I finally answer, and I know I’m right. It’s like I’ve been chosen. But chosen for what? I ask. The answer’s quite simple: To care.” (p. 41)

We can see Ed’s understanding of what it means to be the messenger. The violence perpetrated by the man on Edgar Street is a jarring escalation from the novel’s content up to that point, which emphasizes the urgency of Ed’s mission. As the story continues, Ed’s capacity for compassion leads him to grow in ways he never anticipated and to touch many lives.

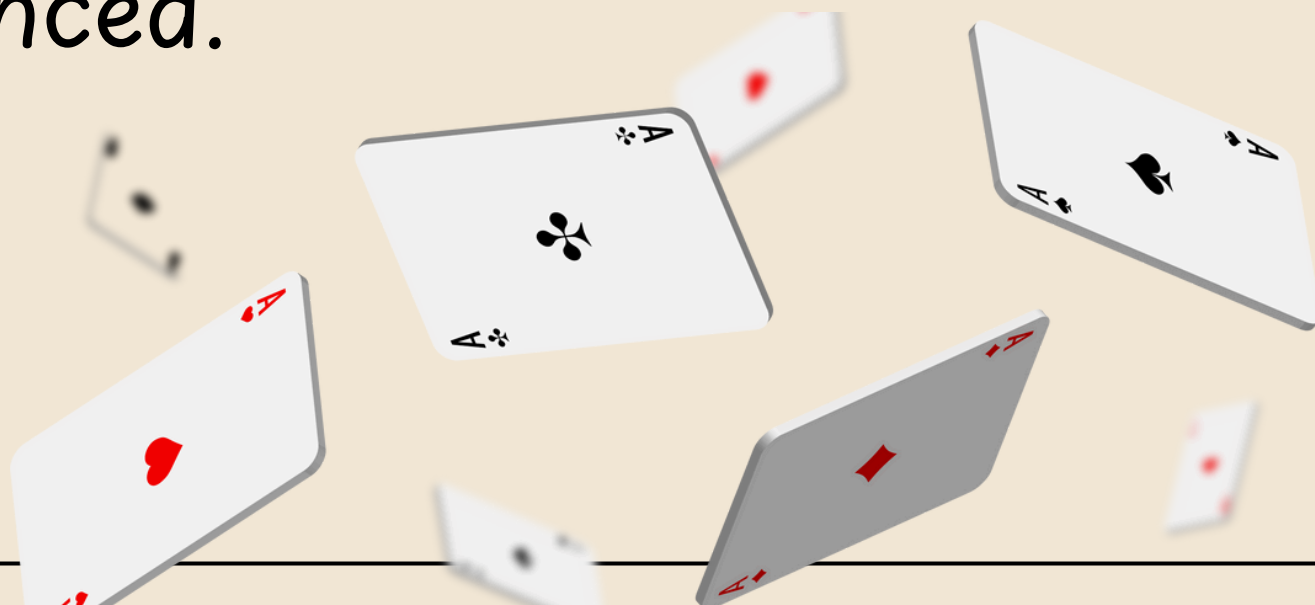


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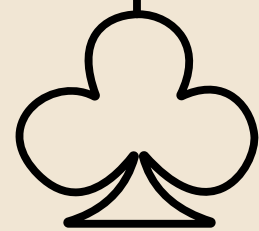
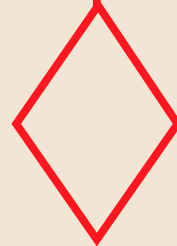
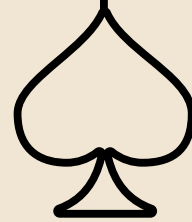
“I think, Don’t blame it anymore, Ed. Take it. I even move out onto the front porch and see my own limited view of the world. I want to take that world, and for the first time ever, I feel like I can do it. I’ve survived everything I’ve had to so far. I’m still standing here.” (p. 124)

Ed’s conviction that he can “take that world” illustrates his renewed confidence as he starts to investigate the ace of clubs. His sense of purpose and opportunity in this passage is like the feeling he had when he first held the ace of diamonds. Now, however, he’s more experienced.



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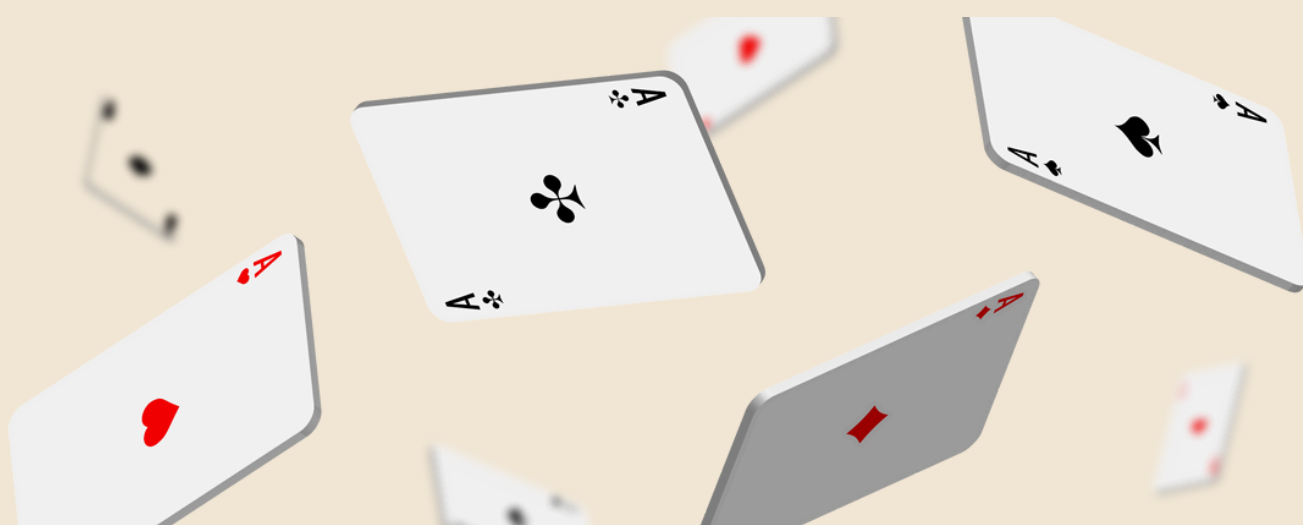
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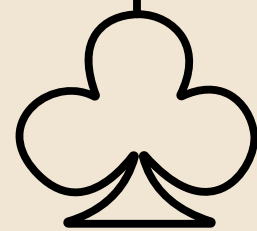
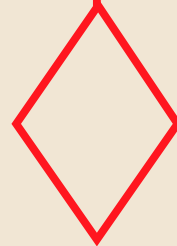
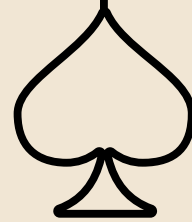
“You know, they say that there are countless saints who have nothing to do with church and almost no knowledge of God. But they say God walks with those people without them ever knowing it.... You’re one of those people, Ed. It’s an honor to know you.”

~Father O’Reilly (p. 156)

Ed’s ability to accept the priest’s words of gratitude shows that his self-image is improving as the novel continues. The more messages that Ed delivers, the more he realizes his own potential and sees worth in himself. How can you relate?



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“Believe it or not—it takes a lot of love to hate you like this” ~Beverly Kennedy (p. 245).

As much as it hurts Ed to hear this, he recognizes that the point of the message was to give his mother the relief of unleashing emotion.

“You are the epitome of ordinariness, Ed.... If a guy like you can stand up and do what you did for all those people, well, maybe everyone can. Maybe everyone can live beyond what they’re capable of.’ He becomes intense now. Emotional. This is everything. ‘Maybe even I can....’” (p. 353)

The twist! Zusak is letting us know he orchestrated all of it - here in particular, the potential for personal growth.



