



# Hope Beyond Pain: When Finite Days Create Infinite Meaning in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

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## Abstract

*Life's ephemerality often magnifies its meaning—a truth poignantly captured in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. This paper demonstrates how existential and psychological perspectives illuminate the novel's portrayal of: love, mortality and the construction of meaning among terminally ill adolescents. Through an existentialist lens, drawing on Sartre's freedom of choice, Camus's absurdism and Frankl's logotherapy, the novel's characters redefine purpose amid constraints. From a psychological perspective, the study examines coping mechanisms, anticipatory grief and emotional resilience demonstrated by Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters. This analysis demonstrates that the characters' limited lifespan does not diminish meaning but intensifies it through authentic decisions and emotionally sustained relationships. By combining existential and psychological approaches, the analysis argues that the narrative locates meaning in human connection, conscious acceptance of suffering and in the willing to accept the constant presence of death.*

**Keywords:** existentialism, psychology, mortality, meaning, love, authenticity, cope, hope.

## Introduction

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* presents a modern reflection of love and mortality through the eyes of two teenagers battling terminal illness. Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, teenagers living with cancer, navigate the complexities of "life, death and meaning". Even though Green's novel is written for young adults, its themes focus more on existential and psychological questions related to life and suffering.

Existentialism—concerned with freedom, authenticity and meaning in an absurd world—intersects powerfully with the novel's narrative. Hazel's acceptance of mortality and Augustus's search for significance reflect Sartre's idea that "existence precedes essence." Drawing on psychological theory, Viktor Frankl's concept of logotherapy emphasizes on meaning derived from suffering, by providing a framework for understanding the character's response to illness and existential anxiety.



By combining psychological and existential approach the paper examines *The Fault in Our Stars* to show how limited human lives can generate infinite meaning. Scholars have long approached *The Fault in Our Stars* through existential and psychological lenses, yet their analyses often remain within the boundaries of despair and acceptance.

Drawing on Camus's absurdist philosophy, Khaled (2020) argues that the protagonists' consciousness of death deepens their sense of absurdity and directing them to live an authentic mode of existence. Pangestu and Rachman (2019) further connect existential anxiety with emotional endurance, illustrating how Hazel's reflective narration transforms despair into self-understanding. However, their discussion does not address the potential of existential suffering that evolve into hope. This research gap forms the focus of the present study.

From a psychological perspective, Javed (2021), based on Lazarus and Folkman's stress theory, examines coping strategies such as humor, denial, and emotional support, while Wulandari (2019) foregrounds narrative therapy by showing how Hazel's act of storytelling enables the reconstruction of meaning after loss. Although these approaches does not fully reflect suffering, as a creative and transformative force. What remains insufficiently examined is the under explored aspect of Green's narrative that moves beyond existential endurance by presenting hope as a generative force that reshapes pain into a source of lasting meaning.

Thus, *The Fault in Our Stars* has been approached as an existential or psychological reflection on mortality, this study moves beyond such readings by exploring how the characters transforms their **suffering into spiritual significance**, discovers hope beyond pain and how they allows their finite lives gain infinite significance through genuine relationships and create meaning.

### **Existential Dimensions of Meaning and Authentic Choice**

Existentialism focuses on individual freedom, genuine living, and the search for meaning in a

meaningless world. Jean-Paul Sartre states in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* that "existence precedes essence," meaning that individuals decide who they become through their actions and choices (Sartre 22). Hazel's willingness to live her life fully despite other illness, illustrates Sartre's description of authentic life. She confronts that, "The world is not a wish-granting factory" (Green 214), thereby she rejects comforting illusions and face reality honestly.

Albert Camus's concept of the absurd—the conflict between human longing for meaning and the universe's silence—permeates the novel. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus describes that, "the absurd hero" is the one who continues his action despite its futility (Camus 78). Augustus's desire to "leave a mark upon the world" (Green 198) illustrates this struggle with existential conflict. Like Camus's Sisyphus, Augustus finds dignity not in success but in perseverance. Once he accepts that oblivion is unavoidable, he reflects Camus's idea of revolt by continuing to value his life despite its absurd nature.

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, rooted in existential psychology, proposes that finding meaning in suffering enables individuals to endure life's hardships. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl writes, "Those who have a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how'" (Frankl 104). Hazel embodies Frankl's insight: though she cannot change her condition, she changes her attitude toward it. Her "why" becomes love—expressed her bond with Augustus and her capacity to give meaning to his final days.

### **Psychological Mechanisms of Coping and Hope**

Psychologically, the novel explores the way adolescent responds to terminal illness by illustrating cancer as an emotional and cognitive experience shaped by fear, affection, resistance and gradual acceptance rather than a medical condition. Hazel and Augustus's coping mechanism aligns with Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, anger, bargaining, depression and eventual acceptance. Hazel's use of sarcasm functions as a defensive strategy against her



anxiety, while Augustus's humor disguises his fear of insignificance.

Frankl's logotherapy combines psychological and existential perspectives by prioritizing meaning as a fundamental human need. This principle is reflected in the *Cancer Support Group* sessions, where they get emotional support through shared suffering. Patrick's reference to "the literal heart of Jesus" (Green 158), highlights the search for transcendence and the absence of divine explanation in the face of pain.

### **Choosing Life Within the Shadow of Finality**

Hazel's character reflects the tension between emotional withdrawal and existential authenticity. At first, she distances herself from relationships because she fears hurting others after her death. This response comes from existential guilt rather than selfishness. This anxiety is expressed when she calls herself as "a grenade" (Green 99), a metaphor that suggests her death will harm those she loves. When her relationship with Augustus deepens, she chooses love despite its inevitable loss. In doing so, love becomes the expression of her freedom and a way of defining her existence.

Augustus's struggle centers on his fear of oblivion. His desire to "leave a scar on the world" (Green 286) explores his longing for permanence in a limited life. Gradually, his life echoes Camus's notion of absurd hero, as he learns to embrace life's transience. When Augustus says, "You don't get to choose if you get hurt in this world, but you do have some say in who hurts you" (Green 313), in this he states, suffering is unavoidable, but one can choose who can cause it. Through this statement Augustus highlights the idea of existential choice by embracing pain as a part of authentic living.

### **Transforming Pain into Purpose**

Hazel's illness is noticeable by the constant medical supervision, oxygen dependence, and hospital visits symbolize both physical limitation and existential restrictions. Despite the confinement, she mirrors what Frankl calls "tragic optimism," by finding

meaning within suffering. Through her relationship with Augustus, she transforms her perception of death not as an ending, but as a continuation of meaning through memory, love and connection.

From a psychological perspective both Hazel and Augustus exhibit resilience. Hazel learns to change the way she thinks about her illness towards gratitude and emotional awareness. When she says, "My thoughts are stars I cannot fathom into constellations," (Green 311) she reflects that her thoughts are like stars that she cannot arrange. This expresses her confusion of grief, but her effort to make meaning of it.

Augustus's decline of health exposes the human vulnerability of an identity built on strength and control. As his condition worsens, he was forced to accept his dependence on others. However with Hazel's emotional support, he accepts his situation and realizes that, "some infinities are bigger than other infinities" (Green 234). This reflects Frankl's idea that even short lives can be whole if filled with meaning.

### **Love Beyond Finitude: The Emotional Infinity**

Love functions as a coping mechanism in the novel, by connecting existential anxiety and transforming suffering into meaning. Hazel reads *An Imperial Affliction*, by hoping that it will explain, how to live with unanswered questions. Through her bond with Augustus, she learns that meaning does not depend on resolution, but on human connection. Their shared experience- such as the trip to Amsterdam, quiet moment on the park beach, and Augustus's final letter- highlights the emotional intensity that gives their lives value.

In the novel love functions as both a way of coping with suffering and a source of meaning. It operates as a force that boosts the characters move beyond fear and certainty. This portrayal reflects Frankl's belief that love enables individual to recognize what is essential in another person, and, through that recognition, discover meaning even in suffering.



### **Revelations of Meaning: Synthesizing Existential and Psychological Insights**

This analysis finds that *The Fault in Our Stars* presents suffering as a way for existential and psychological understanding. Through the experience of Hazel and Augustus, the novel demonstrates that death does not eradicate meaning, instead it makes life more meaningful. Faced with illness and mortality both the characters shape who they are through their choices, that reflects Sartre's idea of identity that is created by action. Their struggle supports psychological views, particularly Frankl's and Erikson's notions on finding purpose and identity during illness and crisis. Their journey shows life gains depth when it forces its own limits.

The study highlights the connection between choice, suffering and love in the creation of meaning. Hazel and Augustus represent a form of freedom that does not come from changing their situation, but from how they respond to it. Their choice to love each other, to write letters, and to treasure memories define their lives. In this process, they prove that suffering is not simply tolerated but transformed. Hazel's physical pain leads to emotional growth and supports Frankl's belief that suffering loses its power when people find meaning in it.

Love is the most powerful force that transcends mortality in this novel. Through their relationship, Hazel and Augustus achieves what the novel calls "a little infinity" within their numbered days, proving that the human spirit's can turn a short period of life into a meaningful existence through their love and remembrance.

### **Conclusion**

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* is not only a tragic love story but also a reflection of life, suffering and meaning. Through the lives of Hazel and Augustus, Green portrays the human search for

meaning in the face of death. The novel reinforces the notion of Sartre, Camus and Frankl by showing that meaning is not found by avoiding suffering but by responding to it. Psychologically, the narrative highlights resilience, self-awareness and the healing power of relationships. Ultimately, the characters in *The Fault in Our Stars* shows that finite days can hold infinite meaning when lived with authenticity, love and courage.

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