



# Emotional Intelligence in the Adolescent Characters of John Green's *Looking for Alaska*

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## Abstract

*Emotional Intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to recognize emotions, regulate responses and respond sensitively to the feelings of others. Instead of measuring cognitive ability or technical skill, it is concerned with emotional awareness, empathy and the ability to manage interpersonal relationships. Scholars such as Daniel Goleman have emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in handling stress, making balanced decisions and sustaining meaningful social connections. In John Green's Looking for Alaska, emotional intelligence plays a central role shaping the inner lives and relationships of adolescent characters. The novel portrays Miles's struggle to process grief, affection and loss following a sudden tragedy and revealing his gradual emotional maturation through reflection and interaction. Despite Alaska's impulsive and unpredictable nature, she exhibits intense emotional sensitivity that deeply influences those around her. Through these characters, the novel presents how emotional understanding enables individuals to cope with loss and navigate personal challenges. The novel presents emotional intelligence not as an abstract psychological idea, but as a lived experience shaped by adolescent behavior and personal growth.*

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, self-awareness, empathy, grief, personal growth.

Emotional intelligence means the ability to recognize and understand one's own feelings while also responding thoughtfully to the feelings of others. While intellectual intelligence is concerned with reasoning and problem-solving, emotional intelligence focuses on emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal understanding. Salovey and Mayer describe emotional intelligence as the capacity to perceive, manage and use feelings effectively in both personal and social contexts. In psychological research,

emotional intelligence has become an essential aspect of personal development, especially during adolescence. The stage is often characterized by emotional ups and downs, identity formation and emotional vulnerability. During this period, individuals commonly experience feelings such as uncertainty, attachment, guilt and grief, which call for emotional awareness rather than strict rational control. Literary narratives that focus on adolescent life frequently portray these inner struggles, allowing readers to see how young individuals try to



understand their feelings and gradually form a sense of self within emotionally complex environments.

Daniel Goleman's idea of emotional intelligence offers a helpful way to understand emotional behavior in literary texts. He explains emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize one's own feelings, understand the feelings of others, manage emotional responses, stay motivated and maintain healthy relationships. These skills are different from academic intelligence, but they work alongside it. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence plays an essential role in personal well-being, social interaction and overall success. During adolescence, emotional intelligence becomes especially significant because feelings are often intense and challenging to control. Adolescents who lack emotional awareness may act impulsively, face difficulties in relationships, and experience inner turmoil, while those who gradually develop emotional intelligence are better able to reflect on their feelings, show empathy, and grow emotionally.

John Green's *Looking for Alaska* presents a realistic portrayal of adolescent emotional life, focusing on friendship, love, grief, guilt, and loss. The novel explores how young characters struggle to understand and manage their feelings in the face of sudden tragedy. Emotional intelligence plays a role that shaping the character's responses to emotional challenges and contributes to their identity formation. Through the experiences of characters such as Miles Halter, Alaska Young, the Colonel, Takumi and Lara, the novel captures different levels of emotional awareness, regulation and empathy. These characters do not display emotional intelligence uniformly, instead the text highlights how emotional intelligence develops unevenly during adolescence.

Adolescence is a period in which individuals begin to question their identity and search for meaning in life. Emotional intelligence helps adolescents understand what they are feeling and why they are feeling it. This understanding encourages self-reflection and reduces impulsive emotional reactions. When adolescents become

aware of their feelings they are better equipped to make thoughtful decisions and build healthier relationships. Emotional intelligence also supports empathy, allowing adolescents to recognize that others experience emotional struggles similar to their own. In *Looking for Alaska*, emotional intelligence is closely linked to the characters ability to cope with loss and confusion, revealing how emotional awareness contributes to psychological growth.

Miles Halter, the protagonist of the novel, shows emotional intelligence through his gradual emotional development. At the beginning of the story, Miles is emotionally inexperienced and uncertain about his own feelings. His attraction to Alaska is based more on fascination and idealization than genuine understanding. This suggests that his self-awareness is still limited. Miles struggles to interpret his emotions particularly his feelings of admiration, longing, and confusion. His emotional intelligence at this stage is underdeveloped, as he cannot clearly recognize and regulate his emotional responses.

After Alaska's sudden death, Miles experiences strong emotions like guilt, grief, anger, and regret. This becomes a turning point in his emotional growth. Instead of avoiding his feelings, he starts reflecting on them, questioning his actions and beliefs. This self-reflection shows that his emotional intelligence is developing. Miles begins to understand that human emotions are complex and that people cannot be idealized or fully understood without recognizing their flaws and struggles. His interactions with the Colonel and Takumi help him see situations from different perspectives, further increasing his emotional awareness. Through shared grief and conversations, Miles grows in empathy and emotional maturity. His journey shows how emotional intelligence can develop through loss, reflection, and meaningful connections with others.

Alaska Young represents a complex and uneven form of emotional intelligence. She is emotionally sensitive and deeply aware of the feelings of those around her. Alaska often understands what her friends feel before they can express it themselves. This ability reflects strong empathy and emotional



awareness. She is capable of comforting others, challenging them emotionally and engaging in deep conversations about suffering, forgiveness and meaning. However, despite this emotional sensitivity, Alaska struggles to manage her own feelings. Her unresolved guilt over her mother's death, fear of abandonment and impulsive behavior indicate a lack of emotional regulation.

Alaska's emotional intelligence is therefore imbalanced. While she is highly empathetic and emotionally perceptive, she lacks the ability to process her own emotional pain in a healthy way. Her impulsiveness and sudden mood changes reveal internal emotional turmoil that she has never learned to regulate. This imbalance makes her character both captivating and fragile. Alaska's emotional struggles highlight the consequences of unresolved trauma and emotional confusion. Her character shows that emotional intelligence does not develop evenly, an individual may possess strong empathy while lacking emotional control. Through Alaska, the novel shows how emotional sensitivity without emotional regulation can lead to emotional suffering and tragic outcomes.

The Colonel, also known as Chip Martin, displays a more stable and developed form of emotional intelligence. He expresses his feelings openly and honestly, which allows him to cope with emotional challenges more effectively. The Colonel demonstrates strong self-awareness and emotional regulation, particularly after Alaska's death. Although he experiences grief and anger, he attempts to understand what happened instead of acting impulsively. His ability to balance emotional expression with rational thinking reflects emotional maturity.

The Colonel also exhibits empathy and strong social skills. He understands when to support his friends emotionally and when to challenge them. His loyalty to his friends highlights his capacity for meaningful emotional connections. Even during moments of emotional distress, he remains connected to others, offering support and guidance. Through the Colonel's character, the novel emphasizes how

emotional intelligence helps individuals face loss with resilience, maintain relationships, and support others during emotional crises.

Takumi presents a quieter and more subtle expression of emotional intelligence. Unlike the other characters, he often observes situations closely before reacting. This reflective approach allows him to understand emotional patterns that others overlook. Takumi is aware of Alaska's emotional struggles and behavioral patterns long before her death. His emotional intelligence is rooted in attentiveness, reflection and emotional insight. Instead of reacting emotionally, Takumi processes his feelings calmly, reflecting emotional regulation.

Takumi also shows empathy by noticing that everyone around him is going through emotional struggles. He supports his friends in subtle ways, offering guidance when needed and giving space when appropriate. His emotional intelligence is not shown through dramatic actions but through quiet understanding and thoughtful communication. Takumi's character highlights that emotional intelligence can be gentle and introspective, challenging the idea that being emotionally aware always has to be outwardly visible.

Lara provides a calm and emotionally mature presence in the novel. Although she is a minor character, her emotional clarity and honesty highlight an essential form of emotional intelligence. Lara understands her own feelings and communicates them openly, which allows for healthier interactions. She recognizes Miles's emotional confusion and responds with patience and empathy instead of judgment. Even when Miles unintentionally hurts her, Lara expresses her feelings honestly without reacting impulsively.

Lara's emotional regulation and empathy reflect emotional maturity. She remains composed during emotional conflict and gives others space to reflect and grow. Her presence in the narrative shows how emotional intelligence strengthens relationships through kindness, patience, and emotional honesty. Although her role is limited, Lara contributes to the emotional balance of the group and offers an example of healthy emotional communication.



Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in adolescent identity formation by helping individuals understand their feelings and emotional reactions. Adolescents who develop emotional awareness are better able to reflect on their experiences instead of reacting impulsively. This reflection contributes to personal growth, emotional stability, and a clearer sense of identity. Emotional intelligence also supports interpersonal relationships by promoting empathy and understanding, reducing emotional misunderstandings and conflicts.

In contrast, the absence of emotional regulation can lead to emotional confusion and inner conflict. Adolescents who struggle to manage intense emotions may experience emotional pain, isolation, and poor decision-making. Research indicates that difficulties in emotional regulation during adolescence are associated with increased emotional distress and psychological problems, as emotion regulation skills continue to develop through this period of life. Unmanaged emotions such as guilt, grief, anger and loneliness can overwhelm adolescents, preventing healthy emotional development. *Looking for Alaska* portrays how emotional intelligence or the lack of it shapes adolescent experiences and emotional outcomes. The novel highlights the importance of emotional awareness in coping with loss, forming identity and building meaningful relationships.

Overall, *Looking for Alaska* presents emotional intelligence as a vital component of adolescent growth. Through its characters, the novel highlights how emotional awareness, empathy and regulation influence emotional resilience and identity formation. Emotional intelligence is not portrayed as a fixed trait but as a developing skill shaped by experience, reflection, and emotional connection. By depicting realistic emotional struggles, the novel underscores the practical importance of emotional intelligence in adolescent life. The study of emotional intelligence in this text reveals how understanding emotions enables individuals to navigate grief, relationships, and personal growth, reinforcing emotional intelligence as a key element of psychological and emotional development

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