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Adam Silvera: How I Write

"I don't ever see any character as 100 percent good or 100 percent evil."

By Allison Futterman | Published: December 19, 2016



Photo: Margot Wood

The YA world has been taken by storm by Adam Silvera. His first book, the speculative novel *More Happy Than Not*, was a huge hit with both readers and reviewers. Fans eagerly awaiting his next book will not be disappointed.

With the release of *History Is All You Left Me*, Silvera tackles serious subject matters, including love, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sexuality, and death. The poignant narrative follows Griffin, a young man with OCD, as he grieves the death of his first love, Theo – while at the same time navigating a complex relationship with Theo's last boyfriend, Jackson. By using an alternating timeline (switching between

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present and “history”), Silvera cleverly provides a way to keep the somber and sad elements from overpowering the reader, while still creating an emotional connection.

Although *History Is All You Left Me* is his first foray into contemporary fiction, Silvera will return to speculative fiction this fall with the release of his third novel, *They Both Die At The End*.

Success as an author

I'm still adjusting to it and the additional pressure it created. I got some criticism in reviews that I've used to improve my craft. I'm grateful for the feedback. The majority of readers wrote thoughtful reviews, and I liked seeing what they identified as weaknesses. I agreed with them and hopefully improved on my writing.

Choosing alternating timelines

This ties back to feedback about my debut novel. People were relieved to have had the humor from the narrator. With *History*, there is no humor in someone grieving the loss of the love of his life. The timeline created a balance between the heavy stuff and some relief for readers.

Compelling characters

I don't ever see any character as 100 percent good or 100 percent evil. When I was writing *History*, it was hard to detach from antagonizing feelings toward Jackson, because he's a good person. As humans, we're all flawed, and I treat my characters like that. Everything I've written has come from an honest place based on some event. It's helped that I've had interesting people to base my characters on.

Handling serious themes in YA

I always write as honestly as possible. If something goes too far, I have my team to call it out and we have a discussion. It's important to be authentic to the characters while also making sure certain themes don't drive too many younger readers away. So far, my editor has made sure the hearts of my books never change too drastically. It can be rough writing about OCD and sexuality, two things I've struggled with over the years, but I've found everything I've written to be very therapeutic and to have helped me find answers to questions I didn't know to ask myself.

Genre

I always want to have some sort of hook. My third book was actually the second one I wrote, and it's speculative – and I thought *History* also had to be. I tried [making it speculative] but nothing felt true, so I had Griffin speak to Theo throughout the novel. It makes it pop a little more.

Getting personal

I think everything is personal in [a] first draft. Afterwards I have to detach. I learned that in the first book, where it was 100 percent me and I knew I had to take a step back. It was easier for *History* because it was inspired by certain things, but different. I could tap into the loneliness. The situations were different, but the emotional resonance is there, even if it's not exactly how it played out in real life.

Break up the routine

I'm traveling a lot, so I write erratically. I always have a pocket notebook on me. It feels different from a laptop, and I think it's good to step away from how you normally do things.

Allison Futterman is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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