

**Review of The Plot, by Jean Hanff Korelitz, 2021. New York:  
Celadon Books/McMillan, cloth.**

Thomas Hansen, Ph.D.

Writers of new books have to do a lot. They have to write something that is clever. They have to include twists and turns. They have to put in some loveable characters, some weird ones, some mysterious, and some we just won't like. They have to include a lot of details in the settings (this book does, including pineapple stencils on the wall) so that we get a good look into the kinds of people who dwell in the story.

And then there is the plot.

This is a book English teachers will love and writers of fiction will adore. It is a clever and complicated story of hopes writers have of becoming madly successful and rich. It is also a thriller, complete with twists and turns needed for books that demand closer reading. Without giving away all of the elements of the book, and without addressing the topic of plagiarism (other reviews talk about this ad nauseam) it is possible to review the book by talking about its different potential uses.

The book has a few different uses. First, it works as a piece of fiction that can be taught at the advanced secondary level or in college courses. The language is generally clear of adult situations or words – though teachers and administrators should always read a book closely before adopting it as books students will be required or recommended to read. The book is a play on the word “plot”

and it contains several scenarios showcasing that game. Teachers – and students with a particular interest in language usage – will enjoy that aspect of the book.

The book can also be used for professional development purposes, especially having to do with the difficulty balancing the world of teaching and ethics with the world of racing to produce works that will sell a great number of copies, make the writer famous, and become part of a writer’s longer-term legacy. The worlds of creative writing programs and the publishing of wildly popular books are distinct. They are not the same thing, and they are related only in tangential ways. The book makes that point very clearly.

The book can also be read by teachers and students of writers for enjoyment. There are many very funny stereotypes of student writers, faculty members, and publishing personnel. With that in mind, readers may think it is a funny book. The book also hits us over the head with the notion that fiction and poetry are different. How so? Read the book. The book also contains the elements of a thriller. It is a whodunit for writing teachers. As a hybrid (thriller, comedy, publishing world expose’ and example of good plots and complex ones) it is enjoyable and one to be recommended.

Teachers and students of writing will enjoy this book, I am confident. Without giving away all of the content, talking about soul-searching and person-searching and motive-searching, I recommend this clever and complicated thriller about one of my great loves: writing.