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**Creating the Imperfect Protagonist in  
Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time***

Madeleine L'Engle's "A Wrinkle in Time," is a quirky young adult novel that beautifully illustrates the author's ability to write a protagonist that exudes imperfection and brokenness – a necessary element in building a hero that will eventually win against all odds. L'Engle's main character, Margaret "Meg" Murry, is portrayed as imperfectly human and relatable to all adolescents who are trying to find their way in a confusing world. She cues in on how the Meg perceives herself as a way to setup the protagonist's overarching goal and allow the audience to see the incredible transformation into a heroine throughout the story. In the beginning of the book, the author creates a solid characterization of Meg in relation to her family.

In chapter one, the author immediately presents Meg as a poor student. She points out that she was dropped to the lowest section of her grade and how even her own teacher made negative comments comparing her to her "brilliant" parents. As an added insult, Meg is characterized as a bully, but she is barely able to fulfill that role as her younger twin brothers urge her to let them do the fighting.

"—A delinquent, that's what I am, she thought grimly.—That's what they'll be saying next. Not Mother. But Them. Everybody Else..."

(L'Engle, 8)

As a young girl struggling with the disappearance of her father, we see that Meg had always tried to grapple with her identity within the family. As a young kid she perceived acceptance to be one who possessed intelligence – a trait that she questioned for herself. She even asked her father if she was dumb. “Oh, my darling, you’re not dumb...you’re like Charles Wallace. Your development has to go at its own pace. It just doesn’t happen to be the usual pace.” (L’Engle, 14)

Even as Meg has crossed over to the planet Uriel, the author chooses to maintain Meg’s lack of confidence in herself as she is faced with new challenges. As Mrs Whatsit and Mrs Which guide the children upon their entrance to the new world, we see that one thing has not changed. Intellectually, she is still characterized as not measuring up to her brother, Charles Wallace, or her friend Calvin. When asked by Mrs Whatsit to list all of the artistic and divine leaders that have helped Earth in the fight against the darkness, both of the young men can easily answer. However, L’Engle successfully shows Meg’s lack of awareness and knowledge.

“Now Calvin’s voice rang with confidence. ‘And Schweitzer and Gandhi and Buddha and Beethoven and Rembrandt and St. Francis!’

‘Now you, Meg,’ Mrs Whatshit ordered.

‘Oh Euclid, I suppose.’ Meg was in such an agony of impatience that her voice grated irritably. (L’Engle, 101)

The characterization of Meg as a less than ideal candidate for a heroine works for L’Engle’s masterpiece that proves you don’t exactly have to be Einstein to save others or even the world – in this case, saving a loved one in an entirely different dimension. You can be imperfect, flawed and even less than stellar in the IQ department. However, Meg is written as one who can challenge these personality obstacles and simply use her heart to overcome the evils

of her surroundings. L'Engle's tactic is to create a relatable protagonist that her audience has little hopes for in doing anything extraordinary – the perfect setup to a resolution where our doubts are proven wrong.

From reciting irrational square roots to realizing that spoken language is not the only way to communicate, L'Engle's design of Meg's character shows readers that being human and imperfect is not a disadvantage when it comes to the supernatural and spiritual forces of the outer world. Meg, representing a doubtful humanity, must go on a journey to understand that changes do not always happen as a result of using human intellect or even reason – change happens when we realize that the most powerful weapon we have is *love*.

**WORKS CITED**

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. Square Fish, 1962.