

“Miranda Stands for People’s Rights:” *When You Reach Me* in the wake of *Miranda v. Arizona*

Though many view *When You Reach Me* as a refashioning of L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*, in more ways than one, Rebecca Stead’s novel is more interested in exploring the ebb and flow of history, the progress and recession of civil rights. Its twelve-year-old main character, Miranda, was named after the Supreme Court landmark case, *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), which occurred shortly before her birth (Stead 116). Both her name and the implication that Miranda was born at roughly the same time as the Miranda decision associate a strong connection between the case and Miranda’s identity. Although Miranda dislikes this association with her name in the beginning of the novel, her later rescue of classmate Marcus from a potentially self-incriminating interrogation shows her symbolically expressing the spirit of the *Miranda* ruling. This symbolism, and the preceding conversations about Miranda’s name, re-interpret and justify the *Miranda* decision for a modern audience. In this literary slipstream of a novel, floating between fantasy and history, readers must learn to navigate around their own assumptions until they, like Miranda, know the whole story.

Borrowing case study analysis strategies from Claudia Durst Johnson’s *Understanding To Kill A Mockingbird*, I will chart the confluence of historic trials in the wake of *Miranda v. Arizona* to explain why Stead, a public defender, named her main character after the defendant of the watershed Supreme Court case. I will address the following questions: how might Miranda’s character growth, from judgmental to empathetic, inform our understanding of the *Miranda v. Arizona* ruling—and what message does this send to more contemporary readers in 2009 or 2017?

I suggest that, in charting Miranda’s character development in this way, Stead’s text articulates its privileged stance in favor of the *Miranda* ruling. In essence, it suggests that when Miranda stands for her Marcus’s rights, *Miranda* stands for the rights of everyone.