

## **IT Came from the Sewer: Monstrous Adolescence in Stephen King's *IT***

Stephen King's 1986 novel *IT* follows the Loser's Club, a group of misfit children determined to banish an evil entity only known as It from their hometown of Derry. Though the novel was (and is) marketed to adults, *IT* is a coming of age story attempting to explain the no-man's land of adolescence and the difficult process of growing up—just like many young adult novels. Water serves as the unifying imagery between childhood and adulthood, and appears in both time periods and in the central locations of the barrens and the sewer.

My talk will examine the use of water imagery in *IT* as a representation of the novel's central issue: adolescence. The sewer serves as the metaphorical boundary between childhood and adulthood. The child protagonists enter the sewer as children and leave victorious (at least temporarily) over the entity they call It, ready to enter into the adult half of their lives. The sewer is where the Loser's Club purposefully goes to encounter their fear—It. Like children entering adulthood, they aren't sure what the outcome will be, or if they will emerge on the other side as the same people. The sewer is also the center of their shared sexual awakening; Bev has sex, or some approximation of sex, with all the boys in the club. King has insisted (repeatedly) that the extensive child sex scene isn't important and that critics should stop focusing on it in their commentary about his novel, but it is undeniably a major part of the book. Though sex more frequently appears as a topic in young adult books, it's undoubtedly part of the general experience of growing up.

Childhood in the world of Derry, Maine begins and ends in the sewer, complete with water imagery representing change and adolescence. By crafting a narrative that juxtaposes two sides of a life—childhood *and* adulthood—*IT* allows readers of all ages to understand that childhood isn't an isolated time in one's life. Instead, it acts as a connected, yet fluid time that can be recalled for strength and guidance against the evils of the adult world.