

Blankets: An Illustrated Novel Study Guide

Blankets: An Illustrated Novel by Craig Thompson

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Plot Summary

"Blankets" by Craig Thompson is a thinly veiled work of fiction. It is a graphic novel, with a story accompanied by the author's artwork.

The story begins with two brothers, Phil and Craig, sleeping in the same bed. The boys are young and not altogether happy about the sleeping arrangements. As Craig states, "Shared" is a sugar-coated way of saying we were trapped in the same bed, as we were children and had no say in the matter" (Chapter 1, p. 10).

The boys continue living in this way until they no longer share a bed. At this point, Craig and Phil become relative strangers although they are only three years apart and live in the same house.

Craig's school days are recounted. The boy is beaten up and humiliated on a regular basis. The bullies insult Craig's whole family and humiliate him in front of everyone. Craig is routinely miserable and feels isolated. He says, "As a child, I thought that life was the most horrible world anyone could ever live in, and that there had to be something better" (Chapter 1, p. 38).

Craig thinks about running away every day. He goes through all of the motions but never carries out the plan, knowing that there were much worse things out in the world and he should be grateful for what he already has.

At night Craig wanted to escape into his dreams. The dreams are elaborate and fanciful.

The main thing Craig and Phil have in common is a love of drawing. Craig uses escapism to avoid his daily problems. The other main focus for Craig is his devotion to God and the Bible. Craig's family is extremely devout - almost to the point of being zealots. Craig believes that the Bible is the word of God and he must obey it.

Craig's experiences at church camp are no better than they are at school, which surprises and disgusts Craig. Things are bleak until he meets Raina, a beautiful 17-year-old girl from Michigan. Craig and Raina spend as much time together as possible.

Craig and Raina continue their relationship after they return to their homes. Craig visits Raina in Michigan for two weeks. While in Michigan, Craig learns a great deal about Raina and her tumultuous family situation. Raina's parents are most likely getting a divorce and Raina is often put in the position of taking care of two adopted siblings with Down's syndrome along with her infant niece.

The pressures at home are too great for Raina and she ends the relationship with Craig.

Craig is heartbroken. He struggles with his devotion to the church and Bible although his faith in God has not wavered. Craig stops going to church and sets out to find himself in a world completely unlike his hometown. In the end, Craig realizes that there

must be a middle ground between the zealot lifestyle of his family and the tumultuous lifestyle of his former girlfriend. He can strive for balance.



Chapter 1: Cubby Hole

Chapter 1: Cubby Hole Summary

The story begins with two brothers, Phil and Craig, sleeping in the same bed. The boys are young and not altogether happy about the sleeping arrangements. As Craig states, "Shared' is a sugar-coated way of saying we were trapped in the same bed, as we were children and had no say in the matter" (Chapter 1, p. 10).

Phil begins to talk about how sharks are nibbling at the side of the bed. Craig pretends to sleep and fake snores. Phil says he knows that Craig is faking. Craig says it is a bed, not a boat and that Phil should just go to sleep. Craig steals the blankets. Phil begins to complain about Craig hogging the blankets and about the fact that Craig is also taking up more than his share of the bed. The boys begin to tussle with the blankets and eventually cause so much noise that their father comes upstairs. The boys continue to bicker. The father says that the boys should not question his authority. The father tells Craig to sleep in the bed. Phil can sleep in the cubby hole. The cubby hole is an unused room hidden behind the paneling in the playroom. It is dark and filled with dust. The author describes, "Uninsulated, unlit, and uninhabited, except by spiders and vermin (we heard skittering within the walls at night) and a few dust-filled cardboard boxes, the cubby hole was best left forgotten" (Chapter 1, p. 16).

Craig says that he should have been the one sent to the cubby hole because he is the pathetic older brother. Craig also talks about neglecting Phil when the younger boy needed a play companion and telling Phil horror stories about the third grade.

Craig's school days are recounted. The boy is beaten up and humiliated on a regular basis. The teacher reprimands him in front of the class for writing an eight page poem about people eating excrement. Craig says he does not want to admit about how often he thinks about it, particularly when it involved the teacher, bullies, and his babysitter.

The bullies insult Craig's whole family and humiliate him in front of everyone.

Craig almost misses his bus. When he gets home his mother asks about his day. Craig says it was boring. Craig goes into the living room to say hello to Phil who is watching Tom and Jerry on TV. Craig says he hopes Tom falls off a cliff and dies. He says, "As a child, I thought that life was the most horrible world anyone could ever live in, and that there had to be something better" (Chapter 1, p. 38).

Craig thinks about running away every day. He goes through all of the motions but never carries out the plan, knowing that there were much worse things out in the world and he should be grateful for what he already had.

At night Craig wanted to escape into his dreams. The dreams are elaborate and fanciful.



The main thing Craig and Phil have in common is a love of drawing. Phil does not share Craig's love of escapism but the boys enjoy the art.

Phil and Craig play outside and find some skulls. Their mother will not allow them to come into the house with the skulls and tells them to put them outside in the tall grass. The boys want to play outside some more but their mother says they have to get rested because they have to go to church in the morning.

The boys go to Sunday school. The teacher talks about how bodies are only temporary and that while some people may get sick or hurt, once they are in Heaven, everything is wonderful. Craig wants Heaven

Craig grows up striving for the eternal world. Whenever something bothers him, Craig reminds himself that he is only passing through.

The pastor at church asks Craig what he intends to do after graduation. Craig does not know. The pastor suggests that Craig go into seminary.

The Sunday school teacher talks about Hell being the opposite of Heaven. The teacher talks about the horrors of hell.

Craig decides that he has not given enough time to his faith. He burns all of his drawings.

Chapter 1: Cubby Hole Analysis

Craig and Phil have a typical relationship. The boys do not have much in common and often fight about trivial things. However, when it is important, the boys are there for each other.

The bullies at school make Craig's life miserable and there seems to be no way around it. Craig's teacher behaves inappropriately, making things worse for the boy, particularly when she says that Craig's mother would be disgusted with him for his poem. Not only is Craig picked on, but his family is ridiculed as well. One of the bullies says that Craig's father looks like a poor Mexican, his mother is so religious that it makes him sick, and Phil looks like he is mentally retarded.

Like many children, Craig dreams of running away. Craig knows he should be grateful for his home and family but cannot seem to get past the misery.

Craig finds solace in his faith. The Sunday school teacher is a zealot and often frightens the children. However, Craig realizes that what he wants is eternal peace. Craig wants Heaven.

It is ironic that Craig decides to burn all of his drawings because they were born out of his need for escape. However, Craig has turned to religion for the same reasons. Craig considers how he might strengthen his faith and survive this world and all of its misery.



Chapter 2: Stirring Furnace

Chapter 2: Stirring Furnace Summary

Craig recounts living in a farmhouse in Wisconsin as a child. In the summer the farmhouse was blisteringly hot. Craig's parents would not allow anyone to open the windows because the humidity seemed to stay forever. At night, the boys were not allowed to run a fan because it was expensive. Phil offers to pay for the electricity but Craig tells him that he does not make enough money picking rocks to pay for it. The boys concoct a scheme to make themselves sweaty enough to gain their mother's pity. In the winter time, there was little heat in the boys' bedroom. A blanket would freeze to the wall. Craig warns Phil not to break it.

The boys love winter and are not cold. They run and play in the snow and rejoice at the freedom. The biggest draw during the winter is Christmas break. While summertime offered manual labor to fill the hours, Christmas break was three weeks of vacation filled with no responsibility. Except, that is, for one week during which the boys are sent to church camp. He says, "For a week, our freedom was interrupted by the pretense of sharing "Christ-centered" recreational activity with other Christian youth" (Chapter 2, p. 77).

People at church camp are not any nicer to Craig and Phil than they had been in the real world. Craig finds this particularly disappointing since he tries hard to be a good person and yet is rejected at every turn. The kids at church camp do not act in a Christian-like manner, which also bothers Craig. Many make fun of him for having no money or for being bad at sports. One of the kids makes fun of Craig for reading his Bible, saying that they are forced to read the Bible enough during the day, why would Craig also want to read it at night? Craig lies and says that he is just organizing his things and puts the book away.

Later that night, Craig cannot sleep. He sneaks out of the cabin. Several of the other buildings are locked. Craig eventually finds an open door at the rec hall. Craig sits inside the building and asks God for forgiveness for lying, for drawing a woman without clothes, and for calling someone a bad name.

As Craig gets older, it is slightly less painful to spend the week at church camp. While the jocks and bullies are still present, it becomes easier for Craig to recognize that there are other outsiders present. Craig gravitates toward those people.

One of the people in the group of outsiders is a pretty young girl named Raina. Raina asks Craig if he would like to join them. Craig is pleased to have someone to talk to while avoiding the bullies.

Raina, Craig and the others run away from the camp counselors. They end up in one of the boys' cabins. One of the boys goes through the room, discussing how much he



dislikes each kid. The boy does not stop with the jocks and bullies. He upends a bottle of cologne in one boy's bag. Craig objects. One of the crowd finds a pipe with marijuana in it and lights it. He offers it to Craig, who refuses. Raina partakes. Craig makes an excuse and leaves.

Craig searches for Raina in the crowd.

"When you are lost or are looking for someone suspected lost, the crowds of people form a threatening undertow, undermining your every effort." Chap. 2, p. 104

Craig's skepticism grows. He attends a concert where the announcer talks about people sharing faith.

"It was nearly impossible for me to accept that a group of people could adhere to the same belief, to be in one heart and mind, much less to join together in a constructive goal." Chap. 2, p. 106

A kid asks Craig why he isn't singing. Craig says he does not sing. Craig never sings.

Craig and Raina bump into each other in the cafeteria. Both apologize for their behavior the night before. Raina says she is sorry for the way her friends behaved. Craig admits to lying about meeting a friend. Raina says she understands and is impressed by Craig's strength. Craig is surprised. Raina says it is clear that Craig does not feel the need to be someone he is not; nor does he need to prove himself.

Raina grabs Craig's hand and the pair goes out to the lake. A counselor chastises the pair, saying that the lake is reserved for hockey and broom-ball only. The camp does not want to have to pay for liability insurance in case someone falls and cracks his skull open. The counselor tells the kids to go to the rec hall and play foosball until chapel starts in twenty minutes. Then the counselor falls down. Craig and Raina laugh and walk off.

In the rec hall, Craig excuses himself to go to the bathroom. Craig returns from the bathroom and looks for Raina. She is hiding underneath a basketball game. Craig crawls underneath and joins Raina. Raina says she is going to skip chapel so that she can sleep. Raina says the sermons are dumped down and vapid, plus they try to make the kids sing. Craig says he doesn't sing either. Raina says she has no voice but when she does sing, it's sacred. Craig offers his coat as a pillow. Raina falls asleep. Craig cannot resist and touches Raina's hair.

Chapter 2: Stirring Furnace Analysis

Chapter two reveals a lot about Craig's character. Craig is still involved in escapism. Being thrown into the church camp situation only increases Craig's feelings of being different and alone. Craig wonders why kids at church camp are so mean. Craig thinks that church camp should be a place where people are kind to each other and act in a



Christian manner. The kids always tease Craig about not being good at sports as well as not being able to afford any of the additional activities.

As Craig gets older, he continues to try to separate himself from the jocks and bullies. Despite their behavior Craig manages to stay true to who he is and to not give in to the crowd mentality. Craig tries to escape into his own world as much as possible. Craig often asks for forgiveness for his behavior.

When Craig meets Raina, he feels that things are beginning to change. Raina is a pretty girl who actually seems to be interested in him. This fact surprises Craig and he is unsure of himself.

Craig is disappointed when Raina's friends go through the boys' cabin and destroy property that belongs to a seemingly harmless boy. Craig is further disappointed when Raina smokes the pipe. Craig refuses to smoke because he says it is not for him. Despite any peer pressure, Craig managed to stand up for what he believes in and not give into the others. Craig makes up a lie and leaves to get out of the situation.

Craig cannot stop thinking of Raina, a sign that he is smitten. Raina feels the first friend Craig has had in a long time and being with her is a respite from all that he has suffered. Being with Raina feels right.

The pair bonds when the church counselor falls on the ice. The couple holds hands for the first time and Craig's spirits are lifted.

Craig hears boys in the bathroom talking about how easy it is to get sex at church camp. Craig blocks out the talk and goes to find Raina. Raina is slightly rebellious which also appeals to Craig.

Sitting alone with Raina is comforting and Craig feels at peace. Craig shows bravery when he touches Raina's hair. The girl likes the gesture and Craig gains some confidence.



Chapter 3: Blank Sheet

Chapter 3: Blank Sheet Summary

Craig writes that he and Phil undertake a challenge each winter. The challenge is to walk across that top of the snow without breaking through the crusty surface. Phil thinks of it as a competition. Craig thinks of the challenge as a way to challenge himself and not as a competition. If it were a competition against Phil then Craig would be the winner. If competing against himself, Craig would often lose.

In Sunday school the teacher speaks about Heaven. According to the teacher when a person is in Heaven, he spends his day worshipping God. It is work but everyone loves it. The teacher says that people sing praises to the Lord. Craig says he does not sing and plans to draw for the Lord. The teacher ridicules Craig and says that drawing is not praise. Craig asks questions but the teacher continues to tell Craig that drawing is not a worthy form of praise. After church the minister approaches Craig and asks if he has given any more thought to becoming a pastor or a missionary. Craig worries about missionary work and tells the pastor that he is susceptible to diseases.

Craig goes home and thinks about what the teacher has said. Craig decides that he is wrong in thinking that he can draw Christian cartoons and bring people to Jesus.

Craig becomes ill. His only joy comes from Raina's letters. The letters are filled with flirtation. Craig admires Raina's handwriting, the perfume on the letters, the poetry and other things she sends. One day there is a terrible blizzard. Raina calls from a phone booth. She says that her parents are getting a divorce. Raina has started to drive to see Craig but the blizzard is getting worse and the roads are closed. Raina must return home. He says, "And though her journey was unsuccessful, she had made a blatant gesture of her affection" (Chapter 3, p. 165).

Craig feels much better after talking with Raina. He continues to draw, using Raina as his muse.

Craig asks his mother if he can visit Raina in Michigan during school break. His mother says he has missed a lot of school. Her questions are satisfied but his mother says she must consult Craig's father. Craig promises not to miss any more school and to keep his grades up.

Craig's mother drives halfway to Michigan so that Craig can meet Raina. Raina's father has driven halfway as well. On the way back to Michigan, Raina's father talks non-stop about his youth, snow, and living in the Midwest. He says, "You know, people that live outside the Midwest say we must be crazy to live in the snow and cold, but I think we gain a lot by enduring these winters" (Chapter 3, p. 176).

Raina's dad drops Raina and Craig at the house and then goes to pick up Ben and Laura, Raina's siblings. Laura is a child with Down's syndrome. She clings to Craig from



the start, beating on him and playing rough. Ben will not speak to Craig. It is too difficult to tell from the pictures if Ben is also a Down's syndrome child or merely uncommunicative.

Raina presents Craig with a handmade quilt. Craig asks what he can give Raina in return. Raina asks Craig to paint on her bedroom wall.

At night, Craig sits down to read his Bible. He says, "Even while visiting my friend's house, I was committed to reading my Bible each night" (Chapter 3, p. 198).

The next several pages are devoted to Luke 8:40-53, "A Dead Woman and a Sick Girl."

Raina's mother comes home. She is thrilled to meet Craig. Raina's mother apologizes for the state of the house. She tells Craig that there is tension in the house although she and her husband are trying to make the divorce as graceful as possible for the children. However, Raina has had a great deal of tension in her life and had taken on many responsibilities.

Raina and her mother go into the kitchen to talk while Craig reads his Bible in Raina's room. Raina's mother asks Raina to write a note to her father. It details her schedule for the next day and tells her husband to make sure certain tasks are taken care of in her absence. She also states that she has canceled the counseling appointment because it is not helping the situation.

After Raina's mother goes to bed, Raina and Craig sit in Raina's room and talk for a long time. This time Craig resists touching Raina and goes to bed.

The bed in the guest room is stiff and neglected. Craig feels as if he is in a coffin with all the stuffed animals taking place of mourners.

Chapter 3: Blank Sheet Analysis

Craig is still undecided about his future although he is a senior in high school. The pastor encourages Craig to go into the ministry. While Craig is thoroughly devoted to his faith, he is resistant and not ready to make that decision. Raina's father confides in Craig that he had no plans at that age.

Craig continues to feel that his drawing should be a way to serve God but that others seem to ridicule his talent. Still, Craig does not stop drawing. In fact, Craig's drive to create is impassioned by Raina's words and poems. Raina becomes Craig's muse.

Raina is experiencing a lot of traumatic behavior at home. It is Craig that Raina looks to for comfort. Craig wishes he could help Raina but there is nothing to be done. Hearing Raina's voice helps to raise Craig's spirits. Craig's love for Raina lifts him above the taunting at school.



Craig sees first hand Raina's home situation. It is clear that Raina takes on a lot of responsibility, particularly when it comes to Laura, who needs a lot of care. Raina's parents try to ease the tension but there is no way to make the situation easier.

Raina's family is welcoming to Craig. Craig stays true to himself by reading the Bible in Raina's absence. Craig has feelings for Raina that he does not understand. Craig remembers the incident on the school bus when the driver found Craig's picture of a naked woman. Craig's parents worry that he is using his talent for the devil. Craig begins to wonder what Raina would look like naked. Craig feels ashamed. That night, Craig does not allow himself to touch Raina at all in the hopes of doing the right thing.

This section also includes lengthy Bible passages and drawings, relating them to the story.



Chapter 4: Static

Chapter 4: Static Summary

Craig wakes up and realizes that he did not remember falling asleep. Craig hears Raina's voice coming from the other room. Raina and Ben are seated at the table talking about Ben being the coolest uncle ever. Craig walks into the room and Ben leaves.

Raina explains that she and Ben had the morning together. It is almost noon. Craig is shocked that he overslept. Craig eats breakfast. Raina's father comes home with sausage McMuffins then remembers that Craig and Raina are vegetarians. Craig thinks he would not be able to eat anything more substantial than cereal because his stomach is in knots.

Raina's father asks Craig to help him and Ben loads 2x4s into the truck. While the men load the truck, Raina's father talks to Craig about the divorce. He says that Raina's mother, Judy, wants a divorce but that he does not believe in divorce and thinks it is just a phase.

Raina's father takes Laura and Ben and leaves. Raina and Craig take the van and go for a drive. They admire the bright white snow that has just fallen and has not yet been turned to gray slush. Raina drives to a mountain and the pair gets out. They admire the shadows.

Raina says she does not feel like doing anything. She makes a snow angel.

Raina talks about static. It is believed that the noise one hears when snow falls is static from the snowflakes breaking through the dry air. Craig talks about being fascinated by static electricity when he was a boy. He and Phil believed the sparks caused by the static were sprites or fairies until their parents explained. Craig and Phil were disappointed.

The pair talks and eventually kisses.

Chapter 4: Static Analysis

Ben still hides from Craig. It seems that this is something Ben does all of the time, not just because Craig is there. Craig's observations regarding Laura are eye opening. Craig believes that people can easily identify developmentally challenged children more by their lack of motor coordination than their outward appearances. Craig believes that Laura is beautiful.

It is strange that both of Raina's parents feel the need to speak to Craig about the divorce and the state of the family. Perhaps neither has anyone else to talk to and so

they confide in Craig. Craig says nothing during these exchanges but it helps him to better understand the family dynamic as well as Raina's personal situation.

Raina seems to be willing to become physically close to Craig but Craig is hesitant. Craig fears that he might do the wrong thing in this situation. Craig is afraid of offending Raina or worse, acting in a way that would shame God.



Chapter 5: I Don't Wanna Grow Up

Chapter 5: I Don't Wanna Grow Up Summary

Craig and Raina arrive at Raina's house. Raina's brother-in-law, Dave, is there to greet them. Dave berates them for being late. Raina's father has taken Ben and Laura to church and is disappointed that Raina and Craig did not go with them. Dave asks Raina if she will watch the baby while he and his wife, Julie, go out. Raina agrees. Raina wanders into her bedroom where Julie and baby Sarah are waiting. Julie talks about her day.

Dave and Julie leave. Raina teaches Craig how to hold the baby. Craig is nervous. Craig becomes even more nervous when Raina says that the baby needs to have her diaper changed. Craig says he has never changed a diaper. Raina laughs and says she will do it.

Raina tells Craig about her childhood. Julie is the oldest daughter. Raina was born four years later. The next year, Raina's parents adopted Ben and Laura. Both children are afflicted with Down's syndrome. The family felt so blessed that they needed to share their blessings with people who are less fortunate. Raina says that her parents did not think about the long haul, that each child would grow up but still be like children. Although Laura is 19 she still wears a diaper and crawls. Ben is 26 and relatively uncommunicative.

Raina puts Sarah to sleep. She says that Julie and Dave have only been married for a year but are contemplating getting a divorce. Julie was burdened by family responsibilities and married young. Raina does not like Dave. Raina says she does not worry about Julie because she is an adult. However, she does worry about Sarah. Raina plans to take care of Sarah after graduation.

After Sarah falls asleep, Raina asks Craig if he would like to see some family photos. Craig brings the quilt into the living room and the couple snuggles on the couch while looking at photos and talking. While Craig looks at the photos Raina talks about her childhood. People were mean to Ben so Raina became his protector. Craig comments that Raina looks like a princess. Raina says she was the youngest, so she was spoiled as a young child. As she got older, that changed. Craig teases Raina about her hair during the teen years.

While Raina talks about her childhood, Craig thinks about his own. Raina talks about freedom and power while Craig can only think of isolation and of feeling trapped. It is also revealed that Craig and Phil were molested.

Raina's mother comes home. She talks to the kids for a minute and then goes to bed.

Raina's father comes home with Ben and Laura. Ben stares at Craig, making Craig uneasy. Shortly after Dave and Julie come to pick up Sarah.



Once again, Laura tackles Craig.

After everyone is asleep, Raina and Craig go to Raina's room. They lie on the floor and talk while candles flicker. Raina asks if Craig believes in God. Craig says he does. Raina says she believes in God but does not believe in Heaven or the future. Raina asks if Sarah will go to Heaven if she died today. Craig says he thinks so. Raina asks if someone of diminished capacity, like Laura, will go to Heaven. Craig says he thinks there is a kind of grace period for babies and that people like Laura are exempt from judgment. Craig says he has to think about it more.

Raina tells Craig that she wants him to sleep in her bed. They set the alarm clock for 6 AM so that Craig can sneak back into the guest room before anyone wakes up.

Raina goes into the bathroom to put on her pajamas. While Craig is changing into his pajamas, he is flooded with a plethora of Bible verses about purity, adultery, and fornication. Finally, the Song of Solomon comes to the forefront as Craig pictures an angelic Raina. He says, "Song of Solomon: 4:7, 9 - 'All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you. You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes'" (Chapter 5, p. 306).

Raina comes out of the bathroom and teases Craig about his pajamas. Raina says they should use the new blanket. The pair curls up and goes to sleep. The alarm rings and Craig returns to the guest room. Once Craig is in the guest room, he creates a psalm about Raina.

"Thank you God for your perfect creation, with skin as soft and pale as moonlight, the bones beneath her skin tangling and rearranging, rising along the iliac crest, and dipping into the clavicles. Thank you for the rhythm of her movements, curling - sprawling - her contours lapping like waves around the blankets; she is yours, she is perfect, a temple with hair spilling over her temples; Pressed against her I can hear eternity - hollow lonely spaces and currents that church ceaselessly, and the fallen snow welcomes the falling snow with a whispered 'hush'" (Chapter 5, p. 309-311).

Craig falls asleep clutching the blanket. When he wakes Raina is waiting in the kitchen. They don winter gear and go outside in their pajamas. Craig is cold but Raina tells him to just keep moving.

Chapter 5: I Don't Wanna Grow Up Analysis

This chapter reveals a lot about the childhoods of Raina and Craig. Raina's parents are clearly as devout as they profess to be. The adoption of Ben and Laura, while noble, proved to be a greater strain than anyone could have imagined. However, it also brought joy and purpose to the family.

With the family in the middle of an upheaval, even more responsibility is piled in Raina's shoulders. Raina takes a great deal of it in stride and tries not to let it bother her.



Raina's parents understand the problems. Raina's father believes it is a phase; so much of the blame is put on her mother's shoulders.

Raina recounts a relatively happy childhood. Although Raina claims that she is spoiled, she has given up a lot to care for Ben and Laura. Laura seems to pose a particularly difficult problem as she is growing into a woman but has the mentality and behaviors of a toddler. Laura often attaches herself to Craig and behaves inappropriately. However, this behavior is tolerated because of her diminished capacity. Raina says that Laura was abused as a child and that her parents are overprotective. However, being overprotective can be as bad if not worse than being neglectful.

There is some resentment toward Julie on Raina's part. While Julie left to pursue her own dreams, part of it can be seen as escapism, a recurring theme. When Julie left, a great deal of additional responsibility fell onto Raina's shoulders. Raina does not like Dave and says that Julie only married him to get away from the family.

Craig has a difficult time relating to the tales of Raina's childhood, particularly the happy times. Craig thinks he has not treated Phil well in comparison to how Raina acts with Ben and Laura. Craig thinks about isolation and feeling trapped. It is also revealed that Phil and Craig were molested. The incident does not seem unusual to Craig although it is a clear basis for Craig's self-loathing and shame regarding his own body.

Craig is trying to work through his fear toward Raina and doing the right thing.



Chapter 6: Teen Spirit

Chapter 6: Teen Spirit Summary

Craig and Phil are in bed. Phil is up to his usual shenanigans. This time he tries to convince Craig that he peed on his back while he actually just licked his finger. The boys begin to horse around and then one pees on the other. Craig is lying on the bedroom floor while Phil pees on him. The boys' mother comes into the room and is horrified at what she sees. She takes the boys into the bathroom and puts both boys into the shower. Up to this point, the boys had only taken baths. Craig wonders if their parents had hoped they would be knocked down by steam or mistakenly drowned. He says, "Either way, one's first shower is a right of passage - an initiation into adulthood, only in the context it was more of a baptism, a vain way to cleanse away shame. I scrubbed and scrubbed and still could feel the sin on my body" (Chapter 6, p. 332).

Raina takes Craig to a party filled with her friends who are smoking, getting high and drinking beer. Craig feels miserable and out of place, wondering why he can't be alone with Raina. People offer to give beer to Craig but Craig refuses. Raina explains that Craig does not drink. The friends do not seem to care about Craig but are thrilled to see Raina.

Back at Raina's house, Raina asks Craig to paint a mural on her bedroom wall. Craig says he does not know what to paint. Raina tells him to paint whatever comes to mind, that she will love it regardless. Craig is afraid to make a mistake. Craig also realizes that he has lost the need to draw now that he is in the presence of his muse. Eventually, Craig uses his loneliness as fuel. He paints a tree with Raina and himself sitting on its branches.

Craig takes the poems Raina has been typing and attaches them to the wall as if they are leaves.

Raina's dad goes to pick up Ben. Ben refuses to go with him. Ben has an outburst saying that his father treats him as if he is retarded.

Craig goes to school with Raina. Raina is a popular girl, which surprises Craig. He thought she was unpopular like his is at home in his high school. Once again the pair goes to a party. Once again, Craig wonders why they cannot be alone together since he is only visiting for a short time.

Craig thinks about his Sunday school lesson during which the teacher discusses relationships in Heaven. All earthly relationships will be forgotten and everyone will work and live together as brother and sister.

Raina and Craig are in the car. Raina wonders why one should bother with love. In Raina's mind, everything crumbles, degenerates and falls apart. Why start anything that will surely end anyway? Craig is downhearted by Raina's comment.



Chapter 6: Teen Spirit Analysis

This chapter starts out with a "boys will be boys" attitude. Phil is impetuous and young. It is not difficult for Craig to get pulled into the scene. The boys get carried away and it is as if they do not realize what they are doing until their mother comes into the room. The mother is justifiably horrified and sends both boys to the shower. Craig takes the shower as a form of punishment and also sees it as a foray into adulthood. The mother most likely did not mean it as such but is struggling with her sons' behaviors.

Craig begins to notice that Raina is keeping a safe distance from him. The visit to Michigan will be relatively short and Craig wonders why Raina wants to spend it with her friends rather than being alone with him. Raina wants to have some carefree time away from home and family and also wants Craig to enjoy the things that she likes to do. The activities do not please Craig. Craig's reaction to the parties and people surprises Raina but she does notice Craig's discomfort.

Raina appreciates Craig's art and is thrilled by the painting in her bedroom.

The topic of love raises many interesting points. In Craig's mind, he loves Raina. Raina says she loves Craig as well but Raina is not prepared to give herself to a relationship. Raina has too much responsibility and stress at home to think about any long term commitments. Like Laura, Raina does not seem to believe in tomorrow.



Chapter 7: Just Like Heaven

Chapter 7: Just Like Heaven Summary

This chapter opens with Raina asking Craig to help her sleep that night. They return to the mountain. The day is colder than the last time they were there. The snow had turned to ice.

Things are beginning to change between Craig and Raina. While Craig feels closer to Raina than before, he also feels a sense of distance. Raina seems to be pulled in several directions.

Craig remembers when he had arrived in Michigan. He says, "When I'd first arrived, we were full of restlessness and enthusiasm - awake to all sensation. The days inbetween wandered aimlessly and blended together - oblivious to any other world" (Chapter 7, p. 379).

Craig goes on to say that he is beginning to think of that other world and the fact that his return home is imminent.

Julie and Dave visit. They start to look at vacation brochures and decide to go to Hawaii. Julie asks Raina to take care of Sarah while they are gone. Raina says she will watch Sarah for ten days.

Raina's dad agrees that Raina can take care of baby Sarah while Julie and Dave vacation in Hawaii. Raina's father had objected at first. Raina says her grades are excellent and missing a few days will not make a difference. Raina's dad says that his company is doing fine at the building site and he can take off a few hours each day to watch the baby so that Raina can go to school part time. Raina is happy.

Raina's father leaves for the night after Ben and Laura are put to bed. Craig and Raina sit in Raina's room. They begin to kiss until Raina hears a car pull into the driveway. Raina says she should keep a safe distance from Craig and moves to stand by the tree. Raina says she notices that sometimes Craig looks at her with longing even though she is right in front of him. Craig says that perhaps he is sad about wanting her. Craig thinks a great deal about temptation versus lust. Raina asks which is scarier - lust or temptation?

Raina says that lust might mean that Craig wants her against her will while temptation means that she is standing underneath a tree holding an apple. It might also be temptation for Craig to know that she wants him even more.

The couple kisses just as Raina's mother opens the front door. Raina backs away and begins to talk about Adam and Eve. Raina says that Heaven is a hope and Eden is a memory. She says, "I don't believe in the Eden story because the woman gets all the blame for the fall of humanity" (Chapter 7, p. 397).



Craig explains that both Adam and Eve were barred from the Garden of Eden. He says, "It was generous of God's part to wait until both had sinned before enforcing punishment. Shame is always easier to handle if you have someone to share it with" (Chapter 7, p. 398).

Raina talks about being stressed out. Raina asks Craig not to go home. Craig says he can move to Marquette after graduation. Raina suggests that they drop out of school. Craig can help her take care of Laura and Sarah. Raina seems to like the idea but says she cannot leave. Raina says they sound old, talking about their responsibilities. Raina asks Craig to sleep in her bed.

Craig talks about being younger and how he and Phil would pretend that their bed was a boat. There would be a terrible storm and Craig and Phil would attempt in vain to save the boat. In the end, they would huddle under the blankets and ride out the storm.

"Inevitably, a storm would strike and do a number on our ship - crush the bow - shatter the poop deck - fling one bean-stuffed pirate to his fate, and finally leave our bed coverings in a state of disarray." Chap. 7, p. 409

Raina talks about creating a pretend picnic in her parents' bed. She would use plastic food and create a feast. Ben and Laura would always attend. The stuffed animals were not invited. The only non-human that was permitted at the table was the family's pet monkey, Snowball. Raina asks if they should play shipwreck or feast. Craig says "both." Raina sings "Just Like Heaven" to Craig.

The pair talk for a while and then Raina falls asleep. They do not set an alarm. Craig lays awake for a long time, listening to Raina breathe and the sound of her heart.

Craig marvels at the wonder that is Raina - a perfect creation from God. Her body looks as if it was drawn by a divine artist, sacred and unknowable. For the first time, Craig realizes that he is content in the moment and for the first time, he does not want to be anywhere else.

The next morning, Raina's father, Steve, finds Craig and Raina asleep in her bed. He starts to speak but says nothing. Steve goes into the living room and looks at the family photo album and cries.

The chapter ends with a metaphor, "Sky and earth became one, trees outstretched their naked limbs, snow drifts shifted shapes, washing away to reveal tufts of briar" (Chapter 7, p. 446-447).

Chapter 7: Just Like Heaven Analysis

Things begin to change drastically in this chapter. While Craig has an image of Raina as a perfect being, Raina remains caught up in her day to day life and the futility of making future plans. Craig remains unsure of himself when it comes to his actions toward Raina. Craig wars with his desires and his upbringing, remembering that fornication is



sin. Raina does not seem to have the same issues as Craig. It is not clear whether the couple has sex but they do sleep in the same bed. Raina's father is faced with seeing that his little girl is growing up. This only adds to the grief that Steve is feeling over the impending divorce and the sense that life is spinning out of control.

The author addresses adolescence in a clever way, taking the stories of childish events such as the shipwreck and feast and making them segue into a more adult role.

Craig does not fully comprehend that Raina is tied to her family and that there will most likely not be any plans made for the future.



Chapter 8: Vanishing Cave

Chapter 8: Vanishing Cave Summary

Craig's parents surprise him and Phil with new beds. The boys are growing up now and each deserves to have his own room. Craig will remain in the current bedroom while Phil will get a new bed and move into the playroom. Craig complains but his parents point out that he has the larger bed. The boys are happy. That night and for many nights to follow, the boys find reasons to share a bed, to seek refuge under the same blankets. It seems different when sharing is by choice. After a while the boys can no longer find a reason to share a bed and are separated. Craig thinks about the separation. When Raina asks about Phil, Craig says they are like strangers now.

Raina's mother, Judy, laments her choices. She says she had always wanted to be a mother. Raina points out that she has four children. Judy says it is not as she thought it would be. Steve didn't work for years and so she was forced to take on the burden of being the bread winner. Judy is sad that she had to spend so much time away from home that she had missed many of the moments a mother cherishes.

Craig prepares to leave to return to Wisconsin. Raina is sick, so Craig cannot even kiss her goodbye. There is not much discussion on the way back to meet Craig's mother. Craig hugs Raina and says goodbye.

Craig's mother asks if he and Raina are more than friends. Craig says yes. Craig's mother says she would not have permitted him to go to Michigan if she had known. Craig says that is why he didn't tell her.

Craig arrives at home and unpacks. He looks at everything Raina gave to him. Craig and Raina talk on the phone. They long for each other. Craig looks at his drawings and wishes that he could be with Raina. He unpacks the quilt and decides to sleep with it. Instead of covering himself with the blanket, he curls up with it as if it were Raina sleeping next to him. When Craig wakes at 6, he thinks that it is time to go to the guestroom. Then he remembers that he is at home.

Craig thinks about Socrates asking his disciple to imagine people living in a dark cavern. Craig feels like he is in a dark cavern. He describes, "And since childhood, humans have been prisoners - bound at their neck and feet, facing a wall and unable to turn their heads. Behind them is a walled path, traversed by people carrying statues of animals and humans - and beyond that is a fire illuminating a cave" (Chapter 8, p. 496).

Craig thinks of this fire as he takes all of his drawings and letters and dumps them into a burn barrel that is already lit. He explains, "From the prisoners' perspective, all that can be seen are the shadows of these statues projected upon the wall by the fire, sort of like a shadow puppet show, only the prisoners aren't aware what they see are shadows or puppets, they think they're studying reality" (Chapter 8, p. 497-498).



Craig thinks about the shadows created by the fire. He returns to school and is met with the same jocks and bullies. In class, the teacher continues to talk about Socrates. The prisoners looking at the shadows could not tell that the echoes were in fact echoes and began to think that the shadows were talking.

Craig calls Raina to tell her how much he misses her. He admits to wearing her shirt and socks for days so that he could smell her but the scent is fading. Raina tells Craig that the way he talks is intimidating.

Raina says that she has so many pressures already with taking care of Laura and Sarah plus focusing on graduation that she has realized that a long distance relationship is just one more responsibility she cannot handle.

Craig says he understands but is clearly devastated.

The snow begins to melt, a harbinger that spring is on the way.

Craig calls Raina. The conversation is stilted.

Craig and others begin to talk about what they will do after graduation. Craig is considering going to art school. An adviser tells Craig that art school can lead to other things that may not be good for him. The man says his brother went to art school. He was asked to draw nudes which then led him to pornography. Eventually, the brother turned to homosexuality. The man says he has not spoken to his brother in ten years.

One of the other people in the group says that Craig should go to a Bible centered school. In fact, the only way to be safe is to reject any text that is not Biblically based. Craig is advised to pray about his decision.

Raina tells Craig that she is going to graduate. Craig says he called to tell Raina goodbye.

Once again, Craig burns nearly everything that was once important to him. Craig burns everything that Raina had given him except for the blanket. Craig puts the blanket into a bag and stores it in his closet.

Craig moves out.

Craig returns home for a visit. Phil is graduating from high school. Craig confides to Phil that he is no longer a Christian. While he does not want to lie to his parents he does not want to disappoint them. He says, "I still believe in God, the teachings of Jesus even, but the rest of Christianity...its Bible, its churches, its dogma - only sets up boundaries between people and cultures. It denies the beauty of being human, and it ignores all these gaps that need to be filled in by the individual" (Chapter 8, p. 533).

The boys talk a walk through the field. They talk about the day they found the vanishing cave. On the first day, the boys discover a cave. The cave is not very big. The boys can barely stand inside it. The next day the boys return to the cave that seems to be no



bigger than a den for a small animal. The day after that, the cave was little more than a hole that the boys could stand in. The next day, the cave was gone. Craig says he wonders if it was a dream. Phil says he remembers it and that it really happened.

Craig also thinks about Raina and it feels like a dream. Craig begins to wonder if his relationship with Raina ever happened.

Raina paints over the mural on her wall.

Chapter 8: Vanishing Cave Analysis

Craig regrets that he and Phil have become strangers. He envies the closeness between Raina and her siblings, Ben and Laura. Craig vows to spend more time with Phil when he returns home. Later, when Craig shows interest in Phil's activities, e.g., video games and drawings, Phil is pleased and surprised.

Craig is disappointed that Raina is sick when he is ready to leave. It is obvious that things have changed while Craig was visiting. He is deeply in love with Raina but Raina is confused and intent on focusing on her family. There is no room for Craig in Raina's life at this time.

Craig's mom can tell that there is a relatively serious relationship going on between Craig and Raina. She doubts that she made a wise decision in allowing Craig to go to Michigan.

Craig has a great deal of difficulty upon returning home. Craig misses Raina desperately. Raina is intimidated by Craig's love and devotion. Raina wants to end the relationship but remain friends but it is clear that Craig will not be able to do it.

In addition to losing his first love, Craig is having a crisis of faith. The crisis escalates when he focuses on the negativity of the passages, particularly those in Ecclesiastes. Craig's crisis increases when he learns about translations and amendments.

Craig knows it will be more painful to try to keep Raina in his life so he lets her go. Craig is clearly heartbroken and lost. Raina also says goodbye by painting over the mural on her bedroom wall.



Chapter 9: Foot Notes

Chapter 9: Foot Notes Summary

In Chapter 9, Craig says, "Upon moving out of my parents' home, I made a conscious effort to leave my Bible behind. It was the book of Ecclesiastes that prompted me to do so" (Chapter 9, p. 545).

The author gives several examples about the pessimistic tone of Ecclesiastes but also the contradictory nature of the passages.

Craig begins to realize that Ecclesiastes is contradictory in many ways. In one passage, the book talks about grief and a life of hard labor from the time he leaves his mother's womb. In the next passage, the author shows a Three Little Pigs style drawing in which the pigs are allowed to accept and be grateful for wealth and possessions. In the following passage, the author shows a second picture of a suffering skeletal man who finds that all of his work is meaningless. In the last frame, the author shows the little pigs drinking and being merry after a hard day's work. All of this confuses Craig. Craig wonders if the new additions of the "little pigs" passages were added to assuage the masses.

Craig talks to his pastor about the contradictions. The pastor tells Craig to go to seminary where he can debate such details and contradictions all day long. The pastor also talks about the translations of the Bible from Hebrew, mistakes in the translations, and the scribes' habit of adding on to passages each time the Bible was transcribed or amended.

Craig continues to go through his growth process. He says, "This I couldn't accept. I had been taught that the words of the Bible came straight from the mouth of God. If indeed they were subtly modified by generations of scribes and watered down by translations, then - for me - their truth was canceled out" (Chapter 9, p. 549).

Craig sees his concept of religion crumbling down.

Craig moves to the city to get more experiences. He attends parties, goes to clubs, and gets a tattoo.

Craig returns home for a visit. Phil is getting married. Phil's bride is a geology student. Craig enjoys talking with his new sister-in-law about geology. Craig is fascinated by carbon dating and how non-living things, like rocks are tested to prove the earth's age. It is estimated that the earth is 4.5 billion years old. In the background stands a man who says that according to the Bible, earth is 6,000 years old.

Phil's reception is held at a museum. Craig enjoys the exhibits and plays with the children.



Craig's next visit home is for Christmas. His parents are happy that he has come home for the religious holiday. Phil and his wife are scheduled to arrive. While Craig waits for the family to be together, he visits some old childhood haunts. Craig marvels how the old places still hold uncomfortable feelings for him even after all this time.

Craig's parents talk about how proud they are of him.

Craig knows he is an adult but still feels vulnerable in his parents' house.

Craig's parents ask if he has found a church. Craig thinks that being absent from church for seven years should give his parents a clue that he has had issues with his religious affiliation.

Craig goes to his room and takes out a box of his belongings. He cannot bring himself to open the bag that holds Raina's quilt. Instead, he looks through a box of books and finds his Bible. He turns to Luke and begins to read. Craig finds that he is pleased with the use of the word "or."

The author quotes Luke 17:20-21:

"Once having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you'" (Chap. 9, p. 564).

Craig finds a great deal of reassurance in the word "or."

Craig has a dream about Raina. Upon waking, he is disoriented. Craig thinks that sometimes the dream is better than the reality and for a while after waking, one feels like a ghost. Sometimes that feeling leaves one unable to function in one's surroundings.

Phil and his wife come home. The family celebrates Christmas with their usual ritual. Phil talks about getting a lot of snow in Minnesota.

After dinner, Craig decides to take a walk. He walks through freshly fallen snow, leaving behind footprints. Craig thinks that sometimes it is nice to leave a mark behind, no matter how temporary.

Chapter 9: Foot Notes Analysis

Craig spends a lot of time experiencing life after he leaves home. After a while he moves into the city where everything is completely different. Now that Craig's focus is not entirely on Raina and religion, he begins to notice many other things, including other women. It is strange and exciting for Craig to be able to learn and express himself. The trip to the library shows how sheltered Craig's life had been up to this point.

Although Craig gains a lot of life experience, Craig remains, in many ways, childlike. Craig remains filled with doubt and a need for something larger than himself.



Characters

Craig Thompson

Craig Thompson is the main character in "Blankets" by Craig Thompson. The story relays the experiences of Craig's youth from his familial relationships, through his school years and first love, and beyond into adulthood.

Craig is the eldest of two sons born to devoutly religious parents. Of the parents, Craig's mother seems to be the most devout and is constantly ensuring that her sons get a proper religious education and live according to the rules outlined in the Bible.

Craig is a talented artist that finds great pleasure in drawing and creating cartoons that give praise to God. Craig is disappointed when he is told that drawing is not a proper way to praise God. More than once throughout the story Craig burns his drawings and turns his back on his God-given talent.

Craig has a difficult childhood in many ways. He has been sexually molested by a person close to the family. At school Craig is isolated and feels like he does not fit in with other kids. The bullies and jocks constantly torment Craig.

Craig's life changes when he meets Raina. For the first time Craig feels like he belongs with someone, that he is not a bad person. Craig is able to tolerate less pleasant parts of his life. Craig's love for Raina is part mature, part childlike, and part escapism.

Craig suffers through a crisis of faith in the book after he finds that devoting his entire life to religion is not making it any better. Craig had always been taught that the Bible came straight from the mouth of God. When Craig learns the truth, he becomes disillusioned and looks for answers elsewhere.

Craig is a character that is relatable as most people have felt isolated at one time or another. His character has great strength and the reader can surmise that Craig will be fine.

Raina

Raina is a 17-year-old girl that Craig meets at church camp. Craig thinks Raina is the prettiest girl he has ever seen. Craig is thrilled and puzzled when Raina wants to spend time with him.

Raina is a lover of poetry. While she believes in God and the Bible, Raina professes to believe only in the promises and not the stories of the past, such as the story of the Garden of Eden. Raina says that Heaven is a hope and Eden is a memory. She says, "I don't believe in the Eden story because the woman gets all the blame for the fall of humanity" (Chapter 7, p. 397).



Unlike Craig, Raina is a very popular girl. She likes to attend parties where people drink and smoke, something that Craig does not like. In part Raina likes to escape from her daily life because there are many stressors she must face daily including her parents' impending divorce and her role as caretaker in the family.

Raina clearly loves Craig but is not in a position to reciprocate as Craig would like. Raina says she loves Craig as well but Raina is not prepared to give herself to a relationship. Raina has too much responsibility and stress at home to think about any long term commitments. Like Laura, Raina does not seem to believe in tomorrow.

In the end, Raina says she cannot be part of a long distance relationship, so Craig says goodbye.

Phil Thompson

Phil Thompson is Craig's younger brother. Phil is three years younger than Craig. Like Craig, he is a talented artist and playful.

Craig's Mother

Craig's mother is a devoutly religious woman who works hard to instill faith and values in her children.

Craig's Father

Craig's father is also devoutly religious. Craig's father is also a strict disciplinarian.

Steve

Steve is Raina's father. He is a hard worker and devout Christian.

Judy

Judy is Raina's mother. She is a hard worker and devout Christian that has many regrets about the way her life has turned out.

Ben

Ben is Raina's 26 year old adopted brother. Ben has Down's syndrome.

Laura

Laura is Raina's 19 year old adopted sister. Laura has Down's syndrome.

Sarah

Sarah is Raina's niece and the apple of her eye.



Objects/Places

Sin

Sin is one of the main objects in "Blankets" by Craig Thompson. Craig's family is devoutly religious. His parents often preach about sin and often refer to the Bible to teach the children about it. For Craig, a lot of the issues involving sin are attached to his body, particularly as it grows and changes. Craig immediately attaches shame and self-loathing to hormonal changes and growing up. Part of this comes from his upbringing while part of it comes from being sexually molested as a young boy.

Craig also struggles with sin as it involves pride and improper treatment of others. Instead of focusing on gratitude, as Craig often does, he reminds himself that perhaps he should be asking for forgiveness for his sins.

Craig also has many questions about the Bible and the way it is written, in some ways, this is a sin in Craig's mind as he is doubting the word of God.

One of the biggest issues involving Craig and sin revolves around his attraction to Raina. Craig is embarrassed by his physical reaction to Raina and cannot seem to refuse her. Part of Craig feels like this is normal while the other part of Craig is constantly thinking about fornication and going to hell for his actions.

Throughout the story, Craig constantly seeks a middle ground, often finding none.

Escapism

Escapism is one of the main objects in "Blankets" by Craig Thompson. When Craig and Phil play in their room, they try to block out the reality of heat or cold by occupying themselves with games. The boys often pretend they are running races, being courted by sharks, or fighting against a major storm at sea during which they become shipwrecked. Even as the boys get a little bit older, the need for escapism is still shared.

Craig's first major foray into escapism involves drawing. He and Phil spend long hours creating cartoons and fantastical worlds. Spending time this way allows Craig not to think about the sexual abuse at home, not living up to extremely high standards, being bullied, mocked, and beaten up. Craig is devastated when several people tell him that drawing is not an appropriate way to praise God and that he needs to sing and find other ways to show his love and appreciation. Several times throughout the story Craig burns his drawings.

Raina also indulges in escapism by writing poetry. Some of the poetry involves every day issues and feelings while others involve her love for Craig and "secret" issues she does not share with anyone.



In the end, escapism only gives temporary relief from one's problems and Craig and Raina both realize that life must be faced head on.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin is where Craig and Phil grow up. The summers are humid and hot; the winters are blisteringly cold. The Thompsons live in a rural area which offers little in the way of excitement for the children.

Marquette, Michigan

Marquette, MI is where Raina and her family live. It is located in the Upper Peninsula and is the city that receives the most snow in the entire United States.

Church

Church is one of the places the Thompsons spend a great deal of time. In addition to regular church, the boys also attend Sunday school where they receive additional education.

School

Craig goes to a small, rural school. It is not a pleasant place for Craig as he is often ridiculed, tormented, and beaten up by the bullies and jocks.

Craig and Phil's Room

Craig and Phil's bedroom is the site of many shenanigans from the shipwreck stories to the peeing episode.

Raina's House

Craig travels to Michigan to spend two weeks at Raina's house where he meets her family and learns about her life.

Church Camp

Church camp is where Craig meets Raina. Craig finds church camp to be a lot like high school.

Bible

Craig is devoted to reading his Bible on a daily basis to learn more about God.

Themes

Sin

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Throughout the story, Craig constantly seeks a middle ground but often is unable to find it.

Escapism

Escapism is one of the main themes in "Blankets" by Craig Thompson. It is first seen when Craig and Phil play in their room, trying to block out the reality of heat and/or cold by occupying themselves. The boys often pretend they are running races, being courted by sharks or fighting against a major storm at sea during which they become shipwrecked. Even as the boys get a little bit older, the need for escapism is still shared.

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Religion

Religion is at the center of "Blankets" by Craig Thompson. The main characters are devoutly religious and practice their faith in their every day lives. Some think that Mrs. Thompson is overly religious. One of Craig's classmates comments that Craig's mom is too religious and that it makes him sick.

As part of their religious training, Craig and Phil attend Sunday school. The religious teachings are often fire and brimstone. The teacher talks about how bodies are only temporary and that while some people may get sick or hurt, once they are in Heaven, everything is wonderful. Craig wants Heaven. The Sunday school teacher talks about Hell being the opposite of Heaven. The teacher talks about the horrors of hell.

Craig grows up striving for the eternal world. Whenever something bothers him, Craig reminds himself that he is only passing through and that religion, and God, will save him from his earthly troubles. Craig decides that he has not given enough time to his religion and often puts daily life aside to read his Bible and focus on learning the things he needs to know. Craig's devotion to religion is admirable but often keeps him from living his life. Craig is still hesitant to commit to going into the seminary although he is frequently encouraged to do so. It seems to Craig that he would have to leave everything to devote his life solely to religion. The pastor understands Craig's reservations but has not yet convinced Craig.

When things are difficult for Craig he returns to his religion with more devotion than ever. After Craig graduates, however, he stops going to church and begins to experience life outside the parameters of the old ways. In the end, however, Craig still has the need for religion and begins to realize how important it is and always has been in his life.



Style

Point of View

"Blankets" by Craig Thompson is written in the first-person point of view, through the eyes of the main character, Craig Thompson. The use of first person in the story works well in that the reader is able to understand the Craig's world through his words as well as his drawings. The reader is taken on a journey along with Craig and is enabled to see inside the mind of the boy as he grows into a young adult and faces many trials and tribulations.

The use of first person makes the story seem slightly less fantastic particularly in regards to Craig's drawings and thoughts. Additionally, it is vital to understand how Craig relates to the Bible and his religious teachings as well as his blossoming relationship with Raina. The use of first person gives a great deal of insight into Craig's thought processes and feelings, which are a large part of the story, from his isolation at school to his deepening love for Raina.

While third person omniscient may have enabled the reader to get a broader view of Craig's life and family, the use of first person lends an air of authenticity to the story and allows the character of Craig Thompson to become real.

Setting

The main setting in the story is the Thompson house. It is located in rural Wisconsin. Chapter II, Stirring Furnace talks a great deal about summer and winter in Wisconsin and how often the conditions can be unbearable. To distract themselves from the extreme temperatures, Craig and Phil often play games in their room.

There are four people that live in the Thompson house - Craig, Phil and their parents. The house is modest and appears to be an older farmhouse, which explains the lack of insulation and air conditioning. The author does not discuss the farmhouse as being part of a working farm although it is located next to an empty field. The empty field is where the boys discover the vanishing cave.

The first mention of the house's older condition takes place in Cubby Hole, when Phil is sentenced to spend the night in the cubby hold located next to the play room because he and Craig continuously fight. Phil is terrified of the cubby hole and both boys see the transfer as punishment.

"Uninsulated, unlit, and uninhabited, except by spiders and vermin (we heard skittering within the walls at night) and a few dust-filled cardboard boxes, the cubby hole was best left forgotten" (Chapter. 1, p. 16).



The house seems to be a typical household. As the boys get older, it becomes a gathering place for holidays. In the last scene of the book, Craig has returned home for Christmas, as have Phil and his wife. Craig goes for a long walk outside and realizes that it is important to leave one's mark, however temporary.

Language and Meaning

The language used in "Blankets" by Craig Thompson tends to be relatively informal and relies a great deal on dialogue between the characters as well as many thoughts that occur to Craig on a daily basis.

The language used by Craig and Phil when they are young children seems to be mature. Some of the language and spelling is improper and incorrect throughout the text.

The language used by Craig is very descriptive and is used in such a way that the person he is speaking to can fully understand the meaning and context of what is being said. Craig is very straightforward when he speaks, a fact that sometimes intimidates Raina. At other times, Craig simply does not speak at all and instead the reader is given insight into Craig's thought processes.

There are many examples of more difficult language, usually as it pertains to the passages of scripture included in the book. Some of the passages are presented in an archaic form while some that are shown in later chapters are more modern. In the case of the older passages, some of the language may be somewhat daunting and difficult to someone that is not accustomed to reading scripture or writing in an ancient style. The language in the book is easy to understand and is aided by Craig's artwork.

Structure

"Blankets" by Craig Thompson is a work of fiction. The book is 582 pages in length and is comprised of 9 chapters. The shortest chapter is 45 pages in length; the longest chapter is 95 pages in length. The average length of a chapter is 64 pages.

The story is written in chronological order from the time Craig is 14 years old until the time he is approximately 27. The chapters contain many flashbacks to his childhood, particularly when it involves Phil or the lessons learned in Sunday school. There are many passages in which the author quotes scripture or devotes several pages to drawings without text. Each chapter is titled with a meaningful title that is related to a part of the story, i.e., Cubby Hole, in which Phil is relocated to the cubby hole to sleep after he and Craig fight in bed. Likewise, Chapter VII refers to the song "Just Like Heaven," which Raina sings to Craig.

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The chapters are as follows:



Chapter I: Cubby Hole

Chapter II: Stirring Furnace

Chapter III: Blank Sheet

Chapter IV: Static

Chapter V: I Don't Wanna Grow Up

Chapter VI: Teen Spirit

Chapter VII: Just Like Heaven

Chapter VIII: Vanishing Cave

Chapter IX: Foot Notes



Quotes

"'Shared' is a sugar-coated way of saying we were trapped in the same bed, as we were children and had no say in the matter" (Chapter 1, p. 10).

"As a child, I thought that life was the most horrible world anyone could ever live in, and that there had to be something better" (Chapter 1, p. 38).

"For a week, our freedom was interrupted by the pretense of sharing "Christ-centered" recreational activity with other Christian youth" (Chapter 2, p. 77).

"When you are lost or are looking for someone suspected lost, the crowds of people form a threatening undertow, undermining your every effort" (Chapter 2, p. 104).

"It was nearly impossible for me to accept that a group of people could adhere to the same belief, to be in one heart and mind, much less to join together in a constructive goal" (Chapter 2, p. 106).

"And though her journey was unsuccessful, she had made a blatant gesture of her affection" (Chapter 3, p. 165).

"You know, people that live outside the Midwest say we must be crazy to live in the snow and cold, but I think we gain a lot by enduring these winters" (Chapter 3, p. 176).

"Even while visiting my friend's house, I was committed to reading my Bible each night" (Chapter 3, p. 198).

"Perhaps, I thought, instead of offering Thanksgiving, I should be apologizing - praying for forgiveness" (Chapter 5, p. 313).

"I don't believe in the Eden story because the woman gets all the blame for the fall of humanity" (Chapter 7, p. 397).

"I moved out of my parents' home shortly after my twentieth birthday" (Chapter 8, p. 529).

"Upon moving out of my parents' home, I made a conscious effort to leave my Bible behind" (Chapter 9, p. 545).

Topics for Discussion

If you were in Craig's shoes, how would you handle the bullies at school? Do you think Craig ever tells his parents or teachers about the behavior? What might happen if Craig told an adult about the situation? What could Craig do to prevent the taunting and torment? What would you do in this situation?

Explain Craig's early experiences at church camp. How is church camp different than school? How does Craig behave at church camp? Do any of the counselors notice the behavior of the jocks and bullies? Why is Craig a target? How does he respond?

Craig is prone to escapism. What is escapism? How does it help/hinder Craig? Have you ever engaged in escapism? Explain. How does Craig decide that he should stop escaping and focus more on his religious studies? What actions does Craig take?

Discuss the relationship between Craig and Phil. What is the relationship? Do the boys like each other? What are the similarities between the boys? What are the differences? Why does Craig often feel guilty about his relationship with Phil?

Examine Craig's relationship with Raina. How does it begin? What are Craig's feelings toward Raina? Does Raina return Craig's affections? What do you think will happen with the relationship? How has the relationship changed each character?

Discuss Craig's childhood. How was it different than Raina's? Does Craig look at his childhood as a type of punishment or rite of passage? Do you think Craig's parents were good parents? Explain.

Examine Raina's home life. What types of responsibilities is Raina forced to take on in regards to Ben and Laura? Is it fair? What is Raina's relationship with each? What is Raina's relationship with Julie? What do you think will happen with Julie and Dave? Do you think Raina's parents will get a divorce?