

# **Deadline Study Guide**

**Deadline by Chris Crutcher**

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# Plot Summary

Deadline by Chris Crutcher tells the story of Ben Wolf, an eighteen-year-old high school senior who is dying from a rare blood disease. He decides to forgo treatment and live his last year to the fullest.

Ben lives in an extremely small town in Idaho where everyone has known him from birth. He is very short of stature and has an uncommonly close relationship with his younger brother, Cody, who is taller than he is. When Ben goes for his sports physical, his doctor informs him of his blood disease and tells him that he has less than a year to live. Ben decides not to tell anybody, and he decides to deny treatment. The doctor is very upset by this decision, but Ben threatens to take legal action against him if he tells anybody. He has the right to make his own choices since he is eighteen years old.

Knowing that his time is limited, Ben decides to take full advantage of every moment he has left on the earth. Despite his small stature, he joins the football team instead of cross-country, where he generally excels. He also decides to try to get the attention of Dallas Suzuki, one of the smartest and most beautiful girls in the school in his opinion.

Ben is interested in literature, and he reads nonfiction. It frustrates him that teachers, especially his history teacher Mr. Lambeer, educate the students using biased material. Ben uses his own knowledge of the literature he has read to stand up to the teacher repetitively, challenging common precepts Mr. Lambeer uses in the classroom. He decides that for his class project, he will try to get a street in his mostly Caucasian town named after Malcolm X. Mr. Lambeer threatens to fail him if he does this, but Ben doesn't care because he knows he won't be going to college since he is going to die anyway.

To his great surprise, Ben develops a close relationship with Dallas, and he also becomes close to the town drunk. He agrees to meet with a counselor to placate the doctor, but the counselor can't handle his case because it affects her too emotionally. Ben doesn't appreciate her replacement and denies therapy. The more he keeps his illness a secret, the more difficult it becomes because he feels as if he is betraying those that are closest to him. The only being he can talk with about the situation is Hey-Soos, who comes to talk with him when he is in a dream state.

The football season goes extremely well, and Ben and Cody have an incredible season together. At first Ben doesn't feel any of the negative effects of his illness. As he cultivates his relationships and continues his quest for the pure truth in other areas, Ben realizes that life is more convoluted than he originally thought. He realizes it is wrong to keep his impending death away from those that love him so he tells them about it. They help him through his final days.



# Chapters 1-5

## Chapters 1-5 Summary

Deadline by Chris Crutcher tells the story of Ben Wolf, an eighteen-year-old high school senior who is dying from a rare blood disease. He decides to forgo treatment and live his last year to the fullest.

Chapter 1. Chapter one takes place in early August. The main character, Ben Wolf, intends to spend his senior year learning information that he can use in his future. He is from a very small town in Idaho that has only 943 citizens. He is very smart and has a good chance of getting into nearly any college that he wants to apply to. He is very aware that many people consider the senior year as a time to goof off, but this doesn't interest him.

Ben wants to hold his teachers accountable for the education they are offering him, which he knows is going to cause a problem, especially in Mr. Lambeer's class: U.S. government/current events. This particular teacher is known for teaching a slanted perception of reality. Ben also plans to win at the state cross country meet and win the heart of Dallas Suzuki, who he feels is way out of his league.

Approximately a month and a half before his senior year begins, and two weeks after his eighteenth birthday, Ben discovers that he might never get a chance to graduate. He goes to his routine cross-country physical, and his doctor calls to set up an appointment with Ben and his parents. He seems very serious, so Ben decides to go to the doctor on his own without his parents since he is eighteen years old. Doc Wagner has known him his whole life and doesn't want to talk with him without his parents present, and he tries to insist that Ben come back later when his parents can be present. Ben points out that he is eighteen and says he wants the information without his parents present.

The doctor breaks the news of his rare blood disease to Ben, and Ben isn't so ready to joke anymore. The doctor takes another sample just to make sure the results are accurate, but he already knows that they are since Ben was the only person whose blood the doctor had taken that day.

Trying to assimilate the information, Ben stares out the window and wonders how his mother is going to react to the news. He describes his mother's situation. She is not emotionally stable. She's either completely crashed or moving at a manic pace. When she is at home, she is generally locked in her bedroom. When she's in a manic state, she's generally out and about. His father runs a mail and freight business, taking care of Ben and his brother, Cody, when their mother is locked in the room. He balances the household when she is down and tries to take care of her with the help of the boys.

Ben states that he knows that it is unusual, but he feels as if there is a congruency with the news of his death. He always felt as if he was going to die young. He never even



pictured himself as an adult. The hard part for him is knowing how it's going to affect those that love him.

Leaving the office, Ben drives home and then goes for a run. After five miles of running, he hears a song through his headphones. The lyrics talk about life and death and waiting until you are too old to die young. He goes back to the doctor's and asks to see Dr. Wagner. Ben explains that he always knew that he was going to die young. He repeats that he doesn't want his parents to know, and the doctor is upset. Ben says he doesn't want treatment, and the doctor warns him that eventually he'll hit a point where it's too late to change his mind. Ben says that he doesn't think he is going to change his mind.

In the middle of August, the doctor takes Ben on a trip to Colorado. When they are on the airplane, he tells Ben that he doesn't agree with his decision, but knowing his family situation, he will support Ben. However, he wants to make sure the boy knows what he is facing. In Denver, they go to meet a doctor who tells Ben more about his condition. It's rare and aggressive. Without treatment, he has very little chance of survival. With treatment, life will be hard, and he still doesn't have a good chance of survival. Ben once again decides not to have any treatment, but concludes that he will take supplements, eat healthy food, sleep well, and try out for football. He is going to live as well as he can for as long as he can.

Chapter 2. In chapter two, Ben tries out for football. Veteran football players wonder why he is sitting on the bench, especially when he is so small. He's smaller than most of the freshmen who are trying out for the first time. Cody, his brother, is on the football team. Cody is a senior like Ben, even though Ben is eleven months older. His parents held him back when he was young, hoping that he would have some time to grow. Cody started school young. Even now that Ben is older, he is approximately three-quarters the size of his younger brother. Aside from that, they look so much alike that they could be twins. Cody became the school quarterback during their junior year, and everyone started calling him Big Wolf.

Coach gives his usual talk to all the players, reminding them about the rules on the field and off it. After everyone is dismissed, they go to the a special luncheon, and Ben is the only one who orders vegetables. Coach sits next to Cody and asks Ben why he is doing football instead of cross-country, where he could have excelled. He responds to Coach by saying he wants a new experience. Coach tells him that he can't promise much playing time and also wants to make sure that Ben clears up the situation with the cross country Coach.

Chapter 3. Ben is talking with Marla Dawson as chapter three opens. Seeing her is his compromise with Doc. The doctor agrees not to talk with Ben's parents if he agrees to go to a counselor, and Marla is the counselor. She points out that he is a very unusual case because she has worked with suicidal kids, terminal kids, and kids who have lost siblings and parents, but she has never worked with someone who doesn't care that he is about to die. Ben notes that Marla hasn't been a therapist for long since she is only approximately ten years older than he is.



Ben doesn't care that he is going to die, it's just that he is curious as well as slightly fearful. He is still more concerned about how it will affect those that he loves. He and Marla talk about football and his plans for the upcoming year. He states that he plans to get laid with Dallas Suzuki. At practice, Coach works the students hard. Cody compliments Ben after practice as they climb into his 1941 Chevy pickup truck that was given to Ben by Coach. After practice the next day, Ben he tells Marla that he is scared, although he knows that his early death is somehow right. He asks her if she does dreams and tells her that he has conversations with a being called Hey-Soos. He talks with Hey-Soos about what he is going to do with his life.

Chapter 4. In early September, Ben is in the office with Coach, and they're discussing football. Coach is very impressed with his performance and asks him how he plays football so well despite his small size. Ben says it's all strategy. Coach says he wants to learn more about it so that he can coach that way. Ben tells them it's all math. Coach says that he wishes that he could put Ben in to start, but Ben interrupts him and says that the other guys deserve a spot more than he does since they have been working on the team for several years. He's fine with where he is.

Coach asks how the pickup is running. Ben reflects on how Coach has become like a second dad to him. One Christmas, years before, his mother had an episode and accidentally set the house on fire during an angry fit. Coach had been dropping Ben and Cody off and was there to see the damage. He invited them to celebrate Christmas at his house the next day. Living in this small town isn't easy for Coach. Back in high school he had been in love with Becky Sanders, a girl who died in a car accident. Ben is concerned about how Coach will react to his own death, especially when he has a dead girlfriend in his past.

Ben loves watching his brother play football. Thinking about his upcoming school year, Ben decides to maximize his education. After reading a book about the school system over the summer, Ben realizes that many textbooks and teachers show more interest in getting students to love the country and honor historical figures than they are in teaching facts. He decides to make sure that everything taught to him this year is based on fact and truth, rather than hype. His teacher, Mr. Lambeer, begins to get frustrated with him since he's questioning every statement taught in his US government/current events class. Dallas comments that she wants Ben's reading list.

During the first football game of the year, Cody is doing really well, as is Sooner Cowans. Coach tells Ben that he really ought to be a starter, but Ben insists that he would be better off as a surprise for other teams. Being sick makes Ben bolder, and he finds himself talking with Dallas. She invites him to meet her in the evening at a local restaurant. Ben has another conversation with Hey-Soos while he is resting, and he tries to figure out who he is and what his life is about.

Chapter 5. Even though Coach loves having Ben on his team, others don't. Sooner Cowans is a bully who doesn't like anyone. His father beats him, and he takes his anger out on everyone else. He's fast, and he's tough. After practice, Cody asks Ben to go



over the weeks defenses with him. Ben agrees, but says it will have to be later because he knows he's going out with Dallas.

Before he goes out, he goes to a garage in the alley and knocks on the door. Rudy lives there. He's the town drunk, and Ben decides to bring him supplements. After his talk with Hey-Soos, he has decided to help others. He leaves there and goes over to The Chief to meet Dallas. She wants to interview him for the school newspaper, and it all goes well. At the end of the evening, Dallas asks him homecoming.

## Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the main character. He seems like an average, small high school boy interested in sports and looking forward to college. This helps the young adult reader connect with the main character, so it's a jolt when the reader finds out that the boy has less than a year to live. Right from the onset, the reader understands that not only is Ben facing his own death, but another challenge in his life is living with a mentally unstable mother. It's obvious that he also has the support of the people who have known him since birth in his small town. The doctor, who has known him his entire life, so badly him to fight the illness that he spends a day flying Ben to see another specialist to make sure Ben knows exactly what he is asking for when he refuses treatment.

Chapter 2. Although he is a senior and a stellar cross-country runner, Ben faces his senior year ready for new experiences. In this chapter, he is trying out for the football team. There is a great emphasis on how small Ben is, even in comparison with the incoming freshman. This is mentioned many times throughout the book, and although it's never stated outright, the reader understands that this might have something to do with the blood disease.

In this chapter, the reader is introduced to Cody, Ben's younger brother, who is bigger than Ben. They have an extremely close relationship and are both seniors. Coach talks to members of the team, and it gives insight into his personality. He is a tough coach who is going to work everybody hard. However, he is also dedicated to clean living. Coach wants the kids to focus on academics and to avoid drugs and violence. He is also the promoter of teamwork for every single member of the team. Fairness is key for Coach, and he insists that Ben talk to his cross country coach to make sure everything is all right before he joined the football team. After his speech, the team gets together to eat, and the reader sees that although Ben refuses treatment, he is doing everything he can to help himself. He's the only one in the room that orders vegetables with his other food.

Chapter 3. Ben absolutely refuses to get treatment, but he also shows that he can compromise. This is demonstrated by his accepting counseling with Marla in order to make the doctor happy. He jokes around with her, but also shows that he understands there is a bit of seriousness in his situation. His disease does affect him mentally, and



he wakes up scared, but this doesn't hold him back or make him change his mind about treatment. It just makes him curious.

Ben is much more concerned about the effect his illness will have on those closest to him than he is about his own death. He wants to shield his loved ones from the pain of his death and thinks that the right way to do this is to keep them ignorant about it. Along with the anxiety and sorrow brought on by the disease, there is also a sense of empowerment, and Ben intends to make the most out of his senior year by getting the most out of his education and going after things that before he would have thought were unattainable.

In a counseling session, Ben asked about dreams. He has begun to have conversations with Hey-Soos. It doesn't scare him off, and Marla helps them understand that it's okay to have someone to talk with about what he's going through, even if it is in the dream state.

Chapter 4. In chapter four, Ben demonstrates how intelligent he is. He doesn't brag about it, but he is already becoming a powerful football player in spite of his size. He does it by using his brain. To him, football is all about math with angles and velocity factored in for various plays. Coach wants to learn about his strategy a bit more so he can teach it in the future. This shows that Coach is dedicated to the sport and is open to new ideas. He doesn't mind if the ideas come from someone younger than he.

In this chapter, the reader also find out that Coach is more than a teacher to Ben. He was there to help the family several years ago when Ben's mother had a meltdown. Ben knows that Coach had difficulty dealing with his past as he dealt with the sudden death of a girlfriend from high school. It is something he never really recovered from.

Ben puts his academic plan into action during this chapter. He begins to have his first confrontations with his U.S. government/current events teacher. Ben feels that he is not teaching the facts as they really are, and every inaccurate statement the man teaches the class is challenged by Ben. The reader is aware that the boy has nothing to lose, and this chapter shows how the knowledge also gives Ben the courage to challenge a teacher without worry of ramifications.

Ben's strategy for taking on some of the tougher aspects of life pay off. He is doing very well on the football team and thoroughly enjoys having the opportunity to play football with his brother. He also unexpectedly gets a date with Dallas. When he talks to Hey-Soos, he spends time trying to find out if he is God, or if Hey-Soos is some fabrication of his own mind. Hey-Soos doesn't give them any answers, but challenges him to question himself until he finds his own answers.

Chapter 5. Aside from this teacher, Ben seems to get along with nearly everyone in this town. Everyone else seems to get along with each other, too. However, no place is perfect, and the town does have some bullies. Sooner is a bully, but even as he is introduced to the reader, it's explained that his own life isn't so great. His father beats him. Ben has decided to go out of his way to help others in this last year of his life. He





decides to help the town drunk; perhaps it's because he's taking better care of his own body. He is finding out that he reaches out to others, he's getting surprising results. He even gets the attention of Dallas, to his great delight. Through her interview with him, the reader is once again reminded of how seriously he takes education. He wants to learn from the past to make the present and the future better.



# Chapters 6-10

## Chapters 6-10 Summary

Chapter 6. This chapter begins with Ben talking with Hey-Soos about his time with Dallas. It moves on to a session in which Ben is discussing the event with Marla, his therapist. He jokes around a bit, but Marla encourages him to see the serious side of things. They talk about connecting with people, and Ben can tell that Marla can really relate. She encourages him to stay on task. He tells her that he's starting to feel some grief in spite of the fact that he knows he should be deliriously happy. Marla tells them that is normal.

Coach puts the team through grueling practices, but it's beginning to pay off as they beat other teams. Sooner picks a fight with players in the locker room, but Cody is able to divert him. Ben is proud of his brother. Cody and Ben go home, and as they enter the house, they noticed that their mom is on a tear, cleaning. This always means that a crash is going to come. Ben's dad once tried to explain to him that there was nothing anyone could do about it. It was just part of her illness.

The dance goes well, and Ben enjoys the football hero treatment. After the dance, he goes to Dallas' house and discovers that no one is home. Her mom has taken young Joe Henry to the dentist, and they were staying overnight in a hotel. The two begin to kiss, then have sex. Ben realizes it's very late, and he knows he has to get home, but he doesn't want to offend her. Before he has a chance to figure out what to say, she tells him it's time for him to go home. He drives to the lake on this way home and wants to dream up Hey-Soos, but he can't get into the near dream state that is required since he isn't in bed. He thinks about his developing relationship with Dallas and is bothered by the fact that he's going to have to leave her.

Chapter 7. This chapter begins well into September. Ben is in his class with Lambeer, who is assigning a class project. He stops by Ben's desk and asks him what he is reading. Ben tells him that he is reading "The Autobiography of Malcolm X". Ben says Malcolm is very interesting. The teacher points out that Malcolm had some very radical ideas. At lunch that day, Dallas comes over to Ben and asks him when he is taking her out again. He says he will after her volleyball game. He also tells her that he plans on going to her volleyball game, and she tells him that he had better. He loves watching her game and seeing her in action. The team loses, and she is depressed. She doesn't even want him to walk her to the door at the end of the evening.

Ben stops in on Rudy and finds him looking much better. Rudy notices that he has a book in his back pocket, and asks to see it. Ben shows him his copy of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X". Rudy shows Ben that he has his own copy. During conversation, Ben finds out that Rudy was once a Catholic priest. Ben asks him questions about it, but Rudy does not want to talk. He does, however, agreed to talk a little bit more about Malcolm X at a later date.



Ben spends a lot of time together planning strategies for The Horseshoe Bend game. He and Cody know there's a good chance that scouts will be there, and this might be Cody's way to get into college. Ben understands different ways to read the plays and counteract them, and he shares this information with Cody.

Things are getting a bit more complicated for Ben. He is eager to have a discussion with Hey-Soos. When they talk, Hey-Soos tells him that he will have time to do what he needs to do. They talk about Rudy, and Hey-Soos finishes the conversation by telling Ben to use his instincts with everyone he deals with. On the day of the big game, the team finds out that Sooner is out with a broken collarbone. Cody is under a lot of pressure to make things good at Horseshoe Bend without Sooner's help.

Chapter 8. It's the day of the big game, and everybody is preparing for it. Sooner tells the team that he's not sure if they can win without him there. Cody tells him that it will be tough without him, but they'll do their best to win for him. Sooner tells Cody that his collarbone was broken by his father who was drunk. Ben and Cody agreed that they'd rather have their crazy mom than a dad who beat them.

The game is tough, and they play well. Cody and Ben run a play that seems impossible, but it works, and they are the heroes of the game. Their mom is at the game, and she is thrilled. When they get home, they find out that talent scouts are already beginning to call. The boys are getting ready for the homecoming dance, and their mother begins to show signs of crashing. Dad tells him that he will take care of her, and he tells them to go on to the dance.

Chapter 9. Ben drives his pickup to Dallas's house to pick her up, and she looks beautiful. He is looking forward to a really good night with her. Since there are so few people in the town, everyone in town is invited, and the music is played to please everyone. Ben looks at everything with a new light and wants to be around longer. He is very aware that this might be the best night of his life. He feels the clash of mortality and immortality as he enjoys the pleasures of the evening while knowing that it won't last and he will soon be gone.

When Cody walks into the gym, he is welcomed as a true football hero. He walks over to Ben and tells him that the evening is really Ben's. As Ben heads out to the truck, Coach hollers after him and tells him that he needs to put him in as a starter. When they get to Dallas's house, she invites him in. She tells him that there is good news and bad news. The good news is that she wants him to stay with her for the night, but the bad news is that she does not want to have sex. He is happy to be with her so he stays.

She asks him if he ever thinks about the future, then she asks him if he wondered why she had sex with him the other night then turned him out. She told him that she was testing herself to see if she could have sex. Her uncle raped her when she was young, and she wanted to see if that ruined sex for her. Ben tries to sort things out in his head, and as he drifts in and out of sleep, Hey-Soos talks with him again. Hey-Soos brings up the fact that it was a tough truth that Dallas told him, and it was a big thing that he still



stuck around. It got Ben thinking about the truth he was holding back from her. It's getting very complicated because he thinks he loves her.

Chapter 10. The next morning, Ben goes back to his house, and his dad comments on his clothing, which is obviously from the night before. His dad tells him that his mother has crashed, and he mentions the sex talk, but Ben tells him that he already talked about things with Cody. He tells his dad that he doesn't have to worry about the fact that he might have gotten Dallas pregnant that night. He tells his dad that they used the safest type of sex - abstinence. Dad is relieved.

Ben asks his dad what his plans are for the future when he and Cody are off to college. He wonders if his dad is going to split with his mom, but his dad makes it very clear that he signed on for the real deal, and will not leave his mother. He knows that his wife is just sick, and he plans to stick with her.

In early October, Ben is causing more controversy in his class with Lambeer. The teacher asks him what his project is going to be, and he says that he is going to try to have a street in the town named after Malcolm X. The teacher tells them that he would not want this is a project. Later, Cody teases Ben about the project. Ben tells him that he's just trying to make a point. Cody tells Ben that he should concentrate on football and leave his social work for times in the future. After practice, Ben goes for a counseling session and receives a note from his counselor telling him that she can't handle the sessions with him.

Ben talks to Rudy more about Malcolm X. The conversation turns to churches, and Ben asks Rudy why he left the church. Rudy once again says he doesn't want to talk about it so they begin talking about Malcolm X again and how he relates to society today.

## Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Chapter 6. Spending time with Dallas is a real eye-opener for Ben. He states several times that he never pictured himself getting old and that he isn't worried about dying. However, spending time with her makes him wish that his life wasn't so short-term. He jokes around with the therapist at first but begins to get more serious, and she completely relates. Just as he shows concern for his parents, Ben is concerned about how she is reacting to his situation.

He doesn't question his choice to avoid treatment, but he's starting to realize that life is bittersweet. Every time he enjoys something, he realizes that the experience comes along with a bit of sadness since it won't last. On the football field, both brothers are doing well. Sooner tries to bully some teammates in the locker room, and Cody diplomatically intervenes. Instead of getting jealous, Ben is proud of him. Later in the evening, Cody needs Ben's help analyzing plays. This chapter shows how the two brothers balance each other. They support each other without jealousy and try to help each other become better people.



At the dance, Ben gets a taste of the limelight, and he really likes it. The evening only gets better when Dallas invites Ben home and they have sex. It was one of his goals before he died, and he achieves it. However, he does it with someone he really cares about. He also understands that he might not be treating Dallas fairly since the two obviously have the connection and he isn't going to be around very long.

Chapter 7. Ben's interest in learning is causing controversy in the classroom. He is impressed with the radical ideas of Malcolm X, and Malcolm inspires him. Ben's Interest in "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" broadens his horizons in several parts of this novel. It helps him connect with Rudy, the town drunk. When he begins talking with the man, Ben learns that there is more to him than anyone has ever guessed.

Life is getting more complicated for Ben. This is mirrored on the football field right before the big game. The team has to deal with the unexpected complication of having one of their major starters have to sit out the game. Sooner has a broken collarbone.

Chapter 8. Homecoming is a big deal for any high school graduate, and it's even more of a big deal for Ben since it is his first time on the football team, and it's most likely the last time he will be alive for homecoming. Getting ready for the game, Sooner tells him that his father broke his collarbone. Cody and Ben empathize with him and show the closeness of the shared experience they have with their own mother. They agree that they would rather have their moody mother than a father who beats them.

The game is anything any football player could ask for. The Wolf brothers win the game through a seemingly impossible play that works because they know how to read each other. It's a triumph for the entire family, including their mother. Ben is used to helping his mother when she's having a hard time. That night she crashes, but their father tells the boy that he will take care of her. It's a foreshadowing of what will happen in household when Ben is no longer around to help take care of his mother.

Chapter 9. The homecoming dance seems like a dream. Dallas looks beautiful, and the football players get a lot of attention. Ben soaks it in. When Cody walks in, there is a thunderous ovation, and Ben feels intense pride in his brother. Coach gives him good news about future football games, and Dallas invites him to her house. It's a perfect night. Then she tells him he's serious truth that is very difficult to share. It really messes with the way Ben is thinking and causes him to reflect on decisions he made. He realizes that he needs to tell her the truth about his situation.

Chapter 10. When Ben gets home, his father is waiting for him. Their close relationship is shown when the father begins to have the sex talk with his son, and it also demonstrates the super close relationship between brothers when he tells him that he doesn't need to have the talk with his dad since his brother has already talked with him. Ben shows concern for his mother when he asks his dad what's going to happen with her after he and Cody are gone. The father shows his dedication to his wife by saying he's going to stick with her no matter what. Ben is reassured by this and knows that his dad will stick by him no matter what, also, after this statement.



As the school year goes on, Ben is getting more frustrated with his teacher for not teaching historical facts accurately. He knows his class project is controversial but wants to open the eyes of people in the community. Even as he fights for truth, he is put down by those around him. His therapist has backed out of their sessions because she can't handle the experience. Ben understands why she did it, but he doesn't appreciate the reminder of how serious the situation is. He visits with Rudy, who is cleaning up his act. They get into a discussion about religion and political stances, but he won't discuss much else. Ben is intrigued.



# Chapters 11-15

## Chapters 11-15 Summary

Chapter 11. Ben is upset with Hey-Soos as this chapter opens. They're having a conversation, and he is accusing Hey-Soos for not caring whether or not he lives or dies since he's not try to persuade him to go through treatment. Hey-Soos reminds him that it's not too late to get treatment, but Ben decides to stick with his initial reaction to the illness and forgo treatment. Hey-Soos encourages him to see life as if it's a video game. He should play the best that he can, but not to worry too much about other people. Hey-Soos explains that people are not always what you expect.

In early November, Ben finds that football isn't as easy as it was a month ago. Now they have to contend with the weather. The team is in very good shape, and scouts are attending the games. Coach thinks there is a good chance that Cody will get scholarships. He also thinks that Ben should be able to get some credit, but Ben tells him not to worry about it. Coach tells Ben that he heard rumors about the boy's activity in Lambeer's class and tells him to be careful since the teacher is known for using grades as a weapon. Ben tells him not to worry about it.

Ben goes to Dallas's house nearly every day. She spends a lot of time with Joe Henry, and Ben enjoys spending time with him, too. He tells Dallas that he likes the little guy, and she seems to appreciate it. When he gets home one night, his father asks him if there is something that they should know about because he's acting different, more focused. He reassures his father, telling him that he's okay. Ben is still concerned about how the news of his impending death is going to hit his mentally unstable mother.

Chapter 12. Even though Coach is very serious about sports on the field, he still pushes academia. He encourages the students to think about the work they do and to be logical in thinking. Ben asks if he can change his book to "The Autobiography of Malcolm X". Sylvia, a student in the class, states that she doesn't think anyone should be allowed to read the book. They get on the discussion of book burning and, to prove a point, Coach goes to the school library and grabs a copy of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X", takes it outside, and burns it. He knows it's not the only copy that the school has, and he pays for the book before he does it. It's a lesson on democracy.

Ben has another conversation with Hey-Soos. They talk about the book burning, and Ben finds that he wants somebody real that he can talk with. He expresses his concern about Dallas in the future, and talks about her experiences with her uncle and how difficult that must have been. He also talks about football and how he is feeling. He's making a point of eating well and taking supplements and feels pretty healthy so far. He wants this last year to be normal, and Hey-Soos points out that his situation isn't normal. Ben decides that he still doesn't want to tell anyone what's happening until after the football season is over.



Chapter 13. In late November, the football team goes against Timberline High School. The other team is very talented, and their key players are identical twin Nez Perce Indians. They play at Boise State where Cody is likely to go to college. Sooner offends the captains of the other team. It's a huge tactical error, and the other team shows no mercy. They lose the game. Ben wishes he had one more game, but he still appreciative of the season that he did have.

Ben goes to visit Rudy after the game, and they talk about Malcolm again. They discuss the way that Malcolm X threatened the power structure, and Ben asks if that's what Rudy did with the church. Rudy says he'll talk about that another time. Later, at Dallas's house, she asks him if he thinks they have a chance of being together in the future. She asks if his love for her is unconditional. She asks Ben if he would still love her if he found out that Joe Henry was her son, not her brother. He is the result of the rape by her uncle. She was only thirteen years old. Ben is stunned, and she asks him if he wants to leave her. He says that he is staying. She tells them that she plans on going public with the news after graduation. Dallas says that she hates secrets and says that they kill people. Ben tells her that he will be there for her unless something drastic happens. He realizes he has gotten himself deeper into a mess by not speaking about his illness.

Chapter 14. It's Thanksgiving day, and Dad, Cody, and Ben are watching a football game and eating holiday nuts. Mom is crashed again, and Dad isn't very good at cooking. Coach arrives at their house bringing in entire Thanksgiving meal.

In early December, the football season is over and everyone is focusing more on academics. Ben is still coming to terms with the idea that Joe Henry is Dallas's child. He wonders if the boy knows that she is his mother. He tries to imagine what she has been through. He is thinking this while he is in Lambeer's class, and his thoughts are interrupted as Lambeer asks him if he has considered changing his project.

Ben says that he decided not to change it since Malcolm X is part of current events. He points out that prejudice and racism are rampant as shown through the whole Hurricane Katrina situation in the World Trade Center situation. The teacher tells him that he has a good chance of receiving a failing grade for the project if he chooses to go with it, and this could result in a failing grade for the course, which would cost him his diploma. Ben says that would be all right since he would only be sacrificing three months since he could make up the grade during summer school somewhere else. Dallas backs him up by talking about her grandparents' treatment in the United States when they were sent to a relocation camp during World War II even though her family had never set foot in Japan.

Ben knows he is choosing this project partially as an opportunity to get to know Rudy better. He goes to talk with him about it and finds Rudy completely wasted. Rudy tells him that he doesn't want to clean up his act and wants him to stay away. This makes Ben very mad, and he smashes all the bottles he can find in the room. By the time he goes home, he is exhausted and overwhelmed by everything happening to him. As he





drifts off to sleep, he has another conversation with Hey-Soos. Ben tries to talk around telling the truth to the ones he loves, but the idea is not flying with Hey-Soos.

Chapter 15. The next morning, Ben goes to check on Rudy. The man tells him that he has to stay away from him. When Ben asks what is wrong, Rudy confesses that he is a child molester who joined the priesthood to keep himself away from kids. Ben is shocked, but he listens to Rudy's story. Rudy left the priesthood when he couldn't resist temptation and became a drunk so that he would be incapable of harming anyone else. Ben doesn't know how to deal with the new information.

A few days later Ben meets with a new therapist, and he can't stand him. The man doesn't want to accept his decision to avoid treatment for his illness and threatens to turn him in. The therapist gives him a small assignment, to write down things that he would like to do while he is still on Earth. This sounds like a fine plan to Ben. The next time he talks to Hey-Soos, he asks why he didn't warn him about the therapist or Rudy. Hey-Soos helps them see things in a different light. Rudy really isn't a danger to him, but he might in danger himself. Hey-Soos encourages him to think about himself and what his impact on others might be.

## Chapters 11-15 Analysis

Chapter 11. As Ben discusses things with Hey-Soos, he realizes that he's getting more of an education than he thought he would this year. He is learning about people and life. Things are often much more than one would expect.

When Ben tried out for the football team, he was just trying to do something new in spite of his small size. He didn't realize that the team might go to Regionals and possibly State. The season kept extending as if it were a gift to the boy who dared to try. Because the season goes so well, Ben gets to see colleges recruiting his brother. It's a small sign that things are going to be okay even when he's gone.

Things are also going well with Dallas. Ben spends a lot of time at her house playing with Joe Henry. At home, Ben's father comments and the change in him. Cody has noticed it, also. Ben decides to keep quiet about the truth, though, since he is still concerned about how his mother is going to react to the news.

Chapter 12. The reader already knows that Ben respects education and that he loves Coach. In this chapter, the reader sees a connection which can explain even more why Ben has so much admiration for Coach. The man is dedicated to academic studies even during the football season. He is also very open-minded. He has no problem with Ben reading the Malcolm X book, and when another student voices the opinion that the book is bad, Coach turns the situation into a lesson on democracy and book burning. He knows how to reach the students and keep an open mind.

In the talk with Hey-Soos after this event, Ben concludes that one can't really judge people by how they look. He is speaking about Sylvia who looks good but bothers him with her ideas. Hey-Soos opens up Ben's mind to be more accepting of all types of



people. Hey-Soos encourages him to push the edges of social thought and concepts. The conversation wraps around what is normal and what is not, and Ben is once again faced with the fact that what he is going through is not normal so he shouldn't expect other people to treat it that way when he tells him.

Chapter 13. It's the day of the big game in Boise. Ben knows that it's going to be a huge day for his brother. The project he has chosen to do for Mr. Lambeer's class is about breaking down the walls of prejudice and stereotyping in the town. In this chapter, the reader sees that this is an obvious problem. The captains of the other team are brothers who are American Indians. Sooner offends them right from the start of the game by raising a hand in the air as if he's being sworn into a courtroom and saying, "How, Chief." This sets the stage for disaster in the game, but Cody still plays well, and a scout approaches him. Ben is comforted by his brother's opportunities for the future.

Ben has a good meeting with Rudy, where he is learning more about the past and Malcolm X. Things are lining up and the world seems seeming relatively peaceful until Dallas springs news on him that she is really Joe Henry's mother. That's unsettling enough, but she follows the announcement by saying how much she hates secrets, and that's very unnerving for Ben. Not only does he have a secret, but she is sharing her secret thinking that he is going to be around for a long time, and he isn't.

Chapter 14. This chapter opens on Thanksgiving Day. It isn't as bad as the Christmas a few years before, but it's not the typical American family celebration, and the mother crashes again. Similar to the Christmas years before, Coach comes to help the family, but does it in a way in which no one is embarrassed.

In class, Mr. Lambeer talks more about Ben's project and tries to talk him out of it. Ben stands firm in spite of threats that he will fail the class so he can't graduate. He is empowered by the thought that it doesn't matter since he won't be able to go to college anyway. He is pleased when Dallas chimes in to support him. Ben, in addition to opening people's eyes about prejudice, also uses his project to get to know Rudy more. Their last meeting went well, and Rudy taught him a lot. This time when he goes to visit Rudy, he finds that Rudy has slipped back into his alcoholism. This depresses Ben. He thinks about Rudy and his mother and gets depressed when he realizes that he isn't helping anyone.

Chapter 15. Ben tries to look at people's situations with a new perspective and goes back to help Rudy. Rudy springs a truth on him that completely shocks him. It makes Ben reconsider what he knows and really doesn't know about the people in his life. After talking with Hey-Soos once again, he also reconsiders what he really knows and doesn't really know about himself and his impact on other people.



# Chapters 16-20

## Chapters 16-20 Summary

Chapter 16. Ben makes this list of things he wants to do before he dies. It's not a very serious list. He is writing it because he wants to get rid of the new therapist. After leaving the list in a note for the therapist, he goes to Mr. Lambeer's classroom. The teacher tells him that he can't do his project because the school bond levy is coming up, and the project would make them look as if they weren't serious about education. Ben argues that the lesson is very important and states that he will go about it in the proper manner. During class, he announces to the teacher that he is going to do the project anyway. Lambeer blows up in front of the class, and Ben is sent to the library for the rest of the period.

The teacher and the principal tried to persuade him to change his project. They don't realize that he doesn't care whether or not he will get his diploma. They both try to persuade him to not do the project. Ben reminds them that he wants to get the most that he can out of this last year of high school. They tell him he can't do it. He tells them that he's going to do it anyway, and he will write it up. He will hand the project in, and he will take whatever grade they give him.

Chapter 17. Ben brings Rudy some more supplements, and Rudy is surprised to see him back. He thought Ben was going to call the cops on him. Ben tells him that he is really messed up, but he appreciates that Rudy told him the truth. He states that he still can run faster than Rudy. Ben says he is so going to visit with Rudy because he knows he's safe since the truth is out. This reminds him of the importance of telling the truth.

Ben drives home, and on his way home he notices the lights on at Coach's house. He stops in, and while they were talking, he asks Coach about the girlfriend who had died. Coach tells Ben he wishes he had been prepared more. Coach tries to encourage Ben to limit his Malcolm X issue to his English class, but Ben says he can't do it. He points out the false information that Lambeer teaches in his class. After driving back to his house, Ben decides to go out and run. He takes a course he knows well, but finds that he is easily fatigued. His body is starting to show signs of decline. It hits him hard mentally, and he realizes that he doesn't want life to end so suddenly. On Christmas Eve Cody is making plans for the future and is excited about it. Ben wants to tell him what is going on, but he decides not to since it's Christmas Eve.

Chapter 18. On Christmas Eve, Ben is really regretting that he decided to keep his health a secret. Hey-Soos talks with him about it, and points out that God knows what is going on. He also reminds Ben that there is only one universal thing, and it's truth. Ben determines to tell his loved ones what is going on. It's going to be difficult, but he knows where to start.



Ben goes to visit Rudy, and the man shares some of his grief and shame and guilt over his past. Ben tells him that he is still willing to be his friend despite what he did. On January 2, Ben goes to talk with Coach. He tells him that he is dying from a blood disease. Coach is shocked and doesn't understand why he is kept it quiet until Ben points out that he never would have been allowed to play football. He tells Coach that no one else knows yet. He is telling Coach because of his past experience with death. Coach says he will be there for Ben. He also says he'll help the people who love him understand what is going on after Ben talks with them.

Chapter 19. Coach helps Ben decide who should know his situation. He will definitely tell Cody and Dallas, but doesn't know what to do about his parents since it could send his mother over the edge. Ben goes to visit Dallas, and she is making spaghetti for Joe Henry. He tells her that he has bad news—that he is dying. She asks him when he found this out and what he is doing about it. She also realizes that he knew throughout their entire relationship, and she is very angry with him. She kicks him out of the house.

As he drives away, he thinks about his situation. He doesn't know how he's going to make it without her by his side. The night is very cold. When he gets to his house, Ben decides to go for a run so he can do some thinking. Ben realizes he needs to tell his brother the news before he finds out from someone else. That night he talks with Hey-Soos, and they discuss how difficult the situation is. In mid-January, Ben is going around town trying to get support for his Malcolm X Avenue project. It's not going well. The only signature he has on his petition is his own.

Chapter 20. Ben's attitude is beginning to change. It's difficult for him going to school and see Dallas without her acknowledging him. He's bracing himself for his talk with Cody, and he starts to become aggressive because he isn't feeling very well. He begins to wear his running clothes instead of regular clothes so that he can escape his reality and go running no matter what time of day it is. At lunch, Cody asks him why he isn't sitting with Dallas. He says they're taking a break from each other. He tells Cody that they need to have a serious talk. Ben tells him the news when they are back at home sitting in his room talking after midnight.

Cody remembers that Ben always used to talk about dying young. He understands why Ben made the choice he did, and he tells him that he's going to stand by him although he wishes that Ben had told him it from the start. Cody expresses regret that they aren't going to play football together in the future. Ben says he will still be playing with him in his head, then Cody shows Ben that he'll actually listen for him in his heart.

Ben can't sleep so he goes to visit Rudy at three in the morning. He finds the man lying on his cot with an envelope sticking out of the cover of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" next to him. He committed suicide and left a note for Ben. Looking at him, Ben realizes that he is going to look like that soon. The man looks calm. Ben calls 911 to report the death, and there are no problems. In the note, Rudy tells Ben that he just couldn't live like that any longer. He does tell him that he appreciated his friendship, and that he should not feel connected to his death in any way. He asks Ben to keep the



secret of his past hidden if at all possible. Ben feels that that is right and destroys the letter.

## Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Chapter 16. Up until this point in the book, Ben is learning how to cope with this new situation, trying to define the proper time to let the truth out, and he is trying to understand those around him. In this chapter, he seems to have found himself. With confidence, he turns away the new therapist and stands up to his teacher. He does it respectfully and with a solid plan.

Chapter 17. Ben shows that he is listening to Hey-Soos and is willing to look at people from a different perspective. Ben goes back to help Rudy, and the reader can see his impact on the town drunk. The whole situation gets Ben thinking more about death and truth. He goes to Coach, who has experienced death and had his life changed by it, to get some input. Ben starts feeling some tiredness and realizes that it's the beginning of the end. He has to come up with a plan for telling his loved ones. However, he doesn't want to act right away since it's Christmas.

Chapter 18. The holidays are over, and Ben knows it's time to start telling people. It's extremely difficult. The first person he tells is Rudy, and it comes up naturally in a conversation about death. Next he goes to Coach, who offers him the support that he knows he needs. Ben is content with his decision to hold off the news until after the football season, especially after Coach admits to him that he probably wouldn't have let him play.

Chapter 19. Although he already had some support, it is so difficult to decide who to tell about the disease. He still isn't sure whether or not he should tell his parents. The next person he tells is Dallas, and she feels as betrayed as Ben thought she might. She kicks him out, and he feels the loss deeply. Things seem to be getting even more difficult. Aside from breaking the news of his illness to others, his project is going just like he thought it would. The people in town don't want to support it.

Chapter 20. Ben is beginning to feel physically weaker, and he still has to tell his brother the news. Dallas is avoiding him, and he realizes he needs to stop hiding the truth from his brother. Cody is bothered by the fact that he didn't come straight to him, but he also understands. He recalls how Ben thought that he was going to die young, and he offers support in any way Ben needs it. As the brothers talk together, they keep in mind that while they will be physically separated, they will always have a bond in the heart. The whole situation is so stressful that Ben can't sleep, so he goes to visit Rudy. The man has committed suicide, and Ben gets his first visual of what that really looks like. The letter he left behind reassures Ben, and he isn't afraid of death.



# Chapters 21-Epilogue

## Chapters 21-Epilogue Summary

Chapter 21. On the way to school, Ben stops off at the sheriff's office, as requested. The sheriff compliments him on his football games, and Ben has the thought that the football season means more to people than Rudy's life. When he gets to school, Ben remains in the truck a bit longer as a wave of the fatigue rushes over him. This is happening more frequently. In school, he has a hard time concentrating in class, and he is still working on his project, without much success. In class, Mr. Lambeer once again argues with him about the paper, and a student encourages him to get Ben out of the class. Dallas defends Ben. Mr. Lambeer kicks him out anyway, sending him to the library. As he sits in the library, Ben does some thinking and realizes he needs to talk to his parents. That evening, he tells them. His dad moans. His mother's shoulders begin to shake, and Dad moves over to her telling Ben that it's okay to leave. He'll handle his wife.

Chapter 22. By early February, things are beginning to become a little clearer. It's still difficult, but Ben is starting to feel the disease more often. Even with his supplements he's having a hard time getting the energy to sit in classes. Coach lets him rest in his office in the gym and covers for him. It's very difficult seeing Dallas, knowing that he betrayed her, especially after she had been betrayed by her uncle. Life on Earth is tough.

Ben has another conversation with Hey-Soos about his situation. He talks about Rudy's situation, and when Hey-Soos leaves, Ben has a feeling that he won't see him again until he dies. Ben goes over to Dallas' house. He apologizes to her for not telling her what was going on and explains that he was scared. She still doesn't know if she can accept the situation, but she lets him play ball with Joe Henry.

In mid-February, Mr. Lambeer is questioning Ben on the two days of class that he missed that week. He wonders if that has something to do with the project. He questions Ben's loyalty to the people in the town. This bothers Ben, who points out that all he wants is to learn good information during his senior year, and he wants to be taught the truth. The two get into a big argument about things that should be taught and perspective. Mr. Lambeer accuses him of thinking he is very smart, but lacking experience. Ben tells him that he will never get the experience because he's going to die.

Chapter 23. Ben can't believe that he told everyone that he is going to die. Most of the students are avoiding him, but Cody sticks close the afternoon after he tells everyone. When he goes to school in the morning, the hallways are quiet. He finds out that Sooner Cowans was killed in a car wreck the night before. The principal talks to the student body to help them come to terms with the sudden death. Ben decides to go for a run or walk, whatever he can handle. His brother asked if he wanted him to come with him, but he declines.



He goes out and listens to the song on his iPod about being too old to die young. He thinks about death and how no one could have guessed that Sooner had a death sentence, also. He realizes he has an advantage by knowing. He hopes he will make it to the end of the school year so that the student body doesn't have to deal with the situation they dealt with that day. He and Cody go to Sooner's funeral, but Cody can't sit through it. After he leaves, Ben thinks he hears wailing and realizes that the situation is extremely difficult. Dallas comes and sits by him, but soon leaves without talking with him. He doesn't know what that means.

Chapter 24. In the weeks following Sooner's funeral, Ben declines rapidly. He is exhausted, and his dad stays with him when he can't go to school. He is losing weight. Cody has agreed to go to Boise State, where he will be a starter as a freshman. He's nervous about it, but Ben knows his brother will be fine. Coach visits regularly. Every once in a while Ben has a good day, and on one of these days he asks Cody to take him to Mr. Cowans' house. He tells the man that he thinks he's going to see Sooner in a short period of time. He asks him if there's anything he wants to tell Sooner. The man tells him to tell his son that he sorry that he broke his collarbone.

Ben drifts in and out of reality. He thinks he sees Dallas next to him, and it makes him feel good. He is starting to feel a connection to the next world. Ben told the principal that he would speak at graduation but realizes that he isn't going to make it. He jots some notes down. He hopes Cody will talk for him. Marla comes to visit him and apologizes for leaving him. He tells her that she probably did the right thing. Dallas visits him, and she apologizes to him. He tells her there is nothing to apologize for. He is happy they are together again and asks her to sleep next to him.

Epilogue. At graduation Cody gives the speech that Ben wrote before he died. In the speech he explains the reasons that he chose to die the way he did. He talks about the importance of getting as much out of life as you can, and he also talks about Sooner. Ben encourages the students to name a street in town Malcolm X Avenue.

The last pages of the book highlight Joe Henry in a jogging stroller with Cody and Dallas running together behind him. The news that the boy is her son is public knowledge now. The teens talk about their plans for the future since they are going to the same college, and they discuss the possibility of living together with no strings attached so they can both help take care of Joe Henry. At the top of the bluff, Dallas takes out Ben's iPod and listens to the too old to die young song. As they jog home, they pass a street that has a handmade plywood sign that says Malcolm X Avenue.

## Chapters 21-Epilogue Analysis

Chapter 21. The day after Rudy dies, Ben goes to the courthouse. His conversation with the sheriff gets him thinking about the value of life. The man seemed more interested in talking about the football game than he did in dealing with the life of the town drunk. That day Ben has a hard time concentrating because the events of the past few months have Ben really thinking about people and their lives. He thinks about factors in their



lives that contributed to the way each person ended out. As he struggles with the meaning of everything, he realizes he can't keep the truth from his parents any longer. They are very distressed at the news, and when the mother starts to fall apart, the father says he will take care of it. It's a foreshadowing of a future without Ben.

Chapter 22. Dealing with illness and its effect on his loved ones is more difficult for Ben than the illness itself, although that is hard to handle, also. He is getting more tired, but because of the support of those who love them, he has opportunities to rest. Ben is feeling the clock ticking and is discouraged by his lack of impact on those around him, especially Rudy. Hey-Soos helps him put things into perspective. Ben realizes that he is not going to last much longer. He goes to apologize to Dallas and plays with Joe Henry. He hopes that Joe Henry will remember him, hoping that he had an impact on the little boy's life. In school, Ben gets into another argument with Mr. Lambeer. As the argument escalates, Ben accidentally tells the class that he is dying.

Chapter 23. This chapter offers an interesting perspective on death. Just as everyone is reeling with the news that Ben is going to be dead soon, another boy in the school dies suddenly in a car accident. Even though Sooner was a bully, his death is hard to take. Ben realizes that he is fortunate to have the chance to say goodbye to people. He is reminded that one never knows what to expect in life. Cody has to leave the funeral, and Ben gets some support as Dallas comes to sit in Cody's place. It is confusing to Ben.

Chapter 24. Ben declines rapidly, but he has a peace about the whole situation. He realizes his family is going to do all right without him. He is saddened by the thought that he is going to go, but he is comforted by the fact that things will go on for those he loves. Dallas comes to visit and they clear up all the tension between themselves.

Epilogue. Cody has to read the speech that Ben had written for graduation since Ben is no longer living. It wraps up the truth of what Ben learned in his final year. The book ends on a positive note, with Cody and Dallas looking towards the future, and the reader understands that Ben will always be a part of them, and it's right that they should move on.





# Characters

## Ben Wolf

Ben Wolf is an eighteen-year-old high school senior who excels in cross country. He is very small compared to others—even smaller than the high school freshman. Ben finds out that he has an aggressive blood disease that is going to kill him within a year. This doesn't scare him, since he is never pictured himself living beyond his youth. However, he is distressed by the effect his death will have on those that he loves.

A smart boy, Ben is determined to get the most out of his last year of life. He strives to get the best education possible and challenges his teachers to teach the truth. Since he knows he is going to die anyway, he tries things that he might have thought impossible previously such as dating the girl of his dreams and trying out for the football team in spite of the size.

## Cody Wolf

Cody Wolf is Ben's brother. He is eleven months younger than Ben, but he is quite a bit taller. Otherwise, they look very much alike. Because of the placement of their birthdays, they both end up being in the same class. Their relationship is extremely close, and Cody has dreams of playing football with his brother and going to college with him. He is a starter on the football team, and he is in the running for a good college scholarship. While he plays football well, he needs his brothers help to analyze plays.

One of Cody's greatest strengths is his kindness and diplomacy. He knows how to diffuse a tense situation with a few choice words. Cody is saddened by the fact that his brother didn't share the news of his death with him immediately, but he understands. He is there to offer any support that is within his power to offer.

## Mr. Lambeer

Mr. Lambeer is Ben's US government/current events teacher who is constantly arguing with Ben.

## Coach

Coach is the football coach, English teacher, and close family friend. He is like a second dad to Ben.



## **Dad**

Ben's dad runs a mail and freight business. He is very dedicated to his wife and sons.

## **Mom**

Ben's mom has a mental illness that makes her manic for periods of time then sends her crashing. She spends a lot of time locked in her room when she crashes.

## **Dallas Suzuki**

Dallas Suzuki is the girl that Ben falls in love with.

## **Hey-Soos**

Hey-Soos is a being that comes to Ben when he is in a semi-dream state.

## **Sooner Cowans**

Sooner Cowans is the school bully who is also on the football team.

## **Rudy McCoy**

Rudy McCoy is the town drunk who Ben tries to help. The man knows a lot about Malcolm X.

## **Doc Wagner**

Doc Wagner is the doctor who told the boy about his illness.

## **Marla Dawson**

Marla Dawson is the therapist who quit on Ben because she couldn't handle the situation.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Trout, Idaho**

This is Ben's home town.

### **Trout High**

This is Ben's high school. It has ninety-three students.

### **Denver, Colorado**

This is where Doc Wagner takes Ben to talk with a specialist so he could see what he is dealing with.

### **Boise**

This is where they played a football game.

### **Grey Ghost**

This is the name of the pickup truck Ben drove. It was given to him by Coach.

### **The Chief**

This is a restaurant where Dallas and Ben ate.

### **Dallas' House**

Ben was honored to be invited into her house, and he spent the night there.

### **Ben's House**

Ben's house was where his mother frequently locked herself in her room. It's where he and Cody talked a lot.



## **Football Field**

The football field is where Ben spent some of the best moments of his senior year with his brother.

## **Bluff**

Ben ran to get his thoughts in order. He sometimes ran to the top of the bluff.



# Themes

## Death

Death is a very obvious theme in the novel *Deadline*. Right in the first few pages, the reader understands that Ben has a very short time to live, even though he is only a high school senior. He has a disease that is taking over his body, and he chooses to avoid drastic intervention. It seems that Ben is facing a harsh reality coping with death at such a young age, but the author makes a very clear point of having Ben accept death gracefully to a point where he has never even imagined himself doing anything other than dying young.

The shock of Ben's death is put in perspective with the even more shocking death of a classmate who is killed unexpectedly in a car crash. Suddenly, having a year to prepare for death seems like a gift rather than a curse. The author also uses suicide to show a different side of death.

While death is a major theme in the novel, it is clearly shown that death is not something to be feared. It is something that does not just affect the victim, but the lives of anyone connected with the person who dies. A large portion of this novel addresses the issue of making life easier for those who remain after the person they love dies. Ben is concerned about his mother and his brother, but because he is able to tell them about his death, he also has the comfort of knowing that others will be there to help them, and they will be all right even after he is gone.

## Truth

Throughout the novel, Ben struggles with his decision to keep his impending death a secret. He does it to protect those that he loved the most, but soon realizes that holding the truth back might be harming them more in the long run. Dallas opens up to Ben and tells him her own secret before saying that if there's anything she hates it lies. Truth goes hand in hand with trust, and the secrecy and lies eat at people.

Ben begins to understand that secrecy is depriving others of their chance to say goodbye to him. This is further emphasized when he talks with Coach and learns that the most difficult parts of dealing with his former girlfriend's death was the fact that they never had a chance at closure.

Hey-Soos makes a point of telling him that there is only one thing that's universal, and that is truth. When Ben does let the truth out, he realizes that life is not easier, but it is much clearer. He finds that truth brings freedom. In addition to not having to worry about remembering what was to have told to keep your lies straight, Ben points out that truth is a powerful tool that one can use to save the future.



The quest for truth is also shown in Ben's passion for academia. He regularly stands up to his teacher demanding that they be taught the truth rather than a political agenda. Ben points out that learning the truth of the past is the only true way to fix problems of the past and face the future.

## Love and Support

Love and support is another main theme in this book. At first, Ben keeps his impending death a secret from those close to him because he loves them and doesn't want to hurt them. He wants his last year to be as normal as possible. What he doesn't realize when he makes this decision is that he needs the support of his loved ones to get through the year, and they need his support to learn how to live without him.

Ben reaches out to help others in his last year. It is through his support that Rudy cleans up his act and get some joy in his last days. It's through Ben's love and support that Dallas gets brave enough to share her secret and overcome her shame over what happened to her.

Coach becomes the major support for Cody and Ben because he is there to help them without judgment through the years as a family deals with the mother's mental illness. Because of this close relationship, Coach is also there to help Ben and support him as he tells others what is happening with him and as he faces the decline of his body.

Hey-Soos is also there is a support for Ben. He helps Ben face tough issues and work through them mentally. It is also a comfort for Ben to realize that he will soon meet Hey-Soos on the other side.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is in first person. This is important because the reader really connects to the situation and the emotions of what is occurring in the novel. Through the first person viewpoint, the reader can feel the shock of the news Ben receives, see his concerns over how it's going to affect his loved ones, and get a glimpse into his own thought process throughout his final year. The book offers an unusual approach to death. It doesn't exactly embrace it, but it accepts it. Because the reader is part of Ben, the reader is encouraged to accept death as a part of life, too.

The first person perspective helps the reader put things into perspective. Instead of judging Rudy, the reader is part of the thought process of understanding his entire story right through to its tragic outcome. The reader sees the impact of Ben's relationship on Dallas and understands how they deal with the betrayals in her life.

Although Ben's death is the main theme of this novel, it could be difficult for a reader to take in. If the novel were written in third person, the reader could easily disassociate. Instead, because of the first person viewpoint, the reader faces the end with understanding and acceptance. All the loose ends are tied up, and Ben is ready to go to the next stage. The reader is comforted by knowing the family will be all right, and that Ben is most likely connected with Hey-Soos.

## Setting

This novel takes place in the very small town of Trout, Idaho. The town has only 983 people so everyone pretty much knows everyone. This is an important part of the story because it shows how close Ben is to the people in his life. Using small-town trust, the doctor takes Ben on a flight to Denver to show him how serious his illness is. The teachers in the school are involved with the students in their home life so it's not unusual for Coach to be such a big part of Ben and Cody's life. The school itself has only 93 students.

A large part of the novel takes place in school. In addition to the academia, the school is the central location for social events such as town dances and football games. Whenever Ben needs to escape and think, he is able to go running in a safe environment. Other parts of the novel take place in Ben's house and in Dallas' house. The rural setting is integral to the novel because it would be much easier to hide a severe illness in a more urban setting. Ben wants to make an impact on the world, and he uses the lessons he learned in the book about Malcolm X to help open the eyes of the people in his small town. Since the town has few minorities, Ben feels that it is an important topic to address.



## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is very relaxed, but it doesn't dumb-down to the reader. Ben speaks like a typical teenager, with a bit of sarcasm and sass interspersed with deep thought. Right from the beginning, Ben states that he plans to make the final year of high school count. He is determined to learn as much as he can. He uses information gleaned from books he read to back up his points and state his case in a clear manner. He treats others with respect, even when he doesn't agree with them.

There are times when he gets frustrated, and sometimes he swears in front of Hey-Soos and is immediately brought to task for his verbiage. The different characters in the book have different word usage, making them stand out from each other. The author does not hesitate to use slang, swearwords, or abbreviations such as "gimme" instead of "give me."

When it comes to talking about sex, the author is blunt but not graphic. The reader knows it happens, but most of what happens is left up to the reader's imagination. The author is also careful to bring up their ramifications of sex and covers the topic of safe sex. This book is written for young adult readers. The laid-back writing is appealing and adds to the story, making the characters appear more real.

## Structure

This novel is comprised of twenty-four chapters and an epilogue. The chapters don't have any titles except for their numbers, but many of them start with a notation of the date so the reader knows how time is passing in the last year of Ben's life. The chapters are short, each running approximately ten to fifteen pages long. Within each chapter, changes of scenes are noted by three heavy dots.

Throughout the novel, Ben has conversations with Hey-Soos, a being that comes to him when he is in a semi-dream state. All of his conversations with Hey-Soos are written in italics. His thoughts relating to the conversations with the being are also in italics. In the Epilogue, Cody reads the speech that was written by Ben before his death. The entire speech is written in italics.

The dots, chapter breaks, and italics make it easy for the reader to understand what is going on and to follow the time frame of the novel. Time moves forward quickly yet logically, since several days can be covered within one chapter with the small breaks. Right from the outset, the reader understands Ben's choice to die without any intervention that would make his last days more difficult. As the reader move forward in the book, there is a distinct understanding that time is running out not just for the novel, but for Ben himself. The book is very appropriately titled *Deadline* and is written in such a manner that the reader feels it.





## Quotes

"And lay it on me he did, and I am no longer so glib."  
Chap. 1, p. 3)

"It's as if the universe slipped a long time ago and revealed to me my destiny."  
Chap. 1, p. 3

"He can't help but take in my size. People I've never met do that the moment they hear my deep voice and realize I'm not a sixth-grader..."  
Chap. 2, p. 18

"Sure there are guys out there twice my size, just like there are guys in cross-country with twice my inseam, but the only reason I never turned out before was fear of permanent damage, and permanent won't last as long now."  
Chap. 2, p. 20

"I have maybe twelve months to fall in love, marry, make smart investments, grow old, and die."  
Chap. 2, p. 24

"Since Hey-Soos asked me what I wanted to do with this time, I've decided a little time with the least of my brethren and might look good on my celestial resume and Rudy sure qualifies there."  
Chap. 5, p. 56

"I'm gonna I feel bad anytime I get anything good, 'cause I have to give it up."  
Chap. 6, p. 68

"I think when you're dying you start looking for important things in the corners. You can't let anything that seems even semi-important pass, because it passes forever."  
Chap. 7, p. 88

'Love, in the universal sense, is unconditional acceptance."  
Chap. 9, p. 129

"Just because we live in Podunk, Idaho, where it's easy not to pay any attention to all that, doesn't mean we're not going to get confronted with it when we get out in the world."  
Chap. 10, p. 139

"'I hate secrets,' she says, and though her voice is strong, tears stream down her cheeks. 'They'll kill you.'"  
Chap. 13, p. 186

"But the truth doesn't need to be known, or believed, to be true."  
Chap. 14, p. 202



"When Doc gave me the news I thought it was all about me, but I was wrong. It's about me and everyone I touch."

Chap. 19, p. 257

"You just can't get relativity out of black-and-white."

Chap. 21, p. 274

"Things are clearer now, though; not easier, clearer. The truth really does bring freedom."

Chap. 22, p. 282

"Though I haven't seen Hey-Soos since I started my downward spiral, I'm starting to get it about connection, and in my weakened physical state, my spiritual state seems almost electric."

Chap. 24, p. 307

"Something you learn on the last day of your life is as important as something you learn on the first day of grade school, because you're not dying, you're changing."

Chap. 24, p. 310

"When I took risks like this was my last chance and at the same time kept it in my head that my actions have consequences not only for me but for every one I touched, forever, I made my best decisions."

Epilogue, p. 312



## Topics for Discussion

Why did Ben decide to keep his impending death a secret, and would you agree with his decision?

What was Ben hoping to get out of his last year academically?

What was Ben hoping to get out of his last year athletically?

How did a relationship with Ben change Dallas?

Why did Dallas feel betrayed?

What kind of relationship did Ben have with Cody?

Why do you think Rudy ended his life, even though Ben was trying to help him?

What were some of the greatest lessons Ben learned in the last year of his life?