

# **It's Kind of a Funny Story Study Guide**

**It's Kind of a Funny Story by Ned Vizzini**

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# Plot Summary

*It's Kind of a Funny Story* is a coming-of-age novel for young adults. Loosely based on the personal experience of author Ned Vizzini, it follows the story of fifteen-year-old Craig Gilner, whose depression and decision to end his life lands him in the adult psychiatric unit of a Brooklyn hospital. There he meets a diverse group of fellow patients and is able to confront the source of his anxiety.

The reader first meets Craig Ginter as a freshman at Executive Pre-Professional High School. The school is one of the most prestigious in Manhattan. Although Craig studied obsessively for months before the entrance exam -- and achieved a perfect score on it -- he has been letting his school work slide since the day he was accepted. He has descended into a depression which he reveals to his family but not to his friends. It doesn't help that he must watch his best friend Aaron date Nia, the girl Craig also likes. Craig's parents are supportive of him and have sought help from a number of sources, including Dr. Barney, who prescribed an anti-depressant, and Dr. Minerva, the latest in a long string of therapists. So far, however, Craig has found little relief from his problems, which include what he calls Tentacles that hold him back, Cycling that causes his mind to race uncontrollably, and a lack of Anchors to hold onto.

As he hopes for a Shift that will enable him to be happy again, Craig sinks further into despair and decides to end his life by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. However, on the night he plans to do it, he suddenly feels his heart beating through every part of his body and decides he wants to live. A call to the suicide hotline ends with the suggestion that he seek help at the nearest emergency room, which he does. After assessing his condition, the hospital psychologist recommends that he stay a few days on 6 North, the adult psychiatric unit. It's the only option available while the adolescent unit is being renovated. His parents agree, and Craig is admitted.

On the unit, Craig meets a diverse group of fellow patients, some adult and some teens like himself. He is particularly drawn to Noelle, a girl about his own age, who has disfigured herself by cutting her face. As his five day stay proceeds, Craig begins to eat normally again and feel more hopeful as he sees people whose lives are far worse than his. In an art therapy class, he begins drawing maps, a practice he enjoyed as a child, and at the suggestion of a fellow patient, he draws the outline of a head around them and turns them into brain maps. Eventually, the maps become an Anchor for him and a way to understand his own problems and the lives of his new friends on the unit.

By the time the book concludes, Craig has developed a romantic relationship with Noelle. The relationship gives him a sense of confidence he has never felt before. He reassesses his relationships with Aaron and Nia after seeing things in a different light. He knows that his future is in art rather than the high-pressure high school he worked so hard to get into, and he arranges to transfer to a different school. When he is released from the hospital, he realizes that there are many things he looks forward to doing, but the most important is simply living.



# Chapters 1 through 6

## Summary

### Part I: Where I'm At

#### Chapter 1

Craig is with a group of friends at the home of Aaron. Most of them are smoking pot, but Craig is experimenting with staying away from it. When he goes into the bathroom to urinate, he looks at himself in the mirror and muses that although he appears to be normal, he wants to kill himself. He splashes water on his face in order to feel something and tries to delay his return to the room where his friends are gathered.

#### Chapter 2

Craig is in the office of his therapist, Dr. Minerva. He reflects on the many therapists he has been to and on the fact that he has problems with eating. He is impressed because Dr. Minerva quickly picked up on his personal language, including Anchors, which refer to things that occupy his mind and make him feel good temporarily, and Tentacles, which are unpleasant things that invade his life. He talks to Dr. Minerva about his belief that he is lazy and wishes she could simply tell him what to do. He hopes someday there will be what he calls a Shift that will return him to a place of happiness. Few things now make him happy, but he does like to ride his bike, play video games and watch others play them. Dr. Minerva asks when he was a child, what he wanted to be when he grew up, which causes him to reflect on that.

#### Chapter 3

Craig reflects on his lifelong love for maps, beginning with maps of Manhattan, where he lived as a small child. When he became frustrated by his inability to trace maps of Manhattan, his mother suggested that he draw his own maps of imaginary places instead and this became his Anchor for several years.

#### Chapter 4

Craig's session with Dr. Minerva ends with her reminding him to listen to Dr. Barney, the psycho pharmacologist who prescribes his medications. When she asks what he plans to do after he leaves her office, he replies that he is just going to keep at it and keep hoping that things will get better.

#### Chapter 5

Craig is walking home to the Brooklyn apartment he shares with his parents. He used to like food but since he stopped eating last fall, he feels that the groceries and restaurants he passes are mocking him. When he forces himself to eat, he usually vomits afterward,



but sometimes feels better and eats a lot. He looks forward to the Shift, which he thinks will enable him to eat normally again.

## Chapter 6

Craig arrives at home and is greeted by his two dogs, Rudy and Jordan. He sits at the table with his parents and sister, Sarah, and tries to force himself to eat, but after just six bites he goes to the bathroom and vomits. He reflects on how much his parents have done to try to fix him, which makes him feel ashamed, and he tells himself that the Shift must be coming because if he keeps living like this, he will die.

## Analysis

The book's first six chapters set up its basic premise, the troubled life of fifteen-year-old Craig. On the outside, his life appears to be normal. He lives with his family, hangs out with his friends, and does the things a typical teenage boy would do. But, some sort of change has occurred in recent months that has left him in a state of mental torment. The author points out that appearances can be deceiving as Craig looks at his reflection in the bathroom mirror and realizes that he looks normal even though he knows that he is not. It is apparent that his friends are not aware of the issues he is facing.

Craig is clearly an intelligent young man as evidenced by the insightful names he has given to various forces in his life. He remarks to himself that Dr. Minerva has picked up on these terms, making it clear that they are not devices that have been given to him by his therapist, but rather terms he has devised on his own to describe his inner thoughts. He recognizes that there are good things in his life, which he calls his Anchors. But, there are also Tentacles which hold him back and keep him from being happy. His reflection on the maps he drew as a child foreshadow developments later in the novel through which a different, more advanced form of the same maps will emerge again as Anchors to help him find his way back.

Craig's inability to hold down food can be seen as symbolic of his enormous desire to rid his body and mind of the troubled thoughts that have overtaken him.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe Craig as we know him so far. In what ways is he a typical teenager? In what ways does he differ from his friends? How does he seem to feel about his relationships with his friends and family?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Anchors and Tentacles, the terms Craig uses to describe opposing forces in his life. What people, activities, concepts, etc. serve as Anchors and Tentacles in your own life?



## Discussion Question 3

During dinner, Craig's mother tells a story about taking one of the family's dogs to the vet. How does Craig relate the dog's medical condition to his own life?

## Vocabulary

Conjunction, lob, antagonist, ventilation, resin, concise, ricochet, translucent, specimen, predator, sanctuary, anorexic, justification, gall, cosmic, complexity, sequential, profound, invoke, encase, taut, epiphany, amplify, diluted, ineffectual.



# Chapters 7 through 11

## Summary

Part 2: How I Got There

### Chapter 7

Craig reflects on the fact that he does not know why he is depressed, but he does know the chronology. It began when he was accepted to one of the best high schools in Manhattan, Executive Pre-Professional High School. After studying obsessively, he got a perfect score on the entrance exam, and he remembers that the day he received the results was his last good day. He lost touch with most of his friends except for Aaron. He recalls the first time he visited Aaron's apartment. He was offered pot but refused it.

### Chapter 8

Craig has recollections about a party at Aaron's apartment on the night the test results arrive. Aaron and Nia were also accepted to the school. When they gather with other friends to celebrate, Craig smokes pot for the first time.

### Chapter 9

The party continues as Craig watches Aaron and Nia making out on the couch. A girl named Julie wants Craig to kiss her, but he refuses and she leaves. Craig is increasingly impaired from the pot and the liquor he took from his parents' house. He eventually falls asleep. When he wakes up, it is 2:07 a.m.

### Chapter 10

Craig and Aaron leave the apartment and walk to the Brooklyn Bridge as Aaron describes the sexual experiences he had with Nia earlier. Craig says that he is happy and he muses about someday being valuable in Manhattan. Impulsively, he decides to walk out over the trussing on the bridge and lean over the water. As the chapter closes, he reflects that he could have died then and probably should have.

### Chapter 11

Craig reflects on the rest of junior high and his growing attraction to Nia, whom he pictures when he masturbates. He did not read the books he was assigned over the summer, so he got a 70 on a test on his first day at the high school, the lowest grade he had ever gotten. He recalls how difficult and time-consuming his schoolwork was and how he began slacking off and waiting to hang out with Aaron. This was when he began labeling things Tentacles as he realized he was not gifted, but merely average and not as smart as the other kids at the school. Three months after entering high school, he



experienced stress vomiting for the first time. He told his parents that he might be depressed.

## Analysis

Craig's intelligence is confirmed by the revelation that he attends an elite school after receiving a perfect score on the entrance exam. The author also begins to roll out one of the book's primary themes -- the pressures faced by teenagers and how they are handled differently by different individuals. Aaron did little to prepare for the test, and Craig studied obsessively for many months. Yet, both of them were accepted to the school. Apparently, Craig was burned out after his intense preparation. He has done little since to actually succeed at the school he worked so hard to get into. The author also makes a subtle anti-drug reference by noting that the first day Craig smoked pot was also his last good day.

Even though Craig claims not to know the source of his depression, it is clear that he instinctively knows that it has to do with his school. He recalls specifically that his last good day was the day on which he was accepted there. Things have gone steadily downhill since then. The zeal with which he prepared for the entrance exam caused him to become more isolated to the point that he has few friends left. Looking back at the book's first chapter, it is clear that his relationships with his current friends are superficial, leaving him unable to share his problems with them despite the fact that he feels increasingly desperate.

Craig's jealousy over Aaron's budding relationship with Nia sets up continuing issues along those lines and foreshadows future events. We also see his intense self doubt begin to emerge as he thinks that his poor grades mean that he is less intelligent than others. It is not clear whether or not he could succeed if he put in more effort. It is obvious, however, that he is not concentrating on his school work.

The Brooklyn Bridge, an important symbol in the book, emerges for the first time in this section. It is established as an important element for Craig. The structure connects his childhood home of Manhattan, where he remembers being happy with his map Anchors, and his current home in Brooklyn, where his life is falling apart. He also sees it as connecting his current life to what he hopes his future life will be -- playing some yet-undetermined but significant role in the city.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the party that takes place the night Craig gets his acceptance letter. Do you see signs that could point to what subsequently goes wrong in Craig's life? What hints does the author provide?





## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Craig's home life with Aaron's. Include in the discussion their living situations, parents' traits, and general family situations.

## Discussion Question 3

Why is the Brooklyn Bridge important to Craig? What does it symbolize for him? Why is the scene on the bridge significant?

## Vocabulary

Chronology, mandatory, dignitary, comprehension, maul, plaintive, estranged, ancillary, cusp, paunchy, pungent, lucrative, tiered, alluring, pugnacious, gyrate, increment, morph, proclaim.



# Chapters 12 through 16

## Summary

### Chapter 12

Craig's makes his first visit to Dr. Barney. He describes his depression, including the fact that he often thinks about suicide and his feeling of being overwhelmed by his schoolwork. He says he experiences something he calls Cycling in which the same thoughts go through his head over and over, including worries about failing in life, and he ends up not doing his homework. Dr. Barney prescribes an antidepressant called Zoloft and refers him to the first in what will become a series of therapists.

### Chapter 13

Craig thinks the Zoloft is working because he feels better after taking just one pill, but later he realizes this must have been a placebo effect. He begins eating and sleeping better, but always relapses. One day he tells Nia that he is taking medication for depression and she reveals that she is, too. In time, his prescription runs out and he does not get it refilled because he believes that he is better, but as the chapter ends, he reveals that two months later he was back where he started.

### Part 3 "Badoom"

### Chapter 14

This chapter begins Part 3 and picks up where Chapter 6 ended. Having vomited up the dinner he just ate with his family, Craig decides to kill himself that night. He regrets the pain it will cause his parents and sister, but he wants to be out of pain. He plans to sneak out later and jump off the Brooklyn Bridge, but first he asks to sleep in his mother's bed, as he often does when he is having a bad spell. He tells his sister he loves her and calls Nia. He asks if she might have chosen him over Aaron, and she says she might have preferred him if he had kissed her the night of the party, but he hadn't. Before he hangs up, he mouths "I love you" into the phone.

### Chapter 15

Craig is unable to sleep because his mind is Cycling badly. He thinks about all his failings, then begins to plan his suicide, including what to do with his bike once he reaches the bridge. Still unable to sleep, he begins doing push-ups until his heart seems to be beating loudly – badoom! – in every part of his body. Suddenly he is conflicted about whether to proceed with his suicide plans and picks up a book called *How to Survive the Loss of a Love*, which recommends calling the local Suicide Hotline if you feel like harming yourself. He finds the number in the phone book and dials it.

### Chapter 16



Craig's call is relayed to an anxiety management center that takes overflow calls from the suicide hotline. Giving a fake name, he talks to someone named Keith who seems unequipped for handling a potential suicide and suggests he call the national suicide hotline's 800 number. He tells his story to the woman who answers and she convinces him to go to the nearest emergency room.

## Analysis

Craig's crisis comes to a head in this section as the author paints a very realistic picture of the cycle of depression. Although he realizes he is not doing well in school, Craig experiences a sort of mental paralysis that makes it impossible for him to study, and that causes him to worry about failing not only in school, but also in life, a situation that could be alleviated by working harder in school and improving his grades. He also reveals a continuing series of relapses into depression and eating issues after periods in which he feels somewhat better.

Craig's relationship with the Brooklyn Bridge returns in this section when he determines that it will be his means of killing himself. Although he does not carry it out, his plan parallels the earlier scene in which he and Aaron cross the bridge and he commits a dangerous stunt that could have killed him. That event occurred on what he says was his last good day and now he decides that the bridge will also bring an end to his last bad day.

There are other examples of symbolism and metaphors in these chapters. Although he is 15 years old, Craig returns to his mother's bed when he is having a particularly difficult time, recalling the safety and security a mother brings to a young child. The book from which he gets the idea to reach out for help is aimed at people who are suffering in the wake of a loved one's death, but it becomes a literal lifeline for Craig, saving him from death. The author takes a swipe at ineptitude in the public sector when Craig's call connects him with someone who is completely unable to offer any viable solutions, and he hints at the growing problem of depression and suicide when the hotline, which is held out as a last hope for someone considering suicide, has so many calls that the overflow has to be referred to unqualified volunteers. Craig's heart also stands as a symbol of life as its loud thumping is the impetus that causes him to realize he does not want to live because although his brain seems broken, his heart still works.

## Discussion Question 1

Earlier in the novel, Craig says that one of his few pleasures is riding his bike around Brooklyn. Describe the role his bike plays in his suicide plan. What do you think the bike symbolizes for him? Do you think it plays a role in his eventual decision to live?



## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Craig's phone call to Nia? Why does he call her rather than Aaron? What is her reaction? What, if any, effect does the conversation have on his suicide plan?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Chapter 15 titled "Badoom"? What does the word mean to Craig and how does it affect his plan?

## Vocabulary

Callous, evaluation, contemplate, affirmative, sustainable, somber, anguish, functional, placebo, dastardly, vengeance, interact, manic, amenable, farce, mimic, ferocity.



# Chapters 17 through 21

## Summary

### Part 4: Hospital

#### Chapter 17

Craig arrives at the ER and is admitted. He observes a variety of other patients. Then, he is taken to Room 22, where a physician named Dr. Data talks with him and says that Dr. Mahmoud will come in to see him a little later. She tells him to call his parents. As he is looking for a phone, he realizes that the police officer who has been sitting outside the room is there to keep him from hurting himself, as he is on suicide watch.

#### Chapter 18

Craig calls his mother and tells her where he is. She is upset, but relieved that he is OK and proud of him for seeking help. As he waits, his mind begins to cycle, but in time his mother arrives, as does Dr. Mahmoud, who asks Craig if he wants to be admitted. Thinking he is agreeing to an appointment to talk with Dr. Mahmoud, he agrees and is told that since the hospital is undergoing renovations, he will be placed with the adult patients rather than just teenagers. When a man named Smitty takes him to 6 North, he realizes he is in the hospital's mental ward.

### Part 5: Six North, Saturday

#### Chapter 19

On the psychiatric floor, Craig meets Monica, a nurse, who asks him questions about how he is feeling. When he says he had not understood that he was checking himself into a facility, she shows him the form his mother signed and tells him he cannot be discharged until a doctor agrees to it, but he can petition to leave after five days. He is dismayed when she takes his cell phone because he thinks that is the only thing connecting him to his family and friends, then a fellow patient named Bobby arrives to take him on a tour of the floor.

#### Chapter 20

Bobby takes Craig on a tour, beginning with the dining room where an odd assortment of patients is gathered. He sees bedrooms with the names of patients and their physicians, but his room is not yet ready. Bobby tells him the rules and procedures, and Craig muses that while he assumes it is wrong to ask someone how they got here, it is probably OK to tell someone why you are here. He tells Bobby that he suffers from serious depression, and Bobby says that he has had the same problem since he was fifteen. The chapter ends with Smitty telling Craig his room is ready.



## Chapter 21

Craig meets his roommate, an Egyptian man named Muqtada, who says very little. Craig muses that there are people worse off than he is. As he goes into the hall to head for the dining room, he meets another patient named Armelio, whom Bobby says is called the President because he runs the entire floor. Armelio hustles everyone into the dining room, and Craig sits next to a man named Humble who is babbling about psychologists owning yachts.

## Analysis

The story takes a definitive turn in this section when Craig enters the hospital. Because of his age and inexperience, he has not thought the process through before going to the ER, which turns out to be a positive development because if he had realized the ramifications, he would not have taken the step.

He unknowingly receives a clue about what is happening when the ER nurse gives him two armbands rather than just one, and when a police officer takes a seat outside his door. It takes time before he realizes that both of these developments are signals that he is on suicide watch, but by this time, he has begun to go along with the program and seems in no hurry to leave and resume his plan to kill himself, despite the extreme Cycling he experiences.

Craig's world begins to change when he begins meeting his fellow patients, beginning with Jimmy, a man who appears to be high on drugs when he comes into the ER and later is transferred to the psych unit along with Craig. Once he arrives at the psych floor, he meets other people who are different from anyone he has known, but their odd behavior does not seem to alarm him because although he did not intend to check into a psychiatric facility, for some time he has come to think of himself as different and separate from his friends and family, so he immediately feels an affinity for his fellow patients.

Most of this section is procedural, moving the plot forward by getting Craig into the hospital and into the psych unit.

## Discussion Question 1

How do you think Craig feels once he enters the ER? Do you think he regrets his decision? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

How do Craig's parents react when they learn where he is? Is their reaction realistic, in your experience? Is his mother right or wrong to agree to let him enter the adult psychiatric unit?



## Discussion Question 3

How does Craig begin to relate to his fellow patients from the beginning? Refer to specific events or conversations that lead to your conclusion.

## Vocabulary

Array, unfurl, affix, writhe, affirm, dejected, alternative, ideation, languish, indecipherable, efficacy, atrium, discretion, enunciate, gaunt, gait, perpendicular.



# Chapters 22 through 27

## Summary

### Chapter 22

Craig is eating lunch as Humble asks him questions and rambles. Craig is amazed to find that the food looks appetizing to him and he actually eats a second helping, thinking that maybe an animal instinct is causing a small Shift for him. He and Humble talk generally about girls and Humble reveals that he, too, wants to die. He has been living in his car for the past year and it has now been towed. Craig is feeling good about himself when he sees three of the younger people beckoning him to join them.

### Chapter 23

Craig joins the three girls at their table. One with a blue streak in her hair is particularly hot and is identified as Jennifer, while a big girl says her name is Becca. Another girl with cuts on her face, later identified as Noelle, leaves the table, then holds up a sign at the window that says "Beware of penis," after which it is revealed that Jennifer is really a guy named Charles. All the patients line up to get their medications and the nurse tells Craig he has no meds scheduled. When he asks for some to help him deal with this crazy place, she replies that if they had pills for that, they would not need places like this.

### Chapter 24

Craig's family is visiting him. They meet a few of the other patients and Craig asks his father to stop making jokes in an attempt to lighten the mood. Craig asks them to bring some clothing and a phone card, and his mother tells him to let Dr. Barney and Dr. Minerva know where he is. His family is thrilled when he tells them how much he ate at lunch, then President Armelio asks Craig to play cards with him, so the family leaves.

### Chapter 25

Craig begins making phone calls even though he dreads talking with anyone and dealing with the outside world. He calls home and Sarah gets the messages from his cell, and they are from Nia, Aaron and his science teacher, telling him he is seriously behind. He feels the Tentacles building up again. He calls Nia and when he admits that he thought about killing himself last night, she assumes it was because he could not have her even though he assures her he has bigger problems. When the call ends, Craig realizes that something else has shifted inside him and he is no longer attracted to Nia.

### Chapter 26





Dr. Mahmoud visits Craig and tells him he will be in the hospital for five days. Craig is dismayed since he says he is feeling better, but Dr. Mahmoud is insistent. Craig is concerned about falling further behind in school and about his friends learning where he is, but Dr. Mahmoud assures him that having a chemical imbalance is nothing to be ashamed of. Craig calls Dr. Minerva, and she is unhappy that he has taken a turn for the worse. She says that she will visit him on Monday.

## Chapter 27

Craig is eating dinner with Humble, who fills him in on some of their fellow patients as well as staff members Bobby and Johnny. Craig learns that Jennifer/Charles has left and is surprised no one threw him a party, but Humble says they cannot do that every time someone comes and goes. He says that people do not want to leave because they are going back to the streets, jail, etc. and that Craig is lucky to have a home and family. When Craig gets up to get napkins, he returns to find that the girl with the cuts on her face has left him a note asking him to visit her the following night.

## Analysis

The story becomes somewhat unrealistic when Craig suddenly finds that he is able to eat normally under what would be a very stressful situation. It can be surmised that the author is making the point that Craig has turned a major corner simply by addressing his problems directly and aggressively by checking into an in-patient facility, but it makes little logical sense.

Craig also turns a corner in his relationship with his family when they visit him for the first time. Throughout the novel, his mother has worked hard to find help for him. However, his father, while loving and supportive, has addressed the situation by making jokes. As his illness has progressed, Craig has felt guilty about the problems he has caused for his parents, so he has been reluctant to complain about his father's attitude and his belief that he can help lighten Craig's mood simply through humor. Now that he has taken the step of checking into the hospital, he is comfortable enough to ask his father to stop making jokes, because it is now clear that his situation is extremely serious. This signals that, even though Craig does not see it yet, the Shift he has hoped for has begun to occur.

Another sign of the Shift comes when Craig talks with Nia on the phone. In his new surroundings, he is beginning to achieve a sort of clarity that helps him see Nia not for the beautiful, unattainable girlfriend of his friend, but as the self-absorbed person she really is. Rather than expressing concern for Craig and looking for a way to help, she is fixated on her belief, which is false, that his suicidal tendencies resulted from the fact that she chose Aaron over him. As Craig gets to know his fellow patients and learns their stories, the author advances another of the book's themes -- the fact that there is value in everyone. The people he meets have serious problems, but getting to know them enables him to not only appreciate his own life more, but also see the good



qualities his fellow patients possess, some of which he does not see in his "normal" friends.

The author also uses this section to demonstrate the complexity of his characters. Noelle is beautiful, but has damaged her looks by cutting her face, and she is an enigma, disappearing quickly and leaving strange notes for Craig. The hottest girl on the floor turns out to be a transvestite, and Humble, who lives in his car, turns out to have much in common with Craig. The hospital, as surreal as the situation is, is helping Craig to find a sense of comfort and belonging that he has not felt for some time.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do you think Craig suddenly finds food appetizing and is able to eat normally?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the other teens who are in the hospital. How do they resemble Craig's "normal" friends? How do they differ? In what ways are they opening up Craig's mind in new and different ways?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss Craig's concept of Anchors and Tentacles in this section. Are there Anchors, either new or existing, that he holds onto as he begins his hospital stay? Are there Tentacles that remain despite his new situation, or new ones that appear?

## **Vocabulary**

Infusion, elucidate, distinct, oblivious, slither, peripheral, encased, gesticulate, hoist, dispense, schizophrenic, bipolar, indecipherable, monstrosity, allegiance, banish, relentless, stasis, prognosis, distinction.



# Chapters 28 through 32

## Summary

### Chapter 28

Craig is musing that nearly everyone except him smokes when he is told he has a phone call. It is Aaron, who is at a party and high. Nia has told him where Craig is and now word has spread to everyone at the party and they are all laughing and making fun. Craig hangs up on Aaron and returns to his room, thinking that he is now even lower than he was the previous night because he no longer has control over his situation and everyone knows. The Cycling starts and he tells the nurse he will be unable to sleep, so he is given a drug that causes him to drift off almost immediately.

### Part 6: Six North, Sunday

### Chapter 29

Craig is awakened by a nurse drawing blood. He takes a shower and joins the other patients to have his vital signs taken. An employee instructs him on filling out menus for the food he wants for each meal. He joins Bobby and Johnny for breakfast, learning that they can get passes to go out because they have been there longer than five days. Bobby is applying for a place in an adult home and is concerned about not having an appropriate shirt for his interview, so Craig offers to have his mother drop off a dress shirt and lend it to him. Craig also wonders where the girl with the cuts on her face is and whether she will be around that night for what will technically be his first date.

### Chapter 30

Craig meets with Monica, the nurse, who asks how he is adjusting. He tells her about breaking things off with Aaron and Nia, and she warns him not to become too friendly with his fellow patients because he is there to focus on himself and his own healing. She tells him that he must begin participating in the floor's activities and since he says he has no hobbies, she signs him up for arts and crafts at 7 that evening. Remembering his date with Noelle, he says he might be late but does not reveal whom he is meeting.

### Chapter 31

Craig meets Noelle and they play a game in which each asks the other a question and the response has to end with another question. He learns that she has been in the hospital for twenty-one days and is leaving on Thursday, the same day he hopes to leave. Before they leave to go to arts and crafts, he asks if he can kiss her, but she says no and they run down the hall together.

### Chapter 32



This chapter takes place in the arts and crafts session, where Craig tells Joanie, the instructor, that he cannot draw. The other patients shout out suggestions for things he might draw and when Noelle suggests something from his childhood, he immediately begins drawing the kind of maps he used to be obsessed with. When someone asks if he is drawing a brain, he says yes and draws the outline of a head around it, thinking to himself that a working brain is much like a map, getting someone from one place to another, but a nonworking brain gets blocked, like dead ends on a map. Eventually, he notices that Noelle has left, but she leaves a note saying they will meet again on Tuesday night. He returns to his room and tells Muqtada that he is feeling quite a bit better, and the chapter ends with Craig thinking he will be able to sleep without medication.

## Analysis

This section brings into full focus the difference the author draws between the "normal" kids who are Craig's friends and the "crazy" people who are his fellow patients. Aaron is his best friend and they have much in common, but he is completely unsupportive of Craig and his problems. Part of the reason for his attitude when he calls Craig is the fact that he is high, but that seems to simply amplify his lack of empathy as he not only makes fun of Craig himself, but also encourages the others at the party, who are ostensibly Craig's friends also, to join in humiliating him. Craig's fellow patients, however, although they seem to have little in common with him and only a few hours of shared history, are supportive and understanding in ways his other friends are not. In a very short amount of time, Craig has begun to relate more to his fellow patients than to his longtime friends and peers.

Craig's "date" with Noelle is also significant. He has always wondered -- and even asked Nia to confirm -- what would have happened if he had made the first move with Nia rather than letting Aaron have her. At the same party, he passed up an opportunity to kiss another girl, but now, in a completely different environment, he is able to ask Noelle for a kiss. Even though she turns him down, it is an important development for Craig. In the hospital, the Tentacles that have held him back in every area of his life have been removed, or at least loosened, and despite his bizarre surroundings, he begins to feel comfortable with himself and others.

The arts and crafts session is also significant because it brings Craig back around to his map-drawing, which eventually will change everything for him. This time is different though. He begins by drawing maps of streets, parks, etc. as he used to do -- maps loosely depicting the Manhattan where he hoped to make his mark someday -- everything changes when he draws the outline of a head around them. Now the maps depict portions of the human brain. Some paths come to a dead end, while others go on and on. Although he has had extensive therapy and some medication, Craig is now figuring things out for himself as he begins to think about how the brain operates, which will benefit him as he continues his journey.



## Discussion Question 1

Analyze Craig's phone call from Aaron. Is this Aaron substantially different from the guy we have seen previously? If so, how? If not, what signs has the author given to hint at this part of his personality? How do you interpret the behavior of Craig's other friends who are heard in the background?

## Discussion Question 2

In Chapter 29, Craig is asked to fill out menus for upcoming meals. Why is this significant for him? How does his reaction signify the beginning of the Shift he has hoped for?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Ebony say that causes Craig to begin looking at his drawings from a different perspective? Why is this such an important development?

## Vocabulary

Migrate, indiscretion, facsimile, searing, languish, bleary, communism, underestimate, indentation, ambience, abstract, arduous.



# Chapters 33 through 38

## Summary

Part 7: Six North, Monday

### Chapter 33

It is Monday morning, and Craig is worrying about the fact that he should be in school. He checks his messages and finds one from Aaron, apologizing for his behavior, adding that he and Nia are having problems and that he thinks he might be depressed too. Craig leaves him a message saying he should see his doctor and discouraging him from visiting. Craig returns a call from his science teacher, explaining that he is in the hospital and will catch up on his work later. Another message is from a girl named Jenna, whom he knows only slightly, saying she would like to hang out with him, and he ignores messages from his other friends. At his suggestion, Muqtada finally leaves their room for a few minutes but returns quickly. Craig gets another phone call and when he realizes it is the principal from his school, he hangs up on him. The Cycling begins again, with Craig thinking he has made a terrible mistake by coming here and that he has no future. Then, he goes to his room and lies down until Dr. Minerva arrives at 3 p.m.

### Chapter 34

Craig tells Dr. Minerva that the call from his principal upset him and they discuss how he is doing. She prompts him to note that there are no Tentacles in the hospital because everything is orderly, but she discourages him from thinking of the other patients as his Anchors. Craig assures her that he no longer wants to kill himself, but he is upset when she insists on calling the principle, Mr. Janowitz. However, when they speak, Mr. Janowitz assures him that many other students have been in similar situations and that the school will provide full support for him. He is relieved to hear this, but he cannot get excited about going back to school. Dr. Minerva says she will see him again on Wednesday, and Craig returns to his room to draw more brain maps and feels excited for the card tournament Armelio is planning.

### Chapter 35

Several of the patients gather for the card tournament, with Joanie supervising. Bobby arrives and announces that he was approved for the adult home and says it owes it to Craig because he loaned him the shirt. Craig thinks about how momentous this is for Bobby and realizes his problems pale in comparison to someone who has to struggle for a place to live. The tournament continues and things get raucous, eventually prompting the staff to take Humble away. When Craig goes to bed that night, he forgets his problems and falls asleep.

Part 8: Six North, Tuesday



### Chapter 36

Craig is eating breakfast with Johnny and Bobby, who tell him that Humble is probably being pumped full of even more drugs than he takes ordinarily. Bobby and Johnny talk about their own drug use, then begin teasing Craig about Noelle, who has entered the dining room and is sitting alone. Craig plans to spend the morning drawing more brain maps, which have become very popular with the other residents.

### Chapter 37

A guitarist named Neil arrives to play for the patients and everyone grabs an instrument and joins in. In time, they get up and dance, and although Craig has never been a good dancer, he gets into the spirit and his confidence grows enough that he gets Noelle to dance with him.

### Chapter 38

Neil asks Craig if he might consider volunteering here, as he does, after he is released. Craig shows him his brain maps and Neil says he might like to buy some. Craig calls his mother, who says that Dr. Mahmoud has confirmed that he will be released on Thursday and that she and his father will pick him up. A staff member announces that Craig has a visitor and he is surprised to see that it is Nia, who looks like she has been crying.

## Analysis

Craig is once again being forced to face his Tentacles as calls from several friends and his school principal bring him back to the enormous pressures he feels outside the hospital. He is being pressured from several areas, including the need to fit in with his peers, the need to succeed in school and the belief that his performance at school will be the sole determinant of his success in life. The reappearance of his Tentacles even holds him back from interacting with his fellow patients, who show potential for becoming Anchors, although Dr. Minerva quickly discourages that idea. While the world of the hospital is proving calming for Craig, it is not his reality and eventually he will have to deal with the real world. However, Craig also begins to learn that his assumptions are not always correct when he speaks with the principal and finds him to be supportive and understanding, thus moving Craig a little closer to the Shift he seeks.

The brain maps continue as an important symbol in this section, tying together Craig's past with his present and future. The first hint that art might be a potential career for him occurs when Neil asks to buy some of the maps, and Neil also raises the possibility that Craig can use his experience to help others suffering from emotional disorders.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Craig so surprised by his conversation with Mr. Janowitz? What reasons did he have for believing the conversation would have gone differently?



## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Dr. Minerva discourages Craig from thinking of his fellow patients as potential Anchors?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Craig lending his shirt to Bobby? Why is this a learning experience for Craig?

## Vocabulary

Project (verb), pithy, wallow, pretext, gauge, exponentially, volatile, affirmative, warrant (verb), buffer, reprieve, partition, lope, ante, inclination, debacle, initiative, laconic.





# Chapters 39 through 44

## Summary

### Chapter 39

Nia tells Craig that she and Aaron have broken up. Even though he had decided earlier he was finished with her, he finds that he is still very attracted to her, so when she begins touching him and looking into his eyes, he knows he will go along with whatever she wants. She tells him she likes him because he's screwed up in a good way that gives him experience and when she asks to see his room, he leads her there.

### Chapter 40

Craig and Nia are in his room, and for the first time, Muqtada is not there. She questions him about some of the other patients but he is defensive about them. Even though his stomach is beginning to tighten like it used to, Craig decides to get what he wants so he pushes Nia onto Muqtada's bed and they begin to make out. However, when she says that hooking up in a hospital is on her checklist and mentions Aaron, Craig is put off. Suddenly Muqtada comes in and is irate at the thought that they were going to have sex on his bed. Nia prepares to leave but before she does, Craig says he likes making out with her, but he does not like her as a person. Nia says he won't see her again and leaves, then Craig realizes that his next date with Noelle is in just two hours.

### Chapter 41

Noelle arrives in the hallway for the date and she is furious about Craig making out with Nia. When she calms down, they have a serious talk during which Craig says he likes her scars because she wears her problems on her face rather than hiding them like he and others do. She tells him that she cut herself because being beautiful was something she did not want to have to live up to and says that someone tried to take advantage of her. Craig shows her a brain map that depicts a male and a female lying side by side and when she asks if she can keep it, he says he must fix it up first. As the chapter ends, he asks for her phone number so he can call her after they are released.

### Chapter 42

Humble returns at dinner time, having been pumped full of drugs after his outburst during the card tournament. Humble, Craig and Noelle talk and Craig puts forth his theory that because young people have more choices today, they have crises similar to a mid-life crisis at much younger ages. As he talks, Craig is happy that Noelle listens to what he is saying and likes him. He decides that he will call his father, who is slated to bring a DVD of Blade II the following night, and ask him to bring something else as well.

### Part 9, "Six North, Wednesday"



## Chapter 43

Craig is up early and decides to take a cold shower rather than a hot one so he will be forced to finish faster. Afterward he asks Smitty if he can play some music in the hall tonight and also says he is bringing Blade II for everyone to watch. When Smitty takes his vital signs, his blood pressure is 120/70 and he realizes it is the first time it hasn't been perfect.

## Chapter 44

Dr. Minerva visits Craig. Craig tells her that he is getting anxious about getting out of the hospital because he will have to face all the emails that have piled up in the past few days. He expects to have many emails about school and if he does not answer them, it means he will fail at school and at life, because school is what he does right now. He shows her his brain maps and she is impressed, and they agree that they could be his Anchor. However, he cannot go to Executive Pre-Professional for art and Dr. Minerva suggests that he consider going to a different school. Craig thinks about that and realizes that although he worked hard to get there, in less than a year it has landed him in a psychiatric hospital, so where will he be if he continues on the path he has set for himself? As the chapter ends, he tells Dr. Minerva that he is going to call his parents and tell them he wants to change schools.

## Analysis

Craig's visit from Nia is a pivotal event for him. When she tells him that she and Aaron are no longer together and appears to be interested in him, he realizes that he can finally get what he wants and decides to go for it, but as is often the case, the reality is not at all as good as he had imagined it would be. The girl he has obsessed over turns out to be shallow and Craig finally sees her for who she really is.

Craig's next date with Noelle is completely different from his encounter with Nia. Rather than playing games, Noelle is completely honest with him about her problems and the reasons she cut herself. There is a rawness to the character that is a complete contrast to the more narrowly-drawn, self-absorbed Nia. In a previous chapter, Nia confided to Craig that she, too, takes antidepressants in an effort to relate to him but it is Noelle to whom he is able to relate in a more mature, honest way.

Finally, Craig is brought to the pivotal point of realizing that the Tentacles that hold him back are too great to overcome without making a complete change in his life. The idea of getting accepted to his prestigious school was more important to him than attending and succeeding at the school, and that is why he never reached his potential there. He finally realizes that the school -- and most important, the way it makes him feel about himself -- is doing serious harm and that he must make a change. Fortunately, his stay in the hospital has brought him back to his drawing, which has been a lifelone Anchor although he did not always see it as such.



## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Nia and Noelle. What attracts Craig to each of them? What puts him off? Why are their differences important?

## Discussion Question 2

What do you think would have happened if Muqtada had not entered the room when Craig was on the bed with Nia? Explain what leads you to your conclusion.

## Discussion Question 3

Throughout the book, Craig has equated success at his high school with success in life. Why does he feel this way? Do you think it is possible to fail at school and go on to succeed in life? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

Recruit, intriguing, subconsciously, expectant, clarity, cede, glib, dichotomy, rectify, corrupt, synch, culmination, drastic, geriatric.



# Chapters 45 through 50

## Summary

### Chapter 45

Craig learns that he has a visitor and is surprised that it is Aaron, who has brought a record of Egyptian music that Craig wanted. Aaron apologizes for his previous behavior – sincerely this time – and Craig thinks that Aaron has been demoted from his most important friend to simply a friend and will even have to earn that. Aaron says he and Nia are back together and the breakup came because he freaked out when he learned she was on medication because both of his parents are on heavy medications too. Craig tells him he plans to transfer schools. As Aaron leaves, he tells Craig not to kill himself. Craig doesn't think that Aaron is a bad guy. He is just someone who hasn't had his stay on Six North yet.

### Chapter 46

Craig draws a personal brain map for each patient who wants one, making the streets, etc. orderly or chaotic depending on how he sees the person. He also collects phone numbers from them, but Johnny and Bobby refuse, saying meeting in the outside world ruins relationships formed in the hospital. He gives Noelle the map he showed her earlier, and the only addition is his phone number written on the back. He also asks her to come to his room that night, but she is noncommittal.

### Chapter 47

Craig's family is visiting him, and he shows them the brain maps. His father is concerned about his desire to study art, but Craig explains that he concentrated on getting into his current school so much because it was a challenge, but it is not right for him. He will have to finish the school year there but can transfer after that. As they leave, Sarah says she is embarrassed by the hospital and Craig says he is too, but in a good way.

### Chapter 48

Craig and some of the other residents watch the movie, along with Craig's father, who must leave when visiting hours end. Craig convinces Muqtada to leave their room to listen to the Egyptian record he borrowed from Aaron. Then, Noelle meets him in the room.

### Chapter 49

Craig and Noelle lie down on his bed and begin kissing, then he begins to explore her body with his hands. He is amazed and thrilled that he is able to do these things and



that she enjoys it as well. When they get up to join the others for the rest of the movie, Craig thinks that he is the happiest person in the world.

#### Part 10: Six North, Thursday

In the book's final chapter, Craig's parents arrive early to take him home. He says goodbye to everyone and tells Noelle, who will be released later today, that he will call her later. After he is released, Craig assures his parents that he is fine but asks if he can walk home alone. As he goes outside, he thinks that he has not cured anything but something seismic is happening inside him. He feels as if his brain has been off kilter and now it is connected with his spine and ready to take charge again. He thinks about all the things he can do, including the most important one – live.

## Analysis

Things are not always what they seem to be, as Craig learns when Aaron visits him at the hospital. Having previously written his friend off as a jerk -- and with good reason -- Craig now sees another layer to Aaron when he learns that his friend's family situation is more serious than he realized. Aaron has always had enormous freedom and his parents have appeared to let him do as he pleased, but now it becomes apparent that they simply ignore and neglect him because of their own problems. Craig is gradually becoming wiser about the people and the world around him as he learns that we rarely know what really goes on in another person's life.

The insights he has gained over just a few days become apparent when Craig draws a personal brain map for each of his fellow patients. He depicts Humble's brain as chaotic, Ebony's brain contains a series of circles, and the map he draws for Noelle shows a male and female connected by a bridge, symbolizing the Brooklyn Bridge that has been so important to Craig. Craig is learning to use his talent and his particular fascination with maps to understand other people as well as himself.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Johnny and Bobby refuse to give their phone numbers to Craig? Do you think their reasoning is right or wrong? Explain your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

What does Craig mean when he tells his sister he is embarrassed by the hospital, but in a good way?



## Discussion Question 3

What do you think Craig has learned by his experience at the hospital? Do you think the experience will change things for him? If so, in what ways?

## Vocabulary

Sheepish, demoted, crux, stride, minimal, random, grid, intricate, respective, distinguishing, reverie, levitate, disseminate, omniscient, seismic.



# Characters

## Craig Gilner

Craig Gilner, the book's lead character, is a 15-year-old boy who lives in Brooklyn, NY with his parents and younger sister, Sarah. He is a freshman at the prestigious Executive Pre-Professional High School in Manhattan, but he is struggling there despite scoring a perfect 800 on the difficult admissions test. Craig saw a challenge in getting into the exclusive school, so he studied obsessively for the test, but slacked off immediately after getting accepted and is now falling increasingly behind and finding little motivation to catch up.

For several months, Craig has been suffering from depression that affects his ability to eat normally and causes thoughts to race around his head, a process he calls Cycling. His parents have been supportive, but things have not improved despite medication and therapy, so in a desperate moment, Craig decides to kill himself but changes his mind and goes to the Emergency Room instead.

Finding himself in the hospital's adult psychiatric wing, Craig finally begins to decompress as the pressures of school -- and the spectre of failing at it -- are temporarily replaced by getting to know the odd cast that comprises his fellow patients. As the days pass, Craig begins to appreciate his life more when he sees how much more difficult others have it, and how much more disturbed some of his new friends are. He also gains insights into his own illness as well as self confidence through his budding romance with a fellow teen patient named Noelle, and by the time his five-day stay comes to an end, he has made some life-altering decisions.

By the time the book ends, Craig has changed from a follower to a leader, and from an awkward boy who is curious about girls but a little afraid of them to an increasingly confident young man who has made out with not one, but two girls in the space of 24 hours. He has also rediscovered his interest in art and realized that it was the challenge of getting into school that interested him, not the school itself. The Craig who emerges from the hospital has gained important insights into the issues that caused his problems and decided to do rather than think from now on.

## Noelle Hinton

Noelle Hinton is a girl about Craig's age and a fellow patient in the psychiatric wing. She is very pretty, but she has several deep cuts on her face from self-mutilation. She has been in the hospital for twenty-one days when Craig meets her.

Noelle is something of an enigma. Rather than introducing herself to Craig outright, she begins their relationship by leaving notes for him and disappearing just as he is about to pursue her. She invites him on a 5-minute date with her. She sets the rules by insisting that each of them must ask the other a question, and they must respond with another



question. She is difficult to pin down and get to know, but she eventually opens up to tell Craig that she cut herself so she would be relieved of the pressure of living up to having a certain image, and she hints that she might have been abused.

While Craig's relationship with Noelle helps Craig grow, she already has a great deal of self awareness. She likes to be in control, but there are hints that the relationship will become more equal if it continues outside the hospital.

## Aaron Pardis

Aaron Pardis is Craig's best friend. They became friends during grade school and continued on to Executive Pre-Professional High School together, but Aaron did not have to work as hard as Craig did to get accepted.

Aaron lives in a Manhattan apartment with his parents, who are later revealed to be on heavy doses of antidepressants, a fact that disturbs him. His home life is nothing like Craig's. Craig's parents are very involved in his life, but Aaron's mother and father are remote and leave him to his own devices. He takes advantage of this by spending most of his time smoking pot and playing video games in his room while his father struggles to write elsewhere in the apartment.

As the novel progresses, Craig rightly questions his friendship with Aaron. For example, shortly after Craig enters the hospital, Aaron calls him on the phone, but rather than being concerned for his friend's well-being, he is clearly high and hosting a party at which their mutual friends make fun of Craig and his situation. While his first apology is somewhat shallow, Aaron later comes to the hospital with a true apology and an explanation about the source of his behavior, and by the end of the novel, Aaron is the character who exhibits the most growth with the exception of Craig.

## Nia

Nia is a friend of both Craig and Aaron's, having gone to grade school and now high school together. She is pretty and outgoing, and Craig is very attracted to her, so he is dismayed when she begins a sexual relationship with Aaron during a party to celebrate their acceptance to high school.

Nia and Craig remain friends and when he confesses to her that he is taking antidepressants, she tells him that she takes them too. However, her shallow side is revealed when she learns that Craig seriously considered suicide and she assumes that it was because she had chosen Aaron over him. She appears to redeem herself when she visits Craig at the hospital and shows a serious interest in him, but disappoints him when she reveals that their relationship would merely enable her to check "hooking up in a hospital" off her bucket list. Craig eventually sees Nia for what she is and it is presumed that they will go back to being friends, but much more casual than before.





## **Craig's family**

Craig's mother, father and younger sister Sarah live with him in a mediocre apartment in Brooklyn. Although Craig thinks his father jokes too much to lighten the weight of his depression and his mother leaves too much to God, they are extremely supportive of him and do everything in their power to help him recover from his emotional difficulties, as does Sarah.

## **Dr. Barney**

Dr. Barney is a psycho pharmacologist and the first doctor whom Craig sees for his depression. He prescribes an antidepressant and refers him to a therapist.

## **Dr. Minerva**

Dr. Minerva is the therapist whom Craig is currently seeing, and she is the latest in a long line of them. She is supportive and understanding, and Craig likes her more than his previous therapists.

## **Dr. Mahmoud**

Dr. Mahmoud is a psychiatrist who sees Craig in the Emergency Room and admits him to the hospital.

## **Muqtada**

Muqtada is an Egyptian patient in the psych unit and Craig's roommate.

## **Fellow patients**

A number of patients Craig meets in the hospital are medium to minor characters in the book. They include Bobby, Solomon, Armelio, Humble, Jennifer, Becca, Jimmy, Johnny, Ebony, and the Professor.

## **Ronny and Scruggs**

Ronny and Scruggs are friends of Craig, Aaron, and Nia. They appear only briefly.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Tentacles

Tentacles is the word Craig uses to describe things in his life that seem to hold him down and cause him stress. The most prevalent example is his prestigious but very difficult high school and in particular the homework, reading, etc. that he is always behind on.

## Anchors

Craig uses the word Anchors to describe things in his life that he feels he can hold onto and that ground him. In his childhood, the maps he drew served as Anchors for several years; but, as he became increasingly depressed, he lost all of the Anchors in his life. As he begins to improve, he returns to the maps, and they again begin to serve as Anchors. While people like his parents can be Anchors, Dr. Minerva warns him against thinking of his fellow patients as Anchors because their relationship is temporary and he should be focusing on his own recovery rather than concerning himself too much with them.

## Cycling

Cycling is a condition in which thoughts -- usually disturbing, stressful ones -- run over and over in Craig's mind. They are a symbol of all the things that are wrong in his life and his undue concerns about his future. For example, he often thinks about his homework and the fact that he is behind, which leads to thinking that he will fail in school, which leads to thinking he will be unable to go to college, then unable to get a job, then become homeless, and on and on and on.

## The Shift

The Shift is how Craig describes the change he hopes will come in his life. He envisions a moment in which everything will shift, his depression will disappear, and he will be happy again.

## Maps

Maps are perhaps the most important symbol in *It's Kind of a Funny Story*. When Craig is young, he is fascinated with the island of Manhattan and tries unsuccessfully to trace it. When this becomes frustrating for him, his mother convinces him to draw maps based on his own imagination. These become very important to him for several years. His maps became symbols of the freedom he felt in his mind and his imagination. He



was not limited by anything real. He could put streets, rivers, and buildings wherever he wanted them to be. Later, in the hospital, Craig begins drawing the maps again. At the suggestion of a fellow patient, he draws the outline of a head around them and turns them into brain maps. At that point, they began to symbolize the similarities between a street map and the human brain, as Craig realizes that a non-functioning brain has dead ends, while a functioning one has no limitations. The brain maps are also a means for him to connect with his fellow patients and to understand them better as distinct individuals.

## **Brooklyn Bridge**

Craig spent his early years in Manhattan, where he now attends school. He now lives in Brooklyn. The bridge that connects the two boroughs is very important to him for several reasons. It is a symbol of the connection between two parts of his life, as well as between his past and present and his present and future, which he hopes will include doing something of substance in Manhattan. The bridge is also significant because jumping from it becomes the method of suicide Craig chooses.

## **Badoom**

Badoom is the word Craig uses to describe the sound and feeling of his heart on the night he plans to commit suicide. It is symbolic of the life force, as it is when he seems to feel his heart beating throughout his entire body that he realizes that while he no longer wants his malfunctioning brain, he very much wants his heart, and he decides to abandon his suicide plan.

## **Executive Pre-Professional High School**

Craig is a freshman at Executive Pre-Professional High School, one of the most prestigious in Manhattan. While he worked hard to get in and is proud of that accomplishment, it has proven to be not what he wants at all and has become the most important Tentacle in his life. It represents both success -- his achievement of being accepted and the promise it brings of a successful career and life -- and failure -- his inability to and disinterest in actually doing the work once he arrives there.

## **Emergency Room**

The Emergency Room at Argenon Hospital serves as a lifeline for Craig. It is near his home in Brooklyn, but when he plans his suicide, he is more drawn to the Brooklyn Bridge, which then represents death and freedom from his problems. However, he eventually chooses life and the hospital where he finds help.



## 6 North

6 North is the adult psychiatric unit at Argenon Hospital where Craig becomes a patient. It represents a number of things in the novel. When he first arrives, it seems like a prison with locked doors from which he will be unable to escape for at least five days. Soon it becomes a place of solace and, to some extent, freedom for him -- a place where his Tentacles fall away and he can escape the constant pressure he feels from his demanding school. As time passes, it becomes a place where he finds new Anchors, a better understanding of himself and those around him, a new direction and a new sense of confidence.



# Settings

## New York City

The novel takes place in various places in New York City. This setting is important because the city symbolizes a number of things for the main character, Craig. His early years were spent in Manhattan, which still stands as a symbol of success for him. Manhattan is connected to Brooklyn, where he currently lives, by a bridge and Craig imagines that when he is an adult, he will cross that bridge, both literally and figuratively, and make his mark on the world.

Manhattan is also the setting for Executive Pre-Professional High School, the prestigious school Craig attends. Although no scenes take place there, the school looms large in the plot because of Craig's obsession with getting accepted and its role in the emotional distress that lands him in a psychiatric hospital.

## Aaron's Apartment

Several of the book's scenes are set in the Manhattan apartment in which Craig's friend Aaron lives with his parents. The apartment is large and well-appointed, with an essentially separate section in which Aaron spends most of his time. This situation enables Aaron, Craig, and their other friends to hang out and smoke pot without interference from the parents.

## Craig's Apartment

Several scenes in the novel's early chapters take place in the apartment Craig shares with his parents and sister. It is a modest apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Craig remarks several times that it is somewhat on the shabby side. Still, it is a loving home and the place from which Craig's parents try to help him as he descends into depression.

The setting is also pivotal because of its proximity to the Brooklyn Bridge, where Craig plans to commit suicide. It is just two blocks from the hospital where he enters the Emergency Room and eventually the psychiatric unit.

## 6 North, Argenon Hospital

The majority of the book takes place on 6 North, the adult psychiatric unit of Argenon Hospital in Brooklyn, where Craig stays for five days. The hospital is just two blocks from his home and a few miles from his Manhattan school, but in every other way it is a world apart.



The unit is locked down and populated by a diverse group of patients. A number of scenes take place in different parts of the unit, including the room Craig shares with Muqtada, the dining room, a recreation room, the conference room where he meets with his doctors, and the hallway in which he makes phone calls and receives visitors.

## **Brooklyn Bridge**

The Brooklyn Bridge connects Brooklyn with Manhattan. While only one scene takes place there, it is an important setting that is woven throughout the book.

On the night they are accepted to their prestigious high school, Craig and Aaron walk across the bridge from Manhattan to Brooklyn. During that time, Craig impulsively climbs onto the trussing and hangs out over the river, nearly falling and foreshadowing his eventual plan to jump off the bridge.

Although he never follows through with his plan, Craig later decides to commit suicide by jumping off the bridge. It is also important to him as a symbol of the connection between his past, present, and future. It is his connection to Noelle.



# Themes and Motifs

## Coming of Age

Although it takes place over a short period of time, *It's Kind of a Funny Story* is a coming-of-age novel in which a young person has experiences that move him or her from childhood to adulthood or into a greater sense of maturity.

In the case of this book, the protagonist is Craig Ginter. At age 15, he is struggling with many of the things typical boys his age face -- awkwardness with girls, curiosity about his sexuality, struggles with school, concerns about his future, peer pressure, etc. However, Craig faces an additional challenge -- a growing depression that is consuming his life and making him suicidal. For the most part, he is able to hide his increasing distress from his friends, but his school work suffers and his parents worry terribly as they struggle to find ways to help him.

Craig's transition comes after he enters a local hospital's adult psychiatric unit. There he is able to escape temporarily from the pressures he faces in his daily life, take a step back and see his life from a different perspective. He is helped on this journey by his relationships with his fellow patients, some his own age and some older, as well as his changing relationships with his friends from school. As he goes through this process, Craig learns much about what is causing his problems and finds ways to begin solving them. By the time the book ends, his experiences have enabled him to see the people around him in a new light and he has grown significantly in confidence and maturity.

## Handling Peer Pressure and Teenage Problems

As he eventually learns, many of Craig's problems are the direct or indirect result of issues faced by many teenagers. He simply is less adept at handling them than others.

The primary source of the Tentacles that hold Craig back is the pressure exerted to succeed at a very demanding high school. Craig wanted to go to Executive Pre-Professional -- or he thought he did -- and worked very hard to get in. However, the heavy work load proves too much and strikes a blow to his self esteem as he begins to think he is simply not as smart as the other kids who attend the school. The reader never learns whether this is true or not because Craig eventually realizes that he like the challenge of getting in more than the challenge of the actual work, so he decides to transfer schools and take a path that appeals to him more. In the process, the author makes the point that different kids respond to the same situation in different ways, as Aaron seems to have no trouble navigating the difficult school.

Craig is also bothered by concerns for his future. Like many teens, he equates success in high school with success in life, believing that if he is unable to succeed at his challenging school, he is destined to become unemployed and homeless as an adult.



The author attributes this attitude to the pressure elite high schools put on young people to succeed and hints that this situation is unhealthy.

The book also addresses other forms of peer pressure, including drugs and sex. At first Craig is able to refuse Aaron's offer of pot, but eventually he succumbs. His increased use of it parallels his downward mental and emotional spiral. The book does not completely condemn pot, however, as Craig takes periodic vacations from it without feeling any difference in his depression and Aaron seems able to function despite his frequent drug use. Sex is also an issue, as Craig watches Aaron and Nia become sexually active while he remains awkward and unable to even kiss a girl.

## **Finding Value in Everyone**

When the book begins, Craig's friends are his high school peers, primarily Aaron, Nia, and others. As his depression deepens, he knows he is different from them and he envies their ability to succeed at simple things like doing school work and even eating normally while even the most mundane things are increasingly paralyzing for him.

Craig's world widens considerably when he checks into the hospital. There he encounters a diverse group of adults and teens who are battling their own demons, including some who are depressed and others who are truly psychotic. It is an eye-opening experience for Craig, but he embraces it along with the opportunity to get to know his fellow patients and come to understand them.

As the plot proceeds, Craig learns that his old friends Aaron and Nia are not particularly good for him, but rather than following his first instinct to simply write them off, he takes the middle ground. While he now is more aware of their flaws, he also understands the reasons for their behavior and resolves to give them, particularly Aaron, an opportunity to earn his trust and friendship again. He also comes to understand his fellow patients and appreciate each of them for who they are as unique individuals, something he demonstrates when he draws a personal brain map for each of them before he leaves the hospital.





# Styles

## Point of View

*It's Kind of a Funny Story* is written in the first person. The story is narrated by the protagonist, Craig Ginter. The entire story is from his point of view.

Getting the story from Craig's unique perspective is the most appropriate format for this novel. While there are a number of other characters, some more important than others, the plot revolves entirely around Craig and his personal experiences. It is not important that the reader understand what other characters are thinking or feeling -- even more central ones such as Aaron and Noelle -- but it is critical that we understand everything Craig is experiencing from his personal perspective.

Since most of the story is told in the present tense, the author is able to give us Craig's experiences at the same time he is experiencing them. The use of flashbacks to recall certain events also provide an opportunity to see those occurrences with the benefit of Craig's current knowledge and insight.

## Language and Meaning

The book is set in current-day New York and as it is narrated by a teenage boy, uses word and sentence choices that would be typical of someone that age. During scenes featuring some of Craig's high school friends, particularly the book's first chapter, the author uses a fair amount of urban and teenage slang. Sentences such as "Son, what you tryin' to do with my gold, yo?" This, along with other techniques such as having the narrator -- Craig -- say "Ronny is like, blowing smoke . . ." establish a certain mood that gets the reader into the mindset of a group of teenage boys hanging out together, but would be distracting if continued throughout the novel.

The author also brings weight to certain important words by capitalizing them even though they are not technically proper nouns. Words such as Anchors, Tentacles, the Shift, and Cycling are so important to Craig and to his story that they deserve the special emphasis imparted by capitalizing them.

## Structure

*It's Kind of a Funny Story* is divided into 10 chapters of unequal length, but most are fairly short. The chapters are numbered but untitled, and they are further divided into 10 parts.

Part 1, entitled *Where I'm At*, introduces Craig in the present day and provides an overview of what his life is like and the problems he is experiencing. It is written in the present tense. Part 2, *How I Got There*, is written in the past tense and traces the



events and experiences that Craig believes led to his depression. Part 3, Badoom, returns to the present tense and picks up the current story beginning with the night Craig decides to commit suicide. Part 4, Hospital, takes the reader through Craig's admission to the Emergency Room, and Parts 5 through 10 trace his experiences on the 6 North psychiatric unit. The structure works well since beginning in the present day gets the reader into the story immediately before the author goes back to provide background to help us understand the previous events and experiences that have brought Craig to this point.



## Quotes

And I picture it in my mind: me going back to school. My little group of friends -- only they're not even my friends anymore -- buffered by this new collection of girls who like me because I'm depressed and teachers who are sympathizing and the suddenly nice principal. It's something I want to get excited about. But I can't.

-- Narrator (Chapter 34 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** After his conversation with the principal, Craig should be relieved and optimistic about going back to school because he now know that it will not be the impossible situation he had imagined. However, His perspective about his school and its place in his life has shifted and he is beginning to realize that it is not right for him, no matter how much he wanted it and how hard he worked for it.

It's so hard to talk when you want to kill yourself.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This is the first sentence in the book and immediately draws the reader into the story and establishes the desperation felt by Craig.

Tentacles is my term -- the Tentacles are the evil tasks that invade my life.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This sentence provides a definition of Tentacles, a term that Craig will continue to use throughout the book.

The opposite of the Tentacles are the Anchors. The Anchors are things that occupy my mind and make me feel good temporarily.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This sentence defines Anchors, another of Craig's coined terms referenced throughout the book.

I want there to be a Shift so bad. I want to feel my brain slide back into the slot it was meant to be in, rest there the way it did before the fall of last year, back when I was young, and witty, and my teachers said I had incredible promise, and I had incredible promise, and I spoke up in class because I was excited and smart about the world.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This sentence defines Craig's term "the Shift" and establishes his desperation to return to a place of happiness.

And I did that for the next five years -- whenever I was in class, I didn't doodle, I drew maps. Hundreds of them. When I finished, I crumpled them; it was making them that was important. I did cities on the ocean, cities with two rivers meeting in the middle, cities with one big river that bent, cities with bridges, crazy interchanges, circles and



boulevards. I made cities. That made me happy. That was my Anchor.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This passage introduces Craig's love for drawing his imaginative maps, a practice that will return with great importance later in the novel.

My parents are always looking into new ways to fix me. They've tried acupuncture, yoga, cognitive therapy, relaxation tapes, various kinds of forced exercise (until I found my bike), self-help books, Tae Bo, and feng shui in my room. They've spent a lot of money on me. I'm ashamed.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This passage establishes the extent to which Craig's family has supported him and tried to help him, and his feeling of shame that he has not been able to respond as they have hoped.

The day I got those test results, a cold, plaintive, late-fall New York day, was my last good day.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** This foreshadows the eventual revelation that the pressure of his elite high school is a large part of Craig's problem and the fact that it will ultimately prove wrong for him.

I was happy because someday I'd be walking across this bridge looking at this city, owning some piece of it, being valuable here.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This sentence establishes Craig's hopes for the future before depression consumed his life and also foreshadows the role the bridge will play in his life.

I had a lot of Tentacles. I needed to cut some of them. But I couldn't; they were all too strong and they had me wrapped too tight, and to cut them I'd have to do something crazy like admit that I wasn't equipped for school.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This establishes the enormous pressures Craig feels from his elite school and the shame he thinks would be caused by admitting that he is not as smart as people think he is.

My Tentacles have Tentacles, and I'm never going to cut them off. But my Anchor, that's easy: it's killing myself.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This passage confirms the fact that Craig's life has become so weighty that his Anchor has changed from something positive, like making his maps, to the idea that suicide is the only answer.



I thought I was a bad mother, but I'm a good mother if I taught you how to handle yourself. You had the tools to know what to do. That is so important.

-- Craig's mother (Chapter 18 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Despite learning that her son has almost ended his life, Craig's mother continues to be calm and supportive of him.

This morning I was a pretty functional teenager. Now I'm a mental patient. But you know, I wasn't that functional.

-- Narrator (Chapter 19 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Craig has a reality check in this passage, realizing how much his life has changed in just a few hours, and although he is unhappy about finding himself in the hospital, inside he realizes that he needs serious help.

I get the feeling -- I don't know how I know the rules of mental-ward etiquette; maybe I was born with them; maybe I knew I'd end up here -- but I get the feeling that one big no-no in this place is asking people how they got here.

-- Narrator (Chapter 20 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Craig has just arrived on the psychiatric unit, but his thinking has already begun to shift into a different mode.

As I tune Humble out, I eat not because I want to, not because I have to overcome anything, not to prove myself to anyone, but because it's there. I eat because that's what people do.

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** Eating is a small step, but it is indicative that the Shift Craig has hoped for has already begun, however subtly.

I just talked to this girl -- and I did okay -- but the Tentacles are coiled and the pressure is rising, getting ready to pounce on me when I leave. If I'm in here too long, I'll have that much more to do when I get out.

-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This passage shows that Craig is beginning to realize that his most oppressive Tentacles are coming from his school.

People here don't want to get out. Getting out means going back to the streets or to jail or to try and fish their things out of an impounded car, like me. Your kind of situation, with the parents and a house, that's rare.

-- Smitty (Chapter 27 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Here Craig begins to understand the people he is now living among and to realize that his situation is much, much better.



A working brain is probably a lot like a map, where anybody can get from one place to another on the freeways. It's the nonworking brains that get blocked, that have dead ends, that are under construction like mine.

-- Narrator (Chapter 32 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In this passage, Craig begins to work out the concept of the brain maps that will become his new Anchor, and to realize that his brain is not irretrievably broken, but simply under construction. There is hope for a better life.

Uh, okay! I answer into Muqtada's back. "Ah --" I try and think how to sum it up. "I like making out with you . . . but I don't really like you as a person . . .

-- Craig (Chapter 40 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** After obsessing over Nia and the fact that she is Aaron's girlfriend rather than his, Craig finally sees her for the self-absorbed person she is and realizes that he is over her.

It's literally like breaking away from a monster -- the further I get from thinking about e-mail and Dr. Minerva and the fact that I'm going to have to leave here and go back to Executive Pre-Professional, the calmer I get. And the closer I get to the brain maps, to this little stupid thing I can do, the calmer I get.

-- Narrator (Chapter 44 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Walking down the hall becomes a metaphor for walking away from Craig's problems and closer to a situation he can control and one that makes him happy.

I don't really need to explain this to Aaron. He's been demoted from most important friend to friend, and he's going to have to earn that, even. And you know what else? I don't owe people anything, and I don't have to talk to them any more than I feel I need to.

-- Narrator (Chapter 45 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Craig is taking another step toward making the Shift he has been seeking so desperately.

I've seen it before. You just remember us, okay? We meet in the outside world, it just ruins it. You'll be embarrassed of me and I . . . " He smiles. " . . . I might be embarrassed of me too. And I might be embarrassed of you, if you don't keep your stuff together.

-- Bobby (Chapter 46 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Patients in a mental health facility have a tendency to bond there and feel that they can remain friends when they leave, but it is discouraged by mental health professionals. Bobby has been in and out of this hospital many times and he knows, although Craig does not, that their friendship can only exist inside the hospital because their lives will be different when they leave and their bond would not be the same.



It's okay, Sarah. I just . . . I think I was concentrated on getting into Executive Pre-Professional because it was like, a challenge. I wanted to have that feeling of triumph. I never really thought about the fact that I'd have to, you know, go to the school.

-- Craig (Chapter 47 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** Craig's perspective is continuing to change as he throws off the Tentacle imposed by his school. He now sees why he succeeded at getting in but failed at actually going to school there.

I think they might have to change the whole system. Look, two people like you, smart young people, sent in here because of pressure.

-- Craig's mother (Chapter 50 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** This articulates one of the book's major themes -- the effects of pressure on young people.

It's a huge thing, this Shift, just as big as I imagined. My brain doesn't want to think anymore; all of a sudden it wants to do.

-- Narrator (Chapter 50 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** As he leaves the hospital, Craig finally achieves the Shift he has been seeking.