

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes Study Guide

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes by Chris Crutcher

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Contents

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-4.....	7
Chapters 5-6.....	9
Chapters 7-9.....	11
Chapters 10-12.....	13
Chapters 13-14.....	15
Chapters 15-16.....	17
Chapters 17-19 and Epilogue.....	18
Characters.....	20
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	26
Style.....	28
Quotes.....	30
Topics for Discussion.....	32



Plot Summary

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes is a young adult novel by writer Chris Crutcher. Moby is a high school senior whose best friend, Sarah Byrnes, has been put in a hospital because she refuses to speak. Sarah Byrnes, a young woman disfigured by burns she received when she was three, has always been a friend to Moby even when his excess weight made him an outcast at school. Now Sarah Byrnes needs Moby to be her strength like she was his in junior high. Moby does not know who he can trust but finds himself turning to the most unlikely people to find a way to protect his best friend. Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes is about being an outcast, about friendship, and about standing up for what is right, even when it means betraying the trust of the one who has always been there.

Moby visits Sarah Byrnes, his best friend, in the hospital where she was taken after she quit speaking. Moby does not know if Sarah Byrnes is faking but is determined to do all he can to make her okay again. Moby sees Sarah Byrnes everyday, talking to her about their escapades in junior high when they were both outcasts tortured by bullies who seemed to take special interest in the two of them. Moby and Sarah Byrnes created a newspaper in junior high called Crispy Pork Rinds. The title of the paper refers to Sarah Byrnes' scarred face and hands, a result of burns she received at the age of three, and Moby's excess body fat. The first edition of the paper targeted one bully in particular, Dale Thornton. Dale was punished as a result of the article, so he went after Moby for some payback. Sarah Byrnes realizes that Dale must have learned Moby was the author through the principal at the school, so she befriends Dale to present a united front against the principal with latter issues of the paper.

Moby was asked to join the swim team as they entered high school. Moby began to lose weight but was afraid if he became skinny, Sarah Byrnes would assume he no longer wanted to be her friend, so he began eating more to stay fat for her. Eventually Sarah Byrnes tells him to stop it; however, during this time, Sarah Byrnes became closer friends with Dale. Dale and Sarah Byrnes have an abuse in common; therefore, Sarah Byrnes told Dale things she never told Moby. As a result, Moby finds himself turning to one of his worst enemies when Sarah Byrnes is admitted to the hospital in an attempt to help her. Moby then uses the information Dale gave him to force Sarah Byrnes to show that her break with reality is fake.

Sarah Byrnes tells Moby, both in person and in a letter, that she has faked her mental status in order to give herself time to think. It turns out that Sarah Byrnes' father caused her burns in a fight with her mother and that he has continued to abuse her all her childhood. Sarah Byrnes has noticed her father's cruelty growing and is afraid he is about to do something even worse than the burns he gave her as a child. Sarah Byrnes first considered suicide but then decided to go into the hospital to find another solution. Sarah Byrnes begs Moby not to go to an adult because she knows they will have to involve Child Protective Services. However, Sarah Byrnes is afraid her testimony against her father would never stand up in court because she was so young when the burns happened.



Moby turns to his teacher and swim coach, Ms. Lemry, despite a promise to Sarah Byrnes that he would tell no one. Ms. Lemry says they must find Sarah Byrnes' mother, the only person who could testify against Virgil Byrnes in court. When Sarah Byrnes learns that Moby told Ms. Lemry, she explodes, revealing her ability to talk to the hospital staff. Sarah Byrnes is forced to run away from the hospital so her father cannot take her home. Sarah Byrnes goes to live with Ms. Lemry. Together, Sarah Byrnes and Ms. Lemry go in search of Sarah Byrnes' mother in Reno, Nevada. Unfortunately, when they find Sarah Byrnes' mother, she refuses to help.

While Sarah Byrnes and Ms. Lemry are gone, Virgil Byrnes attacks Moby in an attempt to learn where Sarah Byrnes is. Moby is cut on the face and the knife is embedded in his back. Moby once again turns to Dale Thornton, who gets him medical help and becomes something of a hero in the papers. The attack on Moby gives the police a reason to arrest Virgil, but he has disappeared. Desperate, Sarah Byrnes decides to run away, but Moby and Ms. Lemry are able to stop her. Eventually Virgil Byrnes is arrested and convicted, and given twenty years in prison. Sarah Byrnes is adopted by Ms. Lemry and her husband, giving her a second chance at the happiness she was cheated out of by her biological parents.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Sarah Byrnes is a young woman who was scarred by burns at the age of three. Sarah Byrnes insists everyone call her by her full name because of the play on words with her last name and her condition. Eric "Moby" Calhoun has been her best friend since high school.

In chapter 1, Moby is at swim practice, pushing himself to the brink of exhaustion in preparation for his next swimming match. Afterward, Moby goes to see Sarah Byrnes, his best friend, at the psych ward at Sacred Heart hospital. Moby sits beside Sarah Byrnes but does not know what to do or say. A counselor comes up and tells Moby to just talk to her with the hopes that normal conversation will help her return to herself. Moby asks Sarah Byrnes if she remembers Crispy Pork Rinds. Crispy Pork Rinds is a newspaper Moby and Sarah Byrnes wrote and published in junior high as a way to get back at bullies. The premiere issue got Moby a one way ticket to Mr. Mautz's office, the school principal. Mr. Mautz demanded to know if Moby wrote the paper, but Moby refused to say, standing on the fifth amendment as Sarah Byrnes told him to do. This only caused Mr. Mautz to grow angry, warning Moby that if any more issues of the paper showed up in the school he would be suitably punished. Sarah Byrnes was not one to back down, however, and insisted they get started with a second issue immediately.

In chapter 2, Moby is in his Contemporary American Thought, or CAT, class. Moby introduces the subject of whether or not the world is a good or bad place. Moby uses Sarah Byrnes' life as a disfigured person as a reason why the world is a bad place. Ms. Lemry, the teacher, does not want to discuss Sarah Byrnes without her permission, so she pushes the subject in a new direction. Moby becomes quiet because all he wants to discuss is Sarah Byrnes. Moby is frightened for her, but he does not know what to do to help her. This causes Moby to begin recalling his early relationship with Sarah Byrnes. The two of them were drawn together because Moby was overweight and Sarah Byrnes was scarred, something she called the terminal uglies. Moby recalls one afternoon when a bully, Dale Thornton, wanted Sarah Byrnes' lunch money, but she refused. Dale hit Sarah Byrnes in the face over and over until her scarred skin was swollen and purple, but she continued to resist. Dale turned on Moby then, but Moby was more afraid of Sarah Byrnes than Dale, so he refused as well. Dale finally gave up. It was because of this incident that Dale was the subject of the headline article in the first issue of Crispy Pork Rinds.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

These first chapters introduce the two main characters, Sarah Byrnes and Eric "Moby" Calhoun. Sarah Byrnes was burned as a three year old, supposedly when a pot of spaghetti fell on her. However, when told that her father chose not to have the scars



repaired because they would make her tough, the reader begins to wonder if Sarah Byrnes' father might have had something to do with her initial injuries. In any case, Sarah Byrnes has grown up with horrible disfiguring scars, leaving her prey to the unkind attentions of bullies and classmates all through her school career. Sarah Byrnes proves herself to have a strong character, however, by standing up to these bullies and getting back at them in small, creative ways. It is, therefore, a surprise to everyone who knows her that she has had a mental break that has left her silent and in a psych ward.

Moby is not disfigured but carries around some extra fat that makes him a target of bullies as well. Moby has few friends, so when Sarah Byrnes befriends him, he embraces her friendship and learns from her confidence in the face of adversity. Moby is the follower, Sarah Byrnes the leader. However, this dynamic changed since Moby became a swimmer for the school team, though the reader is unclear at this point why the dynamics changed or how. Now Moby is on the outside looking in as Sarah Byrnes fights for her life and does not know what to do to help her.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

In chapter 3, Moby goes to swim practice on Saturday with Ellerby, his teammate and friend. Ellerby drives a unique car that appears to make fun of religion. This causes a great deal of tension between Ellerby and fellow swim team member, Mark Brittain. Brittain is a Christian and finds Ellerby's car offensive. This leads to animosity among Ellerby, Moby, and Brittain. That day's practice is for every member of the team to swim under their best time for one hundred laps. Ellerby, Moby, and Brittain are among the ones who make it to the end. Ellerby and Moby are constantly setting the pace, so when they reach the ninety-seventh lap, they cause Brittain to fall under his time and be disqualified to continue.

Moby goes to visit Sarah Byrnes where another counselor asks him if Sarah Byrnes has any other friends who might visit her, or know why she had this mental break when she did. Moby thinks of Dale Thornton. Moby remembers just after the first issue of *Crispy Pork Rinds* came out, he hid in a bathroom stall as Dale forced another kid to read him the article in the paper featuring Dale. The article revealed that Dale skipped a class in school a few weeks before due to a bet in which he attempted to keep chewing tobacco in his mouth for a whole hour. As a result of the article, Dale was called to the principal's office and punished for this episode. Soon the whole school knew Dale was looking for Moby.

In chapter 4, Moby talks to his mother about Dale Thornton, causing him to recall Dale's reaction to the article in the first edition of *Crispy Pork Rinds*. Dale knew somehow that Moby wrote the article, so he waited to ambush Moby after school. There was a bet that Moby would not make it home without being beat up, and Sarah Byrnes had a lot of money on Moby. A ride home would make the bet go in Dale's favor, so Sarah Byrnes hid Moby in a box and attempted to push him to safety on a handcart. Unfortunately, Dale was not as stupid as they were hoping, and figured it out. Later, Sarah Byrnes told Moby that Mr. Mautz must have told Dale about Moby being the writer of the article. Sarah Byrnes suggested that they befriend Dale in order to make a united stand against Mautz with future issues of the paper.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Chapter 3 introduces Ellerby and Brittain. These two are polar opposites on the Christianity scale. Ellerby makes fun of religion, looking at it with a cynicism that is unusual in someone so young. It is ironic that Ellerby's father is a preacher, but when the reader takes into consideration that Ellerby's brother, a seminary student, was killed, it begins to make some sense. On the other end of the scale is Brittain, a young Christian who lives an apparently pious life. Brittain is one of those young men who prays before everything and who pushes his beliefs on others. Both Ellerby and Moby



find this irritating; therefore, they have become something like bullies to Brittain. This, too, is ironic since Moby was horribly bullied in his early school career and should understand how that feels, even to unpleasant or opinionated people.

Moby remembers the paper he and Sarah Byrnes wrote and published in junior high school. This paper's first edition featured an article about Dale Thornton, a bully who has harassed them in the past and resulted in Dale getting in trouble both in school and with his abusive father. This leads Dale to beat up Moby. Again irony comes into play when Sarah Byrnes decides they should befriend this boy who beat up both her and Moby, in order to defend themselves against the principal of their school. Sarah Byrnes claims that only the principal could have told Dale who wrote the article and soon learns this is true. This seems like an unusual friendship, but Sarah Byrnes proves once again she is highly intelligent and has a unique sense of justice. Not only this, but the reader suspects she feels some kind of connection to Dale because of the abuse he clearly suffers at the hands of his father, again suggesting to the reader that Sarah Byrnes is also a child of abuse.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

In chapter 5, Moby recalls how Sarah Byrnes convinced Dale Thornton to help them with Crispy Pork Rinds, convincing him that Mautz was the common enemy. The following Monday, Brittain grabs Moby as he goes into his CAT class and asks why he and Ellerby were mean to him at practice. Moby tries to defend himself without looking stupid in front of Jody Mueller, Brittain's girlfriend and the girl Moby has loved since the beginning of high school. Ms. Lemry's entrance ends all conversation, and she asks student to present their ideas for topics to be discussed in class. Ellerby presents a song that expresses how God sees everything from a distance, perhaps explaining why bad things are allowed to happen to good people. Brittain argues with Ellerby's take on the song, expressing offense at the spirit of the song, but Ellerby insists that it is about shame, which is what he wants to present as his topic.

In chapter 6, Moby arrives to see Sarah Byrnes, but Virgil Byrnes, her father, has arrived first. Moby stays back and watches as Virgil speaks angrily to Sarah Byrnes before storming off. Virgil then comes to Moby and asks him if Sarah Byrnes is faking. Moby insists she is not, but Virgil clearly does not believe that. Moby recalls the end of the Crispy Pork Rinds when they could no longer come up with people to attack and stories to write. The paper had served its purpose, running a series of stories about a two-headed alien child belonging to Mautz. Instead, Moby and Sarah Byrnes began getting their revenge on bullies in quieter, more subtle ways. On the heels of this memory, Moby convinces Ellerby to take him to Dale Thornton's house in the Edison district, a dangerous section of town. Moby asks Dale about Sarah Byrnes, questioning something he once said about Sarah Byrnes not getting her burns from a boiling pot of spaghetti like she told everyone. Dale denies that Sarah Byrnes ever told him anything about the origin of her burns but expresses disbelief that Sarah Byrnes would have a mental meltdown.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Moby recalls how Dale became a part of the Crispy Pork Rinds newspaper and how this led to a tentative friendship between Dale and Sarah Byrnes. They seem like an unlikely pair, but again the reader sees the suggestion that both Sarah Byrnes and Dale Thornton were victims of child abuse, especially when Moby describes how angry Virgil Byrnes was as he visited his daughter in the hospital, convinced she is faking. Perhaps a mutual fear of not surviving their childhoods or a desire to survive drew them to one another. In any case, Moby turns to Dale for information about Sarah Byrnes that he feels Sarah Byrnes might have shared with Dale. Dale denies knowing anything but expresses surprise that Sarah Byrnes would break in the way she has. The reader is beginning to believe this is something that would be unlikely as well, since all of Moby's



descriptions of Sarah Byrnes is of a girl who is strong, confident, and able to face anything.

The CAT class is getting underway, beginning to pick topics that are controversial and clearly personal to some of the class members. Ellerby brings up shame as a topic, using the idea that God makes all man responsible for their own lives. This offends Brittain who is a Christian and is offended by any description of God that goes against his interpretation of the Bible. This opens up possible tension that the reader expects to see increase before it comes to some sort of climax.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In chapter 7, Brittain attempts to drop the CAT class and to have Jody withdrawn as well, but Ms. Lemry will not allow Jody to leave because she feels as though she is being pressured by Brittain. As a result, both Brittain and Jody decide to remain. Moby makes a comment to Jody that causes her to leave a note on his desk asking for his number. Later that day, Moby visits Sarah Byrnes and makes a comment about seeing Dale that causes a reaction. Moby begins to wonder if Sarah Byrnes is faking. A few days later, Moby talks to Ellerby about Jody's note but confesses he has done nothing about it. Ellerby accuses him of having cold feet. The conversation turns to Ellerby's shame topic. Ellerby tells Moby that he and his father have been good friends ever since he attempted to run away in the aftermath of his brother's death. Ellerby says that he and his father redefined religion for each other and that his father is supportive of his opinions. Later that night, as Ellerby drops Moby at his house, Dale approaches them. Dale tells Moby that Sarah Byrnes told him her father burned her intentionally by pressing her face against a wood stove. Dale swears both Ellerby and Moby to secrecy.

In chapter 8, Ms. Lemry announces that abortion is to be a major topic they will discuss in CAT class. A few days later, an open discussion about abortion takes place in CAT class. There is a great deal of discussion over whether life begins at conception or later in pregnancy. Brittain brings in the religious connotations of life and argues that abortion at any time is murder. Brittain gets worked up when Moby and Ellerby enter the argument. A verbal fight breaks out between Brittain and Moby that only ends when the class bell rings. After class, Jody approaches Moby and asks him to meet her after school at the Burger Barn.

In chapter 9, Moby goes to visit Sarah Byrnes and she speaks to him. As they walk outside to avoid being overheard, Sarah Byrnes confesses to faking her condition in order to get away from her father. Sarah Byrnes tells Moby that her father burned her face to get back at her mother during an argument, then threatened to kill her if she ever told. Sarah Byrnes has begun to recognize the same crazy behavior in her father recently and is frightened he is going to hurt her again. Sarah Byrnes feels she cannot turn to the legal system because her testimony could never stand up to her father's, and she cannot run away because she is too ugly to disappear successfully. Sarah Byrnes makes Moby promise he will not tell anyone what she has said. Later, Moby has dinner with Jody and learns that Brittain forced her to have an abortion the year before and blamed her for the pregnancy, claiming she should have taken precautions. Jody is unhappy in her relationship with Brittain and wants to move on, preferably with Moby.



Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Ellerby tells Moby why he feels the way he does about religion, citing his brother's death and his crisis of faith. Ellerby also claims that his father is in complete agreement with Ellerby's opinions and supports everything he does. The reader sees this as a strong parent-child relationship, despite the irony in the fact that Ellerby makes fun of religion everyday by driving his crazy car and his father is a pastor. At the same time, the reader sees Brittain's overwhelming devotion to the Bible and God and his opinions that abortion is murder, no matter what. The reader is also struck with Brittain's insistence that the responsibility to prevent pregnancy lies completely with the woman. The reason behind this is revealed when Jody tells Moby she had an abortion at Brittain's insistence. Brittain justifies his actions by saying it is Jody's fault the pregnancy happened in the first place and that people like him are allowed a few mistakes. This makes Brittain a hypocrite and leaves the reader wondering if perhaps his stand against abortion does not come more from a personal sense of guilt than a religious belief.

Sarah Byrnes tells Moby that her father is the reason she has burn scars on her face. Sarah Byrnes' story is horrific and frightening, especially when the reader realizes that Sarah Byrnes' determination to not talk is the only thing that is standing between her and possible death at the hands of her father. This also places Moby in the unenviable position of having to choose between keeping Sarah Byrnes' trust or breaking it and getting her some help.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In chapter 10, Moby tells Ms. Lemry that he is going to begin dating Jody Mueller. Ms. Lemry asks Moby if he is doing this for the right reasons and suggests that he start going a little easier on Brittain. That same day Moby sees Brittain who tells him that Jody is a liar and that he should not believe anything she says. They nearly come to blows, but Moby walks away before the discussion goes that far. Moby's mother questions his motives in dating Jody as well, but Carver, her boyfriend, comes to Moby's defense. Carver then admits to interfering in a relationship Moby's mother was having with a man in his office. Carver's bravery in the face of his mother's wrath makes Moby begin to think Carver is alright after all. After Carver and his mother leave, Moby thinks about his visit to Sarah Byrnes that day. Moby was never allowed to see her because Virgil Byrnes was there, screaming at Sarah Byrnes that she was faking. The counselor finally forced Virgil to leave.

In chapter 11, Moby goes to visit Sarah Byrnes and finds her father there again. Moby takes Sarah Byrnes for a walk outside, but Virgil is watching so she cannot speak. They work out a system of hand squeezing so Sarah Byrnes can answer simple questions. Moby tells Sarah Byrnes he is going to leave a notebook under her mattress and asks her to write her plans in it. When Moby is finally able to get the notebook back, he finds a letter written to him that expresses how afraid Sarah Byrnes is of her father. Sarah Byrnes expresses the idea that the only person who can help her is her mother. Moby takes this letter to Ms. Lemry, trusting her despite his promise to Sarah Byrnes, and they agree that they must find Sarah Byrnes' mother.

In chapter 12, Moby and Ellerby return to Dale Thornton's. Moby asks Dale if Sarah Byrnes ever said anything about her mother. Dale says that Sarah Byrnes once mentioned that her mother dreamed of being a card dealer or dancer in Reno. The following day at school, Mr. Mautz, who has moved up to the high school as vice principal, asks Moby to have lunch with him. Mr. Mautz talks to Moby about Brittain and suggests that Moby be nicer to Brittain. Mautz also asks that Moby stop dating Jody until Brittain can get over their breakup, but Moby refuses. At practice that afternoon, Moby warns Ms. Lemry that Mautz was also asking about CAT. When Moby visits Sarah Byrnes that afternoon, they are able to walk together. Moby tells her that he confided in Ms. Lemry, and Sarah Byrnes becomes so angry that she begins yelling. Now everyone knows she can talk.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

As Moby discusses his decision to begin dating Jody Mueller, everyone seems to wonder if perhaps he is not doing this to get back at Brittain. Moby claims that Jody came to him, but none of the adults in his life seem to believe this. The only person who



does is Carver, his mother's new boyfriend. This combined with Carver's announcement that he manipulated his mother into dating him raises Carver up in Moby's boyfriend approval scale.

Moby learns more about Virgil Byrnes' cruelty toward his daughter and comes to a point where he realizes he cannot handle this situation on his own. Sarah Byrnes needs help or she could possibly be killed, something Moby knows he cannot allow to happen. Moby turns to Ms. Lemry, his favorite teacher, and she agrees to help. However, Sarah Byrnes is not happy about this, but it is clear that her angry comes out of fear. To the reader, Ms. Lemry's involvement offers hope, as does the idea of finding Sarah Byrnes' mother. The reader can only hope that these two women can support Sarah Byrnes and get her away from her father.

Mr. Mautz is beginning to cause trouble for Moby again. Mr. Mautz is the same principal who told Dale that Moby wrote the article that got him in trouble, so the reader already knows Mr. Mautz has a cruel streak. This cruel streak seem to have turned in Moby's direction again, and this time it seems Mr. Mautz has focused on the CAT class. This speaks trouble for Ms. Lemry as well as Moby, and it stems from Brittain, giving both Moby and the reader another reason to dislike Brittain. However, even Ms. Lemry suggests everyone should give Brittain a break, so maybe the reader and Moby alike will learn there is something to empathize with in Brittain's personality or situation.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

In chapter 13, Sarah Byrnes runs away from the hospital before her father can take her home and begins staying with Ms. Lemry and her husband. Sarah Byrnes returns to school, perhaps under the assumption that her father would not make a scene in such a public place. In CAT class, the discussion on abortion continues, but this time Mr. Mautz is watching. As Brittain continues to express his belief that abortion is murder and all babies have a right to life, Sarah Byrnes decides to challenge him. Sarah Byrnes asks if a baby whose mother knows her child is in mortal danger from her spouse should be born; Brittain insists it should. Sarah Byrnes continues to push Brittain until he explodes and accuses her of hiding behind her disfigurement. This explosion causes Jody to confess to the entire class that she had an abortion at Brittain's insistence. Brittain calls Jody a liar and marches out of the classroom.

In chapter 14, Mr. Mautz comes into the CAT class and announces Mark Brittain attempted suicide, and that everyone in class was responsible. Ms. Lemry demands he get out of class and then opens a discussion on suicide. One girl walks out after taking Mr. Mautz's side in the discussion. Ms. Lemry is then called out of the class and does not return. Jody and Moby are at his house after school, discussing Brittain, and Carver tells them his emotional difficulties after his own father committed suicide, helping Jody see that she is not responsible for what Brittain has done. Later that night, Moby goes to Ms. Lemry's house and learns that she and Sarah Byrnes are preparing a road trip to find Sarah Byrnes' mother in Reno. When Moby returns home, he finds a note asking him to call an unnamed man. When Moby makes the call, it is Virgil Byrnes on the other end. Virgil thinks Moby knows where Sarah Byrnes is and threatens to kill Moby if he refuses to tell.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Sarah Byrnes leaves the hospital and moves in with Ms. Lemry. Despite her anger at Moby for talking to Ms. Lemry, Sarah Byrnes appears happy to be with her. In fact, Sarah Byrnes is more relaxed and happy than Moby has ever seen her as she prepares to go on a road trip to find her mother. It seems as though everything is finally coming together for Sarah Byrnes, thanks to Moby. However, tension remains as everyone realizes that Virgil will not stop looking for his daughter. In fact, Virgil calls Moby and threatens him with death if he does not confess to Sarah Byrnes' whereabouts. This situation seems dangerous which seems like a time when it might benefit Moby to talk to someone about these threats, but he chooses not to in order to protect Sarah Byrnes from worrying about his safety, or returning home to protect those she loves.

Brittain has a meltdown as the class continues to discuss abortion, once again making the reader wonder if his convictions are based more in guilt than in religious beliefs.



This seems to be underscored when Jody announces the truth and Brittain walks out of class, calling Jody a liar. This is the second time Brittain has called Jody a liar, reinforcing the idea that Brittain is afraid of the truth Jody has to tell. When the reader learns that Brittain has attempted suicide, it does not come as a surprise, but appears to be a symptom of a lifestyle that was too much pressure for this young man. Jody feels guilty, but Carver helps her see that the actions of one is not the responsibility of another. It is a difficult situation, but Brittain's actions show the reader the depth of the pain this young man feels and the guilt that drives him.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

In chapter 15, Sarah Byrnes' leaves for Reno while Moby goes to school. Moby and Ellerby are called into Mr. Mautz's office where they find Brittain's father waiting for them. When Mr. Brittain announces he blames them for Mark's attempted suicide, Ellerby insists on calling his father. When Mr. Ellerby arrives, he listens to Mr. Brittain's opinions regarding his son's suicide attempt, then asks him to leave. Mr. Ellerby cuts into Mr. Mautz, claiming that he is overstepping his authority and that he is mixing church and state. Mr. Ellerby tells Mr. Mautz that all discussion should cease until the principal returns from a trip out of town. Mr. Ellerby leaves with his son, leaving Moby alone with Mr. Mautz. It is then that Mr. Mautz invites Virgil Byrnes into the office. Virgil accuses Moby of knowing where Sarah Byrnes is and purposely keeping it from him. In anger, Moby admits to knowing where Sarah Byrnes is but refuses to tell. There is nothing Mr. Mautz can do, so he sends Moby back to class.

In chapter 16, Moby is on his way home from Ellerby's when he discovers Virgil Byrnes in his back seat. Virgil holds a knife to Moby's cheek and demands to know where Sarah Byrnes is. Moby manages to knock Virgil into the windshield by driving erratically, then escapes into the streets. Moby runs for a while, but Virgil seems to read his mind and know where he is going. Moby then changes direction when he realizes he is in the Edison district; however, Virgil finds him anyway. Virgil threatens to cut Moby's throat if he does not tell, so Moby does. As Moby is running away, Virgil's knife gets stuck in his shoulder. Moby goes to Dale Thornton's house where the police are called.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

Mr. Mautz continues his campaign against Moby by calling him and Ellerby into his office where Mr. Brittain is waiting to attack them for his son's suicide attempt. Ellerby is too smart for this, however, and he calls his dad. Mr. Mautz is put in his place and forced to back off. Moby is not so lucky, however, and finds himself confronted by Virgil Byrnes. Moby admits to knowing where Sarah Byrnes is, but continues to refuse to tell. This puts Moby in danger, though he does not realize it the time. Moby is later attacked by Virgil and forced to tell where Sarah Byrnes is, but in the process is stabbed and cut. This is an unfortunate situation for Moby, but it gives the police a reason to arrest Virgil Byrnes.



Chapters 17-19 and Epilogue

Chapters 17-19 and Epilogue Summary

In chapter 17, Moby is recovering in the hospital while a manhunt begins for Virgil Byrnes. Brittain comes to visit and tells Moby that he feels stupid for everything that has happened. Ms. Lemry visits, telling Moby that they found Sarah Byrnes' mother, but she is unwilling to help. Ms. Lemry is frightened that this will cause Sarah Byrnes to give up.

In chapter 18, Brittain visits again and asks Moby's advice on dealing with the fallout of his situation. Moby tells Brittain he should stand up for himself. Brittain agrees, telling Moby that Mr. Ellerby came by and offered to help as well. Sarah Byrnes comes later and tells Moby that she is leaving town to protect him and the Lemrys. Moby begs her not to go, but Sarah Byrnes insists it is for the best. When she is gone, Moby calls Ms. Lemry and asks her to come get him. Together they go looking for Sarah Byrnes, finding her in the train station. Ms. Lemry convinces her to stay.

In chapter 19, Brittain returns to school. During CAT, Brittain tells the class that Jody told the truth, that he was wrong, and that no one in the class was responsible for his suicide attempt. This instantly raises Brittain in Moby's personal opinion. Time passes and Virgil Byrnes continues to go free. Carver tells Moby's mother he is going on a business trip, but a short time later Moby sees him on the television news as he is arrested for breaking into Virgil Byrnes' house and beating him up. A reporter does an interview with Carver on live television a while later. Carver admits to breaking into Virgil's house, claiming something had to be done. Carver also claims that Virgil attacked him first but that he was more than willing to fight back because he knew Virgil would get a light sentence for hurting Moby and that he deserved so much more for what he did to Sarah Byrnes.

In the epilogue, Sarah Byrnes is adopted by the Lemry's just a few hours short of her eighteenth birthday. Carver only got a few months of a work-release sentence and probation. Moby and his friends have graduated from high school and are looking forward to going to college.

Chapters 17-19 and Epilogue Analysis

Moby becomes something of a celebrity after being attacked by Virgil Byrnes. All that matters to Moby, however, is that Virgil Byrnes is being hunted by the police and will go to jail. Unfortunately, Sarah Byrnes' mother has refused to come back and testify against her ex-husband, leaving Sarah Byrnes with no hope left. This situation makes everyone afraid she will hurt herself, but Sarah Byrnes once again proves how strong she is. Sarah Byrnes stays and allows Moby and the Lemrys to care about her.

Brittain turns to Moby for help in figuring out how to handle his return to school. Brittain actually stands up and takes responsibility for himself, causing him to earn Moby's



respect and probably that of many other people as well. Brittain has also been approached by Mr. Ellerby to help him sort out his religious convictions, a situation that seems ideal to the reader and might help relieve some of the pressure Brittain feels to be perfect.

In an interesting choice of narrative in which a major event happens outside the scope of the narrator, Carver once again surprises everyone by taking the law into his own hands and apprehending Virgil Byrnes himself. Despite the fact that this is vigilante justice, Moby is impressed and hopes that Carver will one day become his stepfather. The epilogue wraps up the story nicely, showing the reader how everything worked out so that everyone is happy. It is a tale of what can happen if someone stands up for what is right, leaving the reader optimistic for the future.



Characters

Eric

Eric Calhoun is a seventeen-year-old high school senior who is known as Moby because he was overweight before he joined the swim team in high school. Moby is good friends with a girl named Sarah Byrnes, a young woman who was burned severely on her face and hands when she was three. Moby has always depended on Sarah Byrnes to come up with unique ways to get back at the bullies who tormented them daily as children. Moby is an intelligent young man but was frightened and embarrassed when he was teased and would often take whatever the bullies wanted to dish out. Sarah Byrnes stood up, took the hits, and helped Moby to find outlets for his frustration.

Now Moby is a senior; he has lost weight and has made many more friends than he ever had before. At the same time, Sarah Byrnes has stopped talking and is confined to a hospital. Moby wants to help Sarah Byrnes the way she helped him when they were younger, to prove his loyalty to her. Moby has always felt he owed it to Sarah Byrnes to prove his loyalty to a point where he attempted to stay fat after joining the swim team just to prove he was never going to leave her. Now Sarah Byrnes has confided in Moby that her father beats her, that her father caused the burns that have left her disfigured, but Sarah Byrnes has made Moby promise not to tell anyone. Moby can see his dear friend is in danger, but she has left his hands tied in such a way that he does not know how to help. Moby struggles to find a way to help without betraying Sarah Byrnes' trust, placing himself in danger to stand up for what is right.

Sarah Byrnes

Sarah Byrnes is a seventeen-year-old high school senior who was burned and disfigured when she was only three years old. Sarah Byrnes insists that everyone call her by her full name and will not answer to just Sarah because of the play on words between her last name and her condition. Sarah Byrnes has stopped talking just before the beginning of the novel, becoming so catatonic in class one day that the men in white coats must remove her. Sarah Byrnes is placed in the psych ward at the local hospital with hopes she will eventually come out of her catatonic state. Sarah Byrnes' father believes she is faking, but no one is able to prove it.

Moby visits Sarah Byrnes every day until he is finally able to force her to admit that she is faking. Sarah Byrnes tells Moby that her father has abused her terribly her whole life and that she is afraid he is on the verge of killing her. Sarah Byrnes has faked her condition in order to escape her father's clutches long enough to figure out a way to survive. Moby takes it upon himself to help Sarah Byrnes, taking a teacher into their confidences. This teacher helps Sarah Byrnes find her biological mother, the only person who might be able to prove Sarah Byrnes' father's abuse. Unfortunately, this does not work and Sarah Byrnes finds herself vulnerable to her father's continued



abuse. Fortunately, many people stand up to help, and Sarah Byrnes is given a second chance at happiness.

Steven Ellerby

Ellerby is on the swim team with Moby. Ellerby is the son of preacher who questions blind faith in God. Ellerby's older brother, a young man who was about to enter the seminary, was killed, leaving Ellerby struggling with why God would take such a good person and leave others who are not as good. Ellerby and his father talk about this and find a definition of religion in which they both feel secure. Ellerby becomes something of a cynic as he grows up, driving a car that has religious connotations that are offensive to those who call themselves Christians. Despite his religious views, Ellerby is a strong, confident young man who proves to be a good friend to Moby and Sarah Byrnes.

Mark Brittain

Brittain is a member of the swim team. Brittain is a Christian who has strong opinions when it comes to religion and topics such as abortion. Brittain is overbearing, attempting at one point to pull his girlfriend from the CAT class because he does not like what he thinks is anti-Christian discussions. Brittain comes out against abortion strongly, taking the opinion that life is life from the moment of conception and abortion is murder, a sin in the eyes of God. This opinion proves to be hypocritical when it is revealed that Brittain forced his girlfriend to have an abortion, blaming the fact that she got pregnant in the first place on her and claiming that an illegitimate child would ruin the message he intended to spread as an adult. When this information comes out during a CAT discussion, Brittain attempts to commit suicide. Later, Brittain apologizes to the class and admits that he failed himself, his beliefs, and his girlfriend.

Dale Thornton

Dale Thornton is a boy with whom Moby and Sarah Byrnes attended junior high. Dale is much older than the other students in his class because he has failed multiple times. Dale is a bully, often beating up younger kids for their lunch money. Moby and Sarah Byrnes are a popular target for Dale. One afternoon, Dale attempts to steal Sarah Byrnes' lunch money, but she resists, standing there as he hits her in the face multiple times. Finally Dale backs off. Some time later, Dale is the target of an article in *Crispy Pork Rinds*. Dale is punished by the principal for some information that comes out in the article, so he beats up Moby for writing it. Afterward, Sarah Byrnes befriends Dale in an effort to present a united front against the principal. Dale and Sarah Byrnes become such good friends that Sarah Byrnes admits to Dale that her father caused the burns on her face. Moby goes to Dale when Sarah Byrnes is in the hospital for help in figuring out how they can help her.



Jody Mueller

Jody Mueller is Brittain's girlfriend. Jody is also a Christian and attends the same church as Brittain. Everyone thinks they are a perfect couple who will be together for a long time, but when Brittain tries to remove both himself and Jody from the CAT class, Jody reveals that she has some opinions that are different from Brittain's. Jody tells Moby that Brittain forced her to have an abortion despite his loudly-voiced opinion against abortion. Shortly after this, Jody and Moby begin dating, a situation that causes a great deal of tension between Moby and Brittain.

Ms. Lemry

Ms. Lemry is the swimming coach and a teacher at Moby's school. Ms. Lemry is the only teacher Moby feels he can turn to in situations he cannot handle on his own. When Moby begins to date Jody, he goes to Ms. Lemry first. When Moby learns about the abuse Sarah Byrnes has suffered, he again turns to Ms. Lemry. Ms. Lemry takes in Sarah Byrnes, attempting to help, and eventually ends up adopting her. Ms. Lemry is also the teacher of the CAT class. Ms. Lemry gives the students a great deal of room in their discussions but attempts to keep the discussions from becoming personal. Ms. Lemry has a lot of respect for her students and this helps her receive a great deal of respect from them.

Virgil Byrnes

Virgil Byrnes is Sarah Byrnes' father. Virgil is a morose man who often takes his frustrations out on his family. Sarah Byrnes can remember her father attempting to kill her mother by shoving her face in a sink full of water. Sarah Byrnes tried to pull him off her mother, causing him to burn her on the wood stove. Sarah Byrnes' mother left after that, leaving her alone with her father. Sarah Byrnes recounts times in which her father beat her, tied her up, and starved her. Virgil goes after Moby at one point, cutting and stabbing him in an attempt to learn where his daughter is. Eventually Virgil is beaten and arrested after Carver Middleton breaks into his house and confronts him.

Carver Middleton

Carver Middleton is the boyfriend of Moby's mother. Carver appears to be a weak-willed man when Moby first meets him. Carver is a mild-mannered accountant who turns out to have some hidden traits. Carver is Vietnam Vet who decides that Virgil Byrnes deserves to be punished for what he has done to both Sarah Byrnes and Moby. Carver hides in Virgil's house until he comes home and then the two men get into an altercation that leaves Virgil badly injured. Carver admits on television that he hurt Virgil because he came at him but that he was glad he came at him because a man like Virgil deserves to get some of his own medicine. Carver serves several months of a work-release sentence for his actions.



Mr. Mautz

Mr. Mautz was the principal of the junior high when Moby and Sarah Byrnes wrote *Crispy Pork Rinds*. Mr. Mautz could not prove they did anything wrong; therefore, he gave Dale Thornton Moby's name as the author after punishing Dale for information that came out in the paper. This prompts Sarah Byrnes to befriend Dale, who had previously been a bully to her. Mautz is then moved to the high school where he becomes the vice-principal. Mautz attends the same church as Brittain; therefore, he takes Brittain's position that the CAT class is inappropriate and should be shut down. Mautz also blames Moby and Ellerby for Brittain's suicide attempt, trying to make them take some responsibility for the act. However, Ellerby's father learns of the situation and threatens to stop Mautz on the grounds of separation of church and state despite the fact that Ellerby's father is himself a pastor.



Objects/Places

Woodstove

Virgil Byrnes forces his three-year-old daughter's face against a wood stove, burning her, in retaliation against his wife during an argument. Byrnes then refuses to allow the young girl to have her scars fixed, saying they will make her tougher.

Notebook

Moby gives Sarah Byrnes a notebook to write in and share her plans with him. Instead, Sarah Byrnes uses the notebook to write Moby a letter explaining her situation and her desperation to get away from her father.

Hunting Knife

Virgil Byrnes attacks Moby with a hunting knife in an attempt to learn where his daughter is living. Moby tells when Virgil threatens to cut his throat. Moby lives, but he has a cut on his cheek and a knife wound in his shoulder.

The Christian Cruiser

Ellerby drives a car that is called the Christian Cruiser because he has written comments of religious connotation on the sides of the car. Ellerby also plays religious songs over loudspeakers attached to his car's stereo system.

Crispy Pork Rinds

Crispy Pork Rinds is a newspaper Moby and Sarah Byrnes create in junior high in order to seek revenge against people who have tortured them for their differences. This paper causes Moby to be beaten up by a fellow classmate, but then Moby and Sarah Byrnes befriend this classmate in a united effort to humiliate the principal, Mr. Mautz.

CAT

CAT, or Contemporary American Thought, is an exclusive class Ms. Lemry teaches to seniors. This class is meant to encourage young adults to share their views and discuss those views with other students in a safe environment.



Burger Barn

Burger Barn is the name of a local restaurant where the students of Moby's school hang out.

Sacred Heart

Sacred Heart is the name of the hospital where Sarah Byrnes is committed when she stops talking.

Deaconess Hospital

Deaconess Hospital is where women go to have abortions in Spokane.

Edison District

The Edison District of Spokane is a poor, crime-ridden neighborhood. Dale Thornton lives in this neighborhood, and it is in this neighborhood where Moby finds himself running from Virgil Byrnes.

Spokane, Washington

Spokane, Washington is where Moby and his friends live.

Reno, Nevada

Reno, Nevada is where Sarah Byrnes and Ms. Lemry find Sarah Byrnes' mother. Sarah Byrnes asks her mother to come back and testify against her father, but Sarah Byrnes' mother refuses.



Themes

Outcasts

Sarah Byrnes was burned when she was only three, leaving her face and hands covered in disfiguring scars. Sarah Byrnes' father refused to have the scars repaired because he felt the scars would help her to be tough. Sarah Byrnes suffers a great deal of ridicule at school as a result of her burns, which leads to Sarah Byrnes developing a method of dealing with the pain. Sarah Byrnes stands up for herself, often taking punches and mean words, turning them around on the people who dish them out.

Eric Calhoun is overweight. When Eric joins the swim team, they call him Moby because of his size, a nickname that sticks with him all through high school. Moby does not know how to deal with the ridicule his size causes him, so he normally ignores it or accepts it as truth. When Moby and Sarah Byrnes meet, they become instant friends because they are both outcasts in their own way. Sarah Byrnes teaches Moby how to fight back, how to take a punch, and how to get revenge on those who have nothing better to do than make fun of someone who is different.

Outcasts is a theme of this novel because both the main characters have a physical difference that makes them feel like outcasts among their classmates. Both characters learn to fight back in their own way but come to realize that they are not as different from everyone else as they always thought. Sarah Byrnes learns this lesson when she finds people who really care about her no matter what she looks like. Moby learns the lesson when a classmate he thought had it all turns out to have just as many fears and faults as Moby, maybe even a few more. This novel is about being an outcast and learning to fight back, making outcasts a theme of the story.

Christianity

One of Moby's classmates is a Christian who brings his religious beliefs into every discussion in which he is included. This young man, Mark Brittain, feels that a Christian is someone who lives a perfect life and makes no mistakes. Mark also believes that he is destined to spread the word, that his life is a mission to bring more people into the bosom of Christianity. Mark's plan did not make room for his girlfriend to become pregnant. Mark blames the girl and forces her to have an abortion despite the fact that abortion is strictly against his beliefs. Mark believes his mission is too important to be side railed by an illegitimate child and that he is above the simple man who would be damned for committing this sin.

Mark's character explores the pressure Christianity puts on young people and how it can create a situation in which a young man is afraid to do anything wrong. Mark is so sure that he is meant for great things that he cannot let anything stand in his way. However, when the truth comes out, Mark would rather kill himself, a mortal sin in the



eyes of the church, than face the consequences of his hypocritical acts. Mark attempts suicide but is saved just in time; however, he is still left with the consequences of his acts.

This book gives two sides to Christianity. As well as Mark's more extreme beliefs, the book offers Ellerby's view. Ellerby is the son of a preacher. Ellerby looks at religion with a little more leniency. Ellerby believes God watches people from a distance, and this not only gives people a little more responsibility in their own actions, but allows for more leniency on the part of God's expectations for mankind. Ellerby believes that one mistake does not doom people to damnation, but that God takes everyone's actions on a case-by-case basis. Ellerby's opinions give the reader two sides of the issue and allows the reader to make their own conclusions based on their own beliefs and views. These two views on Christianity are important to the overall plot of the novel and therefore make Christianity a theme of the novel.

Standing Up for What is Right

The novel begins with Sarah Byrnes in the psych ward of a local hospital. Sarah Byrnes stopped talking in class one day and has not spoken since. Moby visits her everyday and soon learns that Sarah Byrnes stopped talking because she is afraid her father will kill her, so she has pretended to be mentally ill in order to give herself time to think of what she should do next. Moby learns the truth about Sarah Byrnes' relationship with her father and is sworn to secrecy; however, Moby cannot keep this secret. Moby knows that Sarah Byrnes is in mortal danger and must do something to rescue her. The only problem is, Moby does not know what to do.

Sarah Byrnes has been a good friend to Moby for six years. Moby adores Sarah Byrnes and would do anything for her, including staying fat. Moby does the only thing he knows to do and turns to a trusted teacher. This teacher gives Sarah Byrnes a place to stay and helps her find her mother, the only person who could possibly stand up against Virgil Byrnes in court. Moby has done what is right for Sarah Byrnes; unfortunately, this fails and Sarah Byrnes decides to run away. Instead of allowing this to happen, Moby chases her down and makes her stay. Once again, Moby has done what is right for Sarah Byrnes.

Virgil Byrnes evades the police even after he attacks Moby and gives the police reason to arrest him. Carver, the boyfriend of Moby's mother, listens to Moby and his mother talk about what Virgil Byrnes has done and what he plans to do to Sarah Byrnes. Carver has had enough and decides to take things into his own hands. Carver goes to Virgil Byrnes' house and beats him into submission before turning him over to the police. Carver is arrested and pleads guilty to breaking and entering, as well as admitting on television that he wanted to kill Virgil Byrnes for what he did to his daughter. Carver has broken the law, but he did it to stand up for what is right. It is for these reasons that standing up is a theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The narrating character is Eric Calhoun, known as Moby to everyone. Moby presents his story in a series of flashbacks, creating a narration that moves from present tense to past tense as he presents his story with a grouping of comments that helps the reader better understand the actions of the characters about whom he is talking. The point of view is restricted to Moby; therefore, some important action that takes place in the novel takes place outside the knowledge of the narrator and is presented in a story being told rather than seen. Moby's narration is clear and exciting, keeping the reader drawn in to the very last word.

The first person point of view works in this novel because it presents a story about a young, abuse victim from the standpoint of someone outside the action, someone who can present a somewhat objective viewpoint. The point of view is restricting, keeping the reader from seeing some of the most important events on which the plot is based, but the narration is so well written that the reader does not feel as though anything is missing. This point of view is the most intimate a writer can choose, and it creates a relationship between the reader and narrator that is important to the reader's ability to empathize with the characters, therefore caring about where the story ends. This point of view works for this plot, leaving the reader satisfied with the overall effect of the novel.

Setting

The novel is set in the winter in Spokane, Washington. Most of the novel takes place within the walls of the hospital where Sarah Byrnes is a patient and the high school where both she and Moby attend. The high school is the most important setting of this novel because this is where the dynamics among the students are set and where many of the conflicts that drive the plot take place. The high school sets the tone of the novel, especially the main character's social role in this school; therefore, the high school is almost like another character, a character that dictates who will be loved and who will be hated, a character that allows conflict to continue even after all the players have had enough.

The setting of this novel works because it is a novel about young people who are learning about their place in the world. The first place most people learn who they are as a person is high school. High school defines a person, telling them whether they are popular, smart, or unattractive. However, in this novel, the main characters seek to break out of these stereotypes, to fight against a label that does not fit their entire personalities. The setting of a high school is both a definition of who these characters are and a definition of who they want to be. In this way, the setting of this novel is highly appropriate to the subject matter and the intended audience.



Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. There is much slang in the novel, including words that would be commonly heard in the halls of a high school. There are no foreign words in the novel, nothing with which readers of all ages would not be familiar. The novel is written as though by a high school senior, and the language fits his way of speaking. There is dialogue spoken by older people which often includes some complicated words typical to that of a highly-educated person, but this language only reflects the character speaking and does not pose a problem with the overall comprehension of the novel.

The language of this novel is an expression of who the characters are. The words chosen in each chapter fit the language of a high school senior whose main interests are girls, music, and swimming. There is nothing difficult about the language of the book; it is simple and easy to understand, allowing readers of all ages to comprehend and appreciate the overall themes of the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into nineteen chapters. Each chapter is of varying length, some longer than fifteen pages, some as short as five or six. The novel is written in equal amounts of exposition and dialogue. Most of the novel is told in a combination of a linear timeline and flashbacks, as the narrator attempts to catch the reader up on his relationship with Sarah Byrnes while explaining her current circumstances. This causes the narrator to use both past tense and present tense verbs in order to help the reader understand what is taking place in the past and what is a comment the narrator is making as he writes down his story.

The novel contains one main plot and a few subplots. The main plot is structured around the plight of Sarah Byrnes, a young burn victim who has stopped talking in order to escape her abusive father. The narrator, Sarah Byrnes' best friend, struggles to find a way to help his friend without betraying her trust and losing her friendship. As this is going on, the narrator finds himself thrust between the girl he has loved all through high school and her overly-religious boyfriend in a subplot. Another subplot finds the narrator struggling to come to some understanding of religion as he listens to arguments that make sense from both his mortal enemy and one of his closest friends. These subplots come to a satisfying conclusion at the same point in which the main plot is concluded.



Quotes

"My dad left when I still had a month to go in the darkroom, and historically when people have tried to figure me out (as in, 'What went wrong?'), they usually conclude that Mom spoiled me; gave me everything I wanted because I had no pappy. Truth is, Mom thinks I'm a whole lot better off without that particular pappy and has told me a thousand times she's glad I had the good sense to stay packed away until he split." Chapter 1, pg. 1

"Sarah Byrnes got sick of every new Einstein at school thinking he was the only genius in the world to figure out this great pun about her last name and her condition. She hated waiting for them to get it, so she made everyone call her Sarah Byrnes. If you just call her Sarah, she won't answer." Chapter 1, pg. 7

"We became friends when I was as fat as she is ugly, and I promised a long time ago that I would never turn away from her—told us both that my feelings for her weren't selfish, that I didn't like her only because we shared 'terminal uglies', as she put it." Chapter 2, pg. 17

"Ellerby whisks past my mother standing over the kitchen sink, patting her lightly on the butt. She has long since quit threatening to send his teeth home in a paper bag for that. 'Call me a throwback,' he says, a wistful glint in his eye, 'but when I see a teenage butt on a thirty-six-year-old woman, well, I just have to attend to it.'" Chapter 3, pg. 23

"My mother is a writer. A real one, not just somebody with a manuscript in a desk drawer that she'll finish someday when her kid finally gets arrested or goes to college." Chapter 5, pg. 51

"But Sarah Byrnes is my friend. She was with me when nobody else was. In the days of my life when my body embarrassed and humiliated me every time anyone laid eyes on me, Sarah Byrnes—this person with fifty times my reason to be embarrassed and humiliated—walked with me, even ahead of me. I can't stand to imagine someone hurting her like that on purpose." Chapter 6, pg. 74

"I wanted to tell Brittain that Lemry was trying to tell him that his own little view of the universe wasn't the only view possible; that if there's a heaven, decent people all over the world who have never even heard of Jesus Christ would get to go there. Even if they'd made mistakes. Even if they'd had abortions." Chapter 8, pg. 98

"He says people as committed as he is get special leeway in the Lord's eyes." Chapter 9, pg. 108

"It doesn't make me proud to say this, but even with all the work I've done on the shimmering nerd I once was, there is a scared little fat boy inside me who is terrified of



being seen. And I think if you're going to be with somebody, you owe it to them to show yourself. High stakes there, too." Chapter 10, pg. 122

"Nobody wants to take on the tough stuff. You've been pulling all kinds of stuff since you were a little kid and hiding behind the fact that you were disfigured. I'm tired of all the excuses! Tired of them, you hear? You step up and take your medicine! You should be damn glad you're alive and that God loves you!" Chapter 13, pg. 152

"Prickly pain dances in my left hand, and I watch with strange detachment as the medic inserts a needle attached to a tube into my forearm. Everything is fuzzy. Gauzy. A policeman's lips are moving just above me, but I can't hear a word. Hey, man, these guys have this all under control. I'm outta here." Chapter 16, pg. 184

"Tell you what. I've had enough of this shit. I've had enough of not being able to get anything to turn out my way." Chapter 18, pg. 201

"Boy, ain't it a trip where heroes come from." Chapter 19, pg. 204



Topics for Discussion

Who is Sarah Byrnes? Why does she insist that everyone call her by her full name and not just Sarah? What happened to Sarah Byrnes when she was a child? What is the story Sarah Byrnes tells everyone about this event? What is the truth? Why does Sarah Byrnes keep the truth to herself for so long? Of what is she afraid? Is this fear justified?

Who is Moby? Why is he called Moby? What is his real name? How do Moby and Sarah Byrnes become friends? Why do they seek each other out? Why does Moby decide he does not want to change but to remain the same for Sarah Byrnes? Does this affect their friendship?

Discuss Mark Brittain. What are Brittain's religious beliefs? How do they conflict with Moby's beliefs? Why do Brittain's beliefs bother Moby? How do these beliefs cause Brittain to treat his girlfriend poorly? Is Brittain's treatment of his girlfriend justified? What causes Brittain to attempt suicide? Why are Moby and Ellerby blamed for this failed suicide attempt? Did they really cause the attempt? Explain.

Discuss Carver. Who is Carver? Why did Carver decide to go after Virgil Byrnes? What did Carver originally intend to do with Virgil Byrnes? What really happened? Why? Do you think Carver had the intention of killing Virgil Byrnes from the beginning? Why or why not? Why do you think Carver hid his Vietnam War record from Moby's mom? What does this say about the way Carver felt about his service? Do you think this influenced his decision to go after Virgil Byrnes?

Discuss abortion. What is abortion? Why is it discussed in Ms. Lemry's CAT class? What are Brittain's beliefs regarding abortion? Why are these beliefs challenged by Sarah Byrnes? What does Sarah Byrnes say about her mother's decision not to have an abortion? Why does it turn out that Brittain's beliefs do not translate to his own actions? Is Brittain a hypocrite? Explain.

Discuss Christianity. Why is Christianity a theme of this novel? How does the writer handle the subject in his plot? What are Brittain's opinions on Christianity? What are Ellerby's opinions? How do their opinions differ? How are they similar? How does Christianity impact Brittain's life and what does it have to do with his suicide attempt? Would Brittain have tried to kill himself otherwise? Why or why not?

Discuss suicide. What is suicide? What makes teenagers at greater risk of suicide? Who discusses attempting suicide in this novel? Why does one attempt suicide and the other does not? What does this say about their personal beliefs? What does this say about their strength of character? Is suicide a viable solution to a teenager's problems? Explain.