

# **Stitches: A Memoir Study Guide**

## **Stitches: A Memoir by David Small**

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# Plot Summary

"Stitches" by David Small is a graphic novel depicting a remembrance of a young boy who grew up in a dysfunctional world. This memoir shows how he observed his world and dealt with illness he didn't understand. It also shows how he broke free from the bondages of that world.

David grew up in Detroit. His mother was very quiet, yet prone to crying bouts and fits of anger. His father, a radiologist, worked at the hospital, and his brother Ted played the drums. David was a sick child, and his father constantly gave him medicines, shots and x-rays to try to help him get better.

When things were hard to deal with around the house, David would escape into his imagination. He pretended he was with Alice in Wonderland, and he drew happy characters to escape the anger around him.

In the spring Mama would take David to visit her parents in Indiana. His step-grandfather showed him places, but his grandmother was harsh. When she punished him, he felt he deserved it. Still, he thought she was a bit crazy. David's mother told him to never say that again.

Back at home in Detroit, David's mother sometime had the Women's Auxiliary Bridge Club over. During those evenings, she was transformed and everyone had a great time. David loved seeing Mrs. Dillon. He had a crush on her. As she was leaving she noticed something on his neck. Later, his dad asked a fellow doctor to look at it. They discovered a growth that should be removed, but Mama was concerned about money so surgery was put off. She had money for a new car and for home decorations, but surgery for her 11-year-old son was put off.

David was 14 years old by the time he had his surgery. He felt very comfortable in the hospital, even after they told him that the first surgery wasn't enough. He would have to have another surgery. His parents were acting somewhat strange. His dad tried to talk as if they were good friends, and his mother came to visit him and offered him anything he wished within reason. The next day, he went into surgery. When he woke up, he hardly had any voice. They had to take out one of his vocal cords and his thyroid.

He knew that his world would be changed forever without his voice, but back at home everything was the same. Two weeks after the operation, David decided to change the bandage on his neck on his own. He saw all the stitches and went to find his mother for some comfort. She criticized him for putting pressure on his neck. He went away, and later he had a nightmare. After the nightmare he was walking to the house when he saw a letter his mother had been writing to her mother. In it, he discovered that his growth had been cancerous.

Instead of nurturing him, his parents continued criticizing him and blaming him for wasting the money they had to put into his life. He began rebelling and was kicked out



of school with a recommendation for psychiatric help. The psychiatrist was a great help to him, and he began putting his life back together even as his family life fell apart. David became an artist, and he broke through the walls of craziness that surrounded him in his home life.



# I Was Six (pages Beginning - 106)

## I Was Six (pages Beginning - 106) Summary and Analysis

"Stitches" by David Small is a graphic novel depicting a remembrance of a young boy who grew up in a dysfunctional world. This memoir shows how he observed his world and dealt with illness he didn't understand. It also shows how he broke free from the bondages of that world.

I Was Six ( Beginning - 106)

This is a graphic novel with much of the story shown through pictures. The first chapter opens in a very dark setting. After the title "I was Six," there is a black page with a single word on it saying "Detroit." The opposing page shows a close-up of factories with dark smoke coming out of them. Following this, the images open up to a city street, then a house, a staircase, and a boy drawing.

The author (David) is showing that the place where he grew up wasn't a happy, light environment. He continues by talking about family communication. The reader discovers that Mama communicated by slamming things around. She never spoke her mind, but the family members knew that there were problems by the way they heard her crying behind her door and by her stern demeanor. His father didn't seem to respond to her moods. Instead, he would go down to the basement and hit a punching bag. Ted, the author's brother, would bang on a drum to get his feelings out. David discovered that he was always getting sick. This was his personal way to communicate.

David had been sick from the time he was born. His father, a doctor, tried to fix his son with medicines, shots, and osteopathic manipulations. His father was a radiologist and gave him many x-rays to help find a cure for the boy's sinus problems.

Mama picked up the dad from work, and the boys imagined that they were going off the road in the car as their mother drove. When taken to the hospital, they walked through the basement and passed to the cafeteria and the pharmacy. It all had a very distinctive smell. David remembered seeing his father analyzing x-rays with other radiologists. To him, his father was a hero. He and Ted enjoyed seeing x-rays of little children's stomachs. They swallowed all sorts of interesting objects.

Sometimes they had to wait for their father. David disobeyed his parents and took the elevator to the fourth floor of the hospital. The floor was perfect for skating, and David enjoyed that for a while. Then he saw some specimens that frightened him. One was a little person in a jar. He ran back downstairs where his parents asked him where he had been and where his shoes were. He wouldn't tell them, and this made Mama angry. She stayed angry for many days. David escaped into his own world where he drew happy characters.



One day his brother had to watch David while their mother was out. The boys went to their father's office and looked through books. They were medical journals, and Ted showed David a book that showed images of a growth. David left the room and decided to play Alice. He was in love with Alice in Wonderland, and he wanted to escape into the world of magic that she found. This was common for him—escaping into Alice's world—and the other children made fun of him for pretending that he was Alice. He learned to use his art so that he could dive into a world of imagination where things were happy.

During spring vacation, David's family would split up. Ted and Dad would go east to visit Dad's mother, and Mama would take David and travel south to visit her parents. The trip seemed very long between Detroit and southeastern Indiana, and the car had no radio or air conditioning. It was very hot in the car, but things began to cool off in the evening. As they got closer to her parent's house, Mama would begin to tell stories from her life. This was unusual since she was usually very quiet.

She told about how her grandparents met then eloped. David's grandmother was not accepted by the family, and they wouldn't let her have her baby in the house so Mama was born in a cabin out back behind the main house. At first they thought Mama was dead when she was born because they couldn't find her heartbeat. Soon they discovered that it was on the opposite side of her chest. Her father died when she was 10. He and his friends had been out drinking and drove off a cliff. Grandma was kicked off the property after the death. She worked as a house cleaner then remarried.

David's great grandfather tried to kill himself by drinking Drano. He lived, but the poison ate away his vocal cords so he never talked to anyone again. When David's great-grandmother died, everybody learned she had been a petty thief. No one had ever made her stop. Every time she went to the store, the owner would call her husband, and he would pay the bill.

Grandma was brusque, but Papa John, David's step-grandfather, would take him around town and introduce him to people. The next day, Mama went out and David had to stay with his grandmother. He tried to make the bed with her, but he didn't do it right, and she called him a fool. He asked her about the crucifix on the wall, and she couldn't believe that he didn't have one in that house. He spent the rest of the day playing quietly by himself, trying to avoid his grandmother.

That evening, his grandmother gave him a tiny bit of dinner that didn't taste very good. When she noticed that he wasn't eating it quickly, she took it away and sent him to bed even though it was still light out. She dragged him up to his room and forced to get ready for bed. She stuck his hand under extremely hot water. Even though he was upset, he felt he saw the situation from both her viewpoint and his own. When his mother came home, he said he didn't want to stay alone with his his grandma because he was afraid of her. He said she was crazy, and his mother became angry, telling him never to use that word again.



# I Was Eleven (107-156)

## I Was Eleven (107-156) Summary and Analysis

Although the first section of the book ended with a sad, tense scenario, the second section opened with hope. Women who dressed in all their finery came in their fancy cars to come into the Small's house. It was a successful party where people happily gathered and listened to music, ate great food, and talked and drank. It was a gathering of the Hospital Women's Auxiliary Bridge Club. David loved helping out because he was able to carry Mrs. Dillon's mink coat. He had a big crush on the woman who was a wife of a surgeon. The woman seemed very glamorous to him.

On the nights when the bridge club gathered Mama changed. Her own son could barely recognize her. David helped Mrs. Dillon with her coat as she prepared to leave. She looked closely at him and called to Betty, his mama, to come in to look at his neck. She said it was a growth. His mother hadn't noticed, and David felt confused. He remembered with his brother looking at the books of all the scary growths while their mother was out. Mrs. Dillon asked his mother to promise that she would get the growth checked soon. After the woman left, Mama became angry once again. She didn't appreciate the way the party ended and felt that everything went wrong for her.

David asked if he would have to go see a doctor, and she said that he would certainly see the doctor. However, she also wanted him to know that doctors cost money and they didn't have much of that in the house.

At a later date, the family went to the marina to join friends on a boat. David was with them, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. David's father asked his friend Joe to look at the growth on David's neck since he was an ear-eye-nose-and-throat man. Mama was upset that they would spoil the party. Joe felt the growth and told him to make an appointment for the next week. He asked David's dad to take some x-rays. After he looked at the x-rays, the doctor encouraged David by saying that it look just like a sebaceous cyst.

Joe told them that David would need an operation and a few days in the hospital, but there wasn't any hurry. His mother was concerned about the costs. As they left the room, Joe told them to have David come back in a year for another checkup. Looking back, David realized that his father must have gotten a promotion or raise around that time. The lump in his neck had to wait while his father took his mother on a shopping spree. She bought a fancy new car, and she re-decorated the house.

David continue to monitor the growth on his neck as he looked in the mirror, and he remembered the little man in the bottle that he had seen on the fourth floor of the hospital.



One day his father asked to speak with him. When David went downstairs to talk with his mother and father, he received a lecture on sitting properly. They also talked with him about the books that he was reading. His mother called them "smut" and went to his room. She gathered his books then burned them.





# Three and a Half Years After the First Diagnosis. I Was Fourteen (157-241)

## Three and a Half Years After the First Diagnosis. I Was Fourteen (157-241) Summary and Analysis

David was 14 by the time he had his surgery. He felt very safe in the hospital and thought of the medical personnel and doctors as extended family and protectors. They gave him a sedative, and the surgeons operated on him. The next thing he knew, he was in the recovery room. He discovered that the cyst was still in his neck and that he would need another operation. They were going to call a specialist to come in the next day. Insisting that nothing was wrong, they told him you get some rest.

That night Mama surprised David by visiting him in the hospital. When he asked her why she was there, she said she supposed she had the right to visit her own son. She cried a little then offered to give him anything he might want or need within reason.

He asked her for the book that he had been reading, but he reminded her that she had burned it. She came back into the room with the book. They had it in the bookstore downstairs.

The next morning he went in for surgery once again. Everything was black. When he woke up, he could barely make a sound.

The author uses pictures to show the vocal cords and adds words as he takes the reader inside the mouth. He pointed out that when he woke up from the second operation, he only had one vocal cord so hardly any sound came out at all. As he rode home, David reflected on how curious it was to go in for a simple operation only to discover that he had two operations. While the growth was removed as expected, now he had to deal with the missing thyroid gland and vocal cord. His world would be changed forever.

Still, back at home, everything was the same. The only difference was the fact that this time his silence was not a matter of choice. His mother still banged around in the kitchen. Ted still banged away on his drums in the basement. Dad just left the house.

Two weeks after the operation, David decided to change the bandage on his neck by himself, and he saw what they had done. He went to his mother for some comfort, but she just criticized him for putting pressure on his neck. He had a dream that he was a bat-like creature searching desperately for his mother to protect him from the rain, but he found no comfort.

David got up after the dream and walked to the house. He saw a letter his mother had been writing to her own mother. She had written that David did not know that the growth



was cancerous. As David went out for a walk, he started putting things together and realized that it all made sense. The cancer was the reason for the two operations and the loss of his vocal cord and thyroid. It was also why his parents were acting so strangely.

His mother had given him the book because she thought that he wouldn't survive through to the next day. She had visited him because she wanted to say goodbye and give him one last wish. When she realized that he would live, she came back into the room and took the book back.

When David went back to school he discovered that when one didn't have a voice, one did not exist. He felt this way even with his closest friends. David began skipping classes and walking downtown to watch movies. He felt himself shrinking inside of himself. He hit a point where he was afraid to fall asleep because he felt afraid that the screaming inside his head would be heard by his family. Instead of being sympathetic to his plight, his parents got angry at him for leaving the light on all the time and running up utility bill.

In a fit of rebellion, he went out, leaving all the lights on downstairs, and he took off in one of the family cars. A policeman arrested him for driving without a license at two in the morning, and he spent night in the Wayne County Jail.

In the autumn, David was sent away to an all boys school in the East. He ran away three times. That spring he was sent home with advice to seek psychiatric help. His parents were angry at him for wasting their money. He wanted to scream out at them, but he could only whisper as he asked them what they had to tell him about the cancer. His father said that he did have cancer but he didn't have it now and that's all he needed to know.

David continued to have a recurring dream in which he traveled the same route through a succession of rooms with narrowing passageways which continued getting smaller. When he finally made it through, he would find himself in a Temple whose guts had been bombed.



## August 27 3 PM (242-312)

### August 27 3 PM (242-312) Summary and Analysis

On August 27 at 3 p.m., David went to his first appointment with a therapist. His mother said it was like throwing money down a hole as he walked in by himself. The therapist asked him to come in, and David glared at him then asked if he would be getting some drugs or hypnotism. The man said they were just there to talk.

As a therapist asked him what was on his mind, David pictured the rabbit from "Alice in Wonderland". David said that nothing was on his mind, and the therapist commented that it was curious. The man said that David's mother had said that he had been acting crazy and doing crazy things and wondered if that was true. When David said he guessed so, the therapist said that that was nonsense.

The therapist summarized David's medical and family history and said that it was sad, but not crazy. His world was filled with nonsense, but the therapist was going to tell him the truth. He pointed out that David's mother didn't love him. At this thought, David began to tear up, and he recalled many scenes from his life that were filled with darkness and rain. He reached out to the doctor as they talked through things.

David went to the office three times a week, and it became a haven for him. He began to understand what was happening to him, including the nights with bad dreams and terrors. The therapist encouraged him. David felt as if the doctor truly cared for him and treated him like a son. The man encouraged him in regards to his drawings.

As David was putting himself back together, he realized his family was falling apart. One time he came home early and caught his mother in bed with Mrs. Dillon. Then, they received news from Indiana. One morning when Papa John had gone down to the cellar to stoke the furnace, Grandma locked the door and went around the house setting fire all the curtains. A neighbor saw the smoke and noticed that she was outside dancing naked so they phoned for help. Papa John was saved, but Grandma was taken away to the State Insane Asylum.

Dad invited David out to dinner. He didn't say much during the actual dinner. He just smoked a lot. After the meal was over they took a ride down to the river, and his dad explained that it was common practice to get x-rays for any sort of breathing difficulty in little children. He gave his son cancer.

When David was 16, he moved out of his home. He lived in a one-room apartment in the inner city of Detroit as he finished his senior year of high school. He was lonely, hungry, and afraid of the neighbors. His dreams of becoming a world-renowned artist were not going well, and he painted a brick wall and a closed door without really understanding how they represented his mental state.



He went out in the evenings and made some friends. He met actors and singers who lived in decrepit homes together they made him feel normal and less lonely. Back at home, his parents talked about getting a divorce, but they never did. David dedicated himself to his art, and it became his home. It gave him back his voice.

When David was 30, he was teaching at a college in upstate New York when his dad called and told him that his mother was dying. Driving to Michigan, he screamed in the car. However, he wasn't screaming about the impending death. He just learned that screaming thickened up the vocal cords, and it helped him get his voice back.

When he got to the hospital he took the elevator to his mother's room. She was lying there with a tube down her throat so she couldn't talk. Since he'd been screaming for so many hours, he couldn't speak either. He held her hand and stroked her face, and a tear slipped out of her eye. She died that night. Before he left the hospital, he made one last stop to the lab or he had seen the little man in the jar. Then, he drove away.



# **A Few Years Ago I Had the Following Dream (313-325)**

## **A Few Years Ago I Had the Following Dream (313-325) Summary and Analysis**

A few years ago David had a dream. In the dream, he was six years old once again. There was a house with a garden and a high enclosing wall, and he was the only person who lived in the house. He never went out because he was too afraid. Instead, he would use a toy car to play and go outside.

One day he sneezed, and the toy car fell into some water. The only way he could get his car back again was to leave his house. He heard a sound and looked over the garden wall for the first time, seeing an old building. Someone was sweeping the path from his house to the other place. He realized that the building was the place where his crazy grandma had been locked away. It was the Old Central State Asylum. The figure on the path who was sweeping was his mother, and she was clearing the way for him to follow her to the asylum. But he didn't.



# Characters

## Betty

This woman was David's mother. She did not speak much, but she was prone to depression and anger. One of her methods of communication was banging dishes around in the kitchen. When she went to visit her mother, she opened up and became more talkative. She went out with friends. She also enjoyed having her bridge club over to her house, but her happiness never lasted long. She was angry at her son since the growth on his neck would cost him so much money.

She came to visit David in the hospital and offered to give him whatever he wanted. Later, he realized that it was because she thought he was going to die, and she wanted to say goodbye. He had asked for a book, and when she realized that he would live, she took the book away.

## David Small

This is the main character of the book. He was a sickly child who turned into a quiet young boy. He lived in an angry, unhappy household. Escaping into stories, imagination, and drawing was how he dealt with getting away from the unpleasant household environments.

When people around him were angry, this character knew how to remove himself from the present. He did this when he was upset by the book that his brother was reading. He also did it when he was bothered by the way his grandmother was treating him.

After his second surgery, he realized that his life had changed forever. He reached out for comfort, and when he didn't find it, he lashed out in anger. He was arrested and was soon sent to a boys' school, but he was kicked out of the school as well. After psychiatric counseling, he was able to figure out who he was and put his life back together. He broke through the madness of his household and made a good life for himself, developing his craft as an artist.

## Dad

This man worked as a radiologist. He felt that he gave his son cancer.

## Ted

This was David's brother. He communicated by beating on the drums.



## **Grandma**

This was a harsh, brusque woman who called David a fool and sent him to bed early with little dinner. She burned his hands and dragged him to bed.

## **Papa John**

This was David's step-grandfather. He took the boy around town and introduced him to the locals. He worked as a greeter for the funeral home.

## **Great-Grandfather Murphy**

This character tried to commit suicide by drinking Drano. It didn't work, but the character never spoke again.

## **Irene Dillon**

This was the woman who first noticed the growth on David's neck. David had a crush on her.

## **Joe**

This was the ear-nose-throat doctor who checked the growth when David was eleven. He said that the boy should have surgery.

## **Dr. Blyss**

This is the name of the anesthesiologist who is going to knock out David with gas so he wouldn't feel anything during the operation.

## **Therapist**

This man acted like a father to David, and he helped him get his life back on track after pointing out the harsh truth that David's mother didn't love him.

## **Jim**

This was an actor who was painting his room black with a two-inch brush.

## **Patti**

This was a singer who had a problem with plaster and dust.

## **Stan**

This was a friend who played the guitar.

## **Letitia**

This was a friend who painted self-portraits.





## **Objects/Places**

### **Detroit**

This was where David lived when he was young.

### **Hospital**

This was where David's father worked. They would go there to pick their father up.

### **Hospital Fourth Floor**

This is where David went without permission and saw a man in a jar.

### **Indiana**

This was where Mama would take David during spring break. They would visit her parents.

### **Grandma's House**

This place reminded David of the house in Hansel and Gretel. He asked Papa John if he ever put children in the furnace.

### **Wonderland**

This was where David would mentally escape after falling in love with Alice.

### **Growth**

This is what appeared on David's neck. It became cancerous.

### **Vocal Chord**

This was what David lost after his stay in the hospital.



## **Drawing**

This was what David used as an escape when he was upset by things going on around him.

## **Wayne County Jail**

This was where David spent a night after driving his parent's car without a license.

## **Old Central State Asylum**

This was where David's grandmother was sent after she set her house on fire.



# Themes

## Living in a Dysfunctional Family and Breaking Free

David lived in a very dysfunctional household. His mother was constantly unhappy, quiet and angry. She banged dishes around on a regular basis and felt that her life was miserable. His father escaped what was going on by using the punching bag in the basement or by leaving to go out. David's brother would use his drum set to escape from the tension in the house, and David himself was immersed himself in a world of imagination and drawing to escape the realities of his existence.

The craziness in his household didn't begin with his mother. As he learned more about the family history, he realized that there were several mentally unstable persons in his family history.

When David visited his grandmother, he tried to avoid being alone with her after she got angry with him and put him down verbally. At one point she held his hand under burning water. The hard part for him was that he understood why she felt the way she did, and he felt as if he deserved the punishment he received.

David felt anger and abandonment, and he began acting out. After some time in jail and time in a private school he was kicked out of, he went for psychiatric help. This began to change his life.

The therapist helped him understand that he wasn't crazy for acting and feeling as he did. He had to come to terms with the fact that his mother never loved him, but he also had to understand that he was not beyond redemption. The therapist treated him like family and encouraged him, and he began pulling himself together. He moved out of the house his senior year, and pursued his career as an artist.

As time went on, David became stronger as a person. He was even able to go visit his mother as she lay on her deathbed. He faced his old fears outright. This was shown by the way he went to the fourth floor of the hospital to look at the man in the jar. At the end of the book, he highlighted a symbolic dream where he realized that his mother was paving the way for him to follow into the world of insanity. However, he was strong enough to break free and did not follow.

## Growths and Cancer

David was no stranger to the hospital. It was where his father worked, and he joined his mother and brother on a regular basis as they went to pick up their father from work. One time David was playing while he was waiting for his father, and he entered a lab where he saw some strange things in a jar. One looked like a small man, and it terrified him.



Another time, his brother was watching him while his parents were out. They went up into their father's office and read books that they didn't typically read. As he browsed through the books, the young David learned about abnormal growths for the first time. The pictures scared him so much that he ran out of the room and tried to escape into an imaginary world to block out the images of the growth.

When he was 11, the woman he had a crush on discovered a growth on his own neck. His mother begrudgingly took him to the doctor to have it checked out, and the doctor said that they would have to have the growth surgically removed, but it would only be a couple of days in the hospital. His mother was upset about the cost of the operation, and she decided to hold off on the procedure. The doctor suggested that they come back every year for a checkup to monitor the growth.

Instead of going back to the doctor, family used any money they had to buy a new car and furniture. It wasn't until David was 14 that he finally had a chance to go through the surgery.

At this point, the growth had changed and become cancerous. However, nobody mentioned that to him. He found out by accident as he was reading through some of his mother's correspondence. Since he had discovered the concept of growths in the book he shouldn't have been reading, and since nobody talked with him about the cancer, he was terrified. It made him even more angry with his parents since they didn't nurture him when he reached out in fright.

## Mental Escape

Their reality was a factor that David's family did not cope with well. His grandmother was crazy, and his mother was frequently mad or sad. Although the rest of his family seem to escape from the world by making noise, David did things differently. He escaped by slipping into the world of imagination. He was particularly drawn to the world of Alice in Wonderland, and he desperately wanted to enter her magic world. When he began seeing the psychiatrist, he imagined him as the rabbit and Alice in Wonderland.

Even when he was very young, he would create a world with happy characters in his imagination, and he would draw them. Mentally, he would jump right into the page, escaping from his own reality.

When he went to therapy, a man reached through to him and encouraged him, commenting on how wonderful his drawings were. David pursued a career in art, even when it was difficult. This book was an autobiography, and it was written as a graphic novel so the reader could see his drawings. Most of the story is conveyed to the pictures even more than it is conveyed by the way of words.

# Style

## Perspective

"Stitches: A Memoir" is written from the point of view of David Small. It's a story of his own life. David is a successful artist, and he uses his art to explain what it was like growing up piecing some of the obstacles he had in his life. In this book, he looked back on his past with subjective insight.

When David wrote about his mother, and when he drew pictures about her, he drew them from the viewpoint of a child who didn't understand what was going on. The end of the book, he wrote a brief section about his family and the insight he received as an adult regarding his mother is pointed out.

When one looks back at the book with this knowledge, one can see glimpses into his mother's situation from an adult point of view. For example, the young David feels as if he's in trouble w, and his mother tells him to never to mention the word crazy in regards to his grandma. As an adult looking at the mother and her background, it's easy to understand her own fear regarding her family's insanity.

## Tone

The tone of this book is subjective. It's told in the perspective of an innocent young boy who is trying to come to terms with who he is and what life holds for him. The author bluntly states thoughts and feelings. However, he doesn't delve heavily into the emotions of how he felt. For example, when David's parents were mad at him for leaving lights on when he had nightmares, he didn't say how hurt he was that they didn't try to help him. Instead, he simply stated that he knew the importance of lights and the utility bill and showed it as he rebelled by leaving all the lights on before taking their car.

A lot of the emotion of the story is shown in images. When David finally reaches through to his mother, it's shown by a single tear behind her glasses. When he comes to terms with the fact that his mother doesn't love him, it's shown through a series of dark, rainy scenarios from his own life.

## Structure

"Stitches" by David Small is a graphic novel. On the opening page of the book, it is written that "Stitches" is a memoir. This page is followed by a page of legal information and a dedication to Mark Stuart Quinn and to the author's brother, Ted. After the title page, the book opens with a black page with white lettering. This is the beginning of the book. There is no index, but the book is split into sections grouped by the author's age and other significant events.



Each page is broken up into a series of boxes depicting scenes much like a comic book. Some of these images have writing on them, adding to the story. All the letters in all the words are capitalized.

The first section is 106 pages long. The second section is 50 pages long. The third section is close to 100 pages, and the next section is a bit over 50 pages. The very last section of the book highlights a dream the author had. It was less than 15 pages. After the storyline is finished, there is a section about the author's family. In this section, readers can't see images of the author's actual family. There is a brief writeup about the mother, the father, and a picture of the author himself when he was young.



## Quotes

To me, Dad and his colleagues seemed like the heroic men featured in the ads in LIFE magazine, marching bravely into the bright and shining future.

Stitches, p. 27.

Her silent fury was like a black tidal wave. Either you get out of the way, or...

Stitches, p. 46.

I thought it must be her hair that gave Alice the magic ability to travel to a land of talking animals, singing flowers and dancing teapots. I wanted to go there immediately.

Stitches, p. 56.

As evening came on, the air began to cool, the land began to roll, and Mama-usually so sternly silent-began to talk. She told me her family stories.

Stitches, p. 66.

On the one hand, I felt the fear, humiliation and pain... while on the other, for reasons I cannot quite understand... I felt that she was justified... that I deserved everything I got.

Stitches, p. 97.

Also on those enchanted bridge club evenings, something happened to my mother. She became someone I hardly recognized.

Stitches, p. 113-114.

Doctors cost money and money is something that is in short supply in this house!

Stitches, p. 122.

Around that time Dad must have gotten a promotion or a raise. The lump in my neck had to wait while he took Mother on a shopping spree.

Stitches, p. 137.

No one can love a hospital, but those bland, functional spaces and fixtures were part of my life. There, I felt safe.

Stitches, p. 160.

Your vocal cords make the sounds of your voice, your curses and your prayers.

Stitches, p. 183.

The fact that you now have no voice will define you from here on in, like a fingerprint, the color of your eyes, your name.

Stitches, p. 186.



When you have no voice, you don't exist. Even among my old friend I felt invisible, a shadow flickering around the edges of every event.

Stitches, p. 212-213.

...while I always had to return home where, as I was slowly beginning to pull myself together, my family seemed to be quickly falling apart.

Stitches, p. 270

Suddenly I realized the building was the one where Grandma had been locked away. The Old Central State Asylum. The figure was my mother, sweeping the path, clearing the way for me to follow. I didn't.

Stitches, p. 324-325



## Topics for Discussion

Describe David's relationship with his parents.

Why did David choose silence and illness as his method of communication?

How did Mother change when they traveled to visit her mother?

What were the signs of insanity displayed by family members for several generations?

Why didn't David have much of a voice, and why did he need two surgeries?

How did David react after he discovered that he had cancer, and how did his parents react?

How did David show that he had broken through the path to insanity? Who helped him and how?