

The Sledding Hill Study Guide

The Sledding Hill by Chris Crutcher

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Plot Summary

The Sledding Hill is a novel by Chris Crutcher. The story follows the main character, Billy Bartholomew, as he tries to help his best friend, Eddie Proffit, put the pieces of his life together after Eddie's father dies and Billy dies. After finding his father and Billy's bodies within a month of each other, Eddie stops talking. In an effort to help Eddie learn to deal with such tragedy, Billy's spirit remains Earthbound as he walks his friend through the steps of grief and letting go.

Billy says a few things to Eddie, but when Billy first starts to appear, Eddie thinks that he's going crazy. Eddie believes that his best friend is haunting him. In order to ease Eddie into the idea that Billy's spirit is appearing to Eddie, Billy starts to appear to Eddie in his dreams. Billy takes them to the sledding hill, where they enjoyed so many good times together growing up. Eventually, Eddie starts to come around to the fact that it's not a dream, but that Billy really is appearing to him.

When Eddie starts school without Billy, Eddie still isn't talking to anyone. Eventually, Eddie starts going to the janitor's closet, where he talks to Billy's father. He swears Billy's father to secrecy. When the reverend of the local church, who is also an English teacher at Eddie's high school, tries to get a book banned from Eddie's Really Modern Literature class, Eddie plots with Billy's father to finally take down the tyrant Reverend Tarter.

Once Eddie is making new friends and even on his way to gaining a girlfriend, Billy knows that it is time to move on. The primary reason that Billy stayed on Earth was to help Eddie overcome his fear of loss. Once Eddie is beyond this, Billy says goodbye.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Eddie Proffit and Billy Bartholomew are good friends. Everyone thinks this is an odd friendship because Billy is the smartest kid in his class and possibly the school. Eddie on the other hand is perceived to be the dumbest kid in class, and possibly the school. It turns out that Eddie is a genius though, but gets easily distracted when talking tests or trying to do his homework.

When Billy's father, the school janitor, figures out Eddie's attention span is short, he has Billy come to the furnace room every day and helps Eddie complete his homework in blocks, so as to keep his attention focused.

The summer that Eddie turns 14, he works at his father's gas station in the morning and then rides his bike to the hot springs with Billy in the afternoons. One afternoon, Eddie stops at the gas station to drop off cake and milk to his dad before biking on to the hot springs, and Eddie finds his father dead in the back from a tire dropping on his head. Eddie thinks it's just a dream, so he gets back on his bike, doesn't tell Billy anything and they off to the hot springs.

Three weeks later, Billy is trying to get Eddie back to normal life since his dad died. Billy notices that Eddie stays focused when he's riding a bike or running, so Billy has important conversations with Eddie when they are riding together or running together.

One day, Billy goes to school to find his dad. When he can't find his dad, he kicks some sheet rock that is precariously leaned up against a wall. The sheetrock falls and hits Billy in the base of his neck, snapping his spine and killing him. Eddie finds Billy's body. Eddie rides his bike to the hot springs, buries himself up to his neck in mud, and tries to turn what he saw into a fantasy. He dresses and gets back on his bike, which is where the Sheriff picks him up and tried to take him home. When Eddie's mother is gone, the Sheriff tries to talk to him. When the Sheriff asks Eddie if Billy was still alive when Eddie was trying to move the sheetrock off of him. This sends Eddie's thoughts into a direction, where he believes he might be responsible for Billy's death. Billy, who is the narrator of the story, says it's the last time anyone hears any words from Eddie in a while.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Eddie is so smart, such a genius, that his mind functions at a very different level than the average human being. While he is extremely intelligent, he lacks basic common sense in a lot of ways. Billy implies at the end of the chapter that Eddie becomes mute, which is why nobody hears words come out of Eddie's mouth for a while.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Billy says when he first dies, he doesn't realize that he's dead. He says the good news is that you don't feel anything—it's a painless process. When he sees Eddie find his body, Billy tries to talk to her but doesn't know how to talk as a spirit or ghost as of yet. Billy says that his could can leave Earth immediately, but when he sees how freaked out Eddie is from finding two dead bodies in a month, he decides to stay.

Eddie starts to see the advantages and disadvantages of being mute. At first, everyone accepts it as part of the grieving process for losing his father and best friend in a one-month period. Then, people get sick of it and start withholding things from him in an attempt to get him to speak and ask for things.

Eddie first started having problems with Tarter when he started going to Sunday school in first grade. Eddie starts asking the Sunday school questions, which is what Eddie does, but the reverend thinks Eddie's dad is putting him up to it because Mr. Proffit isn't religious.

When Eddie goes mute at 14, he especially enjoys it because it irritates Reverend Tarter.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Billy foreshadows that his spirit remains on Earth to continue to help Eddie live as normal a life as he possibly can. Specifically, Billy wants to help Eddie get through the death of his father and now Billy's own death.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The Reverend will be Eddie's English teacher when he starts school again. The Reverend is coming to Eddie's house two or three days a week to help his mom with the grieving process. It's been two months since Billy died. Eddie doesn't think much about Billy anymore. Billy starts to appear in Eddie's dreams, at his window and in the back of cars when Eddie is filling the tanks. It almost scares Eddie into talking but he doesn't know who to tell.

One Wednesday night, Mrs. Proffit leaves for church. Eddie is flipping through the TV channels, when he comes across a show about a real live haunted house. His fear works up, so he ends up going to hide in the basement. He chooses the basement because he thinks he is facing his fears this way, resolving the problem, like turning into the slide when your car slides on ice—something Eddie's dad taught him. When Eddie finally calms down, he gets up to go back upstairs, but a mouse runs over his bare foot, he trips, cracks his forehead on the banister and then run shrieking from the house. He hides near a tree after running through the night and eventually finds his way back home, where his mother finds him staring at the TV, soaking wet from the rain.

Chapter 3 Analysis

It seems as if the reverend's interest in Mrs. Proffit is romantic. It foreshadows the reverend and Mrs. Proffit marrying. Eddie believes that he is going crazy, so the voices he hears in his head and the faces he sees of his dead friend are convincing him that he's losing his mind. He's really not losing his mind, but Eddie doesn't know this. Now that the two people in the world that he trusted the most and protected him are dead, Eddie has no idea who to turn to with his problem.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

While Eddie is drying off in his room, Tarter comes in to talk to him. Tarter says that Mrs. Proffit is concerned about Eddie—from his whimpering in his sleep to being mute. Tarter asks Eddie if he is familiar with the bible story about Job, which is where God destroys Job's entire family and then when Job doesn't complain, God gives him a new family. Tarter suggests Eddie think about being baptized.

When Tarter leaves, Eddie's mind starts bouncing around like it always does. His thoughts rest on the sledding hill as he drifts off to sleep. This is when Billy steps in to ask if he can sled down the hill with Eddie. After sliding down the first time, Eddie asks Billy if he ever sees his dad. This is when Eddie realizes that the voice he heard while sitting under the tree was Billy's voice. When Eddie wakes up from his "dream," he decides he is going to be baptized.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Tarter comparing Job to Eddie is Biblical symbolism. Tarter is suggesting that like Job, Eddie has lost of the two most important people in his life. Tarter is also suggesting that Eddie do something about it and give himself over to the Lord. Eddie believes that a baptism will wipe away the "evil" presence of Billy stalking him. The problem is that this requires Eddie to talk and he feels safe in his silence.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Eddie runs even more now that his dad and Billy are gone. Eddie realizes that he is angry with Billy for dying. Eddie has enrolled in baptism classes and is seeing less of Billy. Eddie goes to his first baptism class. When Tarter suggests that the mark God gave Cain in the bible is the mask that African Americans now wear, Eddie gets angry because he knows that Tarter has crossed a line. Eddie gets up and walks out of the room.

Eddie is so angry that he finds himself in front of Billy's dad's place. When Billy's dad sees Eddie, he invites Eddie in for a Coke. Eddie starts talking to Billy's dad, telling him what Tarter said and how much Eddie misses and needs Billy. When Eddie realizes he's talking for the first time in months, he says he only wants to talk to Billy's dad and swears him to secrecy.

Billy's dad tells Eddie to go back to baptism classes. He tells him to listen to what the reverend says because he might say some things Eddie can use to get back at the reverend for later. Billy's dad and Eddie make a pact to be there for each other.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Eddie is progressing through the normal stages of grief. Right now is in the angry stage. It seems as if Tarter is a racist. Eddie and Billy's dad find solace in each other for their losses. It foreshadows Eddie carrying out the plan that he and Billy had to take down Tarter as an English teacher by outsmarting him instead of letting Tarter win with his disciplinary actions and torture.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Billy is talking to Eddie in one of his "dreams" where they are on the sledding hill. Eddie asks Billy why he's haunting him and Billy says he isn't, that Eddie's his best friend. Billy says he meets Eddie on the sledding hill because they had so much fun there when Billy was alive. Billy asks Eddie why he wants to be baptized and Eddie says it's because he's scared.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Billy cannot change Eddie's mind or point things out directly to him, but Billy can use their discussions in his dreams to make suggestive comments that gets Eddie thinking along the right lines. It seems as if Billy is warning Eddie about Tarter, as if Tarter might do something to Eddie, such as expel him out of school.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

It's the first day of school. While Eddie usually gets picked on by various groups of kids, the fact that his father and best friend died has earned him some leeway. Eddie is enrolled in an elective first period, Really Modern Literature, which he planned to take with Billy. The class is taught by the librarian, and the students are allowed to read any books they want. Billy comments on how fast he can read now that he's dead. Billy quickly reads the one book that Ms. Lloyd is requiring the entire class to read. Billy knows why Ms. Lloyd wants them to read it, why Moeltke, a senior who is a Christian, doesn't want to read it and why Eddie will love it. Billy also mentioned seeing a train coming at the end of the tunnel.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Eddie is seeing life from a totally different standpoint now that he is dead. His ability to devour books in seconds seems ironic to him since it doesn't really do him any good to read the book. Billy seeing the train at the end of the tunnel signifies that something bad is about to happen to one of the characters.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Billy explains that dead people are so smart because they can see the big picture of what is going on. Billy says the reason he stays connected to Earth is because of Eddie. He mentions that his mother left him and his father when he was three. She fell in love with someone else and left town, but his father stayed and raised Billy. He says his father could have gotten a scholarship to college but that he chose to stay with his mother because he was so in love with her. Billy says the Eddie and Tartar trains are speeding toward each other and about to crash.

Reverend Tarter brings up the book Ms. Lloyd has assigned to the church board members at the meeting. The reverend says that Dan Moeltke brought the book to his attention because it contains topics, such as homosexuality, abortion, drug abuse and legalized gay marriage. The reverend says the book is also full of four-letter words. He suggests that the board lodge a formal complaint through the student group Youth for Christ to ban the book from the curriculum.

One of Ms. Lloyd's students, Montana West, has a father on the church board. Maxwell West marches into the principal's office the Monday morning after the board meeting. Ms. Lloyd is also summoned to the office. Later that day in her class, Ms. Lloyd tells all of the students they have to turn in the Warren Peece books. Montana asks if her father is trying to ban the book and if theta's why he was in school this morning. Ms. Lloyd says she can't divulge that information at this time.

Eddie connects with the book because each of the characters has problems. While the problems are different from Eddie's, he can still relate to the characters. Eddie pretends to turn his book in, but instead stashes it in his backpack.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Eddie and his father are parallel to one another. They are both brilliant, but because their brains don't allow them to focus on any one things, it prohibits them from attaining the most success they can. Even though Billy's father is the school janitor, he is also brilliant. He could have gone to college on a full scholarship, but chose love over academics. Billy mentioning that the Eddie and Tartar trains are speeding toward each other heading for a crash is a metaphor for the uprising that is about to take place between Eddie and Tartar over Tartar's religious beliefs and tyranny is discipline.

It seems the battle, or the war, that will be raging between Reverend Tarter and Eddie is over the book Warren Peece being included in the curriculum. First, Eddie relates to the characters in Warren Peece because they have major problems that are different than finding your father and best friend dead within a month of each other, but that Eddie can relate to. Second, the problems the characters have help Eddie to feel as if his

problems aren't that bad and are more manageable than he originally thought. Finally, the book is helping Eddie to focus, which rarely occurs.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Eddie returns to baptism class and Tarter is surprised to see him. Tarter asks Eddie if the Cain story offended him and that's why he left. Eddie shakes his head no. Tarter goes on to explain that African Americans can still live a good life and get into heaven, but Eddie knows that Tarter thinks it is a separate haven. Eddie ponders why none of the other 70 Youth for Christ students have never stood up to Tarter on his beliefs. Eddie proceeds with acting to make Tarter believe that Eddie is on Tarter's side. Tarter tells Eddie that he is going to have to speak so that he can testify prior to his baptism.

Tarter asks Eddie to stay after class. He tells Eddie that he wants to move up his baptism. Tarter also mentions that he wants Eddie to join the Youth for Christ group in the next couple of weeks.

During Eddie's run for cross-country team practice, Eddie and Billy speak in Eddie's mind. Eddie tells Billy that Billy's dad was right about him staying in baptism class to help bring the reverend down. Eddie says he knows it's the reverend behind it because Montana's dad is connected with the church. Eddie also admits that the book is making him feel less lonely and as if he has friends.

Chad Nash, another member of the cross-country team and Youth for Christ, starts running with Eddie. He admits to Eddie that he's gay, but that he can't tell anyone. Chad also mentions relating to the gay character in the book, Warren Peace. With his actions, Eddie assures Chad that his secret is safe with him and that if anybody finds out that no harm will come to Chad.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Reverend Tarter is trying to use Eddie as a headpiece for the Youth for Christ protest against the Warren Peace book. What Reverend Tarter doesn't know is that Eddie knows precisely what the reverend is trying to do. Eddie plans on using the inside knowledge the reverend provides him to bring the reverend down, rather than hoist the reverend up on a pedestal with his crusade for banning the book.

Eddie is taking a stance against banning the book more for others than for himself. Because the book makes him feel less alone, he thinks that people that don't have friends and people to turn to should be able to turn to the book.

Chad Nash is an example of someone the book is helping. Chad relates to one of the characters in the book, the homosexual one, because Chad is gay but has to keep it a secret from everyone. The book is helping Chad to cope with his issue, which is precisely why Eddie feels he has to fight against having the book banned.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Eddie is in the janitor closet with Billy's dad for lunch. Eddie is talking up a storm. Billy's dad mentions that the banning of the book has the reverend's fingerprints all over it. Billy's dada tells Eddie he needs to get a group of students together to fight the book banning because the reverend has the school principal and three board members in his pocket.

The following morning, Dan Moeltke and the other officers of the Youth for Christian group intercept Eddie. Dan says they want to make him an honorary officer of the group. Dan also mentions them spearheading the banning of the Warren Peace book.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Billy's dada is pointing out that in this situation, there is not a separation between church and state. Because some of the congregation members of the church overlap with positions in the school, the school board members and the principal are going to wield their power to go forward with having the book banned. Ironically, Billy's dada says the same thing Chris Nash said, that Eddie needs to make some new friends now that Billy is gone.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Eddie is talking to Billy in his mind again while Eddie is running. Eddie tells Billy that he should tell Eddie something that Eddie doesn't know to prove that it's really Billy. Billy says something in Russian and Eddie starts running faster.

Eddie attends a YFC meeting. Dan has a PowerPoint presentation and handouts about Warren Peece. He gives the members the background on the author. He also hands out sheets cataloguing the obscenities used in the book, as well as the topics in the book that the YFC finds offensive. He is preparing the members to stand up and speak at the school board meeting. He points Eddie out in the crowd and tells him publicly that they are counting on his support. In mock support, Eddie raises his fist in the air.

Billy mentions to the reader that everyone involved in the conflict over the book is a good character. This is because each one of them believes that what they are doing is for the good of the students. This includes Dan, the reverend and Ms. Lloyd.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Eddie realizes that it's really Billy that is communicating with him in his head. This both scares Eddie and makes him feel more comfortable. It scares him because a dead boy is talking to him in his head. It makes him feel more comfortable because Eddie feels as if Billy is still there supporting him. The struggle between the characters is a struggle between good and evil. The ironic part is that each of the characters involved in fighting for or against the book banning is good because their purpose for fighting about the book has good roots, rather than evil ones.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The principal, Mrs. Madison, goes to the library to ask Ms. Lloyd about confiscating the copies of *Warren Peace* from her class. Mrs. Madison says she's heard students discussing the book and its ending when Ms. Lloyd indicated they were only three-quarters of the way through. Ms. Lloyd points out students can't read it in school, but they can read it at home. When Mrs. Madison asks to see the confiscated books, she notices one is missing. When Mrs. Madison points this out to Ms. Lloyd, Ms. Lloyd says that Eddie indicated he left his at home. Mrs. Madison mumbles under breath that Eddie is on their side, which prompts Ms. Lloyd to question if Mrs. Madison is behind the challenge of the book.

Ms. Lloyd asks Eddie to stay after class. She tells him what happened with Mrs. Madison. She says Mrs. Madison suggested that Eddie is against the book. Ms. Lloyd explains to Eddie that she's fighting for the book and not against him. Eddie tries to tell Ms. Lloyd he's on her side with his smile, but she seems to miss his message. Eddie takes the book out of his backpack and speaks to Ms. Lloyd, telling her that he's finished with the book.

On his run that afternoon, Billy doesn't go along with Eddie. Billy says that the real reason Eddie loves *Warren Peace* is that he has made friends with the characters, and these characters cannot leave him.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Eddie continues to be a silent warrior. He is acting as a spy—spying on the inner workings of the reverend and the YFC members. With this behind-the-scenes-knowledge, he has an advantage when he speaks at the school board meeting because he knows what speaking points the YFC are going to use to try to ban the book. Ironically, Dan says he's concerned that Eddie won't be talking in time to speak on their behalf at the school board meeting. What Dan doesn't know is that Eddie will be talking and he will be talking against the YFC.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Billy's dad is reading Warren Peace to a room full of students in the catacombs after school. Ms. Lloyd stands in the back of the room with her own copy of the book. Billy's dad tells the group that if they want to win against the YFC that they have to get organized. Montana West volunteers to be the spokesperson and the group votes to have her speak on their behalf.

Eddie is talking to Billy during his run. They talk about the fight for the book and the author of the book. When Eddie questions his need to fight for the book, Billy tells Eddie the reason he feels the need to fight for the book is because it's about fighting for freedom. Eddie asks Billy if he's going to stay with him, but Billy says not for much longer. Billy says that Eddie won't need him anymore because Eddie won't be afraid anymore.

Eddie sends an email to the author of the book requesting a statement he can read during the school board meeting. The response comes almost immediately.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Montana and Maxwell West are the polar opposites of each other, even though they are father and daughter. While Maxwell is a straight and narrow Christina, Montana West has piercings and tattoos and dresses all in black in the Goth style. Montana is also the epitome of abiding by the old adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover." While Montana is covered with piercings and tattoos, she is also the type of person that will strike up a conversation with anyone, no matter what "group" or clique to which they belong.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Billy occasionally pops into the mind of the seven year old Sanford Tarter. He sees the boy playing with matches and his mother telling him to pray to Jesus or she'll show him what it feels like to be set on fire as she holds a lighter to his fingers.

The Friday before the Tuesday school board meeting, Eddie goes to Tarter's classroom after school. He speaks to Tarter for the first time. He tells Tarter that he wants to give his testimony on Sunday. Tarter agrees and asks to see the testimony before he gives it out loud in church. Eddie says he'll give it to Tarter Sunday morning.

Eddie goes down to the janitor closet as Mr. Bartholomew is packing his tools and things. Eddie says he heard he got fired for reading the book to the kids. Eddie asks Billy's dad to come to church on Sunday to listen to him give his testimony for baptism.

Dan is preparing the YFC members for the school board meeting. He also mentions that Eddie will be speaking. He says Eddie is giving his testimony in church on Sunday but Tuesday will be the first time most people hear him speak since he went mute.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Billy says the opposites sides of the issue are what keep the world afloat. The foundation of the issue is being able to understand the other side, where the other person comes from. Since humans are unable to gain this understanding the way Billy can, the game on Earth continues.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

On Sunday, Billy's dad goes to church with Eddie and Eddie's mom. One of the church members says that Billy's dada can stay for the sermon but that Eddie's testimony is only for the congregation members, so that he'll have to leave. Tarter gives his sermon all about the school board meeting and how the community is at a crossroads between good and evil. When it's time for Eddie to speak, Billy's dad leaves and the reverend introduces Eddie, reminding the congregation everything Eddie has been through in the past year. Billy sees an open "window" and knows he has to take advantage of it as Eddie stands up to speak.

Billy appears in the back of the church, holding up cue cards to help Eddie stay on track. Eddie starts to give his testimony. Everything seems to be going the way the reverend planned, until Eddie veers off to how Leviticus goes for the maximum punishment. He talks about how his dad use to tell Eddie to do the math—which is that one in 10 people is gay and one in 10 people is African American. Eddie and his father conclude that if God makes these one in 10 people then being gay or being African American is not a bad thing.

Eddie switches gears and mentions the school board meeting. He says this will be his last Sunday in church and that he won't bring his school business to church if they don't bring their church business to school.

When Tarter sends two church elders to get Eddie, Eddie takes the cue. Eddie jumps on the ledge of a window that has a stained glass image of the Virgin Mary. As he stands on the ledge, he asks, "What would Jesus do?" He says Jesus would do the same thing that Ms. Lloyd and Mr. Bartholomew did, which was to read the book to those who wanted to read it. As the church custodian moves the ladder to get Eddie down off the ledge, Eddie jumps down and runs out of the church.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Billy knows that he has to make Eddie see him—more than Eddie sees him when he's dreaming and the two boys are talking. Seeing Billy is what will help Eddie to focus on what he has to say during his testimony. Otherwise, Eddie might go off on a tangent and not make the point that he wants and needs to make to the churchgoers.

There is a lot of biblical symbolism in Eddie's testimony speech. Eddie speaks of Ms. Lloyd and Mr. Bartholomew as if they are Jesus because Jesus would allow the students who want to read the banned book to read it. One of the first thing Eddie suggests when he gets to the part of his speech pertaining to the banned book is that they should separate church from state—that they should keep religion out of the schools and education out of the religious institutions because they are two separate

issues. It is also biblical symbolism that when Eddie jumps on to the window ledge, that the light shining in around him from the Virgin Mary's halo gives Eddie a glowing "aura" as if he is angelic. Eddie even mentions that Jesus was a rebel like Eddie, which means that Eddie himself could be Jesus.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

It's the night of the school board meeting. Eddie isn't there because they checked him into the state mental health hospital for think he is Jesus. Eddie calls Mr. Bartholomew to tell him about the surprise he has planned for the meeting. Each side of the debate speaks. Eddie is crouched in a janitor closet in the hospital and then breaks free and runs to the meeting when the coast is clear. Chris Nash even speaks, admitting he's gay and how the book helped him. The author of the book, Chris Crutcher, arrives and Mr. Bartholomew greets him, Eddie bursts into the meeting, greets Crutcher, and walks to the podium to introduce Crutcher.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Essentially, the reverend and Eddie's mom are trying to keep the evil away from Eddie. They believe that in Eddie's case, the evil is a mental health issue since Eddie believes that he is Jesus. People have a tendency to be scared of what they don't understand. The reverend and his followers do not understand the issues addressed in Crutcher's book, which is what makes them scared of these issues. Their fear is what is compelling them to try to ban the book.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Montana bursts into the meeting in a cloud of black and silver. She says she couldn't speak until she finished her homework. She hangs her homework to her dada and starts her speech against banning the book. When she realizes Crutcher is there, she turns it over to him. Crutcher realizes he could never follow such an amazing speech so he says he agrees with what Montana said. After the meeting, while Ms. Lloyd, Mr. Bartholomew, Crutcher, and Eddie are drinking coffee, all of the Crutcher books are cleared off the library shelves.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Montana's father is trying to keep Montana from speaking her side at the meeting by forbidding her to drive her car until she's finished her homework. Ironically, Chris Crutcher drives 100 miles to attend the school board meeting, but doesn't really say anything that is helpful in preventing the books from being banned. Even with all of the support for not banning the book, the book still gets removed from the library.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Billy sits in the high school library while all of the books the school board deems inappropriate are removed. When the board tries to get the books banned from the city library, it doesn't work. When more kids start using the city library, this creates jobs for Ms. Lloyd, who quit, and Mr. Bartholomew. Eddie starts selling t-shirts and bumper stickers like the t-shirt Montana wore to the school board meeting that says, "Leviticus Sucks." Eddie got suspended for three days for wearing the prototype t-shirt, but was reinstated when he wrote a rambling and not very much an apology "apology" letter. Because Eddie doesn't need him anymore, Billy is getting ready to leave. Eddie is making new friends and even moving towards trying to make Montana West his girlfriend. Before he goes, Billy compiles the story into a book manuscript and manages to hit the send button to Chris Crutcher's editor. She sends back an email saying she didn't even know he was working on a manuscript and that she made a few changes but otherwise it's the cleanest draft he's ever submitted.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Billy has used his powers to get his story published through the likes of Chris Crutcher. Since Billy's job on Earth is done, he can now move on to the afterworld. Billy stuck around long enough to get Eddie back on track with his life.



Characters

Billy Bartholomew

Billy Bartholomew is a teenage boy. He lives in a small town by the name of Bear Creek in Idaho. Billy is also one of the smartest boys in his class, and possibly even his school. Billy is best friends with Eddie Proffitt. Billy's father is the janitor at the local high school. His mother left Billy and his father when Billy was three years old.

Billy is a short and very skinny kid. He loves to run and ride his bike, especially with his best friend, Eddie. Billy and Eddie are inseparable. Billy grounds Eddie in many ways. Because Eddie is very unfocused, Billy tries to keep Eddie out of trouble from going off on tangents in church and in class at school.

One day, while up at the school looking for his dad, Billy gets mad and kicks a stack of sheetrock that is leaning up against the wall. When Billy turns his back to it, the sheetrock falls on him, breaking his spine and killing him. Billy's spirit separates from his body, so he can see himself lying on the ground and he can also see when Eddie comes and finds his dead body.

Billy decides to remain Earthbound so he can help Eddie. Eddie is not only suffering the loss of Billy, but also his father too. When Billy starts talking to and appearing to Eddie, eventually Billy is able to help Eddie overcome his fear of loss and get back on track to living a normal life.

Eddie Proffit

Eddie Proffitt is also a teenage boy. He is 14 years old. He is best friends with Billy and the boys have been friends since childhood. Eddie is really a genius, but nobody knows this because he fails his IQ test and doesn't get very good grades in school.

Primarily, this is because Eddie has a hard time focusing. He starts thinking about one thing, and then this leads him on a tangent to think of something else, and so on and so forth. His thought process prohibits him from ever really getting anything done.

Billy's father figures out that Eddie is a genius. He starts taking Eddie into his janitor closet after school to help Eddie with his homework. Eddie is also the son of the local Chevron gas station owner. During the summer between eighth and ninth grade, Billy finds his father dead at the gas stations. A few weeks later, Eddie finds his best friend Billy dead too—both from tragic accidents.

Eddie deals with his grief and loss by going mute—so he completely stops talking. Eddie allows fear to lead him through life for the next few months, until Billy's spirit shows up and tried to help Eddie through the grief process. Eventually, Eddie takes on



the reverend and English teacher who tries to get a book that Eddie relates to banned from the high school curriculum.

Reverend Sanford Tarter

The Reverend Sanford Tarter stand 5'6" tall. He weighs 132 lbs. The reverend preaches at the Local Red brick Church. In addition to being a preacher, he is also an English teacher. He is known for his creative discipline techniques. Billy and Eddie plot to make Tarter fall from his reign of terror by being exceptionally smart students in Tarter's class.

After Mr. Proffit dies, Tarter takes a special interest in helping Mrs. Proffit and Eddie through the grieving process. Tarter starts having dinner at Eddie's house a few night s a week. Tarter also tries to convince Eddie to speak again and be baptized.

When Tarter finds out the librarian at the school is allowing her students to read a controversial book, he tries to have the book banned from the curriculum. This is part of Tarter's effort to clean up the school curriculum in general. Since Tarter knows he cannot lead the banning of the book, he convinces the leader of the Youth for Christ group at the school to stand up against allowing the book into the curriculum.

Mr. Bartholomew

Mr. Bartholomew is the school janitor. He never went to college because he fell in love with his wife and Billy's mother. When Billy's mother wanted to stay in Bear Creek and cut hair for a living. Mr. Bartholomew chose to forgo going to college and stay with the woman he loved.

Mr. Bartholomew is a very smart man. He acts as a guide for Eddie after Mr. Proffit and Billy die. When the book is banned from the classroom, Mr. Bartholomew also reads the book to students that are interested in it, but in secret in the school catacombs. When the school board finds out about his actions, he is fired.

Mr. Bartholomew continues to help Eddie fight against Tarter and the school board to keep the book from being officially banned.

Mr. Proffit

Mr. Proffit is Eddie's father. He owns and runs the Bear Creek Chevron station in town. Mr. Proffit is also a very intelligent man, but he never goes to college either. When he is alive, Mr. Proffit doesn't like Reverend Tarter and his beliefs. In fact, Mr. Proffit is constantly challenging Tarter. Mr. Proffit is the direct opposite of his wife, who is a very religious woman.



Mrs. Proffit

Mrs. Proffit is a very religious woman. She is always going to church and speaking about God and Jesus to her family. When her husband is killed, Mrs. Proffit becomes even more religious. She goes to church more often and she invites Reverend Tarter over for dinner a lot.

When Eddie stops talking, she blames herself for his being mute. She sends the reverend to Eddie's room to talk to him.

Mrs. Lloyd

Mrs. Lloyd is the high school librarian. She is also the teacher of the Really Modern Literature Class that Eddie is enrolled. Mrs. Lloyd chooses and assigns the book, Warren Preece, to the class. When the reverend and his followers try to have the book banned, Mrs. Lloyd fights against it. After the school board officially bans this book and other books from the high school library, Mrs. Lloyd quits working at the high school and starts working at the city library.

Dan Moeltske

Dan Moeltske is an athlete at the high school—playing two different sports. He is also a very intelligent boy. He attends the Red Brick Church and is the president of the school organization—Youth for Christ. Dan is also enrolled in Mrs. Lloyd's class. When Dan brings the book to the attention of Reverend Tarter, Tarter convinces Dan that he and the other students must work to ban the book from the curriculum because it is against their religious beliefs.

Maxwell West

Maxwell West is on the board of the Red Brick Church. He also has a daughter, Montana West, that attends the high school and is enrolled in Mrs. Lloyd's class. Maxwell West is the one that goes to the principal's office to lodge a formal complaint about the book and Mrs. Lloyd. In essence, he is the one that gets the ball rolling on the book-banning issue.

Montana West

Montana West is Goth. She dresses in all black clothing. She has tattoos all over her body that she has been able to get using her fake ID. She also has piercings all over her body. She is constantly arguing and rebelling against her father. When she finds out her father is trying to ban the book from her literature class, she agrees to be a part of

the opposition. Montana is the one that gives the speech on behalf of the students that don't want the book banned at the school board meeting.



Objects/Places

Bear Creek

Bear Creek is a small town in Idaho, where Billy and Eddie grow up. Bear Creek has a population of 3,065 residents. The town is in the panhandle of Idaho, close to the Canadian border to its north. Bear Creek is the primary setting for the novel.

Proffit's Chevron

Eddie's father owns Proffit's Chevron. It's the only gas station in Bear Creek that fixes trucks. The summer that Eddie turns 14, he works at the station with his father for four hours in the morning. It is at the gas station that Eddie finds his father dead because a truck tire falls on and crushes Mr. Proffit's head.

Hot Springs

The hot springs is a popular spot for the locals. Billy and Eddie often ride their bikes there after Eddie gets off work in the summer. Billy and Eddie are on their way to the hot springs when Eddie stops by the gas station and finds his father dead. When Eddie finds Billy dead, he goes to the hot springs, takes off all his clothes, and buries himself in mud.

Red Brick Church

The Red Brick Church is the local church in town. Reverend Tarter is the preacher at the church. The church is the setting for a few scenes in the novel. For example, when Billy attends baptism classes, it is at the church. It's also at the church where Billy gives his testimony for baptism that turns into his speech for challenging the banning of the book.

Bear Creek High School

Bear Creek High School is the school that Eddie starts attending without Billy, after Billy dies. Reverend Tarter is an English teacher at the school. It's during his first period class at Bear Creek High School where Mrs. Lloyd assign Eddie and his classmates to read the book, Warren Peece.

Warren Peece

Warren Peece is the novel Mrs. Lloyd assign her literature class to read. The book contains profanity and covers several controversial topics: homosexuality, drugs and



abortion. This is the book that starts the banning war between Reverend Tarter and Mrs. Lloyd. It pulls the students into it as well, making them choose a side as to whether the book should be banned or not.

Handouts

Dan creates handouts that are reference sheets about the book. One of the sheets catalogs the profanity that is used. The other sheets reference the topics that are problems for him and the other Youth for Christ members because of their religion. Dan hands these sheets out at the YFC meeting to prepare the students that will be standing up and speaking at the school board meeting to ban the book from the high school curriculum.

The Sledding Hill

The sledding hill is a big hill in town that all of the kids sled down during the winter. When Billy starts appearing to Eddie in his dreams, Billy takes Eddie to the sledding hill. Billy tells Eddie that he meets him at the sledding hill because of all of the good times they had together there.

Leviticus Sucks T-shirt

When Montana West shows up at the school board meeting she is wearing a Leviticus Sucks T-shirt. The school board members say she can't wear such a t-shirt, so she attempts to take it off until her father stops her. After the meeting and banning of Warren Peece, Eddie creates and sells t-shirts and bumper stickers with the same saying to sell.

Janitor's Closet

The janitor's closet is where Mr. Bartholomew takes Eddie to do his homework every day. It is also where Eddie retreats to talk to Mr. Bartholomew in private. When Mr. Bartholomew gets fired, Eddie talks to him in the closet while Mr. B is packing up his things. In essence, the closet is a place of solace and respite for Eddie from the rest of the world.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Eddie and his father have a closer relationship than Eddie and his mother. Eddie and his mother, however, have a unique relationship of their own.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. First, Eddie doesn't have any friends in school. Everyone thinks he is an idiot. Since Eddie is always disrupting class with his questions, most of the kids don't want anything to do with. Billy, however, comes to understand Eddie. They form a friendship that is endless—even death cannot separate the two boys. Billy and Eddie counteract each other as friends. While Eddie is the leader in many things that the boys do, Billy is the one that grounds Eddie, helps Eddie to focus and does things to keep Eddie out of trouble.

When Billy and Mr. Proffit die, Eddie forms a special bond with Mr. Bartholomew. The two use each other in a positive way to fill the void of both of their losses. Eddie becomes surrogate son to Mr. Bartholomew and Mr. Bartholomew becomes a surrogate father to Eddie.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as the loss of a father and a best friend to tragic accidents. Eddie struggles with getting his life back on track after the two most important people in his life are ripped away from him.

Eddie deals with the responsibilities in life of having a dead parent and a dead best friend. He is also learning about the importance of freedom—freedom of choice—when the reverend tries to get Eddie to be baptized. Additionally, Eddie is faced with the decision to stand up to the reverend and his cohorts to try to stop them from banning a book that is helping Eddie to heal from his losses.

Finally, Eddie faces the rite of passage of having his first girlfriend. Eddie forms a special bond with Montana West during their fight against the book being banned from school. In the end, it seems as if the two are forming a girlfriend and boyfriend type relationship.



Good versus Evil

Another primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. While it is presented in a light-hearted manner, Eddie struggles with his religious beliefs. He is torn between the beliefs of his and those of his mother. Eddie starts to believe that God is punishing him for his beliefs by taking away his father and best friend, and then allowing his best friend to haunt him.

Every adult and student involved in the debate about banning the book is also struggling with good and evil. Each person believes that their motive for their side of the debate comes from a good place. The root of the fight to ban the book or not isn't evil, but the opposing sides see their opponents as those with evil intentions.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view, from the perspective of main character, Billy Bartholomew. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time Billy's death. The past represents the time leading up to the deaths of Mr. Proffit and Billy.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with two of the main characters, Billy Bartholomew and Eddie Proffit. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Billy and Eddie's heads, thoughts, and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator and to Eddie. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in Bear Creek, which is a small town in Idaho, during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of the deaths of Mr. Proffit and Billy Bartholomew. Eddie is constantly trying to find a way to deal with the deaths of the two most important people in his life. At first, Eddie does this by not talking anymore.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the narrator is dead and that he is telling the story as a spirit or ghost. However, as events unfold, Billy's death is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 18 chapters. Each chapter ranges from seven pages to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator injects his own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing his opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel. The author is even a

character in the novel, playing the part of the author of the book, Warren Preece, that is the subject of the banning debate.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships such as friendship and romantic relationships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Eddie Proffit. Another subplot is good versus evil.



Quotes

"Was he still alive when you were trying to pull him out" (Chapter 1, p. 15).

"God takes care of all his creatures" (Chapter 2, p. 27).

"What would be a good next move" (Chapter 3, p. 44).

"This selective mute thing is not serving you well" (Chapter 4, p. 47).

"Look, I know you and Billy were planing" (Chapter 5, p. 74).

"So why are you warning me about Tarter" (Chapter 6, p. 83).

"I'm assigning one book, Warren Peece, by Crutcher. That one we'll discuss in detail" (Chapter 7, p. 87).

"Ruth Lloyd has assigned a book to her literature class that should raise all our red flags" (Chapter 8, p. 94).

"Warren Peece is the first book I've ever read with...with characters who seem like they could be my friends" (Chapter 9, p. 114).

"We keep those we love alive with the acts we commit in their names" (Chapter 10, p. 123).

"If we orchestrate this correctly, we can make a big impact on the community and our school" (Chapter 11, p. 130).

"I believe stories have the power to heal" (Chapter 12, p. 143).

"Are you going to stay with me" (Chapter 13, p. 160).

"You still run things, Eddie. Don't ever sweat that" (Chapter 14, p. 177).

"I won't come here and bring my school business, and you don't come there and bring your church business" (Chapter 15, p. 193).

"And by the way, I know I'm not Jesus" (Chapter 16, p. 217).

"If you don't want to lose us, stop trying to tell us how to think" (Chapter 17, p. 224).



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Eddie Proffit? Do you think he knows his father is dead when he finds him or is he in denial? Why doesn't Eddie tell anyone his father is dead or that Billy is dead? Why instead does Eddie go on doing what he was doing when he finds the bodies? Why do you think Eddie stops talking? What does Eddie ultimately realize about his relationship with her Billy?

Discuss the relationship between Eddie and Billy. Why does Billy become friends with Eddie when everybody else thinks Eddie is strange? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Billy feel about Eddie? How does Eddie feel about Billy? How do Eddie's feelings change when he starts seeing Billy as a ghost? What does he do about it? What happens to Eddie?

Discuss the relationship between Eddie and Mr. Bartholomew. Are they friends, allies, surrogate son and father or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Eddie feel about Mr. Bartholomew? How does Mr. Bartholomew feel about Eddie? How do Eddie's feelings change after Billy dies? What does he do about it? What happens to Mr. Bartholomew?

Who is Billy Bartholomew? Why does he take on the role of Eddie's caretaker when he is alive? Why does Billy say that it is Eddie that keeps him Earthbound after he dies? Where do you think Billy goes after he helps Eddie? What role does Billy play in Eddie's healing process?

Who is Reverend Tarter? Do you think he believes that his work in the church and school is for good or evil? What are his motives for trying to have the book banned? Why does the reverend put Dan up to leading the ban on the book instead of leading it himself?

Discuss the relationship between Eddie and Mrs. Proffit. Why does Eddie despise her so much? Do you think Eddie blames her for what happens to himself after his father dies? Why doesn't Mrs. Proffit talk to Eddie herself instead of having the reverend do it?

Discuss the banning of books. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?