

BANNED

A Guide to Teaching

Challenged and Banned Books

Featuring the Novels of
Chris Crutcher



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CENSORSHIP

About This Guide

This guide will help teachers and librarians gain a better understanding of banned and challenged books and equip them to answer questions about the reasons books are banned, the ramifications of banned books, and the effects that challenged and banned books have in the classroom. This guide will also introduce Chris Crutcher—whose novels have been repeatedly challenged in states across the country—as well as his response to his critics.

What Is the First Amendment?

The First Amendment to the Constitution is part of the Bill of Rights. It safeguards the liberties of all Americans by ensuring that government cannot prohibit the expression of an idea, even if that idea is unpopular or unorthodox. A free society depends on the free exchange of ideas. The First Amendment defends that freedom.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

What Is a Banned/Challenged Book?

- A challenged book is a book that a person or a group has attempted to remove from the library shelves and/or a school classroom because of objections regarding the book's content.
- A banned book has been successfully removed from the library shelves and/or school classrooms.

Why Are Books Challenged?

- Profane language
- Sexual, racially discriminatory, or violent content
- Political and/or religious differences
- A variety of other reasons

When people challenge a book, they are attempting to impose on others their views and opinions about what is appropriate or fitting reading material. When a challenged book is banned, the complainants have usurped the rights of those who might choose to read the book. Because of dedicated librarians and teachers, many challenges are unsuccessful, and most books are retained in the school curriculum or library collection.

About This Guide

What Is Banned Books Week?

Since 1982, Banned Books Week has celebrated the right of Americans to express their opinions and to access the opinions of others. Banned Books Week draws attention to books that have been banned or challenged. Fortunately, most attempts to ban books fail, thanks to the ongoing vigilance of teachers and librarians who fight to keep challenged works in their schools and public libraries. During the last week of September every year, teachers, librarians, and booksellers work to raise awareness of First Amendment issues and the power of literature in a free society.

What Is the Freedom to Read?

In 1953, the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Book Publishers Council issued a joint statement on *The Freedom to Read*, which affirms the responsibilities of librarians and publishers to make the widest diversity of views and expressions available. It states, in part:

- “Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.”
- “It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people’s freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.”
- “It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a ‘bad’ book is a good one, the answer to a ‘bad’ idea is a good one.”

The complete statement can be found on the ALA website at www.ala.org.

Teaching Banned/Challenged Books

If a teacher chooses to use a book that has been banned in another community as part of an assignment, he or she should be prepared for possible objections. The following suggestions could be helpful.

- Offer students who object to the banned/challenged book an alternate book that deals with similar topics and themes.
- Ask all students to have their parents sign a permission form stating that it is acceptable for them to read the banned/challenged book.
- Provide reviews from professional sources that support teaching the banned/challenged book, and document the benefits students will receive from reading the book.
- Discuss the controversial subjects with your students openly.

If a book is challenged in your community, you can help fight censorship by contacting one or more of the organizations listed on page 10 of this guide.

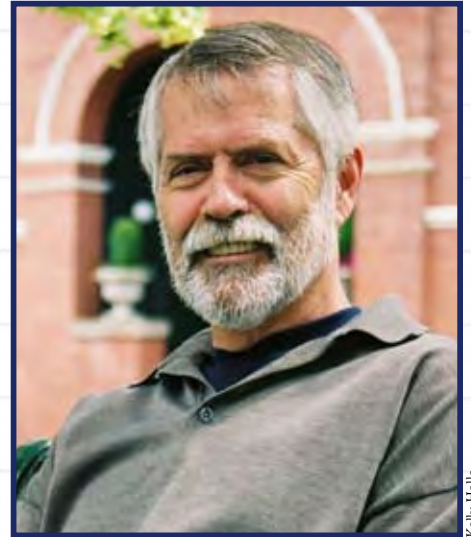
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Meet Chris Crutcher

Chris Crutcher is well known for the books he has written for young adults; nine have been named ALA Best Books for Young Adults, five have appeared on ALA's 100 Best Books for Teens, and several are currently being adapted as major motion pictures. Mr. Crutcher has also received numerous awards, including the ALAN Award in 1993, the NCTE/SLATE Intellectual Freedom Award in 1998, the Margaret A. Edwards Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2000, *The Writer Magazine* "Writers who make a difference" award in 2004, and an award in 2005 from the National Coalition Against Censorship "for his courageous novels for young adults and his outspoken defense of free speech."



Kelly Halls

The most enduring part of Mr. Crutcher's books are the characters he creates—real people, gleaned from his small-town boyhood in Idaho, his ten years directing an alternative school, and his twenty-five years as a child abuse and neglect counselor. His characters are the kids who walk the halls of today's schools and read at public libraries. Mr. Crutcher's stories urge kids to have courage and to take responsibility for their lives, to become everyday heroes who stand up and do what is right. His readers recognize themselves in his books, and realize that somebody else might just understand their crises after all. Mr. Crutcher says, "The truth screams to be told in its native tongue." By telling his characters' stories in language authentic to their life experiences, he honors the struggles of people he considers truly heroic. For Chris Crutcher, life influences the stories he writes, and writing the truth as he sees it distinguishes him as the man and writer he is.

A champion for free speech, Chris Crutcher continuously fights for intellectual freedom. He loudly proclaims the rights of high school students to feel visible and to find and read the books they need most, in spite of censors. His books are frequently challenged and/or banned.

Mr. Crutcher recognizes that censors' desire to suppress his stories comes from fear and ignorance, and he knows they bear him no ill will. In order to fight those censors, he works closely with the National Coalition Against Censorship; he writes articles to newspapers and magazines defending freedom of speech; he speaks on radio talk shows advocating the rights of teenagers to read stories of authentic life experiences; he writes to teenagers expressing his concerns that adults are trying to "protect" them by keeping them in the dark; and he continues to write stories teens want and need to read.

Willingly speaking to school boards and parents, Mr. Crutcher openly discusses with them the "uncomfortable" truths and controversial language and ideas he writes about. Because of his commitment and dedication to the concept of intellectual freedom, Mr. Crutcher travels all over the country to speak at schools, state and national library and teachers' conferences, and public libraries. Just like the characters he writes about, who take risks for their beliefs, Mr. Crutcher proves himself to be a perpetual defender of intellectual freedom.

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A Few Words About Censorship

by Chris Crutcher

Over the past three or four years I've been asked repeatedly by students doing reports on book censorship if I think there are any books that should be censored. My answer to them is always no. They give me all kinds of titles they believe are inappropriate and I still say no.

"What about child pornography?"

"Child pornography is illegal. You don't have to censor it."

"What about slasher stuff, or racist material, or material that degrades women?"

"No, nope, huh-uh."

"You think that stuff is appropriate for my little brother to read?"

"You didn't ask me what was appropriate, you asked which books should be censored."

I don't think that stuff is appropriate for your little brother or you or, for that matter, me. But you live in a *free* country, and that means standing up for that *freedom*, not just for the things you agree with or believe in. If you live in a democracy, and you want to participate in that democracy, you have to learn to stand up for the expression of things you hate. It's easy to promote material that represents what you believe—a little harder to do that for material that makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up."

Clearly this battle for intellectual freedom is not over. New book challenges emerge on a regular basis. What interests me is the number of would-be censors who use the same language in those challenges. That lets me know the attacks are orchestrated—and I have to say, "talking points" are a lazy person's style of protest.

I always address this intellectual freedom issue from two perspectives—the philosophical perspective and the personal one. The argument from the philosophical perspective is easy: It's fine to say what is okay and what is not okay for *your* child to read. It is not fine to say what is okay for other people's kids to read. This is the United States of America. We are a free country, and the concept of intellectual freedom is embedded in our origins.

The personal perspective is more intriguing to me, because it takes into account the *content* of what censors want to eradicate from school and public libraries and from curriculums. Inappropriate language is always a target. I can't speak for other writers, but I use language for realism and for humor. I try to be aware of the teenage mind and the teenage perspective. Many censors actually zero in on the language itself, devoid of context. You can't legitimately criticize anything if you're not willing to take context into account. If you don't consider context, you simply appear ignorant. Nearly any sexual content or issue of sexual preference also falls into the crosshairs of the censors. To write about young adulthood without writing about sex is like writing about the forest without including trees. It isn't real, and it won't be accepted. It always amazes me that one of the most powerful forces in our world—the basic *engine* of evolution—is something so many people are afraid of talking about. I believe they don't understand that they take themselves off the short list of people *their own children* might turn to. Children who believe they will disappoint or anger their parents by letting them know they are going through natural developmental stages will go elsewhere for their information.

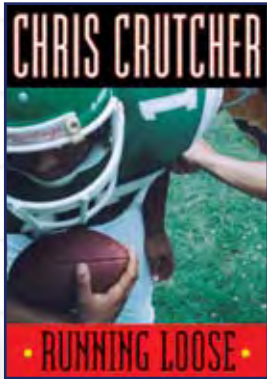
The generation gap is constantly addressed when we look at the struggles between adolescents and adults. I believe much of that gap is created because we, as adults, are afraid to talk about what is important to adolescents, and they are naturally—developmentally—skeptical about talking with us. If they knew we could listen, that gap could be narrowed. Talking about stories, talking about a *character's* issues instead of more personal, closer-to-home issues, is a great way to get the conversation started.

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Chris Crutcher: A Book Study



Running Loose (1983)

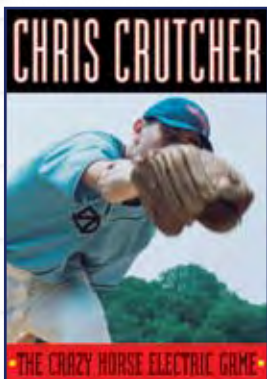
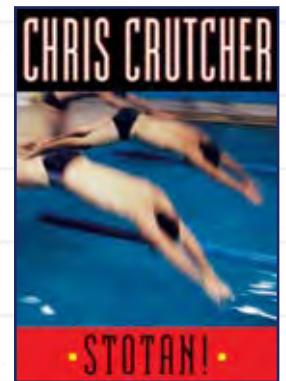
When Louie's football coach orders the players to hurt an African-American player on another team, Louie refuses. His fight against racism causes him to lose his position on the football team, get suspended from school, and be barred from participating in all athletics. Prejudice in Louie's small town threatens to destroy people and their reputations.

Whenever prejudice surfaces, people are hurt and lives are destroyed. Why don't the other players take a stand for what is right? Why is Louie able and willing when none of the other players are? Are the sacrifices Louie makes for his beliefs worth the pain he suffers?

Stotan! (1986)

Four high school swimmers volunteer for Stotan Week, a series of intense training sessions to push them past the point of pain. Upon completion of the week, Nortie's dad beats him up, Jeff discovers he has leukemia, and Walter and Lion do their best to hold the team together against an onslaught of racist attacks.

Not only do the main characters deal with the pain of their current situations, but the circumstances of their pasts are full of sorrow as well. Who does each character draw on for strength? How does the group dynamic help each character individually?



The Crazy Horse Electric Game (1987)

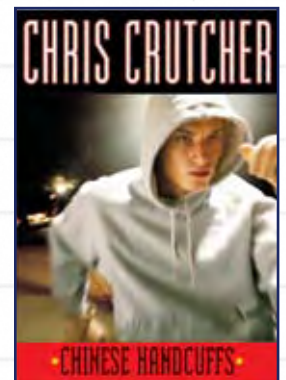
When an accident leaves all-star pitcher Willie Weaver partially paralyzed, he realizes he cannot function in his old life. He boards a bus to Oakland, where he meets Lacey Casteel, a pimp who takes him in but forces him to attend the One More Last Chance High School. There Willie learns to compensate for the paralysis, fighting his way back to physical and emotional health.

When Willie first runs away from home, his life is miserable, and no one knows where he is or how to find him. Why does Willie feel that this is the only solution to his problem? What is Willie really running away from? How does the reader know that Willie finds the peace that he is seeking?

Chinese Handcuffs (1989)

After witnessing his brother Preston's suicide, Dillon attempts to put his life back together. For one thing, he has to accept how he feels about Stacy, his brother's old girlfriend—and about their child, whom he desperately loves. Dillon's friend Jennifer must also learn to move past her pain and confront the sexual abuse to which she is being subjected.

The title of this book is symbolic of Dillon's struggle with his circumstances and emotions. What are Chinese handcuffs? How do they play a role in this book? Why is this the perfect title? If Dillon's finger is in one end of the Chinese handcuffs, who or what is in the other end?

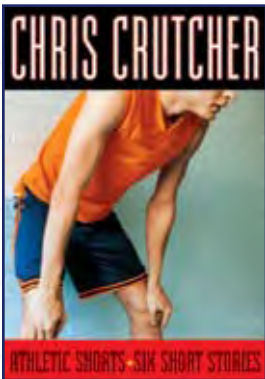


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Chris Crutcher: A Book Study



Athletic Shorts (1991)

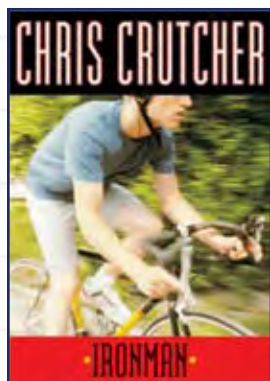
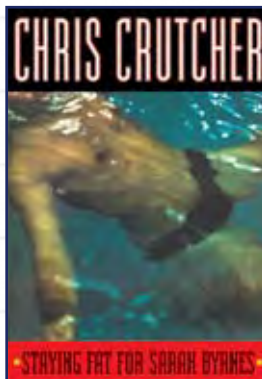
In this collection of short stories about the characters in his novels, Chris Crutcher attempts to address unanswered questions about his characters' lives either before they made their debuts in his novels or after the novels ended.

What theme runs through each of these stories, even though the characters and the situations they face are different? How does this theme apply to each story? How do the characters' actions contribute to this theme?

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (1993)

When overweight Eric joins the swim team, he begins to slim down and make new friends, suddenly threatening his relationship with Sarah, a classmate disfigured at the age of three when her own father pushed her face against a hot stove burner. Eric does his best to stay fat so that he and Sarah will continue to share their outcast status. But the situation comes to a head when Sarah totally stops speaking and is institutionalized for mysterious reasons.

Although the external conflict surrounding Eric and Sarah's friendship seems to be the driving force of the story, the real issues stem from their individual internal conflicts. What are the major external conflicts? How do the external conflicts drive the internal conflicts?



Ironman (1995)

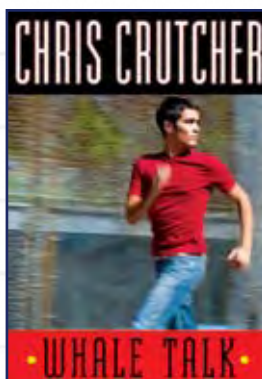
Bo must interrupt his triathlon training two mornings a week to attend an anger management class with a group of social misfits. As the triathlon event approaches, Bo makes a wager with his fiercest competitor, only to learn that his own father has given the opponent a world-class competition bike to insure that Bo will lose.

How does Bo's anger drive him to succeed? What role does Bo's father play in both harming and helping Bo? What does Bo learn about himself through the anger management class?

Whale Talk (2001)

Although T.J. is a talented and gifted athlete, he refuses to join any of the school teams or participate in any other school activities. However, when his charismatic English teacher convinces him to begin a swim team, despite the overwhelming odds against success, T.J. is inspired to beat the system. He recruits every misfit in the school to be on the team and tries to ensure they will all win letter jackets.

T.J.'s obviously strong leadership abilities allow him to take a group of kids who are not athletes and lead them to victory. What pivotal decisions does T.J. make to set the wheels in motion? What are the results of his decision? What is T.J.'s motivation for starting the swim team?



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Chris Crutcher: A Book Study



King of the Mild Frontier An Ill-Advised Autobiography (2003)

Chris Crutcher shares stories of his life growing up in a small town in Idaho and reveals the inspiration for some of his characters and the situations in which they find themselves. His readers will once again appreciate the truth and empathy with which he writes, and see the connection between his writing and his real-world experience.

How does Mr. Crutcher's coming-of-age in the 1960s differ from a teen's coming-of-age today? What societal changes have taken place in the last forty years to change the definition of coming-of-age? What dangers do teens face today that teens in the 1960s did not face?

The Sledding Hill (2005)

When Eddie's father and his best friend, Billy, are both killed accidentally within a month, Eddie is left alone to deal with his grief. But Billy, the narrator of the story, sees no reason to let death interrupt their friendship, and begins to visit Eddie. Reverend Tarter, who also teaches English at Eddie's school, does his best to manipulate Eddie into joining his church and his crusade to get a book banned at school.

Intellectual freedom is at the heart of this novel. What is intellectual freedom? How does Reverend Tarter threaten the students' freedom to read? What bigger issues are at stake?



Deadline (2008)

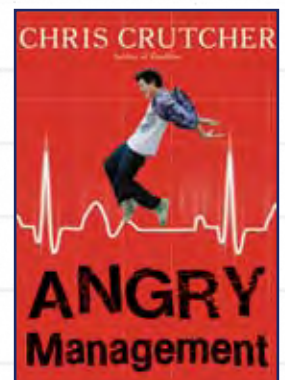
When Ben Wolf discovers at the beginning of his high school senior year that he has a fatal disease, he decides to make the most of his short time left—go out for the football team, land his dream girl, fight racism in his small town—and tell no one of his condition. Ben's plan to pack a whole lifetime of living into a single year does not go quite according to plan. But then, that's life.

What do you think about Ben's decision to keep his diagnosis a secret? What would you have done if you were in Ben's position? What does this novel have to say about secrets? What does it say about truth?

Angry Management (2009)

The three novellas in this book feature characters from Chris Crutcher's novels—Sarah Byrnes, Angus Bethune, John Simet, Matt Miller, and Montana West—living outside their original times and in some cases outside their original settings. They are all connected by Mr. Nak's Angry Management group—a place for misfits and also a place for stories. And, man, does this crew have stories!

How do Mr. Nak's first-impression notes before each novella set up your expectations for what follows? When are his first impressions on target and when are they off? How does anger affect each of the main characters? What other emotions shape these characters?



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Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions

1. As a class, read the First Amendment. Then discuss how freedom of speech is related to the freedom to read. Does the First Amendment guarantee freedom to read? Is it possible to have a society where people are free to express their ideas but not free to hear the ideas of their fellow citizens? Does the right to express ideas imply a right to receive ideas?
2. Ask students to select one of Chris Crutcher's challenged books and research the reasons that it was contested as well as the final results of the challenge. Then ask them to write a rationale for keeping the book on the library shelf and in the classroom. Have students read their rationales to the class and then combine them in a booklet.
3. Divide the class into two groups and have one group argue against censorship under any circumstances and the other argue that the desire to protect students outweighs their First Amendment right to receive information. Ask each group to answer these questions: Who determines what needs to be censored? Who should judge what is appropriate?
4. Have students conduct research to find books that might have been controversial decades ago but that are not considered controversial today. As a class, discuss why public opinion has changed toward those books.
5. Movies, television programs, video games, and music recordings all carry ratings to indicate an age-appropriate audience. Why are these forms of entertainment dealt with in a different way from books?
6. One of the arguments against banning books is that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one. Select a book that some people might find objectionable. How could opponents of this book counter its subject matter or ideas without resorting to banning it? Have the class research books with viewpoints that are contrary to the objectionable book. Discuss whether promoting these books is an effective strategy for countering the ideas of the "bad" book.
7. Chris Crutcher is proud to have repeatedly made the ALA's annual list of top ten most frequently challenged books. Discuss why Chris Crutcher might be proud of this fact. Would it be better to be universally loved? Why or why not?
8. Chris Crutcher has said that his dad was a conservative who would have "run a nail through his eye before allowing a book to be censored." Many book challenges come from religious conservatives, but not all do. As a class, discuss the relationship of censorship to the political spectrum. Why might conservatives want to ban books? What different reasons might liberals have to ban books? Why should both conservatives and liberals alike defend freedom of expression?
9. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas once wrote, "Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us." Discuss with your class the meaning of Justice Douglas's words. How can restricting free thought and free speech weaken America?
10. Have the class read one of Chris Crutcher's frequently challenged books, such as *Athletic Shorts* or *Whale Talk*. Hold a mock trial based on the following scenario: A school board has found the book to be vulgar, offensive, and inappropriate for minors. They have had it removed from the curriculum and the school library. A group of students is suing the board on the basis that the banning infringes their First Amendment rights. They seek to have the book restored to the library. Divide the class into three groups. One group will represent the school board members, one group will represent the students, and the last group will represent the court justices. Have the two sides argue their cases before the judges. After all arguments have been made, the judges should render their verdicts.

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More on Banned/Challenged Books

Organizations That Fight Censorship

www.abffe.com – American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression

www.aclu.org – American Civil Liberties Union

www.ala.org – American Library Association

www.publishers.org – Association of American Publishers

www.firstamendmentcenter.org – First Amendment Center

www.ftrf.org – Freedom to Read Foundation

www.reading.org – International Reading Association

www.kidspeakonline.org – kidSPEAK!

www.ncac.org – National Coalition Against Censorship

www.ncte.org – National Council of Teachers of English

www.pfaw.org – People for the American Way

Other Authors Whose Books Are Frequently Challenged

- Maya Angelou
- Chris Lynch
- Sonya Sones
- Francesca Lia Block
- Toni Morrison
- John Steinbeck
- Ray Bradbury
- Walter Dean Myers
- R.L. Stine
- William Faulkner
- Katherine Paterson
- Mark Twain
- Kevin Henkes
- Maurice Sendak
- Alice Walker
- Harper Lee
- Shel Silverstein
- Paul Zindel

Please visit Chris Crutcher online at
www.chriscrutcher.com

for more information about
his books and his experiences as an
author whose works are frequently challenged.

Books by Chris Crutcher

Running Loose

Pb 978-0-06-009491-1 • \$8.99 (\$11.99)

"A hard-hitting and candid coming-of-age story." —*ALA Booklist*

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA *Booklist* Editors' Choice
- New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Stotan!

Pb 978-0-06-009492-8 • \$7.99 (\$10.50)

- ★ "A fine coming-of-age novel. . . . *Stotan!* is very, very good." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- *School Library Journal* Best of the Best in Young Adult Literature

The Crazy Horse Electric Game

Pb 978-0-06-009490-4 • \$7.99 (\$10.50)

"Magnificently portrays the thoughts and feelings of a crippled athlete . . . a testimony to the indomitability of the human spirit."

—*The Horn Book*

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- *School Library Journal* Best Book

Chinese Handcuffs

Pb 978-0-06-059839-6 • \$8.99 (\$11.99)

"Crutcher constructs his tangled web with intelligent insight, creating a painful, powerful story."

—*The Horn Book*

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults

Athletic Shorts

Tr 978-0-688-10816-8 • \$18.99 (\$20.50)

Pb 978-0-06-050783-1 • \$7.99 (\$10.50)

- ★ "The characterizations are powerfully drawn, and the dialogue is quick and scorching." —*The Horn Book* (starred review)

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers
- *School Library Journal* Best Book
- *School Library Journal* Best of the Best in Young Adult Literature

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

Pb 978-0-06-009489-8 • \$8.99 (\$9.99)

- ★ "A masterpiece." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- *School Library Journal* Best Book
- *American Bookseller* Pick of the Lists
- California Young Reader Medal

Ironman

Tr 978-0-688-13503-4 • \$17.99 (\$25.50)

Pb 978-0-06-059840-2 • \$7.99 (\$10.50)

- ★ "Crutcher has consistently penned exceptional reads for YAs, and *Ironman* is one of his strongest works yet." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers
- *Horn Book* Fanfare
- *School Library Journal* Best Book
- *American Bookseller* Pick of the Lists
- California Young Reader Medal
- New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Whale Talk

Tr 978-0-688-18019-5 • \$16.99 (\$18.50)

Pb 978-0-06-177131-6 • \$8.99 (\$11.99)

- "Compulsively readable." —*Kirkus Reviews*

- ALA Top 10 Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA Popular Paperback for Young Adults
- Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award
- Washington State Book Award
- New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

King of the Mild Frontier

An Ill-Advised Autobiography

Tr 978-0-06-050249-2 • \$17.99 (\$21.99)

Pb 978-0-06-050251-5 • \$7.99 (\$8.75)

- ★ "This honest, insightful, revealing autobiography is a joy to read. Crutcher's fans will relish this intimate glimpse of the author." —*ALA Booklist* (starred review)

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- *Kirkus Reviews* Editor's Choice
- New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

The Sledding Hill

Tr 978-0-06-050243-0 • \$16.99 (\$22.50)

Lb 978-0-06-050244-7 • \$17.89 (\$23.89)

Pb 978-0-06-050245-4 • \$8.99 (\$8.75)

- ★ "Clever, spirited. An involving story." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

- New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Deadline

Tr 978-0-06-085089-0 • \$16.99 (\$21.50)

Lb 978-0-06-085090-6 • \$17.89 (\$23.89)

Pb 978-0-06-085091-3 • \$8.99 (\$10.99)

"An exhilarating read that will make readers wonder about the meaning and worth of their own lives."

—*The Horn Book*

- ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers

Angry Management

Tr 978-0-06-050247-8 • \$16.99 (\$22.50)

Lb 978-0-06-050246-1 • \$17.89 (\$23.89)

Pulling no punches when it comes to the realities of teens' lives—in terms of sexuality, language, and passion for justice—this collection of novellas will resonate with readers.

To order, please contact your HarperCollins sales representative, call 1-800-C-HARPER, or fax your order to 1-800-822-4090. Prices and availability subject to change.

Teaching ideas prepared by Susan Geye, Coordinator of Library Services, Everman I.S.D., Everman, Texas, June 2006; updated by HarperCollins Children's Books, June 2009.

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