



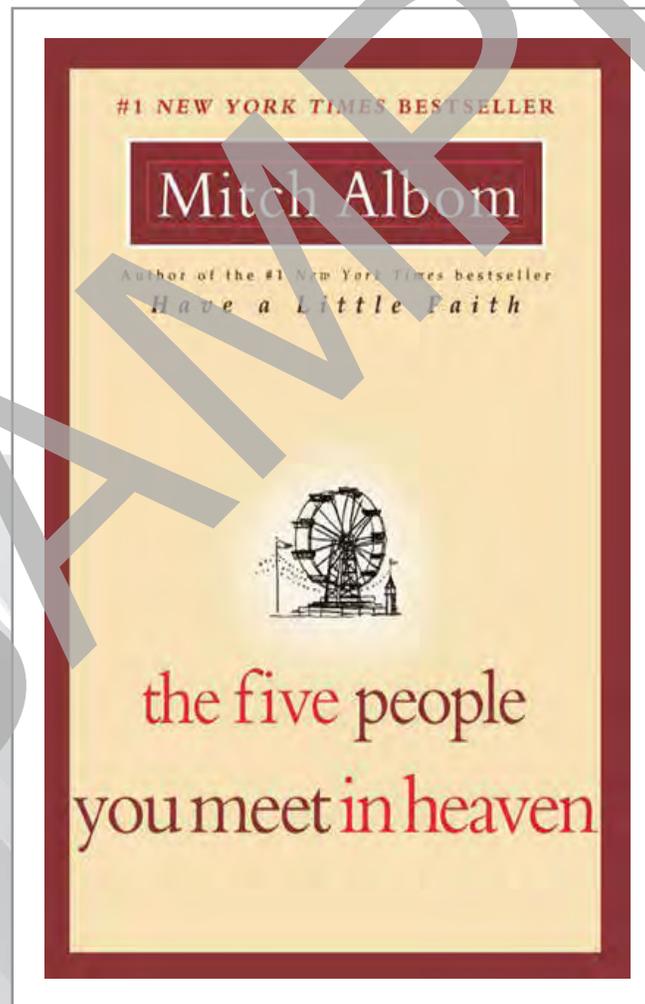
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Five People You Meet in Heaven

Mitch Albom



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Five People You Meet in Heaven

Mitch Albom

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, analysis,
research, compare/contrast,
critical thinking

Literary Elements

Simile, metaphor,
personification, theme,
symbolism, characterization,
foreshadowing, plot
development

Comprehension

Cause/effect, predictions,
conflict, inference

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
application

Writing

Poetry, review, script,
response

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interview,
soliloquy

Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, montage,
sketch; Music—lyrics,
appropriate selections;
Current Events—
newspaper/magazine;
Drama—script, acting

Genre: fiction

Setting: Ruby Pier (amusement park close to ocean); Philippines; heaven

Point of view: third-person omniscient

Themes: love, hope, redemption, the afterlife, heaven, sacrifice, forgiveness, regret, impact individuals have on people's lives (known and unknown)

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. others

Style: narrative

Tone: contemplative

Summary

Eddie is an elderly man who feels that his life is empty and pointless. He blames his father and his war experiences, including imprisonment by the enemy and a severe injury, for his failure to attain his dream of becoming an engineer. He feels trapped in a meaningless job of maintaining the rides at Ruby Pier, an amusement park. His marriage to Marguerite is the primary joy of his life, and her death causes him to withdraw further from life. He dies at the age of 83 while trying to save the life of a little girl at the amusement park. Five people, each connected to Eddie's life in some way, are waiting for him in heaven to explain the truths of his Earthly life. As their stories unfold, Eddie searches for assurance that he has found redemption by saving the child's life.

Characters

Eddie: the protagonist; head of maintenance at Ruby Pier; faces the truth about himself and his life when he arrives in heaven

Marguerite: Eddie's wife; dies at age 47; fourth person Eddie meets in heaven

Eddie's parents: **father**—strict and demanding; **mother**—loving; unable to cope after her husband's death

Joe: Eddie's older brother whom Eddie believes to be more successful than he

Mickey Shea: alcoholic friend of Eddie's father

Noel: man with whom Eddie goes to the racetrack

Dominguez: Eddie's co-worker

Amy or Annie: child whose life Eddie attempts to save; he can't remember her name for certain

Smitty, Morton, Rabozzo: Eddie's fellow prisoners-of-war

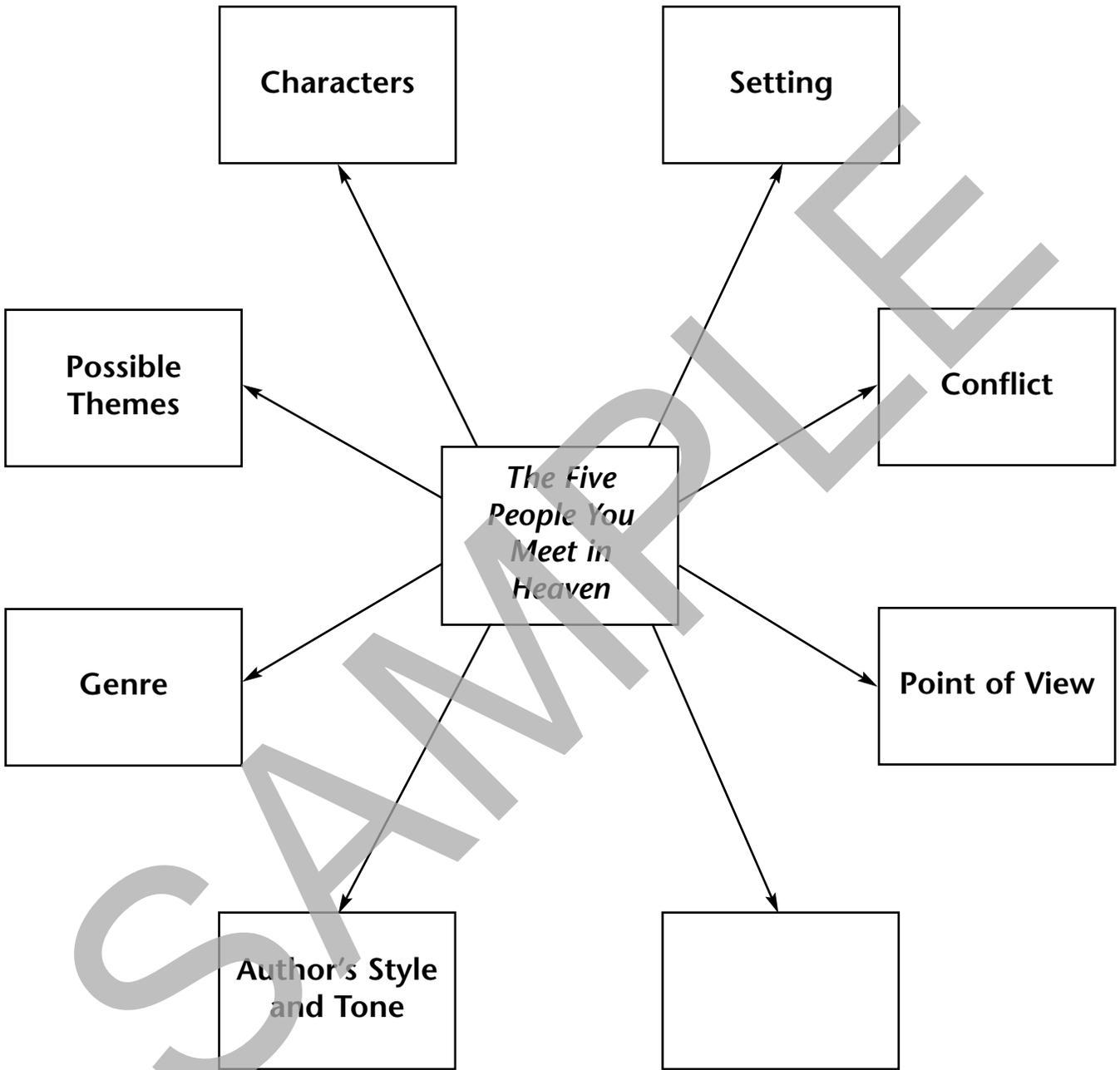
The Blue Man (Joseph Corvelzchik): side-show attraction at Ruby Pier; first person Eddie meets in heaven

The Captain: Eddie's commanding officer in the war; second person Eddie meets in heaven

Ruby: wife of Emile, who built Ruby Pier and named it after her; third person Eddie meets in heaven

Tala: small Filipino girl for whose death Eddie is responsible; fifth person he meets in heaven

Story Map



Pages 1–18

Eddie spends the last hour of his life at Ruby Pier amusement park, where he is the maintenance supervisor. He dies while attempting to save the life of a little girl who is in the path of a falling cart.

Vocabulary
craggy (2)
shingles (3)
solvent (5)
gravity (13)
hydraulic (15)

Discussion Questions

1. Analyze the effectiveness of beginning a story with the ending. Who do you think will be the five people Eddie meets in heaven? (*Eddie dies in an accident involving Freddy's Free Fall, an amusement ride at Ruby Pier. Beginning with the end of his life enables the reader to speculate about his life and about the five people he will meet in heaven. Details about his entire life and death will unfold in a series of vignettes beginning with his birth. Answers will vary. p. 1, inference*)
2. Examine the information about Eddie, including what his physical characteristics divulge about him. (*He is short and has white hair. His barrel chest, thick forearms, lined face, and brown uniform indicate years of outdoor manual labor. His bent fingers reflect fractures from machinery, and his nose shows signs of having been broken several times. His army tattoo and the cane he uses to get around because of a war injury designate his service in the armed forces. He has shingles and is coughing up "something he does not want to see," implying physical illness. Eddie is responsible for maintaining, i.e., keeping safe, the rides at the amusement park. He walks around the park daily, checking each attraction for problems and listening for any hint of something wrong. pp. 2, 8–10*)
3. Analyze the effectiveness of the "countdown" of the last hour of Eddie's life and what this reveals about him. Note the importance of his 83rd birthday. What would you do if you knew you had only one hour to live? (*Eddie goes about his normal routine, oblivious to his impending death. During the increments of lapsing time, he takes his last walk along Ruby Pier, speaking to customers and responding to the children. He takes two little boys for a ride on a roller coaster. He visits with Dominguez and gives him \$40.00 as a gift. He confronts teenagers about their dangerous actions. He takes time to make a pipe cleaner animal for Amy or Annie, the little girl whose life he will later try to save. Eddie's actions reveal a conscientious, caring elderly man. Answers will vary. pp. 2–14*)
4. Discuss how Eddie feels about his job. Examine the circumstances that prevent the attainment of his dream. (*He believes his job, which involves spreading grease, adjusting brakes, tightening bolts, and checking electrical panels, requires no more brains than washing a dish. He has often longed to leave the job and build a different life but blames the war for thwarting his dreams and determining his destiny to become a maintenance man like his father. p. 5*)
5. Examine details about Eddie's one true-love snapshot. Correlate this mental picture with the simile, "She was like a wound beneath an old bandage, and he had grown more used to the bandage" (p. 10). (*His mental snapshot is of Marguerite when she turns and waves to him, dark hair falling over one eye, as she walks away after an evening on the boardwalk with him. For the rest of his life, whenever he thinks of her, he feels the same overwhelming love he felt at that moment. Fourteen minutes before his death, he imagines himself dancing with Marguerite as they listen to a recording of Judy Garland singing "You Made Me Love You." Simile: After her death, he thought of her often, but not so much now. He compares the pain of losing her with a wound that is covered with a bandage. With the passage of time, the bandage has become familiar, and he no longer thinks of her as often. pp. 9–10*)

6. Analyze the foreshadowing of the fateful incident involving Nicky and his car key, and discuss the events that lead to Eddie’s death. What are Eddie’s final words? What would you want your final words on Earth to be? *(Months earlier, Nicky removed his car key from a key chain and put it in his jacket pocket. He tied the jacket around his waist as he and his friends rode the fastest rides at Ruby Pier. He lost the key on one of the rides. [This key causes the accident.] Eddie listens intently as the words “Oh my God! Look!” rise above the everyday sounds. He immediately sees one of the carts at the top of Freddy’s Free Fall tilted at an angle, with four passengers held in only by the safety bar. Eddie gives instructions for saving the lives of the passengers, then tells Dominguez to send the cart down. As the riders are pulled to the platform, Eddie realizes the cable is unraveling and yells for the workmen not to release the cart. They cannot hear him above the roar of the crowd. As the cart starts down, Eddie yells for the crowd to get back. As they move away from the area, he sees a little girl, Amy or Annie, sprawled on the ride’s metal base. She is crying for her mother. He drops his cane and lunges toward the child. The last sound he hears is his own scream. He lands on the platform and feels two small hands in his own, followed by a stunning impact and a blinding flash of light, then nothing. Answers will vary. pp. 10–11, 14–18)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Complete the following: “If I had only one hour to live, I would (do, say, wish)...”
2. List two similes and one metaphor from this section and continue this activity throughout the book when applicable. Examples: **Similes:** (Eddie’s) “arms folded like a seal’s flippers across his chest” (p. 8); “...pulley...ripped the cable’s steel wires—as if husking an ear of corn” (p. 17); **Metaphor:** Cart No. 2: a boulder off a cliff (p. 18)

Pages 19–36

Eddie awakens in heaven. A series of short vignettes reveal the details of his life. He meets his first person in heaven, the Blue Man.

Vocabulary	
feign (23)	
razed (27)	
pristine (27)	
gingerly (28)	
kiosk (29)	
conjoined (30)	
perversion (30)	

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Eddie’s birth. Note the simile that reflects his father’s reaction. *(He is born in the 1920s in a crowded hospital in one of the poorest sections of the city, reflecting the family’s low socio-economic status. Their last name is difficult to pronounce; the story later refers to their Romanian cousins [p. 52]. The nurse takes Eddie’s father to the newborns’ nursery and points out Eddie’s crib. The simile “...his face seems to crumble, like a bridge collapsing into a river” indicates tears of joy, followed by a smile, as he realizes this baby is his. p. 19)*
2. Examine the importance of Eddie’s reflections after his death. Note what he asks himself and what he remembers. Analyze the simile that expresses how he feels (p. 21). *(Where...? What? Did I save her? Did she live? Where is my worry...my pain? Eddie sees nothing of his final moment on Earth. He is floating with arms extended as they were when he tried to pull the little girl to safety. He remembers the falling cart, trying to save the crying little girl, hitting the platform, and the child’s hands in his. He feels no pain or sadness and is floating over a sea of changing colors. He begins to drop, sees the sands of the shore, and goes underwater. He feels “like a child in the cradle of its mother’s arms,” i.e., comforted, calm, safe. pp. 20–22)*