



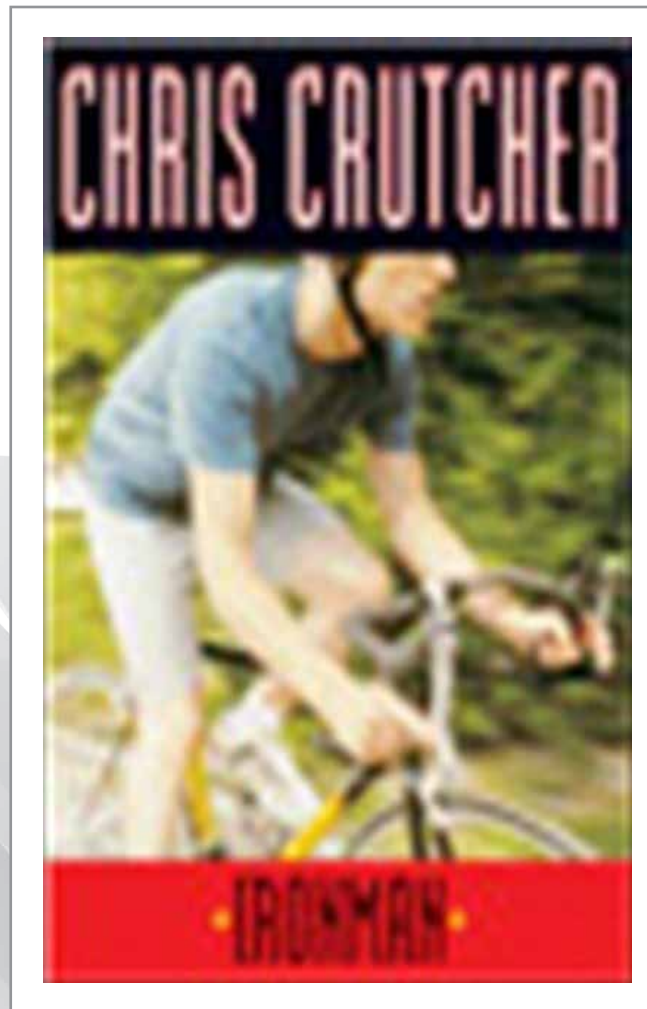
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Ironman

Chris Crutcher



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Ironman

Chris Crutcher

## 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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## Summary

After seventeen-year-old Bo (Beauregarde) Brewster talks back to his English teacher, he finds himself in an early morning anger management group. Training for a triathlon, he is the “jock” in the bunch and can’t see himself relating much at first to these seemingly tough kids—although he is definitely interested in the one girl, Shelly, a future American Gladiator. The group leader, Mr. Nakatani, helps Bo reflect on the problems in his relationship with his authoritarian father, and he soon learns that he has more in common with the others in the group than he thought. (The narrator of the story is Bo; most chapters are comprised of unsent letters Bo has written to Larry King.)

## About the Author

Chris Crutcher was born on July 17, 1946, and raised in a very small Idaho logging town (Cascade, population 950). The middle of three children, he was the son of an Air Force pilot and a homemaker. He was a mediocre student, and although both parents loved reading, Crutcher did not.

After high school (where *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the only book he read cover to cover), he earned a B.A. from Eastern Washington State College. He taught for a while in an alternative school for urban kids in Oakland, California, (eventually becoming director of the K-12 school), then returned to Spokane, Washington. He worked as a child and family therapist there, and is now chairperson for the Spokane Child Protection Team in addition to his work as a full-time writer.

Athletics are part of the fabric of all Crutcher’s stories and not surprisingly, the author is a swimmer and distance runner. He didn’t start writing until age 35. Two of his favorite books are *The Color Purple* (Alice Walker) and *Catch-22* (Joseph Heller).

Other stories by Chris Crutcher include *Running Loose*, *Stotan!*, *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*, *Athletic Shorts*, *Chinese Handcuffs*, *The Deep End*, and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*.

## Initiating Activities

### 1. Background Information

The original Ironman Triathlon, a triple endurance event (swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, run 26.2 miles) was created by Navy Commander John Collins in 1978. The first triathlon was a dare among friends in Oahu (Hawaii). 15 men participated and 12 completed the race.

The first prize purse is currently \$35,000 with an extra \$5,000 thrown in if you can beat the current record time. It will debut as an Olympic event (at 1/4 the distance) in 2000. An even shorter distance version—the sprint—is popular among young competitors.

### 2. Prereading Discussion/Writing

**Anger and Fear:** What sorts of things make you angry? Do you think there’s a connection between anger and fear? What are some different ways people express their anger? What are some “healthy” and “unhealthy” ways to deal with anger? For example, what is the best way to deal with a bully? Are you more often angry at others or angry at yourself? What helps you when you feel really angry? Can anger be a good thing? Does it help to talk with other

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people about your anger? What is mercy? Does it help to show mercy when you are angry? Who deserves mercy? Who doesn't?

**Parental Control:** What sorts of limits should parents be allowed to set for their children? When has a parent stepped over the line and become over-controlling or even abusive? Why do you think some parents try to control their kids more than others do? What constitutes physical abuse? What about emotional abuse?

**Honor and Trust, Responsibility and Respect:** What is honor? Is it an old-fashioned idea, or something we still value? Have you ever tried to do the honorable thing? What people do you associate with the description "honorable"? What is responsibility? How do you achieve a sense of responsibility? Is it important to have that sense? What is trust? How do you decide whom to trust? What happens when someone betrays a trust? What is respect? Who deserves respect? Whom do you respect? Does an older person who fails to show you respect—for example, a teacher—still deserve your respect?

**Friendship:** What qualities do you look for in a friend? Do most people make friends with people who are like them? How do people make friends in new situations like new schools or camps? Have you ever found yourself making friends with someone you never thought would be your friend?

**Prejudice:** What is prejudice? What sorts of prejudices exist among your classmates? How do you explain these prejudices? Do you think it's true that prejudice often arises from fear? Do you have any prejudices? What problems do prejudices cause? What can teenagers do about prejudice?

**Sports:** What are some reasons people enjoy sports? Do people enjoy playing sports for the same reasons they enjoy watching? What is a triathlon? What sort of person do you think triathlons appeal to?

### 3. Anticipation Guide

In small groups or as a class, students discuss their opinions of statements that tap themes they will meet in the book. As they read the book, they should look for connections between their prereading discussion and the story.

Sample statements for discussion:

- Responsibility is about doing things you don't want to do.
- A sense of responsibility isn't something you can teach.
- Teens aren't ready to manage their own lives; adults have to step in sometimes.
- Kids should have the same Constitutional rights and responsibilities as adults.
- You can't teach people respect by humiliating them.
- Parents who don't set limits end up with kids who have no respect.

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## Chapters 11-12

Bo talks to his mother about his father and she explains that she takes responsibility for allowing an abusive situation to continue for so long. Bo apologizes to Mr. S for shunning him and Mr. S accepts, saying that while he had felt hurt, he's happy Bo learned something. Mr. Nak is called to Hudge's house to help deal with a crisis: Hudge's father shot and killed his puppy to punish his son for not feeding it. Hudge is taken to a psych ward. For Valentine's Day, Mr. Nak has each member of the group decorate a box and bring in a valentine for every member of the group with something "decent" and true written on each card. Mr. Nak reads Hudge's cards and Bo is touched by the care that obviously went into the notes. Bo doesn't risk writing anything too revealing to Shelly, but in her valentine, Shelly opens up about how she feels toward him. In her note to Elvis, Shelly offers to help him watch his siblings. Elvis reveals to Bo that Bo's father is double-crossing him by giving a \$5,000 bike to one of Bo's competitors in the triathlon.

### Vocabulary

weld 146	epidemic 147	diminishes 149	dysfunction 150
banishment 152	filleted 152	cadence 153	nondescript 154
riveted 156	sedate 157	ferret 162	sneer 163
felonies 167	misdemeanors 168	rummage 170	perpetuate 171

### Discussion Questions

1. Does Bo's mother feel guilty about the environment in which Bo grew up? (*She realizes she should have stood up for herself and her son.*) Should she have? Was she responsible for her husband's treatment of their son? What do you think she should have done?
2. Why did Mr. Nak go to Hudge's house? (*He was called there by authorities when a crisis arose; Hudge's father shot Hudge's puppy and Hudge flipped out.*) Why did Hudge blame himself for the puppy's death? (*His father blamed him, saying he warned Hudge the puppy would be killed if Hudge didn't feed him, and Hudge forgot once to feed him.*) Do you think Hudge's father is mentally ill or just cruel? What punishment do you think he should receive?
3. Why do you think Mr. Nak gave the Valentine's Day assignment? (*Each group member had to decorate a box plus exchange cards, writing something decent and true to each other member.*) Are you surprised that everyone did the assignment? Which of the Valentines would you have found hardest to write?
4. Why do you suppose Shelly's note was more personal than Bo's? Do you think she minded?
5. How can everyone tell that Hudge put time and effort into his notes? (*He tried to personalize them; his notes often showed that he noticed something about each person.*) What do you think he would have put on your card, if you were in the group?
6. What did Shelly offer Elvis, in her Valentine? (*to help watch his siblings*) Why? (*She realized he needed concrete help.*) Are you surprised she would make this offer after the names he has called her?
7. What was in Elvis's note to Bo? (*that Bo's father wasn't his friend—a reference to what he knows about Bo's giving the Merlin to Bo's competitor*) Why do you think he let Bo know what he had seen? Would Bo be better off not knowing?

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8. Why do you think Bo’s father would give a bike to one of his competitors? (*to “teach his son a lesson”; He doesn’t feel that his son deserves to win.*) Would a father really do this? Bo’s father prides himself on being so upright and honest. How do you think he could defend his own deceitful actions to himself?
  9. What is one line or passage that strikes you in this section of the story? Why?
  10. **Prediction:** Who will Bo choose as “Stotans”?

## Supplementary Activities

### Literary Analysis: Theme

The **theme** is the central idea of a story, an insight about life. Clues to the theme are often provided by the title, by statements characters make, and by what characters learn.

**Ask:** Why didn’t Bo’s mother stand up to her husband sooner? Why didn’t Hudge blame his father for the puppy’s death? What does Mr. Nak mean by his definition of heroism (p. 171)? What is the author saying about standing up for yourself?

### Writing Idea

You are in Mr. Nak’s group. The week before Bo arrived, Mr. Nak gave this assignment. Describe a time you experienced the truth of this statement: “There is no act of heroism that doesn’t include standing up for yourself” (p. 171). Write a one-page paper on this topic, with specific details about the time you stood up for yourself, or wish you had.

## Chapters 13-14

Shelly lends Bo a sled and he hitches his mother’s huskies to it, running alongside while Shelly, Jordan, and Elvis’s little brother and sister take a ride. For training in the pool, Bo uses special gloves Shelly ordered for him. Redmond tries unsuccessfully to intimidate Bo into ending his time in Mr. Nakatani’s group. Mr. Nak helps Bo realize what he fears—how low Redmond makes him feel—and face that fear. Bo asks his father whether somebody is getting a Merlin bike from him, and his father avoids the truth. In a rage that night about his father’s betrayal, Bo bikes to Mr. S’s in the middle of the night and Mr. S advises him to remember that the triathlon is his challenge, not something to let his father take away from him. Shuja organizes the Nak Pack to support Bo in his quest and the anger management group become Bo’s “Stotans.” Mr. Nak goes to the store to talk with Bo’s father, who grows defensive. Mr. Nak reveals that he lost his own children in a car wreck that happened while he was driving drunk.

### Vocabulary

appropriated 173	altercations 174	taper 175	motivation 176
juvenile 179	agenda 182	bankrolling 185	righteous 186
mascot 192	intimidates 193	turbocharged 193	biases 193
absently 195	averted 199	composure 199	agenda 199
crusade 199	consumes 201		

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Shelly help Bo train for the race? (*She gets him a sled, special swim gloves, and a special bike seat.*) Have you ever had a friend try to help you achieve a certain goal?