



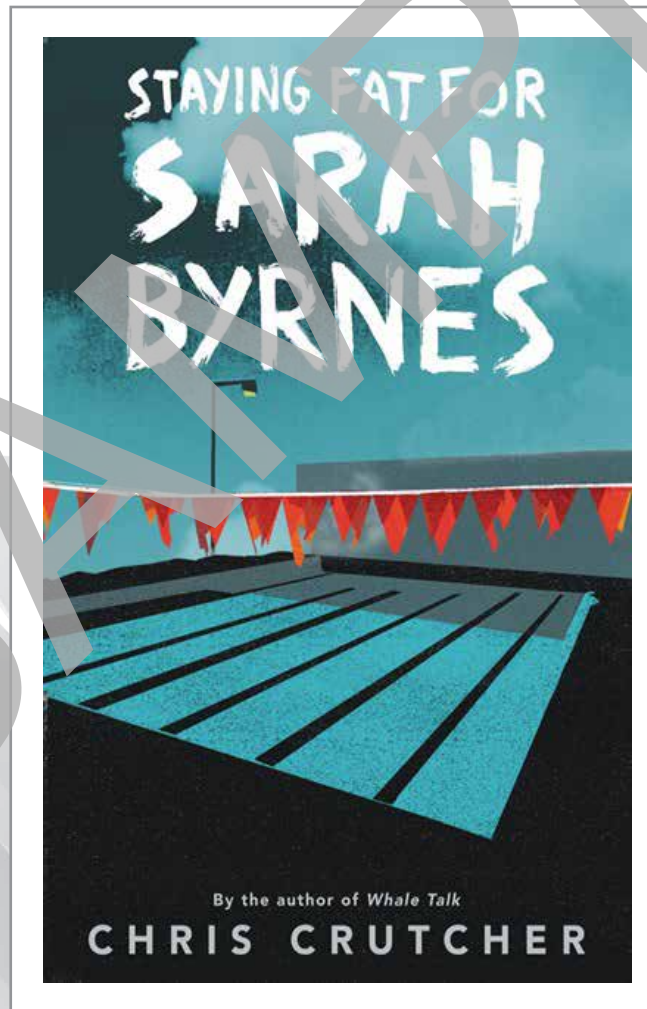
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes**

Chris Crutcher



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

# Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

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!

---

**ISBN 978-1-50204-204-0**

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

[novelunits.com](http://novelunits.com)

## Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
About the Author .....	3
Initiating Activities.....	3
Vocabulary Activities.....	6
Nineteen Chapters and Epilogue .....	10
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, Literary Analysis, and Writing Ideas	
Post-reading Discussion Questions .....	29
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	30
Assessment.....	36

## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, prediction, classifying and categorizing, interpreting, applying, evaluating, synthesizing, problem-solving

### Comprehension

Predicting, cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, inferring, drawing conclusions

### Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion and cooperative groups, entertainment of others with dramatic activities, debates

### Writing

Journal, freewriting, creative, descriptive, persuasive, newspaper headlines

### Vocabulary

Synonyms, word mapping, context definitions, figurative language

### Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, flashback, conflict, theme, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, description, point of view, suspense, epilogues

---

## Summary

Eric is overweight, and has been ridiculed by other kids all his life. That is one reason he becomes friends with Sarah Byrnes, a classmate whose face was disfigured by burns when she was three. When Eric becomes a distance swimmer with the nickname “Moby,” loses some weight, and begins to make friends, Sarah is afraid she’ll lose his friendship. Eric remains devoted to her, and when Sarah one day stops talking and is taken to a psychiatric ward, Eric begins delving into the mysteries of her past. As students read about Eric’s Contemporary American Thought class and see how various characters’ lives unfold because of their beliefs and past experiences, they will be exposed to a number of controversial issues that both students and adults face on a daily basis.

## 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 *Ironman*.

## Initiating Activities

### 1. Prereading Discussion/Writing

**Friendship:** What qualities do you look for in a friend? What would you be willing to do for a friend? What wouldn’t you be willing to do? Have you ever found yourself making friends with someone you never thought you would be close to? Do most people make friends with people who are like them? Why do friendships sometimes end? Why do friends sometimes grow apart? Can a boy and a girl have a friendship without romance? A romance without much friendship? What if a friendship between a boy and girl is platonic—but only for one of the friends? What should you do if one of your friends doesn’t like another one of your friends? How much should you worry if one friend resents your spending time with other friends? Do most people put their romantic relationships ahead of their friendships? Should they?

**Obesity/Disfigurement:** Why are some teenagers overweight? What problems does this cause? What are some solutions? Do heavy girls have more problems than heavy boys? What advice would you give to people who get teased about their weight? What problems does someone with facial disfigurement have to cope with? Are these similar to the ones a heavy

---

person faces? How would most of the students in your school treat someone with either of these problems?

**Abuse:** How would you define “abuse”? How are physical and emotional abuse different? Similar? What would you do if your friend was being abused? What sources of help are there in your community for abused children and teens? What sorts of problems do people who were abused as children face in later life?

2. Anticipation Guide: In pairs, small or whole group—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:
  - People with a “weight problem” should accept themselves as they are.
  - Being continually told that you’re worthless is as bad as being physically abused.
  - There’s no such thing as a purely platonic friendship.
  - No one can force you to be a victim; it’s a choice you make.
  - A friend in need is a friend, indeed.
  - There’s no place for vigilante justice in today’s world.
  - Our beliefs color what we see.
3. Prediction: Have students make predictions about the story based on the title and cover. Why would someone “stay fat” for someone else? What does the cover illustration tell you about the type of story this is? What sorts of problems might arise in a story about a swimmer?
4. Interest Hook: Read the first page and part of the second aloud. “My dad left when I still had a month...And my mom is a fox.” What does the opening reveal about the story and characters? What are your impressions of the narrator? Which of his problems do we know about so far? How can you tell that he has a sense of humor? How will the father’s weight problem affect his son?
5. Response Log: Have students keep a response log as they read the novel. Some possibilities for format are:
  - a) Have students divide each page page into three columns.

Pages	Summary	Reactions
		(These might begin: One question I have..., This reminds me of another story..., I know how Moby felt when..., I predict that..., If I were Sarah, I wouldn’t..., I wonder if Sarah’s father...)

- b) In a second type of reading log, students choose a passage from each section that strikes them for some reason, copy it, and explain why the passage seems important to them. (Has Crutcher used language in a special way? Does the passage reveal something important

---

## Chapters 9-10, pp. 100-123

When Eric visits Sarah, she starts to talk and admits her catatonia has been an act. She also admits that her father burned her when she tried to protect her mother from him at age three. Her mother left that day and never returned. That night Eric has his date with Jody and she drops a bombshell: She had an abortion once, at Mark's insistence despite what he said in class against the procedure. Eric asks Ms. Lemry her opinion of his taking Jody out. She suggests he take it a little easier on Mark, and not rub it in that he is seeing Mark's former girlfriend. Eric's mom advises him to be careful that Jody isn't using him. Eric's mom's current boyfriend, Carver, on the other hand, advises Eric to go for it. When Carver goes on to say that that he sent an employee who was then dating Eric's mother out of town to clear the field for himself, Eric's mother gets angry. Eric notices that she gets over her anger more quickly than she has with former boyfriends, and wonders whether this relationship could be serious. Back at the psychiatric ward, Sarah's father threatens to drag her home. Eric debates with himself whether to break his promise of secrecy to Sarah by going to Ms. Lemry or his mother for help.

### Vocabulary

stethoscope 100	ventriloquists 102	jeopardize 104	vulnerable 106
leper 107	mission 108	testosterone 111	sanctuary 112
pretense 114	documented 115	decorum 115	pathological 115
encounter 116	coincidental 116	impeccable 116	manipulating 117
auditors 117	colossal 118	incensed 118	inverse 118
underhanded 119	retreat 120	attendant 120	
nonresponsive 121			

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Sarah has decided to talk again? Why had she been keeping silent? (*She is afraid of her father, and wanted an excuse to be in the hospital—a safe haven.*) Is Eric mad that she didn't let him in on her hoax sooner? (*He is annoyed.*) Should she have told Eric earlier?
2. Why does Sarah think she has to be "tough or funny every minute" (p. 102)? (*to protect herself from the pain of facing her disfigurement*) Have you ever known anyone like Sarah? What other choices does she have?
3. What happened to Sarah's mother? (*She left the night Virgil attacked her and burned Sarah, who was trying to protect her mother.*) Do you think she was a coward for not protecting Sarah from Virgil?
4. Are you surprised that Jody has told Eric about the abortion? Why do you think she told him? Does she think Mark is a hypocrite? (*Yes; he pressured her to abort and to face the abortion alone, but said in class that abortion was sinful.*) How do you think Sarah will react when she learns that Jody and Eric are growing closer?
5. What are Eric's reasons for wanting to take Jody out? (*She is attractive.*) Is one-upping his swimming rival, Mark, one of those reasons? Do you think Eric knows, himself? What do you think of the advice Ms. Lemry, Eric's mom, and Carver give Eric about dating Jody? (*Ms. Lemry says to take it easy on Mark; Eric's mom says to make sure he isn't being used; Carver advises him to go for it.*) What would you say, if you were his friend?

- 
6. What sort of plotting did Carver do to get closer to Eric's mother? (*Carver sent his rival out of town on business.*) Does it surprise you that he's a bit of a schemer? Does it surprise Eric's mother? (*It angers her but also pleases her.*)
  7. Why do you think Sarah's father spends so much energy trying to control her? Why doesn't Sarah just call the police? (*She thinks her situation would only be worse once her father returned home.*) Do you think she's right about what would happen to her father and to her?
  8. Why is Eric afraid to start something with Jody? (*He feels inexperienced and insecure.*) Do you agree that it's better to start with some girl/boyfriends you aren't really interested in? Why is Eric suddenly sorry he doesn't have a father around? (*A father might give him some advice on dating.*)
  9. What sorts of problems does Virgil seem to have? (*alcohol, hallucinations, rages*) Do you think there's hope for someone like him?
  10. **Prediction:** Will Eric break his promise and go to Ms. Lemry or his mother about what Sarah has told him?

## Supplementary Activities

### The Author's Craft: Conflict

**Conflict**, or struggle, drives the plot. There are several types: person against person, person against nature, person against society, and inner conflict. Have students point out examples of each kind of conflict in the story. For example, Eric experiences inner conflict as he struggles with his decision whether or not to tell the secret Sarah has entrusted him with.

### Writing Ideas

1. Describe an example of inner conflict you have experienced within the past week.
2. Everyone from Mark Brittain to Eric's mom seems to have an opinion on Eric's seeing Jody. Write a letter of advice to him, based on your own experience and/or observation.

### Research

Find out more about catatonia and its possible causes.