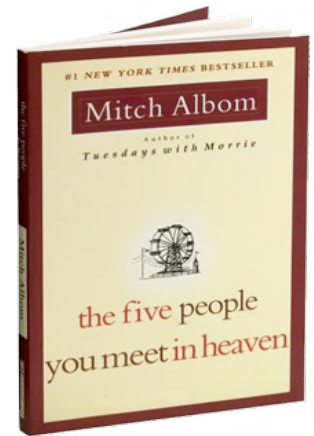


# *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

This Educator's Guide is written to aid 10th through 12th grade teachers teach Mitch Albom's best-selling book *The Five People you Meet in Heaven*. The Guide is divided into 6 subjects, and includes discussion questions and vocabulary words. Answers are provided only for the "Themes" and "Five People" sections of the Language Arts and Reading Comprehension subject heading.



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### Overview

*The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, written in 2004 by Mitch Albom, is a story about an amusement park mechanic named Eddie who dies trying to save a little girl. The book begins by detailing Eddie's movements during his last hour alive. Albom writes that although it "might seem strange to start a story with an ending...all endings are also beginnings" (1). When Eddie dies he finds himself in heaven, where he soon learns that he will meet five people who will explain to him the meaning of his life.

## I. Language Arts and Reading Comprehension

### Setting:

1. Ruby Pier is an amusement park, not a modern-day American theme park. What are the differences between Ruby Pier and today's theme parks?
2. Encourage your students to research an amusement park located on a pier. Report findings in front of the class. (Suggested leads: When was it built? Is it still operational? How has it managed to remain viable? Or, what brought about its demise?)

## **Protagonist:**

1. Eddie exists in a "weary state of acceptance" (5). Explain what Albom means by this statement. How did Eddie come to be in this state?
2. The author divulges important information about Eddie's life by detailing 15 of his birthdays. How does this interesting device illuminate Eddie's character? Do you like Eddie? Why or why not?
3. What does Eddie's relationship with Dominguez reveal about his character?
4. Talk about (in groups or as a classroom exercise) what you know about Eddie.
5. Encourage your students to talk about Eddie's volatile relationship with his father. How does it affect their opinions about Eddie?
6. Albom writes: "People say they 'find' love, as if it were an object by a rock. But love takes many forms, and it is never the same for any man and woman. What people find then is a certain love" (155). Discuss Albom's idea of love. What kind of love did Eddie and Marguerite share?
7. When Eddie is with Marguerite, he "as always...mostly wants to freeze time" (78). Ask your students if they have ever experienced a moment that they want "to freeze." List the moments and discuss as a class.
8. Albom quite ably stirs up his reader's emotions. How does the author accomplish this? What techniques do writers use to draw in their readers?
9. What are Eddie's first sensations of being in heaven?

## **Themes:**

1. List the themes in the story. (Love; "No story sits by itself"(10); the circular nature of life; learning to live nobly and well, learning to be a better person/husband/wife/, learning to be "loyal to one another" (138) because life is circular, it all comes back.)

2. Detail how Albom sustains the themes throughout the book.(Through hindsight, flashbacks. We are given insight into Eddie's life through both the stories each of the Five People teach him, and the birthdays.)

3. Is one theme more pronounced than the next? (All the themes are interconnected -- the circular nature of life.)

4. Trace the cause for the malfunction of Freddy's Free Fall ride to Eddie's death. What does the cause of Eddie's death have to do with the theme of the book? (The ride's cable snapped because a car key had fallen into exactly the wrong place "at a most precise moment" (17). Over time, the cable scraped up against a locked pulley until it was completely severed. Nicky, to whom the key belonged, is the great-grandson of Ruby. The act of dropping the car key links Nicky to Eddie; as the Blue Man tells Eddie "we are all connected" (48).)

5. Explore Albom's method of viewing the same story "from two different angles" (42). How does this technique strengthen the book's themes? (This technique allows the reader to ponder how his/her actions affect others, to realize that one's choices do affect others, sometimes quite seriously. It reinforces Albom's message of the circular nature of life.)

6. Engage your class in a discussion about chance and free will. Use the Blue Man's conversation with Eddie as a starting point. (The Blue Man tells Eddie that there are "no random acts," and that fairness "does not govern life and death. If it did, no good person would ever die so young" (48). Eddie's actions as a young man unknowingly killed the Blue Man. Is this fair?)

7. Discuss the book's themes in relation to Eddie's last act on earth – that of saving the child. (All the book's themes are apparent in Eddie's last act on earth. There are no random acts – the car key caused the accident that in turn kills Eddie, who sacrifices his life for the little girl's. During the war, even in the act of murdering his captives, Eddie had love and compassion for others – he thought he saw a movement in the hut and so, driven by the power of love(he had already miraculously let go of the anger he harbored for his captors), he investigated the hut, despite the fact that his body was aflame.)

## **Five People:**

1. Who are Eddie's five people? (1. Blue Man; 2. the Captain; 3. Ruby; 4. Marguerite; 5. Tala.)

2. List the lessons Eddie's Five People teach him. (1. Blue Man: no random acts/circular nature of life. Blue Man tells Eddie that "the human spirit knows, deep down, that all lives intersect" (48). 2. The Captain: when you lose something, you gain something else. "Sacrifice is a part of life", the Captain tells Eddie (93). "Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else (94). 3. Ruby: let go of anger. In Ruby's words: "Holding anger is a poison. It eats you from inside. We think that hating is a weapon that attacks the person who harmed us. But hatred is a curved blade. And the harms we do, we do to ourselves" (141). 4. Marguerite: Although life ends, love endures; the power of love. 5. Tala: Eddie's life had a purpose; he kept children safe at the pier.)

3. Is it possible that Eddie's Five People each teach him more than one lesson? (Yes, it is possible that each person taught Eddie more than one thing. Allow your class to bring up their own ideas.)

4. Tala taps into Eddie's deepest core when she asks him why he is sad. How does Eddie respond? (He "surrender[s] all barriers" and tells her that he "didn't do anything with his life," that he "accomplished nothing" (191).)

5. What did Eddie accomplish with his life? (He made the rides safe for countless numbers of children, children who, because they did not die at Ruby Pier, lived happy lives with their families. Eddie looks down and sees the children on the pier alive "because of the simple, mundane things [he] had done in his life, the accidents he had prevented, the rides he had kept safe..." (192).)

6. Tala tells Eddie that he saved the little girl's life. Discuss the symbolism of the child's rescue. (Eddie ended his life doing what he had done with his entire life: saving a child. It is fitting that the child lived; it is his atonement for burning Tala. Despite everything that Eddie experienced and happened to him in his lifetime, he is ultimately a good-hearted person who has taken the deepest meaning of love into his soul: he cares for other people more than he does his own life.)

## **II. American History and Geography**

1. Eddie fought in World War II. When was WW II? When did the USA get involved?
2. Who were our allies?
3. Locate the Philippines Islands on a map.
4. Why were the Philippine Islands an important battleground?

## **III. American History and Religion**

1. Read the First Amendment of the American Bill of Rights. What does it declare about religion in America? (See link [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov))
2. The Founding Fathers ensured that religious freedom is a guaranteed right for all Americans. What motivated them to do this?
3. In the book's Preface Albom writes: "Everyone has an idea of heaven, as do most religions, and they should all be respected." Discuss the author's cautionary words with the class.
4. Tolerance for other Americans' religious beliefs is necessary to American society at large. Discuss whether this is true historically.
5. List ways that religious tolerance can be practiced in your school and community.
6. List ways that tolerance for others' differences (physical, emotional, ethnicity) can be incorporated in your students' lives.

## **IV. Religion and Spirituality**

1. Imagine that Albom's depiction of heaven is correct. Ask students to list the five people they think they would meet in heaven, and the lessons their five people would teach them.

2. Pose this question to the class: If it is true that one's actions and choices do affect others, how might a person live more peaceably with his neighbors?
3. What are the 3 major religions in the USA today? Which is the fastest growing?
4. List other practiced religions in the USA.
5. Divide the room into groups and assign each group a religion. Ask each group to research what their assigned religion teaches its followers about heaven and/or afterlife. Report findings to class.

## **V. Art History**

1. When Eddie realizes that he is responsible for the Blue Man's death, he believes he is in heaven for punishment. For centuries artists depicted the pleasures of heaven and the horrors of hell. Divide the class into groups. Ask each group to research famous paintings of heaven and hell (i.e. Michelangelo's Last Judgment, Hieronymus Bosch's work, etc.). Share and discuss the paintings with the other groups.
2. Discuss how an artist (painter or writer) can influence a non-reading public.
3. Do modern artists influence people's beliefs today?

## **VI. Vocabulary**

- Pier
- Arthritis
- Nimble
- Cacophony
- Pulley
- Husking
- Belittle
- Turrets
- Promenade
- Meld

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