

***Whale Talk* and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher**

**Directions:** As you read the two stories, answer the questions in journal style. Use a bound notebook to respond as you read the books with examples and references to the text. Loose or stapled papers will not be accepted.

***Whale Talk***

**Theme questions:** Respond to three questions. Examples and references to the text are mandatory.

- Is the book more about making connections with others than rebelling against others?
- What lessons about living can a reader learn from *Whale Talk*?
- If you have read other Chris Crutcher books, compare *Whale Talk* to his other work. If this is your first exposure to Crutcher, then what are your impressions?
- Find connections between this book and the “world outside”. This means connecting *Whale Talk* to your own experiences, to things at school, in your neighborhood, to similar events at other times and places, to other people or problems, or other writings on the same topic by this author or other authors.
- Names are important in this book. List the different names and decide how the names help to define the characters.
- The members of the swim team are “different”. What do they learn about one another from their experiences on the team? How do they learn it? What can we learn about being “different” from this book?

**Journal Questions:**

**Choose three journal questions. Answers should be 3-5 paragraphs in length. (Only the teacher would read these.)**

- Are you someone who prefers to be alone? Or are you someone who prefers to be in a group? Discuss in a short essay when and why you prefer to be alone or with others?
- Does TJ remind you of anyone you know? If so, describe that person and tell how that person impresses you.
- Have you ever-experienced prejudice? Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever bullied someone else? If so, share the experience in your journal.
- None of the families is perfect in *Whale Talk*. Describe your own family. What do you like about your family? What challenges does your family face?
- Choose your favorite passage in the book. Discuss why it is your favorite passage.

## *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*

**Theme questions:** Respond to three questions. Examples and references to the text are mandatory.

- Author Chris Crutcher dedicates this book "for all those who finally stand up for themselves". Which characters learn to stand up for themselves? What has to happen to get them there?
- Narrator Eric Calhoun ("Moby") seems to think of himself as Sarah's only real friend. But super loser Dale Thornton is the person she tells what really happened when she was burned. Why do you think she chooses Dale to confide in?
- Sarah Byrnes has spent a lifetime standing up for herself but it hasn't made her safe or happy. What additional lessons or skills does she pick up in the course of the book?
- Some readers find it confusing that the book skips back and forth between the narrator's middle school memories (such as publishing CRISPY PORK RINDS) and what's happening in the present time. Why do you think the author tells the story in this way and what does he gain?
- Moby's dad left the family before Moby was born and Sarah's mother runs out on her daughter not just once, but twice. Yet there are several strong adults; parents, a teacher, and a minister, who help the kids and who have their respect. What qualities do you notice in the "good" adults? Do they seem realistic?

**Essay Questions:** Respond to three questions and answers will be 5-6 paragraphs in length. Examples and references to the text are mandatory.

- Choose three characters, and explain what happens to them in the end.
- Explain the title, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*.
- Would you want your teenage son or daughter to read this book? Should this book be taught at a middle or high school level? Are the topics too sensitive for a "young adult" novel? Explain your answers in detail with examples from the book.
- What passage, scene, or dialogue especially impressed or provoked you? What "lasting" images stayed with you after you finished the book? Explain your thoughts in detail using examples from the book.
- Author Chris Crutcher dedicates this book "for all those who finally stand up for themselves". Which characters learn to stand up for themselves? What has to happen to get them there?

Your complete notebook will be collected on Friday the first week of school and will count as a test grade. Remember to use legible writing, accurate spelling and punctuation. **Enjoy** Mr. Crutcher's works as you explore his characters and themes.