

LOSERS BRACKET

by CHRIS CRUTCHER



DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

A fantastic athlete, seventeen-year-old Annie Boots is luckier than most teens in foster care: her foster parents are well-to-do and plan to support her college education. Annie, however, can't seem to break ties with her biological mom and sister. Despite insistence from her foster father that she disconnect completely, Annie keeps finding herself drawn back to them. When a family argument ensues at a swim meet and Frankie, her nephew, disappears, Annie feels responsible and sets out, desperate to find him.

★ **"Crutcher has written another thoughtful book about kids in extremis; no one writes better about this subject . . . will speak to readers' hearts as well as their minds."** —*Booklist* (starred review)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Annie signs up for Hoopfest annually and deliberately throws the first game each time so she can compete in the losers bracket. Explain how the losers bracket works. Why does Annie want to compete in the losers bracket? How might "losers bracket" apply to the way Annie views her own family?
2. Characterize Nancy, Annie's biological mother. Annie seems to understand her biological mother's shortcomings. How does Annie feel about her mother? Her sister? Despite Nancy's poor parenting skills, Annie still wishes to see her. Why?
3. Annie and Sheila grew up with the same mother. Yet, Annie seems to have a better understanding of her life and has a better chance at success. What accounts for these differences? Can you think of ways the two sisters are similar? Explain.
4. Describe Annie and Sheila's relationship. How would each sister describe the other? How might Nancy describe each of her daughters? Use evidence from the text to support your answers.
5. Annie is a member of a book club at the library. During one of their discussion groups, Sharon, the librarian, says, "See, life happens as much in the imagination as it does out where there's earth, wind, and fire. How we *understand* story can be a blueprint for understanding our lives" (p. 152). Explain what this passage means to Annie and the other members of the group.
6. Identify two themes in the story. Using supporting evidence from the text, explain how the author develops these themes.

7. The author conveys pieces of the story through notes a therapist writes that summarize Annie's visits to her office and her observations. What details do the therapist's notes add to the story? What do these details tell us about Annie?
8. During a swim meet, Annie's young nephew disappears. What does Annie fear has happened? Why does she feel responsible? How do her biological mother and sister react to his disappearance? How do Annie's foster parents and Marvin, her foster brother, react?
9. Annie's foster father tries to keep Annie from her family because he believes they are a bad influence. Why is he not successful? How does Annie respond to his ultimatum?
10. How does the author use the character of Marvin in the story? That is, what does Marvin add to the story, and to your understanding of the other characters?
11. Annie finds her foster mom to be a safe haven and a constant in her life. Cite examples from the story that illustrate her support. Likewise, Walter serves as a second support. How so?
12. Crutcher has created a story that is both tragic and funny. Provide examples from the story that illustrate this style. What impact does this style have on your reactions to characters, their flaws, and their circumstances?

ALSO BY CHRIS CRUTCHER



★ **"A masterpiece."**
—*School Library Journal*
(starred review)

—Booklist Top 50 YA Books of All Time
—YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults
—*School Library Journal* Best Book



"Compulsively readable."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

—YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults
—New York Public Library Books
for the Teen Age

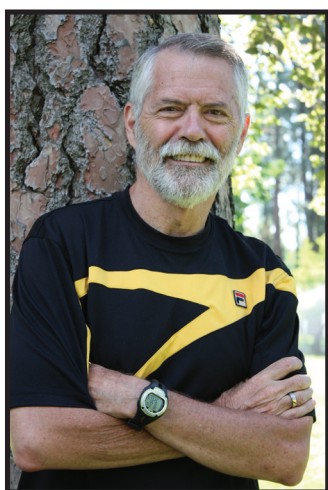


Photo by Kelly Milner Halls

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Crutcher has written eleven critically acclaimed novels, an autobiography, and two collections of short stories. Drawing on his experience as a family therapist and child protection specialist, Crutcher writes honestly about real issues facing teenagers today: making it through school, competing in sports, handling rejection and failure, and dealing with parents. He has won three lifetime achievement awards for the body of his work: the Margaret A. Edwards Award, the ALAN Award, and the NCTE National Intellectual Freedom Award. Chris Crutcher lives in Spokane, Washington.