



The Five People You Meet In Heaven

by Mitch Albom

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Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Kay Wheeler

**LIVING
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Synopsis

The End

Readers are introduced to Eddie whose life has just ended.

The last hour of Eddie's life is spent, at Ruby Pier, an amusement park on the ocean. Eddie's job is to keep the rides safe. The newest attraction is called Freddy's Free Fall, and this is where Eddie will be killed in an accident. Eddie is a squat man with white hair, thick forearms and a barrel chest. His left knee was wounded in the war, which causes him to walk with a limp. He keeps a cigarette behind his ear and a ring of keys hooked to his belt.

With fifty minutes left on earth, Eddie takes his last walk along Ruby Pier. Customers know Eddie. His work shirt has a patch that reads EDDIE above the word MAINTENANCE. Today is Eddie's 83rd birthday.

Forty minutes before his death, Eddie rides the Ghoster Coaster to ensure its safety. His protruding lower jaw makes him look as though he is always smiling, and this makes the children trust him.

With thirty-four minutes to live, Eddie maintains his routine and chats with Dominguez, a lanky, bony-cheeked young man who works with Eddie in the shop where both Eddie and his father have worked.

Thirty minutes before his demise, Dominguez wishes Eddie "Happy Birthday" and reminds Eddie that he and his wife were going back to Mexico to visit family. Eddie gives Dom money for his trip.

Twenty-six minutes before his death, Eddie challenges teenagers' reckless behavior on a railing sending them scurrying. A story had gone around about Eddie as a soldier, in which he had seen combat, won a medal, and been wounded fighting with one of his fellow soldiers.

With nineteen minutes left on earth, Eddie rests for the last time in his regular spot on the Ruby Pier boardwalk; the spot is behind what used to be the Stardust Band Shell, which is where he met Marguerite. Her image will always be remembered by Eddie as a snapshot: a warm September night, she'd worn a yellow dress with a pink barrette, they'd danced to a big band, and as the evening ended and she walked away, she had turned and waved.

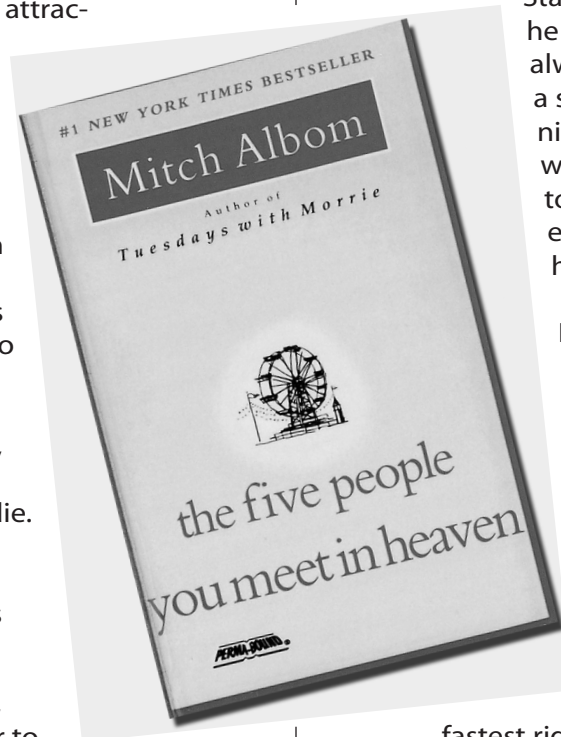
In a brief flashback and because no story sits by itself, the end of Eddie's story was touched by another seemingly innocent story from a month earlier: a young man, Nicky, who had just begun to drive and was uncomfortable carrying a key chain, arrived at Ruby Pier with three of his friends, removed a single key and placed it in his jacket pocket, and after riding all the

fastest rides discovered the key had been

lost.

Fourteen minutes before his death, Eddie sits reminiscing about Marguerite and the Stardust Band Shell.

With twelve minutes to live, Eddie makes for a little girl an animal out of pipe cleaners. As Eddie begins twisting his pipe cleaners, he asks the little girl where her parents are, and she tells him her mother is riding the rides with her boyfriend. Eddie hears shouts and sees the danger immediately. At Freddy's Free Fall one of the carts has tilted, and passengers are hanging on. Eddie directs



Dominguez to get the people off the ride and release the cart. Just as the safety is released, Eddie realizes that the cable is unraveling because something had been scraping across a locked pulley causing the cable to unravel—a car key.

As Eddie motions the crowd back, he spies the little girl at the base of the ride. As he grabs her hands, he is struck by the falling cart.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

In the 1920s, Eddie's father smiles when the nurse points out his newborn son.

The Journey

Eddie sees nothing of his final moment on earth. He feels himself floating through colors. He remembers the cart falling and the little girl and wonders if he saved her.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

Eddie and his family celebrate his fifth birthday at the pier. Eddie's father plays cards with Mickey Shea and other coworkers. Mickey calls Eddie over to give him his birthday bumps; he turns Eddie upside down lowering Eddie's head toward the ground and begins to count. When Eddie is turned right-side up he punches Mickey in the arm and runs to his mother.

The Arrival

Eddie awakes in a teacup. He is struck by three quick thoughts: he feels wonderful, he is alone, and he is still on Ruby Pier—the Ruby Pier of his childhood, some 75 year earlier, only everything was new and fresh. He tries to yell, but nothing comes from his throat. He is limber and runs, something he has not done in the 60 years since the war. When he stops running, he is standing in front of a large theater. A barker's voice is announcing a freak show, and Eddie peeks behind the curtain. Sitting on a stage is a middle-aged man with narrow, stooped shoulders, naked from the waist up; his skin is blue. He greets Eddie and says he's been waiting for him.

The First Person Eddie Meets in Heaven

The Blue Man tells Eddie not to be afraid; Eddie, who had barely known the man, wonders why he was seeing him now. The Blue Man explains to a doubting Eddie that they are in heaven. He further explains that there are five people you meet in

heaven, each for a reason, and that each had affected his life. When Eddie asks the Blue Man what had killed him, he's told that he (Eddie) had.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

Eddie is seven years old, and his gift is a baseball. When his brother Joe misses a catch, Eddie's ball hits the freak show tent attracting the attention of two of the inhabitants. Eddie retrieves his ball before running after his older brother.

The Blue Man tells Eddie his story: his real name is Joseph Corvelzchik, he came from Poland to America in 1894 with his parents, he was a nervous child, and he had not always been a freak. Seeking relief from his nervousness, he went to a chemist who gave him silver nitrate, which later was considered poison. When the medicine failed to work, he started taking more turning his skin gray and then blue.

Unable to find work and uncomfortable around people, he found a dark saloon where he could hide. One night, a group of carnival men came in, and he agreed to join their carnival. One winter he came to Ruby Pier and the pier became his home.

The Blue Man explains that the heaven he is sharing with Eddie is his own, not Eddie's.

The Blue Man relates a story from different perspectives. In one, a little boy chases his ball into the street narrowly avoiding an accident with a Model T. In the other, the driver of the Model T is so anxious after the near miss he suffers a heart attack and dies.

The Blue Man asks, "You see? Little boy?" Eddie conveys his recognition of the event.

Today is Eddie's Birthday

Eddie's eighth birthday is spent at a funeral where he sees other people from the pier dressed more like his parents rather than in their bright carnival garb.

The First Lesson

The Blue Man explains that he is there to teach Eddie that there are no random acts and that all lives are connected. That you can no more separate one life from another than you can separate a breeze from the wind. The Blue Man and Eddie

observe the Blue Man's burial, and as they embrace, Eddie absorbs all of the feelings experienced during the Blue Man's life. The Blue Man's skin color and tone becomes perfect and he disappears.

Sunday, 3 P.M.

After the carnage at the pier, people watch helplessly, word spreads of the tragedy, and the pier empties.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

On his seventeenth birthday, Eddie is teased by his brother Joe about his new girlfriend, and they start to scuffle. News of the war in Europe plays on the radio until his mother changes the channel. She eases the tension by making Eddie dance with her and then Joe.

The Second Person Eddie Meets in Heaven

Eddie feels himself land in a new environment. He still feels hale but less limber. The dark, lifeless terrain is a battlefield, and he runs then crawls through mud before encountering a rifle, helmet, and his own dog tags. He retreats to the cover of a wall and a banyan tree.

Earlier, when America entered the war, Eddie had enlisted and began practicing his marksmanship. A drunken Mickey Shea encouraged him to always shoot without thought of who might be killed or why.

Sitting under the banyan tree, Eddie remembers that soldiers marked the graves of their dead with their helmets, rifles, and dog tags. He recognizes the remains of a village that had haunted his dreams for years. From above, Eddie hears a familiar voice with a Southern drawl, and then joins the soldier he sees in the tree. The soldier, the Captain, had been Eddie's commanding officer during the war.

Eddie learned many things during the war but not how to become a prisoner of war; on a Philippine island, Eddie and his fellow soldiers were captured by the enemy. Eddie explains to the Captain how he'd returned to the pier after the war, that he'd not seen any of their comrades, and how his injured leg had prevented him from leaving; the Captain asks if Eddie still juggled.

While prisoners, Eddie and the men from his unit were forced to work in a coal mine. After months of cruel punishment, Eddie devised of a plan for escape. His juggling diverted the attention of the guards and allowed his comrades to overpower the guards. Before fleeing, they raid the supply hut, find some weapons, and then burn the camp.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

On his birthday, the night before he leaves for the service, Eddie has dinner with his family and Marguerite. She gives him a small box, they walk the pier, and she tells him she'll wait for him and teases him about not getting shot.

Inflated by their new sense of control, the men scattered with the grenades, rifles, and flamethrowers. They fired the nozzles of the flamethrowers and watched the huts ignite.

As Eddie turned something caught his eye which appeared to be a child-size figure crawling inside a burning barn. Eddie ran back convinced something innocent was being burned in front of him. A piercing pain in his leg was followed by a transport vehicle with the others who encouraged him to hang on.

The Captain asks Eddie if he remembers getting out of the barn. Eddie remembers the bullet never being fully removed and how War had entered his soul as surely as the bullet had entered his leg.

The Captain tells Eddie he was the one who shot him. They fight and topple from the tree. The Captain directs Eddie's attention back to their escape, where Eddie sees the Captain killed by a land mine as he enables their escape. Parts of the Captain land in the banyan where they had been sitting.

The Second Lesson

The Captain explains the role of sacrifice in people's lives, and that that was what he had to tell him. Eddie offers his hand, and the Captain says that's what he'd been waiting for. With a wave of his hand, the charred environs of their imprisonment had been restored. The Captain returns Eddie's rifle and dog tags, Eddie sees his picture of Marguerite inside, and the Captain disappears.

Monday, 7:30 A.M.

The morning after the accident, Dominguez and Willie discuss the park's reopening while they wait for the old man to come in and get the workday started.

The Third Person Eddie Meets in Heaven

A sudden wind lifts Eddie to snow-covered mountains where he wanders until finding a diner in which people from different eras eat their dinners. Looking through the windows, he is unable to attract anyone's attention, and then freezes when he spots his father among the diners.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

On his twenty-fourth birthday while in the V.A. hospital, Eddie is surprised with a birthday party and cake brought by his parents and brother, Marguerite, and Mickey Shea; he wants to run away. His father diverts his eyes when Eddie spies him staring at his encasted leg; Eddie holds back his own tears.

As a child, Eddie's relationship with his father was one of neglect, violence, and silence. When his father lost at cards he would take it out on the boys, breaking their meager toys or lashing them with his belt. While Eddie continued to adore his father, the only approval he received was from playing baseball or fighting, often on behalf of his brother Joe.

After being released from the hospital, Eddie returned to his parent's apartment where, following a night of drinking, his father yelled at him to get a job and threw a punch which Eddie was able to block. This first time Eddie defended himself marked the end of communication between him and his father.

As Eddie slumps against the diner wall, stung again by the denial of a man whose love he craves, his father continues to ignore him, even in heaven.

An elderly, well-dressed woman from an earlier era encourages Eddie not to be angry and assures him his father cannot hear him. Suddenly they are at the bottom of the mountain, and Eddie asks if she is his third person; she affirms. Telling Eddie she had been a waitress at the Seahorse Grill and motioning toward the diner floods Eddie's memory of a place he'd often had breakfast as a child.

The lady tells Eddie that her sisters would scold her for refusing proposals and that one morning the finest looking gentleman walked in the diner and she knew he was the man she would marry; his name was Emile, a man of means who loved going to seaside resorts. One day he proposed and promised to build a park just for her, a promise he kept. The elderly lady introduces herself as Ruby, namesake of the amusement park where Eddie had worked.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

On Eddie's thirty-third birthday he awakens with a jolt after another of his recurrent dreams about the war. Having long since given up his dreams, Eddie goes off to work at the pier and returns later that evening to Marguerite's Happy Birthday wishes and dinner. Mr. Nathanson interrupts their evening and tells him something has happened to his father.

Eddie has seen pictures of Ruby in the repair shop. She had also been featured on the park's original entrance. She relates how Emile had hired some roustabouts to help with a big Fourth of July celebration, and their carelessness had led to a fire that destroyed the park, left Emile a broken and broke man, and her wishing the park had never been built.

Ruby explains to Eddie that things happen for reasons, and her reason for meeting him at this moment is to explain why his father had died.

The phone call Eddie received while Marguerite prepared for his birthday had been from his mother who explained that earlier in the week his father had returned from work soaked and smelling of the ocean, had not seen a doctor, had become sicker, and developed pneumonia. Eddie decides alcohol had a role in his father's accident and tries to alleviate his mother's feeling of guilt.

To protect his father's job, Eddie begins working at the pier part-time while continuing to drive a cab. He visits his father in the hospital but says nothing, instead he holds up his greasy hands to show his father. When his father dies, Eddie goes through his father's drawers, trying to find something of his to keep retaining only a deck of cards. Marguerite and Eddie move back to the building where Eddie had grown up, and he accepts a full-time job at the pier

that allows him to keep an eye on his mother. Eddie feels trapped in a position he had been groomed for, and he curses his father for dying and trapping him in the life he tried to escape.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

On Eddie's thirty-seventh birthday, he has breakfast with Noel while they discuss the youthful candidate for president, a tragedy at the Brighton amusement park, and careless smokers on the pier. When Noel asks if Eddie wants to go to the track after work, Eddie thinks about Marguerite, but then agrees to go.

The Third Lesson

Ruby suggests that, perhaps, Eddie had been hard on his father too. She reminds him that the fight that ended communication between the two had caused Eddie to get up and get a job.

Ruby takes her parasol and draws a circle in the snow; Eddie looks into the circle seeing his apartment of years ago and a drunken Mickey Shea talking with his mother. When Eddie's mother goes to change her clothes, Mickey assaults her. Eddie's father enters in time to prevent further attack, but Mickey runs off and Eddie's father shakes his wife before heading out into the stormy night.

Ruby draws another circle in which Eddie sees Mickey and his father each make their ways to the pier. Mickey falls and rolls into the ocean. His father dives in, wrestles with Mickey, and then manages to pull him safely to shore.

As Eddie begins to realize that he really hadn't known his father, Ruby explains he had left intending to hurt or kill Mickey, but he couldn't knowing how Mickey drank and that his judgment had faltered. Ruby further explains that many years earlier, when Eddie's father was looking for work, it was Mickey who went to the pier owner and vouched for him, and when Eddie was born, it was Mickey who gave his parents money to help pay for the extra mouth to feed. She continues, telling Eddie that Mickey had been fired that afternoon, he'd been drunk and missed his shift again, and had gone to Eddie's father for help. He was very drunk by the time he reached the apartment.

Ruby tells Eddie that was how his father became ill—spending hours on the beach for hours, soaked and exhausted. She informs Eddie that his father

died because of his loyalty to a friend. On the night of his death and after days in a coma, his father had dragged himself from his hospital bed, opened it, and called out the names of Eddie's mother, brother, Eddie, and for Mickey Shea. Ruby goes on to say that she knew about his father's last night because Emile had been in the bed next to his; she encourages Eddie to forgive his father and let the poison go that had haunted his life.

After telling Eddie that his father was not the reason he'd remained at the pier, he asks why he had; she tells him he still has two people to meet in heaven and disappears. Eddie is transported back to the top of the mountain and enters the diner to speak with his father. He apologizes but is still unable to be heard. A youthful Ruby reappears briefly then disappears.

Thursday, 11 A.M.

The amusement park owner pays for Eddie's burial from his uncashed paycheck, and a nearby church conducts the funeral. When asked by the pastor what could be said about Eddie, Dominguez tells him Eddie really loved his wife.

The Fourth Person Eddie Meets in Heaven

Eddie blinks and finds himself in a small, round room with an oval mirror hung that casts no reflection of him, only the reverse of the room and a row of doors. He realizes his body has further aged.

He pushes open one of the doors and steps into what appears to be a wedding reception where he thinks he hears a Northern European language spoken. When he coughs, everyone looks up, and he retreats through the door.

This time the door takes him to another wedding, perhaps a Spanish wedding; he coughs, everyone looks up, he retreats. The sequence repeats at an African wedding reception, a Chinese reception, and a French reception. He was always uncomfortable at weddings because of his leg.

Wondering what the wedding receptions have to do with him, Eddie finds himself at an Italian reception where a bridesmaid approaches him and speaks to him in Italian, "For the bitter and the sweet?" At the sound of her voice, he freezes and drops to his knees. He recognizes the voice of Marguerite.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

Eddie is in the maintenance shop where his brother Joe shows him a new drill which runs on batteries. Joe is a salesman for a hardware company and his salary is three times what Eddie earns. Joe congratulates Eddie on his new promotion, head of maintenance, his father's old position. Marguerite enters wearing her Ruby Pier uniform, asks Eddie to step outside, and a group of children surprise him with a cake on his thirty-eighth birthday. They'd been unable to have children, and Marguerite has been talking about adopting. Marguerite takes his picture with a borrowed Polaroid camera as he watches her and blows out the candles.

At the Italian wedding, Marguerite extends her hand to Eddie and assures him that she is Marguerite. Eddie weeps.

Their own wedding had taken place on Christmas Eve at Sammy Hong's Chinese restaurant, a humble affair. Marguerite had chosen a heaven full of weddings and celebration. Marguerite tells him that she'd waited for him and how much she had loved him. He starts to tell her about his death, but then apologizes to her and tells her how much he has missed her.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

Eddie and Noel leave work early to play the Daily Double on Eddie's thirty-ninth birthday. After winning nearly \$800, Eddie calls Marguerite to share the good news. She is not happy and reminds him of their plans to adopt a child. Feeling guilty about her response on Eddie's birthday, Marguerite drives to the track to apologize. As Marguerite drives, two drunken teenagers drop their empty liquor bottles from the overpass, one of which smashes her windshield in a spray of flying glass; her car veers into the concrete divider, she's tossed around inside the car, and she's knocked unconscious.

Confined to bed for six months and with mounting expenses, Marguerite's injuries heal but at the cost of the adoption. Marguerite becomes silent, and Eddie loses himself in work. Eddie never bets the horses again. Years pass, and their wounds slowly heal.

Three years later, Marguerite collapses and is diagnosed with a tumor on her brain. Later, when the cancer is no longer treatable, she is told to get her

affairs in order. Marguerite is released from the hospital, but two days later she returns.

In heaven, Eddie's perception of time becomes confused. He spends what seems like days with Marguerite, and they speak of everything he wishes to speak about. One night he tells her about finding peace with regard to his father, and she smiles; Eddie realizes how happy this would have made her. Another night, he speaks about the changes at Ruby Pier and apologizes for never getting them out of there.

Marguerite asks what had happened during the war, and Eddie tells her he lost himself. He asks if God knows he is there. Eddie admits that some of his life he'd spent hiding from God, and the rest of the time he thought he had gone unnoticed.

The Fourth Lesson

After many talks, Marguerite asks if he'd been angry that she'd left so soon; he reluctantly admits as much. Marguerite tells Eddie that there was a reason for it all and that even though she had died, she had remained with him—that life ends, but that love didn't. He asks her to change her appearance to that of the end of her life and closes his eyes. When he opens them, she is gone, and so is everything else.

Friday, 3:15 P.M.

Dominguez and the estate attorney enter Eddie's apartment looking for financial papers, bank statements and jewelry. Dominguez realizes how much he misses the old man, and that they hadn't even cleared out his locker—no one had the heart. Searching Eddie's bedroom bureau, the attorney finds a leather-bound box containing just a black bow tie, a Chinese restaurant menu, an old deck of cards, a letter with an army medal, and a faded Polaroid of a man by a birthday cake surrounded by children.

The Fifth Person Eddie Meets in Heaven

Eddie finds himself suspended in a white void. Hearing a series of high-pitched sounds, Eddie clutches his cane (the first time he's had it since his death). The noise reminds him of the war and the sounds of the pier—sounds from his nightmares.

Eddie is relieved to find the sound is coming from children, thousands of them at play, splashing in the river. Eddie's eyes catch sight of a slender

young girl standing on a white boulder who beckons him.

Today Is Eddie's Birthday

On his fifty-first birthday his first without Marguerite, Eddie shuns celebration and has a solitary day.

On his sixtieth birthday, Eddie uses parts of his lunch as bait to fish.

On his sixty-eighth birthday, Eddie endures a birthday call from his brother in Florida.

On his seventy-fifth birthday, Eddie checks the maintenance reports, closes a ride, and does the ride maintenance himself.

On his eighty-second birthday, Eddie goes to the cemetery and visits the graves of his mother, brother, and father, saving Marguerite's for last.

The Last Lesson

The little girl appears to be Asian and introduces herself as Tala. She's interested in the pipe cleaners in his pocket, and he makes a dog for her. She smiles then tells him he'd burned her. She tells him her mommy, her *ina*, had told her to hide in a barn when they heard the soldiers. Eddie is overcome realizing that he had seen someone in the barn and had set it on fire. As she plays with the toy dog, Eddie begs for her forgiveness.

Feeling a tap on his shoulders, Eddie looks up and Tala asks him to bathe her; he sees that now she is not a beautiful child, her skin is charred and blistered. He washes her in the river, and the charred flesh becomes healthy. Tala conveys to Eddie that she is his fifth person and asks why he's sad. Eddie relates, as he had with the others in heaven, that he'd not accomplished anything with his life—that he wasn't supposed to be there. Tala challenges his response saying he kept children safe. Eddie asks about the little girl on the pier, and Tala explains he'd pushed her away; the hands he felt were actually Tala's keeping him safe and bringing him to heaven.

Eddie is submerged in the river where he feels every pain, injury, scar, and bad memory wash from his body. Tala pulls Eddie through a collage of color, and he rises to the sight of a huge colorful

boardwalk filled with thousands of people from the past, present, and future. Tala releases her grasp, and Eddie floats to the top of a grand, white Ferris wheel and a cart holding a smiling Marguerite as the voices form a single word from God: Home.

Epilogue

The park at Ruby Pier reopens three days after the accident; Freddy's Free Fall reopens the following year with a new name. Eddie's apartment is rented to someone new. Dominguez takes over Eddie's job and he puts Eddie's few possessions in a trunk alongside memorabilia from Ruby Pier, including photos of the original entrance. Nicky, the young man whose key had cut the cable, returns often to Ruby Pier, where he brags to his friends that his great-grandmother was the woman for whom the pier was named.

In the future, lines form at Ruby Pier – just as a line forms someplace else: five people, waiting, in five chosen memories, to have their questions answered. And in that line now is a whiskered old man, who waits in a place called the Stardust Band Shell to share his part of the secret of heaven: that each affects the other and the other affects the next, and the world is full of stories, but the stories are all one.

Timeline

- Dec. 7, 1941** The Japanese Navy attacks Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, and the U.S. joins World War II. With the German failure to defeat Russia and with the United States joining the war a day later, this date marks the main turning point of World War II.
- Dec. 11** Germany and Italy declare war on the U.S.
- Dec. 19** Hitler appoints himself military commander-in-chief.
- Jan. 2, 1942** Japanese forces occupy Manila.
- Jan. 10** Japanese forces invade Indonesia.
- Jan. 11** Japanese forces occupy Malaysia.
- Jan. 12** Japanese forces invade Burma.
- Jan. 25** Japanese forces invade the Solomon Islands.
- Feb. 15** Singapore surrenders to the Japanese.

- May 6** The last American troops in the Philippines surrender.
- June 4** The battle of Midway: Four Japanese carriers are sunk, and one American carrier. Japan's naval superiority is lost.
- July 3** Japanese forces land in Guadalcanal.
- Aug. 7** U.S. forces land in Guadalcanal.
- Feb. 2, 1943** The last German forces in Stalingrad surrender.
- July 10** The Allies invade Sicily.
- Sep. 8** Italy surrenders. The German forces in northern and central Italy begin occupation in the country.
- Nov. 19** The Marines land in Tarawa.
- Jan. 16, 1944** Eisenhower becomes the supreme commander of western allied forces.
- June 6** D-Day: American, British, and Canadian forces invade France at the beaches of Normandy.
- June 19** Battle of the Philippine sea.
- July 24** The Marines land in Tinian.
- Aug. 15** The Allies land in southern France.
- Aug. 25** Paris is liberated.
- Oct. 20** The Marines land in Leyte, in the Philippines. In response, the Japanese Navy begins to use Kamikaze suicide pilots.
- Jan. 9, 1945** U.S. Marines land in Luzon in the Philippines.
- Feb. 19** The Marines land in Iwo Jima.
- March 4** Manila is liberated.
- March 16** The battle of Iwo Jima ends.
- April 6** The Marines land in Okinawa. Japan orders all its forces to use Kamikaze suicide tactics.
- Apr. 7** The super battleship *Yamato* is sunk on its way to a Kamikaze fight in Okinawa.
- May 8** Germany surrenders. The war in Europe ends.
- June 21** Battle of Okinawa ends.
- Aug. 6** Hiroshima is destroyed by an atomic bomb.
- Aug. 14** Japan surrenders. World War II ends.

Author Sketch

Mitch Albom was born on May 23, 1958 in Trenton, New Jersey. He is an award-winning sportswriter, novelist, newspaper columnist for the *Detroit Free Press*, syndicated radio host and TV commentator. Albom is a graduate of Brandeis University and Columbia University. Before becoming a journalist, he was briefly an amateur boxer, nightclub singer, and pianist. He is also a member of a rock band called The Rock Bottom Remainers.



An accomplished songwriter and lyricist, Mitch Albom wrote the song "Cookin' for Two" for a television movie directed by Arnold Schwarzenegger. He also wrote lyrics for songs recorded by Warren Zevon, with David Crosby on backup vocals. Albom wrote the best-selling novel, *Tuesdays with Morrie* in 1977. The novel stayed on the *New York Times* best-seller list for four straight years. Oprah Winfrey produced the television adaptation for ABC and it was the most watched television movie of 1999. The movie went on to win four Emmy Awards.

In 2003, Albom wrote the *New York Times* best-seller, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. It too, was adapted for television and starred Jon Voight, Ellen Burstyn, Michael Imperioli, and Jeff Daniels.

Albom founded two charities in the metropolitan Detroit area, "The Dream Fund" in 1989, and "A Time to Help" in 1998. He serves on the boards of various charities, including CATCH (Caring Athletes Team for Children's and Henry Ford Hospitals), Forgotten Harvest, and Michigan Hospice Organization. Albom resides in Michigan with his wife, Janine.

Critic's Corner

During his career, Albom has received more than 100 writing awards from varied associations. Albom's work has appeared in *Sports Illustrated*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Sport*, *The New York Times*, *TV Guide*, *USA Today*, and Germany's popular *GEO Magazine* as well as on the Internet with MSNBC.

Although *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* sold very well, the novel did not receive the acclaim of *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

Other Awards Include:

- Top Sports Columnist in the Nation by the sports editors of America (APSE), which is the highest honor in his field.
- Seven first place APSE honors for feature writing, an unparalleled achievement.
- Writing Awards from: AP, UPI, Headliners Club, National Sportswriters and Broadcasters Associations
- National Hospice Organization's Man of the Year (1999)

Other Books by the Author

- Live Albom I* (1987)
- Live Albom II* (1990)
- Live Albom III* (1992)
- Live Albom IV* (1995)
- Bo – The Autobiography of Bo Schembechler* (1989)
- Fab Five* (1993)
- Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997)
- For One More Day* (2006)

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- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitch_Album

General Objectives

1. To analyze the idea of Heaven
2. To understand how all lives are connected
3. To access the main character's personality
4. To recognize the novel's themes
5. To describe the novel's plot
6. To sympathize with the main character's plight
7. To find examples of compassion
8. To sympathize with the main character's anger and loss
9. To recognize the significance of setting
10. To describe the novel's mood

Specific Objectives

1. To understand that one's life has meaning
2. To understand the importance of forgiveness
3. To recognize the damage violence and anger cause
4. To assess Eddie's resilience
5. To recognize the importance of courage under harsh circumstances
6. To understand relationships between family and friends
7. To describe how Eddie copes with injury and death
8. To understand Eddie's feelings toward his father
9. To see how Eddie grows to understand and appreciate his life
10. To evaluate the ending to determine whether or not it is really happy

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Mitch Albom's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Characterization: the different ways an author tells readers about characters. Writers can tell about characters directly or let the readers reach their own decisions about a character indirectly by showing the comments, thoughts, and actions of the other characters. Albom uses both direct and indirect characterizations to show how Eddie misunderstood his life.

Conflict: conflict in literature is a struggle or fight. There are two kinds of conflict. In an external conflict, characters struggle against a force outside themselves. In an internal conflict, characters battle a force within themselves. *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* has strong external and internal conflicts as Eddie struggles with the physical violence he endured at the hands of his father and his deep-seated anger toward him.

Setting: the time and place where events take place. The setting may be stated outright or you may have to infer it from details in the story. To infer the setting, look for words that tell when and where. Also look for clues in the characters speech, clothing, or means of transportation. Since

the setting is so important to the plot and theme Albom clearly describes places that Eddie lived and worked throughout his life.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Books

Tuesday's With Morrie (1999)

The Secret Life of Bees (2003)

Life of Pi (2004)

DVDs and Videos

Tuesdays with Morrie (1999)

Five People You Meet in Heaven (2003)

It's A Wonderful Life (1946)

Defending Your Life (1999)

Audio

Five People You Meet in Heaven

It's A Wonderful Life

Internet

www.bookbrowse.com

www.authors4teens.com

www.teenreads.com

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* should include these aspects:

Themes

- worthlessness
- loss
- denial of affection
- sacrifice
- courage
- kindness
- love
- coping skills
- human connection
- forgiveness

Motifs

- feelings of failure and disappointment
- surviving the loss of loved ones
- coveting the love of a parent
- fighting for your country
- loneliness and despair
- experiencing and showing kindness
- showing love
- enduring a violent childhood

- learning that all lives are connected
- losing anger and finding peace

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in the book. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page number indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "But the running boy is inside every man, no matter how old he gets." (p. 29)
(*Eddie remains young at heart, as do many while growing old. Aging is a state of mind.*)
2. "Things don't change here. And there's none of that peering down from the clouds, I'm afraid." (p. 33)
(*The Blue Man explains to Eddie that heaven may not be as he expects.*)
3. Eddie envied the way his brother looked in the evenings, so tanned and clean. (p. 107)
(*Eddie's was embarrassed by his grease stained fingernails. They were black from working on the rides at the pier. He resented his job and that he'd ended up doing what he said he never would. The way his brother looked reminded him that he was stuck in a life he didn't want.*)
4. "That there are no random acts. That we are all connected. That you can no more separate one life from another than you can separate a breeze from the wind." (p. 48)
(*The Blue Man tries to explain to Eddie that all lives are significant—that each life has meaning, is important, and is connected to everyone else.*)
5. "Dying? Not the end of everything." (p. 91)
(*The Captain explains that there is more to death than just the ending of life: death helps to explain and to make sense of someone's life; death is just the beginning.*)
6. "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 harm we do, we do to ourselves." (p. 141)
(*Ruby explains that hatred is the weapon that, in the end, only hurts the one holding on to it. Rather than relieving the pain, it brings more pain.*)

7. "Lost love is still love, Eddie. It takes a different form, that's all. You can't see their smile or bring them food or tousle their hair or move them around a dance floor. But when those senses weaken, another heightens. Memory. Memory becomes your partner. You nurture it. You hold it. You dance with it. Life has to end...Love doesn't." (p. 173)

(Marguerite tells Eddie that love never leaves; it stays with you, and although the person you love is gone, the memory of them lingers. The memory of love is what is important and should be cherished.)

8. They were there, or would be there, because of the simple, mundane things Eddie had done in his life, the accidents he had prevented, the rides he had kept safe, the unnoticed turns he had affected every day." (p. 193)

(Eddie begins to understand that his life was not wasted. He lived so that the rides at Ruby Pier were safe for all to ride. He finally realizes that his life had meaning and purpose.)

9. "You didn't get it. Sacrifice is a part of life. It's supposed to be. It's not something to regret. It's something to aspire to." (p. 93)

(Eddie begins to see that there are small and large sacrifices. Everyone sacrifices. It's a part of life. He begins to understand that the Captain's death had purpose. The sacrifice the Captain made saved all of their lives. Eddie realizes he should stop thinking about what he lost and release his pent up anger.)

10. "We move through places every day that would never have been if not for those who came before us." (p. 123)

(We benefit from those who came before us, and those who come after us will benefit from us. And so life goes on. We are forever connected.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where is the story set? Why is setting important?
(The story takes place in a heaven. It is important because Eddie needed to revisit the places in his life that had a lasting affect on

him. He thought he lived a mundane, unimportant life that made him feel useless.)

2. Why did Eddie limp?
(The Captain shot him in the knee because he wouldn't get in the jeep when he was called. The Captain felt he had no other way to make him join the other men.)
3. Why did Eddie envy his brother?
(Joe worked as a lifeguard during the summer, and Eddie felt stuck working with his dad maintaining the rides. Joe always looked tan and clean; Eddie had dirty fingernails from greasing the rides.)
4. What happened on Eddie's 83rd Birthday?
(Eddie died trying to save a little girl from being killed by a cart falling from Freddy's Free Fall.)
5. How did the cart come loose from Freddy's Free Fall?
(A key fell from the pocket of a rider. The key caused a cable to break and the cart to fall.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)

6. Who is Nicky and why is he important to the story?
(Nicky is the rider who lost his key that damaged the cable and caused the cart to fall. He was also the great-grandson of Ruby.)
7. In what ways is Eddie an admirable character?
(Even though Eddie feels he is a loser, he stood by his mother and Marguerite; he was diligent in his work at Ruby Pier.)
8. Why is Ruby important to the story?
(The pier is named after Ruby. If there had been no Ruby there would never have been a Ruby Pier.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Why did the author include some humorous parts?
(The comic relief, e.g. when Eddie's mother has him dance with his brother, helps relieve the tension of the home life in the book.)
10. What does Eddie's limp symbolize in the book?
(Eddie's limp is a reminder of his failure in life. It is constantly with him.)

Questions 11 – 12 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, role-play a dialogue between the Captain and Eddie, in which they discuss their experiences during the war.

12. Hold a round table discussion in which you discuss what each person's heaven would be like.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. Make a model of the dance hall where Eddie and Marguerite danced. Choose appropriate building material such as blocks or cardboard.
2. Imagine you are creating a movie of *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Choose background music for three especially dramatic scenes.
3. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural of the main events.
4. Make an advertisement for Ruby Pier.
5. Draw or paint a new cover for the novel.

Language Arts

1. Recast one chapter from Joe's point of view.
2. Write a newspaper article detailing the accident that caused Eddie's death.
3. Create a character sketch of Eddie and Joe.
4. Write a dialogue between Eddie and his father in which he explains how he feels when his father ignores him by playing cards and passing him around for others to watch.
5. Sketch a layout of Eddie's apartment on Beachwood Ave. Note the closeness of Ruby Pier and the sight of the Ferris wheel out his window.

History/Social Studies

1. Learn more about the war in the Philippines. Share your findings with the class as a speech or in a web page.
2. Learn about amusement parks and their beginnings. Share your findings with the class.
3. Create a map of an amusement park on a pier. Be sure to include the boardwalk and beach area.

4. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward self and family. Consider Eddie's mother, Marguerite, and Ruby. How are they alike? How are they different?
5. Compare and contrast amusement parks of today from those during Eddie's lifetime.

Science/Math

1. Joe is a hardware salesman and sells a drill run on batteries. Explain what nickel cadmium is and how it works.
2. The Blue Man took silver nitrate to calm his nerves. Explain what silver nitrate is and why it caused him to turn blue.
3. Explain the difference between roller coasters of today and those of Eddie's time. How are they different? How are they the same?
4. Eddie and Marguerite loved salt water taffy. What is salt water taffy and how is it made?
5. Why were amusement parks built at the final stop of railroad routes? Did it help increase ridership? Was it for financial gain?

Speech/Drama

1. Write and deliver a speech about the safety of overpasses.
2. Debate whether or not *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* should be mandatory reading on your grade level.
3. Choose a dramatic scene from the novel, such as Eddie raising his hand to his father for the first time. Working with some classmates, perform the scene.
4. Choose a dramatic scene from the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* and compare it to a scene from the novel *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*.

Alternate Assessment

1. Write a character sketch for Eddie.
2. Make a list of actions that show Eddie is heroic.
3. Read another novel by Mitch Albom and compare and contrast it to *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*.

Vocabulary

In the blank provided, write the letter of the definition that best fits the word.

1. _____ imminent
 - A) well-known
 - B) controlling
 - C) likely to occur at any time
 - D) of a bridge

2. _____ barrette
 - A) balance bar used for practice of ballet
 - B) brake on a carnival ride
 - C) shoulder insignia worn by soldiers
 - D) clasp for holding hair in place

3. _____ arterial
 - A) gallery displaying circus art
 - B) of the arteries
 - C) of the bombs dropped from planes
 - D) steel beams that steady rides

4. _____ cacophony
 - A) multi-syllables
 - B) ensemble of brass and woodwinds
 - C) harsh sounding
 - D) music of a calliope

5. _____ husking
 - A) Prussian military officer
 - B) ballroom dancing
 - C) removing covering of some fruits, vegetables or nuts
 - D) coveralls worn by mechanics

6. _____ tawny
 - A) yellowish or yellowish-brown color
 - B) strong and agile
 - C) wispy
 - D) brazen

7. _____ impotent
 - A) self-impressed
 - B) lacking power or ability
 - C) of great significance or importance
 - D) sassy

8. _____ carnage
 - A) a ceremonial procession
 - B) amount a horse or vehicle can pull
 - C) destruction or massacre
 - D) flowers worn on a lapel

9. _____ porous
 - A) loud and slow
 - B) granular
 - C) destitute
 - D) easily penetrated

10. _____ bandolier
 - A) male support garment
 - B) belt for carrying ammunition
 - C) operator who navigates a bandol
 - D) daily medication dispenser

11. _____ prominent
 - A) well-known
 - B) controlling
 - C) likely to occur at any time
 - D) of a bridge

12. _____ carousel
 - A) noisy or drunken feast or gathering
 - B) part of a flamethrower that shoots the flame
 - C) Ferris wheel
 - D) merry-go-round

13. _____ beseeched
 - A) hunted
 - B) dominated
 - C) made an urgent appeal
 - D) forgave

14. _____ bodice
 - A) ice sculpture
 - B) fitted part of a woman's dress
 - C) blatant or unmistakable
 - D) unbelievable

15. _____ roustabout
 - A) unskilled laborer
 - B) seat on a merry-go-round
 - C) dizzying
 - D) spinning like a top

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| _____ 1. Burned by Eddie in the Philippines | A. Joe |
| _____ 2. Saved Mickey Shea from drowning | B. The Captain |
| _____ 3. Her husband built the pier | C. Eddie |
| _____ 4. Always bought saltwater taffy for Eddie's birthday | D. Eddie's father |
| _____ 5. Eddie's brother | E. Marguerite |
| _____ 6. Loved to read comic books | F. The Blue Man |
| _____ 7. Drank silver nitrate to calm his nerves | G. Dominguez |
| _____ 8. Died trying to save soldiers in the Philippines | H. Tala |
| _____ 9. Helped Eddie repair rides on the pier | I. Ruby |
| _____ 10. Lost his key on Freddy's Free Fall | J. Nicky |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. Nicky

2. Tala

3. Eddie's limp

4. Eddie's apartment

5. Heaven

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- _____ 1. Marguerite and Eddie married before he leaves to fight in the war.
- _____ 2. Eddie's father thought Joe was weak.
- _____ 3. Dominguez was Eddie's boss on the pier.
- _____ 4. Eddie shot the Captain in the knee.
- _____ 5. Eddie and the other soldiers were prisoners during the war.
- _____ 6. Eddie juggled bricks as a diversion so he and the other men could escape.
- _____ 7. Eddie and his father got along well.
- _____ 8. Joe died before Eddie.
- _____ 9. Eddie saved a deck of cards that belonged to his father.
- _____ 10. Mickey Shea drowned after falling off the pier.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Chose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Which character in the novel did you admire the most? Why?
- 2. Summarize the events in *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*.
- 3. Discuss how Eddie's father treats him.
- 4. Compare and contrast Eddie's mother and Marguerite. How are they the same and different?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Underline the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. When the story opens, Eddie is working at **(Ruby Pier /a hardware store)**.
2. It was **(Marguerite's/Eddie's)** 83rd birthday when he died.
3. Eddie woke up in a **(teacup/diner)** when he arrived in heaven.
4. Eddie met Marguerite at the **(Fun House/Stardust Bandshell)**.
5. **(Ruby/The Blue Man)** was the first person Eddie met in heaven.
6. A bottle thrown from an **(overpass/roof)** caused Marguerite's accident.
7. Ruby Pier was named after Nicky's **(great-aunt/great-grandmother)**.
8. **(Firecrackers/Cigarettes)** caused the fire that destroyed Ruby Pier.
9. Ruby worked as a **(nurse/waitress)** before she met her husband.
10. **(Tala/Marguerite)** was the last person Eddie met in heaven.

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. Ruby Pier

2. The Deck of cards

3. The Ferris wheel

4. The Chinese restaurant menu

5. The picture of Eddie surrounded by children

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| ___ 1. Did not speak to Eddie the remainder of his life | A. Eddie |
| ___ 2. The love of Eddie's life | B. Eddie's mother |
| ___ 3. Helped Eddie on the pier | C. Marguerite |
| ___ 4. Eddie's brother | D. Ruby |
| ___ 5. Tortured Eddie and the other soldiers | E. The Blue Man |
| ___ 6. Accosted Eddie's mother | F. Eddie's father |
| ___ 7. Worked in sideshows on Ruby Pier | G. Joe |
| ___ 8. Married the builder of the Pier | H. Mickey Shea |
| ___ 9. Burned Tala | I. The four crazies |
| ___ 10. Always had a birthday cake for Eddie | J. Dominguez |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Chose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe Ruby Pier.
2. Explain how Eddie changes over the course of the novel.
3. Trace the novel's plot. Include some events from the rising action, climax, and resolution.
4. Describe the local reaction to Eddie's death.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A | 11. A |
| 2. D | 7. B | 12. D |
| 3. B | 8. C | 13. C |
| 4. C | 9. D | 14. B |
| 5. C | 10. B | 15. A |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. H | 6. C |
| 2. D | 7. F |
| 3. I | 8. B |
| 4. E | 9. G |
| 5. A | 10. J |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. Nicky's key caused the cart to fall and take Eddie's life; Ruby Pier was named after his great-grandmother. He brings the story together at the end.
2. Tala helps Eddie to see that his life was significant and had value; she was the Philippine girl burned in the barn.
3. Eddie's limp is a constant reminder of the failure he felt he was; his limp shames him and causes him to be distant from the ones he loved.
4. Eddie's apartment is important because of its location. He could never escape his life and work even while looking out his window.
5. Heaven enables Eddie to revisit places and/or people to help him make sense of his life.

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Ruby Pier | 6. overpass |
| 2. Eddie's | 7. great-grandmother |
| 3. teacup | 8. Firecrackers |
| 4. Stardust Bandshell | 9. waitress |
| 5. The Blue Man | 10. Tala |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

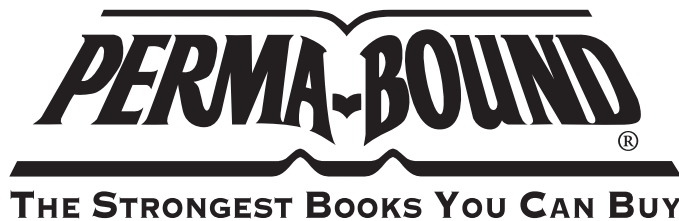
1. Ruby Pier is important because Eddie's life was spent there; he also felt trapped by the pier.
2. The Deck of cards that Eddie saved belonged to his father and is important because it symbolizes the problems that existed between Eddie and his father.
3. The Ferris wheel was always in view where ever Eddie was, reminding him of his life and work, and ended up being his heaven—his home—with Marguerite waiting for him.
4. The Chinese restaurant menu, one of the few items left in a leather-bound box found by a lawyer after Eddie's death, is from his wedding reception at Sammy Hong's and represents his longing for Marguerite.
5. The Picture of Eddie surrounded by children is proof that Eddie wasn't really alone in life; his life had a purpose: keeping children safe.

Part III: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. H |
| 2. C | 7. E |
| 3. J | 8. D |
| 4. G | 9. A |
| 5. I | 10. B |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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