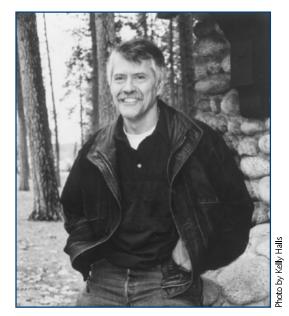
- **9.** Crutcher writes about lettering in football and the C Club initiation he had to go through. At what grade level did Crutcher go through this secret initiation? Was this level typical? What events took place during this initiation? Were the coaches aware of what was going on? Is this type of initiation still happening today? Would it now be considered harassment?
- **10.** Crutcher was not much of an athlete as a teen, but as an adult, playing basketball, swimming, and running are an integral part of his life. In the epilogue he states, "A sport has its own built-in integrity, doesn't need an artificial one. Athletics carries its own set of truths, and those truths are diminished when manipulated by people with agendas" (p. 256). What are the agendas to which Crutcher refers? How do these agendas affect high school athletics today?
- 11. When Crutcher was in upper elementary school he was enthralled with the series of Chip Hilton sports books by Clair Bee. In later years Crutcher realized that although the character Chip Hilton may represent something young readers can aspire to, "Chip also represents what can never be" (p. 233). What does Crutcher mean by this statement? How does it relate to the type of young adult novel Crutcher writes?
- **12.** Crutcher was not much of a reader when he was a teenager. He only read when he had to and that was not often. What does Crutcher mean when he writes, "Serendipity *did* get me to read one book during my highschool years" (p. 218)? Why had he not read before this? What was the book he read? Was the next school-assigned book as enjoyable?
- **13.** Crutcher refers to a conversation with Reverend Grant, who asked him what his all-time favorite children's book was. Crutcher answered that it was *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss. The reverend then asked him if there was a lesson to be learned from this book. He also asked Crutcher if he believed that an elephant could hatch an egg. What was Reverend Grant trying to get Crutcher to realize about the Bible when he asked these questions?
- **14.** Crutcher writes about a student at one of his school visits asking him why someone always dies in his books. What was Crutcher's answer? Do you agree with him that "without loss there is no story" (p. 163)?

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About the Author

Chris Crutcher has won two lifetime achievement awards for his work: the Margaret A. Edwards Award for Outstanding Literature for Young Adults, and the ALAN Award for a Significant Contribution to Adolescent Literature. He lives in Spokane, Washington.

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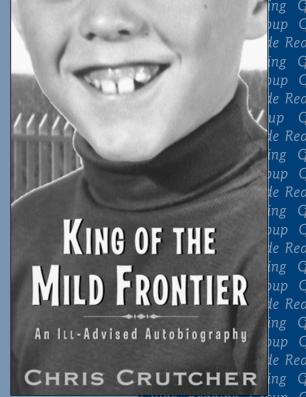
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Reading group guide questions prepared by Ruth Cox.

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King of the Mild Frontier An Ill-Advised Autobiography

By Chris Crutcher

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Guide ISBN: 0-06-054507-0

About this guide:

Chris Crutcher is the critically acclaimed author of seven young adult novels and a collection of short stories, all of which were selected as ALA Best Books for Young Adults. Drawing on his experience as a family therapist and child protection specialist, Crutcher writes honestly about real issues facing teen a gers today: making it through school, competing in sports, handling rejection and failure, dealing with parents.

In King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Auto biography, you will read about Chris Crutcher's life as a dateless, broken-toothed, scabbed-over, God-fearing dweeb, and once you have contemplated his ascension to the buckskin-upholstered throne of the King of the Mild Frontier, you will close your eyes, close this book and hold it to your chest, and say, "I, too, can be an author."

The topics and questions in this guide are intended to spark discussion and debate about the issues raised in his thought-provoking autobiography.

About this book:

Chris Crutcher revisits his late 1950s and early 1960s youth in this funny yet poignant autobiography. From trying to impress a member of the girls' softball team

(with disastrous dental results) to enduring the humiliation of his high school athletic club initiation, this memoir of the tricky road to adulthood is candid, disarming, hilarious, relevant, and never less than riveting.

In small-town Cascade, Idaho, where Crutcher grew up, boys

played sports even if they had no interest or athletic ability. Crutcher often had neither, but that did not stop him from being recruited to play. He was not a natural young athlete, and his love of junk food, readily available from the vending machines at the family-owned gas station, further impeded his childhood and adolescent sports career. Eventually he did find his sports niche in swimming and, later in life, running.

Crutcher vividly describes a temper that was always waiting to trip him up even as it sustained him through some of the most memorable mishaps any child has survived. He discusses his career as a family therapist and the way incidents in his own life, including his quick temper, help him relate to his clients. These incidents also found their way into his award-winning novels and short stories. But how did this guy, who lifted his brother's homework through the entire tenth grade, ever become a writer, not to mention the author of eight critically acclaimed books for young people? As in his novels, Crutcher's autobiography reflects real life and the hardships that go along with living and dying. The frontier may be mild, but the book is not. You will laugh, you will cry, you will remember.

For discussion:

- **1.** How does Crutcher's coming-of-age in the 1960s differ from a teen's coming-of-age today? What societal changes have taken place in the last forty years to change the definition of coming-of-age? Discuss the dangers today's teens face versus the ones Crutcher faced.
- **2.** Crutcher's grandfather was a kind and caring man who often helped others when they needed it, no questions asked. He gave people "the benefit of the doubt." Sometimes he was taken advantage of, but in most cases he was repaid

for his kindness. What does it mean to give someone the benefit of the doubt? Would a teenage Crutcher have been given the benefit of the doubt by his high school principal or football coach? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to ask someone to give you the benefit of the doubt? Does it matter who you are, whether you are a football player, a

cheerleader, a straight-A student, or the class clown? Are people as likely to give teens the benefit of the doubt today as they were fifty years ago? Why or why not?

- 3. Crutcher admits to having problems controlling his temper in his younger years. What incidents did Crutcher experience as a young child that may have added fuel to the fire? How did his older brother, John, play into Crutcher's anger? What is the "famous family story" his mother tells about how they cured his temper when he was two? Why did Crutcher ask her to stop telling the story?
- **4.** Crutcher addresses real-life issues in his novels—teenage sexuality, abuse, race relations, suicide, etc. Why does his realistic approach to teen issues frequently raise the ire of the censor? Do you think his autobiography, *King of the Mild Frontier*, will be challenged? If so, for what reason?
- **5.** Crutcher's work as a family therapist dealing with emotionally and physically abused children has given him an unusual degree of insight into children and teenagers. What types of issues does Crutcher discuss in his autobiography? How does he use his own life experiences and those of his clients when writing his novels?
- **6.** Janice Winthrop, one of the least popular girls in school, was voted Cascade High School carnival queen. Who instigated "rigging" the election so that Janice won? What was Janice's response to her time in the spotlight? What did Crutcher learn from this experience?
- **7.** Crutcher attended high school from 1960 to 1964, a time when girls' competitive sports in schools did not exist. His high school principal went so far as to say, "Chris, you know girls aren't emotionally equipped for competitive athletics" (p. 50). Was this an accurate statement in the 1960s? Is it an accurate statement today? How has the public image of girls' sports changed since the 1960s?
- **8.** Crutcher re-created his swimming experience at Eastern Washington State in his novel *Stotan!*, which focuses on a group of high school swimmers. Crutcher defines a Stotan as "a cross between a Stoic and a Spartan: simply put, a tough guy who shows no pain" (p. 63). The term was coined to describe the Australian runner Herb Elliot, a world-record holder in the mile run who dominated his event in the 1960 Olympics. Crutcher's coach took the term and applied it to swimming. Which athletes of today could be considered Stotans? Why? Are all of today's Stotan athletes male?

Praise for King of the Mild Frontier

"Readers will clasp this hard-to-putdown book to their hearts even as they laugh sympathetically."

—Publishers Weekly (starred review