

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Saint Maybe

by

Anne Tyler

Book Information

Anne Tyler, Saint Maybe
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Interest Level: UG

The happy Bedloe family is living the ideal existence in Baltimore in the 1960s until a tragic event occurs, and seventeen-year-old Ian Bedloe blames himself for the accidental death of his older brother.

Topics: Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Death; Family Life, Misc./Other

Main Characters

Agatha the oldest of Lucy's children; a quiet, rather unattractive girl

Bee Ian's mother, who is nearly crippled by arthritis and who becomes exhausted by Danny and Lucy's children

Cicely Ian's high school sweetheart, who leaves him when he becomes devoted to his church and Lucy's children

Claudia Ian's older sister, who is married and has many children

Danny Ian's older brother, who kills himself when he is told his wife has been unfaithful

Daphne Lucy's youngest child; a girl with a mind of her own who is most likely not Danny's child after all

Doug Ian's father; a schoolteacher who retires and finds it difficult to fill his time usefully

Ian the principal character of the story; a young man who feels he has caused his brother's death and, consequently, helps raise his sister-in-law's children

Lucy Danny's wife, who has two children by a previous marriage and has a daughter while married to Danny

Mr. Brant Ian's boss; a carpenter who is deaf and who takes Ian on as an apprentice

Reverend Emmett the minister of the Church of the Second Chance, who advises Ian to earn forgiveness by taking care of Danny's children

Rita a woman who runs her own business and who becomes Ian's wife

Thomas Lucy's middle child; an easygoing, popular boy

Vocabulary

calamity a distressing event or situation

insipid dull or without interest

pyre a combustible pile used to burn a corpse at a funeral

reparation the process of repairing or making amends

Synopsis

Ian Bedloe is the youngest son of a typical Baltimore family. As the story begins, he is a popular high school student with a steady girlfriend. His older brother, Danny, is a bachelor who works at the post office. That is where Danny meets his future wife, Lucy, as she is mailing some belongings to her ex-husband. They have an extremely short courtship, and suddenly, he is a husband and father to Lucy's two children, Agatha and Thomas, from her previous marriage.

Seven months into Lucy's pregnancy, she delivers a healthy girl named Daphne. Lucy finds she needs some time to herself, so she asks Ian to baby-sit for her. After a short time, Ian begins to wonder if Lucy is having an affair during her afternoons away from the children. He also realizes that, most likely, Daphne is not Danny's daughter; Lucy was probably pregnant when she and Danny first met.

Ian doesn't tell anyone his suspicions until one Saturday evening when he is baby-sitting for Lucy. When she fails to return, causing Ian to be late for an important date with Cicely, he becomes frustrated and angry. Danny returns before Lucy, and he agrees to take Ian to Cicely's. In the car, Ian tells Danny his suspicions about Lucy. After Ian gets out of the car, Danny drives it into a wall and kills

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himself.

Lucy is left with three children and no job. It doesn't take long for her to reach the end of her rope, and she takes a fatal overdose of sleeping pills. The children are sent to live with Ian's parents until other relatives can be located. However, this never happens.

When Ian comes home for Christmas break, he sees how difficult it is for his parents to take care of the children. He feels that he is the cause of Danny's death. He is so full of guilt that he walks into the Church of the Second Chance during a prayer meeting. He confesses his guilt to the minister, and Reverend Emmett tells him he must take care of the children in order to be forgiven.

Ian decides he will drop out of college and work as a carpenter so he can be home to help raise Lucy's children. He becomes very devoted to the church and the kids, and Cicely moves on to someone else.

When the children grow up, Agatha becomes a doctor in California, Thomas creates computer games in New York City, and Daphne remains in Baltimore, going from job to job. Ian's mother, Bee, dies rather suddenly, and soon it is just Ian, his father, and Daphne living at home.

When Agatha comes home after Bee's death, she is appalled at the messy state of the house. She has Daphne hire Rita to clean, discard, and organize things. Rita has a steady boyfriend until she sees Ian. She promptly breaks up with her boyfriend, and soon she and Ian are married.

Within four months, Rita is pregnant. Ian has mixed emotions about this because of his prior experience with children. When Joshua is born, Ian thinks back to when Daphne was born, and how Lucy changed so many people's lives.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Ian dream and daydream about Danny?

He felt enormous guilt about Danny's death, and it came out in his subconscious. He thought a lot about "what might have been."

Literary Analysis

Briefly summarize Ian's life. In what way is your life similar to Ian's? Try to think of five things you have in common with him and explain them.

Ian is a popular high school boy who isn't very concerned with grades. His life doesn't go the way he planned. He is devoted to Lucy's children. He is often lonely later in his life.

Inferential Comprehension

How did Ian feel about Lucy? How do you know?

He thought she was beautiful and probably felt himself guiltily attracted to her. He wished that Cicely would be more like her by wearing seamed stockings and acting more mature. Even after she died, he would think back to how pretty she was, and how she tempted him "like the Devil."

Constructing Meaning

What insight into human nature do we gain from *Saint Maybe*?

One event can change our lives forever. Guilt is a destroying emotion. It is difficult to forgive, as well as to be forgiven.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting This story begins in the 1960s, and most of the references to clothing styles and other fads are from this time period. Have the students research this decade to find out what styles and colors people wore, what type of slang was used, and the types of cars people drove. They should try to find pictures that would match what the main characters might have worn and how they wore their hair. They should think about what their tastes might have been like

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during the 1960s. Would they have matched anyone from the story?

Understanding Characterization The greatest influences in Ian's life are probably the Church of the Second Chance and Reverend Emmett. Have the students think about who and/or what has influenced them most during their lives. Do they wish they had never met this person or experienced this event? Do they think they have been a major influence in someone else's life?

Recognizing Feelings Ian's feelings of guilt become almost overwhelming until he decides to take care of Lucy's children and earn forgiveness. Ask the students if they have had a time when they felt guilty about something they have done or said. What did they do to get rid of the feeling? Have they ever told someone something only to regret it later? Ian decided not to tell Daphne that her boyfriend was cheating on her because of the way Danny reacted when he told him Lucy was being unfaithful. Do the students think this was a wise decision? Is Ian being selfish or wise? Is he saving Daphne's feelings or making life harder for her in the end?

Understanding Sequence In this story, the introduction of Lucy changes the lives of all the characters. Ask the students to write down a summary of all the major events from the story on pieces of paper. Then draw a line that signifies the length of the story. The students should shuffle their pieces of paper and place them along the time line, trying to put them in the correct order. Discuss how the story would be changed if some of the events were missing or put in a different order.