

## A Note to Students

This guide is for you — not just for your teacher. The questions here don't have one right answer. They're designed to help you think about Charlie's experience, your own experiences, and what you believe about friendship, fairness, and standing up for yourself. You can discuss these in class, write about them privately, or just sit with them. There's no wrong way to use this guide.

## PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING CHARLIE

### 1 Why does Charlie continue seeking Mark's approval, even after Mark has made his life miserable?

*Think about the moment Charlie opens the door. He hates Mark more than anyone — yet he listens. What does Charlie want so badly that he's willing to risk being hurt again?*

### 2 Charlie blames himself for “starting it” when he shrieked in English class. Is that a fair conclusion?

*He says, “I'd started it myself, and Mark ran with it.” Do you think Charlie really started it? How does this kind of self-blame help Mark stay in control?*

### 3 Why doesn't Charlie tell his mom about Charlie Day, even when things get really bad?

*He keeps everything secret — the brick wall, the bathroom attack, the blood on his hands. What fears are driving that decision? Have you ever kept something hard to yourself for similar reasons?*

### 4 Mark repeatedly tells Charlie he is “immature” and acting “like a baby.” How does this one word become a tool of control?

*Notice how Charlie starts using Mark's own language on himself: “Don't act like a baby,” he whispers to himself. What happens when someone convinces you to police yourself with their words?*

## PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING MARK

### 5 At the end of the book, Mark reveals he lost all his friends after slamming Charlie's head into the brick wall. Does this change how you feel about him?

*We find out Mark came to Charlie because he had no one else. Does that explain his behavior? Does it excuse it? Can someone be both a victim and a bully at the same time?*

### 6 Mark's dad calls him “stupid” in front of Charlie and yells “I'M IN CHARGE” at his own son. What does this scene tell you about where Mark learned his behavior?

*Charlie says, “It suddenly made sense why 'I'm in charge' triggered him.” Does understanding where bullying comes from make it easier to forgive?*

### PART THREE: TOXIC FRIENDSHIPS

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**7 What makes toxic friendships so difficult to recognize when you're inside them?**

*Mark gives Charlie posters, takes him to dinner with his family, and occasionally acts like a real friend. Why does the good stuff make the bad stuff harder to walk away from? What's the difference between a friend who challenges you and one who controls you?*

**8 Charlie gives up his pajamas, his stuffed animals, changes his shower habits, and even throws away his yogurt on Mark's orders. How does each small surrender make the next one easier?**

*Think about the frog in slowly heating water. Did Charlie notice each individual change happening to him? Is there a moment where you think he should have walked away?*

**9 Mark makes Charlie say, "I promise not to act like a baby" out loud at the frozen yogurt place — in front of other people. Why is a public humiliation like this especially effective as a form of control?**

*What does it feel like to be forced to say something you don't believe? How does that kind of moment change the way you see yourself?*

**10 Charlie's mom and Mark's parents are present through much of the story but miss what's really happening. What does this tell us about how well adults understand peer manipulation?**

*Charlie's mom even tells Mark that Charlie is "immature" — the same word Mark uses against him. How do you think that moment felt for Charlie? What would a more helpful adult response have looked like?*

### PART FOUR: THE KEY MOMENTS

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**11 Charlie rescues Max from the dumpster — covered in rotten food and dirty diapers. Why is this scene so important to the story?**

*Max was given to Charlie by both his parents before his father died. Mark doesn't know that. Does it matter that Mark didn't know? What does Charlie's choice to rescue Max tell us about what he's really protecting?*

**12 On the hike, Charlie grabs the branch from Mark after being whipped — and then accidentally slashes Mark's face. What would you have done in that moment?**

*Was Charlie wrong to grab the stick? What was he trying to do? How does this accidental injury change the rest of the story?*

**13 When Charlie finally has the power to destroy Mark in front of his parents, he says, "It was nothing." Why does he protect Mark — the person who tormented him for a year?**

*Charlie says he knew "right from wrong" — and his reason for staying quiet has nothing to do with forgiving Mark. He's protecting himself. What does that distinction tell you about who Charlie has become?*

**PART FIVE: FORGIVENESS, REVENGE, AND MOVING ON**

- 14** Charlie recites his Charlie Day list — thirty incidents from a single Friday, memorized in exact detail with timestamps. Why did he memorize it?

*He says he built the list “to build up my hatred and remind myself not to give up.” Can hatred be a survival tool? When does it help? When does it become a trap?*

- 15** When is forgiveness helpful, and when is it harmful?

*Charlie tells Mark “Not yet” — not “no,” but not “yes.” Is that forgiveness? What’s the difference between forgiving someone and trusting them again? Does someone have to earn forgiveness, or is it something you do for yourself?*

- 16** Charlie tells Mark: “You made me want to kill myself.” What makes Charlie finally say this out loud, and why does it matter that he does?

*He says it twice, slowly and directly. He’s not asking for an apology or trying to punish Mark — he’s naming the truth out loud for the first time. What does it feel like to finally say a hard thing you’ve been carrying alone?*

- 17** How does bullying affect the way a person sees themselves?

*Charlie describes himself as “not normal,” “pathetic,” and someone who “brought it on himself.” These aren’t Mark’s words anymore — they’re Charlie’s own. How does that happen? Have you ever adopted someone else’s harsh opinion of yourself?*

**PART SIX: YOUR THOUGHTS**

- 18** What would you have done differently than Charlie?

*Think of three specific moments where his story might have gone differently. Is it easy to know the “right” thing to do from the outside? What might have stopped you from doing it differently if you were in his position?*

- 19** The book ends with Charlie saying “Not yet.” What do you think happens next?

*Does Charlie eventually forgive Mark? Do they become friends again? Does Charlie thrive in high school while Mark struggles? Write the first paragraph of a Chapter 22.*

**A Final Question to Sit With**

Charlie says at the end: “I used to be so desperate to make a friend that I would do anything — or say anything. Or agree to anything. But that wasn’t me anymore.” What changed in Charlie over the course of the summer? And what do you think it means to truly know your own worth?