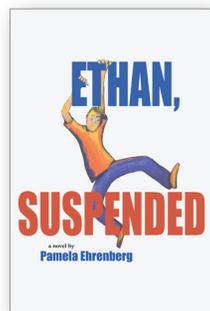


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PAMELA EHRENBERG grew up in a suburb of Baltimore, spent time in Philadelphia and western Maryland, and has lived in Washington, D.C., for ten years. She has taught seventh and eighth grade English at a Washington, D.C., junior high school and she currently serves as a consultant for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. She is also the author of the acclaimed novel *Ethan, Suspended* (Eerdmans). For more about the author, visit www.pamelaehrenberg.com.



ALSO BY PAMELA EHRENBERG



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Written by Pamela Ehrenberg

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TILLMON COUNTY FIRE

Written by Pamela Ehrenberg



I watched the fire for a while, and then: crack. The basement window split, a long spidery crack at first, then all the pieces flew out in a pop that made me step back several steps.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Diversity
- ❖ Peer pressure
- ❖ Tolerance/acceptance
- ❖ Individuality
- ❖ Making choices
- ❖ Disability/autism
- ❖ Family relationships
- ❖ Sexual orientation

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
Discussion Guide

VOCABULARY

Look up the following words in the dictionary: enlightening, obligated, stamina, monotony, stoic.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Based on the title and the picture on the book cover, what do you think the book is about? Do you think the fire will be arson or an accident? Why?

2. Sometimes people judge others without knowing them, basing their decisions on superficial things, such as the way someone looks, dresses, or talks. Think about a time when you judged someone too quickly. How did you change as a result of this experience?

3. In this book, some of the characters have to make tough decisions. Have you ever had to make a difficult decision? Write about it in a journal entry.



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. What is Tillmon County like? What kind of people live there? How do those people feel about the rest of the world and the people in it? How is Tillmon County similar to or different from where you live?

2. How does Albert interact with the world differently than other people do? What are some of the challenges of being close with someone who has Albert's way of seeing things? What are some of the rewards?

3. Foreshadowing is when an author presents clues about events yet to occur. How does the author foreshadow Aiden's involvement in the fire? How does she foreshadow Albert's involvement?

4. An internal conflict is one which occurs inside a character's heart or mind. Which characters undergo internal conflicts? What are those conflicts? Are they able to solve them? If so, how? Create a chart listing the characters' names, the conflicts they face, and the solutions they find.

5. On page 134, Cait says, *But I know more than most people about not-knowing for as long as possible, about choosing to stay in a comfortable darkness you can never return to once you decide to Know. And about how not-knowing is a kind of knowing, too.* What does Cait mean by "not-knowing"? Why does Cait know more about not-knowing than most people? Why do you think she capitalized the "K" in Know? How can not-knowing be a kind of knowing?

6. Why do you think the author included the postscript? What do you learn about Aiden? What connection is the author trying to make between the characters of Rebekah and Aiden?



ACTIVITIES

1. Each character in the book has a unique writing style and presentation. Amelia writes in an informal font and doesn't use proper capitalization. Rob writes in a poetic style, making use of stanzas and short line lengths. What would your style and presentation look like? Create a journal entry about your hometown, choosing a font and style that reflects your personality.

2. Everyone knows about everyone and everything in Tillmon County. While some characters can't wait to leave it, others learn to appreciate the close-knit environment. With a group of students, debate the quality of life one experiences living in a small town versus living in a large city. What types of opportunities are available in each? What is the cost of living? How do people relate to one another in each environment?

3. Reflecting on the fire and its consequences, Jeremy asks, "Does anyone act alone?" (page 157). Individually or in a group, develop a creative response to the themes of identity, diversity, and connectedness that come up in this book. Options might include writing a poem; painting or illustrating a scene; making a collage using images from the book or of diverse elements from your own community; or writing and performing a song, rap, or public service announcement. Present the responses to the rest of the class.