

Common Sense Media
Whirligig Book Review
Book review by Matt Berman

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

Parents need to know that even without much action, this beautifully thoughtful book is enthralling to many young adults. It's a powerful, complex tale of guilt and redemption that may inspire in kids a desire to create their own whirligigs, and to explore the country. Parents need to revolve around the main character's attempt to kill himself while driving drunk, which results in the death of another person.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Brent begins his second life the night he kills a girl.

Desperately chasing junior-class popularity, Brent gets drunk at a party and is humiliated in front of all his classmates. Driving home in a fog he decides to commit suicide by driving into oncoming traffic. But the ensuing accident kills a girl in the other car instead.

As a form of restitution, the girl's mother asks that Brent travel to the four corners of the United States--Maine, Washington, California, and Florida--to build and set up whirligigs that display her daughter's face. So Brent sets off to travel the country with a bus pass and a bag of tools.

In alternating chapters, Fleischman tells of Brent's odyssey of guilt and self-discovery, and of the surprising effects his creations have on others, often years later.

TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT ...

- Families can talk about consequences. When Brent is first sentenced, does his punishment seem serious or does he seem to get off easy?
- Can you think of something you've done impulsively that had unintended consequences affecting someone else?
- Families can also talk about teen depression. Have you or anyone you know ever felt like Brent at the beginning of the story?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS...

- How do decisions and actions lead to outcomes and consequences?
- What do we learn by listening, learning, teaching, creating?
- How can our legacy positively impact the world?