

The **Death** and *Life* of **Benny Brooks**

ETHAN LONG BOOK CLUB GUIDE

About the Book

Benny's life is slowly unraveling. His parents are newly divorced, his mom chooses to move away, and Benny and his brother and sister are left with their chain-smoking dad, who has just been diagnosed with lung cancer. Benny is lonely, anxious, and very angry. He can't sleep at night and spends his days trying to survive fifth grade. Writing from a personal place, Ethan Long sheds light on the challenges of growing up amidst family turmoil and finding hope in hard times.

Discussion Questions

1. When Benny feels sad and angry, he says the easiest thing to do is “swallow it all down” (p. 5). How does this approach affect him throughout the story?
2. In the book we see Benny's drawings. How do they contribute to the story? What do they tell you about Benny and his version of events?
3. How would you describe Benny's relationships with his various family members? How do those relationships change throughout the book?
4. When he first learns that he'll be going to therapy, Benny is upset. How does his opinion on therapy change throughout the book? How does therapy help him?
5. How do Benny's struggles affect his friendships? How does Theo keep showing up for him throughout the book?
6. Many nights Benny has trouble with falling asleep and strange dreams. Why do you think that is? How does he work to overcome it? Has this ever happened to you? What did you do?
7. After he learns his dad only has months to live, Benny says, “It's extremely hard going through life looking through a peephole” (p. 191). What does he mean? How do you see it represented in the story?
8. When Benny starts crying at school, he thinks, “Nothing can help me” (p. 206). Is that true? What people and strategies help Benny in the story?
9. Throughout the book, Benny spends a lot of time looking at or imagining clouds. What do the clouds symbolize for him? Do clouds symbolize anything for you?
10. How has Benny changed by the end of the book?

