



Spin Cycles

Reading Guide

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Preliminary Remarks

- The following assignments offer tasks and activities from which the teacher or students can choose.
- Many tasks are suitable for talks or presentations to the class.
- Some tasks overlap with others.
- The material can be edited and students may copy instructions, questions, and answers into their exercise books.

About the Book

Brilliant, homeless and nearly invisible, a young man wanders through Boston, looking for meaning and hope. Extreme mood swings and an unusual outlook on life make it impossible for him to thrive in mainstream society. He finds comfort in laundromats, where he calms himself by watching clothes tumble round and round and round. And in the streets he finds other people like himself, below the radar, laboring to survive. Poignant and buoyant, **Spin Cycles** is a story of loss, discovery, and, just possibly, redemption.

About the Author

Charles Coe is author of two books of poetry: **All Sins Forgiven: Poems for my Parents** and **Picnic on the Moon**, both published by Leapfrog Press. His poetry has appeared in a number of literary reviews and anthologies, including *Poesis*, *The Mom Egg*, *Solstice Literary Review*, and *Urban Nature*. Charles was selected by the Associates of the Boston Public Library as a "Boston Literary Light for 2014."

Pre-Reading Questions

COVER:

The cover depicts a skewed image of a dryer. What does it mean?

TITLE:

When paired with the cover, **Spin Cycle** seems to be a reference to washing machines. How are the words “spin” and “cycle” different when they are on their own?

Activities While Reading

SETTING:

This novel has several settings located in Boston, Massachusetts. The main character is homeless. Using the Internet or other sources, do some research on homelessness in Boston. What is the size of the homeless community? What resources are available to the homeless in Boston? Now, think about your own community and do the same.

THEME:

This is a story told through the point of view of a homeless individual. Write down your ideas of homelessness. What kinds of people do you think live on the streets?

CHAPTER SUMMARIES:

Write a brief (two to three sentence) chapter summary tracking the main character’s journey throughout Boston and the people he meets.

Post-Reading Questions

SETTING:

The main character of this novel finds comfort in the beauty of the Charles River. Can you say why a river has this effect?

CHARACTER:

When we first meet our narrator, is there any indications of his mental state? If so, what are they?

Describe our protagonist's relationship with his parents. How does he fail his parent's expectations? How do they fail his expectations?

What role does King Leonard play in our main character's life?

How does our narrator learn to live without King Leonard?

How do you think "regular society" treats people like the narrator in the story? Why?

POINT OF VIEW:

The main character suffers from some type of mental illness. Do you think that this affects the way he tells his story? If yes, how so?

THEME:

Spin Cycles tells the story of being an outsider. What is it about our narrator that makes him different from those around him?

Think about how society deals with mental illness. Then, think about how the narrator disproves certain stereotypes of mental unbalance. What do you think should be done to help him?

TITLE:

Now that you have finished the book, what do you think could be the broader meaning of the term **Spin Cycles**?

SUMMARY:

Write a 90 to 100-word summary of our unnamed protagonist's journey.

BOOK CRITIQUE:

Explain what you liked or did not like about **Spin Cycles**. You can use specific passages to prove your point.

Did **Spin Cycles** change the way you think about homelessness? If so, in what way?

WRITING ACTIVITY:

Write a short story from the point of view of King Leonard. Describe how he became homeless and what led him to his park bench.