

Stay with Me

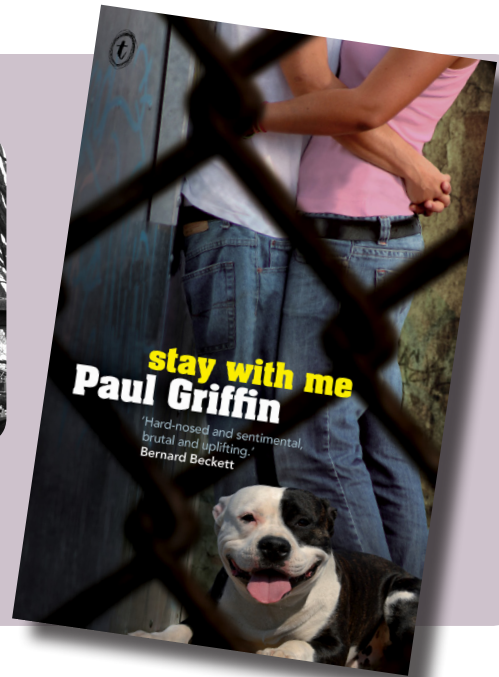
Paul Griffin

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Fiction, paperback

Recommended for secondary students



Praise for Paul Griffin and *Stay with Me*

'Every now and then a writer comes along who combines great storytelling skills with a real gift for prose. Lee Child...Elmore Leonard: these are the guys to whom Paul Griffin will surely be compared one day. Griffin writes with true grace.' Scott Smith

'A well-written and touching story, *Stay With Me* tugged at my heartstrings. This realistic coming of age book has a compelling story, vivid characters, and lovable rescue dogs. I was hooked on this emotional story immediately and found it to be a moving and inspiring read.'
Library Thing Early Reviewers

Praise for *Ten Mile River*

'Tom and Huck for a new era, a new generation. This book's got balls and beauty in equal measure.'
Phillip Gwynne

'I love the rough and tumble of Ray and José's relationship. I've never been to Ten Mile River but this story about the curse of brotherhood rings true.'
Scot Gardner

'A striking debut...The language is tough but convincing, the setting authentic, the characters memorable and their struggles played out with a complexity that respects the audience's intelligence.'
Publishers Weekly

'The most powerful feature of the book is the friendship between the boys, captured in all its contradictions... The loyalty that is so often portrayed as wholly positive has its downfalls here. This and the open ending are just two of the complexities that raise *Ten Mile River* above the ordinary. ...grittily credible.' *The Age*

Synopsis

Sometimes love is found in the strangest places. When it finds Céce and Mack, they seem an unlikely pair, yet the two teens play to each other's strengths and weaknesses and they appear to be the perfect fit.

Stay With Me offers a raw look at life through the eyes of narrators Céce (pronounced Cee Cee) and Mack. Both work at the Vic Two restaurant. Both have alcoholic parents. But while Céce has a chance to change her life through education, Mack seems destined to slide further into a darker place.

Mack is a slow learner, so his peers and most adults have branded him 'stupid'. Céce, a straight-A student, sees beyond this label. She is drawn to Mack's gentle nature and has no idea of the anger that he struggles against and which will eventually be his downfall.

Céce and Mack, along with Boo, his pit bull dog, find a piece of heaven in their brief time together. The two of them share their hopes and dreams and struggle to make sense of their world, which can sometimes be harsh and unforgiving.

When Mack snaps and commits a crime that earns him a life sentence, Céce cannot see a way forward. But life does go on; Céce will take the entrance exam again. Tony, her brother, will come to terms with his war injuries. And Mack, with the help of a jail guard, will finally find a place in the world where he can use his skills as a dog-trainer and offer a better life to injured soldiers.

This is a story about hope and fighting the odds. It's about taking a chance to get to know someone and finding the beauty and honesty that lies within them. Along with the hardship and the injustice comes a story full of humour, passion and wishes that come true. *Stay With Me* leaves the reader uplifted.

A perfect book for teens.

About the Author

When he's not writing, Paul Griffin works as a teacher, mostly with at-risk kids in high schools and juvenile detention centres throughout New York City, where he lives with his wife and his pit bull dogs. His first novel, *Ten Mile River*, is published by Text.

Themes

- Love
- Friendship
- Isolation
- Loss
- Belonging
- Lies
- Conflict
- Family
- Grief
- Identity
- Violence

Discussion questions

1. *She only stops when he stops, and she (Boo, the dog) leans against his leg. He can't get her to quit following him.*
'Instead of wait, try stay.'
'You can use whatever word you want, so long as you use the same word every time.'
'Stay is better.' (p.93)
Discuss the title of this book and what it might refer to.
2. *This is my secret place, the graveyard. The people who owned this land before they gave it to the city are buried here. Ten crypts, all worn by rain and mossed over. Nobody comes to visit them except me, and they let me sip the quiet. I lie back in the high grass and watch the hot wind punch it, and the dogs settle in around me.* (Mack, p.43)
This story is told by two narrators — Mack and Céce. Examine the characterisation of both narrators and discuss by looking at speech patterns, vocabulary and content, how the author creates two distinct voices.
3. *'Ten letters, second is e, to make a net or network,' Vic mumbles over his puzzle.*
'Reticulate,' I say.
'Atta girl.' Vic licks his pencil and scribbles it in. (p. 22)
Vic is constantly working on his crossword puzzle, throwing out clues and asking for answers. What is his role in the story? Discuss.

4. *'There's all this slamming into the wall. Sheetrock breaking. And I was afraid to go out there. Afraid to see it. To hear it. I turned on my little radio Mom got me for my birthday. I rolled that tuning dial back and forth and found nothing but static...so I rolled the volume all the way up and held the radio to my head to deafen myself with the hissing.'* (p. 270)

Before each of Mack's violent episodes, his head is filled with 'static'. Explain how his past links with these episodes. Mack relies on Céce to 'turn down the static'. Discuss whether this is a good or bad strategy.

5. *'He totally looks like Matt Dillon from The Outsiders.'* (p. 17)

S.E. Hinton was only 16 when her book *The Outsiders* was published in 1967. A film adaptation of the book, produced in 1983, is mentioned several times throughout the text. If you haven't already read it, give it a go, or read a synopsis of the book online and discuss why the author might have included it in his story.

6. *Why can't folks just leave folks alone? Serious, why do they always need to mess with you?* (p. 46)

Violence is a constant theme throughout the story. Note the various forms it takes. Is there justification for the use of violence at any time? Discuss.

7. *'No, Ma. You don't get it. He makes me feel like I can be somebody else.'* (p. 103)

Both Mack and Céce seek personal change through being with each other. Can personal development occur through outside influences or does it come from within? Discuss.

8. *I turn the corner, and my old man is out on the stoop with his lady friend, and they're good and twisted already...* (p 79)

Mack's father and Céce's mother are both alcoholics, yet are depicted quite differently. How have their actions, when under the influence of alcohol, impacted on the lives of their children?

9. *There's no cells in there. Just bunches of cots lumped in raggedy rows...Going into the tent alone? Not having somebody inside? I feel like a bait dog about to get chucked into the pit.* (p 134)

Mack may not be socially adept with humans, but he has a way with dogs, especially pit bulls. Discuss how the author has used pit bulls as an analogy for Mack as a character.

10. *Me and Ma are running food to our tables and Marcy's because my girl doesn't do too well when we get busy. Vic's whomping garlic and tossing it into Anthony's pans, ten going at once...I'll always remember this...Doesn't sound like much of a moment, but I have a feeling this might be the last time we're all together like this.* (p. 50)
- Both Mack and Céce come from dysfunctional families, yet there is a strong sense of community within the restaurant Vic Two. What is family? How is it shown to be more than just biological ties?
11. *Boo's upset because he's upset. She wiggles next to him and nudges his hand with her snout, but he won't pet her. I reach out to Boo.*
- 'Don't,' Mack says. 'Wait till she's not scared. If you pet her when she's scared, you're rewarding her fear. My mom taught me that.'* (p. 95)
- This lesson about training dogs is a metaphor for how Mack has experienced life before working at the Vic Two restaurant. Discuss.
12. *I'm just getting to know him, and Boston gets released, of course. He gives me a scrap with his number on it.*
- 'That's my moms's house. For when you get out. You can come live with us. She's a little mean, but she cooks pretty good.'* (p. 154)
- Mack looks after Boston in jail, but when Mack reaches out to Boston on the outside, the ex-con's attitude to Mack has changed. Discuss.
13. *Wash says, 'What're you going to call this one?'*
- 'Boo.'*
- This Boo dog is just running circles around me, teasing me to play with her. I say, 'Boo, stay.'*
- Tell you what? She stays.* (p. 288)
- Mack befriends stray dogs throughout his life and cares for them and trains them before finding a good home for them. He names all of these dogs the same name — Boo. How does the character of Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird* tie in with the idea of the pit bull dogs called Boo? Why do you think Mack always calls them the same name? What effect might it have had if the author had chosen a different name for Mack's latest dog at the end of the book?
14. Each chapter is a countdown to 102 days — a figure mentioned at the start of the book. Why do you think the author has used this device? What effect does it have on you, the reader?
15. *I'm heading out of the hutch when this old stoop-back crank Larry comes up to the roof to hang his wet sheets...*
- 'You better not have another dog in there. I'll call the cops.'* (p. 46)
- Rewrite this scene from Larry's point of view. When Mack bashes Larry, does Larry get what he deserves? Discuss.
16. *'When I was nine. When that dog bit me in the alley that time. When it bit me in the face? I wasn't alone.'* (p. 263)
- Céce lives with the guilt of Marcy's damaged arm sustained after an incident that occurred when they were both nine years old. How has this guilt affected Céce's life? Should she feel guilty?
17. If you had to describe this book to a potential reader, what words would you use? 'Uplifting', 'tragedy'...? Discuss.