

EVERY MISSING PIECE



Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: Grades 3 - 7

Publisher: Little, Brown Books
for Young Readers

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About the book:

Maddy Gaines sees danger everywhere she looks: at the bus stop, around the roller rink, in the woods, and (especially) by the ocean. When Maddy meets a mysterious boy setting booby traps in the North Carolina woods, she suspects he is Billy Holcomb--the boy who went missing in the fall.

As Maddy tries to uncover the truth about Billy Holcomb, ghosts from her own past surface, her best friend starts to slip away, and Maddy's world tilts once again. Can she put the pieces of her life back together, even if some of them are lost forever?

About the author—Melanie Conklin:

Melanie Conklin grew up in North Carolina and worked as a product designer for ten years before she began her writing career. Her debut middle grade novel, *COUNTING THYME*, is a Bank Street Best Children's Book, winner of the International Literacy Association Teacher's Choice Award, and nominated to four state reading lists. Her second novel for young readers, *EVERY MISSING PIECE*, published with Little, Brown in May, 2020. When she's not writing, Melanie spends her time doodling and dreaming up new ways to be creative. She lives in New Jersey with her family. Connect with her on twitter [@MLConklin](https://twitter.com/MLConklin)



Pre-Reading Discussion:

- Author Melanie Conklin's dedication for *EVERY MISSING PIECE* reads, "For my father, one of the good guys." Explain what it means to be a "good guy". Consider how this phrase might connect with aspects of the story.
- Define the words anxiety and curiosity. Are these feelings related in any way? Explain your answer.
- After studying the illustration on the book cover, predict what *EVERY MISSING PIECE* is going to be about.

Post-Reading Discussion:

This time Stan did switch off the radio, plunging us into awkward silence. For some reason, the missing boy made me think of Dad.

*Only my father
didn't disappear.*

He died (8).

- Identify Maddy's obsessive character traits. Explain reasons why she constantly worries about safety issues.
- Consider her mother's response to Maddy's apprehension about seemingly trivial concerns. What does the mother's patience reveal about her character?
- Notice that, in the scene referenced above, it is Stan, Maddy's new stepfather, who takes initiative to turn off the radio news reporting about the missing boy. Explore reasons why this action is significant.
- Justify Maddy's obsession regarding the missing boy. Why is solving the mystery of his identity important to her?

“Exactly. What we know to be true depends entirely on our point of view.” I looked at him watching the sky through his glasses, and for a few moments, the barrier lifted. Not enough to go away forever, but enough to stand there together, staring at the stars (60).

- Examine situations in the story in which Maddy’s initial perceptions of individuals or situations were proven to be mistaken. Why does she react in this way?
- Regarding Eric’s identity, Maddy’s insight was proven to be correct. Why is this significant to the story?
- A barrier is defined as being a blockade, an obstacle, and an obstruction. Maddy frequently refers to experiencing an invisible “barrier” when interacting with Stan. What does she mean by this? Who is responsible for establishing this invisible barrier – Stan or Maddy? Explain your answer.

Before I could figure out what to say next, Diesel Jessup’s father charged around the trailer with a shotgun in his hands. He ran in front of Kelsey and Eric and started to lift the gun (84).

- Analyze the events that occurred in this scene. Why would Mr. Jessup resort to using a firearm as a threat against Stan?
- Who is Bob? Why is he significant to the story?
- Though being completely caught off guard, Stan responds to Mr. Jessup’s ambush in calm, forgiving manner. What does this reaction reveal about Stan’s character?
- Who is the “good guy” in this scene? Explain your answer.

“Love can do both,” Mom said. “It hurts and it heals. You have to risk one to gain the other. But I have never regretted loving someone” (100).

- The word risk means danger, jeopardize, and to face danger. Determine how being willing to take risks is contrary to Maddy’s true nature.
- Explore how Maddy’s curiosity about Eric’s true identity was transformed into genuine care and friendship.
- Discuss how Maddy’s judgmental point of view regarding Stan, Eric, Diesel, and Mr. Jessup shifted as she learned the truth about their characters.
- Explain how love and friendship became the missing pieces that helped to heal Maddy’s feelings of grief and loss.

Writing Activity:

Write an essay examining the phrase “good guy” as it relates to the story and in your own life. Determine the attributes required for an individual to be described as a good guy. Consider how good guys are often defined by quiet consistency and great kindness. Share your work with the class.

Activity: Character Analysis

Using the Character Analysis template on the following page as a guide, analyze how Maddy’s experience with the characters featured brought about a change within her. Identify Maddy’s initial perception, a defining moment that revealed their true character, and the change that occurred in her character. Cite a reference in the text that validates your observation. Discuss your perceptions with your classmates.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:

Reading Literature: RL.1, RL.2, RL.3, RL.4, RL.7, RL.10 Writing: W.2, W.3, W.4, W.7
Speaking & Listening: SL.1, SL.2, SL.4, SL.6



Character Analysis Activity Worksheet

STAN

Maddy's initial perception of Stan	Defining moment or experience	Brought about this change in Maddy
Citation in text		Citation in text

○

○

ERIC

Maddy's initial perception of Eric	Defining moment or experience	Brought about this change in Maddy
Citation in text		Citation in text

○

○

DIESEL

Maddy's initial perception of Diesel	Defining moment or experience	Brought about this change in Maddy
Citation in text		Citation in text

○

○

DAD

Maddy's initial perception of Dad	Defining moment or experience	Brought about this change in Maddy
Citation in text		Citation in text

