

## Teacher's notes

# The Body

by Stephen King



## SUMMARY

**T**he *Body* is quite different from most of Stephen King's other work, in that it is not a horror story – although it does contain one or two nasty moments. It was originally published as part of a collection of tales called *Different Seasons* (1982), a book in which King wished to show the different side of his imagination.

The semi-autobiographical story concerns four young boys, growing up in a poorer area of Maine, in the Northeastern corner of the United States. It is set in 1960. The boys, Gordie Lachance, Vein Tessio, Chris Chambers and Teddy Duchamp, are all about to turn thirteen. When they hear about the death of another boy, who was walking in the forest miles from his home, they can't resist the temptation to go and look for his body, though they know the journey will be long and dangerous. The adventure becomes a turning point in all their lives, as they face the dangers and wonders of the forest, and some of the bigger questions of their lives to come.

Full of the atmosphere of a teenage summer, *The Body* is both an adventure story and a portrait of four boys on the first step of their journey into adulthood.

## ABOUT STEPHEN KING

Stephen King is the highest-earning author in the world. Since selling his first book in 1973, he has published over thirty novels, of which there are more than 150 million copies in print. He earns \$2 million a month from book sales and film returns. All this was achieved from poor beginnings and King's is a success story that could itself have come from the pages of fiction.

He was born in 1947 in Portland, Maine, the American state where *The Body* is set. His father, a merchant seaman, deserted the family in 1950, and Stephen and his brother David were raised alone by their mother. Early on in life, King became addicted to radio horror tales and science fiction films. According to one report, he was 'oversized and ungainly' as a boy and 'predictably chosen last' in team games. At high school, he began to write stories, and at the University of Maine took creative writing courses. He had already sold short stories to magazines before he graduated in 1970.

After college, King worked in a launderette until he found a teaching position. From 1971 to 1973, while he taught at a secondary school in Hampden, Maine, he continued to write, often in the school's boiler room, with a child's desk against his knees. By then he was married (to Tabitha Spruce, whom he had met at university), had a child and was weighed down with bills. But in 1973 he sold his first novel, *Carrie*. When his publishers, Doubleday, told him that paperback rights to the book had been sold for \$400,000, he was freed from teaching and able to devote himself full-time to writing.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Many of the ingredients that now characterize what we think of as a Stephen King novel can be found in *Carrie*: small-town New England, usually thought of as a quiet, conventional part of America, becomes the arena for a battle of good versus evil. Psychic powers or some supernatural creature – or both – cause a series of horrible events in what was an ordinary, sleepy town.

In fact, New England – where some of the first European settlements in North America were established, in the 17th century – is no stranger to the supernatural. When most of America was still the home of so-called Indian 'savages', the fragile colonial settlements lived in fear of the wildness beyond its fences. The forests became a symbol of evil and the unknown – the horror of untamed nature. (The Puritan colonists' fear of nature was a theme in the writings of another New Englander, Nathaniel Hawthorne.)

In 1960, the year in which *The Body* is set, the New England forests were still quite extensive. Since then, the city suburbs and roads have forced them back, but in 1960, according to King (writing in *The Body*) 'it was still possible to walk into the woods and lose your direction and die there'.

The mysteries of these forests play a large part in *The Body*, since it is there that the four young heroes of the book decide to go to undertake their life-changing quest. As they travel further from civilization, the boys are have to rely on their own personal resources, and must grow up to face what comes. However, as well as terrors and the harsh realities of life, the wilderness reveals its secret

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wonders. Their journey to see another boy's dead body becomes a journey out of innocence.

*The Body* is set at the beginning of a decade in which America, too, was shaken out of its innocence. 1960 was the year that John F Kennedy was elected president, on a wave of optimism. But only three years later, the youthful promise that he symbolized to so many was ended when he was shot. The shock of Kennedy's assassination was tremendous. Many Americans were confused by the seeming irrationality of the event. From 1962 onwards, the American military increased its presence in Vietnam – leading to the most disastrous foreign military involvement in American history. But at the same time protests against the war grew in strength as America's youth grew in a new self-confidence. Those who entered their teenage years in the sixties were entering an era when the culture and values of the young would be totally different from those of their parents.

*The Body* was filmed in 1986 as 'Stand By Me' – with the late River Phoenix as Chris Chambers.

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

### ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Stephen King is famous for his horror stories. This story has elements of horror and is based on his childhood. Put students into groups. Ask them to discuss what things they think may have happened in his childhood that made him into a writer of horror stories.

### ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

#### Chapters 1–7

Put students into small groups to discuss these questions:

- The opening sentence of the book is: 'The most important things are the hardest things to say.' Is this the same for children and for adults?
- What kind of relationship does each of the boys have with his family? How might this affect their behaviour generally? How might it affect their behaviour during the course of this story?

#### Chapters 8–11

Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss:

- the significance of 'that moment' described on page 15, when the writer (Gordie) is standing on the bank looking down at the railway track.
- daring things they remember doing from their childhood.

### Chapters 12–15

- The experience on the bridge is a terrifying moment. Put students into small groups. Ask them to describe their own most terrifying moments.
- Put students into pairs. They are Gordie and Chris. They role-play the continuation of the conversation about education and friends which they don't finish at the end of Chapter 13.

### Chapters 16–20

- We learn that Chris, Vein and Teddy are going to die young. Ask students in small groups to guess how each of them might die.
- Put students into groups of four. Ask them to imagine a conversation the young boys have six months later. They role-play the conversation. They are being completely honest and they say how they felt when they discovered the body.

### Chapters 21–27

- When they get back, Gordie would probably like to tell Chris that he loves him, but he can't manage to do it. Ask students to discuss the following:
  - Is this because they are both boys?
  - Would things be different for two boys today?
- In the same groups as for question 1 in Chapters 16–20, students compare their predictions with what actually happened.

### ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Put students into small groups. They discuss the effects of the adventure on the boys' friendships. Would things have been different if they hadn't had the adventure?

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

#### Chapters 1–7

- backpack** (n) a large bag that you carry on your back when you go walking  
**dump** (n) a place where unwanted waste is taken  
**garbage** (n) rubbish  
**guy** (n) (informal) man  
**hail** (n) balls of frozen rain  
**puke** (v) (slang) to be sick  
**pussy** (n) (in this context) a coward  
**tracks** (n) the lines of metal that a train runs on

#### Chapters 8–11

- ass** (n) (slang) a person's bottom  
**worm** (n) a small soft animal without legs that lives in earth

#### Chapters 12–15

- bog** (n) soft, wet ground

#### Chapters 16–20

- deer** (n) a beautiful, quite large animal that lives in forests  
**leech** (n) a small soft animal that sticks to an animal's skin to drink its blood

#### Chapters 21–27

- cartridge** (n) a tube containing explosive material and a bullet for a gun



## Student's activities

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These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

- What do you know about Stephen King? Answer these questions, then look in the Introduction in the book to see if you were right.
  - What kind of stories are most of Stephen King's books?
  - Which country does he come from?
  - What year was he born?
    - 1913
    - 1947
    - 1963
    - 1970
- The story in *The Body* takes place in America in 1960. How much do you know about America? Answer these questions.
  - Who became president of the USA in 1960, and was murdered in Dallas, Texas in 1963?
  - In which part of the USA is the state of Maine?
  - In which century did the first European settlers go to the USA?

### Activities while reading the book

#### CHAPTERS 1-7

##### Chapters 1-4

- Complete these notes about the story. Look back through Chapters 1-4 if you need to.
  - The story happens in a town called ..... in the state of .....
  - It begins on a Friday in the month of ..... in the year .....
  - The weather is ..... and .....
  - There are ..... or ..... 'regulars' in the boys' gang.
  - When the boys talk about the dead body, there are ..... of them in the tree-house.
  - The story-teller's first name is .....
- Match these descriptions with the boys' names.
 

The story-teller	wears glasses.
Teddy	has a father who drinks.
Chris	is like Teddy - not very intelligent.
Vein	has not been home much this summer.
- Shut your book and try to answer these questions. Check your answers in the book.
  - What is the name of the boy who died?

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- Who tells the tree-house boys about the body?
- How long ago did the dead boy disappear?
- What had the boy been doing when he disappeared?

#### Chapters 5-7

- Write the second names of each of the four 'tree-house' boys.
 

Gordie .....

Chris .....

Vein .....

Teddy .....
- The sentences below are all about Chris or Gordie. Close your book. Write the correct name.
  - ..... spent a lot of time alone when he was younger.
  - ..... was once accused of stealing money from the school.
  - ..... had an older brother called Denny, who was killed.
  - ..... doesn't like drinking alcohol.
  - ..... is the strongest and bravest boy in the gang.
- What do you think is going to happen during the boys' search for the body? Discuss your ideas with two other students.

#### CHAPTERS 8-11

##### Chapters 8 & 9

Put these events in the correct order.

- The boys reach the dump.
- The boys throw coins to see who will go and get some food.
- Teddy turns to face the train that is coming towards them.
- Gordie goes to buy some food.
- The boys see how much money they have got altogether.
- The boys drink water from the tap.
- Gordie pulls Teddy to the top of the bank and pushes him over the edge.

##### Chapters 10 & 11

- Answer the following questions.
  - What surprises the boys about Milo's dog, Chopper?
  - What happened on the beaches of Normandy, France? Why was Teddy's father there?

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- (c) What does Gordie say to stop Milo threatening them?
- 2 Which boy do all these adjectives describe?  
*brave, strong, hard, thoughtful, caring, understanding, affectionate*

**CHAPTERS 12-15****Chapters 12 & 13**

- 1 Join these beginnings and ends of sentences with *because* or *so*.
- (a) Teddy is very excited  
(b) Chris dares Gordie to cross the bridge  
(c) Gordie puts his hand on the railway track  
(d) The boys are out of the heat of the sun  
(e) Chris thinks he and Gordie won't be friends next year
- (i) they don't mind the insects too much.  
(ii) Chris has to go across first.  
(iii) the bridge is dangerous.  
(iv) they are going to study on different courses.  
(v) he wants to know if a train is coming.

- 2 Work with a partner.  
Describe Chris's character. Write a paragraph.

**Chapters 14 & 15**

- 1 Talk to another student.
- (a) What do you think it is that the boys hear screaming in the night?  
(b) Do you think that taking turns to keep guard the best thing to do? What would you have done in this situation?
- 2 Close your books. In Gordie's dream, who
- (a) is in the water?  
(b) is playing with plastic buckets?  
(c) is lying on her back in a grey suit?  
(d) starts repeating a poem?  
(e) pulls Chris under the water?  
(f) doesn't try to save Chris?

**CHAPTERS 16-20****Chapters 16 & 17**

- 1 Answer these questions.
- (a) Why doesn't Gordie tell anyone about the deer? Why does he think it is the best part of the trip?  
(b) The writer talks about his 'first day in the forest in Vietnam'. What happened in Vietnam and why was the writer there?
- 2 Use the information in Chapter 17 to describe leeches and what they do.
- 3 Talk to another student.

What do you think is going to happen from now until the end of the story? Look back at your answers to question 3 in Chapters 5-7. Have your ideas changed?

**Chapters 18-20**

- 1 Who says these things? Try to remember, without looking at the book.
- (a) 'What are we going to do now?'  
(b) 'It's still closer if we can carry on. Let's go.'  
(c) 'THERE! THERE HE IS! I SEE HIM!'  
(d) 'What have we got here?'
- 2 Close your book. In your own words, describe as much as you can remember about the body. Then compare your description with other people's.

**CHAPTERS 21-27****Chapters 21-24**

- 1 Discuss these questions with another student.
- (a) Why do Gordie, Chris, Vein and Teddy feel so angry with Ace and his gang? Can you understand this?  
(b) Why does Chris change his mind about taking the body back?  
(c) Why has Gordie thought so much about finding the bucket?  
(d) How do Gordie and Chris feel when they say goodbye? Why? Have you ever felt like this at the end of an adventure? Do you think Chris really feels as if he 'didn't have a care in the world'?
- 2 We know that Chris, Vein and Teddy die young, but guess what will happen to each of the four boys before they die. Will they go to university? What jobs will they do?

**Chapters 25-27**

- 1 How do you feel when you read about what the boys' parents say when the boys get back from the trip? Why do you feel this?
- 2 Did you guess correctly about what would happen to the four boys?

**Activities after reading the book**

At the end of the story, we learn what happened to Chris, Vein and Teddy. Look back at page 51. The writer says: 'They say the effect of events can grow larger and larger as the years pass, so who knows? If we hadn't walked along the tracks maybe Chris and Teddy and Vein would still be alive today.'

What do you think the writer means? What could it be about what happened to Chris, Vein and Teddy that was linked to the adventure in this book? Discuss your ideas with other students.



The Body is an American experimental metal duo formed in 1999 in Providence, Rhode Island and composed of Chip King (guitar, vocals) and Lee Buford (drums, programming). As of 2019, they have released six studio albums as well as a number of other records. Drummer Lee Buford started the band with hometown friend Chip King after one year of school at the Museum School in Boston and moving to Manhattan in a four-month stint with Blue Man Group. They released their eponymous first full-length in 2004 the body O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, Judge of the Earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve., released 19 October 2018 1. Voice of Passion 2. Only I, Only I 3. No Shadow/No Strength 4. Exist No More 5. The Dawn and the Dark 6. Impossible Past 7. Fear of Burial 8. As We Were No Longer recorded Oct. 13th and 14th in Portland,Or. engineered and mixed by Robert Comitz at Stop/Start Studios additional drums by Zachary Jones. At The Body Shop, weâ€™re committed to tackling the plastic crisis differently. Not using plastic is not the only answer. If used responsibly it can be sustainable, so we need to show love for the plastic that we do use. Discover how weâ€™re fighting for people and the planet with Community Trade recycled plastic from Bengaluru, India. [READ MORE](#). Have you signed up for our exclusive offers? Please correct the following errors.