



2005

The Sledding Hill

Laura Wadley

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Crutcher, Chris. *The Sledding Hill*. Greenwillow, 2005. ISBN 0060502436.
\$15.99. 240 p.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Censorship--Juvenile Fiction; Death--Juvenile Fiction; Book--Reviews;

Eddie Profitt loses his father and his best friend Billy in the same terrible year, so he stops speaking. Luckily Billy is still hanging around in the sweet, pain-free, very cool place where we go after we die. He postpones exploring the galaxies to help Eddie learn to live again. Billy helps Eddie stand up to a fundamentalist English teacher/pastor who wants to ban a book which is required reading in his school's "Really Modern Literature" class.

Eddie and Billy are deeply sympathetic, well-developed characters--funny, bright, thoughtful, and intelligent. One comes to care very deeply for both of them--Eddie, in particular--during the course of the narrative. Unfortunately, the characters Crutcher doesn't like in this story are not much more than cardboard cutouts dancing around on popsicle sticks in a tediously predictable puppet show: Mr. Tarter lives up to his name by tormenting his students physically and spiritually; Eddie's mom has so little personality she is practically transparent; a self-righteous jock is also the leader of the Christian Student association.

The Sledding Hill could have been an extraordinary consideration of the difficulties of nurturing young people without denying them knowledge by encouraging them to read widely and outside what may be comfortable for them or their parents. Instead, we have two marvelous characters in a tract that equates all conservative religious belief with abuse and weakness. Crutcher's appearance as a character in his own book, rather than being clever, comes across as condescending and almost childish: "See--I can write a controversial book without bad language, sex, or violence. Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah-nah." Opportunity lost.