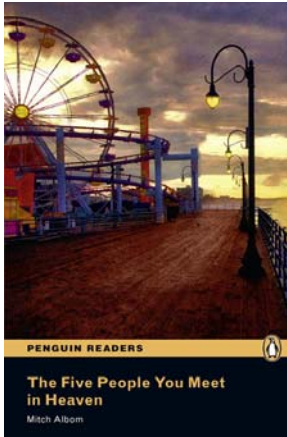




The Five People You Meet in Heaven

Mitch Albom



About the author

Mitch Albom is a best-selling author, screenwriter, journalist, musician and broadcaster. His books have sold millions internationally and have been translated into forty-two languages. Some of them have also been made into critically-acclaimed TV movies. His first novel, *The Five People You Meet In Heaven* (2003), advocates the value of love and human life, before and after death. These themes run through much of his work. He is also a great philanthropist, having started four charities to help those in need. He currently lives in Detroit, Michigan, with his wife Janine. For more information, see the introduction to the Penguin Reader.

Summary

Chapter 1: Eddie is the maintenance man at Ruby Park, an old-fashioned American amusement park. He has worked at the park for more than sixty years and today is his eighty-third birthday. It will also be the day he dies. Every week he goes on at least one ride and he often takes children with him. He works with a Mexican man called Dominguez. Today Eddie gives Dominguez some money to buy a present for his wife. Later he tells some teenagers off for climbing on a gate before going to sit on an old wooden beach chair. He has nineteen minutes left to live. He reminisces about the one true-love moment in his life when he met a woman called Marguerite at Ruby Park. That night Eddie told his brother he had met his

future wife. Twelve minutes before Eddie's death, a little girl asks him to make an animal for her out of a balloon. Then Eddie hears screaming. There is a problem with 'Freddy's Free Fall,' a ride at Ruby Park. One of the cars is leaning dangerously with four people inside. On Eddie's orders, Dominguez climbs a ladder and helps to free the people. He then starts to release the car. Eddie is trying to work out how the accident has happened and suddenly realizes that something has got caught in the machinery, causing the cable to wear away. If the car is released, it will fall. Eddie tries to get Dominguez's attention but fails. He screams for the crowd to move back and they do but then he sees the little girl from earlier. She has fallen at the base of the ride. As the cable breaks, Eddie dives to save her and his days on earth are ended. His last memory is two small hands in his.

Chapter 2: Eddie finds himself floating through different colors. All his pains and worries have disappeared. He is back at Ruby Park but it's the way it was when he was a child. He is old but he's running like a young boy. He goes into the Freak Show and meets a man with blue skin. Eddie remembers the man vaguely from when he was a child. The Blue Man explains they are in heaven and that when a person first arrives there, they have to meet five people who will help them understand their lives on Earth. The Blue Man is Eddie's first person. Time goes back to Eddie's seventh birthday and then the Blue Man explains how Eddie caused his death. The Blue Man came from a poor Polish immigrant family. He was a very nervous child and had many problems. Trying to cure his nerves, he took some medicine that was poisonous and eventually turned his skin blue. Unable to find any other work, he ended up working at the Freak Show. One day Eddie was playing with his friends and ran after a ball, almost causing a car accident. The driver of the car went on his way in shock and this time he crashed. He got out of the car but the shock was too much for him and he had a heart attack and died. The driver was the Blue Man. Eddie now thinks the Blue Man is going to punish him but instead he explains that this story is just a lesson to teach him that all lives are interrelated. The Blue Man disappears and time goes back to Eddie's seventeenth birthday celebration. It is a short time after Eddie had met Marguerite.



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Chapter 3: Eddie is now a young man during the war. He hears the voice of the Captain he served under when he was in the army. He is Eddie's second person. During the war, Eddie, the Captain and three other soldiers had been captured by the enemy. First they were imprisoned in a hut and then they were taken to work in a coal mine. They were treated badly and given very little to eat. In the fourth month, one of the soldiers, Robozzo, fell ill and was shot by one of the enemy soldiers. At this point Eddie started to concentrate on finding a way to escape. One night the enemy soldier who was guarding them was trying to juggle. Eddie, having learnt this skill at Ruby Park, started to show him how to do it properly and the other enemy soldiers came to watch. Eddie used the rocks he was juggling with as weapons and the other soldiers took advantage of the situation to overthrow and kill the enemy soldiers. After escaping they decided to burn down the coal mine buildings in revenge. When everything was alight, Eddie thought he saw the figure of a young child crawling inside one of the burning buildings. The other soldiers shouted at him to leave but he moved toward the building, closer to the fire. He wanted to help the child and he got so close that his clothes began to burn. Suddenly he felt a terrible pain in his leg and he fell down. He had been shot. The other soldiers pulled him out of the fire and lifted him onto a vehicle and Eddie remembered little more. The Captain now explains that he had shot Eddie to save him from dying in the fire. The Captain thought he was having a breakdown and that it was better to sacrifice the man's leg rather than the man's life. The Captain had also died a short time later when he had gone ahead of the vehicle to check the way was safe and had stood on a bomb. The Captain now explains that the second lesson is about sacrifice. Life is full of sacrifices and everybody has to make them. Sacrifice is not about what you lose but about what you and others gain.

Chapter 4: Eddie finds himself in a beautiful mountain landscape. He is now in his thirties. He sees some flashing lights and walks toward them. There is a café and his father is sitting inside. Eddie's father had caused him a lot of pain during his life. When Eddie was a child, he mostly ignored and neglected him. When he was drunk he would also beat Eddie and his brother. When Eddie was an adult, one night after the

war, his father came home to find Eddie sleeping on the sofa. He began to shout at Eddie about being lazy and he tried to hit him. For the first time in his life, Eddie defended himself and his father never spoke to him again. Suddenly an old woman appears in front of Eddie. She is Eddie's third person and her name is Ruby. In life, her husband had built Ruby Park for her. She talks to Eddie about his father. One night his father had arrived home with his clothes full of sand and completely wet. He caught a fever and died some time later in hospital. Later Eddie and his wife, Marguerite, had to move back in with Eddie's mom and Eddie had to take a job at Ruby Park so that he could be near his mom. Eddie assumed that his father had been drunk on the night he got ill, and blamed him for dying and trapping him into a life he didn't want. Ruby shows Eddie the full story. Eddie's father had died bravely trying to save a friend from drowning despite the fact that this friend had previously attacked Eddie's mom. Eddie's father had later died at a window in the hospital calling out the names of his family, including Eddie's. Ruby knew this because her husband had been in the next bed. Ruby tells Eddie that he must lose his anger and his regrets and forgive his father. This he does.

Chapter 5: Eddie is in a small room. He goes out of a door and experiences many wedding celebrations from around the world. At the last one, he sees a beautiful young woman. It's Marguerite. She is his fourth person. Eddie cries and tells her how much he has missed her. Time goes back to Eddie's thirty-ninth birthday. He was gambling at the races with a friend. Marguerite was driving there to persuade him to go home but she had an accident and ended up in hospital. They had been trying to adopt a child but now that Marguerite was so ill it was impossible. Eddie felt guilty and their relationship wasn't good for a while, but eventually their love returned. Sadly, Marguerite got a brain tumor when she was forty-seven and died, and Eddie was heartbroken. Eddie and Marguerite spend time together in heaven and she teaches him his fourth lesson. She explains that when she died she continued to love him as he did her. She explains that lost love is still love. Life has to end but love doesn't. They dance and Marguerite disappears.



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Chapter 6: Eddie can only see white and he misses his wife. Then he hears a screaming noise and sees a river full of children playing. One small beautiful girl calls to him and a wind pushes him to her. Her name is Tala and she is his last person. She tells him that he had burnt her when she was hiding from the soldiers and Eddie realizes that she is the figure he saw in the burning building during the war. He cries and asks for her forgiveness. She gives him a stone and asks him to wash her with it. Eddie now sees how her skin and body are completely burnt and he follows her to the river. As he rubs the stone over her body, the burnt skin drops off and she is beautiful again. She now asks him why he had been sad when he was on Earth and he explains that he had felt his life was a waste. She explains that in fact his life had a clear purpose. He was meant to be at Ruby Park to look after the small children. This is his final lesson. Tala also explains that he had pushed the young girl out of the way of the falling car before he died and saved her life. Tala had then led him safely into heaven. The hands that Eddie had felt in his at the moment of his death had been hers. Eddie now passes through the many colors of heaven which are the emotions of his life and ends up in his own heaven with his wife Marguerite. He will be one of the people there waiting in heaven for the little girl whose life he saved after she has grown up and died and needs to learn five lessons that explain her life on Earth.

Background and themes

All lives and acts are interlinked: The idea that nothing is random runs throughout the book. Although Eddie hardly knew the Blue Man he was indirectly responsible for his death. Eddie's own death is also caused by a young man who previously lost his key at the amusement park as it gets lodged in the machinery and causes the cable to break. Numerous events in Eddie's life, such as the wounded leg or his father's untimely death, lead him to a seemingly unfulfilled life at Ruby Park, yet Tala explains that this in fact was his real purpose in life because there he could look after the young and innocent.

Sacrifice is good: Although sacrifice at the time may seem painful it has its fruits. Young men

who lose their lives at war are making a sacrifice for their country. The Captain that Eddie meets in heaven actually saved the lives of Eddie and two other soldiers who would have driven over the bomb if he hadn't stood on it. Eddie's own life was sacrificed to save the young girl from the falling car.

The power of love and forgiveness: Alбом suggests that love is all powerful and reaches beyond death. Eddie's love for Marguerite is true and she can feel this even though she is no longer on Earth. Alбом also suggests that we have to forgive and conquer our feelings of anger and regret if we are to find real peace.

Nothing is what it seems: This is most clearly represented in the story of Eddie's father. Eddie blames him and is angry because he believed he died because of drinking. In fact he died heroically. He also thinks his father never spoke to him after the night they fought, but in fact his father died calling his name.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss and research: Write the following question on the board: *What happens after death?* Put the students in small groups to discuss all the possible theories that exist according to different religious or non-religious people. Get feedback from the whole class. Now put them in pairs to do some research on the Internet to find out extra information about particular theories, for example, Buddhism, Catholicism, etc., that they are not familiar with.

Chapter 1

While reading (page 2, after '... but he didn't celebrate birthdays any more.')

2 Pair work: Put students in pairs to discuss the following questions: *How did you use to celebrate your birthday when you were a child/teenager? How do you usually celebrate your birthdays now? How do the old people you know celebrate their birthdays? Have you ever done anything unusual on your birthday?*



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3 Guess (p. 2, after 'And if he had known, what would he have done differently?'): Put students in pairs to answer these questions: *What might Eddie have done if he had known he was going to die? What would they have done in the same situation?* Get feedback.

4 Pair work: (p. 5, after 'He told him he'd met the girl he was going to marry.'): Put students in pairs to discuss the following questions: *Do you believe in love at first sight? Why do two people fall in love with each other? How do they know this love will last forever? Why do many people get married and then divorced these days?* Get feedback.

After reading

5 Discuss: Put the students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *Do you think Eddie had a happy life? Do you think he was happy just before he died? Do you think he was a good man?* Get feedback.

6 Role play: Put the students in pairs and tell them they are journalists who are going to interview one of the people who were rescued from the leaning car at Ruby Park. Get them to write six questions they could ask. Now rearrange the pairs and get one person to be the journalist and the other the interviewee. They ask and answer the questions and then switch roles.

Chapter 2

Before reading

7 Guess: Explain to the students that the people Eddie meets in heaven are all going to teach him something. Put them in pairs to talk about what they might teach him. Get feedback from the whole class.

While reading (p. 11, after 'His.')

8 Pair work: Put students in pairs to discuss how the circumstances of Eddie's birth are different from those surrounding the birth of many children today. Prompt them with the question: *What was Eddie's father doing when Eddie was born?* Get feedback and then ask

them to discuss the following question: *How different is the role of a father now in the early years of their child's life in comparison to his role 80 years ago?*

9 Discuss (p. 13, after 'I've been waiting for you.'): Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *What kinds of people were considered to be freaks in the past? How were these freaks treated? Do you think this was fair? What kinds of people are sometimes considered to be not 'normal' these days? Are they treated more fairly than they were in the past?*

After reading

10 Discuss: Remind students that the Blue Man was a poor Polish immigrant and then put them in small groups to discuss the following questions: *What are the causes of immigration? What kind of immigration has occurred in the past and what kinds of immigration are occurring today? Why do immigrants often have a difficult life?*

11 Write: Tell the students to imagine they are the Blue Man's mother shortly after he lost his job at the factory. Tell them to write a letter to the boss of the factory explaining how difficult life is and begging him to give the child his job back.

12 Pair work: Ask the students what the Blue Man's lesson is and elicit the answer (All acts/lives are connected.). Ask them to discuss in pairs how true they think this is and get feedback. Now ask them to individually write down five important things they have done in their lives. Tell them to discuss the following questions about these things with a partner: *Which other people/events influenced your decision to do these things? What would be different now if you hadn't done them? How would this have affected the lives of others?*

Chapter 3

Before reading

13 Discuss: Explain to the students that the next scene in heaven takes place during a war. Put



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them in small groups to discuss the following questions: *What causes war? Have countries always had good reasons for going to war? Should the young people of a country be obliged to fight? Would you be willing to fight for your country?*

While reading (at the end of page 28)

14 Write: Tell students to imagine they are Eddie and to write a letter to Marguerite from the Philippines. Tell them to include descriptions of what is happening and the hardships the soldiers have to suffer. Tell them to write in the first person and include details of how Eddie feels.

15 Guess (p. 39, after 'Because I was the one who shot you.'): Ask students to discuss in pairs why they think the Captain shot Eddie. Get feedback from the whole class.

After reading

16 Write and ask: Write 'Why did Eddie first take a job at Ruby Park?' on the board and elicit the answer (To save money to study engineering.). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapter 3. Check their work as they do this. Now have students stand up and mingle, asking and answering each others questions.

17 Pair work: Ask students to think about any sacrifices, large or small, they have made in their lives and explain them to a partner. Encourage them to think how they or somebody else benefitted from those sacrifices. Get feedback.

Chapter 4

Before reading

18 Pair work: Explain to the students that the next chapter is all about Eddie's father and then tell them to answer the following questions in pairs: *What is/was your father like? What is/was his job? What is/was your relationship with your father like? What kind of things did you do with your father at the weekend? Were you*

punished by your father when you were a child? In what ways has he influenced your life?

While reading (page 52, after 'A heavy gray cloud hangs over his day.')

19 Discuss: Put the students in groups to answer the following questions about dreams: *Do you often remember your dreams? Can you remember any particular dreams you have had? Do you ever have nightmares? Can you remember any? Do you think dreams are significant in any way?*

20 Pair work (p. 54, after 'Emile loved holidays'): Ask students why July 4 is a holiday in the United States and elicit the answer (It celebrates the country's independence.). Now ask them to talk in pairs about national holidays in their country, saying when they are celebrated and why, and what people usually do on those days.

After reading

21 Discuss: Remind students that Eddie's father died because he had tried to save a good friend. Put them in groups to answer the following questions: *What makes a good friend? Should we always forgive a good friend whatever they do or say? Was Eddie's father right to save Mickey? Get feedback.*

22 Pair work: Remind students that Eddie's father used to beat him and then ask them to answer the following questions in pairs: *Is it ever acceptable for parents to hit their children? What kind of discipline do you think parents should use with their children?*

23 Write and guess: Write 'Eddie used to climb under the Ferris wheel to collect keys.' on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (coins not keys). Now students choose a sentence from Chapter 4 and rewrite it changing one word. Students mingle, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.



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Chapter 5

Before you read

24 Pair work and guess: Tell students that the next chapter is about Eddie and his wife and then put them in pairs to talk about what they know about their lives together so far. Ask them to consider the question: *Do you think they were always happy? What are some of the typical problems married couples have?*

While reading (page 67, after ‘Marguerite has been talking about adoption.’)

25 Discuss: Put students in small groups to discuss the following sentences: *Why do many people adopt? How difficult is it in your country to adopt a child? Do people adopt from other countries? Which ones? Do you think adoption should be easier?*

26 Pair work (at the end of page 69): Elicit from the students what people do at the races (gamble) and then put them in groups to discuss the following questions: *Do many people gamble in your country? What do people usually gamble on? Is this a bad thing? Have you ever gambled?*

27 Write and role play (p. 73, after ‘They talked about everything.’): Put students in pairs and tell half the pairs to write five questions that Eddie might ask Marguerite and half the pairs to write five questions that Marguerite might ask Eddie. Then rearrange the pairs to role play a conversation between the two.

After reading

28 Pair work: Establish the fact that Eddie and Marguerite’s marriage was sometimes good and sometimes not so good. Now ask students in pairs to answer the question: *What makes a good marriage?* Get feedback.

Chapter 6

Before reading

29 Guess: Explain to students that Eddie is about to meet the fifth person. Ask them to

discuss who they think it might be (you could give them a clue by saying it’s a child) and what they think will happen after the meeting. Get feedback.

While reading (page 77, after ‘Then a small, mysterious noise brought him to consciousness again.’)

30 Pair work: Ask students to write a list of 10 noises. Get feedback and write the noises on the board. Then ask students to talk with a partner about how often and where they hear these noises and whether they find them pleasant or not.

After reading

31 Pair work: Write the following words on the board: RIVER, BALLOON, HIDE, STONE, PUSH, HOME.

Put students in pairs to talk and write about how they were significant in the last chapter, without looking back at the book.

32 Write: Ask students to talk to a partner about what the word HOME means to them. Get feedback from the whole class and then ask students to write about it individually. Encourage them to be descriptive and emphasize that they don’t need to limit the description to a physical place but that it can also include an emotional aspect.

33 Write and guess: Write the names of the following characters on the board: EDDIE, THE BLUE MAN, MARGUERITE, TALA, THE CAPTAIN, RUBY. Put the students in small groups and tell them to choose one character each. Then ask them to write three sentences about that character, two which are true and one which is false. Students then read their sentences out to the other members of the group who have to guess which are false.

34 Discuss: Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *Did you like the book? Why/Why not? Do you think his ideas about life and death are true in any way? Do you think everybody has a purpose in life? Do you believe in destiny?*