

Tales of a Paperboy – A Christmas Story

Discussion Topics for Book Clubs

Following the death of his mother, fourteen-year-old Daniel Morgan moves from Texas to Utah to live with his grandma and new step-grandfather while his dad pursues a job out of state.

Encouraged by his father, Daniel reluctantly starts his first job as a paperboy. Lonely and lost in an unfamiliar environment and with the holidays approaching, Daniel finds comfort and hope in the sound of local church bells.

Through his grandparents and the retired families living on his paper route, Daniel learns valuable lessons about responsibility and family. But will he find the spirit of Christmas he longs for?

The Characters

Which character in the book did you relate to the most?

Daniel – The Paperboy

How is Daniel dealing with the death of his mother?

Have you experienced anything similar, particularly as a teen?

How does Daniel deal with the feeling of abandonment?

Have you ever felt abandoned?

Did anyone help you? How?

Daniel makes friends and builds relationships with several people that aren't of his generation.

What are the advantages of having cross-generation friendships for a teenager? What are the advantages to the older generations?

Daniel uses journaling throughout the book.

How is journaling a healing tool for someone who is struggling?

Does journaling play a role in your life?

Have you ever been impacted by someone's journal?

Eileen – The Grandmother

Eileen represents the nontraditional motherly figure. She steps up and provides a home and support for Daniel. She uses her love of journal writing to inspire Daniel.

Who are some of the mother figures in your life?

What are some of the creative things you have done to help a child mature?

Authors commentary -

Eileen is based on my mother (and a little on my mother-in-law). The creativity she displays echoes my mother's creativity when trying to get through to me, especially during my teenage years.

Yet there are others as well, friend's parents, my aunts, and my grandparents also have had a lasting influence on my life. The term "Mother" truly is as much a verb as it is a noun.

Tracey Christensen – The Santa Impersonator

Who are the mentors in your life?

Have you been a mentor to others?

What types of service can you identify in this book?

How has service been impactful in your personal life?

In your career?

In your community?

Redemption is the reward for Tracey in his family life.

Have you ever needed the forgiveness of someone?

How has redemption played a part in your life?

Authors commentary -

Tracey is a mash-up of several men throughout my life. These men taught me about fixing cars, working with electricity, building, home repairs, and ultimately the principles of troubleshooting anything. They provided lessons on leadership and learning, which propel me to try hard things. Tracey's character embodies the spirit of service. In my opinion, service is the foundation of success in life. And in the case of Daniel, one of the prime avenues to healing.

Mrs. Duncan – The Choir Director

Whether only by nature or by profession, Mrs. Duncan is an educator, the book doesn't say. She signs Daniel up for Choir. She grasps the opportunity to teach Daniel about music and provide an outlet for Daniel to engage with other people.

Who are the people in your community that helped raise you?

Authors commentary-

Mrs. Duncan is another conglomerate of women in my life. My Mom used to say that I had a lot of "Girlfriends." She was referring to the senior women in my life that I have developed a personal relationship. These women encouraged me, supported me, scolded me, taught me, and loved me. Some of them were my clients on my paper route; others were schoolteachers, Sunday school instructors, and choir directors. The adage "It takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb that means that an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment.

Mrs. Johnson – The Nurse Who Loves Shepherds

Mrs. Johnson is a nurse and spent much of her professional life serving people during some of their darkest moments. She has a unique perspective on service that she sees paralleled in the story of the shepherds.

Who are the angels in your life?

Authors commentary –

Mrs. Johnson Teaches Daniel about why her favorite characters in the Christmas story are the shepherds. She tells Daniel about a correlation between the shepherds and the Angels that announce Christ's birth. She tells Daniel that "We are just a mortal form of angel when we serve each other."

Mr. Dewey – The Cranky Neighbor

At the beginning of the book, Mr. Dewey is an annoyance to Daniel. Daniel struggles with the rigidity of Mr. Dewey's demands on the time, place, and manner of Daniel's deliveries.

How does Daniel first view the people on his paper route?

Did you ever wholly change what had been your first opinion of someone?

Authors commentary-

Daniel learns more about Mr. Dewey and eventually realizes that the same thing that Daniel hated, Mr. Dewey's demanding nature, was likely due to his military background. Daniel writes, "I have grown up thinking some people are all good and some people are all bad...they are just people. And people can be either or both."

The Bells

Bells play a background theme for a good part of the book.

How do bells symbolize the changes that have occurred in Daniel's life?

What other things do bells symbolize?

How has music influenced your life?

How did it influence Daniel's?

Do certain songs spark memories?

Has there been a time in your life you were too distracted to notice something important?

How do you recognize the Christmas Spirit?

Christmas is a time of joy for many people but can be a struggle for others.

What is it about Christmas that elicits these emotions?

How do you feel about Christmas?

As Christmas approaches, what might you be more aware of in others?

Authors commentary-

This book is fiction but echoes my own life. For instance, I was a paperboy in South Ogden, Utah. And I loved hearing the bells ring out over my neighborhood. One December, it seemed, for whatever reason, I could hear them. It was an extra cold year and the additional winter gear I donned was the reason. However, I did not recognize that the problem could be so simple. I became worried that the church had stopped playing them altogether. Until one morning, the temperature was a bit warmer, and as I rode my bike, I felt like I was overheating inside my bundled-up cocoon. I began removing my hat and scarf that I had wrapped up around my head and letting the built-up heat out. To my delight, as I let myself breathe in the crisp cold December morning air, I heard the bells once again ringing through my heart. It was just as clear as I remembered, and for the rest of that year, no matter how cold it got, I never bundled up so tight as to impede my ability to hear those Christmas bells.

About the Author

Andrew J. Mair is a Texas-based, Utah born, personal blogger and writer of fiction. He participates in several podcasts as a social media manager and contributor, most notably, the Utah based show, in podcast form, The Cultural Hall.

His first book, Tales of a Paperboy – A Christmas Story, was released on August 17th, 2020.

Andrew writes several personal blogs, including one entirely dedicated to Christmas. During December for many years, Andrew posts every day from December 1st to Christmas Eve about a range of holiday topics ranging from Christmas carols and angels and shepherds to Santa Claus.