

try until you fail, cry until you laugh

**THIS IS THE PART
WHERE YOU
LAUGH**



PETER BROWN HOFFMEISTER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

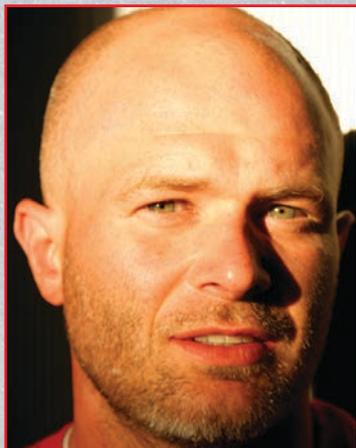
One summer in the life of a teenage boy as he navigates first love, addiction, basketball, gang violence, and a reptilian infestation in a trailer park in Eugene, Oregon.

Travis has plans to spend the summer as follows:

- Working on his basketball game with his friend Creature.
- Reading excerpts from Creature's novel-in-progress: *The Pervert's Guide to Russian Princesses*.
- Canoeing around the lake, trying to catch a glimpse of the beautiful girl who just moved in.
- Not getting into trouble, not going back to juvie.
- Searching the homeless camps for his mother, with a jar full of cash to help her get back on her feet.

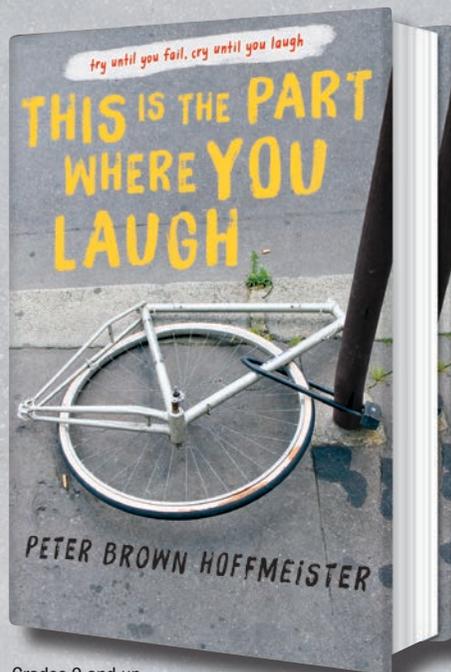
From a powerful new voice in YA literature comes an unforgettable account of growing up, making mistakes, and rising out of the shadow of drug abuse.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Author photo © 2010 by Elena Seibert

Peter Brown Hoffmeister is the author of the critically acclaimed adult novel *Graphic the Valley*, and the memoir *The End of Boys*. A former troubled teen, Hoffmeister now runs the Integrated Outdoor Program, serving teens of all backgrounds, taking them into the wilderness to backpack, climb, spelunk, orienteer, and whitewater raft. He lives with his wife and daughters in Eugene, Oregon. Visit him online at peterbrownhoffmeister.wordpress.com and follow him on Twitter at [@peterbrownhoff](https://twitter.com/peterbrownhoff).



Grades 9 and up
HC: 978-0-553-53810-6
GLB: 978-0-553-53811-3
EL: 978-0-553-53812-0

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Travis thinks, “I wonder if we are given our hands, if the hands that we’ll have in our adult lives are there from our births, waiting for us, waiting for our futures. Or if our hands are a choice? A series of choices? And if so, are your hands a choice?” (p. 31)
 - How would you answer Travis’s questions?
 - What does Travis mean when he talks about his hands?
 - What do his hands symbolize?
 - Do you have choice(s) in life or is your future already decided?
2. As the story progresses, it is interspersed with excerpts from Creature’s novel-in-progress, *The Pervert’s Guide to Russian Princesses*.
 - Why might Hoffmeister choose to intersperse these excerpts?
 - How do these excerpts affect the storyline?
 - How do these excerpts develop the character of Creature?
3. When Travis asks Creature, “Hey, Creat. Why do you write about those Russian princesses?” he replies, “I guess it’s like this: they didn’t have any power.” (p. 67)
 - What do you think Creature means by his comments about power?
 - Who is powerful in the story? Who is not?
 - If you were going to write about something or someone to empower them, who or what would it be? Why?
4. Travis reacts to his mom’s drug use with anger, jealousy, and confusion. He asks, “Why are some people the way they are, while other people are like my mom? Maybe we need to ask more questions.” (p. 197)
 - If you were Travis, what questions would you ask?
 - Besides punching, what other ways does Travis show his anger?
 - Have you experienced a relationship with mixed feelings—anger and joy, sympathy and cruelty, resentment and kindness? How did you work through those conflicting feelings?
5. Sometimes when Travis thinks he sees his mom, it’s like he swallowed a piece of glass: “I wonder where it’s going to cut me.” (p. 78)
 - Why does Travis feel this way about his mom?
 - Is there a person in your life about whom you would say something similar?
 - What simile or metaphor would you use to describe how you feel when you see that person?
6. Travis compares himself to Creature and finds that they have similarities and differences, observing, “Sometimes I feel like I’m oatmeal and he’s Cream of Wheat” (p. 60).
 - What are some of the ways that Travis and Creature are similar? How are they different?
 - What brings these two teens together in their friendship? Is it the similarities, differences, or both?
 - Are you and your close friends more similar or more different? Why?

7. As their relationship grows, Travis and Natalie have much in common but also many differences. Think about their home lives and their relationships (Travis with his grandparents and Natalie with her mom and stepfather).

- In what ways are Travis’s and Natalie’s family relationships similar?
- In what ways are they different?
- How might the saying “opposites attract” apply to Travis and Natalie’s relationship?

8. Over the course of the story, you learn about Travis’s special relationship with his grandmother. On a canoe ride with Travis, she says, “‘This is wonderful . . . it’s more than nice.’ I can’t see her face, but I know she’s smiling. I can hear the smile in her voice.” (pp. 139–140)

- How does Hoffmeister develop and demonstrate the close relationship between Travis and his grandmother? Find some examples in the story that describe this special relationship.
- What does Travis mean when he says, “I can hear the smile in her voice”?
- In your own life, is there someone special to you the way Travis’s grandmother is special to him? How would you describe that person?

9. At the hospital, “the doctor says, ‘There was too much internal bleeding. He was gone before we had . . . And unfortunately—’ Before he can finish, I hit him.” (pp. 304—305)

- Why does Travis react to the doctor with violence?
- How does Travis deal with Creature’s death?
- How does this relate to Travis’s other relationships in the story?
- Who do you think is ultimately responsible for Creature’s death?

10. When Natalie and Travis are sitting by the lake, she says, “This is the part where you laugh. You just have to. When things are so shitty that there’s nothing that you can do, there’s no other way to react.” (p. 263)

- What does Natalie mean by her comments?
- What is the significance of the book’s title, “This is the part where you laugh”?
- If you were Travis, how would you respond to Natalie?
- Do you know someone who has encountered hardships like Travis’s?
- In your own life, during times when everything seems to go wrong, how do you react?



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

STEREOTYPES

Think about ways that you and your classmates might sometimes label each other—for example, nerd, jock, class clown, teacher’s pet, stoner, or drama geek.

- What stereotypes exist at your school?
- How do you perceive others labeling you?
- Do stereotypes define a person’s true self?
- Have you ever labeled someone but later learned that the label was incorrect? How did you feel?

FRIENDSHIP

Talk to your classmates about friendships.

- What are attributes of a good friend?
- How should friends treat each other?
- What is the difference between a friend and an acquaintance?
- What qualities do you look for in a friend?
- In what ways does friendship change as you get older?

FAMILY

Write about a special relationship between you and a family member.

- What defines the members of your family?
- How does one develop trust and respect for a family member?
- How do you show your love to that family member?
- How does that family member show love to you?

WEB RESOURCES

Read Hoffmeister’s blog: peterbrownhoffmeister.wordpress.com/

Eugene Daily News: eugenedailynews.com/2013/03/a-conversation-with-author-peter-hoffmeister/

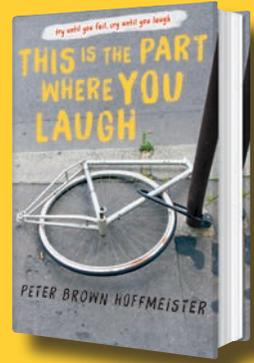
Vice: vice.com/read/the-problem-with-oregons-homeless-population-is-a-failure-to-communicate-121

Twitter: [@peterbrownhoff](https://twitter.com/peterbrownhoff)



PRAISE FOR

THIS IS THE PART WHERE YOU LAUGH



★ “A memorable story of good kids transcending rough lives. . . . What might seem didactic in lesser hands feels realistic and right here. Messages are delivered in natural dialogue, the well-drawn characters speaking from the heart with wisdom derived from firsthand experience.”

—*Kirkus Reviews, Starred*

★ “Profane and profound. . . . A raw offbeat novel with an abundance of honesty and heart.”

—*Publishers Weekly, Starred*

“*This Is the Part Where You Laugh* is so real it hurts.”

—David Arnold, author of *Mosquitoland*

A courageous novel. Incandescent and unflinching.”

—Jeff Zentner, author of *The Serpent King*

“Hoffmeister glosses over nothing. He doesn’t give a single word for free. There is blood and truth on every page.”

—Estelle Laure, author of *The Raging Light*

“In my mind the best storytellers walk that high tight wire between tragedy and comedy. The further they take you down the road of comedy, the further you’re willing to follow them down the road of tragedy. *This Is the Part Where You Laugh* is exactly the part where you laugh. And ache.”

—Chris Crutcher, award-winning author

This guide was created by Gregory Lum, Library Director at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon.

