

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussions, library programs, or classroom activities.

Meet Ohio author and teacher Christopher Barzak and learn about his story of ghosts, grief, and healing.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading *The Gone Away Place*.

Discover read-alikes and resources to explore topics and themes in depth.

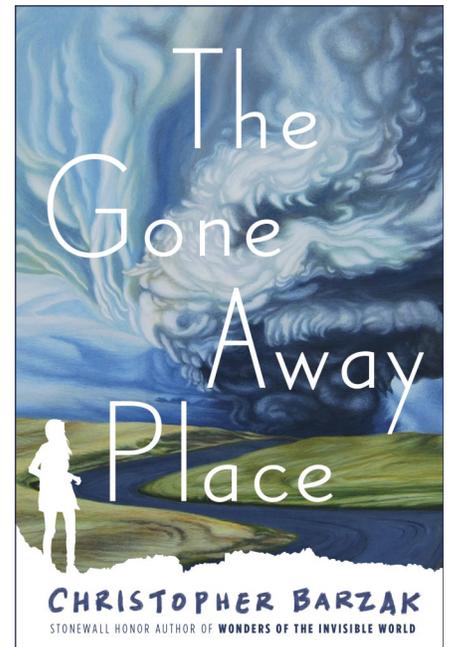
The Gone Away Place

By Christopher Barzak



About the Book

Ellie heads up her high school yearbook, and until the tornadoes come, her biggest worry is how to raise enough money to print them. But since the day when a rash of powerful tornadoes touched down in Newfoundland, Ohio—killing more than half of the students in her school, not to mention dozens more people throughout the town—she’s been haunted: by the ghosts of her best friends, by the boy next door, even by her boyfriend. And the living are haunting her too, all those left behind in the storm’s wake to cope with the “gone away” pieces in their lives. A chance encounter with one ghost leads Ellie to discover a way to free the spirits that have been lingering since the storm, and she learns that she’s not the only one seeing the ghosts—it’s a town-wide epidemic.



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Book Details

The Gone Away Place by Christopher Barzak.
Penguin Random House, 2018. ISBN 9780399556098. 304 pages. Ages 14+.
970 Lexile.
www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/539781/the-gone-away-place-by-christopher-barzak/

Available as an ebook through the Ohio Digital Library:
ohiodigitallibrary.com

Christopher Barzak's other books include **One for Sorrow** (2007); **The Love We Share Without Knowing** (2008); **Birds and Birthdays** (2012); **Before and Afterlives** (2015), winner of the Shirley Jackson Award for best collection; and **Wonders of the Invisible World** (2016), a Stonewall Honor book.



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**“I can’t let
what’s gone
away remain an
empty space
inside me.”**

About the Author

Christopher Barzak was born in Warren, Ohio, and grew up in Kinsman, Ohio. After two years as an English teacher in Japan, he returned to his home state, where he teaches writing at Youngstown State University. His stories have appeared in the anthologies *Trampoline*, *The Coyote Road*, *Salon Fantastique*, *Interfictions*, and *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror*, as well as in the publications *Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet*, *Realms of Fantasy*, and *Nerve*, among others. Barzak is also the author of four novels and two collections of stories.

Author Resources

Christopher Barzak’s official blog
christopherbarzak.com

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

To schedule an appearance, contact Lisa McLatchy at
liske@aol.com.

Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing *The Gone Away Place* with teens.

Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key elements in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.

- Why do you think Christopher Barzak chose *The Gone Away Place* as the book’s title? What does it refer to in the story?
- Which character did you most identify with? What aspects of that character resonate with you?
- Christopher Barzak wrote *The Gone Away Place* from several different points of view. Why do you think he made that choice? How does this structural decision add meaning to the story?
- Stories play an important role in *The Gone Away Place*. How did Ellie share stories before the tornados? Why do you think the ghosts are able to move forward after sharing their stories with Ellie?
- Throughout most of the book, Ellie sees Ingrid as a threat. How does her perception change after Ingrid tells her story? Could Ellie have done something that would have helped her see Ingrid a new light sooner?
- Adrienne makes the decision to possess her younger sister. Does the fact that she asked permission justify the risk? What do you think would have happened if Couri had said no?

Talk About It (continued)

- Margery Addison went out of her way to return an envelope of photos to a stranger. How did that act of kindness affect Ellie? What are some ways that you could show kindness to others?
- Many, but not all, of the parents in **The Gone Away Place** see the ghosts. Why do you think Ellie's mother doesn't see them?
- Ellie now has videos of the ghosts' last words and chooses to share one of them. Do you think she should share all the videos? What would the benefits be? What harm could it cause?
- What do you think caused the gray area that the ghosts described? Why do you think it had started to fade at the end of the book?
- The actions of the parents in this story profoundly affect their children, both living and dead. What things did some of the parents do well? What things could some of the parents have done differently? What could you learn from this book about how to treat other people?

Go Further

*Ideas for extending the experience of reading **The Gone Away Place**.*

Educators: Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards and resources, such as Social and Emotional Learning, may also apply. Discussion questions and educational activities for **The Gone Away Place** align with Learning Standards for Grades 9-12.

Librarians, parents, and others: These activities are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, education.ohio.gov. From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Learning in Ohio."

Spoiler warning! Some activities refer to key elements in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.

- Ellie plays what she calls the *I'm fine, really* game as a way to avoid her feelings of grief after the death of her friends. Do you think grief is limited to death, or can people grieve other kinds of losses, such as the loss of a job or a relationship? What are some ways you can support someone who is grieving?
- Ellie is passionate about photography and writing, and plans to study them in college. What activities or causes are you passionate about? Why are they important to you?
- Ellie and her friends had planned to attend college together. At the end of the book, she decides that she is ready to move forward without them. Write or describe what Ellie's first few months of college might be like.
- At the end of **The Gone Away Place**, Christopher Barzak describes two natural disasters that provided the inspiration for the story. Using online resources available to students through INFOhio (infohio.org) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (ohioweblibrary.org), look up information about the May 31, 1985 tornados and the March 11, 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami. What elements from these disasters appeared in the book? Do you think the hauntings were real? Are there different ways to be haunted?

Explore More

*Additional ideas and resources to use with **The Gone Away Place**.*

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Distress Helpline provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disasters. The service is free, anonymous, and confidential, and can provide counseling, coping tips, and referrals. People can call or text for themselves or on behalf of someone else.

Alateen

<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/> (National)

www.ohioal-anon.org/alateen_about.html (Ohio)

In Alateen, teens affected by someone else's drinking can come together to share experiences, discuss difficulties, find hope, and encourage one another. Both in-person and chat meetings are available.

Child Welfare Information Gateway

www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/

The Child Welfare Information Gateway provides information and resources about all aspects of child welfare, including the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Visit the website to access nationwide and state-specific resource lists.

LGBT Youth Resources

www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm

This website lists resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, other government agencies, and community organizations that help foster positive environments for LGBT teens. Resources are divided into sections for LGBT youth and friends/supporters; educators and school administrators; and parents, guardians, and family members, and are designed to ensure that LGBT teens are protected and supported.

The Science of Ghosts

www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/science-ghosts

This article from Science News for Students reveals some scientific reasons why people may believe they have experienced encounters with ghosts.

Check It Out

*Recommended for readers of **The Gone Away Place**.*

One for Sorrow by Christopher Barzak. Bantam, 2007.

A Heart in a Body in the World by Deb Caletti. Simon Pulse, 2018.

Thin Space by Jody Casella. Simon Pulse/Beyond Words, 2013.

The Boy in the Black Suit by Jason Reynolds. Atheneum BFYR, 2015.

Goodbye Days by Jeff Zentner. Crown Books for Young Readers, 2017.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:
library.ohio.gov/ctro.

This toolkit revised
August 2020.