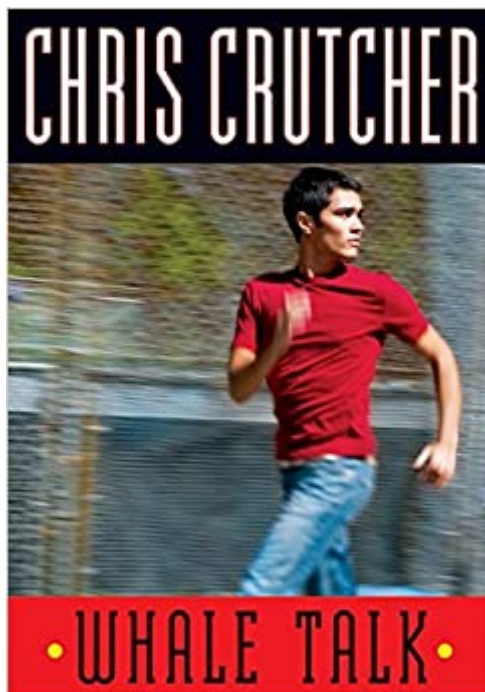


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# Whale Talk



## Synopsis

A varsity letter jacket: it's exclusive, nearly unattainable, revered . . . and everything that's screwed up about Cutter High, as far as T. J. Jones is concerned. That's why T. J. is determined to have the Cutter All Night Mermenâ "the unlikeliest swim team a high school has ever seenâ "earn letter jackets of their own. It won't be easy. For one thing, they don't even have a pool. They will fight for their dignity, they will fight with each other, and sometimes they will just fight. And then they will realize that a single moment can bring lifelong heartache or lifelong friendship. For T. J. and his crew of misfits, the quest may be far more valuable than the reward.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

T. J. Jones is black, Japanese, and white; his given name is The Tao (honest!), and he's the son of a woman who abandoned him when she got heavily into crack and crank. As a child he was full of rage, but now as a senior in high school he's pretty much overcome all that. With the help of a good therapist and his decent, loving, ex-hippie adoptive parents, he's not only fairly even-keeled, he has turned out to be smart and funny. Injustice, however, still fills him with fury. So when big-deal football star Mike Barbour bullies brain-damaged Chris Coughlin for wearing his dead brother's letter jacket, T.J. hatches a scheme for revenge. He assembles a swim team (in a school with no pool) made up of the most outrageous outsiders and misfits he can find and extracts a conditional promise of those sacred letter jackets from the coach. After weeks of dedicated practice at the All Night Fitness pool, the seven mermen get good enough not to embarrass themselves in

competition. The really important thing, though, turns out to be the long bus rides to meets, a safe place to share the hurts that have made them who they are. Meanwhile, T.J.'s father, who has taken in a battered little girl to ease his lifelong guilt over his role in the accidental death of a baby, tangles with another bully--her stepfather--and his growing murderous rage. Chris Crutcher, therapist and author of seven prize-winning young adult books, here gives his many fans another wise and compassionate story full of the intensity of athletic competition and hair-raising incidents of child abuse. (Ages 12 and older) --Patty Campbell --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Crutcher's (Running Loose; Ironman) gripping tale of small-town prejudice delivers a frank, powerful message about social issues and ills. Representing one-third of his community's minority population ("I'm black. And Japanese. And white"), narrator T.J. Jones voices a darkly ironic appraisal of the high school sports arena. Despite his natural athletic ability (at 13, he qualified for the Junior Olympics in two swimming events), T.J. has steered away from organized sports until his senior year, when Mr. Simet, a favorite English teacher, implores him to help form a swim team for the school (and thereby help the teacher save his job). T.J. sees an opportunity to get revenge on the establishment and invites outcasts to participate on the team; he ends up with "a representative from each extreme of the educational spectrum, a muscle man, a giant, a chameleon, and a psychopath." As might be expected, he accomplishes his mission: his motley crew of swimmers is despised by more conventional athletes (and coaches). The swimmers face many obstacles, but their dedication to their sport and each other grows stronger with every meet. The gradual unfolding of characters' personal conflicts proves to be as gripping as the evolution of the team's efforts. Through T.J.'s narration, Crutcher offers an unusual yet resonant mixture of black comedy and tragedy that lays bare the superficiality of the high school scene. The book's shocking climax will force readers to re-examine their own values and may cause them to alter their perception of individuals pegged as "losers." Ages 12-up. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

When I began reading *Whale Talk*, I thought I would be reading a story about a teenager struggling to put together a swim team at his very athletically-driven high school (as suggested by the synopsis). What I ended up reading, however, was a story about perseverance, acceptance, tolerance, love, and sacrifice. Crutcher's protagonist, T.J. Jones, is a rare gem of a character. Having survived an early childhood of neglect and being the target of racism in his mostly white school, T.J. has plenty of reasons to be angry. However, he remains stoic in the face of adversity,

refusing to rise to the racial taunts of his enemies. In fact, what makes him such a wonderful character is that his indignation and sense of justice are not reserved for himself but for others who fall outside the scope of the "in" crowd. His effort to put together a swim team is driven by an injustice he witnesses towards another classmate. In a school driven by athletics, he walks a precarious slope with the individuals on his team who fit plenty of categories--mentally challenged, handicapped, mute, overweight--except athletic. Still, T.J.'s drive and determination help whip this group of misfits into a competitive swim team in no time flat. Of course, from the arc of the swim team come many other compelling story lines--abuse, death, racism, and forgiveness. Crutcher seamlessly weaves these threads into the story by putting T.J. front and center. By witnessing and even participating in other characters' difficulties--the racial abuse inflicted upon a five-year-old girl of mixed race, the tragedy of his father's past, the sexual abuse suffered by one of his teammates--T.J. is better able to put his own life into perspective with guidance from his loving adoptive parents and his therapist. Although the last 20 pages or so stray into melodrama, this book is powerful on so many levels. Images--the deer, the Brillo pad--will stay with the reader long after the book has been closed. At the core of its message is the idea that no one really knows what difficulties others are facing, a poignant message given the times we live in.

Whale Talk is a book that takes the reader on a roller coaster ride of emotions. The book warms the heart, infuriates, teaches, and opens the eyes of any reader that picks this book up. The Tao Jones is a mixed race character who is adopted from a drug-addicted mother. Tao is taken in by a truck driving dad and lawyer mother who are just about the coolest parents on earth, but they aren't without their own baggage. Whale Talk is a masterfully woven tale that traces Tao through his struggles in a racist society that is also a little elitist. Tao, like most of Crutcher's protagonists, is a great athlete with a strange sense of humor. Tao enjoys getting even with those who single out he, or any other character in the high school that is different, by using the predators' ignorance against them. All in all, this is an honest portrayal of a complex mix of race, family secrets and small town routines held up by the Good Ol' Boy system along with serious developmental psychological issues. This book will make you laugh, it will make you cry, but most importantly, it will make you examine your inner-most being in ways that will surprise you. Chris Crutcher is the undisputed King of YA Literature, which he proves with his most powerful YA novel to date.

Love this book - I am a high school Special Education teacher and I read this with my students - the content opens so many doors to communicating with my students about relevant and real issues

faced by teens in high school. Highly recommend the book. Quick shipping and zero problems.....

Shortest review: Read this book. It's pretty amazing. Short review: If you're a teen or the parent of one, if you enjoy underdog or sports stories, if you've been through high school, or if you've ever experienced bigotry, read this book. It's pretty amazing. Longer Review: Yes, Crutcher packs a lot of issues into this book (racism, abandonment, child abuse, physical limitations are only a few), but each one is handled with sensitivity and humor. A rare combination, even rarer when done successfully. There's drama and comedy and suspense and action and emotion. The protagonist is flawed but incredibly sympathetic and appealing; secondary characters are finely drawn. We might never meet a T.J., but this creation of Crutcher's is a pretty amazing read.

Was required to read this book for my college English class. I couldn't put it down. If you want to start a honest dialogue about race & socio economic classes this book is a good place to start. Some of the language and characters are hard to swallow, but it's written well. Highly recommend for anyone who has a high schooler or was a high schooler.

Fantastic book

WHALE TALK WAS VERY, VERY GOOD. I LIKED IT A LOT. IT HAD A LOT OF SWEAR WORDS IN IT, WHICH MADE ME WANT TO READ IT MORE. THE PEOPLE IN THIS BOOK SWEAR A LOT LIKE I DO. THIS BOOK IS ABOUT SWIMMING AND SPORTS IF YOU LIKE SPORTS AND LIFE AND LITERATURE, THAN YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME A TEACHER I HAD EVER ASSIGNED ME A BOOK WITH THIS AMOUNT OF SWEAR WORDS WHICH WAS ODD. THIS BOOK WAS A LITTLE HARD FOR ME TO READ BY MYSELF. THIS BOOK WAS A 220 PAGE BOOK, I LIKE LONG BOOKS WITH THAT MANY PAGES. YOU SHOULD ALSO TRY TO READ THESE OTHER CHRIS CRUTCHER BOOKS LIKE IRONMAN, STOTAN, AND CHINESE HANDCUFFS. CHRIS CRUTCHER SOUNDS LIKE A VERY GOOD AUTHOR. ERIC, 16 YEARS OLD MISS WATER IS MY TEACHER (Written by a student of mine to fulfill a class project. JW)

I think this book should be part of the canon for teenage readers. I read it years ago, then taught it, and the students who needed to hear from Mr. Crutcher's main character T.J., thanked me profusely for "making them" read it. I bought this copy for my grandson and he whipped through it in a day

with a "wow,Wow, WOW," as he shut it. And it just isn't for boys!

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