

HOLIDAY HOUSE

READING GROUP

GUIDE



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The Ghost Rules

by Adam Rosenbaum

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Elwood McGee never asked to have “ghost-sight,” and it involves a lot more drool-dodging than he expected. Ghosts are the WORST—and they’re all over the place in this sharp-witted middle grade debut novel.

Did you know that ghosts love coffee? They’re not trying to be scary. They’re just deprived of an appropriate amount of caffeine! They also bump into things by accident, are occasionally nosy, and get a little nervous when they’re seen by the living.

Elwood McGee knows these ghost facts because he’s one of those rare people with the gift of ghost-sight. And it turns out ghosts are everywhere! Especially in the small Tennessee town where Elwood and his family had to move following the death of his big brother Noah, which Elwood thinks was his fault.

Once Elwood figures out he can see ghosts, he becomes single-mindedly determined to use his powers to see Noah and talk to him once last time. With the help of two girls who live on his street, Elwood embarks on a journey through the surprisingly funny world of ghosts and faces the realities of letting go.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss the six Ghost Rules (p. 3–5). Elwood says, “The real problem is the older ghosts. They’re either too far gone to care about the Rules or so old they’ve forgotten them completely” (p. 2). Chart the ghosts that Elwood encounters and discuss which ones have ignored or followed the rules. What are the scariest ghosts he encounters?
- When does Elwood realize that he has ghost-sight? Why doesn’t he tell his parents about his newly discovered ability? Explain why Pops thinks he should keep this ability to himself. What causes him to share his ghost-sighting with Sydney and Tabitha? How do they react to this notion? Elwood says, “[N]o one ever told me being unique would feel so lonely” (p. 136). What are some of his loneliest times?

- Describe the ghost of Pops. How does Pops’s ghost help Elwood get to know the grandfather that he never really knew? What does Elwood learn about Noah’s relationship with Pops? Explain the significance of the travel books in his grandparents’ house. Even Elwood’s mom doesn’t know why the books are there. What does this reveal about his mom’s relationship with her parents?
- Elwood references his brother’s death at the beginning of the novel. Why does he wait so long to reveal the accident that killed Noah? How do his parents deal with their grief in different ways? Debate whether they are so caught up in their own grief that they don’t see that Elwood is grieving. Elwood says, “It’s not like I didn’t want to talk about Noah. It’s just that I didn’t know how to talk about it” (p. 44). Cite the scene in the novel where Elwood comes face-to-face with his own grief. How does this help him talk about Noah? In what way does this change the way Elwood’s parents deal with him?
- Describe Sydney Burke and Tabitha Tamez. Why does Elwood need someone with a big personality like Sydney? Trace Elwood’s developing friendship with the girls from the beginning of the novel to the end. What do they teach him about being a friend? Tabitha has a secret library. Why does she need this secret room? Explain the Michelle Obama poster in Tabitha’s secret space: “DON’T BE AFRAID / BE FOCUSED / BE DETERMINED / BE HOPEFUL / BE EMPOWERED” (p. 98). In what ways might these words guide Elwood as he confronts living in a new town and deal-ing with his family issues?
- Sydney’s father, Dr. Burke, tells Elwood, “You have a real strength in you, Elwood. You may not feel it, but it’s there. I can see it” (p. 139). Explain how Elwood’s trip to Nashville takes a certain type of strength. At what point does he begin to feel his own strength?
- Describe the Palace theater. Why is Sydney so determined to save it? What is Elwood’s reaction when he first enters the Palace? He immediately sees two ghosts: Ned, a boy not much older than him, and Adeline Andrews. What does Elwood learn about the property from the ghost of Adeline? How does Adeline recognize Sydney’s love for the Palace? Why is Adeline Sydney’s hero? How does Elwood help Sydney see Adeline?
- Who is Leo Parsons, the man in the cowboy boots? Why is he a threat to Sydney’s plan to save the Palace? How does Elwood save the Palace for Sydney, Adeline, Ned, and the entire town?
- Elwood says that he tried hard to hate the town of Long Hollow. What does he learn to love about the town by the end of the novel? How will attending a new school in the fall be easier than he thought when he first moved to town?
- Theme is a message, or the overall meaning of the novel. What is the central theme of this book? Explain the title of the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adam Rosenbaum has operated a sawmill in Kentucky, stocked groceries in Los Angeles, and was a student draftsman at his local power company growing up in the suburbs of Nashville. He’s spent the last fifteen years in video production and digital media in Middle Tennessee, where he lives with his wife and four kids. When he’s not writing things or reading things, you’ll probably find him running down a trail or trying to track down the perfect blueberry donut. *The Ghost Rules* is his debut novel. Learn more at AdamRosenbaumWrites.com.