

Educational Resource

The Half Life of Ryan Davis

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Synopsis

The disappearance and presumed death of Ryan's older sister Mallory three years earlier has had a profound effect on Ryan's family and his life. His parents have divorced, his father has little to do with his children and his mother has turned her focus to her missing daughter, to the extent that she almost completely excludes her younger children Ryan, now fifteen and his younger sister thirteen year old Gemma. But their mother's strictness in the name of protecting them from Mallory's fate, and her high expectations become overbearing and Ryan just wants to do the things normal teenagers get to do. When Gemma starts dating Ryan's best friend Alex, Ryan disapproves. He starts dating himself and gets a job, both without his mother's knowledge. When his plans to spend more time with his girlfriend alone backfire things come to a head. Ryan runs away in the middle of the night, and unexpectedly meets with Mallory. But Gemma is now left alone with their mother and when his little sister asks Ryan for help his return home culminates in a dramatic scene between Mallory and their mother. Will Ryan's family ever be whole again? Or did Mallory light the fuse that will blow it apart forever...

Themes

Family, family expectations, family pressure, growing up, isolation, fear, mental illness, teenage relationships, family breakdown, divorce, running away

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Ryan is so alone?
2. How do you think the situation (Mallory running away) could have been avoided?
3. Should Ryan have told his mother he had a girlfriend? Should he have told her about the job?
4. Why do you think the author introduced the character of Kim?
5. Should he have told someone what was happening with his Mother? Who should he tell? Why didn't other people notice what was happening in Ryan's family?
6. What advice would you give Ryan
7. What positive things occur in Ryan's life as a result of everything that happens?

Teacher Notes

1. Finding the good in the bad (Q7.) – the Father takes responsibility and becomes involved again with his children, Ryan's mother gets the help she needs, Mallory is no longer separated from her family, Ryan realises that wanting a part time job and having a girlfriend are perfectly normal
2. Recognising support networks for children outside of their own family members
3. Acknowledging contributing factors to Mallory's disappearance,
4. Making connections – the mother's attitude to Mallory/Ryan and Ryan's attitude towards Gemma and his disapproval of her relationship with Alex