



What I Did

By Christopher Wakling
ISBN: 9780062121691

Introduction

"This is family life today at its most believable: warm and messy, bored and raging . . . I Loved It."
—Emma Donoghue, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Room*

"This is a story about a terrible thing which happens to me. I have to warn you that nobody is bad or good here, or rather everyone is a bit bad and a bit good and the bad and the good moluscules get mixed up against each other and produce terrible chemical reactions. Did you know cheetahs cannot retract their claws?"

Six-year-old Billy loves animals, David Attenborough documentaries, and sneakers that flash when he runs. He does not love sitting still, the blood-soaked sky in *Watership Down*, or his father's cell phone.

When Billy runs into a busy street, ignoring his father's commands, he sets in motion a series of unexpected, family-altering events. *What I Did* is a heart-wrenching reminder of how best intentions can lead to disastrous consequences, and how one rash decision can take on a life of its own.

Questions for Discussion

1. The events of the book are set in motion when Billy's father spansk Billy after Billy runs out into a busy road. The spanking comes from a place of fear and love, but is seen quite differently by a stranger. Do you think Billy's father's actions were inappropriate? Is it ever justifiable to spank a child?
2. Everyone in this book—from Billy's parents, to the passerby who reports Billy's father to the authorities, to the social workers, to the doctor who examines Billy—has Billy's best interests at heart, and yet he is put through a harrowing experience, from the conflict at home to the climactic scene on the cliffs of Dover with his father. How could this have been avoided, if at all?
3. Were you nervous that Billy would be taken away from his family? At what point did you get nervous? Which parts of the book were the most tense, for you?
4. Would you have done anything differently as Billy's parents? Did you find yourself judging his father? His mother? Both? Equally?
5. Is Billy a 'normal' six-year-old?
6. Billy's narration is an integral part of this novel. How would this book be different if it were told from an adult or third person point of view?
7. Billy is often unconsciously very funny. Which were some of your favorite lines of his? What part does humor play in the book?
8. Billy sees the world through the prism of David Attenborough's wildlife documentaries, and likens people to animals. How does this trait affect the action? What animal do you think Billy, himself, would be?
9. Billy says at the beginning of the novel, "Nobody is bad or good here, or rather everyone is a bit bad and a bit good and the bad and the good moluscules get mixed up against each other and produce terrible chemical reactions." Did you put any one character "at fault" for what happened? Or did you feel it was an accidental confluence of events?
10. What roles do you think that Cicely, Lizzy and Grandma Lynne have within the story?
11. How do you think Billy, twenty years from now, will look back on these events of his childhood?
12. Grandma Lynne, talking to Billy's parents, says, 'Things like this. They snowball. You have to react quickly to stop them getting out of hand.' Do you think the social workers react proportionately to the accusations against Jim? What difficulties does the state face in protecting children from abuse?