

Charlie Joe Jackson's Guide to NOT Reading

by Tommy Greenwald

So here I am in middle school, and I'm proud to say I *still* hate reading.

Which is how the whole mess began.

It started when I was supposed to read this book for my English class. It's about this kid, Billy, and the bargain he strikes with the Devil to pitch a no-hitter in the championship game. But, it turns out the Devil is actually just a guy that was hired by Billy's dad to pretend to be the Devil, because Billy's dad figures that if Billy thinks he made a deal with the Devil, then Billy would have the confidence to actually pitch a no-hitter.

It's apparently a pretty good book, according to my teacher, Ms. Ferrell. And I guess it's got one of those just-believe-in-yourself-and-others-will-believe-in-you-too

messages that grown-ups want kids to hear over and over.

Anyway, like I said, that's where I ran into trouble.

I did what I usually do. I read the back cover, the front inside flap, the first chapter, and the last chapter.

Then I sat next to my friend Timmy McGibney at lunch.

For about two years, Timmy and I had what you might call an "arrangement". I would buy him an ice-cream sandwich, and he would tell me all about what was in the rest of the book. It was a "win-win" situation, which is one of those weird expressions my parents use all the time.

Naturally, I figured we'd make the same deal we always made.

"So Timmy," I said, handing him his ice-cream sandwich, "*Billy's Bargain* was a pretty good book."

"How would you know?" he asked. He always asked me that. It was kind of a routine we had.

“Well, the beginning and ending were pretty good.”

“I guess so,” Timmy said. He was fiddling with his lacrosse stick. Lacrosse was the only thing he loved more than ice-cream sandwiches.

“Tryouts coming up, huh,” I said, pointing at his stick.

“Yup,” he said. I waited for him to say something else, but he didn’t. This was weird. Usually he could talk about lacrosse for hours.

Timmy wolfed down his ice-cream sandwich and looked at mine. “I’m actually really hungry today,” he said. “Really, really hungry.”

I suddenly got a pretty uneasy feeling. “What do you mean, ‘really, really hungry’?”

“I’m saying I’m so hungry I could eat two ice-cream sandwiches,” Timmy said. “Maybe three.”

I looked at him in disbelief. We’d had the same deal going for almost a year. I’d handed over enough free ice cream for him to start his own dairy farm. Now all of a sudden he was pulling this!

I looked around. I checked my pocket for money. I considered my options. Then I did the only thing I could do.

I bought him another ice-cream sandwich.

Charlie Joe’s Tip #8

NOT ALL BOOKS ARE BAD

Every once in a while, a book can be a good thing. Here are those rare exceptions:

1. Comic books
2. Yearbooks
3. Checkbooks (when your grandparents are writing you a check for your birthday)
4. Facebook (when your parents aren’t looking)

