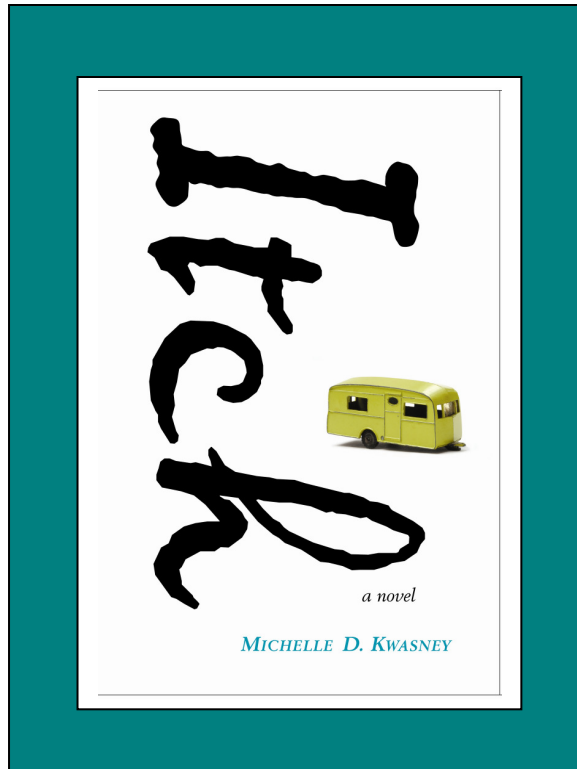


# Study Guide



## Itch

by Michelle D. Kwasney

Hardcover:

Published by Henry Holt and Company (BYR)

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Middle-Grade Fiction

Grade Range: 4 to 8

Age Range: 9 to 14

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## **Book Description:**

After the death of her beloved Gramps, Delores Colchester, better known as “Itch,” moves with her grandmother from Florida to Ohio. Starting over is hard, and Itch feels like an outsider in her new school, until she becomes friends with popular baton-twirling Gwendolyn. On the outside, Gwendolyn seems perfect: talented, smart, and beautiful. But she has a dark secret, which Itch begins to suspect and soon discovers is true. “Speaking up takes courage,” Gramps had always told Itch, and she’s about to discover just how much.

In a story set against the backdrop of the 1960s, Michelle D. Kwasney weaves a powerful coming-of-age novel about freindship, family, and the secrets that can tear them apart.

**Related themes:** Friendship, family, courage, honesty, upper elementary grades, moving, girls and women, physical abuse, self-esteem, death, 1960s.

## Discussion Questions

### Before reading:

1. What does the title of the book bring to mind?
2. What would you predict about the story, based on the *title*?
3. What would you predict about the story, based on the *image* on the jacket?

### After reading:

1. The novel takes place in 1968. How is life in the 1960s different from your life now? How is it similar to your own?
2. Delores Colchester, better known as Itch, says she is “shy in the speaking up department.” How does she eventually overcome this?
3. Itch and Gram are affected very differently by Gramps’s death. How do they each reveal their feelings? In what ways do they *hide* their feelings?
4. When Itch learns that Gram plans to sell Gramps’s car, she is devastated. What does losing his Bel Air represent to her? Recall a time someone got rid of something that was valuable to you. How did you feel?
5. Billy Applegate reveals to Itch that his mother is dead. Afterwards, Itch opens up too, telling Billy about Gramps. Has anyone ever confided in you, causing you to trust him or her in return? What happened?
6. Sometimes, we bend the rules to help someone in danger—such as when Itch convinces Gram to drive without a license in order to rescue Wendy. Describe a time you risked getting caught doing something “wrong” in order to do the “right” thing.
7. Although her character only appears briefly in the beginning of the book, before Itch moves to Ohio, much is revealed about Bailey Parncutt through the letters she writes to Itch. How does Bailey change over the course of the story? How do Itch’s feelings about Bailey change?
8. How would Itch and Bailey likely stay in touch with one another if the novel were to take place *today*, instead of in the past? What other story details might change if the story were set in the present day?

9. Wendy's birthday gift from Anna Marie is a beautiful porcelain doll. When Wendy removes it from the box, Anna Marie reprimands her, saying, "She's supposed to stay in her display case." What do the girls' actions in this scene say about their personalities?
10. After Itch plays her Beatles record on Gram's phonograph, Gram says, "Everybody's got a yesterday they yearn for." What is she trying to tell Itch?
11. What leads Itch to make a new swing for herself? Why doesn't she do so earlier?
12. Even though Wendy's mother has hurt her, Wendy admits she misses her mother after she leaves. Can you understand Wendy's feelings? How would you feel if you were Wendy?

## Creative Writing Exercises

1. Itch keeps a Favorite Words list. Which words would *your* list include?
2. Gramps has a habit of choosing unusual objects to describe what people are "made of." Choose a few people you know and come up with two or three things each of them are made of. How did you arrive at your choices?
3. Itch has a special Thinking Swing that gives her time alone with her thoughts. Describe the place where you do your best thinking.
4. Itch and Bailey keep a "Things We Both Can't Stand" list, and dislike of the color pink is the first item. Imagine making such a list with your best friend. What would it include?
5. Itch and Wendy share Necco Wafers the first time they meet. Describe a time you shared a favorite food or snack with a friend.
6. Sure it will win Wendy's friendship, Itch struggles to find a way to replace Wendy's busted thermos. Remember a time you put extra effort into proving yourself as a friend. What happened?
7. Itch claims she can hop in Gramps's car and "make the whole world disappear." Where do you go to make your worries vanish for awhile? What makes that place special for you? Describe it.
8. When Itch sees Wendy's bruises, she remembers what Gramps told her: "Speaking up taking courage." Think of a time you had to act in a way that took courage or bravery on your part. What happened? How did you feel?

9. Which character would you choose to spend a day with—Itch, Wendy, Anna Marie, Connie, or Billy? What would you do together? What would you talk about?
10. At the end of the book, Itch says, “Maybe there are some things we never find the answers for.” Do you agree? What are some of your unanswered questions?

## Recommended Reading (books with similar/related themes, for compare and contrast):

*What Jamie Saw*, Carolyn Coman, Front Street, 1995  
*The Great Gilly Hopkins*, Katherine Paterson, HarperCollins, 1978  
*Olive’s Ocean*, Kevin Henkes, Greenwillow, 2003  
*When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*, Kimberly Willis Holt, Henry Holt (BYR), 1999  
*Bud, Not Buddy*, Christopher Paul Curtis, Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 1999  
*Pictures of Hollis Woods*, Patricia Reilly Giff, Wendy Lamb Books, 2002  
*Snap*, Alison McGhee, Candlewick Books, 2004  
*Walk Two Moons*, Sharon Creech, Joanna Cotler Books, 1994

## Website and Links:

Author’s website: [www.michelledkwasney.com](http://www.michelledkwasney.com)

Publisher’s website: <http://us.macmillan.com/HoltYoungReaders.aspx>

Publisher information about *Itch*: <http://us.macmillan.com/itch>

A conversation with the author:

[http://us.macmillan.com/AuthorExtras.aspx?AuthorKey=1254660&m\\_type=4&m\\_contentid=4611#cmscontent](http://us.macmillan.com/AuthorExtras.aspx?AuthorKey=1254660&m_type=4&m_contentid=4611#cmscontent)

Recorded Books:

[http://www.rbfilm.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=rb.show\\_prod&prod\\_id=99424](http://www.rbfilm.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=rb.show_prod&prod_id=99424)

Information on helping abused children: [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)

## About the Author:



**MICHELLE D. KWASNEY** is the author of the young adult novel *Baby Blue*, which was a Booksense Pick and a New York Public Library Best Book for the Teen Age. She holds a master’s degree in education, and has worked as an elementary-school art educator in the public schools of Massachusetts and New York for over twenty years. Michelle lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Additional information can be found at: [www.michelledkwasney.com](http://www.michelledkwasney.com)