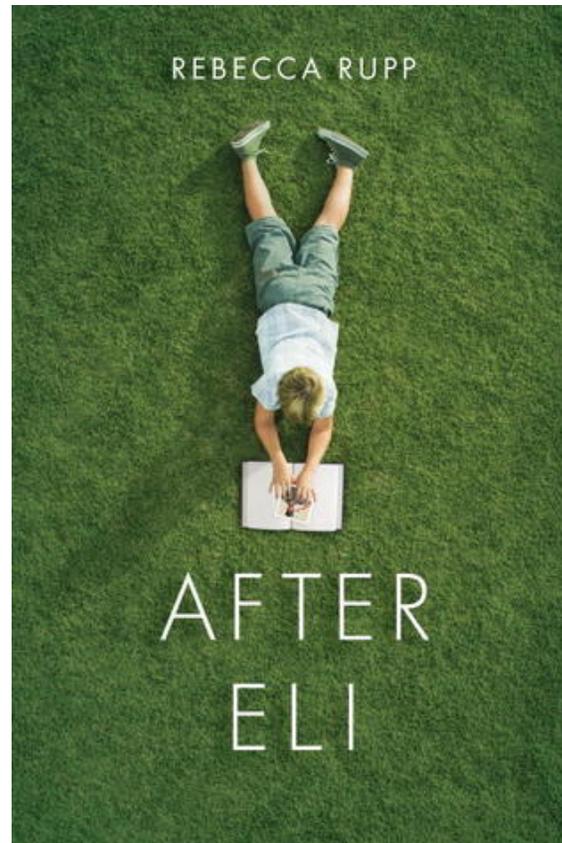


Literature in Context: A Community-Based Education Guide to *After Eli*



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Summary

Daniel Anderson's older brother Eli was killed while serving in the American military in Iraq, and three years after Eli's death, Daniel is still working out how to feel and how to move forward after such a monumental event. In order to try to find meaning in death – not only Eli's, but *all* deaths – Daniel has created a Book of the Dead. His Book of the Dead is really an old binder, but it's filled with names of the deceased and their causes of death, all of which Daniel processes to find meaning in both their lives and their deaths – with the hope that he will someday be able to find meaning in Eli's death and the hole that it has left in his life.

Daniel's Book of the Dead has been years in the making by the time his story begins, right at the kickoff of what turns out to be one of the most transformative summers of Daniel's life. Whether it's all of his studies of creative causes of death or simply the time that has passed, Daniel finds himself suddenly able to open his eyes and truly see the world around him. He makes friends, begins to see the good in others, and even begins to better understand the impact that his brother's death has had upon the other members of his family. Luckily, Daniel's summer of awakening isn't just a moment, it's a beginning – and by the story's end, his momentum is leading him away from his Book of the Dead and towards whatever is next.

Critical Thinking Questions

While After Eli is a work of fiction, its content can also be processed as if it were a true story – making it an even more meaningful resource for learning. Not only can readers practice deepening their understanding of the story by closely considering these questions, they can also learn about the impact that modern military action has on families and communities right here in our own country. Considering this theme around Memorial Day provides an opportunity to see the holiday's role in American culture.

Questions for Understanding the Text

- Why do you think Daniel still keeps the (E.) for Eli in his name, even though he admits he may have outgrown it?
- What does Daniel think about Eli's decision to join the military? Why? Do you think he'll change his mind?
- How do you think Daniel feels about Eli's "education days" now that Eli is gone? Explain.
- How does Daniel's understanding of Walter change throughout the story? Explain how you can tell.
- Daniel seems unsure of Isabelle initially, but is still happy to spend more time with her. Why do you think he's open to getting to know her better? How does his view of her change as he gets to know her?

- Walter and Isabelle are opposites, but both fit into Daniel's life. What role does each character play in Daniel's life? What might they be giving him that he wouldn't have otherwise?
- Though Daniel begins the story by saying he's not sure he'll ever come to terms with Eli's death, something does eventually shift within him. What do you think changes? Why?

Questions for Learning from the Text

- Neither Eli's family nor his community seem to understand why he joined the military. Do you think you understand?
- What do you think Eli thought would happen when he was deployed? How does that compare to what really happened?
- Do you think that Eli meant to leave his family behind to feel the way that they now do? Explain.
- Daniel's experience of losing a sibling to military service seems to be uncommon in his community. What do you think could be done so that Daniel's family might not be so isolated in their experience?
- How do you think the experience of losing a loved one to military service differs to losing a loved one to illness, an accident, or another more commonly experienced cause of death?

Community-Based Learning Map

After Eli brings the reality of military action into a modern context for young readers, who may not yet understand that war and military-related death is not just something of the past. The resources included here can be used to explore the impact of military service and the memorialization of those who have lost their lives while serving.

Resources for Self-Directed Learning Around Memorial Day

Learning Ahead: Memorial Day

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2017/05/23/hf-580/>

An excerpt from the May/June edition of Learning Ahead, this resource includes background information on the tradition of Memorial Day and the ways in which it is celebrated locally. Linking studies of Memorial Day to a poem by Walt Whitman, this resource encourages discussion and experiential learning.

Massachusetts Memorial Day: Western Massachusetts

<https://www.massvacation.com/explore/holidays/memorial-day/#western>

A complete guide to the Memorial Day parades and other community events held in western Massachusetts. Nearly 20 western Massachusetts communities hold annual parades in honor of Memorial Day!

Massachusetts Servicemembers Killed in Action: Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom

<http://www.mass.gov/veterans/cemeteries-and-honors/oef-oif-fallen-heroes.html>

This list, compiled by the state government, includes the names of all servicemembers from Massachusetts who have been killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Names are listed alphabetically by town of origin, making it very easy to learn about the impact that current military action has had on your own community. Exploring the list is a learning experience on its own, and looking at the specifics of the information offered about each person can become a lesson on branches of the military and/or data and statistics.

Memorial Day Ceremonies at State Veterans Cemeteries

<http://www.mass.gov/veterans/cemeteries-and-honors/cemeteries/state-cemeteries/annual-events.html>

The state veterans cemeteries in Agawam and Winchendon both hold special Memorial Day ceremonies annually, offering an opportunity to directly engage in memorializing Massachusetts residents who lost their lives while serving in the military.

Veterans War Memorial Tower at Mt. Greylock State Reservation

<https://www.mass.gov/locations/mount-greylock-state-reservation>

Did you know that atop Mt. Greylock sits a permanent memorial to those who lost their lives during World War I? Approved by the state legislature in 1930, the Veterans War Memorial is designed to serve as a permanent beacon to honor those who served. Visit Mt. Greylock to experience the tower's magnitude and consider its symbolism.