



Breathe: A Ghost Story

Cliff McNish , Geoff Taylor (Illustrator)

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Jack is used to danger. His asthma has nearly killed him more than once. But his new home has a danger he's never known before - *the spirits of the dead*.

They can't breathe, but in Jack's house they chase, hide, *scream*.

Only Jack can see them. Only he can hear them. And only he can learn their secrets in time to save himself... and his mother...

Winner of the Salford Book Award, the Calderdale Book Award and the Virginia Readers' Choice Award. In May 2013 Breathe was voted by the Schools Network of British Libraries as one of the top 100 adult and children's novels of all time.

Breathe: A Ghost Story Details

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Author : Cliff McNish , Geoff Taylor (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Breathe: A Ghost Story for online ebook

Jewels Faulkner says

First of all, i've never read anything like this. Absolutely nothing horror related. So it kind of freaked me out to read it on a page. You know? It's different when you read it, not see it. Parts of the book, let me rephrase that, the whole book is really seductive. I can't really put a pinger on it but when I was reading it all I could think about is that it sounded a lot like Jaycee Dugard. Even though the children in the house weren't tortured in that way it seemed to sort of resemble that.

I might not have been able to finish this book if it weren't for the character "Ann." I think that her character goes deeper than all the others. Well, maybe besides the Ghost Mother's character. Anyways, I loved Ann so much because what she sacrificed for the other 3 ghost children was unbearable. The special 'agreement' with the ghost mother just to save the other three. The fact that part of the 'agreement' was the she couldn't feed off of her in front of the other children. The thought that she knew that eventually all of them would get their souls taken away to the Nightmare Passage but she loved them so much that she wanted to prolong it as long as possible. How she understood Oliver better than he understood himself. I could go on and on but it's getting late.

I can't really say that I enjoyed the book. I didn't dislike it either. It just left me with the chills.

Jade Long says

This is a very tense story that focuses on the thrill and suspense of ghost stories, not very bloody or gross like some horror stories I have read, which I appreciate but still reasonably scary. It really opened my eyes to how dangerous illnesses can be, particularly asthma, and how lucky we are today to have the medicine we have. The end was quite satisfactory with the code which I remembered from earlier in the book, that really nicely wrapped up the entire story. It's a spine chilling tale that is definitely worth reading.

84-The_enlightment_of_Doctor_Grace_part5_Jesus says

Breathe by Cliff McNish is about a boy named Jack. Jack's father just died. His mom moves to an old house because Jack likes those types of houses. But something strange is happening to him. After his dad died, he would run his fingers over everything, sensing his dad. When he first arrives, he sees four faces looking out a window in the house. Those faces belong to Oliver, Ann, Charlie, and Gwyneth. They are ghost. Jack goes into his new room where a lady died. He does not know this, but he senses it and discovers a lot about her. When he goes into another room, he looks out the window and watches a scene of a little girl coughing in her garden. She smiles, but her mother looks scared. Jack meets Ghost Mother, a lady who has been trapped in the house for ages. She feeds off the souls of the four ghost children, whom she trapped there. She feeds off of them because souls left on Earth fade away into the Nightmare Passage. Ghost Mother wants to replace Jack's mother, and tries to convince him the children are bad. Jack learns that the girl he saw in the garden was Ghost Mother's daughter, Isabella, but she died when she was young. Jack accidently brings her spirit from beyond and get's some of the story out of her. Ghost mother felt bad so she left the window open in winter and froze to death. When people die, their love ones come down and bring them up. She refused to go

and got trapped. Feeling the Nightmare Passage approaching, she captured Daniel and sucked his soul out until he was sent there instead. Then she captured the four other children. Ann is the weakest. She let Ghost mother feed on her to protect Charlie and Gwyneth. When Oliver learns Jack can see them, he tries to warn him but Ghost mother finds out. Ghost Mother takes over Jack's mother and pretends to be her. She locks Ann in a wardrobe and Threatens to send her to the Nightmare Passage if the children tell. Jake finds out anyway. Ghost Mother sends Ann to the Nightmare Passage, then Oliver. Gwyneth and Charlie try to save him, but she captures them. When she is about to drain them, Jake has an asthma attack and passes out. They get sent to the Nightmare Passage and Ghost Mother plans to kill Jack. Right before she does Jack's mother regains control and stops her. Jack learns he can call out to the Nightmare Passage and summons it to take her away. After that he gains the ability to contact people who are dead who's loved ones got sent there. He let's them reach into the darkness and pull everyone, Ann, Gwyneth, Charlie, Oliver, and everyone else out. The moral of this story is wrong never wins and right prospers greatly. Ghost mother got an eternity in the Nightmare Passage, unless her husband and daughter choose to bring her up. This book is very good and the author did a very good job writing this. I like the title. When you read the book and about his asthma, you understand how appropriate it is. Plus it is sort of dramatic. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

Tina says

Original post at One More Page

I may be one of the biggest scaredy-cats in the world, or at least, among my group of friends. I know this doesn't make sense when it comes to my love for all things zombie. I like all the shambling, brain-moaning creatures, but when it comes to ghosts and other supernatural stuff? I cower under my covers. When I was a kid I used to like scaring myself silly by watching those Halloween specials that all local TV shows air during those times and no fail, I always end up being too scared to sleep for at least a week after watching those shows. I finally got to the point where I told myself to stop -- no more scary TV shows, no more scary anything, especially if I will lose sleep over it!

So to be totally honest, I was kind of apprehensive with my Required Reading challenge for October, given my state of being a chicken. :P But of course, what is a challenge if you don't challenge yourself, right?

The thing that really got me to buy *Breathe* by Cliff McNish is the fact that the main character, Jack, has asthma. I'm an asthmatic, too, so reading about characters who have the same condition brings me comfort because I could relate to them ((If you want to know how it is to have an asthma attack, try breathing through a straw. Hard, right? :P)). Jack's asthma attacks seem to be more dangerous than the ones I've been having lately, though, bad enough to almost kill him. It doesn't help that his dad recently passed away. In an effort to stop him from stressing out or getting lonely, Jack and his mom moved out and into an old farmhouse, where they hope to find peace and quiet.

But instead of finding peace and quiet, they find something else. Little did they know that the farmhouse was haunted by four ghosts, all children, whose spirits can't seem to leave the house Jack finds that he has the ability to sense who had lived in the house before, and to the ghost children's surprise, he could actually *see* them. This makes Jack extremely curious to the point of triggering his asthma, but then he discovers that there is something more sinister living in the house, and only he has the power to save himself and his mother.

Like I said, I'm a big scaredy-cat, so I made it a point to read *Breathe* in broad daylight. The first few chapters of the book were creepy and the illustrations at the start of each chapter gave my imagination enough fuel to see practically the entire chapter. McNish's writing is very vivid -- it was easy to slip into the world he created and actually see the house and the characters. I admit to being spooked for the first few chapters (but then again, it may be just because I'm easily frightened), but I grew comfortable with it later on. Jack's asthma attacks were also very accurate -- and also really scary, in the actual physical sense because I know *I* could also experience something like that. The extreme measures he and his mom had to go through just to make sure his lungs would behave is something akin to what my mom used to do when I was younger. I'm really, really hoping my asthma won't escalate to anything similar.

You know now that I think about it, it's not really *that* scary. However, I think I can attribute that to the fact that the story is really quite linear. Somewhere early into the book, we already know who the real villain is, and a little bit of why. The other reasons and the story were gradually revealed, but by then it feels almost like a typical ghost story. While I'd really rather not read ghost stories, I still want for a twist that will leave my mouth hanging open in the end, at least to thrill the reader in me.

Breathe still manages to have a heart-warming moment somewhere in the end, which earns it more points for me. I liked how the Nightmare Realm (the place where spirits go when they don't go to the "light") is described, and how one of the ghost kids finds some kind of peace there. The actual ending was wrapped nicely and I think it would leave readers with pretty much a good sense of completeness that stand-alone novels can give. (Except if you decide to nitpick, like me. But I can't offer another ending, so I should stop doing that :D)

Breathe by Cliff McNish may not fare so much with people who really *love* ghost stories (or who take delight in being scared), but for a casual reader (or for someone who doesn't really like getting scared), it's a pretty good novel. The first aid lessons for an asthma attack are a plus, too. This is my first Cliff McNish, but I think it won't be my last. Now, are his other books scary, too?

Charlotte (Bookmarks and Blogging) says

Also view at Bookmarks and Blogging

3.5 stars

I class myself as a horror fan. Not a big one, mind you, but I do enjoy a scary story every now and again. I like being left shaken and wondering if the things from the book are actually real and are coming to get me, even if it means I don't get to sleep for a week.

Maybe it's because I mainly read Stephen King when I read horror, or maybe it's because I'm not as much as a wimp as I first thought, but *Breathe* wasn't very scary. Quite creepy, yes, but not in the 'I need to put the book down for a while' kind of way.

I haven't read any typical ghost stories, so this was a nice change for me. I enjoyed how Jack, the main character, had a paranormal ability to sense other people through touching the furniture in the house and could talk to spirits. It wasn't overdone, like a lot of paranormal things tend to be, nor was it just done for the sake of it; it actually had a point to it and helped the story develop and unfold.

Speaking of the story, it was definitely interesting and intriguing. I was always wondering *what's going to happen next?* at the end of each chapter, and I found it a little tricky to try and figure it out. Normally, I'm quite good at figuring plots out (especially in cliché books) but I was pleasantly surprised that guessing *Breathe's* storyline was more difficult.

I did find the writing to be quite simple and more for children and younger readers than young adult/adults readers. It wasn't necessarily bad, but it did get a little boring at times, what with all the simple sentence openers. (Although that's probably because I've found myself reading more 'adult' books lately, and they have a distinctly different style of writing compared with young adult and young reader books). I think the flow of the writing and the story combined was good, but if the plot hadn't have been so interesting I think I would have enjoyed the writing less. It made for easy reading, though, and I found myself racing through this book and not having to stop and puzzle out the meaning of a word or anything.

Overall, I'd say *Breathe* fits more into the paranormal and supernatural genres rather than horror (that's not a bad thing! I enjoy paranormal and supernatural stories!), but that it's a quick, interesting read. I didn't find myself totally submerged in the story and right on the edge of my seat, but I don't regret buying and reading it.

I'd definitely recommend *Breathe* to any younger readers that are looking for something spooky and trying to break into the horror genre.

Megan Halili says

This book is wonderful for younger writers wanting to explore different genres - in this case, paranormal and mystery.

The characters felt very much fleshed out - yes, even the ghosts without any! - and made me feel the deepest sympathies for all involved. From the Ghost Mother and her child's tragic backstories, to her daughter's last moments, I constantly had a tear threatening to fall from beginning to end.

Thank you Cliff, for inspiring me and I'm sure many other young minds in the world of writing!

Bonniemilam says

McNish's idea of the after-life is very disturbing.

James Perkins says

It's got a deliciously creepy cover, of ghost faces peering out of windows, clearly old photographs blown up to fuzzy proportions, but very effective. It's got a good title: *Breathe* suggests tiredness, desperation, holding still in fear. The cross hatch drawings by Geoff Taylor that start each chapter add a wonderful old-style atmosphere to the text.

But that's all I can find to say positive about this book. From page two it fails. The book was published in

2006, with the children its ghosts used to be dead at minimum 60 years earlier and isolated in this lonely old house. Yet the children are using expressions like "freak out", which is 60s hippie slang and would be unknown to them. Other dialogue is unrealistic: one of the children describes the sinister Ghost Mother as "in her element" - an expression very unlikely to be used by a twelve-year-old child. There are several instances of odd speech like this. Jack's mother is rather unsympathetic considering how recently her husband - Jack's father - has died.

Then there are the strange metaphysics that author McNish has just dreamed up for this story and make no sense whatsoever, because they are not present in other ghost literature, and therefore require some explanation - but he has not provided any. The ghosts seem to have limited powers of movement but otherwise drift around on air currents like wisps of cloud. What? It's not clear why the four ghost children don't just hold back whenever the Ghost Mother wants a sip of their souls - after all, they have to let her. Surely they could play practical jokes or outwit her? The process is described so poorly that it's not in the least scary. And what's this Purgatory-like Nightmare Passage which seems to contain one big wind storm that cursed souls ride like surfers? Where does that fit into anything? Possession doesn't seem to be much of a thing in this universe - even while it's going on, they just yell for a bit in the mind of the possessor, and once it's over, the sufferers don't seem to have much in the way of after-effects, but I would think somebody who was possessed would suffer from PTSD, hallucinations, delusions, and a range of other psychiatric conditions, and those around them would be suspicious for quite some time afterwards. Nope! Everyone is back to normal in the blink of an eye.

The single most problematic thing with this book is how its whole premise has been wasted. Here's an asthmatic boy in the countryside with his mother to recover from the stress of his father's death - in a big old rustic haunted house, no less. It's a truly great idea for a children's book: lots of kids have asthma, kids are scared of ghosts, old houses look creepy, lots of kids have parents die on them. The readership can relate. Yet at no time does the asthma play a key part in the plot. The boy has a couple of asthma attacks, sure - but never is his life in danger, never is there any real threat, and the ghosts seem to kind of look on impassively or are even unaware of it. Even his mother seems mostly uninvolved. There's just mention of the inhalers here and there.

The writer creates no empathy for either his ghost or human characters, so there is mostly no tension or suspense or real creepiness. However, the bleak desolation of the Nightmare Passage might be unsettling for younger readers - why didn't McNish provide a more positive vision of death? This is a wonderful opportunity to teach children about how death comes to us all, and make them understand that it is part of life, and that there is nothing to really worry about. Instead he seems to be trying to clumsily terrify them, which mostly backfires.

Of all the books I've ever read, this is quite possibly the one with the most potential that completely failed to live up to its expectations on every single level. It got good reviews and won a slew of awards, but I really can't understand how.

Lori says

Fans of *The Sixth Sense* (yep, it's about a boy who "talks to dead people") and general creepiness will like the concept, but the pieces did not make a satisfying whole for me. Too much build up, too convenient a resolution, and the plot was thin in places. Lone Star winner for 2008-09.

Pahilario22 says

Breathe, by Cliff McNish is a thrilling and shivering novel about a young boy who has a sense for feeling ghosts. This assiduous author, I can tell, really put thought into this novel because of the way it is written. I never really thought of the things that were written into this book and never really thought of ghosts this way before. That is the reason why I think this book was intensely amazing.

Jack, the main character who has asthma, moves into a new, antiquated home after the recent death of his dad. His mom, Sarah, believes moving would take his mind off his dad. Little did they know, the house was full of other paranormal features, such as: a Ghost Mother, ghost children and shivers from the Other Side and the Nightmare Passage.

The Ghost Mother only wants to be acquainted with another child that will love her, but when Jack realizes what she really is, he denies to ever love her. The other ghost children, captured by the ghost mother so many years before for their soul, try to flee the Ghost Mother as well. Jack soon finds himself in the feat of trying to save the ghost children from getting their soul drained by the vicious Ghost Mother and the feat to save his mother whose body was possessed by the Ghost Mother because she wanted Jack to love her.

If you really are looking for a book with intensity, shivering feelings and adventure, I advise you to look into this ghostly novel. You'll come out of it thinking you've seen something in the corner or you'll have the feeling of being watched.

Airiz C says

I can best describe this kid's horror/paranormal story by McNish as a cross between two of Neil Gaiman's most popular children's books—Coraline and The Graveyard Book.

Basically this is the gist: asthmatic boy Jack and her mom moves into a big old house where ghost children Gwyneth, Ann, Oliver, and Charlie are incarcerated. Once they realize that Jack can see and talk to them, they start to ask for his help. Supposedly they should be crossing to the other side now, but the devilish Ghost Mother imprisoned them to feed from their spirit energy just so she can stay in the mortal's world. If the spirit energies of the ghost children are emptied, they're going to be claimed by the scary Nightmare Passage. Now here's an itty bitty detail that rung a bell: Ghost Mother wants Jack to treat her as his own mother, and forget his real one. If the Ghost Mother doesn't remind you of Coraline's "Other Mother" I think you have a problem. And I don't have to tell you what's in The Graveyard Book that's also present in this story, right? XD

Anyway, I liked how McNish deftly designed the dimensions where the spirits go after they shuffle off the mortal coil; I picture the setting quite clearly, and if I remember correctly it gave me a few goosebumps when I was reading the scene backdropped by that. I liked the scene where Jack calls to the Nightmare Passage to swallow up the Ghost Mother and then let everyone else who's trapped there out. Quite suspenseful and it's reminiscent of the horror books I used to read as a kid. Makes me want to grab a few R.L. Stine's books, dust them off, and read them.

Recommending this to people who like a decent paranormal story.

Avery Riebel says

Ann, Oliver, Gwyneth, and Charlie are just like all the other kids. They like to play, joke around, and just have fun. There's only one thing that sets them apart from everyone else- they're dead. These ghost children have been trapped in the same house for years, unable to pass on to the Other Side because of the spirit energy sucking Ghost Mother, feeding off the children simply to stay in the living world. Yet after a ghost's soul is deficient of energy, they are claimed by the Nightmare Passage, a horrid, barren place where disobedient souls are sent to be punished.

Breathe: A Ghost Story tells the tale of a twelve year old boy Jack, his mother, and the spirits in their new home. Jack had developed a gift after the death of his father- the gift of seeing when and how a person has died just with a caress of an object. His senses are heightened in this house, and every curl of a finger sends his mind spinning. It's not long before he meets- and befriends- the one and only Ghost Mother, along with Ann, Oliver, Gwyneth, and Charlie, whose stories he will learn a little too late.

Soon the Ghost Mother, aching to fill a void with the son she never had, can't stay away from Jack. Will Jack be able to protect himself, his mother, and the ghost children all while trying to defeat the Ghost Mother?

The horror genre has always been my favorite. In movies, it never fails to entertain. Yet I had never found a book in the horror genre that I truly enjoyed... until this one. Breathe: A Ghost Story by Cliff McNish is riveting. Do not let the size of it fool you- once you start reading, you will not be able to put it down. It is a page turner, and unlike other stories, exceptionally unpredictable. I seriously suggest this book to all who like scary stories of any kind, or those who are just looking for a good read!

Cheney says

I enjoyed reading this book to my students. I do wish it had been a little shorter in length. It was thrilling and at times a little creepy. But if you are looking for a scary book that will give chills this is not the one.

KK Helfen says

I really liked this book surprisingly! I was faced with so many emotions at times. Not your typical "happy ending" and quite a few "pins and needles" moments. I had never heard of this story or the author until 2 of my friends told me how good it was. I am so impressed with this story that I would likely read another of Cliff McNish's novels.

Jack and Sarah have moved to an old farmhouse for a new beginning after Jack's father died. Jack has chronic and deadly asthma and must keep in control of his breathing at all times. He also has a special gift: he can sense the presence of the dead around him. For the first time in his life, Jack realizes he can not only begin to see the ghosts around him, but he can also communicate with him. A deceased woman called the Ghost Mother begins a mother and son relationship with Jack, but one full of lies. There are also ghost children in the farmhouse and the Ghost Mother will do everything in her spirit power to keep those children from ruining the relationship she is trying to create with Jack. These ghosts are stuck in the human world and were never able to cross the other side. Who kept them back? How did they end up in the farmhouse? Can the Ghost Mother be trusted? And why isn't Jack's mom acting like herself? This story will surprise you in

more ways than it did with me. It will make you stop and think what may be on the Other Side.

The only things that I didn't like about this book was that some of the chapters kept going on for a long time and I thought that I would never finish the chapter. Also, at times I, personally, got confused because it would say one thing, then go on to something totally different that has nothing to do with what they were just saying. But overall I liked it and I would recommend it to anyone who likes to be spooked in the middle of the night. Why the middle of the night? Because you'll be hooked on the story that you won't want to put it down.

And just a note, be wary of the shadows and drafts within your home....

Beth Bonini says

This ghost story, aimed at 11-14 year old readers, would probably not appeal to any children who have had real experience with death. All horror and ghost stories delve into the frightening mysteries of what happens to us after we die, but this story explores that idea in a way that might properly disturb those of sensitive imagination. Unlike many ghost stories -- I'm thinking of the humorous Eva Ibbotson variety -- this story really touches on loss and mourning.

At the beginning of the novel, twelve year-old Jack and his mother are moving into an old house whose elderly owner has just died. Jack's father has also recently died of an unexpected heart attack. Jack is "sensitive" (what might be described as psychic) to the spirit world, and immediately picks up on the spectral inhabitants of the house: four ghost children and a ghost mother. The ghost mother is a long-time resident of the house; a century or so before, she lost her daughter to consumption. The ghost mother wants another child to love, but she is also tortured by unresolved guilt for the part she played in her child's death. There is also the practical matter of needing to "consume" souls in order to retain her own power. Disappointed by the ghost children who refuse to love her, who refuse to be the replacement of her own lost child, the ghost mother has resorted to feeding off of them. When she has consumed a soul, what is left of that being is trapped in the "Nightmare Passage" -- a kind of purgatory of wind, cold and physical torture.

Before long, Jack is being targeted by the ghost mother's frightening and destructive "love". Crippled by his own asthma, Jack has to stave off the ghost mother -- whilst somehow also saving his own mother from possession and the four ghost children from the Nightmare Passage. The idea of "breathing" has an interesting dual meaning in the story. The ghost mother breathes in souls; Jack struggles, literally, to breathe. Breath and life are inextricably connected.

It was an absorbing story, with an interesting explanation for what happens to souls who get trapped in this world. As I mentioned before, it felt real enough to bite a bit too close to the bone.
