



How I Spent My Summer Holidays

W.O. Mitchell

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When *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* was first published in 1981 a Western reviewer wrote: "If *Who Has Seen the Wind* told the story of a young boy's coming to terms with death, *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* tells of a young man's attempt to come to terms with his own sexuality and that of the world around him."

The twelve-year-old young man is Hugh, and in small-town Saskatchewan it is the hot summer of 1924. When Hugh and his friends dig a secret cave out on the Prairie, they soon find it occupied by an escaped patient from the mental hospital. Defying the adult world, the boys become involved with a former war hero and current rum-runner, King Motherwell, in sheltering and feeding the runaway. When passions aroused by sex explode into murder, Hugh leaves his boyhood behind him for ever.

How I Spent My Summer Holidays Details

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Author : W.O. Mitchell

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From Reader Review How I Spent My Summer Holidays for online ebook

Christelle says

Classic coming of age story. I could really picture the boys and their summer adventures.

BrokenTune says

When I first started my Canadian reading project, W.O. Mitchell seemed to appear on every list of recommended authors.

How I Spent My Summer Holidays tells the story of a summer in 1924 when a group of boys were set on adventure and inadvertently got mixed up with a murder.

It is only several years later when the MC returns to his hometown that he is able to put his childhood memories into context and understands the story fully.

In many ways, How I Spent My Summer Holidays reminded me of the film Stand By Me. Both are coming of age stories in which a group of boys are faced with the discovery of a dead body, and in both stories, even though the boys set out as a group, every one of them gets to hold on to a different part of the story, a different reality which will eventually shape their lives.

Gillian says

An excellent Canadian coming-of-age novel. It reminds me of my own childhood and also stories from my Grandpa who would have been a contemporary growing up on the prairies. It has an interesting plot, excellent character development, and some nice observations about memory and the creation of personal legends.

Lisa says

Roman à clef. Not my usual, but nice. I learned a lot because I had to use Google to look up about ten thousand terms. And by the way, did Stephen King steal from this for "The Body"? He definitely stole most of it for "It".

Elin says

"How I spent my summer holidays" is a story about a young boy growing up on the Prairies of Western Canada. My mother's family homestead is not far from where the story takes place, as a result, this book has

a special fondest.
absolutely a delightful read!

Biblio Curious says

I had to read this one in middle school or high school and didn't enjoy it. It was uncomfortable and strange to read. The only part I remember is the weird scene at the swimming pool. I was a kid once and never acted this way or saw boys act this way. I'll give it another flip through now that I'm an adult. But it was one of those painful to get through assigned books in English class. It was one of the worst I had to finish for school.

Catcher in the Rye was much better. Stone Angel was also fantastic. The Lottery Rose and All Quiet on the Western Front were all good books that were assigned reading. I remember so many things from these books and would eagerly read them again. They are all sad books also. It could have been a better teacher or just better novels. Go Ask Alice was also great, I read it during the troubled Teen Years and felt her writing was so honest.

Kathleen says

We listened to the audiobook of the classic HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER HOLIDAYS written and read by W. O. Mitchell and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. This master of the English language had us laughing aloud more than once, and occasionally cringing as he related the experiences of small prairie town 12 year old Hugh and his friends in the 1920's.

W. O. Mitchell's CBC Radio broadcasts delighted a generation of Canadian listeners.

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Daniel Kukwa says

If your only experience with W.O. Mitchell is "Who Has Seen the Wind" you might be surprised by the undercurrent of darkness running through this book. Mitchell manages to take what is, on the surface, a very young adult story and add layers of grown-up revelation, awakening, and even violence. It's a surprisingly melancholy take on growing up, resulting in a very engaging & gripping story.

Jenya Yuss says

One of the most amazing books I have read in a very long time. It makes you laugh, it makes you cry, it makes you think. Very fast paced and easy. If you manage to get your hands on it, I would recommend it! (although I did have a hard time finding it)

Carol says

I stopped writing book reviews for several years, but I can recommend W.O. Mitchell as he is always good. Here is a quote that I underlined...

"Everybody gets scared," King said. "Nothing wrong with that. Main thing is -how do you handle it.

"How?" Peter said.

"By not thinking."

"I find that difficult to..."

"But it's right-you got to turn off thinking-right off-and do what you got to do. If you think about it, then you'll get more and more scared and more and more paralyzed. So-blank it out-thinking. That's the way the army works."

Ann says

Near the beginning of this book there is a dream that contains a disturbing image that made me shy away from reading this story. The book is about a boy's loss of innocence and the retelling of the dream led me to believe it would be a different type of tale than it was.

It turned out to be a memorable coming-of-age chronicle about Hugh who lives in a small prairie town. The year is 1924 and the details make it sparkle with life. W.O. Mitchell knew how it felt to be a boy on the cusp of adulthood and all the dreams, fears and follies that entails.

Hugh is looking back as an adult on a time of his life that may have caused the recurring dream and takes us with him on the journey that is at times funny, sad, scary and fresh.

Stacy says

It took me a while to get into this, as I thought he was skipping around too much. Soon, I was laughing uproariously over his boyhood antics. After that, I was drawn into the intrigue and sadness of that summer. Although we may not have experienced the extreme events Hugh did, the childhood of all of us is captured in some way here.

Kenton Smith says

Really enjoyed this, maybe more so because I was once a 12 year-old boy and lived in the country. Definitely not as innocent as the last book of his that I read (Who Has Seen the Wind) so be prepared for teenage-boy language and thoughts. Love the way Mitchell writes and this is no exception.

Manybooks says

This classic of modern Canadian literature, which was first published in 1981, is, I believe, sometimes thought of as being somewhat of a children's or at least a young adult novel (and is often read in both Junior High and Senior High English classes in Canadian schools). However, while the main character of W.O. Mitchell's How I Spent My Summer Holidays, Hugh (or Hughie) is a twelve-year old child (at least during the flashbacks, the memories of that one summer), How I Spent My Summer Holidays is certainly NOT a children's novel (even though Hugh is twelve years old during that summer described and remembered, I do not think most twelve year olds would either be able to fully comprehend the scope of the story or even much enjoy it). I first read How I Spent my Summer Holidays in grade eleven English, and while I very much enjoyed the novel then, I believe that I actually got much more out of my recent rereads. And while I would thus not hesitate to warmly recommend How I Spent my Summer Holidays, it is most definitely more a book for adults and older teenagers above the age of sixteen or seventeen. I think I was about sixteen when we read this for school, and while I enjoyed it at that age, if we had been made to read How I Spent My Summer Holidays in Junior High (which I think approximately corresponds to Middle School in the United States), I know I would likely have had a much less positive opinion of How I Spent my Summer Holidays (and would probably have found it very much an overly difficult read).

The main protagonist (Hugh, who appears as both an adult and as a child) is sensitive, intelligent, from a secure home and community, but in his child persona, he also displays obvious traits of rebelliousness, particularly towards adults (in this way, twelve year old Hugh is a typical budding teenager). There is much joy portrayed in Hugh's recollections of that one summer holiday, the innocence of youth, the fun of boys' clubs, the summer swimming hole. But against these familiar (and enjoyably innocent) activities of boyhood are presented the problematic and uncomfortable aspects of Hugh's sexual development, and the violence and horror of the events which transpired that one summer (the discovery of Bella's body in the cave, that King Motherwell had murdered Bella, his wife, King hanging himself at the "Mental" as well as Hugh's own guilt, for it was he who inadvertently revealed Bella's secret love affairs to King).

The older Hugh, the one recollecting, remembering that one summer, in a way sits in judgement of a society, where the natural development and expression of sexuality is considered sinful and at the very least distasteful, where humanity and decency are denied to the mentally ill, where puritanism and puritanical thoughts are forced even onto and into children (and if some of these children later break under the dictates and strictures of said puritanism, they are simply tossed aside and consigned to the "Mental" as deficient). Innocence is lost, but not only is it lost, the children actually seem to be somewhat guilty themselves and bear the sins of the entire community, perpetuating its destructiveness in their adult lives, in their chosen careers (like Austin Musgrave, who uses his childhood talents and tendencies for gossip, spying and tattle tailing in his profession as a child psychiatrist).

How I Spent My Summer Holidays shows thematically that darkness, that both good and evil can and do exist within us all (even children). The novel is therefore for all intents and purposes quite dark in general outlook, although there are also an undeniable optimism and feelings of hope present. In many ways, How I Spent my Summer Holidays can be considered a "Bildungsroman" (a novel of development), but while the main theme seems to focus on the narrator's (Hugh's) childhood, the central theme is actually the reconciliation of the now adult narrator's past with his present (his childhood self with his adult self). Personal responsibility and acceptance of said responsibility, of one's past, of one's memories are required for growth towards deeper and lasting self-knowledge.

Hugh's narration tends to move back and forth in time throughout the novel, and although this does render How I Spent my Summer Holidays rather confusing and somewhat distracting at times, it is actually an ingenious narrative tool, as it both focuses and continuously refocuses the reader's concentration and attention. The reader is not able to be lulled into a sweet sense of nostalgia; he/she needs to remain continuously engaged and vigilant. The back-and-forth narrative also causes the reader to reflect on exactly "what is memory" and to even question his/her own memories and recollections of the past (what is illusion, what is reality).

The impetus for Hugh to review the circumstances of a period of his adolescence is a recurring disturbing dream he has been having as an adult (dreams might be illusions, but they also hold the keys to memory, and these memories, these dream sequences are both realistic and illusionary at the same time). Memories might be nostalgic, they might be dark, they might be light, and taken together, taken in combination, they can perhaps provide answers and a deeper sense of self-awareness. How I Spent My Summer Holidays also demonstrates in no uncertain terms that one's memories are part of a larger story (family, society, the world). No man is an island, and Hugh finally realises that his own memories, his own story are simply part of a whole, one of several pieces of the jigsaw puzzle(s) of life, society, community, both past and present.

Finally, Hugh's life, Hugh's way of thinking, have been shaped not only by himself, by his family, his community, his own experiences, but also by the prairie landscape of the Canadian wilderness. The children's joy in the simple pleasures of prairie (country) living permeates How I Spent my Summer Holidays and does much to somewhat mitigate and relegate the horrible events of Bella's death, King's suicide and the problems and traumas experienced by the mentally ill (and the stigmas attached to them). Hugh's memories of the prairie landscape are likely somewhat nostalgic and overly glowing, but the children's response to and appreciation of nature is authentic, spiritual, cleansing and meditative, providing a welcome relief and foil to the horrible occurrences of that one summer, showing that even in the most dire circumstances, nature and the beauty of nature is present to lay a healing hand of potential hope on the world and its inhabitants.

Tawnya Roy says

I actually listened to this on CD while driving back and forth to work. The scene in which the kids dig the first cave had be roaring with laughter in the car. I am sure anyone driving past me thought I was nuts.
