

# Book Review

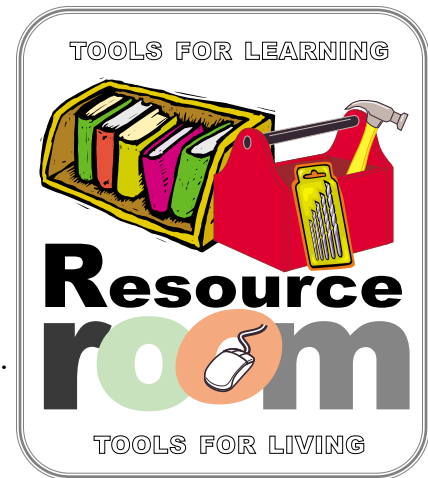
**Title:** *Athletic Shorts*

**Author:** Chris Crutcher

**Publisher:** Dell Publishing, 1989

**Length:** Six short stories, most about 25 pages long.

**Print size:** Small.

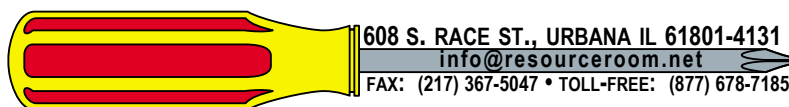


**Summary:** Chris Crutcher extracted characters from his novels and one other story, and assembled six short stories in this book. The characters generally have something athletic in their profiles, hence the title *Athletic Shorts*. They also face formidable challenges in their lives of one sort or another.

**Readability:** Chris Crutcher is fond of figurative language and metaphor — students who like things concrete may get lost and stay lost without guidance. An example: “However, that’s not the principal reason I sometimes see my so-called real parents as emissaries from way down under.” If the student understands the sentence, they’ll probably identify with it and find it funny; if they don’t understand “emissaries” or “way down under,” it will be a sentence without meaning.

The characters in the stories wouldn’t be found in “Leave it to Beaver.” However, unlike much young adult fiction, the stories aren’t *about* the out-of-the-mainstream elements of the characters’ lives, written so that someone from the mainstream could better understand them. The stories are about all sorts of things — and the characters just happen to have interesting facets of their lives which, of course, have a significant impact on the events of the stories.

The conflicts are fairly easily defined, so this book could be a good vehicle for making “plot puzzles” to describe the conflict, and rising and falling action, etc. Of course, it could also be used to examine elements of short stories. Character analysis might be more difficult, as students may be distracted by the more interesting parts of the characters’ lives, but it could be an excellent opportunity for having students look beyond surface details and apply the same criteria for looking at character and character development as they would to more easily understood people.



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If you happen to include discussions of learning styles, with concepts like “kinesthetic learning,” the first story provides a concise, elegant example of a person who learns a skill quickly and well — once it’s presented via his “strong channel.”

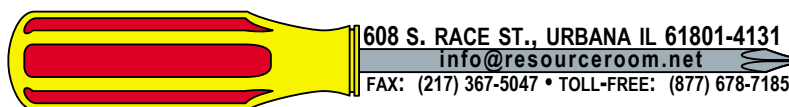
**Maturity issues:** The plots and characters deal with difficult contemporary issues which include homosexuality and racism. They are dealt with openly but not sensationally. There is also some use of language (such as “the s word”) that wouldn’t be advocated in most school hallways. Read the book just because it’s good, then decide whether it fits your class or meets an individual student’s needs.

**Typical multisyllable/irregular words:** You may want to see how many of these words your students can identify before expecting them to read independently. Both the vocabulary and the figurative language make this a fairly challenging book.

emissaries  
cache  
anticipatory  
camouflage  
campaign  
humiliation  
monogamous  
intricate

extraordinaire  
opponent  
critiqued  
Wrestlemania  
cannibalizing  
volunteer  
larynx  
shenanigans

karate  
cemetery  
eccentric  
sewer  
fiberglass  
palatial  
nouveau  
unkempt



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