**Godless**



# Bio of Pete Hautman

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| “Here I am, very full of myself, at the  National Book Awards ceremony in 2004” |

“Don't you know that if you like an author's work you should hope never to meet him (or her) in person? More than once I have admired a writer and then, upon meeting him (or her), discovered him (or her) to be a self-involved jerk with the personality of a rabid weasel. And don't you find gender correctness to be exhausting?... I’m nowhere near as interesting to you as you are to yourself, and probably even less interesting to you than your lint-filled navel. Nevertheless, I am compelled by various forces to share information about myself—such as my middle name (Murray), how I like my eggs cooked (poached, or gently scrambled with fresh black Perigord truffle, please), and whether or not I believe in God.  
  
This is also a good page for students who have an "'author report" due tomorrow morning. So here's some miscellaneous personal info.” I don’t think I could better describe Pete Hautman if I tried.

# Book Summary

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| https://www.amazon.com/Godless-Pete-Hautman/dp/1416908161 |

Godless is about religion from two separate view-points, combined into a single character. Jason Bock is a teenager who does not believe in religion, despite the pressures of a religious family and regular meeting with a religious (indoctrination) discussion group. After being punched to the ground beneath the town’s water tower, Jason invents a religion based on the tower. He begins to include people into his invention and things begin to go out of his control. The group gets caught and are punished for playing around with the town’s water supply, but things don’t end there. The group splits apart into those that abandon the idea entirely, want to use it to have fun, whole-heartedly believe it, and him. Jason discovers something about religion that he hadn’t before as he comes into his own and is seen as an adult.

# 1) Can’t Prove You Wrong

“You know, it makes sense what you were saying about the water tower,” Shin says as he adds fresh water to the snail pond.

“What did I say?”

“That I can’t prove you wrong. I mean, you can’t prove a negative, right? Like, you can’t prove that doesn’t exist, and you can’t prove that the water tower isn’t God. Besides, when you get right down to it, it’s a matter of relativity.”

“It is?” I don’t always follow Shin’s logic.

“Sure. God is relative. As far as the pods are concerned, *I’m* God.” (Godless, 24-25)

As most of the novel is based on religion, so too are some of its best quotes. Here, while Shin is taking care of his personal snail habitat, he compares his relationship with them to that of God and mankind. To me, the most important part about this quote isn’t that they are discussing the complexities of religious faith, but that they are teenagers. This novel is meant for this age group because, despite what some would think, young adults are perfectly capable of understanding and even creating similar distinctions as adults. For the young adults that struggle with being unable to share beliefs with those around them, this novel is a fantastic way to better understand themselves or simply cement their feelings.

# 2) You Don’t Believe Any of This, Do You?

“Do you really think that I think the St. Andrew Valley water tower is the all-powerful, all-seeing ruler of the all-that-is?... So, you ask, how can Jason Bock be serious about a religion that worships a false god?

Are you kidding?

You ever watch a football game and get totally into it? Why? It’s not a *real* battle. It’s just a game that somebody made up…

Same thing with water towers and God. I don’t have to be a believer to be serious about my religion.” (Godless, 89-90)

Jason, and therefore the author, is explaining how someone can take constructed ideas as seriously as reality. It explains how people can truly enjoy certain subjects, such as sports and religion. For Jason, his religion for the town’s water tower is simply a creation of his own to make a group he could be a part of, who shared his serious treatment of it. In many ways, this argument perfectly illustrates how it can work for any manner of situations with its use of football as a prime example. In today’s culture, this would also work for video games or reading. Believing something to be true doesn’t need to be synonymous with enjoying the idea of it. I think this is a great lesson for young adults to understand as they learn what to believe in and what to take seriously.

# 3) How Can You Understand Something

“Shin, are you crazy?”

“I don’t know,” he says. “Do you think I am?”

“Well, this water tower stuff . . . it seems like you’re, you know, so *into* it. You don’t really think the water tower is God, do you?”

His eyebrows crumple. “Don’t you?”

“As a joke, sure. But . . . no, I don’t.”

He is looking at the sketchbook, at his rendering of Tower God Jason Bock.

“You said you did,” he says.

“Yeah, but I was–“

“How do you know it’s not true if you don’t believe in it?”

“I . . . huh?”

He looks up from the sketchbook and into my eyes. “How can you understand something you don’t believe in?”

“Shin, that desn’t make any sense. That’s like saying you can’t understand leprechauns unless you believe in them.”

“Do you understand leprechauns?”

“I don’t believe in them.”

“There you go.” (Godless, 191-192)

This quote is arguably the most important quote in the entire novel. While this novel’s main themes are against religion in general, it also presents us with this gem of understanding. This book is meant for people that don’t believe in religions and it is meant to teach a simple principle. The reason why non-believers don’t understand a religion is because they don’t believe in it. It’s a sort of compromise between the two groups to hopefully create a sense of acceptance. The point of this novel, based on this excerpt, is not to attack religions, but rather to allow young adults to understand why some religions aren’t for them.

# For Teaching

This book is great tool for learning religion in its various forms, as well as the lack thereof. I’d honestly put this book in the age group of sixteen. It’s a simple read, but also very thought provoking for growing teens. I would use this book to start discussion in groups of four about various chapters of the book. Each would discuss the theme of the chapter, then present their findings, consensus, or disagreements. Finally, I would have a brief writing exercise on how the book connected with them, either positively or negatively. I would say that teens need to read this book because it presents a sort of levity towards a serious subject of thought, without vilifying either side.

# For Teens

Young adults are all trying to better understand themselves and the world around them. Religion is one of societies tools for comprehending both at once, from a spiritual perspective, so it is no wonder that most young adults focus a lot of the time into thinking about their or others’ religious beliefs. This book should be recommended in school because it is short and concise, while also being incredibly entertaining. It provides realistic scenarios with teens, such as how certain characters are nothing like how they first appear to be. Some even have mental issues that only show themselves later in the book. It also doesn’t shy away from the repercussions of the character’s actions.

If I had to categorize this book based on the reading, I’d describe it as a “Modern Problem” book. It is a work of realistic fiction where the characters could all be found in the real world, with real-world problems. It faces and answers difficult questions about religion without it losing its entertainment value.

# Complexity

Godless is rated as a 4.1 on the ATOS for reading level and a Lexile level of 640L. But I’ll explain how that translates into how it reads from a person’s perspective. It is a perfect read for freshmen and sophomore students in high school because it is easy to follow. It doesn’t have hidden meanings in it that need to be analyzed, instead presenting them clearly as every chapter ends. The text is organized evenly on the pages, with lines having enough space between them to not make the novel appear intimidating.

It has a unique (to me) perspective that includes thoughts and observations from Jason, as well as inner monologues to present short pockets of exposition. The sentences are not complex by any means, allowing any reader to follow along. There are a few words that some would need to look up, but these occasions are not required to understand the plot. Finally, the novel’s ability to dive into the mind of Jason is compelling because it is does not go out of its way to paint him as a benevolent hero character. He’s just a kid who acts out against the pressures around him. The only reason why I would focus on sophomores rather than freshmen for this book is for the LIGHT mentioning of Jason’s sexual attraction toward one of the female characters. It’s not graphic by any means, but it’s enough that I would feel more comfortable teaching with slightly older students.