

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

# The Monster of Kings Island

Christopher Bollen

## About this Text

Christopher Bollen is a New York City based author. He has written five novels and several short stories, articles, essays, and interviews. **As you read, take notes on how the author sees himself and others.**

## Vocabulary

**You will see the following words in this text:**

commensurate (*kuh-men-ser-it*)

dubious (**doo**-bee-uhs)

infamy (**in**-fuh-mee)

innate (ih-**neyt**)

ubiquitous (yoo-**bik**-wi-tuhs)

## INDEPENDENT READING

## NOTES

[1] The monsters of Southern Ohio had long wait lines and strict height requirements. But one behemoth<sup>1</sup> in particular — a roller coaster called the Beast — served as a rite of passage for us kids of Cincinnati. Even before I saw the roller coaster, its **infamy** was scored in my mind by way of the Beast's **ubiquitous** logo: two manacled<sup>2</sup> claws straddling a railroad track that disappeared into a fiery hellhole.

[2] It was a test of courage and bladder control that made watching a slasher film at a friend's sleepover seem like a walk in the woods. (Full disclosure: At 8, walks in the woods frightened me, as did swimming pools and vans with sliding doors — in fact my childhood could be described as one extended panic attack kept in check by the far worse fear of social ridicule.) Every summer my family packed into our van and drove to our local amusement park, Kings Island. And every summer I was spared the horror of the world's longest wooden roller coaster by being too short to clear Scooby-Doo's outstretched paw in the park's **dubious** measuring system of emotional and physical maturity.

[3] But by the summer of 1984, my body had failed my **innate** survival instincts by growing beyond the 48-inch ride requirement. My older sister, Heather, a Beast veteran with lip-snagging braces, brought along her best friend, Traci. On the drive, I tried to calm myself with memories of **benign** park activities: the rainbow potato-sack slide or the Viking ship. Heather turned to me in the back seat. "I call hitting the Beast first." I appreciated her biannual tightenings at the orthodontist.

Make notes about how the author sees himself and others.

<sup>1</sup> **Behemoth** (*noun*): an extremely large and powerful animal or monster

<sup>2</sup> **Manacled** (*adjective*): shackled, chained by the hands

[4] “Are you O.K., Christopher?” my father asked as we waited in line at the Beast’s entrance. “We can skip it.” This might have been the moment I realized that clutching your stomach was an international sign of distress. Heather and Traci rolled their eyes. “That wouldn’t be fair to Dad,” Heather said. “If you don’t go on, he can’t either.” I watched the line creep forward, filled with wiry young men with Steve Perry haircuts and women embalmed in enough hair spray that even a rocket launcher wouldn’t disturb their perms. The prospect of fear was a Midwestern mating ritual.

[5] The rickety, brown monster rose vertiginously<sup>3</sup> through the trees. It looked like the Hells Angels<sup>4</sup> had kidnapped Amish barn builders<sup>5</sup> and forced them to erect a shrine of suicidal madness. By the time we reached the boarding station and I towered over Scooby, red cars returned with their shellshocked passengers. I felt the impulse to marry Scooby, to begin a life together on the platform where we would never separate. The teenage conductor grunted. “Chris, come on,” Heather snapped. I belted myself in, my knees nowhere close to touching the bar that was supposed to lock me in place. I just had time to say, “I don’t want to,” before the ride rocked forward.

[6] The car ascended on a jittery chain that did the work of teeth-chattering for me, up a 112-foot peak, and all my brain could contemplate was the drop. My father patted my knee. Goodbye, life. Goodbye, third grade. Boy who feared risks topples out of coaster. As we summited the crest, the world froze briefly, peacefully, and then we plunged. I tried to scream but the wind swept it back into my throat. We were falling a million-miles a second into a black tunnel, swooping on a current of metal and wood, and it wasn’t just the speed but the ride’s jerry-built<sup>6</sup> epidermis<sup>7</sup> that seemed to promise total detachment from the track. We banked turns so fast the landscape became a flip book of greenery and cement. As we shot toward another steep descent, I noticed Traci cringing with her eyes closed, Heather with her metal teeth gritted, her mascara watering and my father, a construction worker whom I had never observed more than mildly irritated, screaming with his back fillings on display.

[7] A sense of joy overtook me, that we could all be scared out of our wits together. Maybe we were always frightened of what was coming, had been forever, but only now could express it in shrieks and tears. Fear was like a connective tissue even if our real connective tissue was sustaining whiplash. After all, that’s what the Beast offered: not death but four minutes of life strapped in and beyond the tether of its own control.

[8] The train threaded into the station. We climbed out, laughing dizzily, and I felt something **commensurate** to love: I had survived the monster, and all I wanted was to go back and be tossed around again.

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<sup>3</sup> Causing vertigo, which is a feeling of being off balance

<sup>4</sup> An international motorcycle club with a reputation for violent activity

<sup>5</sup> An American religious community known for their pacifist beliefs

<sup>6</sup> Poorly made

<sup>7</sup> The outermost layer of the skin

## Close Reading

**Directions:** Reread or refer back to the section(s) indicated. Then answer the questions with your group.



**START** at Paragraph 2

**STOP** at the end of Paragraph 4

1. What ideas about fear do these paragraphs develop? **[RL.2]**

2. How does Bollen develop a humorous tone in this section? **[RL.4]**

**START** at Paragraph 6

**STOP** at the end of Paragraph 7

3. How does the author support the realization that “fear was like a connective tissue”? [RL.2, RL.3]

## Student-Led Discussion

**Directions:** Discuss the questions with a partner. Record notes on both of your answers. Push yourselves to use formal language and evidence from the text. *5 minutes*



1. To Bollen, what did the Beast **embody**? How does that change over the course of the memoir?

2. **CROSS TEXTUAL:** Bollen says "fear was like connective tissue." Consider Zauner's message in "Crying in H Mart" and Noah's message in "Chameleon." What would each author argue is our "connective tissue?" Explain.

3. **CROSS TEXTUAL:** You have read "Crying in H Mart," "Chameleon," and "The Monster of Kings Island." Which memoir's theme resonated most with you? Explain.

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## Independent Practice

**Directions:** Answer the multiple choice questions for “The Monster of Kings Island.” 5 minutes



1. Which statement *best* expresses a theme of this memoir? **[RL.2]**
  - A. It is best to face challenges with family members.
  - B. Joy is a stronger emotion than fear.
  - C. Losing control can be dangerous.
  - D. Fear is a universal emotion.
2. What effect did the author *most likely* intend with the description of the Beast’s logo in paragraph 1? **[RL.3]**
  - A. To develop tension
  - B. To establish a sense of chaos
  - C. To create sympathy for the narrator
  - D. To emphasize the author’s excitement
3. Which of the following is the *best* definition for the word “behemoth” as it is used in paragraph 1? **[RL.4]**
  - A. Something stern
  - B. Something strange
  - C. Something unknown
  - D. Something enormous

4. Reread the following lines from Paragraph 4:

*Heather and Traci rolled their eyes. “That wouldn’t be fair to Dad,” Heather said. “If you don’t go on, he can’t either.”*

How is Heather and Traci’s behavior in this section important to the passage as a whole? **[RL.3]**

- A. It shows how bravery can come with age.
- B. It reveals that peer pressure can influence one’s behavior.
- C. It illustrates that sibling rivalry is often the cause of conflict.
- D. It reinforces the idea that everyone has different viewpoints.

## Independent Practice

**Directions:** Answer the short response prompt for “The Monster of Kings Island.” *15 minutes*



**PROMPT:** You have just read “The Monster of Kings Island” by Christopher Bollen. How does the ending develop the overall meaning of the memoir? **[RL.5]**