

'Bones' details grief, healing

In *The Lovely Bones: A Novel*, author Alice Sebold presents the story of a family's struggle to heal after the disappearance and apparent death of one of its members.

But Sebold allows only the reader to know the true fate of 14-year-old Susie Salmon, who, on a winter night in 1973, decided to take a shortcut home from school through a cornfield and was never seen again. Susie narrates the novel from heaven, where she can see everything that takes place on earth.

In the book's opening lines, Susie point-blank tells readers what her family will never know: Her last moments on earth were filled with terror as she was brutally raped and murdered by a neighbor. In 11 thankfully succinct pages, Sebold describes the horror of Susie's demise, which occurred just a short distance from her home. If Sebold had devoted any more space to describing the tragic way in which Susie died, the novel's true focus — how Susie's loved ones dealt with their loss and how they finally broke free from their grief to go on living — would surely have been overshadowed.

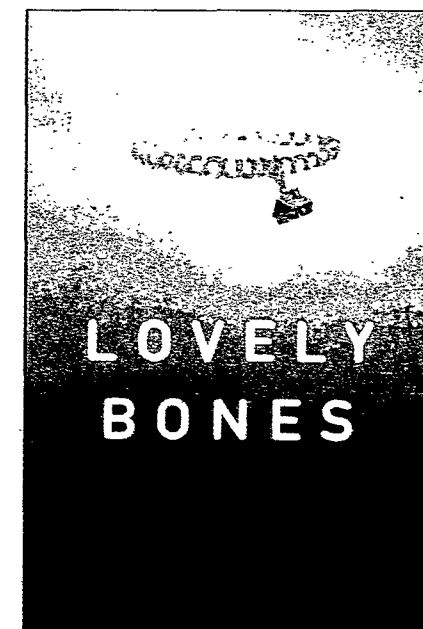
Sebold takes great care in character development, and gets inside the hearts and minds of Susie's family members, closest friends and even her killer. In so doing, she helps readers to understand what events in each character's life caused them to react to her death the way they did. For example, Abigail, Susie's mother, finds solace in the arms of another man, then abandons the family for five years to live on her own. The reader learns that she does this not only to escape Susie's memory, but also to run toward the new life she dreamed of having once her children were grown.

As narrator, Susie jumps back and forth between anecdotes of her past life on earth, her loved ones' lives without her and her new life in heaven. Susie's heaven is a teenager's dream — it looks like the high school she couldn't wait to attend, and it is filled with dogs and friends to keep her company. But, feeling trapped in this perfect existence, Susie longs to return to her life on earth, unable to let go of the tragedy that befell her. Susie lives vicariously through her younger sister, Lindsey, while keeping track of her mother; her father,

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Reviewed by Jennifer Ficaglia
Catholic Courier

Jack; her younger brother, Buckley; her love-that-might-have-been, Ray; an acquaintance, Ruth; and her killer, Mr. Harvey. For the most part, the resulting anecdotes are helpful in studying the novel's individual characters, but can at times be confusing and, at points, tedious to wade through.

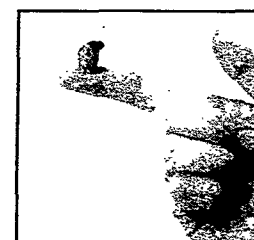
I was also a little disappointed in the way Sebold wrapped up the novel. Throughout the book, Susie struggled to find a way to make contact with her loved ones so she could give them clues about her death and let them know she was OK. When given this opportunity to give her family the closure they craved, Susie used it in another unrelated manner. That was unexpected, but perhaps Sebold was making the point that people sometimes have to find closure in



less tangible ways.

If readers can navigate the rough spots, they will find in *The Lovely Bones: A Novel* a truly heartfelt and thought-provoking story of how different people grieve loss, grow from the experience and find the strength to move on.

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Kids' Chronicle Answers from page 16:

1. Our Father, 2. hallowed, 3. kingdom, 4. will, 5. this day,
6. bread, 7. temptation, 8. deliver