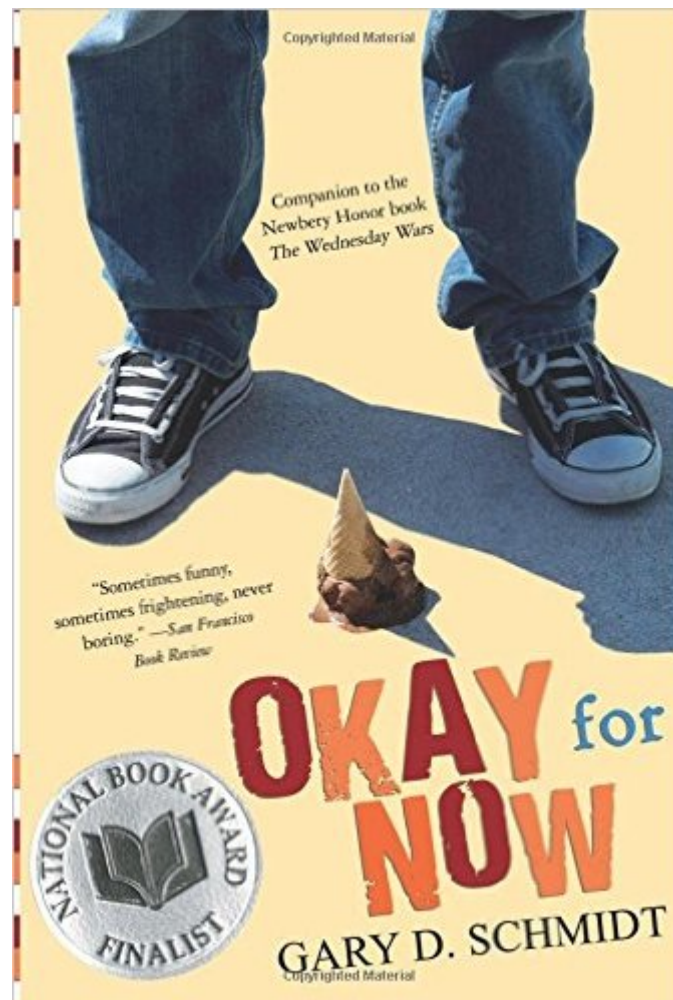


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Okay For Now



Synopsis

National Book Award Finalist "[A] stealthily powerful, unexpectedly affirming story of discovering and rescuing one's best self." —Booklist, starred review
In this companion novel to *The Wednesday Wars*, Doug struggles to be more than the "skinny thug" that some people think him to be. He finds an unlikely ally in Lil Spicer, who gives him the strength to endure an abusive father, the suspicions of a town, and the return of his oldest brother, forever scarred, from Vietnam. Schmidt expertly weaves multiple themes of loss and recovery in a story teeming with distinctive, unusual characters and invaluable lessons about love, creativity, and survival.

Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: HMH Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (February 5, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0544022807

ISBN-13: 978-0544022805

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (286 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #17,854 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Performing Arts > Theater #6 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > 20th Century #38 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Humorous

Customer Reviews

Okay For Now is Doug Swietek's story. Doug is an 8th grader who, due to his father losing his job, moves to a small town with his family. Amidst multiple family issues -- a passive mother, abusive father, bitter and beaten-down Vietnam-vet brother, and a second brother who is merely scared -- Doug manages to discover much about not only his neighbors, but himself as well. In the safety of the town's open-one-day-a-week library, Doug discovers a new talent, love, friendship, and selflessness. Outside of the library, his life is not an easy one. His family has multiple issues. He is unfairly judged by both students and teachers at school. And townsfolk are wary. Doug's optimism, given all of his issues, is catching and he manages to bounce back from the many not-so-great things that happen throughout the book. He manages to keep a good attitude (most of the time, anyway) because he has a mission... To replace the missing plates in the town library's original John James Audubon book. Not only fascinated with learning to draw the birds, Doug learns that

various plates have been sold to raise money for the town and he firmly believes all things belong in their proper place. The plates belong in the book as originally intended, not hanging on somebody's wall. Each chapter of the novel opens with the images of one of Audubon's bird paintings, and the bird is effortlessly tied into the content of the chapter. Dough's insights regarding each plate are not only useful as he learns to draw the birds, they help him to better understand the dynamics of the world around him -- particular those of his immediate family. A passive yet loving mother. An abusive and angry father. A brother who is frightened at how he may turn out.

There are three kinds of literary sequels for kids out there. First, you have the sequel that is so intricately tied into the plot of the first book that not a page goes by that you don't feel you're missing something if you skipped Book #1. The second kind of sequel nods to the first book and brings up continual facts from it, but is a coherent story in its own right. The third kind of sequel makes mention of facts and/or people in the first book but if you read the story on your own you might not even be aware that there was previous book in the first place. *Okay for Now* by Gary D. Schmidt would be the third type of sequel, I think. Ostensibly a sequel to his Newbery Honor winning title *The Wednesday Wars*, the hero of *Okay for Now*, Doug Swieteck, was a bit part character in the first book, and now has come entirely into his own in the second. For fans of the first, you will enjoy the second. And for people who begin with the second, you won't miss a thing really if you haven't read the first. All you'll know is that you have a great book on your hands. A great great book. "You're not always going to get everything you want, you know. That's not what life is like." It's not like the librarian Mrs. Merriam needs to tell Doug that. If any kid is aware that life is not a bed of roses, it's Doug. Stuck in a family with a dad that prefers talking with his fists to his mouth, a sweet but put upon mom, a brother in Vietnam, and another one at home making his little brother's life a misery, it's not like Doug's ever had all that much that's good in his life.

Doug Swieteck doesn't care if you like him. He's just a loser kid from stupid Marysville in upstate New York. Doug first appeared as a secondary character in *Wednesday Wars*, for which author Gary Schmidt won a Newbery Honor. Now Doug is back as the main character in *Okay for Now*, the book I'm reviewing here. Both books feature disappointing fathers, antagonistic teachers who later turn out to be caring adults with some emotional baggage, and pretty girls who become love interests. In both books too, the Vietnam War serves as a backdrop. One big difference, which incidentally is one of my favorite parts of *Okay for Now*, are the Audubon plates of birds. At first, Doug thinks everything is stupid and likes to sarcastically throw around the word terrific, which

makes him kind of hard to stomach. Then Doug sees those Audubon plates, six of which have been sold from the library's otherwise pristine copy of Birds of America to folks with the money to afford them, and his world slowly begins to change. Until Doug saw those plates, wearing a baseball cap or jacket signed by Joe Pepitone would have best fit his style. Even braving tough Mrs. Windermere, who acts like someone out of Twilight Zone, would be more on his level. Doug bikes out to her place every Saturday to bring her ice-cream every Saturday, as part of his weekly delivery job for the boss of a girl named Lil whom Doug ends up thinking is terrific for real. Throughout the course of Okay for Now, Doug changes his mind about lots of stuff such as books are stupid, drawing is for chumps, and his life is no one else's business. Once Doug shows this other side, you'll find him more palatable. Your heart might even break, the way mine did, at how Doug reacts whenever his family gets accused of theft.

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