



Twerp

Mark Goldblatt

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It's not like I meant for him to get hurt. . . .

Julian Twerski isn't a bully. He's just made a big mistake. So when he returns to school after a weeklong suspension, his English teacher offers him a deal: if he keeps a journal and writes about the terrible incident that got him and his friends suspended, he can get out of writing a report on Shakespeare. Julian jumps at the chance. And so begins his account of life in sixth grade--blowing up homemade fireworks, writing a love letter for his best friend (with disastrous results), and worrying whether he's still the fastest kid in school. Lurking in the background, though, is the one story he can't bring himself to tell, the one story his teacher most wants to hear.

Inspired by Mark Goldblatt's own childhood growing up in 1960s Queens, *Twerp* shines with humor and heart. This remarkably powerful story will have readers laughing and crying right along with these flawed but unforgettable characters.

Praise for *Twerp*:

A Bankstreet Best Book of the Year

A Junior Library Guild Selection

A Summer Top Ten Kids' Indie Next List Pick

A Sunshine State Award Finalist

"Reminiscent of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. . . . You don't have to be a twerp to read this book." —
New York Post

"A vivid, absorbing story about one boy's misadventure, heartache, and hope for himself." —**Rebecca Stead**, Newbery Award-winning author of *When You Reach Me*

"Mark Goldblatt is an amazingly wonderful writer." —**Chris Grabenstein**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*

"[Fans of] Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* who have matured beyond the scope and gravity of that series will find a kindred spirit in Julian." — ***School Library Journal***

"Reminiscent of movies like *The Sandlot*. . . . Well-written and funny." — ***The Advocate***

"Alternately poignant and comical. . . . A thought-provoking exploration of bullying, personal integrity and self-acceptance." — ***Kirkus Reviews***

"A timely book." — ***New York Journal of Books***

“Elegant in its simplicity and accessibility.” — *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

“An empathetic and authentic glimpse into the mind of a sixth-grade boy.” — *The Florida Times-Union*

“Funny, poignant, and an effective commentary on bullying and its consequences.” — *The Horn Book Magazine*

Twerp Details

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Author : Mark Goldblatt

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From Reader Review *Twerp* for online ebook

Kwoomac says

I received this book from Netgalley. This is a moving story about a twelve-year-old boy, Julian Twerski, growing up in NYC in the late '60's. It's told in the first person through journal entries. I felt like I was reliving that very difficult age as Julian writes about his daily life in his journals. He hangs around with a group of boys, who have the run of the neighborhood. I grew up in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in Boston but it felt the same. We ran wild through the streets, doing things that would scare me to death today, it I had kids doing that stuff. Climbing anything we could, exploring construction sites of new houses, playing with jack knives. Many an activity ended up in a trip to the emergency room for stitches, which of course were a badge of honor.

It's not all fun and games for Julian. The journal writing is an assignment from his English teacher, where he is supposed to recount an incident that got him and all his friends suspended for a week. A bonus is that if he does it he gets to skip Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. As a way to avoid confronting his role in the incident, Julian writes about everything else going on in his life. It's hard to be twelve. We go with Julian on his first date, which goes the way of many first dates. We experience his up and down relationship with his teenage sister. We live through fights with his best friend. And then there's that incident.

I found Julian to be a very accurate portrayal of a twelve-year-old boy. I felt like I knew him or at least a kid just like him. The book also has a strong message about bullying. The incident which led to the suspension is hinted at throughout the story before Julian eventually decides to share it. We know it involves an older kid in the neighborhood who has special needs. I'm glad we don't learn the details until the end. If I had known about it when I first met Julian, I would have felt differently towards him. Instead, I was able to root for him as he struggles with daily life. The lesson I took away from the story is that the bullying part of Julian, or any kid, is just one part of who he or she is. Fortunately for Julian, he had a mentor to help him work out his role in the incident and use it as a tool to improve himself. I think middle grade kids will enjoy spending time with Julian and his friends. I hope they can learn a thing or two along the way.

Amara Tanith says

A copy of this book was provided via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Twerp is a book that I never would have read had I not received a Netgalley invitation to download it. But afterwards, I decided to check it out; I enjoy Middle Grade, after all, and it would only take a few hours to read. I can honestly say I don't regret reading it.

Not that I'm going to gush; *Twerp* wasn't spectacular by any means, and there were certainly a few things that detracted from enjoyment. But it was ultimately a solid Middle Grade novel, somewhat reminiscent of Jerry Spinelli's Maniac Magee. The main character, Julian Twerski, has a strong voice and comes across as an authentic preteen boy, even when dealing with same and opposite sex friendships and emerging sexuality/attraction; I will admit, though, that I found his 1960's slang to be rather jarring--or at least silly--being a 90's child myself.

The one genuine flaw of the book for me was the "reveal", the point at which Julian finally explained the

incident that led to his journal assignment. Without spoiling it, I can say this much: If you've read any of my Fear Street reviews, you might have seen me mention how much I hate when an author writes an important scene... only to pull the literary equivalent of a "Syke!" by explaining that the previous scene never actually happened, and this next one did instead. That bugs me to no end, and even though it's far more justifiable in Goldblatt's case than Stine's, it still made me roll my eyes.

All in all, I finished the book with a sense of mild satisfaction, as well as the conclusion that the Danley subplot could have been cut entirely from the novel without it suffering any significant loss. Personally, I found it to be something of a distraction from the larger plot of the story, never delivering an emotional impact even remotely comparable to that of the main plotline. However, *Twerp* is definitely still a good book for a Middle Grade reader, and I would recommend it to any fans of MG realistic fiction.

Ruchama Feuerman says

When one of my kids said it was the best book she'd read in ages -- maybe ever-- I grabbed it and read it straight through. (It didn't hurt that the main character shares the same last name as my mother-in-law, may she rest in peace -- Twerski.) It's set in the late 1960s and the language he uses reflects the times.

Julian Twerski and his friends (one who bears the nickname Shlomo Shlomo) did something really bad, and as penance, or instead of having to write a report on Julius Caesar, Julian must write about the experience in his journal, by teacher's order. Of course, Julian keeps avoiding the painful topic, and his digressions make up the bulk of the novel. At first it was a tad slow-paced but midway picked up momentum. I like his language, the tone (has an intimate Salingeresque feel), the natural way he interweaves his Bar Mitzvah, doesn't make the rabbi into a total cliché, or in fact any of the characters. When the Horrible Incident finally gets revealed, I'm so glad it wasn't anything too outrageously shocking. It didn't need to be – pierced the heart just the same. Because by the end, you realize what a mensch Julian is, and the real shock is in that he - - Mr. Good Kid -- did That. Makes you realize how close we all are, just an eyelash away from turning into bullies ourselves.

Reading is my Escape says

Hmmmm...

Sometimes when you brace yourself for a storm, you get a gentle breeze. The storm only comes when you're braced for nothing whatsoever.

page 16

Knowing that, in a thousand years, nothing you're doing or not doing will matter frees you up to do what your heart tells you to do.

page 189

Julian Twerski (aka Twerp), was involved in some sort of bullying incident and his English teacher has him writing about what happened to help him understand it better. Because, from what we know, Julian is a good kid who made the wrong choice. It takes most of the book for Julian to finally write about the incident. In the mean time, we get insight into his decision making process and what goes through his mind.

I must say that I almost stopped reading in Chapter 1 when Julian starts to recount an incident with his friend Lonnie and a pigeon.

Let's just say I was cringing through the entire chapter. Though it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. Anyway, Julian just seems like a dumb kid who is easily influenced by others. But as he writes down the things that happen in his everyday life, he seems to grow and learn.

I don't really have much to say about this book. It was ok. If you want to read a book about bullying or about kids learning to listen to that little voice in their heads instead of what their friends are telling them to do, there are better books out there. I didn't really connect with the characters or even like them very much. I get that Julian is a "good boy" but in the end, I don't get why he did the things he did in the first place. If that makes any sense.

Recommended to:

I would rather recommend *Bystander* by James Preller.

Gary Anderson says

How many times have we witnessed kids picking on one another verbally or physically and, when challenged about it, defending themselves by saying, "It's a joke," or "We're just kidding around"? In *Twerp*, Mark Goldblatt shows how "just kidding around" can become something much uglier.

Julian Twerski, aka Twerp, makes a deal with his English teacher, Mr. Selkirk: If Julian writes stories about himself and his friends, he can avoid writing a report about Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. So Julian writes about whatever comes to his mind, which is usually stories about how his friends manipulate him. They consider it no big deal, and although Julian doesn't like it, he mostly accepts it. Then Julian uses his writing talents to help one of his friends trick a girl into liking him. Julian doesn't intend any harm, but when things get messy, he realizes that a lot of kids in his social circle are using whatever power they have to coerce others into serving them in some way.

Throughout his writing, Julian avoids telling the story of what happened with Danley Dimmel, although he self-consciously mentions this avoidance several times. Instead, Julian explains episode after episode of what we might call bullying-lite. The stories seem to be "just kids being kids," but as they accumulate, we see that sometimes Julian is the victim and sometimes he's the perpetrator. This is business as usual for the kids in his New York neighborhood. Eventually the story of Danley Dimmel is presented, and we see kids become overtly mean as they mistreat a mentally challenged young man from their block. The Danley Dimmel episode is more intense than the other situations Julian relates, but we see that it arises from those same manipulative, competitive impulses.

Twerp takes place in 1969, and unchecked power was an underlying theme in the news of the day. Julian pays a kind of limited attention to what's going on in the news, but he starts connecting the dots. He eventually sees that even the events of *Julius Caesar* relate to pressuring others into doing things they

otherwise wouldn't consider.

Mark Goldblatt's *Twerp* is an important new contribution to YA literature focused on bullying. Through the carefully ordered presentation of episodes and skillful integration of cultural references, readers come to understand that full-blown bullying is different from peer pressure and manipulation only by degree.

The characters in *Twerp* are in fifth through eighth grade, and this story is well-suited for both boys and girls in this age group. It should work well for book circles, individual reading choices, or as a whole-class novel.

Twerp will be published by Random House Books for Young Readers and is scheduled for release on May 28, 2013.

Cross-posted on What's Not Wrong?

Richie Partington says

Richie's Picks: TWERP by Mark Goldblatt, Random House, May 28, 288p., ISBN: 978-0-375-97142-6

- 1 "Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In".....The Fifth Dimension
- 2 "Sugar, Sugar".....The Archies
- 3 "Honky Tonk Women".....The Rolling Stones
- 4 "Get Back".....The Beatles
- 5 "Crimson and Clover".....Tommy James and the Shondells
- 6 "Dizzy".....Tommy Roe
- 7 "Jean".....Oliver
- 8 "Build Me Up, Buttercup".....The Foundations
- 9 "Touch Me".....The Doors
- 10 "Hair".....The Cowsills
- 11 "Sweet Caroline".....Neil Diamond
- 12 "Crystal Blue Persuasion".....Tommy James and the Shondells
- 13 "Everyday People".....Sly and the Family Stone
- 14 "Good Morning Starshine".....Oliver
- 15 "In the Year 2525".....Zager and Evans
- 16 "I Can't Get Next to You".....The Temptations
- 17 "Love Theme from Romeo and Juliet.....Henry Mancini
- 18 "Proud Mary".....Creedence Clearwater Revival
- 19 "Spinning Wheel".....Blood, Sweat and Tears
- 20 "One".....Three Dog Night

These are the first twenty songs on Musicradio 77 WABC's Top 100 of 1969. Having spent 1969 tuned into that station's d.j.s -- Harry Harrison, Dan Ingram, Cousin Brucie, etc. -- I still know these songs intimately. I might have listed the first ten, but I can recall in such vivid detail who and where I was during the summer of '69 (the summer for me between junior high and high school) simply by running the tape in my head of (#12) "Crystal Blue Persuasion" and (#91) The Israelites (by Desmond Dekker and the Aces).

Author Mark Goldblatt, two years my junior, grew up a few dozen miles west of me in Queens, NY. He dedicates this standout coming of age tale and absolutely killer guy read to the "Thirty-Fourth Avenue Boys"

and, in answer to an interview question about his inspiration for TWERP, Mark responded:

"I think the seed was planted in the early 1970s, back when I was in high school. I'd started writing for the school newspaper, and a friend of mine named Ricky was razzing me about it -- it wasn't the kind of thing kids from our block did. But then, after a couple of minutes, his voice lowered, and he said something that caught me off guard: 'If you ever become a famous writer, you better write a book about us.' That stuck with me, the tone as much as the content. There's a sadness about it, an inkling of mortality, or at least a recognition that our lives were about to go in different directions. That's what happened, of course. I've lost touch with most of the guys from the block. But not a day goes by when I don't think about them, where their faces aren't right in front of me, where their voices don't come rushing back."

I share this with you because, in Goldblatt's telling, the voices of these young guy characters in TWERP ring so stunningly true and the setting is so utterly vivid. Particularly, having grown up nearby and having lived those days of '69, I find this to be such a well-told story that hits me right there.

TWERP is a powerful read. At times, it literally had me rolling on the floor and, at others, it had me sobbing. (I'll never think of Mo Willem's pigeon the same way again.) Sometimes (as with the painful fence incident involving Eric the Red), there is a lot of rolling on the floor and moaning. TWERP is written in the first person and it is episodic, reminiscent of some of my favorite Paulsen and Peck in that regard, but is also very different being that the voice here is so authentically Queens Jewish kid. This is a tale that makes me badly want to get to know this author.

TWERP is the nickname that has been given to sixth-grader honor student and speedster Julian Twerski. Julian finds himself writing the dated entries that form the chapters of this book -- about himself and the guys on his block -- both as penance for an incident that he was part of, and as a way to avoid having to write a final paper on Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

We hear all about Julian's aversion to the Bard: "I hate the guy, William Shakespeare. If I met him on the street, I'd just keep walking. Because you know, you just know, while he was writing the stuff he was writing, he was thinking how clever he was. He was sitting at his desk, writing the words, and he could've just said what he meant, but instead he prettied it up until it could mean everything or it could mean nothing or it could mean whatever the teacher says it means. That just drives me bananas. So if keeping this thing going get me out of Julius Caesar, then count me in."

While there is a significant bullying issue underlying Julian's story, that issue is really secondary in the reading to these episodic tales he shares about the exploits of himself and the boys from the block. Above all, they involve Julian's friendship with Lonnie who is the ringleader of the boys, the son of a Holocaust survivor, and is a kid who is currently making his way through sixth grade for the second time. This is also a book with a real physical side to it, this being about healthy sixth grade boys who are prone to daring exploits.

While there are plenty of words that can be employed in characterizing and categorizing TWERP, I'd say that, above all, this is a tween book with a great measure of real heart.

Richie Partington, MLIS

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Diana says

Couldn't get through it. Didn't like tone, or the way that minorities were portrayed.

Jennifer Kirkwood (Levac) says

I picked this book for my son to review a long time ago (I feel horrible that it has been sitting on my kindle for so long) but at the time my son decided he didn't want to read ebooks. So there the book sat until now. I picked up the book on December 30th in the evening, finishing it on Jan 1st after dinner. I would have finished it in one sitting I am sure if I didn't have other things that had to get done.

The author writes this novel in a journal format of a young sixth grader named Julian. Julian has done something with his friends that had gotten him suspended from school for a week. His English teacher wants Julian to write about what happened and why it happened, if he does this he will get out of his English assignments. At the start Julian says what happened wasn't that horrible, that he has done worse things and goes into depth about some of the things he has done. We follow Julian through the ups and downs of sixth grade - love, friendship and running. Julian isn't a bully but we know that something terrible has happened to another student and Julian was part of it.

The author did a great job hooking the reader into Julian's life. There were moments of laughter, shock and tears. Finally getting Julian to admit to his part of what happened to a boy who lives in the neighborhood, who has a hearing impairment. Learning about going along with the group and getting carried away even when you know you shouldn't be doing it.

I give this book a 4 out of 5 stars and would love to read more from Mark Goldblatt. I know my son will love this book and he has showed interest in reading it now.

~*Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.*~

Linda says

Julian is a sixth grader who was suspended for something that the reader does not find out until the end of the book. His English teacher tasks him with writing something reflective when he returns from suspension. He begins a journal about himself and the things going on in his sixth-grade life. We know the incident he's supposed to be writing about involved Danley, but the details are skipped over and practically forgotten for the majority of the book. Most of Julian's journal reflects on daring and crazy middle-school stunts such as walking a tall fence using an axle for a balancing pole, getting eyebrows burned off messing with fireworks, or trying and failing to understand girls.

Though Julian is a likeable character, and there are many funny moments, I was very disappointed in the way the author minimized the bullying incident. It isn't until Julian is forced to write about what happened that the book takes a serious tone (and this isn't until the last 2 chapters). Julian feels regret, but it is unfortunate that the boys are not faced with the lasting effect their actions would have had on Danley. Instead, the focus is on Julian getting the other boys to apologize, which isn't a bad thing, but the hasty handling of it gives the

feeling that once they've all shaken hands everything is ok and they can all move on and forget it happened. It's treated more like an afterthought with an unrealistically simple resolution – which, for me, made it much less compelling. It bothered me and I kept thinking about it after I'd finished the book. The light-hearted, often funny, coming-of-age tale that filled the pages to almost the end just didn't fit with the seriousness of the bullying incident that is revealed.

Jenny Sawyer says

In this coming-of-age story set in 1960s Queens, 12-year-old Julian isn't a bad kid, but he is a follower. And though sometimes being a follower helps him fit in, it also gets him into trouble. What that trouble is, exactly, we don't find out until the end of this book. But throughout the story, there are hints that Julian's week-long suspension resulted from some harebrained scheme by Lonnie, Julian's best friend, and the leader of their neighborhood's crew of tightly-knit sixth grade boys.

Twerp contains all the hallmarks of appealing middle grade fiction: An element of mystery (What did Julian and his friends do to poor Danley Dimmel?), a sports rivalry, and a likable protagonist, who is flawed but sympathetic. My problem, however, as I sailed through this book (which, I should add, is a fun and quick read), is that I wondered to whom this book would appeal. The target audience of 9- to 12-year-olds? Or the editors among whom this book circulated as a manuscript-for-sale?

Frankly, *Twerp* is characteristic of a lot of middle grade fiction on the shelf these days: Engaging stories geared more toward adult readers than the children for whom they are allegedly written. I think *Twerp* could be a good addition to an anti-bullying curriculum, especially given its nuanced representation of the way a basically good kid can get swept up in a herd mentality. It's just too bad that certain other elements (such as not-so-subtle Shakespeare lessons, and a setting that is much more appealing to an adult than a 10yo) also made this book feel like it was calibrated quite precisely for the buyers, editors, and award-givers who grew up in this era and can't pass up an homage to the Bard.

Netanella says

Set in 1969 Queens, *Twerp* is the narrative journal of a 6th grade boy, Julian Twerski, who's been tasked with journalling his thoughts about a bullying incident for which he had been suspended, rather than write a paper about Shakespeare. As Julian writes about his friends, his family and his school, he fills up one composition book after another, and the reader gets an authentic feel for this middle schooler and his friends. Although smart and fast, Julian is a follower amongst his friends, and his journals serve as a guide to help him understand his own way and to make his own decisions. Ultimately this book is a powerful novel about bullying and friendship and choice. Very recommended.

Clare Cannon says

Julian Twerski's honest, self-deprecating and waggish voice finds its way to your heart before he's uttered as much as a sentence. And by the time he's finished unburdening his conscience of the highs, lows and hilarities of his year, he's right up there on your favourites shelf with Spinelli (Stargirl), Palacio (Wonder)

and Rebecca Stead (*When You Reach Me*). This sixth-grader really has a way with words.

We know from the beginning he's writing this journal for his involvement in a bullying incident, for which he and his friends were suspended. His teacher suspects that writing about it will help Julian process what happened, and hopefully learn from it. He's not wrong.

While Julian narrates many things that occurred that year, somehow the whole book is part of his reflection on that final, regrettable event, and the part he played. He begins with a recount of a 'pigeon incident', which allows the reader to see the peer dynamics of his group of friends in action. To Goldblatt's authorial credit, we can detect Julian's change of tone even by the time he finishes the first chapter. Score one for the teacher.

One of the most impressive elements of this story is the change in the protagonist. More than witnessing the mere fact of his change, we are privileged to travel with him through the process. To read, in the first few chapters, sentences like,

"I *hate* Shakespeare. I know that's hard for English teachers to hear, but it's the truth."

is possibly realistic—perhaps disappointing—in a sixth-grade boy, but to read just chapters later that he goes back to his dreaded fourth grade memorisation speech "What a piece of work is man!" and concludes "That's life in a nutshell, if you ask me", and especially to hear the reasons *why* he's changed his mind, makes this an absolute gem among middle grade novels. Julian's pejorative comments about people, too, are often reassessed by the end... this change is just one among many that take place in the process of writing the journal.

Julian's account couldn't feel more authentic. We experience his writer's block, his sixth-grader embarrassment, his playing up to his teacher, and we're even sometimes able to see through his account of events to get a better picture than he himself has put in words. Somehow Goldblatt makes the reader identify with Julian, his teacher, his parent, his friend and even his victim, all at the same time. That's just remarkable.

The second most impressive thing about this story is that Goldblatt makes deep thinking accessible to young readers. He meets us with sixth grade jokes but has us pondering the meaning of life by the end. We go from learning about how his friends got their nicknames (like Shlomo Shlomo, whose mum always calls him twice for dinner) to an *hilarious* account of a fire cracker incident (entitled 'Quentin's Eyebrows') which had me laughing buckets of tears, to his clever jabs at his teacher who will have to read them,

"So you guys can go back to talking about the usual stuff, like whether to erase the blackboard from top to bottom, or from side to side, or around and around in a mishmash."

to his thinking through what he's learned in class (and the times he's put his foot in it), to wondering about his bar mitzvah, to his being mad at God for the grievances of his sixth-grade life, his regret for being so and his reflections on life and suffering and mistakes and beginning again. About three quarters through he's dazzling us with statements like

"That's what it means to be a man. You do what you think is right, regardless of who it hurts, and whether it works out, because in the end you have to live with yourself."

There are a few things to be aware of for young readers, not least of which is the bullying incident recounted at the end (wait for it, don't jump ahead!). There's also a brief romance which doesn't get beyond the first

date to an amusement park, a barbeque at a friend's house where her supposedly attractive mother is noted lounging by the pool in a bikini (the girl even asks whether the boys think her mum 'has a good body'), and various occupational health and safety breaches which reflect the book's setting in the 1960s (one boy landing split-legged on a railing while trying to walk across it, race-running alongside cars, using dangerous fire crackers, etc). But the impressive thing is that all these things are brought into context by Julian's seemingly unintentional assessment of whether they were right or wrong, and he's just about always spot-on. For readers with a minimum level of reading maturity, accompanying Julian on his journey to discover these things for what they are could be invaluable.

To sum up, there's so much in this book it's impossible to do it justice.

Funny, endearing, character building; it will be mighty hard to top this for the year. Reviewed for www.GoodReadingGuide.com

thelastword says

You know when you're a kid and you get bullied and you spend your youth hating that One Kid who you can safely pin every bad incident in your childhood on?

Well when you grow older, and the anger and hurt fades a bit, another kid comes to mind; a kid who stood right beside the Bully Boss and did everything Bully Boss told them to do, but all the while with this 'I don't want to do this but I have to' expression on their face. This kid right here? This is the worst - absolute worst - person you can meet in your life. Maybe when you grow up, you can be friends with the Bully Boss (once s/he's sorted out their issues), but you should never, ever befriend the hurt-faced side-kick.

You wanna know why?

Because worse than a bully, is a slime-ball bully. A slime-ball bully uses this 'hurt-face' on all people at just the right moments and, immediately, no one can believe that whatever they've done - with their own hands - was actually their own doing. And so they blame Bully Boss. Even you, the victim, will blame Bully Boss.

In this book, we are all meant to side Jillian and think that Lonnie is the real problem child; a real psycho in the making. He is the ring-leader, the Bully Boss. Nobody likes him. But everybody loves Jillian. In reality though, Jillian is our slime-ball bully. He is the boy who throws a brick at a bird, all the while whining about how he doesn't want to. It goes something like this:

Scene 1:

Bully Boss: Throw a brick.

Jillian: *Raises brick. Lugs it at bird.* I don't want to kill you bird! *hurt-face* *bird is brained by brick*

(view spoiler)

Guess who people still love after the above incidents? You guessed right! It was Jillian. Why? Because the entire time he was killing/hurting someone else, he was complaining about how he didn't actually WANT to hurt someone else.

But that's just what he's telling you. At one point in the book, Jillian admits that he doesn't care about what he and his gang did to the slow kid - he only cares about out-racing the new fastest kid in school.

This author should have never written about a topic he never intended to (or perhaps didn't know how to) address. Throughout the book we are assaulted with a range of unnecessary stories, all in varying levels of perversion and stupidity, and the actual bullying is only mentioned in the final pages, wrapped in the sickening veneer of 'I-didn't-mean-it'.

Even worse is the atonement; Jillian hastily decides that the only way ~~people will shut up and leave him alone~~ to lay this 'incident' to rest is to round up his friends and apologize to the slow kid, *who laughs in response*. Because *that* makes all the sense in the world.

If you're looking for an actual story about bullying, especially one from a bully's perspective, avoid this book. It is a horrible memoir of a current and future slime-ball bully.

Alex McGilvery says

Twerp introduces Julian Twerski and one of the most authentic young narrators that I have encountered since Holden Caulfield. Julian is assigned the task of keeping a journal after an undescribed 'incident'. The carrot initially is that he can substitute the journal for reading Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. We are then treated to an insider's view of the powerful friendship between Julian and Lonnie and the other boys that make up their group.

While Julian is writing this very personal account of his life, he never forgets that his teacher is going to be reading the words. The tension between what he is telling us and what he might say if Mr. Selkirk weren't reading over his shoulder is ever present.

As Julian writes about the last half of Sixth Grade he talks about the problems with girls, friends and the biggest fifth grader in the world who is going to knock Julian off the pedestal of 'fastest kid in his school'. Though the book is by nature episodic, it builds in tension and power as we read. Julian is a very engaging narrator, but we know that there is something that he is avoiding, and he knows it too.

I really enjoyed this book. The characters and situations are true to life. I remember kids like Julian and the others from when I was young. I can't recommend this book strongly enough for anyone who enjoys a good story.

Louize says

A Quintessence of Dust

TWERP is a coming-of-age story set in 1969, Queens, New York. Julian is a good kid mixed up with the wrong company. Most of the time, peer pressure and wanting to belong got the worst of Julian and lands him into trouble. The biggest trouble wasn't revealed until the end of the story. But throughout the book, there are hints for Julian's week-long suspension. His English teacher assigned him to write a journal involving all of his activities for the semester to get out of reading Julius Caesar, so he thinks this is a pretty good deal. His entries were fun and revealing, but he tried very hard skipping that incident with Danley.

That's what it means to be a man. You do what you think is right, regardless of who it hurts, and whether it works out, because in the end you have to live with yourself.

It took him quite a while, writing things down, he made some huge realization. Some, he made peace with himself; mostly, he started making changes. Belonging and finding one's place is important, but Julian also realized that deciding to stand up for what is right is important too. He decided that anything he does in 1969 is but a speck of dust in the future, but doing what is right will always make a difference.

But here's the weird part. Knowing the truth frees you up. Or at least it frees you up if you accept it. Knowing that, in a thousand years, nothing you're doing or not doing will matter frees you up to do what your heart tells you to do.

Twerp is all about bullying. Not just about bullying the weakest kid by some neighborhood or school kids, but being bullied by your own friends into doing something wrong. Standing up and saying no to a dare is a choice kids in any age should always keep in mind. But don't think for one second that this is a heavy book. Between Julian's misadventures with his ragtag group of boys, sports ambition, and initiation with a girl, there a plenty of things to enjoy in this story.

Originally posted by The Page Walker .
