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"You're making how much an hour"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Do you ride in on a pony" All she wants to do is teach. For Anna Taggert, an earnest Ivy League graduate, pursuing her passion as a teacher means engaging young hearts and minds. She longs to be in a place where she can be her best self, and give that best to her students. Turns out it isn't that easy. Landing a job at an elite private school in Manhattan, Anna finds her dreams of chalk boards and lesson plans replaced with board families, learning specialists, and benefit-planning mothers. Not to mention the grim realities of her small paycheck. And then comes the realization that the papers she grades are not the work of her students, but of their high-priced, college-educated tutors. After uncovering this underground economy where a teacher can make the same hourly rate as a Manhattan attorney, Anna herself is seduced by lucrative offers--one after another. Teacher by day, tutor by night, she starts to sample the good life her students enjoy: binges at Barneys, dinners at the Waverly Inn, and a new address on Madison Avenue. Until, that is, the truth sets in.

Schooled Details

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From Reader Review Schooled for online ebook

Michelle says

Everyone close to Anna seems to think it's a bad idea for her to become a teacher. Her parents and best friend all warn her that she won't do well on a teacher's salary. Teaching is her dream and Anna wants to get her students excited about learning. She thinks she'll be the cool teacher, someone who can both teach and be loved by her students as well.

She goes to work at a very prestigious Upper East Side school. She learns very quickly that any time she asks the students to do any real work at all that their parents will call to complain.

The students come from very wealthy families, families that invest money in the school. So, she's given reminders from her bosses that she's not to question the parents' wishes.

One day, something happens that causes Anna to snap. She feels that she can't inspire the kids to learn with their parents constantly questioning her motives.

When a very lucrative deal is offered to her of tutoring, she has to consider.

She's being offered hundreds of dollars an hour to tutor kids from other schools.

It's very easy for her to make a ton of money tutoring, which sometimes crosses the line between teaching and doing the actual work.

I liked the way Anna's morals were questioned. She would never have pictured herself doing this. It's the opposite of what she wants to do. It goes against everything she stands for.

But when she seems to keep getting rewarded for making the wrong choices, she has to question whether she can really have the job she dreamed of even if she does everything right.

Stuart Nachbar says

I come from a suburban public school education from a community that sprouted from horse farms and apple orchards into a seven to seven thousand person residential development mostly for transplanted New Yorkers. Private school was never a thought to my parents since I attended fairly new public schools.

Among my classmates who stayed in town from kindergarten through the 12th grade were some of the smartest people I know to this day. Our valedictorian went to Harvard, and we sent graduates to MIT, Penn and Cornell, as well a whopping four to Duke. Members of my class, myself included, made up more than one percent of the freshman class at Rutgers. A class such as mine would have been the envy of any school public or private. Yet today, I read so much praising private school education over the public schools.

After reading Anisha Lakhani's novel Schooled, I wondered why.

Lakhani's novel is based on her early experiences as a private school teacher and tutor, then later as the head

of an English department. Her story takes place in a New York K-12 private school that is divided over the ideas of offering a “progressive” education and satisfying the whims of its most important financial contributors. The result is a mess: the school’s marketing focuses on boasts about college placements and teachers are chastised for assigning too much homework, and taking approaches to making that homework too creative—because parents complain when homework isn’t homework as they knew it.

Schooled takes place during the first year in the working life of Anna Taggart, a seventh grade English teacher. The best parts of the story are Taggart’s efforts to manage a classroom of spoiled kids, without drawing the attention of their parents and the principal. The more bothersome are her dallies into the world of high-priced tutor for hire, guided under the influence of Randi Abrahams, a teacher who has successfully used tutoring to improve her standard of living (and shopping) while becoming “cool” with her regular seventh grade class.

Yet Schooled also showed that the wealthy were willing to pay anything for tutoring to help their children get through private school, even to, with their consent, write papers for them. I know this is fiction, but it was frightening to see parents part with considerable sums of money for that kind of help—because they could.

More frightening, these parents went over their teacher’s heads to complain about the assignments their children received to say they were inappropriate, overly demanding, or the best comment: in conflict with their son or daughter’s Bar or Bat Mitzvah reception schedule. Schooled likens the Bar or Bat Mitzvah reception to the debutante’s coming out party. I am Jewish, and my mother taught Hebrew school for over a decade, but I never thought about the ascension in my religious education as a social happening for the “cool kids” in school. But in this novel, a non-Jewish Korean student sends announcements for a faux Bat Mitzvah party.

Although the conversations about shopping for designer fashions and expensive lunches away from school by Anna and Randi bordered on “chick-lit,” I enjoyed reading Schooled. The story made me curious about an educational world that was previously unfamiliar to me, and it left me glad that I have never been a part of it.

Angela says

I think it was partly the fear of running into this world that made me change my mind about becoming a teacher...

This is a solid book with a solid story, but absolutely no depth. There's nothing really specific I can pick out about what I disliked (except every interaction Anna had with her parents. I was supposed to believe she was a graduate from Columbia, but when she was with her parents it was like she was thrown back into middle school-complete with a melodramatic running away from home scene!). The book kept me turning the pages, even though the ending was pretty obvious from the beginning. But Anna fell into this tutoring world way too quickly, and sprang back out, unharmed, just as fast. Everyone Anna encountered felt like a caricature, and paradoxically that feeling increased the more time was spent with them! Characters that we met once or twice at least had hints at depth, but characters like Randi, or Anna's parents, who feature prominently at times, are thin and flat; merely props for Anna to lean on for awhile until she makes it to the end of the book.

Sarah says

While the actual 'story' of this book is packed with cliché, repetition, and redundancy, Lakhani has chosen some very serious, honest, and accurate subject matter. A few years back I read a similar novel (I think it was called 'The Ivy Chronicles') which was also a fictionalized version of a very real and disturbing Manhattan phenomenon -- parents who pay obscene amounts of money so that their children can get into the *right* kindergarten. As a teacher in Manhattan myself, I am aware that this continues to be a serious issue. Lakhani reaches her conclusion very quickly -- don't be *friends* with your students, treat them like adults, have empathy for their hectic schedules, be aware that the world is a difficult place for children and is getting worse, and help them and teach them as best you can -- if it means only reaching a handful out of a class of 40, you have still made some change. I'm glad that Lakhani wrote about private school 'tutoring', and she was quite accurate in the goings on of Upper East Side families (she has first hand experience in the matter after teaching at Dalton). I'm interested in seeing how the Manhattan private schools will react to her book. If any change or any new rules are implemented in the corrupt system, then Ms. Lakhani has my full support!

Marilyn says

Truly a lousy book. Where's a negative rating when you need one? The young teacher morphed from idealistic to mercenary to "teacher extraordinaire" in one short first year of teaching. I only kept reading because it was set in Manhattan society for which I have a morbid curiosity. NOBODY was likeable. Shallow shallow shallow. I'm hoping all tutors aren't writing kids' papers for astronomical amounts of cash.. I ended up speedreading it in about 30 minutes just to see if anyone redeemed themselves. Nope.

Kryisia says

I decided not to finish this book since I have read similar books before and I have a ton of books with which I would rather spend my time. After reading the first few chapters, I found that I have very little sympathy for the main character and rich helicopter parents and their offspring. As a former educator, I wonder about the ethics of the author and others like her who apparently "tutor" students for ridiculous amounts of money which they spend on Manolos and designer handbags. Whatever happened to the vow of "genteel poverty" lol?

Emma (bookish.em) says

This book was somewhat of a light, fluffy read though I did NOT care for the Latina stereotyping. Why does every nanny or housekeeper immediately have to be described as Latina? Do better.

Shasta says

I read this book in one day, so that'll tell you it was entertaining and for the most part, well written. But I had

problems with the content, the pacing of the book, and most of all, the protagonist. 1. the content: I know there are people out there like this. but I still can't believe it which made it impossible for me to suspend my disbelief and just take this book as it was. Is that world for real? Or is the book an over-exaggeration? I suppose the problem could just be that I'm not part of the target audience. 2. The character fell down the rabbit hole too quickly and then made an about-face just as fast. Which really brings me to number 3. Anna was no better than the characters she looked down on in that world. She was inconsistent, selfish, and annoying. I had no sympathy for her, even at the end. Yes, she's supposed to be 22, but her immaturity was grating. She also wasn't very well-developed, and neither were her students, friends, or even the settings for that matter. It was all very one-dimensional. There were characters that were introduced and then immediately abandoned; I really wanted to know more about the LaVeras. Or tidbits thrown in that had me thinking, "wait, what?" (Damien was Teacher of the Year?). Speaking of Damien, what about him? He really served as a bookend when there was so much more to learn about him. How did he sever his relationship with the tutoring world and yet still have enough support to win the award? All in all, I'd say this was a good first effort, but definitely not my cup of tea.

Tara says

LOVED this book! A must read for any teacher who has ever taught in a private school or who tutors (both for me, probably why I loved it so much). Lakhani has the ability to echo the feelings so many new & young teachers have, likely because she is a teacher herself. She writes so fluidly one can hardly bare to put the book down! I read this in record time, excited about every twist and turn that our protagonist encounters. However, as is the problem with too many novels, I was slightly disappointed at the end - it just did not wrap up wholly for me and I felt it was like a rush to the finish line. I was expecting as least one more well-written chapter and was disappointed when it just ended. But, this aside, pick it up! A light fun read, perfect for the holiday season.

Shannon says

I couldn't put this book down! I was totally sucked in and could not believe what the characters went through just to get a buck. It is true that there is a price for everything, even if you don't believe you would ever stoop that low!

I recommend this book to anyone, especially teachers, who I think would really relate to this book.

Roxanne Hsu Feldman says

I read this after hearing lots and reading quite a few reviews about the book, so I am not entirely sure about my reactions - how much was my enjoyment and annoyance colored by these preset expectations? And how much of my secret pleasure and overt disgust came from my having known the author and has been working in the school that this fiction is supposed to be based on? So read on, those of you who are curious to know my opinions about the book, with caution and many grains of salt!

First, I was surprised how the book does not really feature many recognizable students and faculty from the school, nor does it develop the school as a setting fully. In fact, most teachers do not even enter the story. In fact, most teachers do not even enter the story. It's as if this fictional K-12 school has but 50 students and

they all go to the 7th grade and there are only half a dozen teachers who come into contact with the protagonist and the children. In short, the setting of the school is not quite fleshed out or rich, and the supporting characters are not 3-dimensional, either. A few incidents or coincidences are probably not identifiable by those who are not intimately connected to the school, either. So much, so much of the story is extremely exaggerated: the characters complete caricatures, and the whole world distorted with the kind of hyper-reality one can only find in Gossip Girls and Sex in the City. (Of course also in the highly manipulated Real Housewives "reality" shows...)

This brings me to say to those who seem to think that this is a truthful portrayal of the Manhattan Private Schools/Ivy League Feeders world, "You are absolutely wrong." This is fluffy fiction and no more than that.

I don't think there is even a need to defend my school since there is so little resemblance in *SCHOOLED* to the actual school -- including the physical descriptions and the ways teaching and learning are accomplished throughout the years. Suffice to say that I have encountered scores of most brilliant human beings: readers, writers, thinkers, activists, artists, mathematicians, scientists, all kinds of people -- both from its faculty pool and the student body, to feel privileged and proud to be part of this incredible institution.

The biggest weakness of the book, to my eyes, is how bland the writing is... with few exceptions where the lines are actually funny or effective, such as, "The world could be coming to an end and my mother would still find a way to offer a cookie with the gas mask." and "It was an all-purpose word, something of a Swiss Army knife capable of replacing all sorts of words, such as do, write, create, and especially finish." The rest of the book is filled with lines with little crafting or "polishing". Just a few examples here:

page 124: Anna wonders "if Shakespeare would be ... delighted that his work was the cause of such delight to a group of... seventh-graders."

page 126: "The last comment was like a wound in my heart."

page 131: "And I was an air traffic controller trying to control fifteen little planes all trying to land at one time."

To compound the problem of such thin prose is the poor editing. Missing punctuation marks, continuity errors, and misused words, such as "My ears were ringing. And when did faux mitzvah enter everyone's vocabulary accept mine?" ACCEPT? And this is supposedly written/narrated by an Ivy-Leaguer who studied English in college and teaches English to 7th graders.

The one saving grace is that the readers do not admire Anna (oh, maybe a little bit toward the end of the story when she suddenly has a courageous enlightenment moment), and that adds some flavor to the tale of a small fry lost in the world of greasy glitz.

Sandra says

Just in time for the new school year, a novel that will interest teachers, parents, tutors, and anyone interested in who is really doing the homework sent home by teachers today. It's an eye opener. Darkly humorous, *SCHOOLED* was written by a former English teacher in Manhattan.

The story follows Anna Taggart's first year of teaching private middle school children and the shock of discovery about rich kids and the tutors who write their homework assignments for them. An enthusiastic new Ivy League graduate, Anna doesn't just want to teach, she wants to inspire her students. The paycheck isn't great but she's doing what she loves. Until she inadvertently discovers that high-priced tutors are writing

the homework assignments of some of her own students. But she's really shocked when she is encouraged by other teachers and the parents not to ask questions. Even school administration tells her to let the kids slide because, well, their parents make big donations to the school. The parents she's in contact with defend the practice because their poor dears are under such pressure to excel, or have emotional problems and need extra consideration because they absolutely must get into the best universities in the future.

The shock begins to wear off when she's offered a job tutoring in the evenings for \$200 an hour. The kids in her class love her when she lets them slide and begins dressing to their own extravagantly rich standards. The parents love her when she doesn't give them homework or tests, especially tests. The pressure is just too much for the little darlings you understand. Anna falls into temptation and doing things the easy way until her conscience catches up with her. She comes to realize how far she's comprised her own principles and something has to change. Lakhani calls this story fiction based on her own experiences as a teacher and those of her colleagues. It's witty, rings true, and is often downright funny. Four stars out of five. I recommend it.

Thanks to the generosity of Hyperion Books you may WIN one of TWO Advanced Reading Copies of **SCHOOLED** by Anisha Lakhani

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<http://freshinkbooks.blogspot.com/>

Kathleen says

The simple storyline of this book is as follows: a recent Columbia graduate, Anna Taggart is passionate about teaching despite her parents' protests about it being a waste of her Ivy League degree. She finds herself lucky to receive a position at a Manhattan Upper East Side private school, but soon discovers it's nothing like she expected.

First of all, she lives in what she considers poverty. Then the administration comes down hard on her when she starts teaching "real" lessons, saying that she's trying to make the rest of them look bad. Everything caters to the families who are listed as "Friends" of the school (aka those who donate the most money). Her students boss her around, her students' parents bribe her and threaten her, and she is pressured into not giving actual grades. More outrageous stuff happens.

But then Anna discovers the mysterious and lucrative tutoring world. As soon as she realizes she can score \$200 an hour or more, she's hooked. She balks a little at first when she is slowly suckered into actually DOING her clients' homework, but the justifications soon set in. Before long she's not only a part of the private school world that she despised, she's the epitome of it.

Schooled was a quick, easy read that I found myself mildly fascinated with and appalled by. But in the end, it was too shallow. We only get to know a few characters, and they are one-sided. No real relationships are formed. There is a single plot without any depth. Although it was written to make a point, I have my doubts as to how realistic the story actually is.

We get a picture of students who can barely write a coherent paragraph being carried through the most prestigious schools because tutors are doing their work for them. They make it into Ivy League schools and land big-wig jobs simply because of their name or their family's money. While that may happen on occasion, I don't think it happens in such a general way as this book made it seem.

In the end, Anna returns to her morals and figures out a way to actually teach. The problem is, her solution was obvious from the very beginning.

Taylor Cohen says

Couldn't put it down! One of the best books I've read in a long time!

M says

For honesty's sake, this is really worth two stars considering a severe lack of subtlety in the writing as well as unwelcome hyperbole. But the premise was so close to my heart, and Lakhani really nailed it, that I would even give this four stars if my integrity weren't at stake.

As someone who teaches English, and has taught in snooty private schools, and has often seen the ugly side of pleasing parents and their children and their principals which generally means pretending to teach but not working them too hard and all the while knowing that someone else is producing their work so as to guarantee A's, I found this book to be almost laugh out loud relatable.

Lakhani, no surprise, did time herself in a snooty Manhattan school, and produces a lot of firsthand knowledge of the awkwardness of that first year of teaching and the smarmy politics you become privy to. She takes it up a notch, though, in a way that REALLY speaks to the heart of a teacher, by producing a protagonist who realizes that while teaching pays squat, tutoring (or rather intense editing/ghostwriting) is what really pays the big bucks. And so she pursues a double life, essentially back stabbing herself as she does other teachers' assignments to assure a lifestyle grander than that of what a teacher can usually count on.

I loved the honesty of this work - the parents' entitled and condescending phone messages could be quoted verbatim from my own experience, as well as the boys' club attitude on the part of the school to keep the wealthy parents from harm. I enjoyed the temptation to slack off as a teacher all the while suffering from realizing that no one is truly gaining. I related to the threatening feeling the new, popular teacher brings to the school, and how the kids respond to actually learning. All in all this really captured the many mixed emotions of teaching and how hard work really does pay, if not in actual dollars or in popularity. So while it is a light and rather poorly written read (and she's an English teacher who became chair! Sheesh), I can't recommend it enough for anyone in the business.
