



Project X

Jim Shepard

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In the wilderness of junior high, Edwin Hanratty is at the bottom of the food chain. His teachers find him a nuisance. His fellow students consider him prey. And although his parents are not oblivious to his troubles, they can't quite bring themselves to fathom the ruthless forces that demoralize him daily.

Sharing in these schoolyard indignities is his only friend, Flake. Branded together as misfits, their fury simmers quietly in the hallways, classrooms, and at home, until an unthinkable idea offers them a spectacular and terrifying release.

From Jim Shepard, one of the most enduring and influential novelists writing today, comes an unflinching look into the heart and soul of adolescence. Tender and horrifying, prescient and moving, **Project X** will not easily be forgotten.

Project X Details

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Author : Jim Shepard

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Ted says

I loved this. Shepard really set himself a challenge here, not just making the perpetrators of school shootings seem like kids with psychology we are capable of accessing but making violence of such scale seem like a plausible solution to "normal" kids. And he gets junior high just right. He made me remember—unpleasantly. I remember being suddenly forced into new social situations for which I felt unprepared, making my best guess at reasonable behavior, and being laughed at as an idiot. Hell, I still feel this way sometimes. I remember my anxious, desperate, tasteless humor distressing other students and adults. I remember clinging to the fashion safety of, like, two outfits (two different sweatshirts). I remember the random antagonism of everyone by everyone. I also liked how Shepard complicates things. The book doesn't simplify and it's not one long mope. The way Edwin and Flake are treated actually IS miserable. "Unfair" was the word I kept applying to the situations he puts these kids in—when that bastard father steals Edwin's Nerf football at the park; the conversation with the vice principal where Edwin is actually honest about his feelings, to which the v.p. villainously replies that kids like him, in his day, used to get beat up (to which Edwin deadpans, "They still do.") These scenes destroyed me. I loved that Edwin cared deeply for his little brother. I loved that Edwin's parents care about him, that they try to reach him, try to save him. I love the family banter. Shepard's dialogue is sharp and snappy. It's as smart as you are. Edwin's dad says some hilarious stuff. The book is funny! I laughed out loud many times. Just read the first few sentences. This is a book I'll read again.

Hannah Brostrom says

This book had gritty realism, terrific characters, and a plot so unsettling the novel was impossible to put down.

All the events scattered throughout the novel, although random, have a fascinating way of fitting right into place with the main story. Everything encapsulates a tremendously real life of a troubled teenage boy with fierce accuracy.

The way this fragile topic was not treaded lightly made the novel just that more amazing. Extremely relevant and the ending, although expected, finds a way to be just as hard hitting as the rest of the novel.

Amy says

Now this may sound like I'm totally heartless, but I could just not connect to the characters. I couldn't feel sorry for them or wish them anything better. To me, this book was pretty boring and unrealistic and by the end I no longer really cared what happened to the two boys. And what is there to say about the ending? Just another shooting.... this one just didn't sink in with me. :(

Nic says

I read this novel in a day because I couldn't put it down! Shepard chronicles a few months in the life of eighth grader Edwin Hanratty who, with his friend Flake, plots a Columbine H.S.-style attack on their school. The writer succeeds in presenting a believable, sympathetic character and the circumstances and adolescent mindset that could lead to violent revenge, despite coming from a caring home. Edwin is an unforgettable character who deserves as wide an audience as Holden Caulfield, but is unlikely to get it. Shepard doesn't insult your intelligence by offering any simple solutions, but this novel serves as a gateway to get people talking, and thinking.

S. Wilson says

In the aftermath of the Columbine High School Shootings in 1999, countless reporters and commentators repeated similar versions of the same phrase over and over again: "People are wondering how something like this could happen."

Jim Shepard knows.

Project X is one of the few books that has ever honestly attempted to get into the minds of people like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, or the other teenager gunmen who later patterned themselves after the Columbine incident.

Most seem to take comfort in explanations that support preexisting phobias and prejudices; violent video games and movies, popular music, poor parenting skills, drug abuse, white supremacy, and even homosexuality have often been blamed for driving these kids to violence. Project X refuses to fall into this simple-minded trap. Edwin and Flake, the two teenage characters in the book, are portrayed as the complex personalities that people really are, and not the easily categorized stereotypes that people tend to see each other as.

The protagonists in Shepard's book aren't simply misanthropic loners by choice. They are bullied and harassed on a daily basis, in and out of school, by people they know and complete strangers, and by adults as well as teenagers. The toll of this repeated physical abuse, egged on by their inability (both physically and emotionally) to fight back, forces them to withdraw from society. But they aren't presented as pure victims of an uncaring system. Their self-imposed alienation and inability to explain their situation to someone who could assist them, coupled with increasingly anti-social and reactionary behavior, just makes them easier targets and escalates the situation even further.

If this were just about bullies, the playgrounds across the country would be a never ending battlefield (and for some, it is). There are often other influences involved, and Shepard exposes some of these as well. The psychological instability of both characters is well displayed, but never left as a final scapegoat. Allusions to a previous head injury possibly causing some of Edwin's emotional problems, as well as Flake's apparent sexual confusion and sometimes aggressive domination over Edwin in their friendship, add to the pressures and overwhelming confusion. It is all too easy to forget that some kids live with stress levels that often drive adults to nervous breakdowns.

Shepard doesn't just trap these characters in a world where no one cares about them or notices the problem.

Edwin's parents are well aware that their son is troubled, and try to both understand and lend emotional support. But their awkward attempts to reach out never manage to break through the confusion and despair. Their rebellious behavior makes Edwin and Flake an easy target for the scorn of teachers and other adults, but even some of them attempt to help through positive reinforcement, and enrolling Edwin in an after-school program for troubled youth.

The true brilliance of Project X is that Shepard manages to easily evoke sympathy, and even empathy, for Edwin and Flake. Most readers will no doubt find themselves not only wanting to help them, but wondering what could have been done differently. Through fictional characters and events, Shepard is giving the reader a glimpse behind the curtain that hides most of these kids until it is far too late to do anything but pick up the pieces and wonder to ourselves what went wrong?

I have read other reviews of this book, and I am surprised by two common reactions to Project X. One is the repeated comparison of Project X to Vernon God Little, which is unfair to both books. Vernon God Little is a great book in its own right, but only uses troubled youth as a foundation for its story, and in no way attempts to expose or explore the serious issues that Project X does. This is almost like comparing Gus Van Sant's Elephant to Napoleon Dynamite.

The other reaction is from those who complain about the book's ending. Some readers wanted more about the aftermath of the events at the end of the book, and felt the need for closure. I feel that these people missed the point entirely.

Project X is not about school shootings. It isn't about the victims or their families, the assailants or their families, the media coverage afterward, or the attempts by those affected to somehow pick up the shattered remains of what used to be their lives. The truth is, there is no real closure after such a tragedy.

Project X is about what happens before these tragic events. It is about the children who become lost amongst us, the demons that plague and influence them, and most importantly, what finally drives them over the edge. Jim Shepard knows the truth; the only way to save ourselves from them is to learn how to save them from themselves.

Shannon Fay says

Actual rating: 2.5 stars (maybe even 3, but a LOW 3, like a meh, don't really care, fuck it, I feel bad, 3)

So far I'm finding the writing a little challenging.

It's very simplistic and disjointed. Cuts from being in lunch to being in class to at home to with his friend and all happens so fast with no transitioning, that I can't always follow it. I have trouble telling exactly where we are in the story.

I was talking to my sister about this recently, and she goes: "that sounds kind of bad." And I go: "yeah it was. It was hard for me to care about things." And she goes: "I feel like bad writing makes stuff hard to read."

And I go: "Definitely. It makes the story itself irritating and hard to get into, so I don't really care."

The whole thing really was like that. Dialogue that was stilted and wildly unrealistic (because teens don't talk like that. For anyone who wants to know (if you're writing a book), teens talk like this, like normal human beings, but with more slang that us old folks aren't privy to, a couple words abbreviated or just plain invented, and maybe a few words misused or just plain said wrong, because they haven't properly learned what they mean yet. But that's it, aside of some subtle nuances and things, teens pretty much speak the same way as anyone else.

So it just bugs me when people try to write teens as these overly simplistic creatures that barely have a vocabulary.

Notes upon completion:

That ending pissed me off.

Spoiler alert (continue reading at your own risk):

At the very end they finally do what they'd been planning. And then the book ends. Right after the event. You get to see no aftermath whatsoever, which means you don't find out what happens to the rest of the school, you don't find out what happens to our main characters, or their families, you don't find out ANYTHING. That irritated me. And I understand that this book isn't about the aftermath, but about the events leading up to that happening, what makes the boys have this idea in the first, what makes them decide to follow through with it, and how this plan affects them. I get it, but getting literally no closure pisses me off.

The other big issue I have with this book is that there is literally no mention between the boys of the gravity of their plans. Now some might blame that on youth, "oh, they're so young they don't really know what they're doing." But they do. They know full well what they are doing, and perhaps, at most, can't fully grasp the weight of it, but they at least understand mortality and know what will come of this situation. I get that they might not have thought everything out that well, (like what the hell happens after?) but if they can mention "what happened in Colorado," and are aware of Columbine, then they know full well what they're doing, and they know what the ramifications of their actions will likely be. So it really did irritate me that these kids didn't mention the fact that they'd literally be KILLING shitloads of people even once. I don't care how dumb you think kids are. Firstly, they're not, and secondly, by the time you're in seventh grade, you're fully aware of mortality and the tragedy of death and the concept of murder, so the fact that these kids seemed oblivious to the fact that their plan was to murder every single one of their classmates is just absurd. I would understand if they had been so filled with hatred and loathing for their classmates that they wanted to see them all dead (that's not ok, but at least it makes sense), or had they been so incredibly depressed that they wanted to just end everyone's everything and make the suffering stop. But the fact that they planned this like it was slashing everyone's tires, with no mention of murdering people? Just... WTF

I guess, all in all, I just didn't really connect with this book in the way that I like to connect with these types of intense life drama books. The writing was weird and it made it difficult to get into the story, and when I finally learned to ignore the writing and did actually get into things, I mostly just wondered why everyone was such an asshole. I mean, there were moments where I legitimately felt bad for this kid, I really did, because almost everyone he encounters, from the teachers to the other students, to random adults, treats him like utter shit. Like the one random dad who stole his ball, just flagrantly stole it and lied to his face about it, that shit's fucked up. And sure his parents cared, but what could they really do (it must be hard function when you're that one-dimensional)? It must be difficult to have a child that you know is struggling and to be unable to do anything about it (you know, you can't take him to therapy, force him to join some club and socialize and make other friends, or even keep pushing him to talk until he finally does. I know that pushing kids to talk isn't really good parenting, but in some instances, when they keep stalling and saying they'll talk tomorrow and making excuses, at some point, you kind of have to push it out of them. And in some cases, like this kid's, I feel like if someone cared enough to do that, then the kid might actually realize someone cares and be a little more inclined to open up. It's a shame his parents couldn't have done that, or that they couldn't lay off him when he was obviously upset, or spend actual quality time with him for more than just dinner and random two minute check-ins, or believed him when he mentioned the bad things happening to him, or even ask him JUST ONCE, just one damn time WHY he got in that fight, or WHY he was making trouble, because if they had, and he had explained that he got in a fight because kids were bullying him and his friend, and they listened to him, and understood he wasn't making trouble for no freaking reason, then

this situation might not have happened! UGH). So yeah, it's a shame they couldn't have done anything.

Overall, this whole book just felt very flat. The characters, the writing (seriously, one sentence, we're in class, and the next we're on the bus, with NO transition. I had the hardest time following certain parts. Wait, where the fuck are we, who's talking? They said the name once before this dialogue got started, and everyone sounds the same, so I literally have no idea who he's having this conversation with right now...), everything about this book. It was just flat, and kind of a let down.

Long review short: There are better, far deeper and more poignant books about school shootings; even if you're looking for one that specifically portrays the agony of the kids that decide to commit these heinous acts, and the desperation that leads them to do so, (because Project X is told from the perspective of one of the perpetrators of the shooting), there are better books out there.

If you want to read a great book about a school shooting, I recommend Hate List by Jennifer Brown. That book is amazing, and not only do you get to bear witness to the torture that led the kid to decide to commit such a grave act, but you get to witness the fallout, and {sort of} --SPOILER-- healing in the end as well. It's a far better book about the the same tough subject.

Anila Jacob says

it was unexpected. That's all I have to say.

Guillermo Jiménez says

Después de Columbine en 1999, como después de cualquier tragedia que marque el desgaste de la sociedad, los visionarios se dan a la tarea de regresar a «la escena del crimen» a explorar las pruebas que revelen las causas del delito.

Shepard es un probado autor perteneciente a una generación que, cada vez con mayor contundencia, está revisando la tradición de la literatura nortamericana y está intentando (con mejor o peor tino) reelaborarla, reformularla para entregar obras dignas de nuestra época y que sean pruebas cabales de que la literatura no está en decadencia.

Esta novela nos hunde en un «futuro» no tan lejano de los próximos mandos del poder: unos adolescentes nihilistas, desatendidos, desanimados, que poseen una cultura y poder económico peligroso para una sociedad represiva y moralista donde la apariencia es muy importante a cualquier edad, pero, donde el peso y la presión pueden orillar a inocentes a tener un fatídico desenlace.

Lauren says

I tried really hard to get into this book, but I just couldn't. The language felt like it was trying too hard to be cool, trying to be something a junior high school student would say rather than something a junior high school would actually say. And for the life of me, I could not sympathize or like the two young boys that were the main characters. They were assholes and I understood why no one liked them. And I definitely

didn't care enough about them to read a novel about them. If you want an excellent book dealing with the same subject matter, check out *Breaking Point* by Alex Finn.

Rase McCray says

Project X is about a school shooting -- **or is it?** And that final question is what makes this book both provocatively disturbing and so likely to be ill-received (as evidenced by the many negative reviews on this site).

The premise: Project X is the story of two high school boys who get more than their share of adolescent difficulties. They're weird, isolated, picked on, perhaps struggling with depression, and see all their avenues for a better existence closed off again and again. They want things to get better, they really do, and to do that, they're trying to get the same things all teenagers want: friendship, happiness, support, meaningful existence, etc. But as their frustration and humiliation continues, their means for achieving these things begin to get dangerously, even violently, desperate.

This book is a truly amazing novel -- one of my favorites. The characters are absolute screw-ups but Shepard goes to great lengths to show us that they, too, have souls and feelings and insecurities and pain. But even though high school is a time when we all think that it will never get better, the pain these two kids feel is still likely greater than the pain you felt in high school. It's this that makes reading the book so heartbreaking because you just want something better to happen for these kids, either through them making better choices or surely through an adult giving them the opportunities they need to improve.

The reader's desire for things to get better is, I think, one of the absolute driving forces in this book because there are so many chances for it to happen. Even when the plot is set in motion and the kids develop a plan to get violent revenge on the peers and teachers at school who have been so awful to them, even then the book shows us how fragile this plan is. These kids don't necessarily want to go through with their plan, even though it seems to be the only thing giving them the strength to get up each day. As such, the book is filled with the intensely black humor, surreal strangeness, and a tense will-they-won't-they plot that defines the pent-up frustration and desperation of these characters' lives. All of which leads to an ending that I find absolutely stellar, with a final page that ranks up there in my mind with ending of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*.

But this strange mix of True-with-a-capital-T storytelling is also where I think a lot of readers struggle with this novel. In fact, I think readers who dislike this book share two identifiable expectations that ruin their ability to accept this book on its own terms:

1. They expect this book to explain why school shootings happen in such a way that suggests how we can stop them. Or put another way, they're looking for the moral that will righteously vilify the person(s), group(s), or attitude(s) responsible. This propaganda-like clarity would offer the reader the comfort of knowing exactly how they should feel when the book ends, as in Jay Asher's extremely popular book *Thirteen Reasons Why*. (Which is a novel that essentially says (view spoiler).)

2. They expect to find an explanation for the characters' violence that compartmentalizes them and makes their actions easy to understand, even dismissible. In other words, they want to read this book and then say, "We'll never be able to stop school shootings, but that's because the shooters are made in this particular way that can't be fixed -- and since it can't be fixed, it's not my problem." Again, this explanation would provide

comfort because if, for example, the characters were mentally ill, or came from obviously broken and abusive homes, or were drug addicts, or listened to too much heavy metal and played too many violent video games, etc., THEN the reader isn't responsible for doing anything to prevent them in the future. We look for this narrative because it's the one provided by our news media in response to mass violence: the shooter ALWAYS turns out, at least according to the news, as one of these things. And since we can't fix those problems, there's no blood on our hands.

But what makes this book so good -- and what also makes it an uncanny uncomfortable read -- is that Shepard doesn't do either of these things. No one person or attitude or moment is to blame for our epidemic of mass public shootings, and so, so many things need to be done in conjunction if we're to stop them. It's a complex problem in the real world, just as it is in this novel. Shepard doesn't offer us easy answers, just hints at all the ways in which these particular kids want and deserve better from themselves and especially deserve better from the people/world around them. But the Truth of this novel is that life -- in ways both comedic and tragic -- can't be set right with a bandaid and a pep talk. Will someone stop them from enacting these kids from enacting their plan to kill? Maybe, but even preventing every act of violence wouldn't be enough to heal our broken world.

John Addiego says

This is a heartbreaking story, and Shepard captures the emotional turmoil, the iconoclastic teen humor, and the voices of these characters so well. I loved his *Kiss of the Wolf* novel and wasn't sure I was so engaged by this one until I got a ways in and could feel the horror looming on the horizon. I kept wanting to rescue this kid and hoping for his salvation. Shepard has a truly empathetic ear for these kids.

Kai says

Project-X Book Review.
Kai Lammers

During our fiction unit I read the book ,”project-X.” In the book, the main character is Edwin Hanratty. Edwin is a troubled child, his grades are terrible and he gets in fights with kids every single day. But his friend Flake is even more troubled, he hates everything and everyone. He wishes all the jocks and knuckle heads at his school would just die, and that is exactly what he plans to do. A giant terrorist attack at their school, killing everybody. Revenge is all he wants, day and night Edwin and Flake plan, trying to come up with a genius idea, but nothing seems to work, until one day Flake finds a bunch of his dads guns, and he realizes he was missing a golden opportunity the whole time. He calls Edwin and they prepare for their attack. Monday morning Flake and Edwin enter the school with the guns in their bags. Once they hit the massive crowd of jocks and knuckle heads, Flake whips out his gun and starts spraying. While Flake is shooting, a bullet bounces back and hits him in the head killing him. While Flake lies motionless on the ground, Edwin is still hesitating on whether he should shoot or not, but before he can decide the principal runs down, and Edwin throws his weapon down...

The title in this book very strongly impacts the story. The name ,”Project X,” really gives idea that there is some sort of plan behind the story. Edwin and Flake come up with several different plans to kill everyone, none of them really seemed to work. But not project x, no this is the one that worked, that's the one that

killed all those innocent kids. The setting in this book was very important, without it, the story wouldn't be as good as it really was. The setting did change a lot throughout the book, but the three main locations were the school, Edwin's house and Flake's house. The school was the scariest setting, where kids fought and where the shooting happened. Flake's house was where they both got their evil minds thinking, coming up with dark ideas. Whereas Edwin's house was the happiest setting. It was the only place the both boys could have fun without being beat up by other children.

The point of view in this story is first person. This is a brilliant point of view because it is important to see the characters' inner emotions and feelings. If the book would have been written in third person point of view the reader would have never been able to see and feel the way the character felt. Edwin is an odd kid with many different thoughts and emotions, writing this story in first person point of view really allows the reader to connect with him. This book carries a very dark and horrifying mood. The author takes the deepest, darkest thoughts of their minds and turns them into a plan. Throughout the book there are no joyful moments for these boys, every single second of their lives is a living nightmare, to them life is a waste of time. The author makes these moments very clear, in order for the reader to understand what they are going through, and to see what the reader would feel like in the same situation.

The author of my book uses foreshadowing in the very beginning of my book. It starts off with Edwin going to Flake's house on a Saturday afternoon. It seems like a normal hangout at first until Flake is looking for something in his dad's room when he finds a case full of guns. I was confused at first because it had nothing to do with the story at the time, but later in the book I understood why the author chose to add that part.

I would recommend to middle school students. This book shows and teaches students what the effects of bullying could be. But not only that, this book is an action-packed and full of suspense as well as being well written and fluent.

Scoobs says

hmpf...

I'm really digging Shepard's short stories, so I picked this up from the library. He creates great characters, great scenes, and great dialog, which all make for a quick read. I want to say his writing makes an enjoyable read, but with such serious subject matter, I won't. I couldn't put it down, but just like in the way you can't look away from the car crash.

In the end, maybe it's just weird to read about kids who feel alienated and decide the answer is to blow up the world. There were some powerful moments where my stomach dropped or my heart sank while I was reading.

I was reading Ginnie's review and she mentions that this is the best of the flock when it comes to authors who decided to tackle the 'columbine' thing. I'm ok with that.

Laura Aranda says

This book left me incredibly disturbed. I understand the author's aim was to delve into the insanity of young mass shooters, and to reveal the unfortunate consequences that drive young men to violence. But the characters seemed too juvenile, and there is a lack of character development even through the carrying out of

their "plans." While the severity of bullying is addressed, I don't believe this novel helps the discussion of preventing mass shootings in schools.

James Jessup says

This book was extremely fascinating and a very good book to read. This book gives you different perspectives and shows what it's like to live in someone else's shoes. The author really developed his characters, the setting, and the plot very nicely. I would recommend this book to anyone looking for really good quick read.

kelly says

Three words (or four): provocative, disturbing, puzzling.

Loved this book.

Project X is about a familiar topic in contemporary literature--a school shooting. The story is told by Edwin Henratty, for whom the word 'outcast' is an understatement. He's a middle schooler with a laundry list of issues: he's socially awkward, always in fights, always in trouble, isolated, and picked on (by both teachers and students), with parents who try but fail miserably to understand his problems. His only friend is fellow outcast, Flake, and together they begin to plan ways to get back at everyone in school who causes them misery.

The kicker with this book is not the ending, because you already know it will be a violent one. The people in and around these boy's lives are completely oblivious to their plight, rendering them powerless to change the inevitable. As the two boys go about their planning of their hideous revenge, one can only wonder if someone or something could have stopped it. Their plan is fragile at best, yet the pain they are experiencing is so acute that it becomes the only thing that motivates them to go forward. It is what makes this book so truly heartbreaking, you see that these are not merely killer kids, but children experiencing pain.

The voice of this novel was perfect. I have never read Jim Shepard before, but I was amazed throughout the story of the fact that the writer was a middle aged man. The dialogue is perfectly believable, the characters completely fleshed out. There is a healthy dose of black humor too, which I liked. The tone is serious but not preachy, as Shepard leaves the complex problem of mass violence unanswered and up to the reader to figure out.

Needless to say, I liked this book immensely.

Beth Yost says

I read this with the hopes of finding a great recommendation for my freshmen for a realistic fiction. I was intrigued by the content when reading about it. It's a young adult book told from the point of view of a troubled teen that plans to shoot up his school. Some may find that offensive but I think intense issues are only dealt with when addressed so I was curious as to how Shepard would tell the story. I hoped it would be

better and at times it felt a bit like an after-school special, but I could see why YA's would like it and gain something from it. Personally, I didn't find the dialogue convincing, and don't feel he has mastered writing like a teenager would speak. It would get students to address and discuss a very real issue that is scary to address and talk about but important.

Denise says

3.0 out of 5 stars X (Cross) this off your list..., January 16, 2009

This review is from: Project X: A Novel (Paperback)

I read quite a few of the reviews before I started the book. Now, a few hours later, I've finished it and am left wondering -- what was the point of this novel? I mistakenly thought it was YA literature, but have since disavowed that notion. I can't imagine what a teenager or an adult would learn from reading the book. It's purpose definitely wasn't to entertain, or to even delve deeply into the psyche of the boys' backgrounds and lives. I can't help but shake my head in perplexity. With its incomplete characterizations, explanations, and descriptions, not to mention a very unsatisfactory climax and conclusion, the work simply seems incomplete and not nearly as consequential as other books tackling the same weighty subject. For example, a far superior work about school violence committed by a teenaged boy was the incredibly well-written *We Need to Talk About Kevin: A Novel* (P.S.) by Lionel Shriver.

This book answers none of the questions that would have made the work a worthwhile study of what causes school violence. The bullying, teasing, and disaffection was barely touched upon and there isn't even any description of the tortures or humiliations that the two boys received except for fights they got into and a few insults, -- nothing that isn't pretty typically seen and heard in an average junior high I'm sure. Maybe I missed the boat here, but I see nothing that screams that this a work of genius, or even of significance for educators or parents to study in hopes of preventing future children from committing this type of violent crime upon their schoolmates.

I see no purpose to recommending the book. It was OK, but offers no new insight or solution -- seems to indicate that there is a potential for violence in troubled youth, but yes -- we already know that. Most professionals who work with this age group are already well aware of the harm caused by bullying and other harassment that some kids are subjected to, but alas, can't always stop or prevent. The teachers in the book are described in mostly stereotypical fashion ranging from the sarcastic jerk to the sympathetic art teacher, with none understanding the boys or the torment that is driving them to the point of retribution. The boys also contribute to their own disaffection because they do not talk even when help is offered.

Ultimately, the book is unsatisfying and I'd advise you to cross it off your list and, should this topic be of interest to you, select another novel that explores the subject in more depth.

RyanM says

This was a fantastic book. I've never read a book that captivated me in such a way as this. It gripped me from the start and kept me interested throughout. Topics dealt with in this book are very touchy ones and really relevant in today's world. The feeling of sorrow and despair really affected me. A few days after finishing the

book I still could not get it off my mind. It will mess with your head and probably make you thankful for what you have. While the main character is just a misunderstood boy who is in a bad position, at times it can be hard to root for him. Some of the things he does are simply unforgivable, which adds depth to the character. The ending was so emotional for me and I thought about it for at least a week. Read this book if you can handle dark themes and heavy emotion; you will not regret it.

Derick says

"nothing i wanted to be is left."
