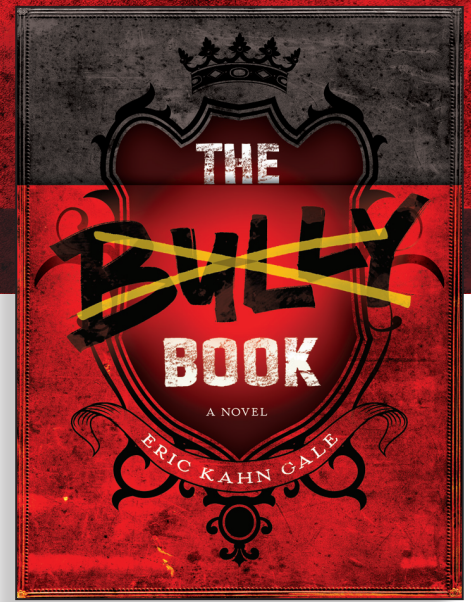


~~THE BULLY BOOK~~

by ERIC KAHN GALE

DISCUSSION GUIDE



About the Book

The rules governing middle school are often a mystery, but for Eric Haskins they're a mystery he needs to solve, and fast. He's a normal, average kid until sixth grade starts. For some inexplicable reason, the class bully and his pack make Eric the Grunt. Even his best friend since first grade turns on him. Eric can't figure out why he's the Grunt. Then he hears about *The Bully Book*, a cryptic guide that gets right inside the head of the Bully. Eric Haskins may be this year's Grunt, but he's not going to stay at the bottom of the social ladder forever.

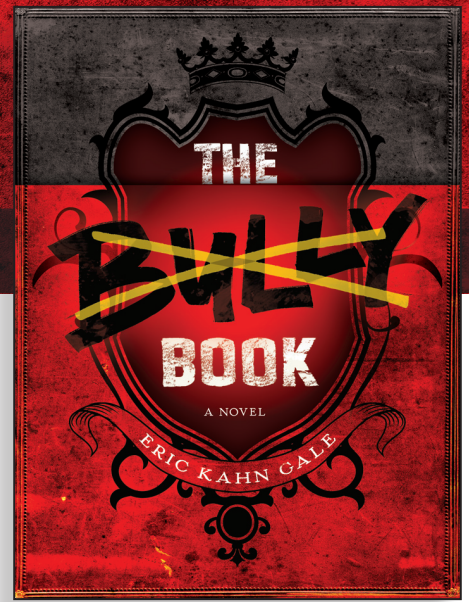
Themes for Thought

- 1. BULLYING.** The topic of bullying is a hot-button issue, not only in the book but in the world today. Think about your school—does bullying happen there? Are you or your friends a part of it? Have you ever been on the receiving end of a bully's actions or participated in behavior that upset others? Why can bullying seem like harmless fun but actually be dangerous and hurtful? Cite a real-life example of bullying to support your thoughts, either a personal experience or a story you heard in the news, and make a case for what can be done to prevent bullying and make schools a safer environment. Compile the class findings into a "Top Ten" list that discusses ways to get along better with your peers.
- 2. FRIENDSHIP.** In the book, Eric loses his best friend, Donovan, and has a complicated relationship with Melody. Friendship is an important (and fun) part of growing up and your experiences at school, but it's not always easy. What is friendship like at your school? Are there cliques? What does it mean to be "popular"? Why do kids sometimes become friends for the wrong reasons? What qualities do you look for in a good and loyal friend? Think further about your own friendships and the relationships in *The Bully Book* as well as the way television and movies portray friendship—how does society influence the way you make and treat your friends?
- 3. NAME-CALLING.** Calling others derogatory words is a form of bullying. In the book, the bullies use the word "gay" as an insult to taunt Eric. Eric defends himself and his classmate, Colin, by saying, "Calling someone gay, like it's a bad thing, is like calling someone a dentist—it doesn't make any freaking sense!" (page 140). Why are words such as "gay" and "retard" so commonly used by kids to tease other kids, and how are such uses inappropriate and misguided? Why are these words offensive to others? How did they come to be used as slurs? Why does Eric say using these words "doesn't make any freaking sense"? Consider what other words people say in the company of friends and peers that can have a bad influence on others. How do those words make you feel? How can you combat this kind of hateful behavior in your own life?
- 4. PERSONAL GROWTH.** As the Grunt, Eric has a difficult time figuring out his own identity and how he fits in with the rest of the sixth-grade class. At first he lets the other kids (and *The Bully Book*) dictate who he should be. Gradually, he stops to think about who he is. Is it ever truly possible to "be yourself"? Have you ever pretended to be something you're not or gone along with someone you didn't think was right in order to fit in? Have you ever gotten caught up in what's "cool" and lost a sense of who you truly are? How did you regain your identity, the way Eric finally does at the end of *The Bully Book*? Write a short journal entry to yourself about a struggle you faced in school and how it contributed to your personal growth. How did you overcome the situation? Did it make you a better person? Explain.

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Discussion Questions

1. What is bullying? Why does bullying go on, and what can you do to combat it?
2. Why is it so hard to stand up to a bully or to stop bullying from happening at all?
3. According to *The Bully Book*, what is the Social Order? Does a social order exist at your school? Explain.
4. How does Eric feel when Donovan stops being his friend? Have you ever had the experience of suddenly losing a friend? How did you feel?
5. What is the Grunt? How do Jason, Donovan, and Adrian turn the rest of their classmates against him?
6. Eric says, “We’re not living in a fair world” (page 21). How has life turned unfair for Eric?
7. Why does The Book recommend that a bully pick friends who are either dumber or stronger than him or her? How do you choose your friends?
8. Why does Eric want to change himself? Why doesn’t he think the role of the Grunt will cease to exist—it will just shift to someone else?
9. The Book says that adults can’t “remember what it’s really like” (page 60). Do you agree or disagree with this outlook on adults? Explain. Why are adults often not able to stop bullying from happening? What is it “really like” for you and your peers?
10. In your experience, is it true that “everyone is telling you who to be” (page 76)? Why or why not? How do you act differently when you are around different people or groups? Why?
11. How does being the Grunt alter Eric’s opinion of himself? How has your own treatment—whether good or bad—at the hands of others affected your self-worth?
12. How does Eric feel about Melody? How does Melody feel about Eric? How do circumstances come between them and their friendship?
13. Several of Eric’s classmates use the word “gay” as an insult. Why does Eric say calling someone “gay” makes no sense?
14. Who is the first Grunt? Who is the author of *The Bully Book*? What is the significance of these identities?
15. How is the Grunt chosen? What does it mean that “the Grunt is the person in your class who is most defined by what he is not” (page 225)?
16. How does Eric allow himself to be defined by being the Grunt? What does he learn about his ability to choose his own identity?
17. How does Eric transform both The Book and himself?



Photo by Aaron Gang

About the Author

ERIC KAHN GALE lives in Chicago, and *The Bully Book* is his first novel. He is determined to get this book into the hands of as many children as possible.