

Colin Fischer Study Guide

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Plot Summary

On the first day of high school, Colin Fischer, a teenager suffering from Asperger's Syndrome, finds his head being dunked in the toilet by school bully Wayne Connelly. Colin, who carries a Notebook around to write down all his thoughts and observations, is generally ostracized by his classmates, except for a girl named Melissa Greer, whom he has had a tentative friendship with throughout grade school because of their mutual position as social pariahs. Though Melissa has blossomed into an attractive young woman garnering the attention of the "popular" boys, she is still determined to maintain her relationship with Colin. Colin's gym teacher, Mr. Turrentine, also refuses to treat Colin like he is different in a negative way, and teaches him to play basketball against all odds of Colin's deficiencies.

Colin spends his time observing the social groupings of his classmates: athletes like Eddie, Stan, and Cooper act superior. Eddie is dating Sandy Ryan, who, like Melissa, has matured physically over the summer, but she is also still the victim of Wayne's bullying. Colin distrusts Rudy Moore, a clever but dangerous student whose facial expressions remain elusive to the ever-observant Colin. At lunch on the first day, Melissa's friends bring a cake to celebrate her birthday, and Colin watches the different ways his fellow students eat. The situation devolves when some jocks attack Wayne for his earlier aggression. Suddenly a gun goes off, sending everyone into chaos, except Colin, who moves in for a closer look: he notices the gun covered in birthday cake, various school supplies, and a tube of melon-colored lipstick at the "scene of the crime."

Colin realizes Wayne has been blamed for the gun when Wayne does not show up in school the next day. But Colin realizes Wayne could not be the gun's owner based on the way he was neatly eating his cake. In emulation of his logical hero Sherlock Holmes, Colin sets out to determine who really had the gun in the cafeteria. When questioned by the police, Colin realizes they suspect gang involvement. For the first time, Colin lies to his parents so he can go visit Wayne after school. Wayne is suspicious of Colin's motivations after the way he has treated Colin, but Colin is simply driven by curiosity to discover the truth. Wayne takes Colin to see members of an LA gang called La Familia to investigate the gang connection. When they inquire about how to get a gun, head gangster El Cocodrilo lets slip that Eddie and Stan previously visited him for the same purpose.

After narrowly escaping the gangsters (who have realized they are bluffing), Colin and Wayne (who is beginning to understand the negative impact he has had on Colin's life) are picked up by Colin's father, Mr. Fischer. Colin's parents worry about his new "friend" and his abruptly rebellious behavior. His younger brother Danny simply can't stand that Colin gets away with actions that he himself would get punished for. He destroys Colin's room, sending Colin into a frenzy. At school the next day, Colin confronts Eddie about the gun. Eddie confirms Colin's suspicions that he bought it, but he discovers Eddie was not actually in the cafeteria at the time of the crime. Colin reviews all the facts and comes up with a new solution: he takes it upon himself to invite Wayne to school to speak with the principal, Dr. Doran, also forging a note to get Sandy Ryan to the



principal's office. Colin realizes Sandy removed the gun from Eddie's locker to keep him safe, and had it in her purse that day in the cafeteria: thus the icing smears. Sandy finally confesses, but Colin has no way of proving the gun actually belonged to Eddie.

The next day at school, Sandy is expelled and Melissa is upset that there isn't more justice for the true gun owner, though Colin is fairly dispassionate about the issue of justice. Eddie and Stan are ready to take revenge on Colin (Stan is still infuriated that a provoked Colin attacked him on the basketball court earlier in the novel) but Wayne arrives on the scene, newly reinstated in school, and stands up for Colin. While serving detention after school, Colin discovers Rudy Moore was involved in the gun incident, sending Eddie to buy it from El Cocodrilo. Wayne threatens Rudy for causing trouble just for the sake of feeling powerful. Both Colin and Wayne know trouble has barely begun with Rudy, but they relish the joy of their newfound friendship.



Part 1: Birthday Cake and a Gun: Chapter 1-2: Shark Behavior, The Prisoner's Dilemma

Part 1: Birthday Cake and a Gun: Chapter 1-2: Shark Behavior, The Prisoner's Dilemma Summary

Readers first meet Colin Fischer in a page from his much-loved Notebook: he is a freshman in high school with only 1,365 days left. He ponders a group of hammerhead sharks near the Galapagos Islands, who join together in a school unlike other species of shark. Scientists cannot deter the reason for this unusual behavior, and Colin wonders if anyone outside the school itself can ever know why the sharks do what they do.

Colin navigates from his locker to the boys' bathroom at school, trying to avoid touching people, turned off by the blue of the bathroom sign and soap. He encounters Wayne Connelly, a boy twice his size, smiling at him. While he tries to determine what the smile means, Wayne picks him up by the shirt, carries him into a bathroom stall and dunks his head in the toilet. Colin determines that the smile was cruel.

Colin goes home to change his clothes, surprising his parents and younger brother Danny (age 11) who are still eating breakfast. He only tells his family, "I got wet." Danny quickly figures out the bullying, and warns Colin to be careful, though Colin barely registers his brother's concern. His father drives him back to school, trying to coax Colin into revealing what happened, but Colin deduces from his father's dress and nervous behavior that Mr. Fischer has an important meeting at work (he is a Senior Analyst at the Jet Propulsion Lab) that could bode ill for Mr. Fischer's project. Colin tolerates his father squeezing his shoulder and returns to school, as Mr. Fischer heads to work worrying about his son.

After the first painfully loud (to Colin) school bell, Colin notices Wayne Connelly beating up jock Eddie Martin, as Eddie's friends Stan and Cooper watch. When Stan and Cooper finally move to intervene, Wayne threatens them too and walks away. Eddie, humiliated in front of several students is soon comforted by his girlfriend Sandy Ryan. Colin notes all of this in his Notebook, observing things he needs to investigate, such as whether Sandy's new-grown breasts have anything to do with her relationship with Eddie.

Suddenly, Stan attacks him, pushing him hard into a locker. Before Colin has time to freak out over the physical contact, Melissa Greer intervenes. Colin has always found Melissa interesting - a fellow outcast with braces and acne, often teased by their classmates - but she has matured over the summer, and is now quite pretty. She rescues Colin from Stan with a withering remark too clever for Stan to understand, who can only focus on Melissa's attractiveness.



Melissa tells Colin she missed him over the summer, and Colin uses his facial expression cheat sheet to read her - recognizing that he embarrassed her when he announces that her breasts got bigger. Melissa writes down her cell phone number in Colin's Notebook, encouraging him to call her. Colin is irritated that she ruined his Notebook.

Part 1: Birthday Cake and a Gun: Chapter 1-2: Shark Behavior, The Prisoner's Dilemma Analysis

Colin Fischer is written in the third person narrative voice, but each chapter begins with a page from Colin's Notebook, a first person glimpse into his life. However, because Colin is obviously not a typical teenager, his Notebook doesn't recount typical thoughts and feelings, instead giving detailed explains of scientific and mathematical phenomena. These brief interludes into Colin's inner brain also then act as a metaphorical theme for the chapter. Colin's curiosity about the mysterious social behavior of one particular school of hammerhead sharks mirrors his bafflement in the face of the social constructs of normal human teenagers.

Chapter Two's Notebook entry about "The Prisoner's Dilemma," explains a mathematical problem concerning two imprisoned thieving partners and whether they will receive less punishment by telling the truth or lying. The dilemma boils down to the expediency of telling the truth. The irony lies in the fact that that Colin always tells the truth, but often too much (the blunt way he comments on Melissa's figure) or too little (the fact that he doesn't tell his parents all the details of how he got wet.) He cannot gauge how much information people actually need from him.

The novel, which is ultimately a mystery story, wraps Colin's character in a shroud of mystery as well: readers know he's different from most teenagers, but they don't know why yet. The name of his disability or condition is withheld. Readers must deduce from Colin's interactions with others that something must be wrong with him: his inability to easily read the facial expressions of those around him, his distaste for the color blue right down to his green-inked pens, his formal way of speaking even to his brother.

On the other hand, the authors demonstrate ways that Colin is exactly like a typical teenager: his apprehension on the first day of high school, his room decorated with photos of actors (though the twist is that he cares little for the actors themselves but rather emulates the roles they were playing, like Sherlock Holmes), and his susceptibility to the attractiveness of a pretty girl. Colin may be unique but he is still a teenage boy, and he is just as complicated as any individual.

Similarly, there is something both completely typical and completely alien about Colin's relationship with his brother Danny. Colin was obsessed with his younger brother from the time he learned his mother was pregnant, but not as most "big brothers" would be. He spends his time investigating and learning about how both pregnancy and newborn babies work, documenting Danny's every infant move. There is a normal level of sibling ribbing between the brothers, but with the caveat that it is all on Danny's side, as Colin



doesn't have the capacity to relate to Danny in that way. Danny is exasperated with Colin's distant and logical behavior, but also worries about Colin being bullied at school.

Following Colin's obsessive need to investigate each thing he sees that does not immediately make clear and logical sense to him, readers can line up the facts that they are given: Colin's classmates are not new to him just because he is starting high school. They know him well and have formed preconceptions about him, and are prone to tease and bully him. Readers indirectly learn that Colin used to have a behaviorist who accompanied him around school, but for the first time he is navigating social situations on his own. He began keeping Notebooks when he was a preschooler, so there is a long tradition of investigation for him, and his reaction to Melissa's phone number on its sacred pages makes sense within the context.

Colin has to work extra hard to read the social cues of those around him, but his diligently observant and curious nature lead him to notice things and deduce their collective meaning in ways other people wouldn't. He puts together his father's neater-than-usual attire and his nervous tapping to arrive at the conclusion that his father has an important and potentially unpleasant meeting. While most teenagers may be able to automatically scan a face for emotional clues, most would also be too self-absorbed to focus on the internal life of others if it didn't directly affect them. Colin, despite his emotional distance, is more sensitive than most people.



Chapter 3-4: Deterrence, The Kuleshov Effect

Chapter 3-4: Deterrence, The Kuleshov Effect Summary

Colin attends his favorite class, math. When the teacher, Mr. Gates, asks if anyone knows what an identity matrix is, Colin is the only student to raise his hand. But before he can give his answer, a cell phone goes off in the classroom. Colin tries to slowly count through it, but as it continues, he drowns it out by barking like a dog, falling on the floor in the fetal position.

Mr. Gates sends Colin to the principal's office, a woman named Dr. Doran. Though sympathetic to Colin's special needs, she advises him to leave the classroom in the event of something upsetting him rather than causing further disruption. Though she has the confiscated cell phone, Colin tells Dr. Doran that she won't be able to trace it to its owner. He takes it apart and finds all the clues that make it completely anonymous. But he tells her he knows who it belongs to: Rudy Moore, a boy in his class about whom Colin wrote in his Notebook: "Intelligent. Dangerous. Avoid" (Page 28). Colin believes Rudy is declaring war on him.

On his way back to class, he sees Sandy Ryan at Eddie Martin's locker, and stops to investigate whether she's robbing him or just sharing his stuff. He is distracted by Wayne Connelly, entering from outside during third period, and notes it for further investigation. However, when Wayne acknowledges him, he looks at Colin with hesitation rather than malice. He simply asks Colin where he's going, and Colin replies that he's going back to class to learn about identity matrixes.

Colin arrives early for gym class with a note from his parents requesting he be excused from gym because of his "poor social skills and sensory integration issues that give me serious deficits in areas of physical coordination" (Page 41). But his P.E. teacher, Mr. Turrentine, refuses to excuse Colin, letting him borrow some old, smelly gym clothes since Colin didn't bother bringing any. Colin is overwhelmed by the proximity of the filth on the old sweats and his fellow classmates, who mock his terribly misgauged basketball shot. Mr. Turrentine immediately sees Colin's status as class punching bag, and subtly intervenes to teach Colin how to shoot a basket using Colin's strengths. By visualizing his shot and considering the complicated set of physics involved in delivering the ball into the hoop, Colin determines the exact way he needs to shoot in order to achieve his goal. When he makes two baskets in a row, even his classmates are impressed.



Chapter 3-4: Deterrence, The Kuleshov Effect Analysis

Once again readers see that though perhaps tactless, Colin is paradoxically very attuned to other people - he can read external clues and reach logical conclusions and then give the appropriate response; for example, he figures out from the succession of pictures on Dr. Doran's desk that she had a child who died and he expresses his empathy with the standard social response: "I am very sorry for your loss" (Page 32). Similarly, Colin seems to be the only person to notice that Rudy Moore's eyes don't match his facial expressions. His eyes remain cold and dead even when he smiles or laughs. Colin thinks Rudy is just simulating human emotion, which makes him similar to Colin in a way: neither feels emotion the way most people do. Rudy is better at faking it than Colin, and Colin intuits that this makes him dangerous.

Chapter 3 begins with a further discussion of "The Prisoner's Dilemma," and its place in game theory as well as a strategy for averting nuclear warfare. Colin describes the dilemma as a paradox because "Cooperation only benefits an individual player when both players cooperate. Otherwise, cooperation is punished" (Page 26). Yet Colin himself is also a paradox: because he has to work so hard at understanding what are people are feeling, he is more attuned to the emotional lives of others. He reads clues others would not bother to see. He does not have the same emotional responses as other people, he doesn't feel things the way most people do, but he is more emotionally sensitive because of it.

The cell phone that sends Colin over the edge with its loud, incessant ringing plays "The 1812 Overture" as its ringtone. Because of its associations with the Fourth of July and cannon fire (though it is actually a Russian anthem celebrating victory over Napoleon) Colin deduces that the cell phone prank is a declaration of war, specifically against him because his "adversary" knew how he would react to the ringing.

When explaining to Dr. Doran why he believes Rudy is behind the cell phone prank, Colin cryptically refers to the "Strange Case of the Talking Doll." This foreshadows that Colin has a history of viewing the events that occur around him as mysteries that need to be solved, in an homage to Sherlock Holmes, his hero.

Chapter 4 begins with a treatise from Colin's Notebook about blank faces: a Russian director named Kuleshov demonstrated that a blank face can only be read given a context (for example a filmed picture of a blank face followed by a roast chicken will make viewers believe the filmed person is hungry, or if followed by a coffin that he or she is sad). Readers initially think Colin talks about this only in relation to his own generally inexpressive face, but he is actually highlighting a quality of his gym teacher, Mr. Turrentine. Mr. Turrentine has an inscrutable face, but given that he is a gym teacher and associated with the jocks, as well as his refusal to dismiss Colin from gym, readers may expect him to mock Colin's deficiencies as much as his "star" pupils tease Colin. Instead, this expectation is turned on its head because Mr. Turrentine actually takes the time to work with Colin without condescending to him. Without a clichéd pep talk familiar to so many teenage underdog stories, Mr. Turrentine teaches Colin to play



basketball. His blank face frees Colin from worrying about reading his facial expressions, so Colin can focus on Mr. Turrentine's instructions. Colin, who knows himself to be quite clever, is further impressed by Mr. Turrentine's deductive skills, making him automatically worthy of Colin's respect. The fact that Mr. Turrentine can control his class without yelling further instills Colin with regard for him (because Colin hates loud noises.)

Chapter 4 is also the first time Colin's condition is labeled: he has Asperger's Syndrome. Though he is smart and high-functioning within his disability, his fellow students still nicknamed him "Shortbus," in reference to the small school bus that frequently picks up and drops off physically and developmentally handicapped students. The cruel nickname demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding about the nature of Colin's condition even among people who have known him for years.



Chapter 5: Primate Behavior

Chapter 5: Primate Behavior Summary

Colin sits in the cafeteria eating his lunch of crunchy foods and observing the social groupings of high schoolers with the objectivity of an anthropologist. He tries to make a chart delineating social status, noting the popular jocks, the popular for popularity's sake, the nerds, etc. He wonders how Rudy Moore, despite nerd-level intelligence has stayed popular, and notes that Melissa, despite new-found popularity, stays friendly with nerds and jocks alike. For her birthday, Melissa's friends Emma and Abby have brought a cake to school, and Melissa invites Colin over to eat some. Colin bluntly refuses due to cake's "mushiness," but Melissa is undeterred by his pseudo-rudeness and promises him a "crunchy" treat in the future.

Wayne Connelly helps himself to the cake without being invited, upsetting Emma and Abby, but Melissa's reaction is more mysterious. The exchange between Melissa and Wayne before he walks away defies easy explanation, but Colin suddenly finds himself wanting to fight Wayne. However, he is distracted by how daintily Wayne, a big, tough kid, eats the cake. He observes others eating as well: Melissa eats in small methodical bites, Rudy throws his cake in the trash, and Sandy wraps a piece of cake and puts it in her purse.

Colin's feeling of violence toward Wayne is apparently shared by Stan, Eddie's friend, who confronts Wayne in retaliation for Wayne's earlier attack on Eddie. Though Wayne is a hulking teenager, he is outmatched by three and Colin watches in fascination as the fight escalates, despite Melissa's efforts to calm everyone down. Colin moves closer for a better look just as a flashing light and loud bang send everyone running. He arrives at the scene of the crime to find a nine millimeter gun smeared with birthday cake icing smoking on the floor amidst lunches, school supplies, books, and makeup.

Chapter 5: Primate Behavior Analysis

The title of Chapter 5, "Primate Behavior" refers to Colin's Notebook entry regarding the ways that animals and humans are similar and different. He particularly notes that primates, unlike other animals, "tend to move toward bright lights and loud noises, preferring to investigate and learn the cause of the commotion" (Page 53). The entire chapter acts as a sort of biological or anthropological study as Colin observes the way his classmates behave in an objective, data-gathering fashion. Colin clearly has spent a great deal of time studying about animal habits, and the studious nature of the chapter is reinforced with wildlife metaphors: Melissa eats like a "hummingbird" and Colin "whipped his head around, giving the impression of an owl spotting a mouse running across the undergrowth (Page 62). The cafeteria has become a jungle full of natural prey and predators, and the metaphor is driven home by Colin's approach of the



escalating violence between Wayne and the jocks, mirroring Colin's earlier elucidation that primates move toward the unknown in order to seek explanations.

Colin sits against the wall in the cafeteria in something his father would call the "gunfighter's seat" - a reference to Western films and the best seat in a saloon to see potential danger. Colin thinks his chances of seeing a gunfight are "vanishingly small" - an irony given that before the chapter is over, a gun goes off in the cafeteria.

Colin wants to box people in with his social map, but he is objective enough to recognize that people often defy categorization. One of the supposed jocks, a skinny kid named Cooper, showed an excellent aptitude at math when they were in grade school. Yet Cooper clearly does not want to be associated with or labeled a "nerd" and therefore he shuns Colin after Colin points out his intelligence. Colin is only vaguely aware that these social groupings are not necessarily as "natural" as they might be in a wildlife setting, but are chosen and worked for among humans.

Readers will also note another battle Colin will have as he delves deeper into the complexities of teenage life: he has not yet fully mastered intuitively reading facial expressions and now there is an added layer of subtext to many conversations. When Melissa invites Colin for cake, he interprets it as face value, and dismisses it because he doesn't like cake, instead of understanding Melissa's real intention: she wants to spend time with Colin and share a happy memory with him. Though his brain has yet to understand the necessity of interpreting intention, Colin's body is ahead of him in responding to Melissa: he blushes as he watches her walk away and wants to fight Wayne when he thinks Wayne is being unkind to Melissa. The psychological minefield of hormonal and often contradictory teenagers is difficult for most people to understand, and will be doubly complicated for Colin as he tries to determine people's motivations.

When Wayne calls Melissa "Missy" and the two teens stand staring at each other, communicating something inexplicable, it indicates there is some personal history between them that may be explained later on in the novel.

In the intersecting social strata of the cafeteria, readers also get a send of a class structure. Colin notes that Melissa carries the same backpack that she used throughout middle school, and Stan mocks Wayne with a reference to "food stamps," indicating they are both financially less well off than some of their classmates. Whereas Melissa is still popular because she is athletic and pretty, Wayne's lower economic status is used as a weapon to mock him with.

Finally, readers should take note of the detritus Colin observes around the gun. The things mentioned specifically are a science fiction novel and a tube of melon-colored lipstick. Readers should watch to see if either of these make a further appearance in the novel to point at the suspect.



Part Two: The Fool and The Freak: Chapter 6: Eyewitness Interviews

Part Two: The Fool and The Freak: Chapter 6: Eyewitness Interviews Summary

Right after the gun goes off, Colin is interviewed by two police detectives. He assumes, given his proximity to the weapon and his history of developmental difficulties, that he is a suspect. They simply want to ensure Colin isn't being intimidated by anyone to withhold information. Colin baffles the police officers with his logical analysis of the situation, further deducing the police suspect gang involvement from his inference that one of the officers was once in a gang himself.

At home, Mrs. Fischer prepares dinner early so the family can attend an emergency school meeting regarding the gun. Both Colin's parents are gravely concerned, but relieved that Colin was not hurt. Colin spends time engaged in his favorite activity, bouncing on his trampoline, in order to think things through.

Colin mentally prepares himself for the community meeting in the school auditorium, which involves his three least favorite things: crowds, noise, and bad smells. Parents are clearly concerned about preventing further violence. Dr. Doran handles the hysterical crowd calmly, in particular fighting off Rudy Moore's combative mother, who tries to blame her inexperience for the incident. Dr. Doran promises zero tolerance for the shooter.

The next day in school, rumors fly about the incident. Colin infers from Wayne's absence that he is the suspect. While speaking with Melissa about it, something clicks in Colin's head and he rushes to Dr. Doran's office: he had seen Wayne neatly eating Melissa's birthday cake, and the gun was smeared with icing. Wayne cannot have been the shooter. Though Dr. Doran listens to Colin's hypothesis, she admonishes him to stay out of the serious police investigation. However, Colin sets himself the mission to prove Wayne's innocence.

Part Two: The Fool and The Freak: Chapter 6: Eyewitness Interviews Analysis

Because of Colin's disability, he is the victim of the same kind of categorization that he tried to enact on his classmates with his social map. Mr. Fischer's co-workers assume Colin must have been involved in the shooting because he is "unstable." Mr. Fischer is pleasantly surprised when Colin shares his success shooting hoop in gym class. Even his own father never expected Colin to have any athletic success. Throughout the novel readers may assume things about characters based on their social standing or outward



appearance, but the authors continually subvert these expectations (recall Cooper's aptitude at math, and Melissa's kindness to her classmates across social strata.)

On the other hand, the authors play into some stereotypes regarding the question of nature versus nurture. Colin's parents both work in advanced space science; he comes from an incredibly intelligent family, which explains his own cleverness. His family is also stable. His parents are loving and gentle with Colin, giving him the space he needs without laying their own frustrations on him. This may demonstrate why Colin is as high-functioning as he is. Readers' brief glimpse at the antagonistic Mrs. Moore also sees a model for Rudy's sharp and unpleasant attitude. The authors indirectly take the stance that children are a direct by-product of their environment.

Once again, Colin makes special note of Rudy's eyes: "His eyes made Colin think of a doll's, not just because of his association with the Case of the Talking Doll, but because there was something wrong about them. Something not quite alive" (Page 81). Readers can expect to know the origin of this "Case of the Talking Doll" before the novel ends, and should also assume Rudy has some involvement with the gun. The authors are setting him up as an entirely untrustworthy character, similar to Colin in intelligence and facial blankness, but with a very cruel twist.



Chapter 7: The Battleship Potemkin

Chapter 7: The Battleship Potemkin Summary

Mrs. Fischer takes Colin to the mall, a social space he has only gotten used to after years of acclimation, to get gym clothes and sneakers. As they leave the store, Colin spots Sandy Ryan buying melon-colored lipstick at a nearby department store and dreads the impending interaction: his other and Sandy's were friends when they were very young. Sandy acts like Colin doesn't exist and Colin is fine with keeping his mind elsewhere as well. He asks his mother to take him to the arts and crafts store as well, and goes home to construct a social map tying people and groups together, just as he believes the FBI does, in order to clarify the gun incident and who might be responsible. He finds it strange that Wayne Connelly has neither a social media presence nor an eighth grade yearbook picture.

The next day at school, Colin is surprised when Cooper and Eddie ask him to play on their three-on-three basketball team. Despite his apprehension about being touched, he takes the opportunity to perhaps question them about the gun incident. He does well for his team until Stan, on the opposing team, takes advantage of Colin's aversion to touching to seriously foul him. Colin retaliates by smashing Stan in the face with the ball and almost strangling him before Mr. Turrentine intervenes. Colin accepts the detention Dr. Doran gives him as a reasonable consequence of his action, but worries that now everyone appears fearful of him.

Even Melissa treats him guardedly, though she is embarrassed when her friends openly mock him. Colin surprises her back to normal, however, when he asks her to teach him how to lie to his parents. Melissa writes a script for him and he calls his mother, claiming he has to stay late at school to do research. Instead, he skips his detention and goes to Wayne Connelly's house. He is mildly apprehensive due to the house's rundown nature, but he knocks anyway.

Chapter 7: The Battleship Potemkin Analysis

Chapter 7 is entitled, "The Battleship Potemkin," which Colin explains in an excerpt from his Notebook: a Russian director used Kuleshov's techniques to make Westerners believe the Russians were amassing a navy, using images of the British navy. Colin concludes, "Kuleshov demonstrated that when you present images together, the audience connects them whether they're actually related or not...Show them what they want to believe. The rest will take care of itself" (Page 90). People will assimilate supposedly new information to fit theories and beliefs they already hold. This corresponds to how people categorize each other, and explains why Wayne, a lower class bully, is the automatic scapegoat for the gun incident.



Readers should note that though Colin doesn't register it as significant, Sandy is shopping for melon-colored lipstick, like the tube he saw at the scene of the crime. This foreshadows that she has some involvement in the shooting, but Colin's explanation of "The Battleship Potemkin" explains why Colin does not make this connection immediately: Sandy does fit his image of a gun-toting gangster, and his history of friendship with her, however distantly past, keeps him from having fully negative feelings toward her. The images of Sandy, the lipstick, and the gun are not directly connected in Colin's head, so he cannot make that leap yet.

Colin ponders that a social map from his preschool days would look very different from the one he is constructing for high school, given, for example, that he and Sandy were once friends and now she looks at him with hostility and contempt. There is an irony in the fact that a decade ago, Colin rejected Sandy for wetting his bed, but now Sandy thinks she has the power to reject Colin, not realizing that Colin is indifferent to her feelings toward him.

When Colin points out to his mother that her instructions to Danny about where to meet them at the mall were nonspecific and thus inadvertently diffuses Danny's petulant defiance of his mother's orders, Danny tells him to not to help. This leads Colin to "puzzle over the meaning of Danny's request. After all, Colin hadn't been trying to help anyone—he was just pointing out the facts. Who the truth helped and how much was irrelevant" (Page 98). Colin lacks a moral compass, being more concerned with true and false than right or wrong, just or unjust.

This incident with Danny when Colin unintentionally helps him shows a building tension Danny is feeling toward his brother. Even when Colin, accidentally or not, keeps him out of trouble, Danny is resentful. Mrs. Fischer is irritated with Danny for "talking back," yet when Colin speaks up she just laughs. Danny clearly feels he is living with a double standard that he cannot see Colin's disability justifying.

Colin has already begun referring to the gun incident as the "Case of the Birthday Cake and the Gun." He has a detachment from reality in which he can see the event as a set of facts to be untangled rather than a dramatic occurrence that involved emotions and actual danger. His detachment makes him an excellent candidate to view the case impartially (he is determined to prove Wayne is innocent despite Wayne's past cruelty toward Colin himself) yet this also foreshadows that Colin may not understand the full danger or ramifications of his choices in trying to solve the mystery.

Keen readers will again note the ways Cooper subtly stands out from his jock friends like Eddie and Stan. Cooper praises Colin vocally during the three-on-three basketball match, and is supportive in face of Stan's intentional torment, encouraging Colin not to let it get to him. Just as Colin noted that Cooper's physicality does not match a typical athlete, his personality does not fit in perfectly with his teammates.

Readers can infer from Colin's description of the way Melissa used to change her clothes upon arriving at school from conservative to trendy that Melissa comes from a strict household. This indicates more complexity in Melissa's character, an inability to

pin her in one social box. For all her kindness, Melissa is not a saint, and is capable of deception.

Finally, there is a shift in Colin, a slow change occurring that is evident in the fact that the second time Melissa writes in his notebook, with a script for how to deceive his mother, he does not mind. Furthermore, his preoccupation with Melissa's "XO" indicates a desire to delve into the complicated subtext of their friendship.



Chapter 8-9: Dupin's Detachment, The Parking Problem

Chapter 8-9: Dupin's Detachment, The Parking Problem Summary

Inside the filth of Wayne's house, Colin has trouble placing the man who lets him in - Wayne refers to him as "Ken," and Colin knows he is not Wayne's father. Surprised to see Colin, he takes him to a local park to talk, despite the fact that the police told him not to leave the house. Colin explains how he knows that Wayne is innocent and that he wants to prove it. Wayne wonders why Colin would help him after all the years of bullying, but Colin simply wants to solve the case, another answer that surprises Wayne.

Colin hypothesizes that the police suspect gang involvement, and Wayne confirms that they asked him about "La Familia," a Latino gang in North Valley. The police claimed that the gun was used in a drive-by shooting the previous year. Colin cannot read Wayne's answers to his questions, unsure if Wayne does in fact have ties to the gang or Latino blood despite his Irish name. But he determines Wayne is not directly in the gang even if he has knowledge of them. He wants to trace the gun to its seller and figure out the real owner. Colin calls his mother to lie again, pushing back his arrival time at home. Colin is surprised at how easy lying to his mother is, though he diminishes his own credibility by tagging an "I love you" at the end of their talk. His mother is only too aware how rarely Colin expresses his feelings without prompting and she becomes slightly suspicious. Despite his issues with public spaces, touching, and hygiene, Colin boards a bus with Wayne to seek out some answers to his mystery.

Colin and Wayne get off the bus at an overgrown shabby house, with two pit bulls trying to scare them off. Colin remains unafraid, the pit bulls back down. Given his own previous dealings with La Familia, Wayne commands Colin to remain silent. A young boy answers the door and takes them to El Cocodrilo, who cheerfully makes chicken cordon bleu in his kitchen, surrounded by fellow gang members. Colin blurts out cooking advice despite Wayne's orders, but he has the wherewithal to proffer an alias. Wayne circumspectly asks about obtaining a gun, referring to a friend who recently bought one from El Cocodrilo. The gangster's response leads both Colin and Wayne to immediately conclude Eddie and Stan got the nine millimeter from El Cocodrilo.

Suddenly loud explosions from the boy's video game send Colin into a panic, piquing the suspicions of the gangsters. Wayne blows the cover fully by calling Colin by his real name, and the boys run away to avoid harm. They find refuge in a Vons supermarket, where a security guard keeps the gangsters at bay. Colin calls his father and asks him to pick up Colin and his "friend" Wayne. Mr. and Mrs. Fischer are understandably concerned by Colin's whereabouts, company and deception, but Danny feels vindicated,



knowing all along that Colin was lying. Wayne worries about how Mr. Fischer will react to him, given his history of bullying Colin.

Chapter 8-9: Dupin's Detachment, The Parking Problem Analysis

In Colin's Notebook entry in Chapter 8, he describes "Dupin's detachment, summarizing the history of mystery novels and concluding that, "Stories about heroes avenging crimes and bringing evildoers to justice go back centuries, but the emphasis had always been on the necessity of revenge, upholding personal and family honor, or the restoration of social order. Dupin was interested in none of these things. Dupin was driven by sheer intellectual curiosity" (Page 118). The metaphor here is clear, as this describes Colin's motivation for nearly all of his actions. Colin's unintentional "help" to keep Danny out of trouble in Chapter 7 is mirrored in his dealing with Wayne. His motive is not to help Wayne particularly. Wayne proffers another motive: that Colin will help him in exchange for a bullying-free future. But this too is incorrect. As Colin himself claims, "If I think if I help you, I will solve the mystery" (Page 123). Colin does not care about the right or wrong or justice of the accusation against Wayne, but simply the truth of who had the gun in the cafeteria. This is a key part of Colin's personality. His investigations are born of detached intellectual role-playing, not a moral imperative to right wrongs or stand up for the helpless. His guiding principle will affect how he pursues his "case," and what the final resolution is.

The park that Wayne takes Colin to is near the site of nuclear testing facilities for America's space program during the Cold War, and the location has long fascinated Colin. The significance of this place reinforces Colin's preoccupation with the "The Prisoner's Dilemma," which was a hypothesis based on the real world nuclear threat escalation between America and Russia during the Cold War, as well as subtly suggesting another paradox: nuclear power as the cleanest, most efficient energy source with the most dangerous consequences should anything go wrong.

Colin gets lost in the game of mystery solving, so that when he encounters the real-life gangster El Cocodrilo, his response comes out of the books and TV shows he has digested: "This was an undercover investigation, which classically required an alias. Colin decided to provide one. Lying was getting easier all the time" (Page 138). The line between reality and fiction is further blurred when Colin chooses as his alias Tommy Westphall, an autistic TV character thought to be the "inventor" of several 1980s TV shows' worlds that theoretically existed only in his head. Colin's understanding of the dangerously real consequences of his actions seems tenuous. Furthermore, readers should note how far Colin has evolved/devolved since Chapter 2 when he claimed a lie could never pay off.

Throughout these chapters Colin and Wayne subvert their expectations of each other: Wayne is surprised when Colin shows no fear to the pit bulls, and Colin is amazed that Wayne can nonchalantly stare down El Cocodrilo. He is further impressed when Wayne deduces the gun's purchases is Eddie as quickly as Colin himself does. Wayne cannot

fathom that Colin would help him after all the trouble he has caused Colin over the years. As the boys are given this unexpected opportunity to get to know each other, they can peel back the layers of preconceptions and stereotypical boxes they have placed each other in and learn to see their true, complex natures.



Chapter 10: Rogue Predators

Chapter 10: Rogue Predators Summary

Colin and Wayne wait at the supermarket for Mr. Fischer. Wayne is suddenly very uneasy around Colin, realizing the effect his bullying has had on Colin's life, and wondering why Colin would help him after all that. Colin maintains his belief in Wayne's innocence as a good enough reason to help. He is interested to know that Wayne has a "real" father, and Wayne becomes very curious about Colin's Notebook and his own appearances in it. Colin refuses to let Wayne read it, and he is relieved when Wayne doesn't simply take it.

Mr. Fischer arrives, clearly apprehensive about Colin's sudden association with Wayne. Wayne becomes more and more uncomfortable as Colin explains how Wayne shoved his head in a toilet, but was then wrongly accused of bringing the gun to school. Mr. Fischer does not know how to take in all this information, and at Wayne's house, asks to speak to his parents. Colin observes Wayne's fear for the first time ever, and Wayne claims his parents are not home. Mr. Fischer lets it pass, and Wayne apologizes to Colin for tormenting him on the playground when they were six. Alone with his father, Colin wonders for the first time if he has made him angry and if he is in serious trouble. Instead, his father gives his standard warning and squeezes Colin's shoulder.

Chapter 10: Rogue Predators Analysis

Colin's Notebook entry returns to the patterns of animal behavior, and in particular to that of rogue predators, who attack unpredictably and therefore statistically have more opportunities to find vulnerable prey. But generally the ecosystem adapts, and the rogue predator and either taken down by other predators who don't like his disruptiveness or the rogue himself adapts. Colin interprets this to mean, "the animal kingdom isn't much different from human civilization— in the end, crime doesn't pay" (Page 150). At the end of this section of the book, Wayne seems to be at this kind of crossroads. This gun allegation proves he is an easy scapegoat for trouble. Either he must adapt his behavior and change his reputation, or the "ecosystem" will adapt to throw him out, whether he is guilty or not.

Similarly, Colin has just had his first attempt at going rogue by deceiving his parents and having a run-n with real gang members. In some ways, this mild form of rebellion proves he is exactly like almost every other teenager in the world, though his parents probably did not expect it from him because his behavior has always been so unique. He will now have to face consequences as well, though judging by his father's confused but gentle reaction, he is not going to get enough resistance to prove to him going rogue isn't worth it, no matter what he says about crime not paying.



Wayne shows some remarkable self-awareness when Colin claims he is helping him because Wayne is innocent. Wayne responds, "Innocent...No, man. I'm not. I just didn't do it" (Page 153). From the Chapter 1 Wayne who appears as a cruel thug to this Chapter 10 insight of possible self-loathing, readers see that Wayne certainly has more depth than it first seemed. Just as Colin is not just an eccentric "retard" Wayne is not an unthinking bully. He knows what he does is wrong, he just seems unable to control himself. His home life is obviously tense and unsatisfying and he has learned to take out that aggression wherever he can.



Part Three: The Olympic Trampoline Team: Chapter 11-12: Hell is Other People, Test Bites

Part Three: The Olympic Trampoline Team: Chapter 11-12: Hell is Other People, Test Bites Summary

Colin and his father arrive home, and Danny wonders hopefully if Colin is in trouble. Mrs. Fischer sends her sons to bed. Colin has his dinner and a bath, while Danny petulantly thuds his way to bed. Mr. and Mrs. Fischer wonder what to do for Colin; they wanted him to be more independent, but his behavior makes them more worried than ever. Suddenly Colin throws a screaming fit above them. His parents rush to his room and discover it has been torn apart, including Colin's social map. Danny defiantly claims he was looking for his iPod. Anger and tension build among the family, and Danny calls his brother a "retard" which nearly sends Mrs. Fischer through the roof, until Colin unexpectedly defuses the situation by stating the word "retard" doesn't bother him since he knows he's too smart to be that.

Mrs. Fischer sends Danny to bed and offers to help Colin clean his room, but Colin wants to do it himself. As Colin tries to calmly survey the damage done to his belongings, he is mentally transported back to the shooting, and he feels certain that something was out of place in the cafeteria, though his memory is too weighted with Melissa Greer to pick up on the important clue. But knowing the key clue exists soothes him into sleep. He arises early the next morning, makes breakfast for his family, and heads to school before they have even finished eating.

Colin carefully plans his confrontation with Eddie before lunch at school that day, catching him off guard in the hall. Colin tells Eddie he knows the gun is his, and Eddie and Stan's physical reactions confirm their guilt for Colin, but he cannot read their reaction when he questions Eddie on why he brought the gun to the cafeteria. Eddie merely laughs, claiming he was training in the weight room with the football team, not in the cafeteria. Colin can't make sense of this. When Colin mentions El Cocodrilo's reference to Stan as a "gap-toothed freak," Stan starts to puff up with potential violence. Before things escalate, Melissa intervenes and drags Colin to lunch. As they sit together, Colin uses half his brain pondering Eddie's answers while also wondering why Melissa barely eats her food. He does not recognize that she feels guilty for defending him by referring to his "condition." He compares Melissa's small meals to a shark's, elaborating on how sharks can store things in their stomachs for long periods of time without digesting them, so after their death, an entire limb or even an outboard motor might be found inside them. He suddenly stops speaking, having an epiphany about the gun and the birthday cake.



Part Three: The Olympic Trampoline Team: Chapter 11-12: Hell is Other People, Test Bites Analysis

In Chapter 11 all of Danny's resentment of Colin comes boiling over. The chapter title, "Hell is other people" and Colin's Notebook analysis of the psychological difficulty of people living in enclosed spaces for extended period of time perfectly sums up Danny's attitude toward his brother. As the youngest member of the family, Danny is the most "trapped," with little control over his own fate. Colin's needs are always put before his own. Ironically, rather than pitying his brother for his disability, Danny is jealous of the attention Colin gets and the indulgence with which their parents treat Colin's idiosyncrasies. Colin arrives home after lying to his parents, putting himself in a dangerous situation with gangsters, and receives no punishment, which is the last straw for Danny. He destroys Colin's room out of anger and also a simple need for attention. His irritation is most likely doubled by the fact that his sibling rivalry is so one-sided. Colin cannot be the big brother Danny would wish for, to look up to and horse around with and compete with. Colin is too lost in his own world to truly understand Danny's needs, and Colin underscores his detachment by not even being offended when Danny calls him a "retard."

The authors tie in some metaphors from Colin's many investigations into the animal world in Chapter 11: when confronted over destroying Colin's room, Danny "reacted like any animal when cornered. He chose to fight" (Page 169). But when he goes too far and calls Colin a "retard," Mrs. Fischer responds with anger: "In primate terms, the alpha female had bared her teeth. Now it was the juvenile's turn to show submission" (Page 169). The novel, reinforcing Colin's predilections, takes many opportunities to compare human and animal behavior, and the literary simile and metaphor act as perfect outlets for these gestures.

Chapter 12 returns Colin to sharks, which readers will note is clearly a favorite subject for him (readers now know why: his father bought him a book on sharks when he was younger.) Colin describes how great white sharks bite humans not with the intention of killing them but to determine what the unfamiliar animal is within their domain. Colin approaches Eddie like a great white, determined to get information from him without going in for a direct kill.

Colin cannot comprehend the sexual innuendo which Eddie uses to talk about Sandy, essentially telling a group of boys that she gave him a blow job using the metaphor of ice cream. Readers should note this completely disrespectful way Eddie talks about his girlfriend, perhaps revealing that his feelings for her are no more than superficial.

Colin notes how "interested" Cooper is in Colin's accusations against Eddie, giving Colin his full attention. Once again, Cooper stands apart from his group of friends; he takes Colin seriously rather than immediately jumping to mock or attack him.

When Melissa touches Colin his reflexive response to shrink away kicks in until another reflexive response supersedes it: the soothing influence that the smell of strawberries



has on him. Readers learn the origins of his association between strawberries and Melissa when Colin remembers her hugging him unexpectedly at age three, an action he simultaneously hates but is intrigued by. Melissa's complex feelings for Colin go back longer than readers could have realized, but continue to point to her deep-rooted attraction to him.

Eddie's declaration that he was not in the cafeteria when the gun went off confuses Colin because he knows Eddie purchased the gun. Logically, the gun belongs to Eddie. But while Colin meditates on all the things one can find piled together in a shark's stomach, he puts the concepts of birthday cake and the gun together and realizes that their togetherness is key to solving the mystery.



Chapter 13-14: What the Tortoise Said to Achilles, Hans Asperger

Chapter 13-14: What the Tortoise Said to Achilles, Hans Asperger Summary

Sometime after lunch, Wayne arrives at school at Colin's behest, thinking Dr. Doran already believes him innocent only to be disappointed. Before the principal can send him away, Colin arrives in the school's office as well, happy to see Wayne so that he can prove Wayne's innocence to the police. Suddenly Sandy Ryan shows up as well, under the impression that Dr. Doran wants to see her - although Colin readily admits he sent the note excusing her from class, and telling Dr. Doran she DOES want to see Sandy, she just doesn't know it yet. Everyone is surprised by Colin's certainty and his take-charge, almost defiant attitude. He announces that the gun belonged to Eddie, that he purchased it from La Familia, and that Sandy took it from his locker in order to keep Eddie from getting in trouble by threatening Wayne with it. Sandy is sure Colin can't prove anything, as is Dr. Doran, but Colin claims Sandy had the gun in her purse, along with the piece of birthday cake she had saved for Eddie who was in the gym. He believes if they check the inside of her purse for gun oil residue and cake frosting, it will prove his point. By announcing he has already talked to Eddie and implying Eddie has confessed, Colin manipulates Sandy into admitting her culpability, just as the police arrive on campus. Colin wants to move on to the bigger issues of how Eddie is involved with a major Los Angeles gang, but Dr. Doran silences him. She sends Sandy to call her parents, tells Wayne they will sort him out the following day, and gives Colin a second detention for missing the first one the previous day. Colin is disappointed that the resolution is not more dramatic, and no one appears grateful for his assistance.

At dinner that night, Colin's parents confront him gently over his recent bout of rule-breaking and detentions. Colin denies nothing and just accepts what has happened as the facts of his life. He doesn't even take credit for "saving" Wayne, instead merely crediting the truth. His parents admit they are proud of him, but Mrs. Fischer warns him not to ever behave so irresponsibly again, and Colin knows she means it. After dinner, Danny also acknowledges that what Colin has done is cool. He circuitously apologizes for destroying Colin's room as well.

At school the next day, Melissa and Colin watch as Sandy cleans out her locker, having been expelled. Melissa thinks it is unfair that Eddie goes unpunished even though the gun was his. Colin disinterestedly points out that the police can't prove the gun belonged to Eddie, so there is nothing to be done. Melissa takes Colin's hands and claims Colin could prove it. After most students have gone to their first class, Colin finds himself ambushed by Eddie, Stan, Cooper, and their friends, who blame Colin for what happened to Sandy. Before they do any damage, Wayne appears and prepares to defend Colin, though a teacher intervenes and sends them all to class before violence



breaks out. Wayne asks if Colin wants to hang out after school, and Colin invites him over to trampoline.

Chapter 13-14: What the Tortoise Said to Achilles, Hans Asperger Analysis

Chapter 13 returns to paradoxes. Colin uses a dialogue between Achilles and the tortoise, written by Lewis Carroll, to turn the morality fable into a mathematical question of logic, perfectly illustrating the place from which Colin investigates the world: he does not ask questions of morality but questions of truth based on logic and facts. However, the paradox Carroll sets up reveals the flaws in Colin's worldview: "Sometimes, logical deductions do not match real world experience. Sometimes, even the most logical person presented with the most objective evidence must put mathematics aside and embrace what he observes to be true" (Page 191). This inability ultimately to rely even on math and logic makes Colin very uncomfortable, as he desires certainty at all times.

As Colin makes his final deductions and conclusions to Dr. Doran, "There was no malice in him. No cruelty. There was just a relentless confidence in the facts" (Page 195). Yet once again, Colin's lack of a moral center or a feeling of compassion renders it impossible for him to consider the feelings of others and the consequences his actions will have on them. Sandy had the gun, but Colin knows she did not own it; he does not stop to consider the ramifications his announcement will have on her life. Even though he acknowledges her emotional reasons for taking the gun and recognizes she had good intentions at heart to protect Eddie, this does not weigh into his firm reliance on the facts. Colin shows remarkably little concern for Sandy's fate as long as Wayne is proven innocent, not because he wants to destroy her but because he doesn't see that he has the power to. He is even unintentionally manipulative in forcing Sandy to confess.

Colin's Notebook entry on Hans Asperger, for whom his condition is named, further underlines Colin's possibly misplaced priorities. Asperger emphasized the unique contributions of people on the autism spectrum as a way of protecting them from the Nazis who were determined to destroy anyone they considered "defective." Asperger make a choice in the name of morality, humanity, and justice to do anything he could to protect innocent lives, whereas Colin ultimately has little interest in the fate of Sandy or Eddie, or the justice of one being punished, though mostly innocent, while the truly guilty party goes free. In fact, while Danny thinks Colin's actions against Sandy are retribution for her peeing on his bed as children, Colin finds another factual reason to justify her punishment: he believes she should have reported the gun to the authorities. Colin is unwilling or unable to acknowledge the gray areas in guilt, or the spectrum of wrongdoing that exists between absolutes. This is an important distinction between Asperger and Colin: Asperger cares more about humanity and Colin cares more about facts. Colin acknowledges the ways he does not measure up to Asperger in a roundabout way: "I have a difficult time making decisions under pressure. Especially when there are consequences" (Page 201).



Colin does not foresee the consequences for Sandy, nor does he have realistic expectations regarding the consequences for himself. Rather than being thanked or congratulated on a job well done, Colin receives another detention. He has so blurred the line between reality and fiction that he expected everything to resolve just as it does in a Sherlock Holmes novel. Colin seems destined to continuously learn the lesson that life is not as neat, simple, and clear-cut as he would like it to be.

The memory of the melon-colored lipstick from the "scene of the crime" finally snaps into place for Colin, and pays off for keen readers who have been tracking the clues themselves.

Even over the course of a few days, Colin has evolved in many ways. Besides his sudden defiant streak, he does not react badly when Melissa holds his hand. He has moved from screaming at an unwanted and unexpected touch to not reacting at all, and possibly even enjoying it, much to his own surprise.



Chapter 15 - Epilogue: Two Doctors in Vienna, Human Behavior

Chapter 15 - Epilogue: Two Doctors in Vienna, Human Behavior Summary

After school, Colin reports to detention. He doesn't mind sitting quietly and studying, but today's detention monitor, Mr. Turrentine, has other plans for his detainees: he gives each a scrub brush and assigns them a bathroom to clean. Colin, though finding the task and his blue scrub brush distasteful, finds a talent for attacking the dirt like a problem to be solved. His solitude is broken when Eddie and Rudy enter the bathroom. Colin hides in a stall and eavesdrops on their conversation, discovering that Eddie is devastated over what happened to his "love" Sandy, but Rudy points out he didn't intervene and admit his own culpability to save Sandy. Rudy promises his father, a high-powered lawyer, will get Sandy out of trouble, but admonishes Eddie for not getting the gun to the right place before Sandy found it and costing Rudy \$300 - which he now expects Eddie to pay off. Rudy leaves and Eddie breaks down crying, while Colin makes a swift exit to give him privacy. Colin rushes home, writing in his Notebook all about R.T. Moore.

The next day, Rudy finds a note in his locker to meet "C" on the football field after school. He is surprised when Wayne confronts him instead of Colin. They have a cryptic conversation: Wayne explains that Colin put all the pieces of the puzzle together, even recognizing that Eddie couldn't have made contact with La Familia on his own, but Colin couldn't figure out why Rudy helped Eddie. Wayne claims he knows Rudy's motivation. He thinks Rudy acted amorally just because he wanted to see if he had the power to destroy someone else's life, no matter who that person was. He threatens Rudy with bodily harm if he ever does something like this again. Rudy counterthreatens by claiming to know where Wayne went during third period on the first day of school, and what he does after school. Wayne says if Rudy knows that, then he also knows Wayne is serious with his intimidations.

Wayne goes to Colin's house, where he joins Colin on the trampoline for the first time. He is surprised that Colin offers his hand to help Wayne get his balance. As Colin lays out his plan for their Olympic pairs trampoline training, his parents watch from inside, glad Colin has made a real friend, but worried about who that friend is. They are simultaneously happy and sad that Colin is growing up and gaining independence. Unconcerned with such heavy thoughts, even leaving thoughts of Rudy aside for the time being, Wayne and Colin relish the freedom and joy of uncontained bouncing.



Chapter 15 - Epilogue: Two Doctors in Vienna, Human Behavior Analysis

The oft-referred to Case of the Talking Doll is finally revealed in Chapter 15: he had been working on an experiment with a motion sensor that causes a doll to bark instead of say "I love you," and his teacher gave him detention when she told him to stop disrupting the class and he bluntly pointed out that homeroom wasn't a class. As there does not seem to be a mystery attached to this "case," readers might wonder if there is even more to the story.

Colin's Notebook excerpt in Chapter 15 compares Hans Asperger to a Nazi doctor also working in Vienna during World War II, who systematically experimented on and murdered children deemed "unclean" by the standards of the Third Reich. This elaboration on Asperger's life from the previous chapter draws out an interesting spectrum of morality. While originally it seemed Colin was different from Asperger in his inability to make decisions based on morality, in comparison to the intentionally malicious Dr. Gross, Colin has much more in common with Asperger than may have been assumed. Rudy is the character who compares favorably with Dr. Gross. Colin and Rudy have a similarly blank expression, yet Rudy has a cruel streak that keeps him from simply being amoral in his detachment. Colin is interested in game theory and may have treated the "Case of the Birthday Cake and the Gun" like a real life game of Clue, but Rudy is a puppet master, treating the lives of those around him as toys for his amusement. For all Colin's flaws, he is not evil, and Rudy may very well be.

When Wayne confronts Rudy on the football field, Rudy is expecting Colin. So Wayne's appearance is a surprise: "Rudy didn't have to turn around to know who had addressed him. What he did not know— what he found fascinating— was why" (Page 224). Herein lies another important difference between Colin and Rudy: Rudy relishes chaos, while Colin desires order. Rudy finds the why's of life fascinating, whereas they make Colin uncomfortable because they are unpredictable and often illogical. These are two very smart, emotionally detached boys who approach the world in very different ways. Colin may only be neutral, but it is far and away better than being actively malignant.

At the beginning of the epilogue, Colin wrestles with the evolutionary, psychological, and religious reasons for altruism. He does not find any of the theories he relates satisfactory. He grapples with the question, "If nature is a constant struggle between organisms for survival and sustenance, why would one creature ever sacrifice its own well-being in favor of another?" (Page 227). This is the ultimate paradox, and yet Colin himself succumbed to it by helping Wayne. He acted illogically despite himself, because for all his faith in logic, he is still human, and susceptible to inexplicable behavior. His behavior is a gamble that resulted in an unforeseeable consequence: he has made an actual friend.

In a final step on his evolutionary journey, Colin offers his hand to Wayne to help him get steady on the trampoline. No longer does he shun or tolerate human contact, he actively seeks it.



Colin may have identified the correct gun possessor and proved Wayne's innocence, but there are many mysteries left unsolved at the end of the novel. Readers might still wonder about the history between Melissa and Wayne alluded to in Chapter 5. Rudy is still quite elusive as a character: why does he declare war on Colin? What is his involvement in the gun - he indicates he sent Eddie to buy it for him in Chapter 15. Why did he need it? Melissa's feelings for Colin are also not clear. Will Cooper ever stop trying to fit in with the popular jocks and acknowledge his true academic gifts? The authors are clearly setting up their novel to be the first in a series when they write "Rudolph Talbot Moore was far from finished with them [Colin or Wayne]" (Page 231), setting up a final tribute to Colin's heroes, each the star of a recurring mystery series: Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Spock, and the actor from CSI.



Characters

Colin Fischer

Colin Fischer is the fourteen-year-old protagonist of this eponymous novel. He has Asperger's Syndrome, a disability on the autism spectrum, but he is high-functioning and very smart, beginning high school with the aid of an assistant for the first time. Colin cannot read social cues and facial expressions and is often awkwardly blunt. He handles things like being bullied or teased with little emotional reaction, just as he has little use for loving outpourings from his parents - he hates being touched, even by people he knows. Colin's heroes are people like Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Spock - bastions of logic and rational thinking. Everything he sees makes him curious and determined to investigate it further, which is how he gets involved in determining who really had the gun in the cafeteria - his observations prove to him it was not Wayne. Colin is not motivated by a desire to make Wayne - or anyone - like him. Nor does he feel any glee that his bully could be kicked out of school. Colin is simply motivated by a desire to know the truth. Morality and justice play little role in his decision-making. Even when lying to his mother, Colin feels only a slight discomfort, an irony for someone so dedicated to the truth. Yet this facility with lying, coupled with his complicated but pleasant feelings for Melissa Greer, demonstrate how Colin is adapting to a bigger and stranger world, just as any normal teenager would. From recoiling at even the touch of his parents to allowing Melissa to hold his hand without even noticing, and offering his hand to Wayne to help him on the trampoline, Colin is as complex and illogical as the world he finds so perplexing because of its inconsistencies.

Wayne Connelly

Wayne Connelly is a freshman at West Valley High School, who has bullied and tormented Colin from the time they were in first grade. He has an imposing physical appearance, and is incredibly strong. Wayne comes from a lower class background, the product of divorce and a mother who is not home much. Though suspicious of Colin's motives for exonerating him from the gun charge, the more time he spends with Colin, the more he recognizes Colin does not expect anything from him in return, as well as noticing Colin's positive qualities. He is forced to re-evaluate how (and why) he has treated Colin throughout their grade school years, and ends up genuinely seeking Colin's friendship despite his quirks. Wayne has resources of courage and intelligence that Colin never recognized before.

Dr. Doran

Dr. Doran is the principal of West Valley High School. She has progressive ideas on education and the integration of special needs students into the mainstream classroom. She is new to the school and has to prove her authority to parents who don't yet know



her and are concerned following the gun incident, but she ably establishes her determination and toughness. At some point she lost her own child, which seems to have resulted in her being more empathetic, and she always treats Colin with respect, but also firmness. She makes some exceptions for his needs but also gives him detention when he misbehaves.

Rudy Moore

Rudy Moore a freshman at West Valley High School. Rudy is smart and popular, but Colin does not trust him, comparing him to a shark, with dead eyes an inscrutable face. Like Colin he remains blank-faced most of the time, but he is much more manipulative and dangerous than he at first appears. He has a hand in a lot of the trouble-making at school, including the gun affair, but no one except Colin suspects his true, malicious personality.

Mr. Fischer

Mr. Fischer is Colin's father, a scientist who works in a jet propulsion lab. Mr. Fischer spends as much time investigating the inner workings of his son's life as Colin spends investigating the rest of the world, but with less fruitful results. He is compassionate towards his sons needs and rarely shows much frustration with his quirks.

Mrs. Fischer

Mrs. Fischer is Colin's mother, a project manager with NASA. Mrs. Fischer is determined to keep her home as stable as possible, requiring the family to eat dinner together and supporting Colin when he suddenly wants gym clothes or arts and crafts supplies. She worries a great deal about Colin being on his own at school, but knows it is for Colin's own good. She does not overreact when Colin directly lies to her or gets detention. Colin's parents are a united front of child-rearing strategy and generosity.

Danny Fischer

Danny Fischer is Colin's eleven-year-old brother, with whom he has a fraught relationship. Danny resents the attention his brother gets as well as the behavior he gets away with, knowing if he (Danny) pulled the stunts Colin pulled he would get in trouble. He loves Colin and worries when he is bullied, but also hates that Colin is so different and can't act like a normal brother, with whom Danny could relate and hang out with.



Melissa Greer

Melissa Greer is a freshman at West Valley High School who experienced a physical transformation over the summer following eighth grade. She spent much of grade school being teased for her appearance (braces and acne), so they share an empathetic bond. Colin treated her decently throughout their school years together and she returns his friendship even now that she has found popularity. She is a bit of a rebel who comes from a strict household. She seems to have some romantic feelings for Colin, encouraging him to call her and making the effort to include him socially. Her feelings extend all the way back to a time she hugged Colin when they were three. Colin associates her with the smell of strawberries, which he finds pleasant.

Eddie Martin

Eddie Martin is a freshman athlete at West Valley High School. He wears a Notre Dame jacket and has starting dating Sandy Ryan. He is one of the popular jocks, but is still subject to beatings from Wayne Connelly. He lacks any strength of character: he teases Colin when it suits him, uses him on his basketball team when it is convenient, but shuns him again after Colin's understandable and provoked attack against Stan. He does not come forward to admit the gun did not belong to Sandy and lets her get expelled without standing up for her.

Sandy Ryan

Sandy Ryan is a pretty freshman at West Valley High School who matured physically over the summer and got the attention of Eddie Martin in the process. She is a popular girl who favors brightly colored makeup. Most of her attention revolves around Eddie: she saves him cake and takes the gun to protect him from getting in trouble, a favor he does not return. Sandy and Colin were almost friends when they were very young, until she peed on his bed and he flipped out. Now she treats Colin like a pariah.

Stan

Stan is a freshman at West Valley High School, whose most notable physical attribute is a gap between his two front teeth. Stan is a popular jock, but often acts like little more than a thug, threatening Colin and Wayne. He maliciously provokes Colin by touching him on the basketball court until Colin attacks him.

Cooper

Cooper is a freshman at West Valley High School. He is part of the popular jock crowd, but he is the gentlest among them; long ago Colin observed Cooper was good at math, and he encourages Colin on the basketball court. Cooper seems fearful of losing his



social status (hence he shuns Colin for noticing his math skills) and participating in bullying even though he has a kinder side. The author's reinforce Cooper as the best of the jocks by keeping him out of the gun purchasing and use debacle.

Mr. Turrentine

Mr. Turrentine is West Valley's gym teacher. He treats all his students fairly and equally, and retains their respect in return. Mr. Turrentine notices Colin being teased, but rather than treating Colin like he is different, or reinforcing the idea that he cannot do things because of his disability, he takes the time to teach Colin to play basketball and believe himself.

El Cocodrilo

El Cocodrilo is a leading member of the Latino gang La Familia, who inadvertently reveals to Colin and Wayne that Eddie and Stan bought the gun. He is a powerful and dangerous man.



Objects/Places

The Notebook

The Notebook is Colin's spiral-bound pad to write down his observations, the facts he learns, and curiosities that he wants to investigate further. He has been keeping a notebook since he was in preschool, and carries it with him wherever he goes, trying to write down what he sees right when he sees it. Colin is very protective of the Notebook, getting annoyed when Melissa writes in it without permission. The beginning of each chapter is a first-person excerpt from Colin's Notebook.

The Trampoline

The Trampoline is in the Fischers' backyard, and where Colin goes when he needs soothing; it calms his nerves and helps him to think.

The Gun

The Gun is a .9 millimeter weapon that goes off in the cafeteria on the first day of high school for Colin and sets up the mystery that Colin decides to solve: he wants to prove the gun did not belong to Wayne Connelly, but to Eddie Martin, though at the time of the gunshot it was in the purse of Eddie's girlfriend Sandy Ryan.

The Melon Flavored Lipstick

The Melon-colored Lipstick is among the evidence at the scene of the gunshot in the cafeteria, though Colin does not pick up on its significance until much later. It belongs to Sandy Ryan, and fell out of her purse along with the gun. Colin sees Sandy buying more melon-colored lipstick at the mall after the shooting, but doesn't compute Sandy's relationship to the gun until later.

The Birthday Cake

The Birthday Cake is a gift to Melissa Greer from her girl friends on the first day of school, which acts as a clue to help Colin exonerate Wayne: he spends his lunch observing his classmates' eating habits, noting that Wayne is a dainty eater. When he sees the gun smeared with cake frosting, he knows Wayne did not possess it. Instead, the frosting got on the gun in Sandy's purse, where she had stored a piece of cake for her boyfriend Eddie.



The Social Map

The Social Map is a corkboard with pictures and yarn that Colin constructs in order to clarify and understand the interactions of different social groups at school. Colin models it on the sort of board used by the FBI to make connections and gather evidence. He flips out when Danny destroys it in a fit of pique.

Strawberries

Strawberries are a food that Colin likes though they are not crunchy, which is how he generally prefers his food. Though strawberries do not appear directly in the story, they are significant because of this anomaly of Colin liking them, and their association for him with Melissa, whose hair smells of strawberries and has since Colin's first memory of her when they were three.

Basketball

Basketball is the sport that Mr. Turrentine teaches Colin to play well, despite his sensory integration issues that make sports difficult for him. By (possibly inadvertently) using Colin's language to help him visualize making a basket, Mr. Turrentine makes Colin try something new and become successful at it.

La Familia

La Familia is a Latino gang based in the greater Los Angeles area, who sold the gun to Eddie Martin, through some connection to Rudy Moore. Wayne also has ties to La Familia, and shows no fear in the face of the hardened gangsters.

West Valley High School

West Valley High School is the public high school that Colin attends in the San Fernando Valley. Its student population incorporates every economic background. Colin is a student here without the assistance of an adult behaviorist accompanying him to class for the first time in his academic career.

Sylmar

Sylmar is a town near to where Colin lives in the San Fernando Valley where Colin travels via public bus (against all his fears and personal tendencies) to investigate La Familia and find out who purchased the gun.



Themes

Paradoxes and the Failures of Logic

Colin spends a great deal of time pondering paradoxes, such as "The Prisoner's Dilemma" and Lewis Carroll's take on "The Tortoise and The Hare." Colin does not like paradoxes because there is no clear-cut answer. As he says, "Inferences make me uncomfortable because I like certainty. The risk of faulty logic is the emergence of a paradox that might someday be resolved through better logic; the risk of making a faulty inference is that you're simply wrong" (Page 191). Yet Colin himself is the ultimate paradox: though he does not experience "normal" emotional reactions to prompts and he finds it an exercise of will to determine the emotional state of others, this makes him far more emotionally sensitive than a typical teenager. Because of his skills at simple observation of the physical world, he can infer an emotional state and respond to it appropriately. He understands what is expected of him emotionally and he works to give those responses to people when he recognizes him, rather than using emotions as a weapon by manipulating or withholding them. This is the key difference between Colin and Rudy Moore, who also seems to lack a well-developed emotional life, indicated by his "dead" eyes. Unlike Colin, Rudy uses his clever understanding of human emotion to stir up trouble.

Colin's heroes all bow to the altar of logic, of straightforward, dry facts that result in an incontrovertible solution. Yet as Colin leaves the simplicity of childhood behind, Colin is discovering that rarely is life free from complexity. The more he encounters reality, the more Colin will see life doesn't fit into neat math equations, and people themselves are uncertain about who they are and how they should act, leading them to make poor choices or do things they don't mean. Colin likes certainty but very little in life is certain. Colin was certain that Sandy was the student who had the gun in the cafeteria, and he is satisfied to have arrived at that truth. But it is not clear that Sandy actually shot the gun; it seems it went off accidentally in the chaotic scuffle in the cafeteria. If this is the case, Sandy is among the most innocent in the case: she did not purchase the gun or intend to use it, and her actual motivation was love, because she only wanted to keep Eddie safe and out of trouble. Yet despite this good and pure motive, Sandy is punished. Colin seems unconcerned about this paradox, but the older he gets the more he will find it impossible to simply rely on logic to make sense of an uncertain situation. Life is full of gray areas between the hard facts of black and white.

Intellectual Curiosity vs. the Moral Imperative to Right Wro

Colin seeks to prove that Wayne is innocent of the gun charge not because the accusation is right or wrong, but true or untrue. Colin is guided by a desire to know the truth, rather than a moral position to see the correct person punished for doing something "bad" (that is, bringing a gun to school and firing it). Colin's moral



ambivalence is difficult to understand; he does not find it problematic that Eddie experiences no consequences for buying the gun, even though he knows the gun truly belonged to Eddie. He does not pursue the truth to its ultimate end because there is no evidence to back it up, and he willingly accepts this. Just as he has no desire to see Wayne punished or hurt because of how he has treated Colin in the past, Colin has no vendetta against the often impolite and bullying Eddie.

Colin does not even have a stance on guns. Are they "good" or "bad," dangerous or defensive - these questions are of little material concern to Colin. In his pursuit of truth, Colin is willing to lie to his mother, an immoral but also paradoxical choice: if truth is of the utmost importance, how can he succumb to subverting it? Further, he soon finds lying easy and feels no remorse for misleading people who love him. He does not feel bad for almost killing Stan, which was a clear overreaction to Stan's (albeit unkind) behavior on the basketball court. He accepts detention as a consequence of his actions, and accepts that he may get in trouble for lying to his parents, but his responses are dispassionate. He understands right from wrong in an intellectual way rather than an emotional way. In some ways his objectivity is a blessing: he cannot be hurt by people calling him "retard" because to him a "retard" is a person with low intelligence, and he knows he's smart. On the other hand, without a moral compass to guide him, Colin may at some point stoop to truly negative or bad behavior if "the end justifies the means" and the truth must be gotten to no matter what it takes.

Human Complexity

As Colin compiles his social map, it is messy because some people cannot be easily categorized. Rudy is smart but popular, unlike other "nerds;" Cooper is good at math but would rather be an athlete even if he is not built for it; Melissa is smart, athletic, popular, and still associates with nerds with little concern for her social status. Even Colin can surprise both himself and everyone around him: by using his talents for math and physics, he is able to accurately shoot a basketball, making him valuable in the eyes of other jocks. Colin cannot relate to the 1980's high school movies his mother makes him watch the summer before his freshman year begins, but his story resonates with the moral of so many stories of teen conflict: one can't judge a book by its cover.

The evolution of a genuine friendship between Colin and Wayne crystallizes this message: Colin surprises Wayne by resolutely helping him despite their unpleasant history together. Colin shows more bravery than Wayne thought him capable of, as well as an unexpected lack of self-pity. Wayne too shows a kind of courage beyond that of an omnipotent bully, as well as a depth of intelligence Colin was sure he lacked. When trying to assimilate the idea of Colin and Wayne as friends Mr. Fischer acknowledges "how things could change between children over time, especially between boys. Conflict had a way of forging friendships" (Page 153-154). More than learning to respect each other as different but worthy adversaries, Colin and Wayne finally notice the common ground between them, which neither had ever bothered to look for before.



Finally, the entire novel acts as a celebration of Colin's gifts because of his so-called disability, rather than a lament that he is handicapped. Like Hans Asperger, Miller and Stentz treat Colin's condition as a unique quality that allows him to bring particular gifts to the table. There is more to him than being "disabled." Often in literature or film dealing with a mentally handicapped individual, that individual is a supporting character who teaches the protagonist a value lesson in tolerance, kindness, or some other sentimental theme. Miller and Stentz put Colin front and center, and they do not make him a saint to glorify Asperger's; he is a flawed hero. But they prove that the view of the world through Colin's eyes is more complex and interesting than one might believe if one simply wrote him off as handicapped.



Style

Point of View

"Colin Fisher" is written in the third person, yet the narrator is not omniscient. Readers understand Colin's thought process and point of view, and see the world through his eyes: he reads the facial expressions of other so readers know what they are thinking, but only rarely do readers get a glimpse into the thoughts of someone else, like Mr. Fischer or Dr. Doran. But Melissa Greer's motives remain mysterious; readers never know for sure if she is simply a nice, generous girl or if she has romantic feelings for Colin. Because Colin himself cannot read such emotions yet, readers are doubly in the dark. Similarly, Colin cannot read Rudy Moore, so readers cannot get a grip on his true personality or motivations, except through his final interaction with Wayne, when Wayne accuses him of messing with the people around him out of malicious curiosity.

Each chapter begins with a first person narrative section from Colin's Notebook. In these brief excerpts, readers do get a more direct line into Colin's brain, yet these passages generally are dispassionate explanations of natural phenomena, experiments, and historical accounts. Colin does not have a particularly active emotional life which is why he has a "notebook" instead of a diary as many teen protagonists would have. But these excerpts still reveal a great deal about the type of person Colin is, what is important to him, and how he interacts with the world around him. The novel, including Colin's Notebook entries, are written in the past tense, reinforcing Colin's desire for dry, established facts that he can record as "truth," rather than the uncertain moment-to-moment instability of the present tense.

Setting

The novel is set in the San Fernando Valley, California, an area that is part of the massive urban sprawl of Los Angeles. The novel takes place in the present; Dr. Doran's ideas about integrating special needs students into mainstream classrooms are particularly modern and progressive. The general understanding of Colin's condition of Asperger's would not have existed a few decades ago; like Hans Asperger in 1930's Vienna, the authors are subtly trying to celebrate the positive aspects of the disability, rather than writing off Colin as "broken" or simply using him as a means to teach other characters value lessons in tolerance. Colin is the clear protagonist; he is not a metaphor or a sidekick.

Colin lives in a fairly typical suburban environment. He attends a public high school, and in many ways the story conforms to particular stereotypes, which Colin documents on his "social map," such as the popularity of jocks and the low social standing of nerds. Melissa has had an ugly duckling evolution over the course of the summer; once she had braces and acne, now she is attractive and the "popular" boys try to hit on her. However, Melissa exists outside of the normal social strata: she tries to be nice to



everyone. Despite her newfound popularity, she maintains her friendships with the people who always showed her kindness, like Colin. Readers can find numerous examples of how people conform to stereotypes and subvert them.

The students at West Valley High School also run the gamut of the socioeconomic spectrum. Colin's parents are literally rocket scientists, but they live in solid middle-class style. They eat dinner together, a strict rule enforced by Mrs. Fischer, in order to maintain a familial bond. The stability of his home life has most likely contributed to his capacity to be as high-functioning within his disability as he is. On the other hand, the squalor of Wayne's house indicates a less well-off and stable living environment, personified in the negative interaction between Wayne and his lazy stepfather Ken and reinforced by Stan's reference to Wayne and "food stamps" (Page 61). Wayne has a reputation as a bully that makes him an easy target to blame the gun incident on. Rudy Moore, whose father is a prominent lawyer in Los Angeles, can afford to lose three hundred dollars in a prank like the cell phone ring. Rudy is just as much a bully as Wayne, but he is able to use his cleverness and financial well-being to deflect all suspicion away from him. He is well-liked and gets good grades, but he is crueler than Wayne. Wayne and Rudy may be similar in many ways, but Rudy's social status prevents people from noticing his bad behavior.

Language and Meaning

Language and meaning are very important to Colin, as they are often difficult for him to interpret. For example, he has a hard time identifying rhetorical questions and sarcasm. Because of his tendency to be bluntly honest or go off on his own thoughts at length, his therapists have given him scripts to follow for human interaction as simple as "Hello, how are you?" Thus Colin's speech is often stiff and formal. He does not speak like a typical teenager, especially when coupled with his elevated vocabulary and knowledge from his extensive reading. He approaches life from a scholarly perspective, and his Notebook, rather than reading like a fourteen-year-old's thoughts and feelings instead comes across like professorial lectures on complicated subjects.

Adding to this academic aura, the authors litter the novel with metaphors and similes comparing Colin's world to the natural world, linking animal behavior to that of humans. However, this is not to say the book is difficult to understand. Like a good teacher, Colin breaks down complex topics into words and ideas that a teenager could understand. His classmates speak like ordinary teenagers and ground Colin in reality. Because of his constant clarifying of language and occasional inadvertent bluntness, Colin is often quite amusing and his insights give the reader a new perspective on the world: by looking directly into the heart of any given subject or event, Colin makes unusual language choices which hit right at the truth that most people are often too embarrassed or afraid to admit. Readers should stay aware of their amusement and keep track of whether they find Colin funny because he is disabled and doesn't know any better, or because the truth he reveals is uncomfortably but honestly funny.



Structure

"Colin Fischer" is divided into fifteen chapters and an epilogue, ranging in length from four pages to twenty pages. Each chapter begins with a brief excerpt from Colin's Notebook, in which readers get a glimpse into the "first-person" perspective of the workings of his mind. Each of these sections introduces the theme of the chapter, generally an explanation of the chapter's title, which then becomes relevant as a metaphor for some real world experience Colin has in school or with his family. "Shark Behavior" becomes a meditation on Colin's thoughts on the typical behavior of high school students, who are as mysterious to him as the patterns of a school of hammerhead sharks; "Primate Behavior" demonstrates why Colin moves into the fray after the gunshot rather than fleeing - he has a need to investigate; and "Two Doctors in Vienna" effectively points out the difference between Colin and Rudy despite some obvious similarities.

The novel is further divided into three sections of five chapters each. A traditional mystery, the novel works in a three act structure: the first section ends with the gunshot, setting up the mystery that needs to be solved: who set off the gun in the cafeteria. The second "act" follows Colin as he collects clues and determines the main suspect. The third act brings about a small reversal (the suspect is not the actual perpetrator of the crime) and the resolution. Keen readers can follow clues to Sandy from the incident itself: Sandy at Eddie's locker, Sandy putting cake in her purse, the prominent mention of melon-lipstick on the floor by the cakes-smearing gun, Sandy shopping for melon-colored lipstick after school.



Quotes

"My behaviorist Marie says, 'Kids are often frightened of anyone different. They make themselves feel secure by picking on kids who are'" (Page 13-14).

"They had been merging in a neat left-right-left weave, an example of spontaneous self-organization. Then a woman in an SUV with a phone to her ear broke the pattern and threw it all into self-interested chaos. Colin found it very interesting how one small violation of the social order could throw an entire system out of balance" (Page 15).

"Colin didn't like to be touched by anyone, even his parents, although he was tolerant if given proper notice. On some level, he understood their need for contact. He had read about it in a book" (Page 16).

"What is interesting is that the Prisoner's Dilemma is a paradox. Cooperation only benefits an individual player when both players cooperate. Otherwise, cooperation is punished. The paradox is easy to resolve if both players know what the other will do because most will take a small gain over a large cost. But that's not how the game works. You can never know what the other player is going to do, so you have to rely on him to choose wisely. This is called "deterrence"" (Page 26-27).

"To learn a thing was to know a thing; to know a thing was to understand a thing; to understand a thing was to face it without fear" (Page 27).

"Colin found Rudy troubling. His expression never matched the hand-drawn figures on his cheat sheet. Rudy's eyes and mouth always seemed to disagree— in fact, his eyes almost never changed. It was as if he didn't really feel anything and simply moved his facial muscles to approximate human emotion. Rudy reminded Colin of a shark, especially when he smiled" (Page 28-29).

"My parents say it's hard to know what I'm thinking because most of the time I maintain a very blank expression. This is not something I try to do; it is just the way that I am...As it turns out, however, the hardest facial expression for another human being to read is a perfectly blank face" (Page 39).

"First, he filmed an actor after instructing him to keep an absolutely neutral expression on his face. When the director followed the image of the actor with a shot of a roast chicken, audiences said, "Look how hungry that man is"...This phenomenon is called "the Kuleshov Effect," after the director who conducted the experiments. What it demonstrated is that you can never tell what a blank face means until you know the context" (Page 40).

"Most animals flee from the loud, the bright, and the unfamiliar; primates tend to move toward bright lights and loud noises, preferring to investigate and learn the cause of the commotion" (Page 52-53).



"The complexities of social groupings at West Valley High School were even more daunting than they had been at middle school, and Colin pondered strategies for untangling them" (Page 57).

"Without realizing it, Kuleshov confirmed a long-held belief about the best way to deceive people: Show them things they want to believe. The rest will take care of itself" (Page 90).

"Colin didn't quite understand what was fair or not fair about it. It was an objective fact—although he knew that many people had trouble discerning facts from a point of view" (Page 125).

"I used to think people did this because they're bad at math, but actually it's because they're gamblers. They pass up good opportunities that are right in front of them in exchange for imagined improvements that almost never materialize. This is why I trust math and I do not trust people. Math makes better decisions" (Page 135).

"Unfortunately, as Colin knew, the human mind was an imperfect recording device. Instead of presenting things objectively, it emphasized the things it found most interesting" (Page 174).

"'Why' can be the most important question of all because human behavior isn't always logical. Human behavior is not a mystery that can be solved or fully understood in mathematical terms. It just has to be experienced" (Page 192).

"Colin didn't think this was fair, but Marie pointed out that sometimes fairness was a difficult balancing act when attempting to maintain basic social order" (Page 215).



Topics for Discussion

What is the paradox of Colin's disability? What are some advantages Colin has because of his Asperger's? Do you think Colin is aware of/upset by the disadvantages? Why or why not? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

Colin's faux pas are often amusing. Do you think the authors do a good job distinguishing between laughing maliciously and benignly at a person with a disability? How do they achieve this, or how do they fail to do so? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

Compare and contrast Colin and Rudy Moore. What is the same about their characters? What is different? Is there anything unexpected / surprising in this comparison? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

Colin claims to solve the mystery of the gun in order to find the truth, not for the sake of justice. Do you think Colin is a moral character? Is it possible, given his disability, for him to be? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

Compare and contrast the ways characters defy expectations and conform to their stereotypical box in *Colin Fischer*, giving two examples of each. Do you think the novel successfully teaches the lesson of "not to judge a book by its cover"? Why or why not? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

Describe the relationship between Colin and Danny. What do you think is the most frustrating thing about Colin for Danny? Do you think he truly hates his brother? Why or why not? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

Compare and contrast Colin, Melissa, Eddie, Wayne, and Rudy's responses to the final resolution of Sandy's expulsion from school. Do you find this ending satisfying? Why or why not? Do you agree with Colin or Melissa over the need for true justice? Be sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.