

# **Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja Study Guide**

## **Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja by Marcus Emerson**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Untitled Chapter – Tuesday. 10:30 AM. Gym Class.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Wednesday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom. – Thursday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Thursday. 10:35 AM. Gym class. – Friday. 9:30 AM. Art class.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Friday. 10:35 AM. Gym class – Friday. 11:35 AM. Lunch.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Friday. 11:45 AM. In the hallway during lunch.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>



# Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this guide: Emerson, Marcus. *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*. Emerson Publishing House, 2012.

*Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja* is a children's novel by Marcus Emerson in which 11-year-old Chase Cooper stands up to the Buchanan School ninja clan and becomes a ninja himself while protecting his cousin, Zoe, from being framed.

When the novel begins, it is the first day at a new school for Chase, as he and his family have moved across town. The only person Chase knows who attends Buchanan School is his cousin, Zoe, a friendly and popular girl who goes out of her way to be nice to everyone. Zoe has great respect for Chase because Chase is family and he wants Chase to fit in quickly. She becomes Chase's guide to Buchanan School, pointing out unkind kids like Wyatt, while making a point to be friendly to unusual but goodhearted kids like Brayden, who claims to hunt werewolves.

At gym one day, Chase and Zoe see a pair of eyes watching them from the woods near the track. Upon investigating the spot with Brayden, a group of ninja kids take Brayden hostage. They tell Chase, Zoe, and Brayden they will let Brayden go provided none of them says anything about what they have seen to anyone. The next day, Chase and Zoe are given the chance to join the ninja clan. Chase believes it will be cool to be a ninja, while Zoe is willing to join just to make sure Chase fits in. The lead ninja reveals himself to be Wyatt, and prepares Chase and Zoe for their test of allegiance. They must steal the purse of Zoe's good friend, Emily. Zoe goes along with this because she values Chase as her family even though she knows it is wrong. When Wyatt dumps the contents of Emily's purse out all over the ground just because he can, Zoe has had enough and quits. Chase, who really wants to be a ninja, refuses to quit with Emily, betraying her by refusing to quit. Wyatt vows revenge against Zoe.

The next day, Chase is given his first real ninja assignment. He is to carry Zoe's backpack to the main office at school and tell the secretaries he found it in a bush. He is instructed not to look inside or he will face vengeance like Zoe. Chase's curiosity, as well as his loyalty and remorse toward Zoe, cause him to look in the bag. It is full of food drive money that the ninjas have stolen. Chase knows he cannot turn in the bookbag or Zoe will get in serious trouble. He and Brayden decide to sneak the money back into the food drive collection box, but they are confronted by Wyatt and the ninjas. Chase refuses to back down from Wyatt, who begins to beat up Chase. Chase refuses to fight back as Zoe, Emily, and others watch on. Finally, Mr. Cooper, the gym teacher, sees what is happening and intervenes. Wyatt is taken away.

Emily helps to clean the blood off of Chase's face, telling him his stand was manly. This makes Chase happy. Chase and Zoe also make amends. The ninjas approach Chase about being their leader. It is explained that Wyatt was power-hungry, and was leading the ninjas in a bad direction. The ninjas now want someone honorable, like Chase, to lead them. Chase says he will think it over. The ninjas tell him to hurry up because they

are expecting a pirate invasion. As Mr. Cooper sends Chase to the nurse, Chase decides that he will indeed become the ninja leader.



# Untitled Chapter – Tuesday. 10:30 AM. Gym Class.

## Summary

Untitled chapter – Chase Cooper explains that while being a ninja is fantastic, it was not always the case for him because ninjas are often seen as bad guys. Chase reveals that what is about to be read is his chronicle so that history will not be repeated.

The novel then steps back in time to when Chase is 11 years old, and is a sixth grader at Buchanan School. Chase is scrawny, unpopular, and the new kid at school. The only person he knows at school is his pretty cousin, Zoe, who is thrilled that Chase and his family have moved to the other side of town. Zoe introduces Chase to their gym teacher, Mr. Cooper. Zoe points out a kid who keeps to himself named Wyatt, who resembles a vampire and has no friends. Zoe explains she tried to befriend Wyatt the year before, but that Wyatt did not want to be friends. Zoe does not want Chase to end up like Wyatt. She also reveals the school is doing a food drive.

While walking around the track during gym, Chase and Zoe see a pair of blue eyes in a nearby treeline. This worries Zoe. Only later does Chase learn he has seen a ninja for the first time.

Tuesday. 10:30 a.m. Gym class. – The next morning, a tall kid with slicked-back brown hair named Brayden introduces himself to Chase. Chase thinks Brayden is weird, but Zoe invites him along to walk the track with her and Chase. Brayden reveals he is a werewolf hunter. Chase asks if Brayden knows of anything living in the woods near school, and points out that he and Zoe saw a pair of eyes watching them the previous day. Zoe tells Brayden not to tell anyone she saw anything, because she does not want to start middle school next year with the reputation for being paranoid or delusional.

When Brayden investigates the spot where the eyes were seen, he is yanked into the woods. Chase and Zoe rush in after him. They are confronted by 15 or 20 kids dressed as ninjas. The lead ninja explains Brayden has been taken prisoner, and that he will only be released if he, Chase, and Zoe promise to tell no one what they have seen, as it would endanger their operation. Chase and Zoe agree. Brayden is released, and the ninjas quickly disappear.

## Analysis

From the very start of Marcus Emerson's novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*, the reader learns that not all ninjas are bad. The idea that not all ninjas are bad becomes an important theme as the novel gets underway, especially as Chase desires to become a ninja. Chase himself directly tells the reader that ninjas are normally seen as bad guys, even though they rarely actually are bad guys. Chase also reveals that what the reader



is about to read is a written account, or chronicle, of Chase's becoming a ninja. He explains that being a ninja is fantastic, not evil, but that his life as a ninja was not always fantastic. Part of this is because initially, it appears as if the ninjas are against Chase, Zoe, and Brayden (they take Brayden hostage and release him only on the condition that they do not say anything about what they have seen). This whole idea can also be seen as a metaphor for people (not just ninjas specifically) not necessarily fitting the stereotype assigned to them by society.

Chase's time as a ninja was not always fantastic also because of the circumstances leading to his becoming a ninja. Having moved across town with his family, Chase begins a new school where he only knows his cousin, Zoe. It is through Zoe that Emerson underscores a critically important theme in the novel: the importance of family and familial loyalty. Zoe goes out of her way to help Chase fit in. She points out unfriendly kids like Wyatt, but ensures Chase meets friendly - if unusual - kids like Brayden. Zoe is even willing to spend time with Chase over her own friends, demonstrating how she values family above all else.

Zoe herself represents a very honorable character. Honor is crucial to the code and reputation of ninjas, and honor is something that all people should generally strive for, argues Emerson throughout the novel. Zoe's desire to help her family member fit in at school, her commitment to family, and her kindness to everyone no matter who they are, speaks of her tremendous honor. It also speaks to the thematic idea that people should be kind to everyone. Zoe is kind to Chase not only because he is family, but because it is simply the right thing to do. The same is true of why Zoe is kind to Brayden. It is an important lesson for Chase, which will have strong influence later in the novel.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why has Chase come to a new school? Why is he so unhappy about beginning a new school?

## **Discussion Question 2**

When Chase arrives at Buchanan School, Zoe helps Chase to fit in. How does she do this? Why does she do this?

## **Discussion Question 3**

In what ways does Zoe show honor early in a novel? Why does this matter for Chase, especially?



## Vocabulary

scrawny, unpopular, affiliated, jitters, sacrifice, contagious, artificial intelligence, epic, paranoid, delusion



## **Wednesday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom. – Thursday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom.**

### **Summary**

Wednesday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom – Chase daydreams through homeroom, and comes to when Zoe asks if he is coming to the next class. It is then that Chase and Zoe realize Chase has received a note from an unknown writer. The note tells Chase to bring Zoe to the edge of the woods at gym class, and that cookies and soda will be provided. Chase wonders if the note is from Brayden and may be a trap, but Zoe does not believe Brayden is smart enough to do such a thing. Zoe thinks it is from the ninjas.

Wednesday. 10:40 AM. Gym class. – Chase is nervous and anxious until gym class arrives. At the woodline with Zoe, a ninja greets them with Oreos and cans of orange soda. They step into the woods only a few feet, but are suddenly surrounded by ninjas. Chase and Zoe are very impressed by this. Chase and Zoe are invited to join the clan. Chase immediately says yes, while Zoe agrees so long as no one else has to know she is in the clan. Chase and Zoe must present a four-leafed clover each to the ninjas the following day to join. The ninjas then disappear in a cloud of chalk dust. Zoe finds this dorky. Chase asks why Zoe has joined. She explains it was out of kindness to Chase because Chase is the new kid and because Chase is her cousin. She wants him to fit in and feel comfortable.

Thursday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom. – Having looked all day and all evening, Chase has been unable to find a four-leaf clover. Morning announcements report that the food drive has gained more than \$3,000. If the goal of \$10,000 is reached, there will be a class trip. Zoe then reveals to Chase that she has two four-leaf clovers that she found years ago. One is for Chase, who is stunned by Zoe's kindness. Brayden appears, and is taken aback that Chase and Zoe want to join the ninjas, because he says ninjas are bad guys. Chase explains he has researched ninjas online, and found out they are mostly peaceful farmers who learned their stealthy skills to defend themselves when outnumbered, but that a few ninjas who went bad gave all ninjas a bad name. Brayden says he does not mean ninjas in general are bad, but the ninjas Chase and Zoe want to join are bad.

### **Analysis**

Chase continues to argue that not all ninjas are bad. He has researched the history of ninjas online, and, as Chase tells Brayden, a few bad apples spoiled the whole barrel. In other words, a few ninjas who went bad gave the rest of the ninjas, all good, a bad name. Brayden argues that, although most ninjas may be good, the ninjas that Chase wants to join are bad. While Brayden presents no clear evidence as to why, Chase cannot present any evidence as to why they are not. After all, as the reader will





remember, the ninjas kidnapped Brayden and refused to let him go until Chase, Brayden, and Zoe promised not to say anything about the ninjas and where they have been getting together.

Nevertheless, Chase is still intent on joining the ninjas. Zoe agrees to join the ninjas as well only because Chase wants to do so, and it's important to Zoe that her cousin feel comfortable and happy in his new school. The challenge to join the ninjas consists of finding a four leaf clover. While Chase is unable to find any, Zoe brings in two four leaf clovers that she previously found, knowing it is more important to be supportive of and to help family than it is to have two four leaf clovers in a collection. Chase is very appreciative of Zoe's efforts and kindness, and he recognizes just how important family is to her, and how kind she is even independent of the idea that family matters more than anything to her. If it was not for Zoe, there is no telling how well Chase may have (or may have not) begun to fit in at Buchanan.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Although Zoe is not very enthusiastic about becoming a ninja, she continues down the path toward becoming one. How does she do this? Why does she continue to do this?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What evidence does Brayden present that suggests the Buchanan ninjas are bad? What evidence does Chase have that the Buchanan ninjas are not bad?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Brayden worry the Buchanan ninjas are bad? Why does Chase seem largely unconcerned?

## **Vocabulary**

minions, comatose, ruckus, stealthy, outnumbered, default



## **Thursday. 10:35 AM. Gym class. – Friday. 9:30 AM. Art class.**

### **Summary**

Thursday. 10:35 AM. Gym class. – Chase and Zoe head to the woods during gym. There, they are made to eat the four leaf clovers they have brought. The ninjas find this gross, which angers Zoe who wants to know why they have just eaten clovers. The short ninja reveals himself to be Wyatt, the leader of the ninjas. Wyatt tells Chase and Zoe they are officially in, but must now do something to prove their loyalty. They must steal Emily's purse and bring it back within the hour. Chase and Zoe reluctantly agree. After Chase and Zoe return, they will receive their ninja outfits.

Chase and Zoe then follow Emily and the girls she is with. Zoe pretends to hurt her knee while the girls drop their purses to go to Zoe's aid. Chase then grabs Emily's purse, and the two rejoin the ninjas. Wyatt then empties the purse on the ground just because, saying the point of stealing is to do whatever they want with what they steal. This is too much for Zoe, who quits. Chase refuses to quit.

Friday. 9:30 AM. Art class. – Chase feels guilty all night about stealing Emily's purse and barely sleeps. At school, Zoe ignores Chase while Brayden reveals the food drive money has been stolen. Chase feels sick about this. Zoe later talks to Chase, during which time she reveals she lied to Emily and told Emily she had not seen the purse anywhere. Chase tells Zoe she knew what she was getting into, but Zoe says she only did it for Chase because Chase was too dorky to fit in on his own. Zoe then hands the teacher a note and leaves class.

### **Analysis**

The idea that not all ninjas are bad seems to be challenged again in this section of the novel. The reader will recall that apart from Brayden being kidnapped, Brayden's warnings are now coupled with the ninjas forcing Chase and Zoe to eat the clovers (just because they can) and the allegiance task of stealing Emily's purse. Zoe is not thrilled about this because it compromises her morals –her sense of right and wrong. Still, she goes along with things because Chase is her cousin, and family is so important to her. When the purse is stolen and Wyatt dumps the contents of the purse out on the ground just because he can, Zoe has had enough. She cannot stand the fact that stealing had been done just because it can be done. This is not the way of an honorable ninja. Brayden's assertion that the ninjas of Buchanan School are bad appears to be completely true.

Had the exercise in stealing been only an exercise, and had the purse been returned rather than its contents ruined by pouring them onto the ground, Zoe might have



considered remaining among the ninjas. But as it is, even family loyalty cannot outrank Zoe's morality. Here, she demonstrates tremendous honor by refusing to remain with the ninjas because right has been violated. Zoe's sense of honor demonstrates a commitment to standing up for what she believes in – and standing up for what someone believes in herein becomes a very important theme in the novel. Zoe is so angry with Chase for not standing up for what he believes in, or for sticking by her as family, that she will not even speak to him. Chase is now in a very difficult position of his own making.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do Wyatt and the other ninjas have Chase and Zoe eat the clovers and then steal the purse? What happens as a result?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Zoe decide to quit the ninjas before she ever even really truly becomes a ninja? Why does Chase decide to stay despite Zoe's reasons for quitting?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What evidence is there to suggest that Brayden is correct when he says the Buchanan ninjas are bad? Why does Chase not take this evidence seriously?

## **Vocabulary**

allegiance, incriminating, brilliance, unenthusiastically, sarcasm, social suicide



## **Friday. 10:35 AM. Gym class – Friday. 11:35 AM. Lunch.**

### **Summary**

Friday. 10:35 AM. Gym class – Brayden and Chase talk during gym. Brayden explains he has overheard the entire argument between Zoe and Chase. Brayden says it is shady to steal a girl's purse, and even shadier to pressure a family member into doing something wrong. When Chase goes to confront the ninjas, all of his guilt disappears at the prospect of becoming a ninja, for the ninjas have his outfit ready. Wyatt and the ninjas then ask if Chase is ready for his next task. Chase says that he is. The ninjas then pull out Zoe's backpack. Wyatt says Chase is to deliver the backpack to the front office and explain he found it under a bush outside. Wyatt explains the task is an act of vengeance against Zoe. Chase is warned not to open the bag or he will suffer the same fate.

Friday. 11:25 AM. Between gym class and lunch. – As Chase heads toward the main office, he realizes Zoe's bookbag is heavier than it should be. Chase decides to open the bag. Cash and change spill out along with a yellow paper that reads Student Hunger Drive, Money Donations. Chase is horrified, and wonders if he is being watched. He quickly puts the money back into the bookbag and wonders what to do next, knowing he cannot bring the bag to the office.

Friday. 11:35 AM. Lunch. – Chase goes to see Brayden in the cafeteria, all the while looking out for Wyatt. Brayden asks about why Chase is carrying Zoe's backpack. Chase reveals why. Brayden is stunned, and agrees with Chase that the cash has to be put back into the food drive container. Brayden even agrees to help by providing a distraction. Chase realizes he now has a true friend in Brayden.

### **Analysis**

Although Chase may not be able to count on Zoe in the present because of his own choices, he can still count on Brayden. Brayden does not like the ninjas after being kidnapped, so he is very willing to help Chase foil their plans of revenge against Zoe. Chase has finally had a moral awakening, and is now standing up for the things in which he believes: doing what is right, and protecting family – especially family that has been unfailingly loyal to him. As Emerson argues still, family is incredibly important, and so is standing up for what one believes in. This is especially true given the current situation.

The current situation is clear: the ninjas under Wyatt want revenge against Zoe for quitting. To do this, they plan to frame her for stealing the food drive money. They have stolen Zoe's backpack, and shoveled the stolen money into it. Wyatt is ordered to take the bag to the office and to explain to the secretaries there that he found the bag in a



bush. Zoe will then be blamed for the theft, and the ninjas will have their revenge. Chase, however, does not want to betray his cousin for a second time. Once was bad enough, but now Zoe stands to get into real trouble for something she did not even do. As a result, Chase is willing to do whatever he can in order to protect Zoe from the ninjas. This chapter demonstrates growth and maturation in Chase's character, as he finds the courage to go against the crowd (the ninjas) and do the right thing by not setting his cousin up to get into major trouble.

## Discussion Question 1

How do the ninjas plan to take revenge against Zoe for quitting? Why do they plan to do this?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Chase decide to turn against the ninjas even though he has been so determined to be with them to the point of refusing to quit with Zoe?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Chase seek out Brayden's help against the ninjas? Why does Brayden agree to help Chase ruin the ninjas' plan of vengeance against Zoe?

## Vocabulary

shady, vengeance, vengeance, curdled, obvious, bustling



## Friday. 11:45 AM. In the hallway during lunch.

### Summary

Chase follows Brayden into the hallway to the front office. He and Brayden look in through the glass dividers to see how many secretaries and office workers are at their desks. As Chase and Brayden try to figure out what to do next, Wyatt and the other ninjas, dressed as normal kids, confront Chase and Brayden. Wyatt tells Chase to do as he has been told, for Chase does not have a choice. No one will believe Chase about Wyatt and his friends being ninjas because Wyatt gives off the appearance of a lonely kid with no friends.

Suddenly, Zoe, Emily, and their friends appear. Zoe is stunned to see Chase with her bookbag. Zoe wants to know if Chase has been instructed to steal her bookbag as well. She then admits to Emily the truth and apologizes, which Emily quickly accepts because she knows Zoe did it for her cousin. Wyatt laughs and says it does not matter because Chase is the one currently holding a bag full of money. Chase throws the bag at Wyatt, which hits him in the face, falls to the floor, and explodes money everywhere.

Wyatt attacks Chase, punching him and making him bleed. Chase refuses to fight back, not wanting to give in to Wyatt's cruelty. Wyatt becomes frustrated, trying to get Chase to fight back. Chase still refuses, knowing if he is caught with the bag, Wyatt wins. Chase has his cousin to think of beside himself. Suddenly, Mr. Cooper intervenes. Wyatt shouts that Chase and Zoe stole the money from the food drive together. Mr. Cooper begins questioning everyone about who it was that took the money. Chase says he took the money to protect Zoe, but immediately, Zoe and Brayden both say they took the money. Suddenly, all the kids that have gathered begin saying they took the money. Mr. Cooper grabs Wyatt by the shirt collar, saying that although it is not clear exactly who took the money, it is clear that Wyatt had something to do with it.

After Mr. Cooper and Wyatt have gone, Zoe reveals she is impressed. Emily is also impressed, calling Chase manly and dabbing away the blood with a tissue from her purse. The ninjas then confront Chase, saying they are now without a leader, and saying that Wyatt only ever wanted to control people. Chase says he will think about accepting the job. The ninjas tell Chase to hurry up and decide, for they are expecting a pirate invasion soon. Mr. Cooper then returns to send Chase to the nurse. As Chase heads in, he decides he will become the leader of the Buchanan School ninja clan, knowing the clan needs an honest and moral leader.



## Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, the idea that not all ninjas are bad is finally upheld. Once Wyatt is caught by Mr. Cooper and kicked out by the ninjas as their leader, the ninjas explain to Chase that they want him to be their leader. They explain that Wyatt was selfish and power hungry, and was not a good or honorable ninja leader. The ninjas did not like the direction Wyatt was taking them, and now believe they can be led in a good direction by Chase. That the ninjas would want someone who is good like Chase to be their leader indicates that the ninjas are not necessarily bad or immoral people. Chase ultimately decides that he will become their leader.

The ninjas want Chase as their leader because Chase has proven himself to be an honorable person, capable of doing good and capable of righting wrongs he has either committed, or helped to cause. Chase's refusal to bring the backpack to the office in order to protect Zoe speaks volumes about how much family means to Chase, and how wrong Chase realizes he has been. Chase's forced confession that he has stolen the money is done in order to protect Zoe, with the idea that he will sacrifice himself rather than let any punishment fall unfairly on Zoe. Chase's refusal to fight Wyatt is not only a matter of standing up for what he believes in, but also because Wyatt sells himself out as the aggressor and bully of the situation. All of these things make Chase honorable, and help him to realize how important honor itself is. It is the way of the ninja, and helps demonstrate that not all ninjas are bad.

### Discussion Question 1

How does Chase demonstrate honor as the novel concludes? What does this ultimately bring about – with Zoe, the ninjas, and Emily? Why?

### Discussion Question 2

Why do the ninjas ask Chase to be their leader? Why does Chase ultimately decide to become their leader?

### Discussion Question 3

Are the Buchanan ninjas truly bad? Why or why not? Do you believe their honor and reputation will improve under Chase? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

smirk, inevitable, average Joe, marionettes, manly, expelled



# Characters

## Chase

Chase Cooper is the 11-year-old narrator of the novel, and the cousin of Zoe. A brand new sixth grader at Buchanan School after Chase has moved with his family across town, Chase is not looking forward to the new school year. He is happy, at least, to know Zoe.

When Chase and Zoe discover that Buchanan has a ninja clan, Chase wants to join immediately while Zoe agrees to join out of kindness to Chase. When the ninjas require Chase and Zoe to steal just for the fun of it, Zoe quits. Chase betrays Zoe by refusing to quit because he is too caught up in the appeal of being a ninja.

However, when Chase is ordered to seek revenge against Zoe by framing her, Chase regains his sense of honor by standing up to the ninjas and refusing to hurt his cousin anymore. Chase has a moral reawakening, and would rather be beaten up by Wyatt and take the blame for the theft of the food drive money than let anything bad happen to Zoe. Because of his heroic stand, Chase regains his sense of honor, Wyatt is punished, Chase and Zoe resume their good relationship, and Emily calls Chase manly for the stand he has made. The ninjas offer Chase the chance to lead them, which Chase ultimately accepts.

## Zoe

Zoe Cooper is Chase's cousin, and is unflinching kind and friendly toward everyone. She is a genuinely good and honorable person who believes family and doing the right thing are the most important parts of life.

When Chase comes to her school, Zoe goes out of her way to spend time with him, to introduce him around, and to point out mean kids like Wyatt, all in order to make Chase feel at home. She even goes to the length of helping Chase join the ninjas, but quits when her morality is challenged by the ninja tasks. When Chase also refuses to quit, Zoe casts a cold shoulder toward Chase. Only when Chase finally stands up to the ninjas and to Wyatt does Zoe reconnect with Chase.

## Wyatt

Wyatt is a loner kid and the leader of the ninjas. Cruel, selfish, and power-hungry, Wyatt is a bully who uses the ninjas to his own ends of control. Wyatt entices Chase and Zoe to join the ninjas, but when Zoe quits, Wyatt vows revenge by orchestrating a plot to frame her for stealing food drive donation money using Chase to do it. When Chase refuses, Wyatt commences beating Chase up – and is caught by Mr. Cooper. Wyatt is then removed by the ninjas as their leader.





## Brayden

Brayden is an unusual but kind kid who is friends with Zoe, and becomes friends with Chase. Brayden considers himself to be a werewolf hunter, and helps Chase and Zoe search for the eyes they see in the woods. Brayden is kidnapped by the ninjas and released on condition of silence. As a result, he comes to believe the Buchanan ninjas are bad. When Chase comes to defy the ninjas, Brayden agrees to help in revenge for what the ninjas did to him. In so doing, Brayden also becomes Chase's first true, non-family friend at Buchanan.

## Mr. Cooper

Mr. Cooper is a coach and gym teacher at Buchanan School. He is friendly but straight-to-the-point, making sure students behave and do as they are instructed. It is Mr. Cooper who intervenes when Wyatt begins beating up Chase, and it is Mr. Cooper who brings Wyatt to justice.

## Chase's sister

Chase's sister is mentioned but never directly seen in the novel. In third grade, Chase's sister is mentioned as having an easier time fitting into the new school because as a third grader, she is less self-aware than older kids like Chase. Chase's sister notices that something is wrong with Chase the night after Chase and Zoe have a falling out over Emily's purse, and so she hangs out with Chase while he plays video games.

## The ninjas

The ninjas, numbering 15 or 20, comprise the Buchanan ninja clan. They are a quiet and mysterious group, at first appearing to all be bad guys. However, when Chase stands up to Wyatt, and when they throw Wyatt out of the clan, they seek Chase to be their new leader. They explain that Wyatt was the wrong kind of leader, for Wyatt was selfish and power-hungry. As such, the ninjas are revealed to be good kids who had a bad leader, but who now need a good leader.

## Emily

Emily is one of Zoe's closest friends. Pretty, kind, and popular, it is Emily's purse that Chase and Zoe are tasked with stealing to prove their allegiance to the ninjas. Emily is very forgiving when she finds out the truth behind why her purse was stolen; she even compliments Chase for being manly for standing up to Wyatt.

## **The secretaries**

The secretaries are only briefly seen in the novel. Three of them work in the main office, and it is to the secretaries that Chase is supposed to drop off the backpack. Chase is supposed to tell the secretaries that he found the backpack in the bushes, but Chase refuses to do so because it will get Zoe in trouble undeservedly. As such, Chase and Brayden are discussing how to get past the secretaries to return the money when Wyatt confronts them.

## **The nurse**

The nurse at Buchanan School is mentioned but never directly seen. She commands great respect and the trust of the students, as well as the teachers. Chase is just on his way in to see the nurse as the novel ends, deciding that he will indeed become the leader of the ninjas.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Ninja eyes

The ninja eyes seen peeking out of the forrest are the first clue that Buchanan has a ninja clan. Ninja eyes are seen by Chase and Zoe when they are walking around the track during gym class. The eyes are the only part of the ninja visible, and are blue in color. Chase and Zoe investigate the area with Brayden, during which time Brayden is kidnapped by the ninjas.

## Chalk dust

The Chalk dust is used Chalk dust is used when the ninjas disappear to create an air of mystery and upholds ninja tradition for vanishing in a dramatic fashion. Two chalk dust-laden erasers are smashed together to create clouds of smoke, from which the ninjas disappear by the time the dust clears.

## Four leaf clovers

A four leaf clover must be found and brought to the woods each by Chase and Zoe to join the ninjas, and symbolizes the power hungry nature of Wyatt. Having found the clovers and presented them, Wyatt instructs Chase and Zoe to eat the clovers just because he finds it amusing. This demonstrates that Wyatt is power-hungry and corrupt as a leader because the eating of the clovers serves no real purpose other than amusing Wyatt.

## Emily's purse

Emily's purse is ordered stolen by Wyatt as a test of allegiance for Chase and Zoe, and symbolizes the moral limits to which Chase and Zoe may be pushed. When it is revealed the purse will not be returned, and when it is demonstrated that the purse has been stolen and had its contents dumped all over the ground just because it could be done, Zoe decides to quit the ninjas because this is wrong and she cannot be a party to it anymore. Chase deals with the guilt because he desperately wants to be a ninja. This causes a falling out between the cousins.

## Ninja outfit

A ninja outfit is presented to Chase following his membership test and his task of allegiance. Chase is so excited to join the ninjas that he forgets his moral guilt over Emily's purse and Zoe's quitting the ninjas. However, the ninja outfit is not even enough to convince Chase to frame Zoe for the theft of the food drive money.



## Food drive money

The food drive money, totaling more than \$3,000, is stolen by Wyatt and the ninjas for a plot of revenge against Zoe. Angry at Zoe quitting, Wyatt wants to ensure that not only will Zoe face the consequences, but that she will be discredited from anyone believing her should she ever decide to talk about the existence of the ninjas. The money is put into Zoe's bookbag, which has also been stolen to ensure that it will appear as if Zoe is to blame.

## Zoe's backpack

Zoe's red backpack is stolen by Wyatt and the ninjas and filled with the stolen food drive money in order to take revenge against Zoe, and demonstrates the extent to which Chase is no longer willing to go to be a ninja. Chase already feels bad enough for betraying Zoe, but framing her for such a horrible crime is something he will not do. As a result, instead of taking Zoe's backpack to the secretaries as Wyatt has instructed him to do, Chase stands up to Wyatt instead.

## Accepting of blame

A sacrificial accepting of blame is undertaken by Chase in order to do what is right while protecting Zoe. When Mr. Cooper comes upon the fight between Wyatt and Chase and discovers the food drive money, Chase takes the blame for the theft in order to protect Zoe. However, all of the other kids except Wyatt begin to accept blame for the theft, allowing Mr. Cooper to see that Wyatt is clearly responsible. This accepting of blame by Chase also leads to a reconnecting between Chase and Zoe.

## Tissue

A tissue is used by Emily to dab some of the blood from Chase's face. This demonstrates that Emily is very forgiving of Chase, and very impressed by his sacrifice and manliness against Wyatt. This allows Chase to notice that Emily has very pretty eyes.

## Leadership offer

An offer of leadership is made to Chase from the ninjas who have now kicked Wyatt out of the leadership spot, and is symbolic of Chase's honor and reputation. The ninjas know that Wyatt has been giving them a bad name and leading them down a bad path. As such, they seek new leadership from someone who has clearly exhibited honor and goodness, and such a person is Chase. Chase ultimately decides to accept the offer of leadership.



# Settings

## Buchanan School

The Buchanan School is the new school to which Chase goes after he and his family move across town. Chase knows only one kid at the Buchanan School, and that is Zoe, his cousin. The Buchanan School is a relatively friendly place, wherein Zoe goes out of her way to make sure Chase fits in by introducing him around to people like Brayden, as well as warning him to stay away from unfriendly people like Wyatt. Chase is especially excited to learn that Buchanan has its own ninjas clan, and so he endeavors to join the ninjas.

## The track

The track is located outside of school beside the woods. During gym class, students are allowed to take laps around the track. During this time, Chase and Zoe do a lot of talking with each other and with kids like Brayden. It is during this time that Zoe is able to introduce Chase to other kids, and to tell him more about Buchanan. It is while walking the track that Chase and Zoe see ninja eyes staring at them from the woods.

## The woods

The woods are located alongside the track at Buchanan School. The woods are the secret meeting place of the ninjas. It is from the woods that the ninjas watch Chase and Zoe, and it is later in the woods that the ninjas kidnap Brayden, releasing him only on condition of silence. It is in the woods that Chase and Zoe are invited to join the ninjas, and are assigned the tasks of eating four leaf clovers and stealing Emily's purse. It is in the woods that Zoe refuses to compromise her morals any more, and quits the ninjas.

## The cafeteria

The cafeteria is located in Buchanan School. It is where the students who attend Buchanan eat lunch. It is to the cafeteria to seek out Brayden's help that Chase goes when Wyatt orders him to bring Zoe's backpack to the front offices to frame Zoe. It is in the cafeteria that Brayden agrees to help Chase protect - rather than frame - Zoe, all in order to get back at the ninjas and because Brayden knows Chase is, at heart, a good kid.

## The hallway

The hallway between the cafeteria and the main office is where Chase and Wyatt have their showdown. Wyatt confronts Chase over Chase's refusal to frame Zoe and ends up



attacking Chase. A large group of students and teachers gather as Mr. Cooper intervenes to stop Wyatt from attacking Chase. It is in the hall that every student except Wyatt takes the blame for the theft of the money, leading Mr. Cooper to realize that Wyatt is the one responsible. It is then in the hall that Chase and Zoe make up, and Emily tends to some of Chase's injuries with a tissue.



# Themes and Motifs

## Ninjas are not all bad

Ninjas are not all bad, argues Marcus Emerson in his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*. Early in the novel, Chase runs down what most people think about ninjas: that they are bad, that they are sneaky, and that they do harm to others. Chase explains that this is not necessarily true. This could easily be expanded to a broader idea that not all stereotypes are correct, with ninjas just being one example.

As the novel gets underway, all of the evidence seems to point to the idea that ninjas are bad. The ninjas under Wyatt force Chase and Zoe to steal a purse and to eat four-leaf clovers. They kidnap Brayden and refuse to let him go until Chase, Zoe, and Brayden agree not to say anything to anyone about the ninjas. When Zoe refuses to stay with the ninjas, Wyatt and the ninjas try to ruin her by stealing the food drive money, putting it in her bookbag, and getting Chase to bring the bookbag to the office.

Brayden himself tells Chase that ninjas in general are not necessarily bad, but the ninjas at Buchanan School are indeed bad. Chase does not believe this at first, saying that his research online demonstrates that most ninjas are good, learning their skills because they are often outnumbered. Chase goes on to explain that a few rotten apples have spoiled the barrel, and that a few bad ninjas does not mean all ninjas are bad.

When Mr. Cooper catches Wyatt attacking Chase, Wyatt is punished. The ninjas no longer want Wyatt as their leader. They realize that Wyatt is power hungry, and they say they need a new leader. They hope Chase will be their new leader because Chase is a good kid, has good morals, and is a natural leader by way of his display of honor in refusing to fight Wyatt. Chase ultimately decides to become the new leader, suggesting that the Buchanan ninjas under Chase will become good.

## Family is more important than anything

Family is more important than anything, argues Marcus Emerson in his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*. When Chase and his family move across town, and when Chase begins attending Buchanan School, Chase's only friend at school is Zoe, his cousin. Their family relation to one another proves very important to one another through the course of the novel, not only as a matter of family importance, but also surrounding the ninja events.

As the novel begins, Zoe goes out of her way to welcome Chase to Buchanan School, and to introduce him to other kids. This is not only because Zoe is a genuinely nice kid, but because she has great respect for family and how important it is. Zoe ensures that she spends time with Chase as he adjusts to school, spending time with him even over her friends to make sure he is settling in well. Zoe decides to try joining the ninjas as



well only because Chase is interested in doing so, and she does not want Chase to be alone.

Things turn bad, however, when the ninjas demand that Chase and Zoe steal Emily's purse. Zoe ends up quitting over the situation. But rather than sticking by his cousin, Chase betrays her by refusing to quit the ninjas. Zoe is heartbroken over this, and refuses to speak to Chase until the food drive money goes missing. By that point, Chase has realized his mistake, and both Chase and Zoe suspect the ninjas of stealing the money.

As it turns out, the ninjas have stolen the money and are going to use it to frame Zoe in revenge for Zoe quitting the clan. By then, Chase has had enough, and refuses to follow through with the plan. He knows how important family is, and knows how Zoe has gone out of her way for him only to have him betray her. He regrets his decisions and will not continue down that path. He instead defends Zoe by refusing to go along with the ninja plans, and even gets beaten up over it. Chase's defense of Zoe, however, brings both cousins together again and foils the ninja's clan's plans.

## **One should be kind to everyone**

One should be kind to everyone, argues Marcus Emerson in his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*. Kindness is never an overrated thing and can easily make a big difference in someone's life. In the novel, kindness is an important thing in terms of both family and friendship, as well as simple human respect for others.

When Chase comes to Buchanan School, his cousin Zoe helps him adjust and settle in. This is not only because she is family, but also because she is very kind. She introduces Chase around, points things out, and helps him to feel welcome. She joins the ninjas with Chase to make him feel more comfortable, and until her morals are compromised by stealing, is willing to go along with the ninja tasks.

As Zoe shows Chase around, Chase and the reader both become aware of how kind she actually is. She is friendly toward Brayden, listening to his talk about werewolves and engaging him in conversation about werewolves, even though she has zero interest in them. She also attempts to make friends with Wyatt the year before, even though Wyatt has no interest in being friends. Zoe's kindness rubs off on Chase, who begins to take real steps towards actual friendship with Brayden.

Brayden, despite Chase's association with the ninjas, remains friendly with, and kind to Chase. Brayden is even willing to help Chase try to save Zoe by returning the money to the donation box before anyone can notice them sneaking it back. Chase's own decision to defend Zoe against Wyatt, and to take the blame for the stolen money to protect Zoe, is not just a question of family, but of actual human kindness. Because of this, Zoe forgives Chase, and Wyatt is ultimately caught by Mr. Cooper.





## Honor is very important

Honor – a sense of pride, reputation, and self-understanding as a way of having done the right thing – is essential not only to ninjas, but to people in general, argues Marcus Emerson in his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*. In the novel, honor is something that Chase and the ninjas find, but which Zoe already has.

When Chase finds out it is possible to join the ninja clan, all Chase wants is to join the clan. He is willing to do whatever is required to join, including compromising his own morals. Zoe temporarily compromises her own morals for Chase out of honoring family, but later decides her own honor and morality are not worth the price of family loyalty.

While Chase is willing to steal, Zoe cannot abide by it. When she, Emily, and the other girls come across Chase, Wyatt, Brayden, and the ninjas, Zoe's honor comes shining through when she confesses the truth behind the purse stealing to Emily. Emily is very forgiving, recognizing the honor that Zoe has had in telling her the truth. Chase also comes to realize his sense of honor, his reputation, and his family's honor are at stake in the food drive money stealing scheme, and so is willing to risk his own honor to protect Zoe's. In so doing, he secures his own honor.

The ninjas under Wyatt have lost their sense of honor. Wyatt is unkind and power-hungry. He is only interested in helping himself and hurting others who get in his way. When Wyatt is caught by Mr. Cooper, and when Chase demonstrates his own honor by standing up to Wyatt and refusing to fight him, the ninjas realize their own honor has been compromised. As such, they ask someone truly honorable, like Chase, to lead them. As the novel ends, Chase decides to do just that.

## People must stand up for what they believe in

People must stand up for what they believe in, argues Marcus Emerson in his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*. Life is full of moral challenges, and how people respond to them defines who they are. There are a few major moral challenges in the novel, and how Chase and Zoe respond to them defines who they are as people.

When Chase and Zoe consider joining the ninja clan, they are told they must steal Emily's purse for a test. Zoe is unhappy with the task, but agrees to do it out of a sense of loyalty to family. However, when the ninjas dump Emily's purse contents on the ground just because they can, Emily has had enough. She quits the ninjas, knowing that what the ninjas are doing is wrong, and standing up for the good that she believes in.

When Chase is tasked with delivering Zoe's bookbag to the front office while telling the secretaries he found the bookbag in a bush, Chase becomes suspicious. He learns the bookbag is full of the stolen food drive money. Because he knows Zoe will get in trouble, Chase decides to stand up for what he believes in by refusing to bring the bookbag to the office.



When Wyatt comes after Chase over Chase's refusal to bring the bookbag into the office, Chase stands up for what he believes in by confronting Wyatt. Chase refuses to fight Wyatt so that Wyatt will be revealed as the cruel bully that he is, and because Chase wants to protect Zoe and her reputation. By standing up for what he believes in, Chase manages to have Wyatt caught by Mr. Cooper. He also manages to avoid blame being placed on Zoe.

# Styles

## Point of View

Marcus Emerson tells his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja* in the first-person reflective narrative mode from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, Chase Cooper. Early in the novel, Chase makes it plain that the reader is now reading his personal chronicle of his first days at Buchanan and how he became a ninja. Chase himself explains he is reflecting on the past so that others might read it and not have history repeat itself. It is therefore only natural that Chase recount the events of his own past in the first-person, for the events not only take the form of a diary chronicle, but because the events being related happened to Chase himself. There is no one better to tell a firsthand account than the person who experienced the events of that firsthand account. In this case, that person is Chase.

## Language and Meaning

Marcus Emerson tells his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja* in language that is simple, reflective, and sarcastic. This is done for a few different reasons. The simple and sarcastic language is reflective of the fact that Chase is only 11, and has only just begun sixth grade. As an average sixth grader, his language is not very fancy or full of many large words. It is, however, full of sarcastic asides. For example, when Chase meets Brayden, Brayden's break-the-ice humor on page 13 compels Chase to think, "Smart one, this kid." Or consider the sarcasm on page 15, when Chase learns that Brayden hunts werewolves: "Yeah, this kid was cool." The reflective language comes as a result of Chase noting early on in the novel that the novel itself is actually a chronicled account of events that happened to him in the past, and that he will not draw upon to tell. For example, on the page 2, Chase makes this clear: "So this is my story – my diary... er, my chronicle. I feel as though it has to be told for others to read so they can learn about the events at Buchanan School. History has to be studied and learned from or else it is destined to repeat itself. And that's something I cannot allow."

## Structure

Marcus Emerson divides his novel *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja* into 11 chapters, with the first being untitled and the succeeding chapters being given titles based on the day, time of day, and location at which the events of that chapter take place. This is done because the novel itself is to take the form of a chronicle, or diary, of the events that occurred to Chase his first several days at Buchanan School. (He explicitly reveals the book to be a diary on page 2.) The chapters are thus made to look like diary entries.

The first chapter, untitled and undated, serves primarily as an introduction, while the succeeding ten chapters/entries form the core of the novel and Chase's experiences. The chapters themselves are interspersed with black-and-white illustrations that depict

the events of the chapters. For example, page 22 of the chapter "Tuesday. 10:30 AM. Gym class" contains an illustration of the ninjas that surround Chase and Zoe.



## Quotes

Oh, the life of being a ninja... I'm not gonna lie to you – it's an absolutely fantastic life. But it wasn't always that way. This might surprise you, but ninjas are often seen as the bad guys. I know, right? I had no idea either until I became one.

-- Chase Cooper (Untitled chapter)

**Importance:** When the novel begins, Chase reveals some very important things in the first few lines. First, he is a ninja. Second, his life as a ninja is fantastic. Third, his life as a ninja has not always been fantastic because many people think of ninjas as the bad guys. This has made things rough for Chase, because Chase is a good kid.

So this is my story – my diary... er, my chronicle. I feel as though it has to be told for others to read so they can learn about the events at Buchanan School. History has to be studied and learned from or else it's destined to repeat itself. And that's something I cannot allow.

-- Chase Cooper (Untitled chapter)

**Importance:** As Chase continues his introduction to the reader, he explains that what readers are about to read is his chronicle of events that happened at school. This means that the novel takes the form of a personal account of what occurred, and what led Chase to write about it. He explains, vaguely (though the details become much clearer later on) that he has written this chronicle as a way to prevent history from repeating itself, meaning the history about to be related is bad.

Little did I know that it was the first time I'd ever seen a ninja.

-- Chase Cooper (Untitled chapter)

**Importance:** On the first day of school, Chase and Zoe see a pair of eyes in the brush in the treeline. While Zoe believes she has seen some kind of dangerous creature, Chase does not believe he has seen a monster. He does not learn until later he has seen a ninja, and does not learn until later what kind of an impact this will have on his own life.

We've taken your friend prisoner because he got too close to our operation. We've revealed ourselves to you because there was a possibility you'd seek help from Mr. Cooper. We've come too far as a clan and can't let it all fizzle out because of a tattle tale.

-- Lead ninja (Wyatt) (Tuesday. 10:30 AM. Gym class.)

**Importance:** While investigating the woods for the eyes seen by Chase and Zoe, Brayden is kidnapped by ninja kids. The lead ninja who speaks to Chase and Zoe explains that Brayden will be released on the condition that none of them say anything about what they have seen. Chase and Zoe agree. The encounter opens up a mystery for Chase, Zoe, and Brayden. Who the ninjas are, and what their operation is, are a mystery that must be solved.



You've been invited to join our clan.

-- Small ninja (Wednesday. 10:40 AM. Gym class)

**Importance:** When Chase and Zoe are invited to the woods by the ninjas, they are also invited to join the ninja clan. Chase immediately agrees to join, but Zoe only joins so long as no one knows she is in the clan. She is friendly towards all kids, but values her reputation. However, why Chase and Zoe have been invited to join is not yet known.

Real ninjas weren't bad guys by default, but the ninjas you're talking about joining...are.

-- Brayden (Thursday. 7:45 AM. Homeroom.)

**Importance:** When Brayden discovers Chase and Zoe are set to join the ninja clan, he is worried. Brayden explains that ninjas in general were not bad guys, but that the ninja clan in the woods in particular is a bad clan. Although more details are not provided immediately, Brayden's warning throws Chase and Zoe off.

I'm out. This is making me feel like throwing up.

-- Zoe (Thursday. 10:35 AM. Gym class.)

**Importance:** Chase and Zoe are assigned the task of stealing Emily's purse to prove their loyalty after they are accepted into the ninja clan. When Wyatt dumps out the purse just because he can, stating he can do whatever he wants with what he steals, Zoe has had enough. She is sick to her stomach by the act of stealing, but stealing without a real reason is even worse. As a result, she quits the clan.

It's gone.

-- Brayden (Friday. 9:30 AM. Art class.)

**Importance:** The morning after the incident with Emily's purse, Chase learns from Brayden that the money for the food drive has been stolen. Chase is sickened by the thought, already beginning to suspect the ninja clan may be responsible. Chase already feels bad enough about Emily's purse, but now he must figure out what has happened to the money.

Zoe was my cousin, and even though she hurt my feelings, she was still family. I've already betrayed her once, and I didn't want to do it again.

-- Chase Cooper (Friday. 11:25 AM. Between gym class and lunch.)

**Importance:** When Chase is assigned to carry Zoe's bookbag to the main office and tell everyone he found it under a bush, he is worried because the ninjas warn him not to open the bag or that he will face the same fate of vengeance as Zoe. Chase has already betrayed Zoe once over Emily's purse and refusing to quit the ninjas when Zoe did, so he worries about betraying her again. Family is important to Chase, and he cannot betray Zoe a second time.

This was bad. Not just bad, but epic bad. Like 'end of the world' bad.

-- Chase Cooper (Friday. 11:25 AM. Between gym class and lunch.)



**Importance:** As Chase carries Zoe's backpack toward the office, he realizes it is very heavy. Opening it up to see what is inside, cash and change spill out along with a note describing the money as the food drive donations. Chase is stunned. He knows he cannot bring the bag to the office, but now wonders what to do.

Somehow in this moment, I had become the bigger man. By refusing to fight back, I was taking a stand of my own.

-- Chase Cooper (Friday. 11:45 AM. In the hallway during lunch.)

**Importance:** When Wyatt and his ninja friends confront Chase as he is attempting to return the bag, Zoe and her friends also confront Chase. The truth comes out about Emily's purse, after which Chase throws the bag full of money at Wyatt, causing Wyatt to attack him. Chase refuses to fight back, and becomes the better person in a bad situation because if Chase gets caught with the bag, Wyatt wins.

My name is Chase Cooper, and I'm a ninja.

-- Chase Cooper (Friday. 11:45 AM. In the hallway during lunch.)

**Importance:** As the novel ends, Wyatt is apprehended by Mr. Cooper and Chase is cleared of any wrongdoing. The ninjas, unhappy with Wyatt's leadership, ask Chase to be their new leader. They are preparing for a pirate invasion, and need a new, good leader. Chase ultimately decides to lead them, and declares as the novel closes that he is now a ninja.