

Hidden Talents Study Guide

Hidden Talents by David Lubar

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Plot Summary

Hidden Talents is the debut young adult novel by writer David Lubar. In this novel, Martin Anderson arrives at Edgeview Alternative School where he has been sent because he has been thrown out of multiple schools in his home district. Martin immediately makes friends with a group of misfits, each of whom has had discipline problems for reasons they do not fully understand. Martin soon realizes that each of his friends has a special talent that they are unaware of. With Martin's help, each student will learn how to control his talent. Hidden Talents is a novel of bullies, of misfits, and of growing up that will both entertain and inspire its readers.

Martin Anderson arrives at Edgeview Alternative School on a Sunday afternoon after a long bus ride. Martin is unhappy that he has been forced to come to this school and even more saddened that his father seemed almost relieved to be rid of him. Martin meets his new principal, Mr. Davis, and immediately offends him by making comments he cannot seem to control. This has always been Martin's problem with authority figures.

As Mr. Davis leads Martin to his room, someone announces that there is a fire. As Martin watches, the science teacher comes to put out the fire and tries to turn it into a science lesson. Then Mr. Davis introduces Martin to his new roommate, the fire starter himself, Torchie. Martin tries to be nice to Torchie as Torchie kindly gives him a tour of the school, but Martin is unhappy in his new situation and does not care about the rules or anything else.

The first day of classes, Martin runs into the school bully, Bloodbath. Then, as he makes his way from class to class, Martin finds it difficult to control his tongue and ends up saying something offensive to almost all of his teachers. Despite this, Martin finds himself accepted into a group of misfits that includes Torchie, Cheater, Flinch, and Lucky.

As the days pass, Martin falls into a routine. Then, when Torchie convinces the others they can trust him, Martin is invited to join the group on their weekly escape into town. The boys go to a local arcade where Lucky provides quarters he swears he did not steal. Martin finds himself watching his new friends, especially Flinch, and an idea begins to form in Martin's mind. The next day at school, Martin does some research in the school library.

That night, Martin confronts his new friends and tells them what he believes he has discovered. Martin thinks that Flinch is precognizant, that Cheater can read minds, and Torchie is telepyric. Martin tries to explain to each boy why he believes this is true, but they become angry and refuse to listen. The following day, all the boys ignore Martin, pushing him out of their small group. Hence, Martin begins sitting with Trash at lunch, a boy who is something of a loner because things tend to go flying around him. As Martin watches him one day, he sees his fork fly off his tray without Trash ever touching it. It is then that Martin realizes that Trash has a talent as well, that he is telepathic.



When Martin finally convinces his friends of the truth, he also convinces them to take Trash into their group. Martin then begins to help each boy learn how to control his hidden talent. When the boys learn that the school is about to be inspected and might close, they decide to use their talents to help the school pass inspection despite Bloodbath's intent to blow the inspection. The boys are successful in their attempts to stop Bloodbath. However, they learn that the inspectors want to speak to a single student about the school and they have chosen Martin. Afraid that he will not be able to control his mouth, the other boys tell Martin that he has a secret talent as well. The boys tell Martin that he has a way of knowing a person's secret weaknesses and desires. Martin recognizes this gift for the first time and uses it to keep his tongue under control.

The school passes inspection and several changes are implemented on Martin's suggestions. Martin is soon allowed to go home. Martin keeps in touch with his friends, who also are controlling their talents well enough that they may be allowed to go home soon as well.



Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Chapters 1-6

Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Chapters 1-6 Summary

In Chapter 1, riding as the only passenger on a bus to Edgeview Alternative School, Martin Anderson is reminded of a prison movie. Martin is intimidated by the large bus driver, so he behaves himself on the ride, but cannot resist a rude parting comment as he gets off. The principal of Edgeview, Mr. Davis, introduces himself to Martin and leads him into the school. As Mr. Davis gives Martin a brief overview of the purpose of the school, Martin finds himself unable to control his tongue until someone yells fire.

In Chapter 2, Martin follows Mr. Davis to a room at the end of the hall where some papers on a desk are burning. Another adult comes running with a fire extinguisher. To Martin's surprise, this other adult asks the students what lesson they have learned from what they have just witnessed. When the commotion dies down, Mr. Davis tells Martin this will be his room and introduces him to his roommate, Phillip, who is known as Torchie by the other students. Torchie repeatedly denies having done anything despite the evidence to the contrary. To silence him, Martin asks for a tour of the school.

In Chapter 3, Torchie walks Martin around the school, showing him the classrooms and the other dorm rooms. Torchie also describes some of the other students, including the bully Bloodbath and his companion, Lip. Shortly after describing him to Martin, Bloodbath himself shows up.

In Chapter 4, Bloodbath explains his rules to Martin, including the fact that everyone gives Bloodbath anything they receive from home. Martin agrees to each rule. Then Bloodbath has Lip hit Martin, but Lip is too small to do much. Bloodbath then gives Lip a lesson in punching by punching Martin in the stomach. As soon as Bloodbath and Lip leave, Torchie returns to escort Martin back to their room.

In Chapter 5, Martin meets Cheater, another student, when he comes to return a magazine to Torchie. Cheater insists that he never cheats and that he is very smart, proving himself by making Martin ask him difficult trivia questions. At dinner, Martin sits with Cheater and Torchie along with another kid known as Flinch. Martin finds the food inedible and the other students typical.

In Chapter 6, Martin asks Cheater and Torchie about a boy he sees sitting alone at dinner. They tell him he is Trash, a young man who has a habit of throwing things. Afterwards, Cheater begins to tell Martin something about what they do on Fridays, but Flinch cuts him off.



Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Chapters 1-6 Analysis

The early chapters of this novel introduce the main characters of the novel. Martin Anderson is a typical eighth grader. However, he has a tendency to say the wrong thing to authority figures or just anyone who makes him feel uncomfortable or unsafe. This has caused Martin to have difficulty in his previous schools and to have difficulties with his parents. Martin has been thrown out of so many schools that his only choice now is to try to make it in this alternative school where children with discipline problems are sent.

Martin meets several of the kids at his new school his first day there. Torchie is a young man who often starts fires, causing a great amount of chaos and damage. This is why Torchie is at Edgeview, although he swears that he never does anything. Cheater is so called because he is at Edgeview because he has been accused of cheating on most of his work in all the schools he has ever been to. Cheater, however, swears he has never cheated and that he is actually very smart. Then there is Bloodbath, the typical bully who begins torturing Martin on his first night there.

Martin is unhappy with this school and the other students, but he tries to make the best of it by trying to make friends with other outcasts like himself. This leads the reader to understand that something special brings these kids together.



Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Chapters 7-13

Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Chapters 7-13 Summary

In Chapter 7, after waking to the smoldering ruins of his Edgeview handbook in the trash, Martin attends his first classes at Edgeview with Torchie. Mr. Parsons, the math teacher, tries to get Martin to tell the class something about himself. Martin becomes annoyed and makes a rude comment about Mr. Parsons' lack of hair. Later, when papers are handed out, Cheater becomes annoyed by his failing grade.

In Chapter 8, on his way to English class, Martin is punched in the shoulder by Bloodbath. In English, Martin meets Miss Nomad, a young teacher who is very enthusiastic. Miss Nomad tells the class that anyone can be a writer, but Martin disagrees because he has an uncle who writes very bad novels. When Miss Nomad pushes the subject, Martin offends her by making comments about how some people should not write. Martin later learns that Miss Nomad is a poet want-to-be.

In Chapter 9, in gym, Mr. Acropolis has the students meditate for the majority of the class period. Afterward they play dodge ball. Martin finds it amazing that Flinch seems capable of moving out of the way of the ball at every step.

In Chapter 10, the science teacher, Mr. Briggs, is the same adult Martin saw put out the fire the day before. Mr. Briggs has the students sit on a rug instead of in desks. After class, Mr. Briggs tries to talk to Martin about his discipline problems, but Martin again reverts to his defense mechanism, his smart mouth. Mr. Briggs does not become angry and Martin wants to apologize, but Mr. Briggs is staring out the window thoughtfully, so Martin does not disturb him.

In Chapter 11, in history class, Martin discovers the teacher, Ms. Crenshaw, is big on role playing. Martin makes a hurtful comment as he takes the wig he is to wear, nearly getting himself kicked out of the class. At the end of the day, after offending most of his teachers with his smart mouth, Martin learns that in a month it will be those teachers who decide if Martin can leave Edgeview or be forced to remain there until he is eligible to transfer to an alternative high school.

In Chapter 12, Martin finds his geography teacher loud and annoying. Martin makes a rude comment to him, causing the teacher to become very angry. Afterward, Martin runs into Mr. Briggs who tries to assure Martin that he is there to help.

In Chapter 13, Martin introduces himself to Trash after nearly getting hit in the head by Trash's flying math book. Martin then goes to his room and overhears Torchie talking to Lucky about him. Martin makes noise so they know he is there and pretends he did not



hear anything. Mr. Davis comes for Torchie and Martin later learns that he made Torchie light a bunch of fires in an attempt to keep him from doing it on his own.

Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Chapters 7-13 Analysis

With his smart mouth, Martin manages to offend or alienate most of his teachers. Ironically, most of what Martin says about his teachers is right on the mark, as revealed in little notes or writings at the end of most of the chapters. Somehow Martin knows exactly what to say to hurt these people without really knowing much about them.

As the day progresses, Martin learns more about his new friends as well. Cheater is clearly frustrated with his teachers' conviction that he cheats on all his work despite his insistence that the work is his own. At the same time, fires continue to break out around Torchie despite his insistence that he does not light them. Trash is a boy outside of Torchie's group who throws things without warning. Martin finds Trash interesting, but is afraid of getting hurt when he is around him because of his penchant for throwing things at people.

Martin learns that after a month he will be evaluated and a decision will be made about his future. Martin worries about this because he knows he has already alienated most of his teachers and the principal. Things do not appear to bode well for Martin.



Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Chapters 14-19

Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Chapters 14-19 Summary

In Chapter 14, after the first three weeks, Martin falls into the routine of the school fairly easily. He finds the shifting teaching styles of the teachers interesting. Martin makes a point of trying to be invisible in class, afraid that if the teachers call on him too often he will again insult them. After saving Cheater from Bloodbath, Torchie and his friends invite Martin on their Friday night excursion, which turns out to be a trip into town.

In Chapter 15, Torchie tells Martin how Lucky found a pipe that leads out of the school grounds. The boys sneak out with a ladder outside Lucky's window. Halfway to town, Martin realizes he has no money for the arcade, so Lucky gives him a handful of quarters.

In Chapter 16, while at the arcade, Martin finds himself watching Flinch play pinball and begins to see something that he might not have noticed if Torchie was not playing right next to Flinch. Back at the school, Lucky shows Martin all the things he has found recently. At Lucky's urging, Martin takes a hairclip for his sister. The next day, Martin goes to the library to research what he believes he has realized from watching Flinch playing pinball. Martin finds it difficult, but finally finds some information on psychic abilities.

In Chapter 17, at dinner, Martin is excited by what he has discovered, but he decides to test his theory first. Martin purposely spills his milk to see what Flinch will do. As he suspected, Flinch stands before Martin spills the milk, avoiding the spill. Back in his and Torchie's room, Martin tells Flinch that he thinks he is precognizant. Martin then tells Cheater that he can read minds and Torchie that he is telepyric. The boys become angry and tell Martin he is wrong.

In Chapter 18, Cheater denies that he read Martin's mind when he was thinking of a number, even though he said the number Martin was thinking. After Cheater and Flinch leave, Martin becomes annoyed with Torchie and says something hurtful. He immediately apologizes. Torchie begins to ignore Martin, so he leaves the room.

In Chapter 19, Martin runs into Bloodbath and his friends in the hallway. Bloodbath asks for money for Martin to pass, but Martin denies having any, so Bloodbath and his friends empty Martin's pockets. They take three quarters Martin has left from Lucky's handful and nearly see the ticket that reveals that Martin has gone to the local arcade.

Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Chapters 14-19 Analysis

As Martin adjusts to the school, he begins to see unusual things about his new friends. Martin realizes that Flinch can anticipate things, which makes him especially good at things like dodge ball and pinball. Martin also realizes that Cheater often knows what he



is thinking even if he clearly is not following Martin's words closely. Martin also has begun to realize that he has never actually seen Torchie light a fire even though fires often ignite around him.

Martin does some research and learns the names of the psychic abilities his friends appear to have. Martin thinks his friends will be happy to learn the truth about their abilities and that it will help them to learn to control them and their behaviors. Instead, Martin's friends are angry with him for suggesting such a thing and refuse to even consider the truth of Martin's revelations.



Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Chapters 20-26

Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Chapters 20-26 Summary

In Chapter 20, the next day, Torchie and the others ignore Martin. For this reason, Martin gets into a war of words with each of his teachers. At lunch, Martin sits with Trash. In his afternoon classes, Martin again gets into arguments with his teachers. During detention, Mr. Davis comes to get Martin.

In Chapter 21, Mr. Davis hooks Martin up to an odd machine and makes him look at a succession of pictures. Mr. Davis tells Martin to say whatever comes to mind when he sees each picture. Martin assumes he will be punished in some way for saying something bad, so he only says good things. However, curiosity overcomes him and Martin says something bad about a picture of a teacher and receives a shock. Mr. Davis then tells Martin that they held his evaluation early and determined he should remain in the alternative school. At lunch the following day, Martin again sits with Trash and sees his fork move without Trash ever touching it.

In Chapter 22, Martin knows then that Trash is telekinetic, but he does not tell him in fear that Trash will become angry with him as well. Martin begins making a list of the kids with special talents. Mr. Briggs comes up and asks Martin what he is doing, but Martin hides the truth. Later, in science class, Mr. Briggs challenges the students to come up with an experiment they can do in class.

In Chapter 23, Cheater suggests they run an experiment to test mind reading. Mr. Briggs agrees and assigns everyone the task of finding a method of doing so. Later, Martin begins observing all his classmates to identify anyone else with psychic talents. That Friday, Martin apologizes to Torchie again and gives him a gift to try to make amends.

In Chapter 24, Martin gives Torchie a harmonica that he loves. That weekend, the others seem to forgive Martin as well. In science the following Monday, the class discusses ways to test for mind reading. They decide to use Zenner cards that they will make themselves.

In Chapter 25, on Tuesday, the science class makes the Zenner cards. On Wednesday and Thursday, they run three tests each as both tester and subject. On Friday they go over the results and discover that several students cheated because they could see the cards in one of the tester's glasses. Bloodbath also cheated when he worked with his buddies. After throwing out those results, the class determines that due to the fact that most everyone got the average five correct, that no one in the class is able to read minds. However, something about the testing catches Martin's attention and he prints out the results to show his friends.



In Chapter 26, Martin shows his friends proof that Cheater can read minds. Cheater did not get a single answer correct during his tests, proving that he knew what the true answer was and he cheated to avoid proving the truth. This causes all the others to finally believe Martin. Martin then invites Trash to join their group.

Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Chapters 20-26 Analysis

Martin's friends are angry with him for saying they have special psychic abilities. Martin does not understand this and is angry too. Martin takes out his frustration on his teachers, saying things that are inappropriate and mean. Only Mr. Briggs seems to understand Martin and care about him. All the other teachers have voted to make Martin stay in the school until he is ready to matriculate into high school.

As Martin continues to observe his friends and learn more about their psychic powers, he identifies Trash's secret talent as well. Then Martin is helped in his quest to find proof when Mr. Briggs allows the class to run an experiment looking for mind readers. Martin finally has the proof he needs when Cheater does not get a single card correct in the test, an impossibility since he should have been right at least a small percentage of the time. This causes the boys to all realize that Martin is right about his claims. Martin finally gets his friends back and convinces them of their magic abilities.



Part 3, Powers: Chapters 27-32

Part 3, Powers: Chapters 27-32 Summary

In Chapter 27, over the next few days the boys meet often in Torchie and Martin's room. Trash makes it exciting because things tend to go flying with him around. One day Martin suggests that they all need to learn to control their gifts.

In Chapter 28, Martin encourages Torchie to make fires in an attempt to figure out how he does it so that he might control it. Martin also tells Cheater he should rephrase his answers to tests to keep from writing what someone near him might be writing. Martin then throws punches at Flinch, trying to teach him to react slower so that he does not appear so fidgety.

In Chapter 29, Martin encourages Trash to begin moving things on purpose, hoping that if he does it intentionally it will not happen accidentally as often.

In Chapter 30, in detention a few days later, Miss Nomad is cleaning out her files and drops one on the floor. When Martin picks it up, he sees several memos that tell him that the school is about to come under inspection by the school board. Martin tells his friends the school might be in danger of closing. The boys, however, are distracted by news of a pinball tournament that weekend. The boys attend and Trash takes first, Flinch second, and Martin third. As they walk home, a group of local boys warn them not to come back. Then they follow them and Cheater can hear them thinking about beating them up. The boys turn and make a stand, using some of their gifts to frighten the boys away. However, when they return to the school, they find Bloodbath waiting for them at the top of the ladder.

In Chapter 31, Flinch tries to get off the ladder as he can see that Bloodbath is going to break the stick holding it in place and cause him to fall, but he is not quick enough. Flinch falls hard. The boys manage to get him into the school and Martin tells Mr. Briggs that he fell down the stairs. Later, the boys decide they must get back at Bloodbath for this.

In Chapter 32, while waiting outside Mr. Davis' office, Martin overhears a conversation in which Mr. Davis tells Mr. Langhorn that the inspection has been moved up. Martin also knows that Bloodbath has overheard and plans to do something to cause the school to fail. Martin convinces his friends that they have to help the school pass.

Part 3, Powers: Chapters 27-32 Analysis

In these chapters, Martin manages to help his friends learn how to better control their hidden talents in order to help them fit in better with other kids and to help them get along better with the authority figures in their lives. However, Martin feels left out because he does not have a power that makes him like his new friends.



Martin and his friends go into town to play in a pinball tournament. When they win all the top prizes, the local kids become annoyed and pick a fight. When Martin and his friends win this fight, they feel good about themselves for the first time in a long time. However, Martin soon learns that this fight will lead directly to the school board doing their inspection of the school earlier than planned and possibly shutting down the school. Martin knows that this is something that Bloodbath would like to see happen, so he convinces his friends to keep it from happening.

Bloodbath has become a problem for Martin and his friends. Bloodbath has harassed each of these students since they first came to the school and now he has caused Flinch to break his arm. The boys want to get revenge on Bloodbath, therefore fighting to save the school seems like a reasonable place to start.



Part 3, Powers: Chapters 33-40 and Epilogue

Part 3, Powers: Chapters 33-40 and Epilogue Summary

In Chapter 33, Martin learns that when Lucky finds things it is because he can hear them calling to him. On the night Flinch broke his arm, Lucky found Mr. Briggs' wallet. Lucky cannot just drop it somewhere to prevent being accused of stealing, but must give it to someone to stop the voices. For this reason, he gives the wallet to Martin. Later, Mr. Davis accuses Lucky of stealing Mr. Briggs' wallet. Martin goes to Mr. Briggs and tells him that he found it the night Flinch broke his arm on the stairs. Mr. Briggs thinks Martin is not telling the whole truth, but he accepts his explanation and gets Lucky out of trouble.

In Chapter 34, one afternoon during class change, Bloodbath locks Torchie in a supply closet with Hindenburg, a child with intestinal gas problems. Torchie lights a fire that causes the supply closet door to burst open.

In Chapter 35, Martin asks Cheater to move close to Bloodbath so that he can hear what his plans are for the day of the inspection. Flinch causes a distraction and Cheater stands behind Bloodbath in the cafeteria. All that Cheater hears, however, is something about candles. Later in the day, Mr. Briggs announces the inspection set for the following day. Afterward, Mr. Briggs pulls Martin aside and tells him that Edgeview is kind of a last chance not only for the students, but most of the teachers as well.

In Chapter 36, Martin and the rest of the students see the inspectors at breakfast where they observe the school before classes. Martin asks Cheater to check in with Bloodbath again and again he gets something about candles. Lucky then finds a candle in a closet attached to some powerful firecrackers. Martin tells Torchie to put out the candles with his power since they think there are many more like the ones Lucky has already found. Torchie does and the first class goes off without a problem.

In Chapter 37, Martin and his friends watch Bloodbath closely at lunch because Cheater has heard Bloodbath thinking of a plan for lunch. Martin and his friends see Bloodbath and his friends move to different tables throughout the room and think they might be planning on starting multiple fights. However, when they stand to do so, Flinch has tied their shoes to the table legs. Then Cheater goes near the inspectors and hears that two have decided to close the school, two want to keep it open, and two are undecided. The deciding factor will be a conversation with one student. They soon learn that Martin has been chosen randomly to be that student.



In Chapter 38, Martin's friends tell Martin that he has a psychic power just like them. They tell Martin that he has an ability to know a person's deepest darkest fears and desires and it is this that has gotten him into so much trouble in the past.

In Chapter 39, when Martin goes into the principal's office and meets the inspectors, he suddenly sees the gift he has been unaware of to this point. Martin knows that he can use the gift to hurt or to manipulate. Martin decides to do neither.

In Chapter 40, Martin runs into Bloodbath in the hallway. Martin reads Bloodbath's worse fear and uses it against him by convincing him that Lip is laughing at him. Then Martin laughs at Bloodbath for believing him. Then Martin punches Bloodbath. Later, Martin tells his friends that he told the inspectors that the school was a good one, but that they could change some things such as taking bullies to another place and allowing students more than one chance to improve and go back to their district schools. It turns out that the inspectors have decided to save the school and to implement Martin's ideas, first by shipping Bloodbath and his friends off and then giving the students another chance to prove they can return to their home schools.

In the Epilogue, Martin returns home and finds his family mostly unchanged, including his father's bullying ways. Martin tries to reign in his smart mouth and use his talent as little as possible. At the same time, Martin keeps in touch with his friends from Edgeview and learns they are doing well too.

Part 3, Powers: Chapters 33-40 and Epilogue Analysis

Martin and his friends decide they must save their school even though they are not sure the school is good for them. Using their talents together, the boys manage to foil Bloodbath's attempts to sabotage the inspection. Martin then learns that he also has a talent, one that makes a lot of sense to him when he finally understands it. However, Martin does not use this talent to manipulate the inspectors, but instead uses honesty to convince them of the changes that need to be made to make the school more successful.

Martin confronts Bloodbath and for the first time uses his talent in a way that does not harm him, but in fact helps him get some revenge and to make weak a bully. Martin has gotten back at Bloodbath for all the terrible things he has done to Martin and his friends, giving some satisfaction to the reader for that subplot of the novel.

Martin is finally allowed to go home and return to his district school. However, with new understanding of his talents, Martin finds himself struggling both to not be a bully and to not use his power to manipulate people into doing what he wants from them. At the same time, Martin now recognizes his own father as a bully and tries to find ways to deal with that truth without further damaging their relationship. Martin has grown a great deal in the course of this novel and that becomes clear at the end of the novel when he talks about his own failings as a human being.



Characters

Martin Anderson

Martin Anderson is an eighth grader who has been thrown out of multiple schools because of a disrespect for authority. Martin often says hurtful and cruel things to his teachers and other people in authority at the schools. For this reason, Martin has been sent to the alternative school at Edgeview. Martin immediately becomes friends with a boy who has a problem with lighting fires and a boy who is often accused of cheating. Martin also becomes known to the teachers as a mouthy child who often finds himself sent to detention, even in this alternative school where teachers are used to bad behavior.

As Martin settles in at the school, he begins to notice odd things about the students around him. Martin is very observant and soon comes to the conclusion that some of his classmates have special psychic powers that they are not aware of. When Martin confronts these boys about the powers he thinks they have, they become angry and choose not to believe him. In the end, however, Martin is able to prove the truth.

Martin becomes something of a leader to this band of misfits. However, Martin feels left out because he does not have a psychic power himself. In the end, though, it turns out that Martin is just as oblivious to his own talents as those around him. Martin is empathic, he can sense the desires and weaknesses of the people around him. Martin knows he can use this gift for both harm and good, but chooses not to use it at all except when he can make someone feel good about themselves.

Philip 'Torchie' Grieg

Torchie is Martin's roommate. Torchie is at Edgeview because fires have a habit of appearing around him. Torchie is not even aware of the fires most of the time until they become blazes. Torchie often denies having lit the fires, but those in a position of responsibility around Martin argue that it must have been him.

As Martin gets to know Torchie and some of the other misfits at Edgeview, he becomes aware that Torchie really is not aware that he is lighting fires. In fact, Martin comes to the conclusion that Torchie is telepyric, that he can light fires with his mind. Martin encourages Torchie to gain control over this ability by purposely lighting fires so that he can learn how he does it to avoid doing it accidentally. In the end, Torchie learns that he can not only light fires, but he can extinguish them as well.

Dennis 'Cheater' Woo

Cheater is a very intelligent young man who has a head full of facts. However, Cheater has been thrown out of multiple schools because teachers believe he cheats on tests



because his answers are often identical to those of the students sitting around him. Cheater swears that he has never cheated on a test in his life, but he is continuously blamed anyway.

As Martin gets to know Cheater, he begins to understand that Cheater can read the minds of the people closest to him. By doing this without being aware, Cheater has been cheating without realizing that the answers are coming from people around him rather than from his own mind. With Martin's help, Cheater learns how to take tests in such a way that it will not appear that he is cheating. Cheater also learns how to use his gift to help in certain situations.

Dominic 'Lucky' Calabrizi

Lucky is a young man who often finds things that others have lost or left behind. Lucky has been thrown out of several schools because it is believed that he steals the items that he finds. In reality, Lucky reveals to Martin that he hears things calling to him and he must find them and keep them to silence the voices. Lucky tries not to take things that can get him in trouble, but sometimes he finds it impossible to ignore those voices.

Willis 'Flinch' Dobbs

Flinch is a young man who appears to be jumpy and unpredictable. Martin finds Flinch distracting until one day at an arcade, he realizes that Flinch is anticipating the movement of a ball while playing pinball. This causes Martin to begin researching psychic abilities and helps him put a name to what Flinch is doing. Martin realizes that Flinch is precognizant, that he knows the future seconds before it happens. This allows Flinch to move out of the way long before something hits him or a spill can land on him.

Eddie 'Trash' Thalmayer

Trash is a young man who is known for throwing things for no reason. Everyone avoids Trash because they are often hit with things that Trash throws. However, while having lunch with him one day, Martin sees his fork move when Trash has not even touched it. This leads Martin to realize that Trash is telekinetic. Trash can move things with his mind. This talent, once Martin teaches Trash to control it, comes in handy when Trash uses it to stop Bloodbath and his friends from starting a bunch of fights the day of the inspection by the school board.

Lester Bloodbath

Bloodbath is the bully of Edgeview. Bloodbath likes to torment the other students by physically torturing them. Martin becomes a victim of Bloodbath on his first day at Edgeview when Bloodbath hits him in the stomach after explaining his rules to him. Later, Bloodbath causes Flinch to break his arm when he causes the ladder Flinch is



climbing to fall. The boys in Martin's small clique decide to get back at Bloodbath after this and they stop him from ruining the inspection by the school board that could potentially shut Edgeview down. Later, Martin gets further revenge on Bloodbath by punching him before Bloodbath can hurt Martin.

Principal Davis

Principal Davis is a caring person who wants to do the best he can to help the students of Edgeview. However, Davis finds some of the students very difficult to deal with. When the school is due for inspection, Davis is aware that some of the people of the local town are unhappy with the school and he worries that they will be shut down or the students will become part of a larger alternative school where they will be lost and forgotten. Davis cares about these students and he does the best he can by them.

Mr. Briggs

Mr. Briggs is the science teacher at Edgeview. Mr. Briggs wanted to work for a chemical company or be a teacher in a more prestigious school, but his unique teaching methods and his mode of dress have caused him trouble in these areas. However, Mr. Briggs cares deeply about these students and he is the only teacher who can see past the hurtful things Martin often has to say to see the goodness in Martin. Mr. Briggs becomes a mentor to Martin without ever becoming aware of the special talents Martin and his friends share.

Miss Nomad

Miss Nomad is a young teacher who has not been teaching for long. Miss Nomad teaches English at Edgeview, one of the students favorite classes. Martin gets into a disagreement with Miss Nomad on the first day of his classes, however, when she insists that everyone can write and Martin insists that some people are simply not good writers. It turns out that Miss Nomad is a want-to-be poet.



Objects/Places

Magazines

Torchie has a lot of magazines that he often shares with his friends, making him popular to his friends.

Letter Jacket

The boy who leads a mob against Martin and his friends on the night of the pinball tournament wears a letter jacket with the name Walden on the back. This turns out to be the son of the mayor.

Rug

Mr. Briggs has a rug in his classroom for the students to sit on rather than sit in desks.

Costumes

Ms. Crenshaw uses costumes to help teach history. Ms. Crenshaw wanted to be a drama teacher.

Ticket

Martin wins a ticket playing skeet ball in the arcade. Martin saves the ticket to send as a joke to his sister, Teri.

Mr. Briggs' Wallet

Lucky finds Mr. Briggs' wallet the night Flinch breaks his arm. Lucky is afraid of being accused of stealing, so he gives it to Martin.

Encyclopedia

Martin uses the encyclopedia to find information on psychic abilities.



Zenner Cards

Martin's science classes makes and uses Zenner cards to test for an ability to read minds. These cards have five different symbols on them that a tester holds up where only he can see it and the test subject tries to read the tester's mind to say what is on it.

Shock Treatment

Principal Davis uses a type of shock treatment to try to make Martin stop speaking so cruelly to his teachers.

MondoVideo

MondoVideo is the name of the arcade where Martin and his friends sneak out to go on Friday nights.

Edgeview Alternative School

Edgeview Alternative School is a middle school designed specifically for students with discipline problems.

Edgeview

Edgeview is the town where Edgeview Alternative is located.



Themes

Bullies

One of the themes of this novel is bullies. The obvious illustration of this theme is Bloodbath, a young man at the school who likes to use his size to intimidate other students. Bloodbath often traps other students in the hallway and steals their money, or locks them in closets so that they will be late for class. Bloodbath also causes Flinch to break his arm when he causes the ladder he is climbing to fall out from under him. This is a dangerous act that could have caused Flinch's death, making Bloodbath not only a bully, but a dangerous criminal.

However, there are other bullies in the novel that are not as clear as Bloodbath. One of them is the main character himself, Martin Anderson. Martin is a bully because he uses his psychic ability to see the fears of those around him and he makes comments on them. Martin upsets most of his teachers the first day of school by making rude comments about the baldness of one teacher to the desire of another to be a drama teacher. In this way, Martin is a bully because he uses words to hurt others much the way Bloodbath uses brawn to do the same.

Another bully in this novel is Martin's father. Martin's father is an unhappy man who often takes out his frustrations on those around him, including his wife and children. It is in part because of his father's behavior that Martin has had so much trouble in school and with controlling his smart mouth. However, Martin soon learns that he can control what he says to people, as his father could. Martin knows he wants to be a better person and he tries harder where his father just continues to be a bully.

Misfits

Martin and his friends at Edgeview are a group of misfits. These young men have been accused of doing many things, from lighting fires to cheating on tests to throwing objects at people. Although Martin soon finds a reason for these behaviors, these boys continue to be misfits because they do not fit in with the discipline problems of the alternative school but they also do not fit in with students in their regular schools.

Martin has always felt somewhat alone because of his inability to control his tongue. When he arrives at Edgeview, Martin tries hard to make friends from the beginning because he does not want to become a target of bullies. By befriending the other misfits at the school, Martin becomes close to a group of boys who will change his life. Although these boys are all misfits, they find together they are strong and better than they are alone.



Psychic Ability

As the novel progresses, Martin becomes aware that the group of kids he has begun to hang out with each has a special psychic ability that they are not aware of. Torchie, who is often accused of lighting fires, is actually telepyric. Flinch, who seems jittery and uncontrolled is actually able to see seconds into the future. Cheater can read minds and Lucky can hear lost items calling to him.

Martin begins to teach these students how to control their psychic abilities. As they gain control and begin to find pride in their abilities, Martin begins to feel left out because he does not have an ability. However, Martin soon learns that he also has a talent is perhaps how he learned the other's secrets. Martin can see a person's greatest fears and desires.

Psychic abilities define these boys who have the abilities. Boys who thought they were trouble makers soon learn that they are simply misunderstood. Each boy learns how to control his abilities and soon they find that they are getting better, that they can begin to transition back to a normal school and way of life because the things that made them stand out as discipline problems is now under control. It is because of these reasons that psychic ability is a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

This novel is written in the first-person point of view. The main character, Martin Anderson, is the narrating character. Martin tells his story with the intimacy afforded a first person narration, drawing the reader in closely and sharing all his thoughts, feelings, and doubts.

The first person point of view is an intimate point of view that keeps the reader focused on the narrating character only even if some of the action of the plot takes place around another character. This point of view creates a relationship between the main character and the reader that is important to the reader's response to the plot of the novel. The author wants the reader to care what happens to the main character, therefore the first person point of view creates a relationship between reader and narrator that is deeply intimate, making the reader deeply concerned for the welfare of the main character.

Setting

The novel is set in Edgeview, a small town where the Edgeview Alternative School is located. Most of the novel takes place on the school grounds, in the classrooms, though there are a few times when the main character and his friends sneak into Edgeview in order to go to the local arcade.

The setting of this novel is important because the author brings the main character to a place that should be his last resort, but turns out to be his best hope. The alternative school is a place where students are placed when no one knows what else to do with them. For Martin, Edgeview is not only the last school that will accept him, but a refuge from a father who is something of a bully toward his difficult son. When Martin arrives, he does not expect things to be much different at Edgeview. However, when he meets Torchie, Cheater, Flinch, Lucky, and Trash, Martin realizes that each of them are special in their own way and it helps him see the good in himself.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The intended audience for the novel is young adults, therefore the novel uses a language that is less sophisticated than an adult language, but more mature than writing for a younger audience might be. The language contains little slang and no foreign words or phrases, making it simple for its intended audience.

The language of the novel is simple and uncomplicated, making it suited to the intended audience. It also remains authentic to the characters, a group of eighth grade boys who

have yet to develop a sophisticated language. For this reason, the language of the novel works well with the plot of the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into more than thirty chapters among three parts. Each chapter is fairly short, some of them only a paragraph or two long. The novel also includes excerpts from reports, memos, business letters, and school essays. The novel is told with narration and dialogue, creating a story that easily visualized as the reader moves through the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Martin as he struggles with his unhappy situation in an alternative school rather than being at home with his sister. One subplot follows martin as he fights off the school bully on several occasions. Another subplot follows Martin as he figures out that all his friends at the alternative school appear to have some kind of special psychic powers. Yet another subplot deals with Martin's realization that he too is special. All the plots of the novel come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.

Quotes

"All I needed was handcuffs. If my wrists had been chained to the seat, the scene could have been taken straight from one of those movies where they show the bus bringing the new guy to the prison" (Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Off the Bus and Into Trouble, p. 3).

"I imagined dozens of kids locked in dungeons, dangling from chains while a huge, sweaty guy wearing a leather apron heated up torture tools" (Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: Taking the Tour, p. 16).

"By the time I'd choked down half the macaroni, I had the whole place figured out. Except for one person" (Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: What's Short and Smart and Fun to Tease, pg. 30).

"On the other hand, it's amazing what adults can do when they set their minds to it" (Part 1, Welcome to Edgeview: A Little More Class, p. 47).

"If my arrival at Edgeview reminded me of a prison movie, the start of my stay reminded me of endless television reruns" (Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Settling In, p. 77).

"Why didn't he believe me? It was so obvious. I thought about all the time I'd spent in the library. Couldn't they see I was trying to help them out" (Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Believe Me Alone, p. 99).

"He smiled at me. It was one of the scariest expressions I'd ever seen" (Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Now You See Me, Now You Don't, p. 108).

"As it turned out, the one absolute thing the experiment proved was that I couldn't see into the future" (Part 2, Seeing the Truth: Pick a Card, Any Card, p. 124).

"But how could I tell them what to do when I didn't even know what it was like to have special powers. That would be like a cat trying to teach a dog to bark" (Part 3, Powers: Burning Questions, p. 147).

"In prison movies, they talk about the long walk—that's the one-way stroll a guy takes from his cell to the electric chair. I was taking a long walk from the lunchroom to the principal's office" (Part 3, Powers: Meeting, p. 203).

"Rage guided me. I shot out my own right fist. It connected straight with Bloodbath's jaw. I don't know which of us was more surprised" (Part 3, Powers: Showdown, p. 208).

"I imagine every talent has a price, both the talents we know about and the hidden talents—the gifts we haven't yet discovered" (Part 3, Powers: Epilogue, p. 213).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Martin Anderson? Why has he been sent to Edgeview Alternative School? Why does Martin compare his arrival at Edgeview to a prison movie? How does Martin feel about having to be at Edgeview? Why can Martin not control his tongue when he speaks to the principal? What does he say to upset the principal in the first moments of his arrival?

Who is Torchie? Why is he called Torchie? How does Torchie respond to Martin's arrival as his roommate? What kind of things does Torchie tell Martin about Edgeview during his tour of the school? How is Edgeview different from other schools? How is it basically the same as other schools?

Who is Cheater? Why is he called Cheater? Why does Cheater feel the need to show off how smart he is? What is unusual about the way Cheater responds to Martin and his sarcasm? Who is Flinch? How does Martin come to know Flinch? Why is Flinch called flinch? What does flinch mean? Who is Lucky? Why is he called Lucky? Why is Lucky sensitive about being accused of stealing?

When does Martin first notice Trash? What does Martin think of Trash? Why do none of the other kids spend time with Trash? What happens around Trash? What does Martin eventually realize is happening with Trash? What does Martin tell Trash to do to control this thing taking place around him? Does Trash learn to control himself? In what way? How does Trash eventually use this ability to help save the school?

Who is Bloodbath? Why is he called Bloodbath? Why does Bloodbath make fun of others? What is Bloodbath's deepest fear? How does Martin become aware of this fear? Why do Martin and his friends want to get revenge on Bloodbath? How do they go about doing this? How does Martin get the ultimate revenge on Bloodbath? Where does Bloodbath eventually go at the end of the novel?

What does Martin often do to his teachers that cause him to get detention? How does Principal Davis try to change Martin's behavior? Does it help? Why does Martin do these things? How does it help Martin when his friends tell him that he also has some kind of psychic ability? What does Martin immediately recognize he could do with the opposite side of this ability? Why does he vow to try not to ever do it? Why does Martin admit that he sometimes gives in to this ability?

How does Martin eventually get the right to return home? Where will Martin go to school? What has changed at home since Martin left? What does Martin plan to do about these changes? How does Martin feel about his father? For what reason? What does this suggest about the future of Martin's relationship with his father?