

# **Just Another Hero Study Guide**

**Just Another Hero by Sharon Draper**

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# Plot Summary

Just Another Hero is the third book in a trilogy by author Sharon M. Draper. It follows a group of students at an urban high school in Cincinnati, Ohio as they go through a series of life-changing experiences over the course of one month.

Arielle Gresham is spending her senior year alone after her self-absorbed behavior has alienated all her friends and caused her to lose her boyfriend, Jericho Prescott, to the heavy and much less attractive Olivia Thigpen. Although she admits that she has behaved badly, Arielle is still a compassionate person. She demonstrates her compassion when she comes to the rescue of Osrick Wardley, a small, bookish, and somewhat odd boy in her class who is the frequent target of bullies. When Olivia interrupts a group of bigger boys who are humiliating Osrick, the two form the beginning of a tentative friendship that will help Osrick turn his life around.

Arielle has problems at home too. She lives in a large, beautiful home and has all the material comforts she could ask for, but they are provided by Chad, the third person in a series of men that her mother has married since her father died in an accident. Although Arielle enjoys and appreciates her clothes and electronics, she pays a high emotional price because her stepfather forces both her and her mother to account for every penny they spend each day and doles out punishments for anything he considers irresponsibility.

Arielle's classmate, Kofi Freeman, is facing problems of his own. He is thrilled when he is accepted to MIT, but worries about how he will pay for such an expensive university. Kofi's family is once again on the verge of being evicted because his father gambles away everything he earns and his mother is too wrapped up in alcohol and clubbing to pay attention to her son. Kofi is also harboring a secret, even from his girlfriend, Dana. After breaking his arm in a club initiation stunt that killed his close friend Josh, Kofi has gotten addicted to prescription painkillers.

Douglass High School is being plagued by two ongoing problems. Money, small electronics and other items are being stolen from both students and teachers, and someone sets off the fire alarm on a regular basis. Osrick and bad-boy Eddie Mahoney are privately suspected by many students as the possible thief, and most people agree that the person setting off the fire alarm is Crazy Jack Krasinski, a seemingly-harmless kid who plays a snare drum and cymbals in the band - and often in the schoolyard - but his antics have become so commonplace that no one pays much attention anymore.

As the plot moves forward, Arielle's privileged life is gone forever when her stepfather's emotional cruelty reaches a new level. She returns home one day to find that he has transferred to a job in California, but not before clearing every item out of their home, including her clothes, every scrap of food, and even the toilet paper, landing Arielle and her mother in a homeless shelter. Kofi's elation at receiving a scholarship that will pay all his college expenses is tempered when Dana discovers his drug problem and convinces him to go cold turkey. Osrick's invisibility to his classmates puts him in a



position to discover the surprising identity of the school thief. But on the heels of that revelation, Jack's increasingly odd behavior leads to a psychotic break and when he holds his classmates hostage with an AK-47 assault rifle, an unlikely hero emerges to save them.



# Chapters 1 through 4

## Chapters 1 through 4 Summary

In Chapter 1, Arielle Gresham has arrived early at school. As she is sitting alone in the hallway, she hears a commotion. She follows the sound through the boys locker room to the pool, where she finds three big guys stripping off a smaller boy's pants and underwear and throwing them into the pool while filming the entire scene. She recognizes the boy as Osrick Wardley, a studious, somewhat odd kid who is a fellow senior and in a couple of her classes. When she interrupts them, the three big guys leave and Arielle gives Osrick a towel to cover himself, but he refuses further help and asks her not to tell anyone, including the principal.

In Chapter 2, Arielle goes to her chemistry class and finds that Osrick is already in his seat. As she watches the other students gather, she recalls that she has lost all her friends recently after treating them badly, and she also lost her boyfriend, Jericho Prescott, to Olivia Thigpen, a large girl and not nearly as pretty as Arielle. November Nelson arrives, announcing that this is her first day back at school since having a baby a few months earlier. Arielle also recalls Josh Prescott, the father of November's baby and a fellow student who was killed several months ago when he fell from a window during a club initiation prank. As the teacher, Miss Pringle, is beginning class, the fire alarm rings and the students make their way outside, nearly forgetting Eric, who is in a wheelchair, but two football players pick him up and carry him outside with the others. Other students briefly introduced in this chapter are Kofi Freeman, Kofi's girlfriend Dana, Jack Krasinski, who plays cymbals and drums in the school band.

When Chapter 3 opens, the students are gathered outside in the cold. November calls her babysitter to check on her daughter, Sunshine, who was born three months early and might have developmental issues. After the students return to class, the principal, Mrs. Sherman, appears on the closed-circuit television system to announce that the fire alarm had been pulled by a student — something that has happened several times recently — and asks for help in identifying who it was. Several students privately suspect it was Jack Krasinski, who is called Crazy Jack, but they have no proof and no one would consider ratting out another student anyway. As the class continues, Kofi, who was injured in the prank that killed Josh and still suffers pain, secretly takes an OxyContin tablet, telling himself that he has a legitimate prescription and is not a user.

Chapter 4 takes place the following day and introduces Arielle's family. She lives in a large, elegant house with her mother, Michelle, and her stepfather, Chadwick Kensington O'Neil. Chad gives both Arielle and her mother a generous allowance to spend, but he insists that they account for every penny they spend, including producing receipts. After her mother successfully accounts for her day's spending, Chad calls Arielle in. Although she is able to account for all her expenditures, Chad announces that he has noticed the cola she spilled on his expensive white Persian carpet and has hired a cleaning company to take care of it. However, it will cost \$650 and the money will



come from Arielle's \$100 weekly allowance, so she will receive no money for the next 6 1/2 weeks. She complains to her mother, but Michelle insists that they are lucky that Chad, who is Arielle's third stepfather, is very good to them and says Arielle should be grateful.

## Chapters 1 through 4 Analysis

The book's first four chapters set up the book's plot, provide an introduction to the main characters, and offer background information on events that have taken place previously in the first two books of the author's three-part series. As such, close attention should be paid to all the characters introduced and the details given because many will come back into play later.

Arielle is pretty and thin, and she used to be popular, but now spends her time alone. The reader is not given any details at this point, but learns that she alienated all her friends, including former boyfriend Jericho, who now dates the much-less-attractive Olivia. Arielle recalls openly making fun of Olivia and now struggles to understand how Jericho could be attracted to her. However, despite this background, she is not portrayed as a person without feelings, because she immediately comes to the aid of Osrick when she finds the bigger boys picking on him, but she knows that her treatment of her former friends make her no better than the boys who humiliated him. The reader also learns that Arielle is now privileged, as she lives in a beautiful home and receives a very generous allowance, but appearances are not always what they seem to be because she is called to account for every penny she is given by her exacting stepfather. It is also clear that her family life has been turbulent; her mother has been married two previous times since her father's apparent death, and Chad is by far the best of the three stepfathers even though his treatment of Arielle and her mother borders on emotional abuse.

These chapters include significant foreshadowing of events and plot points to come, including Jack's mental condition. In a brief reference, the author notes that Jack says the noise of the drums and cymbals he plays drowns out the voices in his head although Arielle does not understand what this means. The reader also sees the beginning of Kofi's drug abuse and his denial that he has a problem. In another casual reference, Arielle's mother mentions that she does not keep a separate bank account even though she earns money, foreshadowing her complete reversal of fortunes later in the novel.

The reader also learns in this section that Miss Pringle is particular about keeping the supplies in her chemistry lab under lock and key, meticulously locking the cabinet after she removes each individual item and unlocking it again to retrieve the next item, and never allowing a student to have access to it. This procedure and the lab itself, including the windows that are described in detail, will play a major role in the novel's plot, as will Miss Pringle's somewhat odd attire and her habit of running on the school track every day.



# Just Another Hero

## Summary

At home as he is getting ready to leave for school, Kofi takes an OxyContin, but he isn't sure whether the pain he feels is real anymore. He learns that his father has gambled away the rent money again and has called in sick to work that day. His father asks Kofi for money, but although he has a part-time job at McDonald's, he spends most of his money on food and family bills and doesn't earn enough to cover the rent too, so he is afraid that the family will be evicted again. His girlfriend, Dana, usually makes lunch for both of them and sometimes that is the only meal Kofi gets. After his father goes back to bed, Kofi's mother arrives home, having partied all night again, and still seems a bit drunk. Kofi is excited to tell her that he has been accepted to MIT, one of the best schools in the country, but she shows little reaction. When he arrives at school, his English teacher, Mrs. Witherspoon is thrilled to hear his news.

In Chapter 6, Kofi and the other students are in Mrs. Witherspoon's English class. She is a great teacher, very friendly and warm with the kids, and her classroom is filled with technological wizardry. The students call her Spoon, which she encourages. As class is going on, Eddie Mahoney arrives. He has spent the past few months in a juvenile detention center, and his presence upsets Dana because it was her testimony that convicted him, but Kofi and the other boys promise to protect her. Eddie tells Mrs. Witherspoon that he asked to come back rather than going to a different school, and he gives Dana a menacing look.

As Chapter 7 opens, Arielle again recalls losing all her friends a few months earlier, but as she starts to sit down by herself in the school cafeteria, November calls her over to sit at her table along with Olivia and Dana. They tell her they are no longer angry with her, and Arielle is relieved to have her friends back. She asks November about the baby, and November says that her mother insists that she take full responsibility for Sunshine, which she thinks is the right thing. Josh's parents initially planned to fight for custody, but they lost interest when the baby was born with health problems. The girls discuss their college applications and Eddie's return. Arielle is about to show her friends the new iPhone she received for her birthday, but it is not in her purse or her book bag, and Arielle panics when she thinks about Chad's reaction when he learns she has lost such an expensive item. Trying to figure out who sits near her in her various classes and could have taken it, Osrick comes up as a possibility, but Arielle hopes it wasn't him.

In Chapter 8, the girls go to the principal's office to report the theft. They bring up the possibility of Osrick, but have no proof. The other girls mention that they have had a few things stolen recently, but have not reported the incidents. Mrs. Sherman, the principal, welcomes November back to school and says that she might be able to graduate with her class in June. As the chapter ends, Arielle is still worried about her parents reaction to the lost phone.



## Analysis

Chapter 5 establishes Kofi's sad home life. He has become a parent to his parents, who have allowed their lives and their home to fall apart over the past few years, sinking deeper into alcohol, partying and gambling. Kofi's father is a dreamer, always optimistic that his next bet or his next lottery ticket will provide the fortune he thinks he deserves, but instead he continues to sink deeper. Kofi, on the other hand, is portrayed as just the opposite — a go-getter who has been accepted to a prestigious college and not only has an after-school job, but spends the little money he earns trying to keep his family afloat financially. He often goes without food except for the lunches Dana provides for him, establishing the close relationship the two of them have developed. Even though they spend a great deal of time flirting and teasing each other throughout the novel, it is clear that they share a deep love for each other and provide mutual support that will be important when each one faces serious issues later in the book. Kofi's usual sense of responsibility is in direct contrast with his growing dependence on painkillers, but he has found that although he no longer suffers pain from his broken arm, the pills help to dull the emotional pain that comes from his dysfunctional home life. Even when he tells his mother about his acceptance to MIT, she is unable to show the pride she should feel, in direct contrast to his teacher, who is exuberant in her reaction. The family's issues are also highlighted when Kofi rightly worries about how they will afford for him to go to MIT and his mother, rather than providing genuine suggestions, offers the vague hope that his father will get lucky at the track.

The introduction of Eddie Mahoney is an important development in this section. He is clearly portrayed as the bad kid who has little to offer and makes the other kids feel vaguely threatened, and his grudge against Dana will come into play later. Eddie's habit of drumming with his pencils gets only a minor mention, but like many other small things, foreshadows major developments to come.

November's return to school brings up memories of Josh's tragic death and her own surprise pregnancy. However, although she was irresponsible in getting pregnant, she has matured enormously and is now taking full responsibility for her baby's care and financial support. November is portrayed as a girl who has far more responsibilities than any of her friends, thus gaining their admiration for the way she has handled her situation, but she is still someone who knows how to have fun.

Other important examples of foreshadowing include the loss of Arielle's iPhone and her suspicions about Osrick,





# Chapters 9 through 12

## Chapters 9 through 12 Summary

In the school hallway, Kofi overhears Eddie lying about how great the juvenile detention center was, but when he starts to talk about having unfinished business at school, the bell rings and Kofi is unable to hear what he says. Kofi asks Jack if he is the one who has been pulling the fire alarms, but Jack does not confirm it. Kofi then runs into Dana, who is upset because he stood her up the previous night. He then recalls that he took two pain pills and fell asleep, but he doesn't tell that to Dana. He takes a pill in front of Dana, claiming it is an aspirin, but she grabs the bottle and sees that it is his prescription. When he says he can quit any time, she tells him to prove it and he gives her the bottle, knowing there are only two tablets left and he has a refill at home.

In Chapter 10, Arielle's mother picks her up from school in her new Mercedes. Arielle begins complaining about Chad, but her mother continues to defend him and they talk about Michelle's previous husbands, both of whom had a bad temper. Michelle admits that she had made some bad choices. Arielle's father was killed by a drunk driver when she was too young to remember him, and afterward things slid downhill until Michelle and Arielle ended up in a homeless shelter, so she continues to tell Arielle that she should be grateful for the life Chad gives them. They also discuss a possible visit to Kiki, Arielle's little sister from her mother's third marriage. She lives at a New Jersey care center that has expertise in children with severe ADHD, but Arielle secretly thinks Chad just wants to be rid of her. As they are talking, another car backs into them.

In Chapter 11, an elderly woman named Mrs. Simsbury apologizes for the accident, saying that her daughter has told her that she should not be driving anymore. Michelle is distraught over the damage to the car and Chad's probable reaction, so she drops Arielle off at home and goes to file a police report, contact the insurance company, and take the car to a repair shop before breaking the news to Chad.

When Chapter 12 opens, Arielle enters the house and Chad begins questioning her about the outfit she is wearing, wondering how she could have bought it since her allowance has been cut off. When he accuses her of stealing it, she confesses that she opened a charge account at the store where she shops frequently. Chad becomes angry and says that as a punishment, she must give up her iPhone for two weeks, and Arielle has to tell him it was stolen two days earlier. Chad is furious and vows that he will never buy her anything again, telling her that she will have to work for any money she gets, and when he finally lets her leave the room, she goes into the bathroom and cries.

## Chapters 9 through 12 Analysis

The reader learns much more about the history of Arielle's family life in these chapters. Little information is given about her father, but the first two men Michelle married after



his death were temperamental abusers, but they were a ticket out of the homeless shelter where they lived, and to Michelle, Chad's emotional abuse over money and belongings is a small price to pay for the comfort in which she now lives. Arielle, on the other hand, enjoys the clothes and electronics she now owns, but doesn't possess the rose-colored glasses through which her mother sees Chad. While Michelle talks herself into believing that sending Kiki away to a special school was for her own good, Arielle secretly knows it was simply a way for Chad to get rid of a young child who made messes in his meticulously-maintained home. However, the degree to which Michelle is genuinely afraid of Chad is revealed in her reaction to the damage to the car, believing that perhaps she can appease him a little by at least getting the car to the shop before telling him about the accident. Much like Kofi and his parents, Arielle is more mature than her mother in some respects, taking care of exchanging insurance information while her mother is busy worrying about Chad's reaction.

Arielle's fear of Chad comes to fruition when he learns about the stolen iPhone. His fury and extreme reaction foreshadow much worse punishments to come as Michelle's blindness about her husband's true nature lands her back in the homeless shelter she was so grateful to escape.

Despite his love for Dana and their close relationship, Kofi now has begun to lie to her as well as to himself about the extent of his dependence on painkillers. He is beginning to see that he has a problem since he missed a date with Dana because of the pills, but is not yet ready to face his addiction and its possible consequences.



# Chapters 13 through 16

## Chapters 13 through 16 Summary

As Kofi sits in class, wishing he could be home in bed, Eddie leaves to use the restroom, pausing to give Dana a menacing look. The class discusses the concept of heroes and whether a woman can be a hero. Osrick speaks up, which is unusual, noting that the Beowulf character they are discussing simply wanted revenge, adding that sometimes people have to get even for bad things. Arielle comments that heroes sometimes turn out to be beasts, citing her home as an example, and Mrs. Witherspoon suggests that they should have a talk soon. Suddenly the fire alarm goes off again and the students speculate about whether the culprit is Jack or Eddie, but they agree that Jack is just silly and wants attention. Kofi has a headache and secretly takes a pill on his way back to class, making sure Dana doesn't see him.

Chapter 14 takes place on the school bus as a group of kids watch the YouTube video of Osrick and make fun of it. Arielle sits silently and helplessly, but Olivia speaks up, berating the kids for making fun, then she sits next to Osrick, who is in the back of the bus and has heard everything. Olivia and Arielle both tell Osrick that they are his friends, but he says he needs to fight his own battles, adding that someday he will get even with the kids who have given him trouble. He says that the video is also on MySpace and Facebook, so it will be around until the kids get tired of it and move on to something else.

In Chapter 15, Arielle eats lunch with her friends and finds that she is getting to like Olivia. November tells the girls that Susan Richards had \$50 stolen from her purse that day, and Arielle announces that she has had to get a job at Smoochie's Boutique, but Chad forces her to give him all the money she earns until he thinks she has been punished enough for losing the phone. Suddenly there is a commotion and Mrs. Sherman announces that her wallet has been stolen. The girls speculate about who might be the thief, centering on Osrick and Eddie, who returned to school the same day Arielle's phone was stolen. Mrs. Sherman seals off the cafeteria and the teachers search everyone's belongings, but Miss Pringle finds the wallet in the trash can near the table where Osrick is sitting alone. The cash is gone, but the day ends with no one being able or willing to identify the thief.

Chapter 16 begins with Kofi in Dr. Stinson's office, where he tells the doctor that he is still in pain. Dr. Stinson writes him a prescription, but says this is the last one, and Kofi tells himself that he must make these pills last. At his job at McDonalds, he thinks that he needs to get a better job, but realizes that no job will be enough to pay for MIT. When he arrives at home, he is surprised and pleased to find that his mother is sober and seems like her old self, and she has made dinner for him to celebrate his acceptance at MIT even though it has been two weeks since he told her the news. Kofi is pleased, but says he is not sure whether to accept the placement because he does not know how they will pay for it. He has applied for scholarships and grants, but does not know if he



will get them. His mother tells him to accept and they they will figure out how to pay for it, then begins drinking. After finishing his homework, Kofi gets a call from Jericho and they discuss their college choices. Jericho has the possibility of attending Julliard for music or Michigan State on a full scholarship for football. After they hang up, Kofi is stressed and feels the pills calling to him, and he thinks that he must get out of the house soon or he will end up like his parents.

## Chapters 13 through 16 Analysis

The character of Osrick comes into clearer focus in these chapters as he speaks up when the class discusses Beowulf. He relates to the character in the poem because he, too, would like to get revenge on the kids at school who bully and make fun of him, particularly after they see the YouTube video of his humiliation at the school pool. Part of Arielle wants to be the bigger person and come to Osrick's defense, but she sits silently as the kids on the bus make fun of him, and even though she claims to be his friend and indeed rescued him from the boys at the pool, she can't help wondering if he is the one who took her iPhone simply because he is odd. The story speaks to not only bullying, but also stereotyping among high school students.

Previously, Arielle also stereotyped Olivia, making fun of her for being large and playing the trombone, yet her former boyfriend now has chosen Olivia over the thin and stylish Arielle. It is only after Olivia, who also has been bullied by Arielle, comes to Osrick's defense that Arielle steps in and is friendly toward him as well. Peer pressure is strong, so while Arielle was willing to stand up for Osrick when no one else was looking, she isn't comfortable doing so in front of a bus filled with her peers. Osrick's desire to get revenge over those who bully him is a red herring, leading readers to believe he will later take extreme action against the kids who have bullied him when the opposite is actually true.

The theft of Mrs. Sherman's wallet provides a number of clues regarding the identity of the thief, although they are not clear at this point. Osrick again is a suspect, especially since he is sitting at a table near where the wallet is taken and where it is found. However, it is his ability to blend in and go unnoticed that will lead to the discovery of the thief and his own act of heroism at the book's climactic point, just as his fellow students' tendency to ignore Jack and his bids for attention will lead him to take extreme action.

The concept of heroism comes up for the first time in this section as the class discusses Beowulf, and the discussion will come into play later when it is time for a hero to step forward.



# Chapters 17 through 20

## Chapters 17 through 20 Summary

Arielle is on her way to take a shower when she runs into Chad in the hall. He questions her about whether she has finished her homework and the many chores he has assigned to her, then tells her she has only three minutes to shower because the water bill is too high. She stays in the shower 10 minutes to spite him, and on the way back to her room she overhears a conversation in which her mother urges Chad to be less hard on Arielle and he reveals that he was raised by a strict, cold father. He tells Michelle that he has given her and Arielle a lot and can take it all away again, then cuts off the conversation and tells her to go to sleep.

In Chapter 18, Dana arrives at Kofi's house with pizza and they discuss his parents. His mother is continuing to go to clubs and his father seems to be working more, but still gambles away all his money. Kofi worries about what will happen to them if he goes away to college, but Dana insists that he must take his opportunity to attend MIT. Kofi gets the mail, which includes a cut-off notice from the electric company and a letter from McDonalds, informing him that he did not receive the scholarship he applied for and he is crushed. Then he sees another letter and when Dana insists that he open it, he learns that he has received another prestigious scholarship that will pay for all four years at the college of his choice as long as he keeps up his grades. As they are celebrating, the pill bottle falls out of Kofi's pocket and he is forced to admit to Dana that he is still taking the pills. Telling him he will ruin his opportunities and his life, Dana forces him to throw the remaining pills down the garbage disposal.

In Chapter 19, Arielle is waiting for chemistry class to start and notes to herself that Eddie always looks like he is up to something. Osrick approaches her and says that despite her suspicions, he did not steal her iPhone, but he thinks he knows who is stealing things, but then Miss Pringle arrives and he stops talking. Brandon Merriweather flirts with Arielle, saying he has tried to call her, and she tells him she no longer has phone service. After he leaves, she tells her friends about the punishments Chad has imposed on her — no phone, computer, TV, etc., and he also makes her reimburse him for the food she eats and has taken away her mother's car and imposed other punishments on her too. Her friends say he sounds like a psychopath. Suddenly Paula Ingram screams that her Game Boy has been stolen, and as they are leaving after class ends, Osrick mouths to Arielle that he knows who the thief is.

Chapter 20 finds Kofi withdrawing from the Oxycontin. As he approaches Mrs. Witherspoon's classroom, he hears Dana crying inside and although the door is locked, it is clear that she is scuffling with Eddie, trying to get away as he insists he just wants to talk to her. Unable to get the door open, Kofi finds Mrs. Witherspoon, who unlocks the door. Dana is unharmed and Eddie announces that he will leave for the day to enable everyone to calm down, and Kofi vows to protect Dana at all costs. Later, Jericho says he is a hero but Kofi doesn't feel like one. Kofi and Jericho discuss girls, with Jericho



noting that although Olivia is not as thin and pretty as Arielle, she brings out the best in him, and Kofi says Dana has the same effect on him. Kofi's craving for the drugs has diminished, but not his anger at Eddie.

## Chapters 17 through 20 Analysis

The conversation between Michelle and Chad reveals some of the reasons for his harsh attitude, as he reveals that his father was very strict, cold and tended to punish him physically. He sees no need to treat children with affection because he was never shown any affection by his own father when he was growing up. While Arielle can do little about her situation, she strikes back by passively-aggressively taking longer in the shower than the three minutes Chad has allotted for her, and although her mother tries in her own way to stand up for Arielle, her dependence on Chad for material things and her fear of his anger makes her completely ineffective in making a case for Arielle. Chad's comment about taking away the material things he provides for them sounds like an idle threat, but will come back to haunt Michelle and Arielle soon.

Chapter 18 is a study in contrasts. Kofi is still setting himself up as his parents' caretaker rather than their son, considering staying home rather than going away to college and revealing that he routinely negotiates with the electric company. However, Dana sees the truth and is determined to prevent him from ruining his life in a futile attempt to take care of them. Again, it is someone other than his parents who share his disappointment when he receives the rejection letter for the McDonalds scholarship and his joy when he opens the acceptance letter for the better, more prestigious one. The mail that arrives contains stark contrasts — the letter from the electric company warning that their services are about to be cut off, a credit card offer that would just get his parents deeper into debt, a rejection for one opportunity to pay for college, and finally the news he has been hoping for, but his excitement is muted when Dana discovers the pills. Still, by the end of the chapter, everything has begun to turn around for Kofi as he sees that he will be able to realize his dream of attending MIT and he takes the first step toward kicking his drug habit. Dana's love for him and her understanding of his situation is reflected not only in her insistence that he throw away the pills, but also in the fact that she has brought pizza, knowing that he is unlikely to have eaten anything other than what she subtly provides. He has an opportunity to reciprocate for the care she gives him when he rescues her from Eddie and vows to protect her from further problems with him.

The extent of Chad's cruelty is becoming even more evident when Arielle reveals that he charges her for the food she eats at home and the situation at home continues to escalate toward its eventual conclusion. Osrick and Arielle's tentative friendship takes a step as he tells her he knows of her suspicions and confides in her that he knows who the thief is. Again, there are subtle clues as to who is stealing items that will become clear once the thief's identity is revealed.

Kofi's discussion with Jericho about girls reveals a growing maturity regarding relationships. Although both still behave like brash teenage boys in many ways, they

have come to realize that beauty really is only skin deep and they now appreciate their girlfriends' inner qualities rather than just their physical appearances.

# Chapters 21 through 24

## Chapters 21 through 24 Summary

Arielle is at the boutique where she works when Brandon comes into the store. He buys a shirt that Arielle says she likes and they flirt. After he leaves, November comes in with her baby, and when Arielle asks how the baby is doing, November replies that if she is not OK, she'll find a way to deal with it. Olivia and Dana arrive, and Arielle learns that Eddit got only a three-day suspension for detaining Dana, but he has been moved out of Mrs. Witherspoon's class. Mrs. Petrie, Arielle's boss, is usually distant, but as she listens in on the girls' conversation, she softens, noting that teenagers have a lot to deal with, and lets Arielle leave early. Dana gives Arielle a ride home, for which she is grateful because it's difficult to take the bus this late in the evening and her mother cannot pick her up because she no longer has use of a car.

In Chapter 22, Kofi and Dana are talking outside the school and he assures her that he is feeling better each day. Jack begins marching around the Commons area, loudly playing his snare drum and chanting. This goes on for about five minutes and while some students laugh at him, most just shake their heads. Dana comments that Jack has looked sad lately, noting that Olivia has mentioned that he has issues, but Kofi shrugs it off. In class, Mrs. Witherspoon tells the students that the incident with Eddie was unsettling and no one will be allowed to be alone in a classroom from now on. Saying that anyone has the capacity to be a hero, she announces the annual Hero Project and divides the students into teams of two, saying that each team must create an interactive project using a fictional hero or someone from their own lives. Kofi and Arielle are assigned to team up and they agree to meet after school to work on the project.

Chapter 23 opens with Arielle, Kofi and Dana meeting at his car. Arielle reluctantly agrees that they can go to her house to work, but warns them not to mess anything up. When they arrive, they find the house unlocked and completely cleared out. Chad has removed everything. There is no furniture, no food, no clothing, no toiletries — even the toilet paper is gone. Arielle calls her mother, who finds that her car is gone too, so Kofi drives to her office to pick her up. Michelle says they will go to the Holiday Inn for now. She has enough money for a few days, then they will figure the rest out.

In Chapter 24, Kofi is itching all over, in what he hopes are the last stages of his withdrawal. Jericho gives him a ride to the outpatient treatment center to get the results of his X-rays, and Kofi confesses that he developed a drug habit. The boys agree that everyone got messed up because of the initiation stunt, and they discuss the fact that Arielle and her mother are now staying at a homeless shelter.





## Chapters 21 through 24 Analysis

Chad's cruelty is further highlighted in this section as he apparently has no regard for Arielle's safety since he won't allow her mother to drive to pick her up. However, that problem becomes minor when Arielle discovers that he has taken all of their possessions and vanished, leaving her and her mother penniless. Arielle has insisted that Chad never physically harmed her or threatened to do so, but his mental abuse is as bad or worse than the physical threats imposed by her previous stepfathers. Michelle commented in an earlier chapter that she has made some bad choices in men, but this time — the one she is certain she has gotten right because she has all the material comforts she could ask for — turns out to be the worst choice of all and she is left with even less than she started with. As the section closes, she and Arielle have come full circle and are back at the homeless shelter without even underwear of their own.

Jack's growing issues are evident in this section, but although others notice his increasingly odd behavior, no one bothers to investigate the situation, choosing instead to simply shrug off his behavior as the usual antics of Crazy Jack. The noise he makes with the snare drum call back to the earlier comment about drowning out the voices in his head, but no one realizes how serious his situation is.

The concept of heroes is raised again as Mrs. Witherspoon assigns a class project, little knowing that members of the class will soon be called upon to behave heroically.



# Chapters 25 through 28

## Chapters 25 through 28 Summary

Arielle wakes up at the homeless shelter, where she and her mother share a room with two battered women in their 70s. Her mother is apologetic about the situation and says she will get them out as soon as possible, and they will also get Kiki back. Arielle needs to return to school, but has no clothes to wear, so Mrs. Toth, the shelter director, lets her choose some things from some teen clothes that have just been donated. Arielle must ride the shelter's bus to school, but her friends greet her warmly and she feels good. She tells the girls that the shelter is not so bad and she has realized that both she and her mother have been mentally abused. They have learned that Chad's office transferred him to California and he had been planning this move for months. He told the movers to keep his belongings and throw Arielle's and Michelle's into a dumpster, but Michelle is getting a lawyer to deal with a divorce and any other action she might be able to rake against him. Jericho announces that he has decided to attend Shenendoah University in Virginia to study music and play football for fun, and Olivia probably will go there too. Arielle realizes that she will no longer get college money from Chad, so she must apply for scholarships to some state schools, and she feels mildly jealous of the magic Jericho and Olivia share.

In Chapter 26, Osrick approaches Arielle and tells her he has bought some anti-theft powder from the Internet and wants her to help him convince Mrs. Sherman to set up a sting operation. If someone gets the powder on their hands, it appears to be invisible, but shows up under a special light and it stays on the skin for about three days. Mrs. Sherman and the school security guard agree, and they coat a \$50 bill and an iPod with the powder and plant them in Arielle's purse, which she leaves on a bench in the gym locker room. She and November watch the end of the gym class and they note that Eddie is also watching. They see Mss Pringle go to the track to run as she does every day, and when the class ends, Eddie is gone. Arielle hangs back until most of the girls have left, then goes into the locker room, where she sees that her purse is there but the money and iPod are gone.

Chapter 27 opens the following morning when Arielle, Osrick, a number of other kids and some teachers are called into Room 123 for a special meeting, and everyone except Osrick and Arielle is puzzled about why they're there. Brandon looks sharp, but Jack's hair is uncombed, his eyes are red, he looks as if he's slept in his clothes and he is behaving more oddly than usual. Mrs. Sherman explains why they are there and each student is asked to pass his or her hands under the light. Eddie goes first and is cleared, then one by one others are cleared also. When Jack's turn comes, he has an extreme reaction, shouting that the light is hurting him, but his hands test clear and Mrs. Sherman suggests that he get some breakfast and see the school nurse. Arielle is cleared, followed by Osrick, but then he knocks over the light and when Miss Pringle picks it up, her hands show imprints of the powder.



In Chapter 28, Miss Pringle is taken to Mrs. Sherman's office by the security guard, and the principal asks Osrick and Arielle to keep this to themselves for the moment. As they walk to chemistry class, Osrick explains that he got curious about why Miss Pringle was so obsessive about keeping the classroom cabinet locked and when he made an effort to glimpse inside when she opened it, she saw electronics and other items. Later, he saw her take Paula's Game Boy. They part ways when Arielle says she needs to stop in the bathroom and Osrick goes on to chemistry class.

## Chapters 25 through 28 Analysis

Arielle, who admits that she has been self-centered and treated other people badly, is being forced to grow up now. She and her mother are only now beginning to understand the full extent of Chad's sick cruelty, and with each passing day, Arielle sees more that she has lost, including the opportunity to go to a top college. However, she is also becoming more appreciative of what she has, including the updated clothes Mrs. Toth finds for her and the fact that her friends are supportive despite how poorly she treated them previously. She also sees that clothes and material goods are not as important as the people you love, and her experiences are already making her better rather than bitter as she vows to do more to help homeless teens once she and her mother are on their feet again. Her growing maturity also extends to her attitude about Jericho and Olivia. Whereas once she was jealous of Olivia because she had ended up with Jericho, she is now envious only of the close bond her friends have with each other.

The thief is finally revealed and it is a shock to everyone except for Osrick. It is now clear that the author has left clues from the beginning, including Miss Pringle's obsession with keeping the cabinet locked, her baggy clothes and habit of running on the track outside the gym every day, and Osrick's proximity to several of the incidents. He wasn't the thief; he was tracking the thief, and in the end, the school geek becomes the hero in identifying the thief and presumably helping the students get their belongings back. Osrick takes another step toward acceptance through his growing friendship with Arielle.

It is also becoming more clear that Jack, rather than Osrick, is the most likely person in the class to snap. His increasingly desheveled appearance and disturbing behavior finally capture the attention of the principal, but in the midst of trying to identify the thief, she is not paying enough attention to see how dire his situation really is, and her omission will have serious consequences.



# Chapters 29 through 32

## Chapters 29 through 32 Summary

As the students wait in the chemistry class, they see a police car arrive and speculate about who the thief turned out to be, noticing that Arielle, Jack and Rosa are not there. Rosa arrives, having held back after having her hands tested to eavesdrop on the rest of the proceedings, and tells them that it was Miss Pringle. When Osrick arrives, he is angry that Rosa has revealed private information, then the students watch through the window as Miss Pringle is led out in handcuffs.

Chapter 30 opens with the fire alarm going off again, then suddenly Jack bursts into the room and points an assault rifle at the students, ordering them to sit down. He is agitated, demanding not to be ignored and making paranoid comments about the blue light burning him, but Jericho talks to him calmly and tries to get him to settle down. Kofi glances out the window and sees that everyone else has gathered outside because of the fire alarm and Mrs. Sherman is looking up at the window of the chemistry class, angry that the members of that class have not come out. When he tries to move the blinds a bit to signal her, the ancient blinds crash down and Jack fires the gun into the windows, sending shattered glass over the frightened students in the room.

As Chapter 31 begins, Arielle is outside, looking up at the window and worrying about her friends who are in the classroom. Many police cars arrive, and after several kids make cell phone calls, parents and reporters begin to arrive and the scene is chaotic. The police release Miss Pringle so she can help identify who might be responsible and the names of Eddie and Osrick come up, but suddenly everyone thinks of Jack. He seems harmless, but Mrs. Sherman recalls that he seemed unusually odd that morning. When she notes that everyone is used to his strange behavior and usually just ignores him, a police officer comments that maybe he got tired of being ignored.

In Chapter 32, Kofi has ducked to avoid being shot by Jack and he has joined the other students huddled against the wall. Jack is angry and agitated, saying that the gun is much louder and better than his drums and cymbals. As his paranoia increases, he begins shooting the classroom computers, and as he hears more sirens, Kofi thinks help will arrive and hopes it will be in time.

## Chapters 29 through 32 Analysis

When Jack finally snaps, his fellow students are surprised because his odd behavior and childish pranks like pulling the fire alarm seemed harmless and a little funny. However, as his behavior becomes increasingly psychotic, it is clear that his reason for pulling the fire alarm is not to avoid tests as everyone assumed, but — like the drums and cymbals he plays constantly — his goal has been to create enough noise to drown out the voices he hears in his head. His reason for being afraid of the blue light now

becomes clear also, as his paranoia causes him to believe that there are forces in the classroom computers that are out to get him.

Heroes slowly begin to emerge, including Kofi, who tries to signal Mrs. Sherman to let her know that something is wrong in the chemistry classroom, and Jericho, who is unusually calm in trying to reason with Jack. Osrick, whose heroic actions identified Miss Pringle as the thief, continues to show maturity in his anger at Rosa for violating the privacy he feels Miss Pringle deserves. Even though she has stolen from his classmates, Osrick's status as an outsider makes him sensitive to people who have problems, so it is not surprising that he would take the side of someone who is down.



# Chapters 33 through 35

## Chapters 33 through 35 Summary

The chaos grows as those standing outside hear gunshots. Arielle's mother arrives, having taken a cab from work, and the police and students speculate about who the shooter might be as they hear more shots. Their question is answered when Susan receives a text message from Osrick, saying the Jack is the shooter, no one is hurt and they need help.

Chapter 34 takes place in the classroom, where Kofi is protecting Dana and Jack is getting increasingly crazy, shooting out lights and other items in the classroom. Suddenly Eddie comes forward, carrying two pencils and begins talking calmly to Jack, telling him that he, too, likes the sound of drums. He begins drumming rhythmically with the pencils and asks Jack to get his drumsticks and play with him. When Jack looks away to get the sticks out of his bag, Jericho, Kofi and a couple of football players tackle him and pin him down, and Kofi pries the gun from his hand. Just then, the police burst into the room and, thinking Kofi is the shooter, push him to the floor and handcuff him. Eventually the other students are able to explain the situation, Kofi is released, and Jack is handcuffed. Kofi thanks Eddie for his heroism, but he simply shrugs it off and leaves. The others leave to find their parents, but Kofi stays behind for a moment. As he looks around the room, he realizes that he feels no withdrawal symptoms and vows never to go back to his addiction.

In the book's final chapter, Arielle happily greets her friends and reporters interview many of the kids who were in the classroom. They reveal how Eddie saved them, but when they look for him, he has disappeared. Brandon finds Arielle and asks her to the prom, she tells him the truth about living in the shelter, but he says that doesn't matter to him, Arielle finds Osrick sitting alone, and he says he is no longer going to tolerate being picked on and plans to ask Susan to the prom, and Arielle tells him he is a hero for finding the thief and sending the text message about Jack, and as she gets ready to leave, she thinks about how grateful she is for her friends. She watches as a TV reporter muses about what makes a hero and who is the hero of the day, then as she runs to the parking lot, Arielle whispers the answer into the breeze.

## Chapters 33 through 35 Analysis

Osrick's heroic behavior continues as he takes a serious risk by sending a text from the classroom. For the second time that day, he turns the disadvantage of being ignored by everyone at his school into an advantage. He is able to observe Miss Pringle's activities because no one paid attention to him, and now he counts on the same degree of invisibility as he crouches in a corner of the classroom and quietly sends a text without attracting Jack's attention.



But the book's surprise hero is Eddie, whose habit of drumming with two pencils has been an annoyance to his fellow students, but now saves their lives. Perhaps Jack is able to relate to Eddie as a fellow outsider, or perhaps the steady rhythm of Eddie's drumming is a familiar sound that soothes him, but whatever the reason, it gets his attention and he looks away long enough for other students to take action. When the situation has been resolved, Eddie behaves true to form by simply walking away rather than accepting praise from his fellow students or interacting with them further.

The book ends on a positive note with everyone being safe and apparently on their way to productive futures. Arielle's friendship with Osrick appears to be cemented as he is grateful that she let him deal with the bullying situation in his own time rather than reporting the pool incident to the principal, and it is clear that her friendship and support have been instrumental in helping him learn to stand up for himself. Just as Josh's death had a profound effect on the lives of his friends, the events of this day also change lives, but this time, instead of teens bowing to peer pressure, heroes are produced.



# Characters

## Arielle Gresham

Arielle Gresham is a senior at Douglass High School, an urban school in Cincinnati. She is pretty and thin at a mere size 2, but her bad behavior toward her friends has driven away everyone in her life, including her boyfriend, Jericho Prescott. Arielle knows she is responsible for her own loneliness, but she still can't help wondering what Jericho sees in the heavy and less attractive Olivia Thigpen.

Arielle's home life is also an issue. Her father died at the hands of a drunk driver when she was too young to remember him, and she is now living with her mother and third stepfather, Chad. She enjoys the stylish clothes and new electronics he provides for her, but chafes under his strict regimen, including having to account for every cent she spends. Arielle is close to her mother, although she doesn't understand why she doesn't stand up to Chad more, and she misses her younger sister, Kiki, who has been sent to a New Jersey school for children with severe ADHD.

During the course of the novel, Arielle shows that she is still a compassionate person by defending her classmate, Osrick Wardley, against the kids who bully him, and she eventually is accepted back into her circle of friends. While she has already learned the harsh consequences of treating people badly, she is further challenged when Chad disappears for a job in California, leaving Arielle and her mother penniless. As she finds herself back in the homeless shelter she thought she'd escaped, Arielle learns to appreciate everything she has, from underwear to her friends and family.

## Kofi Freeman

Kofi Freeman is a senior at Douglass High School in Cincinnati. He is funny, smart and hard-working, and very devoted to his girlfriend, Dana. Some months earlier, Kofi foolishly became involved in an initiation prank for a prestigious campus club, but while his friend Josh was killed, Kofi only suffered a broken arm. However, he is just beginning to admit to himself that he has become addicted to the painkillers he has been taking since the accident. Kofi uses the pills as an escape from his home life, which is dismal. His father is a dreamer who gambles away everything he earns while maintaining that his next big score will set everything right, and his mother drinks too much and spends most of her nights out clubbing, trying to hold onto her youth. Kofi spends most of the money he earns at McDonalds trying to keep the family afloat and even considers giving up his dream of going to MIT because he worries about what will happen to his parents if he leaves home.

Kofi's protective streak also extends to others. When bad boy Eddie Mahoney returns from a juvenile detention center with a grudge against Dana, Kofi vows to protect her no matter what the risk, and when Jack Krasinski takes him and his fellow students





hostage, Kofi is one of the heroes who emerge to disarm Jack and save their classmates' lives. By the book's end, Kofi has also used his strength to conquer his addiction.

## **Osrick Wardley**

Osrick Wardley is small for his age — only 5 feet tall and perhaps 100 pounds even though he is 17 years old and a high school senior. He is smart, excelling in all his classes and a whiz at computers and electronics, but his size makes him an easy target for the school bullies. When his classmates aren't picking on Osrick, they're simply ignoring him, but he forms a tentative and unlikely friendship with Arielle when she accidentally stumbles upon a group of bigger boys humiliating him and puts a stop to it.

As the plot progresses, Osrick finds that his invisibility at school has its advantages. Because no one pays much attention to him, he is able to figure out who is stealing from his fellow students and his resourcefulness enables him to set a trap that catches the thief. He also becomes one of the heroes during the hostage situation when he is able to send a text message to another student, letting the authorities know who the shooter is. At the book's end, Osrick decides to take control of his own life and stand up to the bullies, get involved in school activities and even invite a girl to the prom.

## **November Nelson**

November Nelson, a senior at Douglass High School, recently rejoined her classmates after being out of school for several months following the birth of her baby. She got pregnant by Josh Prescott, who then died in a prank that went wrong. November now lives with her mother and baby girl, Sunshine, but she takes full responsibility for the baby's financial and other needs, and is prepared for whatever difficulties lie ahead if the baby has developmental issues.

## **Olivia Thigpen**

Olivia Thigpen isn't the prettiest girl at Douglass High School. She is heavy and not as stylish as others, but her warm personality has won the affections of Arielle's former boyfriend, Jericho Prescott.

## **Dana**

Dana, a senior at Douglass High School, is Kofi's girlfriend and a close friend of Arielle, Olivia and November. Her tough love approach helps Kofi kick his addiction to painkillers.



## **Jack Krasinski**

Called Crazy Jack because of his outlandish clothing and strange behavior, Jack Krasinski plays snare drum and cymbals in the high school band, but also is known for carrying his instruments around and playing them at odd times during the day. When he had a psychotic break and takes his fellow students hostage with an assault rifle, it is revealed that Jack's love of loud noise is really an effort to drown out the voices he hears in his head.

## **Eddie Mahoney**

Eddie Mahoney has just returned to Douglass High School after spending time at a juvenile detention center. While other students feel threatened by him, his annoying habit of drumming with two pencils comes in handy when he is able to distract Jack and help save his fellow students.

## **Mrs. Sherman**

Mrs. Sherman is the principal of Douglass High School.

## **Miss Pringle**

Miss Pringle is the chemistry teacher and is later revealed to be a kleptomaniac who has been stealing from students and teachers.

## **Mrs. Witherspoon**

Mrs. Witherspoon is the English teacher and a favorite because of her warm attitude toward her students.

## **Jericho Prescott**

Jericho Prescott is the former boyfriend of Arielle, current boyfriend of Olivia, and cousin of Josh Prescott, the student who died as the result of a club initiation prank some months earlier.

## **Chadwick Kensington O'Neil**

Chadwick Kensington O'Neil is Arielle's third stepfather. A banker, Chad is very tight with money and his emotional abuse eventually lands Arielle and her mother in a homeless shelter.

## **Michelle O'Neil**

Michelle O'Neil is Arielle's mother.



# Objects/Places

## Douglass High School

Douglass High School is an urban school in Cincinnati, Ohio attended by the book's main characters and the site of most of the book's scenes.

## Chemistry Classroom

Many of the novel's scenes take place in the high school's third-floor chemistry classroom, including the pivotal scene in which Jack Krasinski takes a number of the students hostage. It is also the room where Miss Pringle keeps the items she has stolen in a locked cabinet.

## English Classroom

Mrs. Witherspoon's English classroom is the site of several scenes in the book. Unlike the chemistry room, it is filled with high-tech electronic gadgetry.

## Arielle's House

During the first part of the plot, Arielle lives in a large, beautiful home with her mother and stepfather, but she thinks of it as a pretty prison because of her stepfather's attitude toward his belongings.

## Hillside Valley Shelter

Hillside Valley is the homeless shelter into which Arielle and her mother move after Chad destroys all of their belongings and leaves them penniless.

## AK-47

An AK-47 is the type of assault rifle Jack uses when he takes his fellow students hostage and shoots up the chemistry classroom.

## Pencils

Eddie Mahoney uses two pencils as makeshift drumsticks when he distracts Jack so the other students can disarm him,



## **Snare Drum and Cymbals**

Jack Krasinski is known for walking around the school grounds noisily playing the snare drum and cymbals he carries with him constantly.

## **OxyContin**

OxyContin is the prescription narcotic painkiller on which Kofi becomes dependent.

## **Kofi's House**

Several scenes take place at the home of Kofi and his parents. It is dismal and run down because his father gambles away most of the money he earns.

## **Smoochie's Boutique**

Smoochie's Boutique is a shop in a Cincinnati mall where Arielle gets a job after her stepfather cuts off her allowance.

## **Miss Pringle's Cabinet**

Miss Pringle keeps supplies in a cabinet in her chemistry classroom. She is obsessive about keeping the cabinet locked and allows no one else to see what is inside because she also uses it to store the items she has stolen from students at the school.



# Themes

## Stereotyping

A central theme of *Just Another Hero* is stereotyping among teenagers and the consequences it can bring. In the beginning of the book, lead character Arielle admits that Olivia Thigpen is foremost among the classmates she has treated badly, and the primary cause has been Olivia's size. Olivia is big, she plays the tuba, and it is inconceivable to Arielle that someone so relatively unattractive — at least compared to her own size 2 figure — could attract her former boyfriend, Jericho. Later Jericho and Kofi have a conversation in which they reveal that both of them have learned to value love and support over beauty in the qualities they look for in a girlfriend, and even Arielle eventually learns that Olivia's personal appearance is not nearly as important as her warmth and friendship.

Osrick Wardley is another victim of stereotyping. His small size and bookish personality make him the target of bullies, while most of his other classmates just ignore him. When she gets to know him a bit better, Arielle begins to see other qualities in Osrick and it is his invisibility that enables him to step up as a hero in two different situations.

Students and teachers have also learned to ignore Jack Krasinski, who has been labelled Crazy Jack. However, it is a term of affection because his odd clothing and bizarre behavior just seem like part of his personality until we learn that he suffers from a terrible mental illness that puts his fellow students' lives in jeopardy.

Eddie Mahoney has been stereotyped as a bad seed because of his recent stint in a juvenile detention center, and his mildly threatening behavior does nothing to dispel that image. In fact, he seems to cultivate it, but like Osrick, he proves to be more than what he seems when he uses a habit that annoys others to start the sequence of events that ends the hostage situation safely.

## Heroism

As the book's title implies, heroism and the question of what makes a hero are central themes in this novel. Chad appears to be a hero for rescuing Arielle and her mother from a life of poverty, but he turns out to be a monster instead. The same can be said of Arielle's first two stepfathers. Although we know little about them, we do know that each of them attracted Michelle enough to marry them, but became cruel and abusive.

While someone who appears to be a hero sometimes turns out to be just the opposite, the book's characters also learn that heroes can come from unlikely sources. Eddie Mahoney seems to be the opposite of a hero. He has just returned from reform school and continues to exhibit mildly threatening behavior toward his fellow students, but as the book nears its conclusion, he is the one who steps forward to distract Jack long



enough for others to subdue him. In true hero fashion, he refuses to accept praise and simply disappears when the situation has subsided.

Another unlikely hero is Osrick, who is the target of bullies and is otherwise ignored. However, his quiet demeanor hides a clever, observant young man who learns the identity of the school thief and executes an innovative plan to prove his suspicions. He also uses his ability to blend into the background to send a quick text message, alerting the authorities about the identity of the shooter and contributing to the rescue of his fellow students.

Taking the concept of heroism to a different level, Kofi exhibits heroic behavior in his determination to kick his drug habit, November in her ability to embrace the hardships imposed by single motherhood, and Arielle by growing up enough to realize that appearances and material possessions are not as important as friends and family

The author uses the poem Beowulf to introduce the topic of heroes and give the students an opportunity to talk about the concept, setting up situations in which some of their own will step up as heroes.

## Consequences

The concept of consequences emerges as one of the major themes of *Just Another Hero*. When the book opens, Arielle is suffering the consequences of the self-centered, arrogant behavior that resulted in the loss of her boyfriend and all her friends. November faces the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy as she must raise her baby alone and deal with the very real possibility that Sunshine will have developmental disabilities and other health problems, but she embraces her situation gracefully. Through their grief and sense of loss, all of the characters suffer the consequences of the foolish prank that took the life of Josh a few months earlier. The consequences of Kofi's dependence on prescription drugs are painful withdrawal symptoms that he experiences when he decides to quit.

The book's adult characters are not immune to consequences. Arielle's mother, Michelle, suffers greatly when her desire for financial comfort makes her blind to Chad's emotionally abusive behavior, and Miss Pringle will be prosecuted for the kleptomania that prompted her to steal from her students and fellow teachers. Kofi's parents are facing the consequences of their irresponsible lifestyle, and they are imposing that suffering on their son as well.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of *Just Another Hero* is the third person. The author focuses on two main characters — Arielle and Kofi — and as the book switches perspective between those two characters in various chapters, the narrator becomes omniscient with regard to those characters only. For example, the first two chapters are told from Arielle's perspective and the narrator provides readers with a glimpse into her thoughts and feelings, but not those of other characters. In Chapter 3, the perspective switches to that of Kofi and the reader has the advantage of knowing his thoughts, but not those of other characters, including Arielle. This pattern continues throughout the book and is a good device for getting readers thoroughly engaged with the book's two most prominent characters.

## Setting

The book takes place in Cincinnati, Ohio in the present day. The most prominent setting is Douglass High School, an urban public school attended primarily by African American students. Many of the book's scenes take place at various locations throughout the campus, primarily the chemistry and English classrooms, the gym, the cafeteria and the school grounds. Early descriptions of the chemistry lab are particularly important because that room figures prominently in two pivotal plot points — the thief who has been stealing from students and the hostage situation.

In addition to the school, various chapters take place in Arielle's house, the homeless shelter, Kofi's house, and the mall boutique where Arielle works. The author also takes care to draw dramatic contrasts between Arielle's and Kofi's homes.

## Language and Meaning

*Just Another Hero* is written in present-day, straightforward language appropriate for its intended audience of teenagers. It is easy to read, but includes an appropriate number of challenging words designed to help young readers build their vocabularies.

Because the book's characters are students at a primarily African American high school, the author includes a fair amount of urban slang in dialogue among the students. For example, characters say things like, "You so crazy" and "You cool" on a routine basis. This is in direct contrast to the language used by Mrs. Sherman, the high school principal, who is noted for her extensive vocabulary and the complexity of her speech, and Chad, whose speech patterns reflect his strict, cold personality and explosive temper.



## Structure

Just Another Hero is comprised of 35 chapters of varying lengths. The chapters are not titled, but each notes the date on which it takes place and the character from whose perspective it is told. While the narration is third person, each chapter is told from the perspective of either Arielle or Kofi, and that is noted at the beginning.

The book begins on Thursday, February 3 with Arielle's discovery of the bigger boys bullying Osrick, her struggles with having lost her friends, and the introduction of Kofi. The story then moves forward a day or two at a time, until Chapter 17, which jumps to Monday, February 21. then to Tuesday, March 1. Time jumps of a few days allow the author to paint a more realistic portrait of Kofi's withdrawal from painkillers and the deterioration of the relationship between Chad, Arielle, and her mother.

The book concludes on March 10 with the revelation of the identity of the school thief, Jack's mental break, and the hostage situation.



## Quotes

"But she knew she wasn't any better than the haters who'd picked on Osrick. It was why she was sitting alone right now" (p. 5).

"When Osrick dressed in wacky clothes, students laughed and made fun of him, but if Jack decided to wear pajamas to school, Arielle noticed, everybody thought it was really cool. She wondered why Jack could get away with it, but Osrick couldn't" (p. 15).

"She gazed at the gleaming stainless-steel refrigerator and stove, the sleek, built-in dishwasher, the marble counters, and the shiny copper pots and pans hanging from hooks in the ceiling, but she felt no pride. Her stapfather made it clear that all of that, as well as the lush white carpets and the original oil paintings on the wall, and she and her mom — belonged to him" (p. 28).

"'Gotta call Doc Stinson,' he muttered. Of course, he wasn't even sure anymore if the pain he was taking the pills for was real or just imagined. 'I just know they make me feel smooth when everything else is lumpy'" (p. 38).

"By the time she breezed in the door a few minutes later, Kofi was feeling the Oxy. He felt mellow and relaxed — like he was floating on that ocean his dad dreamed of. His mother's nightly partying usually made him feel angry and helpless. Why couldn't she just be a regular mom? But the Oxy made it sort of okay" (p. 41).

"As he watched his teacher, he couldn't help but think back to how his own mother had reacted. If she could have shown just a teeny tiny portion of Mrs. Witherspoon's excitement, it would have felt so much more right" (p. 44).

"Arielle stirred the clumpy soup and thought for a moment before answering. 'I think he's a wack job, Mom. He's not...normal. When I'm around him I feel like all the good air has been sucked out and I can't breather right. You feel me'" (p. 81).

"'Grendel's mom just wanted revenge,' Osrick said in his soft voice. 'The people who listened to this story would have understood that.' Osrick bowed his head then, as if he were embarrassed. 'Sometimes people just have to get even for bad stuff,' he added even more softly" (p. 99).

"'One day I'll get even,' Osrick murmured. 'They'll be sorry'  
Arielle felt like she had to speak up too. She turned around and said softly, 'You got friends, Osrick. Remembr that.'

'Who? You?' Osrick sounded doubtful.

'Yeah, me. For real,' Arielle said with more confidence. She glanced at Olivia, who, amazingly, nodded" (p. 107).



"I gotta get a better job quick, Kofi thought, before I toss one of these kids into the french fry grease! But he knew that no after-school job was going to be enough to pay for a school like MIT. He needed big money and soon" (p. 120).

"When he opened the front door, he was surprised to see his mother at home, acting like a real mom. She had cooked dinner — it smelled like chicken with onions, his favorite — washed the dishes, and swept the kitchen floor. Her eyes looked bright and clear, and they reminded him of times when she always looked like that, when she went tromping through the woods helping him find buckeyes for a school project on Ohio. When they'd made a red-green-blue-purple mess of the kitchen table and floor when they dyed Easter eggs one spring. The times before she lost her job...two babies to miscarriages...the times before the liquor bottles started piling up" (p. 122).

"Kofi lay restlessly on the bed, thinking about his parents. He knew he'd have a hard time falling asleep. The prescription bottle in his pocket started calling out to him. Boy, if I don't get out of this house soon, I'll end up just like them" (p. 126).

"She closed and locked the bathroom door and leaned against the cool yellow tiles. Egyptian cotton towels and rugs the color of buttercups decorated the room. But like all the other rooms in the house, it seemed to Arielle to be just another pretty prison" (p. 128).

"'You're the kid, not the parent here, Kofi!' she told him sternly. 'It's not your responsibility to take care of them! They're adults'" (p. 133-134).

"She poked him hard in the chest. 'Don't you dare blame this on your parents! Do they beat you with a stick and force those pills down your throat? I love you, Kofi. But if you don't get control of this, you will end up living with your parents in that cardboard box! Is that what you want'" (p. 141-142).

"'People treat me like I'm invisible, so I notice things,' Osrick said with a shrug (p. 145).

"'You know that saying, be careful what you wish for?' said Arielle. 'Well, it's true. My mother thought she'd be hot and happy forever when she married Chad. But money is cold, cold, cold'" (p. 148-149).

"Jericho slowed his walk and looked thoughtful. 'I quit lookin' at the package, man. All I see is the gift inside" (p. 161).

"Jack looked around, like he was maybe searching for more attention, but most kids continued to chat and text and treat Jack as if he were invisible" (p. 176).

"'No, ma'am,' Arielle admitted. 'When I had a closet full of sharp outfits, well, I just never thought about a kid like me who might need something to wear. It honestly never crossed my mind.' The realization made her feel like pond scum" (p. 201).



"As Arielle got close to her school, she knew that she was probably the guts of everybody's gossip this week. But she didn't care anymore. She was grateful for the smallest things these days. Shoes, Deodorant. Underwear" (p. 202).

"Hey, Arielle. Thanks for believing in me. This was the most fun I've had since I've been in high school"

'You're okay, Osrick. Really okay.' She smiled, waved, and disappeared into the girls' bathroom" (p. 230).

"I know they call me Crazy Jack. But I'm NOT!" he screamed" (p. 242).

"But he's never shown any signs of aggression or violence,' Mrs Sherman added. 'He's usually just fun-loving and noisy. We've learned to ignore him.'

Officer Torino looked up. 'Maybe he got tired of being overlooked'" (p. 252).

"When Jack eased his finger off the trigger, the screaming stopped, only to be replaced by the wail of what Kofi imagined had to be dozens of sirens. Although he couldn't see outside, he knew the authorities would rescue them soon. At least he hoped so. He didn't know how much longer Jack would be content shooting computers instead of people" (p. 255).

"I'll read it,' Mrs. Sherman replied breathlessly. 'JACK KRASINSKI IS THE SHOOTER. NOBODY HURT. EVERYBODY SCARED. HELP US!'" (p. 259).

"Kofi inhaled and realized that he felt great — no itching, no chills, no yearning for the pills. Dana will be proud of me. Then standing taller, he said to himself, Heck, I'm proud of me! He knew he'd never go back" (p. 269).

"I'm sick of being at the bottom of everybody's boot. Enough already!" He stole a glance at Arielle. 'Uh, and thanks for letting me do this when I was ready. I know you wanted to go and tell, but it was something I had to do for myself.' He stood up and stretched" (p. 277).

"Arielle breathed deeply of the spring air that promised flowers as well as rain. She ducked under a ribbon of crime scene tape, sprinted toward the parking lot, then whispered the answer to the reporter's question into the soft breeze" (p. 280).



## Topics for Discussion

How does the author use Beowulf to introduce the topic of heroes? Discuss the students' interpretations of the poem and how they relate to other aspects of the book's plot.

The death of Josh takes place before this novel opens, but his memory is woven throughout the book. How does his death and the prank that caused it affect November, Jericho, and Kofi?

Compare and contrast Arielle and Olivia. In what ways are they similar? How are they different? What enables them to become friends? Why do you think Jericho would be attracted to both of them? Why does he choose Olivia over Arielle in the end?

Discuss the character of Chad. What aspects of his background help to explain his attitude toward Arielle? What do you think caused Michelle to become attracted to him and marry him? Do you consider his behavior abusive? Why or why not?

Name at least three ways in which Arielle's life changes over the course of the novel and discuss each. What do you think she learns about herself and others as a result of these changes?

The revelation that Miss Pringle is the thief is a shock to her students and fellow teachers. Discuss at least three clues that the author left along the way that pointed to her as a possible suspect.

How do you interpret the book's final paragraph in which Arielle "whispered the answer to the reporter's question into the soft breeze?" Who do you think she would identify as the heroes of the day? Why?

Name at least four characters who exhibit heroic behavior during the course of the book and discuss what makes each one heroic in his or her own way.