

# **Nothing but the Truth Study Guide**

**Nothing but the Truth by Avi and Edward Irving Wortis**

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# Contents

[Nothing but the Truth Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....3](#)

[Chapter 1 – 4.....5](#)

[Chapter 5 – 8.....8](#)

[Chapters 9 – 12.....11](#)

[Chapters 13 – 15.....17](#)

[Chapters 16 – 19.....22](#)

[Characters.....24](#)

[Objects/Places.....28](#)

[Themes.....31](#)

[Style.....33](#)

[Quotes.....35](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....36](#)



## Plot Summary

At the beginning of the book, Philip Malloy is obsessed with making it on his school's track team. He wants to impress his father and also improve his chances of going to college. He likes most of his classes, math best of all, but despises Miss Narwin's English class. Phil does not see the point in reading the classic book, *The Call of the Wild*, and butts heads with Miss Narwin every step of the way. After a sarcastic answer on an exam, Phil receives a "D" as his term grade for English – a grade that prevents him from trying out for the track team. Phil immediately blames Miss Narwin for his bad luck and is angry when he learns she will also be his homeroom teacher for the spring term.

Miss Narwin is facing her own challenges as the story begins. As she desperately tries to get a grasp on contemporary teaching, she bemoans the fact that her students do not appreciate, or even care about, literature the way students in the past have. She requests funding from the school district to attend a summer course to improve her student interaction. When she is denied the funding, Miss Narwin becomes discouraged and angry at the lack of concern the administration shows. Though Phil Malloy does not take her course seriously, Miss Narwin believes Phil has potential and hopes she can break through his tough wall and help him succeed.

The morning announcements are always broadcast through the wall speakers during homeroom at Harrison High School. The first day Phil is in Miss Narwin's homeroom, he hums along to the playing of the national anthem over the intercom. Miss Narwin asks him to stop. Phil believes his action is no big deal, but Miss Narwin cites a school memo asking students to stand in a respectful silence during the national anthem as her reason for asking him to be quiet. The first time Phil stops reluctantly. After telling his parents about the incident, and being told by his father he should stand up for his rights, Phil continues to hum along to the national anthem in homeroom. Miss Narwin throws him out once. When she throws him out a second time, the assistant principal threatens Phil with suspension. When Phil refuses to apologize to Miss Narwin, he is suspended for being sent to the principal's office twice in the same week for the same offense. Miss Narwin disagrees with Phil's suspension, but the assistant principal insists that "a rule is a rule."

Phil's mother is upset that he acted up and got suspended, but Phil's father blames Miss Narwin and is outraged his son was suspended for being patriotic. Phil, and his father Ben, go over to tell their neighbor the story. Ted Griffen, who used to chase Phil off his lawn, is running for the school board and Ben believes he should know what happened to Phil. A reporter is at Ted's house doing an interview for the school board elections and she ends up interviewing Phil and Ben Malloy about his suspension. She writes an article for the local newspaper presenting a one-sided view of Phil's suspension and also paints the incident to be about squelching patriotic freedom, not a discipline issue. The people of Harrison Township are outraged, stoked by Ted Griffen who is making the rounds using the incident as leverage to win his school board election campaign.



A national wire service picks up the local story and condenses it to one paragraph, declaring Phil to be suspended for being patriotic and placing the blame solely on Miss Narwin. Newspapers around the country begin calling Harrison High School and telegrams and letters begin arriving, asking for Miss Narwin's resignation. The school board and administration, feeling pressure because of the upcoming school budget election, begin to twist the truth of the incident and school policy to save face. As a result, Miss Narwin becomes the scapegoat and is asked to take a leave of absence. Phil is overwhelmed by all of the attention he receives as a result of the national coverage, and becomes stressed at the teasing by, and disapproval of, his peers. When Phil realizes he will not be able to improve his grade in Miss Narwin's class or join the track team, he tells his parents he wants to switch schools.

At the end of the book, Miss Narwin makes the decision to resign, the school district budget is defeated, and Ted Griffen is elected to the school board. Phil leaves Harrison High School to attend Washington Academy, a private school with no track team. In the final lines of the book, Phil admits he does not even know the words to the national anthem.



# Chapter 1 – 4

## Summary

Pre-Chapter 1: An example of a Harrison School District memorandum is presented. The memo is written by Dr. Joseph Palleni, the assistant principal of Harrison High School. The letterhead of the memo has the motto “Where our children are educated, not just taught,” with the name of the school superintendent, Dr. Albert Seymour, and school board chairman, Mrs. Gloria Harland, just under the motto. The memo describes the standard format for doing morning announcements over the school intercom. The announcements, which are to start promptly at 8:05 a.m. every morning, begin with the day of the week, date, and dictate whether students will be following Schedule A or B that day. The person doing the announcements should then give no more than three historical references about that date and then ask students to rise for the playing of the national anthem. The memo states students are to stand in respectful silence as the national anthem plays. The anthem is followed by announcements and the day’s sport and club news. All morning announcements are to end by 8:15 a.m.

Chapter 1, Tuesday, March 13: An excerpt from the diary of Harrison High School ninth-grader, Philip Malloy, is shared. The entry is written at 10:35 p.m. Philip is excited because Coach Jamison, the high school track coach, stopped him in the hallway that day to tell him to be sure to try out for the team. Philip mentions he will need to buy new shoes and adds he is sure his dad will help because he was so excited to hear about the coach wanting Philip to try out. He wonders if he will need to quit his job as a paperboy. Though the weather has been rainy and cold, Philip says he still ran six miles that day. Philip mentions seeing some information on the news about the Olympics and says he needs to keep saving money for college so he can run on a big stage – unlike his Dad, who had to drop out of college and never made it big. Philip says Sarah Gloss told him Allison Doresett likes him. He says Allison is “really decent” looking and that the two would make an attractive couple. Girls go for guys who win, he declares. Philip laments his English class, specifically his uptight teacher, Miss Narwin, who is making the class read a dumb book about a dog. He claims there have got to be better things for ninth graders to read than Jack London’s, *The Call of the Wild*, a book his mother says she read in high school.

The chapter moves to a letter written by Philip’s English teacher, Margaret Narwin. The letter is written at 10:45 p.m. to Miss Narwin’s sister, Anita Wigham, who lives in Florida. Margaret vents to her sister about the state of the teaching profession and says after twenty-one years of teaching high school literature she is getting a little tired. Despite this, Margaret explains teaching is like a “religion” to her and she likes doing it. Students in her classroom are not the same as the students she used to teach and they have no attention span or interest in learning, which frustrates Margaret because she can tell many of them are very bright. As an example, Margaret mentions Philip Malloy. She describes him as “a boy I like” who is only a mediocre student – a fact Margaret feels is a shame considering his intelligence. She explains Philip’s parents seem like nice



people and his mother seems smart. Despite her frustrations, Margaret tells her sister she is not ready to take an early retirement and move down to Florida because she would miss her books, teaching, and students.

Chapter 2, Thursday, March 15: The homeroom class of Bernard Lunser is described. As the school announcements begin at 8:05 a.m., Mr. Lunser has a comment for everything. His attitude is boisterous and sarcastic but his students do not seem to appreciate the humor. Mr. Lunser teases Philip, who says he is studying for an exam, and makes him put the book away. The teacher shuffles the students out the door following the playing of the national anthem, noting they should all be grateful there are no announcements to have to sit through.

The chapter skips back to the diary of Philip at 11:05 p.m. He complains winter exams are the following week and he has three exams scheduled in one day. Philip explains his philosophy of dealing with teachers and writes he usually just answers with one of their ideas to make them happy. When all else fails, he says, he just makes them laugh. He says he likes math and will take time to study for that exam, but won't waste any time on English because it is just a matter of opinion, anyway. Philip mentions his parents are arguing a lot lately and, from his description, it seems financial worry may be the stressor. He says he has been checking Allison Doresett out and his dad told him girls really go for sports stars. Philip mentions his paper route and says one of his customers owes him for three weeks of paper delivery. He notes he got in a few hours of working out that day, including twenty minutes on his dad's rowing machine. He read in Running Magazine a seventeen-year-old boy named Steve Hallick ran the 55-meter race in 6.51 seconds, a feat Phil finds impressive. He says track practice starts the following week and it's all he and his dad talk about.

Chapter 3, Friday, March 16: Philip receives a memo from the assistant principal, Joseph Palleni, telling him he will be moving to Miss Narwin's homeroom class for the spring semester, beginning the following Wednesday. At 8:20 p.m., Philip calls Allison Doresett. Phil tries to joke his way through the conversation to a less than stellar response from Allison. The two discuss the English exam on *The Call of the Wild*. Philip jokes with Allison telling her that he lost his copy of the book because he tried to read it to a dog that ran away with it and buried it. Allison tells Philip he really should try to give Miss Narwin that story and see what happens. She also tells him she actually enjoyed the book.

Chapter 4, Monday, March 19: This chapter looks at a question on Miss Narwin's English exam, Philip's answer and Miss Narwin's response to Philip's answer. The question asks what the test taker thinks of Jack London using Buck the dog as the focus of his novel, *The Call of the Wild*. Philip sarcastically answers he thinks Buck is actually symbolic of a cat. Readers usually think the book is about a dog but erroneous thought is the whole point of the book, he says. He adds dogs are stupid enough to let people write about them, but cats are smart. Philip concludes the book itself is a dog. Miss Narwin responds to Philip's answer by saying students are not required to like the book but they are required to give a respectful analysis of what they read. She adds Philip has a lot of potential but if he does not shape up, he is in danger of failing her class.



## Analysis

Readers are introduced to the life, concerns and struggles of Philip Malloy through his diary entries. It is evident Philip's interests lie in sports and girls. He enjoys math, but shirks his other academic responsibilities, most notably English. His focus on running and making the track team overshadow his focus on other areas of his life in a detrimental way, but are typical of how teenagers tend to behave.

Similarly to the diary entries, the reader gains insight into Miss Narwin's life and struggles by reading her letter to her sister. In it, Miss Narwin explains the inner struggle she faces by working in a profession she loves but she feels she is becoming disconnected from her students. She is torn between feelings of leaving teaching and staying in her comfort zone. The dynamic of tension between Miss Narwin and Phil is partly caused by personalities, but also caused by the other stressors in their lives.

## Vocabulary

memo, faculty, designated, steadfast, middling, potential, betterment, ambition, carpe diem, assassinated, opinion, facilitate, extracurricular, significance, symbolic, portrayal, masterpiece



## Chapter 5 – 8

### Summary

Chapter 5, Tuesday, March 20: Miss Narwin writes a letter to the school principal, Gertrude Doane, requesting a grant to attend the summer workshop, “New Approaches to the Teaching of Literature for Today’s Students.” The two-week program is being hosted by the State University and Miss Narwin says she believes the class will help her become more in touch with contemporary classrooms. She points out her love of literature is simply not enough to encourage her students to be passionate about literature too, and the workshop will show her new ways to interest students in reading. Miss Narwin points out she knows district money is tight but she has never asked for a grant in over twenty years of teaching.

Chapter 6, Wednesday, March 21: The school superintendent, Dr. Albert Seymour, sends out a memo reminding teachers and administrators that citizens will be voting on the proposed school district budget on April 5. Dr. Seymour urges his colleagues to get out and talk to as many voters as possible before the election to remind them of how important education still is in the fledgling economy. He warns that a major cut to the budget will mean slashes to program funding and possible layoffs. Dr. Seymour also tells teachers that if they become aware of any hot-button issues in the weeks leading up to election, they inform his office so they can avoid potential controversy. He reminds his colleagues an informed voter is a wise voter.

Chapter 7, Friday, March 23: Philip’s diary entry talks about the grades he earned for winter term. While he received an “A” in Math and a “B” in health, the rest of his grades were low. Philip earned a “B-” in biology, a “C” in history and a “D” in English. He blames Miss Narwin for his low grade in English because she clearly didn’t “get the joke” of his exam answers. According to Philip, Miss Narwin wants her students to write down her opinion of the literature and any other answer is considered wrong. Philip laments the fact that soon Miss Narwin will be his homeroom teacher. He then talks about how he did on his sprints, and that the tryouts for the track team are Monday. He wonders if he will need to give up his paper route.

Philip talks briefly about a show he saw on television about international drug trading and the mafia and describes it as being “neat.” He says Sarah Gloss is reading the book, *The Outsiders*, and she told him it was the best book she had ever read and will let him borrow it. He mentions seeing Allison at school and that he loves being able to figure people out. He is in awe of Steve Hallick who reportedly ran a mile in four minutes and seven seconds.

Chapter 8, Monday, March 26: The chapter opens with a memo from Principal Doane to Miss Narwin regarding her request for funds for the summer course in teaching literature. Principal Doane addresses Miss Narwin as “Peg” and it is clear the two share a strong working relationship. Citing financial strain and the school district’s emphasis





on financially supporting activities associated with high school sports, Principal Doane denies Miss Narwin's request. Principal Doane does say that on a personal level, she respects Miss Narwin for trying to broaden her teaching horizons and adds Peg can "always count on" her.

The chapter refocuses on a discussion between Coach Jamison and Philip. In it, Coach Jamison explains Philip's grades are not high enough even to try out for the track team, specifically the "D" Philip received in English. When Philip explains he has never heard of this rule, the coach explains the school handbook says students must have a passing grade in every class in order to try out for a sports team. Coach Jamison suggests Philip go talk to Miss Narwin and see if he can do any extra work to bring the grade up. Philip argues the problem is Miss Narwin and it would be better for him to just switch teachers, to which Coach Jamison responds that 'sometimes in sports, it's better to just "go with the flow."' The coach concludes unless Philip does something to improve the grade, he will not be able to try out for the track team, which would be a big disappointment for him.

That afternoon in Miss Narwin's English class, Philip is distracted and looking out the window. Miss Narwin asks him to pay attention to her and he replies he is listening. When she asks him to repeat what she just said, Philip can't and she asks him to make more of an effort to pay attention to the lesson.

## Analysis

Miss Narwin's personality is explored further in the letter she writes to Principal Doane asking for a grant to take a summer course to improve her student interaction skills. She explains the disconnect she feels with her students but also says she is willing to take some responsibility and improve her teaching skills to help fill the void. The memo that follows from the school superintendent, regarding the school budget, foreshadows the denial of the fund request from Principal Doane that comes in Chapter 8. Readers can feel Miss Narwin's desperation, and the dreaded outcome. Though she is asking for help, she will not receive it.

Philip's flippancy gets the better of him in this section of the book. His aversion to literature and the wall he has built up toward learning anything about the info Miss Narwin presents to the class backfire on him. Earlier in the book Philip mentions how important college will be to his track career, and despite this knowledge, he does not receive a passing grade in English. Coach Jamison implies Philip really needs to take responsibility for his grades, especially if he wants to participate in sports, but Philip continues to blame Miss Narwin. The reader sees the immaturity in Philip and though it is an unattractive quality, it represents a common trait of adolescence with which readers can relate.

## Vocabulary

contemporary, entice, beneficiaries, municipal, mass media, forthcoming, controversial, unawares, electorate, wholeheartedly, intellectual, facilitate, tiresome



## Chapters 9 – 12

### Summary

This chapter chronicles a conversation between Philip's parents. Susan Malloy asks her husband if he has looked at Phil's grades yet and Ben Malloy asks why Phil's English grade is so low. She explains Phil claims it is the teacher who is the problem. When Ben shrugs off Phil not being good at English, his wife warns Phil could flunk the class. Ben says if Phil fails the class it won't be the end of the world and then asks his wife if Phil qualified for the track team. Susan says she hasn't asked him yet and maybe the track tryouts are the reason Phil has been so moody the past few days. She also tells her husband Phil asked if the two of them were planning to get a divorce, a question that shocks Ben. He says he will go talk to his son.

Ben goes down to the basement to talk to his son. He breaks the ice with Phil by giving him a few tips about the rowing machine before asking him "straight up" what is going on with his English class. Phil tells his dad the problem is the teacher and the only students who do well in her classes are her "favorites." When Ben offers to go talk to Miss Narwin, Phil tells him he can handle it himself. Ben then asks Phil how the track team tryouts went and Phil says they haven't happened yet and he doesn't think he will try out after all. When his father presses him for details as to why he doesn't want to try out for the team, Phil responds, "I'm not you." Confused, Ben tells his son he has talent and the new shoes his parents bought for him. Phil continues to shut down his father's questions and eventually says he will think about trying out.

The chapter shifts to a segment of a letter Miss Narwin is writing to her sister, Anita Wigham. In it, she describes how hurt she is that her request for a grant was denied. She tells her sister the lack of respect for literature and showering of funding on silly things, like the marching band, are the problem with the school district. Miss Narwin ultimately blames the decision on the superintendent, who she claims is a political person and is worried only about keeping his job.

The diary of Philip Malloy is revisited at 10:40 p.m. and he talks about the discussion he had with his parents earlier about his English grade and joining the track team. Phil says there are two things really bothering him: that track practice starts the next day and he isn't on the team, and he starts his new homeroom class with Miss Narwin. He swears he is going to find a way to get out of her class.

The chapter sits in on a conversation between Phil's parents at 11:45 p.m. Ben tells his wife he spoke with Philip and was told that his son is not trying out for the track team, a fact that shocks Phil's mom. She says she's sure Phil is just moody and will change his mind. Ben says he hopes that is the case.

Chapter 10, Wednesday, March 28: Phil talks to his friend, Ken Barchet as the boys walk to the bus stop. Ken says he has Miss Narwin for his new homeroom, too, and he



thinks “she’s okay.” Phil expresses his dislike for Miss Narwin and says he’s working on a way to get transferred out of her homeroom and English class. The book skips ahead to homeroom in Miss Narwin’s class. There is confusion among the students as to who should be where and Miss Narwin seems flustered with the task of straightening out homeroom. The morning announcements come on and during the playing of the national anthem, Miss Narwin hears a student humming along. She discovers the student is Philip Malloy and she asks him repeatedly to stop. He argues with her and tells her his former homeroom teacher, Mr. Lunser, didn’t mind if he hummed or sang along. The national anthem ends with Miss Narwin and Phil still arguing their points.

A few hours after homeroom, Miss Narwin tells fellow teacher, Jacob Benison about the incident with Philip Malloy. Mr. Benison agrees humming along is breaking the rules, but doesn’t seem too bothered by Phil’s actions. When Miss Narwin tells him he didn’t stop humming when she asked him to, Mr. Benison responds, “Well, the term won’t last forever.” Just after noon, the book relays a conversation between Phil Malloy and Todd Becker in the lunchroom. Todd asks Phil why he didn’t try out for the track team. Phil tells him he just has too much to do. The conversation shifts to the homeroom incident and Todd, similarly to Mr. Benison, does not seem to think it was a big deal. Todd even says he likes Miss Narwin.

In Miss Narwin’s English class that afternoon, a scene from Julius Caesar is read. Miss Narwin reads the excerpt, “No, Cassius; for the eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things” and then asks for feedback from the class. Phil raises his hand and points out that a cross-eyed person might be able to see his or her own eye. Miss Narwin tells him she will not take his answer seriously. On the bus ride home, Allison Doresett sits next to Phil and tries to strike up a conversation. Phil is distracted and gives short answers. Allison asks why Phil didn’t try out for the track team, and he responds he had something else to do. She moves to another seat after she perceives Phil’s distraction to be disinterest, much to Phil’s dismay.

Back at the school, Miss Narwin finds Mr. Lunser after school. She asks him if he ever allowed Philip Malloy to sing or hum the national anthem in his homeroom class. Mr. Lunser never actually denies letting Philip hum to the national anthem, but instead says he’s not the kind of teacher who likes to break the rules. That night at the Malloy family dinner table, Phil’s parents try to talk to him about what has been bothering him. At first Phil is distracted and does not answer. Gradually, he tells his parents about the incident with the national anthem in Miss Narwin’s class. While his parents attempt to understand, they keep interrupting each other and Phil eventually stops trying to explain and leaves the dinner table.

Later that night, Miss Narwin writes a letter to her sister, Anita. In it, she talks about how she had a hectic day because it was Spring Changeover Day. Miss Narwin explains the day is always a disaster as students are moved from their old routine to a totally new one and that “bedlam” is always the result. She tells her sister during the adjustment, many of her new students use the time to challenge authority and she doesn’t always have the stamina to enforce the rules while being consistent and fair. Philip writes four short sentences in his diary entry. “Today was rotten. Nothing was right. I felt like



punching Narwin in the face. It all just stinks.” Shortly after Philip’s entry, Allison Doresett calls her friend Janet Barsky and tells her about how weird Phil acted toward her on the bus. Allison tells Janet she thinks Todd Becker is really cute too, though.

At 10:45 p.m., Ben Malloy goes to Phil’s room and asks for Phil to explain the incident with his teacher again. Ben tells Phil whatever the situation, his parents will stand beside him. He mentions talking to their neighbor, Ted Griffen, who is running for the school board about the incident if necessary.

Chapter 11, Thursday, March 29: The next morning Phil returns to Miss Narwin’s homeroom. During morning announcements, Phil sings along to the national anthem again and after Miss Narwin repeatedly tells him to stop, she sends him to the principal’s office. In the assistant principal’s office, Phil tells his side of the story. He tells Dr. Palleni he likes to sing along to the national anthem, that it is a patriotic thing. Dr. Palleni tells Phil he broke the rules and was disobedient by not heeding Miss Narwin’s instructions. Phil makes it known he thinks the rule is ill-founded but Dr. Palleni tells Phil he has bigger problems to deal with and he should just run along. The chapter skips to a conversation Ben Malloy has with his boss. Mr. Dexter is upset for a project that has gone wrong and Ben apologizes, though it is not his fault that the mistake was made. Mr. Dexter says the company can “not afford another screw up.”

Back at Harrison High School, Principal Doane calls Miss Narwin into her office. Principal Doane says she wants to talk to Miss Narwin about denying her request for funding for the summer class. Principal Doane explains while doing research for the budget vote, she discovered Miss Narwin consistently turns out students who score higher on standardized tests and go on to prestigious writing programs on a higher education level. Principal Doane tells her Miss Narwin does not need a master’s teaching class because she is already a master teacher. Though this doesn’t change the funding decision, Principal Doane tells her friend “Peg” she just wanted to tell her the statistical information and show her how successful her teaching is.

That night, Ben Malloy tells his wife about the bad day he had at work. She tells him she hopes he stood up for himself and Ben scoffs. He reminds her he is not in a position of power and she drops the issue. At dinner, Phil tells his parents he got kicked out of class for singing along to the national anthem, again. His parents are shocked he could get in trouble for singing the national anthem and his dad tells him to stand up for himself, no matter what.

In a letter written to her sister that night, Miss Narwin describes the conversation she had with Principal Doane and how the kind words really meant a lot to her. She says while most teachers have nothing good to say about their administrators, she is lucky to have administration that takes her concerns and struggles to heart. Philip Malloy writes the same thing in his diary entry for the day, but in regards to his parents. He says while most kids complain about their parents not being on their side, he is lucky that his parents are different.



Chapter 12, Friday, March 30: In homeroom, Phil sings along to the national anthem again. When Miss Narwin tells him he is being disrespectful, he says it is she who is the disrespectful one. He tells her he is just being patriotic, but she kicks him out of class. In the assistant principal's office, Dr. Palleni tells Phil either he apologizes to Miss Narwin or he faces an automatic two-day suspension. Phil pleads with Dr. Palleni to change his homeroom assignment and English class. Dr. Palleni refuses, saying all Phil needs to do is apologize. He tells Phil to sit outside his office for a little while and think about what he wants to do, but Phil tells him immediately he will not apologize to Miss Narwin.

Dr. Palleni pulls Miss Narwin out of a class and asks her to confirm the story Phil told him in his office. The two discuss what the possible motive is for Phil to cause a scene, wondering if it has to do with a girl or trouble at home. Miss Narwin suggests Phil move back to Bart Lunser's homeroom, and Dr. Palleni agrees that will be a step in the right direction. Dr. Palleni returns to the office and tells Phil Miss Narwin is willing to forget about the incident if he will just apologize and not repeat the offense. Phil refuses. Dr. Palleni threatens to call his parents and Phil tells him to go ahead and call his mother.

Dr. Palleni calls Susan Malloy at work, who is clearly upset over the phone. He won't give her details over the phone, but tells her to come to the school and pick up her son. Dr. Palleni tells Phil his mother is on the way. Mrs. Malloy calls her husband to tell him she is on the way to pick up Phil who has just been suspended and Ben immediately defends his son. She says she doesn't know the details of why he is being suspended but she is on her way to get him.

A memo is written, informing Phil that when he returns to school on Tuesday, April 3, he is to report to Mr. Lunser's homeroom. The memo is the exact same format as the memo he received transferring him to Miss Narwin's homeroom, but the details are adjusted to send him back to Mr. Lunser. Susan Malloy arrives to pick up Phil about forty-five minutes after she is called at work. She, Phil, and Dr. Palleni discuss the situation in his office. When Susan tries to express that she feels Phil's rights are being infringed upon, Dr. Palleni quickly cuts her off, stating Phil did break the rules by disturbing the class. Dr. Palleni asks Phil if he broke the rule and Phil says "It's a dumb rule," confirming he broke it.

On the car ride home, Susan tells her son she is very upset he was suspended. Phil continues to place the blame on Miss Narwin, adding his father told him to stand up for himself. Mrs. Malloy seems surprised her husband said that and tells Phil she wishes she had sent him to Washington Academy, a place Phil calls a "geeky private school." Back at Harrison High School, a few memos are written explaining Phil's suspension. The first is to Miss Narwin from Dr. Palleni, telling her Phil was suspended for two days and is being transferred back to Mr. Lunser's homeroom class. The second memo is from Dr. Palleni to Mr. Lunser, explaining Phil will be returning to his homeroom class. In the memo, Dr. Palleni explains Phil has been acting out and he would like to be updated on Phil's future behavior. The third memo is addressed to Principal Doane and in it, Dr. Palleni says Phil was suspended for causing a disturbance and he is transferring him back to Mr. Lunser's homeroom class.



Dr. Palleni flags Miss Narwin down in the hallway and fills her in on Phil being suspended, to which Miss Narwin asks, “Did you have to suspend him?” Dr. Palleni says a rule is a rule and he also transferred Phil back to Mr. Lunser’s homeroom class. He asks Miss Narwin if she would like to switch Phil to a different English class and she says she isn’t ready to give up with Phil yet. Sadness over the suspension is evident in Miss Narwin’s tone as she tells Dr. Palleni she believes Phil really is a nice kid. At 3:45 p.m., Phil receives a phone call from his friend Ken Barchet. Ken heard a rumor that Phil had been suspended and Phil confirms it. Ken seems to think the whole incident is funny, telling Phil that everyone was cracking up. The two make plans to work out after Phil finishes his newspaper route. At 3:48 p.m., Allison Doresett calls Phil to ask him if it’s true he got suspended. When Phil tells her Miss Narwin got him kicked out of school, Allison defends her teacher. Phil disagrees and the two hang up after a few more exchanges.

That evening, Miss Narwin writes a letter to her sister and addresses Phil’s suspension. She tells Anita she believes suspension is never productive, especially since she feels something is troubling Phil at home. She tells Anita when Phil returns to school the next week, she intends to have a heart to heart conversation with him. At dinner, Phil explains his suspension to his father. Ben Malloy is visibly upset and tells Phil they should go talk to their neighbor, Ted Griffen. Phil is hesitant, but follows his father across the street. The two explain what happened and Ted is outraged that Phil was suspended for singing the national anthem. He tells the Malloys he is in the middle of an interview with a reporter and they should come inside and tell her the story. Phil is very hesitant but is encouraged inside by the two men. Inside, Phil tells the reporter, Jennifer Stewart, his side of the story, exaggerating he was actually kicked out three times for singing the anthem. Ted Griffen uses the opportunity to state if he is elected to the school board, he will not allow such things to happen.

At 11:34 p.m. Phil writes in his diary that a lot of things went haywire that day. He says he has a headache and generally doesn’t feel well because of it. Phil says the whole thing is stupid, but he is in the right.

## Analysis

Characters in the story begin to take sides in this section of the book. When Phil tells other students he dislikes Miss Narwin, they defend her and say they think she is nice. When Phil tells his parents about getting in trouble for singing the national anthem, Ben Malloy insists his son do what he feels is right and he will stand beside him. Despite the reason Phil keeps getting kicked out of class, Dr. Palleni defends Miss Narwin, or more specifically, the school rules. When Ted Griffen learns about the suspension, he immediately sides himself with patriotism and instilling patriotic values in the schools.

The idea that relationships and issues are always more complicated than they appear on the surface begins to shine through in these chapters. In Phil’s opinion, Miss Narwin dislikes him and that is the reason she gives him so much grief. It becomes clear to readers, however, through her conversations with Dr. Palleni and in her letters to her

sister Miss Narwin cares about Phil and wants to help him deal with whatever struggles he may be facing.

The issue at the heart of Phil's suspension is complicated as well. Readers know the background story of Miss Narwin and Phil and why she is quick to call out his disturbance during morning announcements. While Phil tells everyone he is suspended because of singing the national anthem, Dr. Palleni makes it clear Phil is being suspended for breaking the same rule twice in the same week. Dr. Palleni explains a rule is a rule, no matter what rule is broken. At the same time, readers wonder why a rule essentially banning students from personal patriotic freedom is not examined more closely.

## **Vocabulary**

absurd, condone, outrageous, shoo-in, straightforward, suspension, intrigue, productive, obscure, infraction, harmony, bygones, provocative, patriotic, disrespectful, complexity, botched, frantic, vanity, paperback, vigilant, bedlam





# Chapters 13 – 15

## Summary

Reporter Jennifer Stewart begins making phone calls to confirm the story that Philip Malloy and his father told her. She calls Superintendent Seymour at home. He is unaware of the issue but tells her there is no such rule in his school district that students cannot sing along to the national anthem. Next, Jennifer calls Principal Doane, who is also unaware of the incident. Dr. Doane explains she was away at meetings on Friday so she was not aware of the suspension and that most discipline issues are handled by the assistant principal, Dr. Palleni. When Jennifer asks Dr. Doane if a student would get in trouble for singing the national anthem at her school, Dr. Doane says “of course not.”

Jennifer calls Dr. Palleni next. When she asks him if he suspended Philip Malloy for singing the national anthem, he claims he did no such thing. As she continues to ask questions, Dr. Palleni says “no comment” and refuses to answer anything further. Jennifer next calls Miss Narwin, who explains Phil Malloy was causing a disturbance and breaking a rule. Jennifer informs Miss Narwin the superintendent claims there is no such rule. Miss Narwin says she thinks Jennifer should really call the school principal and Jennifer says she already did. Miss Narwin concludes she has nothing else to say about the matter. Later that morning, Dr. Doane calls Dr. Palleni to ask for details on Philip Malloy’s suspension. Dr. Palleni explains Phil was suspended for creating a disturbance and when he was given several opportunities to apologize, he didn’t take. Dr. Palleni asks if he should call the reporter back to talk and Dr. Doane tells him not to worry about it and to have a nice weekend.

Phil receives a letter in the mail with his new homeroom assignment and tells his mom hopefully they just forgot to send information on being transferred to a new English class as well. He writes in his diary later that night he may go ask Miss Narwin for extra work in order to get on the track team. Phil says he hates working out without a team.

Chapter 14, Sunday, April 1: The chapter opens with the article Jennifer Stewart writes for the Sunday edition of the Manchester Record. The article is printed in section D, the community section, and explains Phil seems to have been suspended for a rule the superintendent denies having in place. Upon reading the article, Superintendent Seymour calls Principal Doane at home, and Principal Doane explains Phil was suspended for causing a disturbance, not because he was singing the national anthem. Principal Doane also explains Miss Narwin is a good teacher and has been at the school longer than any of the other teachers. Superintendent Seymour tells Principal Doane to refer all phone calls and inquiries to his office.

Ken Barchet calls Phil and tells him about the article. Phil believes Ken is just playing an April Fool’s joke and ignores him. Ken says though the article “ain’t true” it’s still funny to read. Phil’s parents call him downstairs to see the article and Phil appears to be upset. His parents, however, seem pleased that Ted Griffen was able to bring attention to their



issue, noting it is nice to see their name in print. That afternoon, Miss Narwin calls her sister to tell her about the article. Her sister advises her to just tell people the truth and the incident will soon pass. Ted Griffen delivers a speech at a meeting of the Harrison Sunday Fellowship on his goals if he is elected to the school board. He slams funding for computers, which his generation didn't seem to need, and says basic patriotic rights aren't even allotted to students. That evening, Phil writes in his diary his parents seem excited about the newspaper article. He wonders if Miss Narwin will get fired, noting it would be her own fault. He says he finished reading *The Outsiders*, and wonders what it would be like to live without parents and be able to do whatever you wanted.

Chapter 15, Monday, April 2: Word of Philip's suspension becomes national news as the story in the *Manchester Record* is picked up by wire services. An American Affiliated Press Wire Service story summarizes the events of the suspension in one paragraph, naming Margaret Narwin as the teacher who brought about the suspension. Jake Barlow, a radio talk show host, mentions the AAP story. He asks his listeners what kind of school, and more importantly, what kind of teacher, would squelch the patriotism of a teenager. Jake mentions the motto of New Hampshire is "Live free or die."

Back in Harrison, the chairman of the school board, Gloria Harland, calls Superintendent Seymour and tells him about Ted Griffen's speech at the Harrison Sunday Fellowship. She asks the superintendent if the story a kid was suspended for singing the national anthem is actually true, and Dr. Seymour assures her it is not true. He says he will make a few more inquiries about the incident get back to her. Mrs. Harland points out the last thing the school board needs before the budget vote is bad publicity.

Back on Jake Barlow's talk show, listeners begin to call and weigh in on the controversy from Harrison High School. A caller named Steve says the teacher who threw the student out for being patriotic should not be allowed to be a teacher at all. Jake challenges liberal listeners to call in and try to defend the teacher. Another caller named Liz says she would take her kids out of school if a teacher like that was teaching. She explains her husband served in the military and the teacher is taking away student's rights. When a caller named Roger calls in to say the story seems slanted toward the student without any real explanation from the teacher, the talk show host shuts him down. Jake calls Roger a "rotten apple" and then asks his listeners to start a letter writing campaign to Margaret Narwin, telling her whether they agree or disagree with what she did.

Dr. Seymour calls Principal Doane and asks her to make a report about the suspension incident. He asks her to have it to him as soon as possible, though she protests she doesn't have the time to do it or see the need for it. About forty-five minutes later, a reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* calls Principal Doane and asks her about the AAP story. Dr. Doane is shocked the story has somehow made national news. When the reporter starts to ask questions, Dr. Doane tells him she will have to call him back later and the article is full of errors.



At 10 a.m., Dr. Doane, Miss Narwin and Dr. Palleni meet to rehash the incident. Miss Narwin explains again Phil was being disrespectful and also breaking the rule in the memo about morning announcements. When Miss Narwin says in the past Phil has mocked her in his written work, Principal Doane asks if she still has any examples. Miss Narwin says she always hands work back to the students. She also says she doesn't feel Phil needed to be suspended and Dr. Palleni defends his suspension decision, saying they can't start bending the school policy.

Dr. Doane asks Dr. Palleni to write up a draft of the facts and give it to the superintendent. In the memo, Dr. Palleni explains the dates, times and places involved in the incident. He quotes the rules about students being at respectful, silent attention during the national anthem and Philip Malloy broke the rule three times. When he was given the choice to apologize for his behavior and not continue it in the future, he refused. Dr. Palleni also mentions Phil has been noted for showing inappropriate behavior in his English class.

Dr. Doane begins interviewing students who were in the homeroom class at the time of the incident. She first speaks to Phil's friend Ken Barchet. Ken says the singing didn't really bother him and he didn't notice it much. After being interviewed, Ken calls Phil at home from a school pay phone to tell him the principal just talked to him about the incident. Ken says the incident was really nothing for everyone to be so upset about.

The next student that Principal Doane interviews is Cynthia Gambia. Cynthia says Phil started to hum, but it really wasn't a big deal and no one paid any attention to him. She says the disturbance must be because Phil didn't stop humming/singing when Miss Narwin asked him to stop. She adds Phil was being kind of rude and Miss Narwin is a fair teacher, everyone agrees. The final student Dr. Doane interviews is Allison Doresett. Allison says she thinks Phil planned the whole incident just to upset Miss Narwin. She explains Phil does not like Miss Narwin and in general, he has been "moody" lately. Allison adds she really likes Miss Narwin and Dr. Doane thanks her for her honesty.

At a luncheon meeting of the rotary club, Ted Griffen delivers a speech about basic American values and how they are clearly lacking in the school district. He repeats his rhetoric about how schools don't need computers if they can't protect basic rights like patriotism. He asks, "Is that the way we budget our education dollars?"

Based on the findings of her interviews, Dr. Doane writes a memo to Dr. Seymour rehashing the facts of the incident and adding there seems to be underlying animosity Phil feels toward Miss Narwin. Dr. Doane cites his poor grade in her English class as an example of his feelings toward Miss Narwin as a teacher. She mentions Dr. Palleni followed the superintendent's rules when suspending Phil based on his discipline issue. In the afternoon, telegrams begin arriving at Harrison High School from all over the country. One addressed to Miss Narwin is from the Young Americans for America in Tampa, Florida, strongly condemning what they believe was her suppression of patriotism. Another one delivered to Principal Doane is from an individual in North Carolina who says people like Margaret Narwin shouldn't be allowed to teach. Phil also



receives a telegram at home from the Society for Preservation of Free Speech applauding his efforts at protecting the right to free speech in public.

Late in the afternoon, Superintendent Seymour writes a memo to school board chairman Gloria Harland reviewing all the facts and insight about Phil's suspension and the incidents leading up to it. Dr. Seymour mentions the incident took place on account of some personal animosity Phil has toward Miss Narwin and his school performance is also inferior. He mentions there is some belief that Phil is having problems at home, a fact that must remain confidential according to privacy laws. The superintendent says Dr. Palleni suspended Phil based on guidelines the school board had approved.

At dinner at the Malloy house, Phil's parents seem pleased with the reaction to Phil's plight. Phil seems uncomfortable with all of the attention, saying it will "be weird going back" to school the next day. Ben Malloy assures Phil the kids will be on his side and, like Phil said, they all hate Miss Narwin anyway. Ben reminds his son people are really on his side. That night, Ted Griffen delivers a speech at the Harrison Chamber of Commerce that is repetitious of his words in earlier speeches. He mentions Harrison is now known nationally for not being patriotic and says schools should not receive funding for computers when they can't even afford students' basic rights.

At 8:02 p.m., Margaret Narwin receives a call from his sister in Florida. Anita tells Margaret the story is on the front page of her newspaper and asks her sister if it's true. Margaret assures her it is not the true story and says she will call her back. Miss Narwin calls Principal Doane at home and Dr. Doane confirms the story has become national news. She mentions telegrams for Miss Narwin that are being held by the office and suggests Miss Narwin take the next day off. Miss Narwin says she can't give in to the pressure and Dr. Doane assures her it will calm down. In the final entry of the day, Phil writes he didn't really like staying home with nothing to do that day. He says he will be glad to be back in school and he still wants to ask Miss Narwin for more work. Phil writes that he did extra on the rowing machine and he is nervous.

## Analysis

This section emphasizes the hysteria when terms like "patriotism" are used, in this case with little basis. While the article Jennifer Stewart writes for the Manchester Record is not inaccurate, it does not tell the whole truth. Jennifer tries to get the other sides of the story but because of fear, the administration of Harrison High School and even Miss Narwin herself do not respond effectively to her questioning. Though Phil's suspension is more of a discipline issue than one of patriotism, the fact that he was suspended following singing along to the national anthem seems to be the only fact anyone cares about.

There is a lot of blame that is passed around in this section. The levels of administration are quick to blame the others and demand answers of each other. When Dr. Doane writes a memo of the incident for the superintendent, she is quick to point out that Dr. Palleni was simply following instructions approved by the superintendent. When



Superintendent Seymour gives a report to school board chairman Gloria Harland, he is quick to point out that Dr. Palleni was simply following instructions approved by the school board. Rather than examine the rule for its merit, the administration collectively blames Phil's animosity towards Miss Narwin and possible problems at home for suspension.

The rapid spread of the story coincides with the level of passion associated with the story itself. People are quick to defend Phil and blame Miss Narwin, without knowing the entire story. Knowing just half of the story appears to be enough for anyone who hears about the incident.

## Vocabulary

forbid, hogwash, reference, confidential, superior, disturbance, acknowledge, telegram, nuisance, occurrence, raucous, suppression, right-wing, one-liners, inferior, provocative, squelch, ultraliberals, half-cocked



# Chapters 16 – 19

## Summary

Telegrams and letters continue to arrive at Harrison High School, Miss Narwin's home and the Malloy household. They support Phil's actions and discredit Miss Narwin. Superintendent Seymour expresses his concern to Principal Doane at keeping Miss Narwin on the staff, especially with the public outcry and upcoming budget vote. Dr. Doane defends Miss Narwin and Dr. Seymour explains he plans to meet with Ted Griffen and try to smooth things over.

Philip is anxious to get back to school but wonders how his friends will treat him. On the way to the bus stop, Ken Barchet teases Phil about being famous and when Phil says he will ask Miss Narwin for extra credit work, Ken says that Miss Narwin is probably too mad to help Phil. In the hallways at school, students tease Phil and some even express anger at what he has done to Miss Narwin. In his new homeroom, Mr. Lunser encourages Phil to sing when the national anthem is played and Phil is embarrassed and refuses. Later that day, Phil goes to Miss Narwin's English class and she informs him he has been moved. He protests and says that he wants extra work to bring up his grade, but Miss Narwin asks him to leave and go to his new English class assignment. Phil then visits Coach Jamison to try to find a solution to his grade problem and the track team. Coach Jamison basically tells Phil he does not want someone who is not a "team player" on his squad and what Phil did to Miss Narwin was wrong. He tells Phil to come back next year, when hopefully everything will have blown over.

Dr. Doane meets with Miss Narwin and asks her to take the rest of the term off. She says the superintendent believes it to be the best decision and she will still be paid and the leave of absence will not affect her retirement time or funding. Miss Narwin is clearly upset and Dr. Doane explains it isn't a decision based on her teaching ability and it is only about the school budget. After Superintendent Seymour meets with Ted Griffen to explain the school's side of the controversy, Ted Griffen changes his tune during his school board speeches. Ted explains the national anthem incident had nothing to do with school policy and instead was the issue of one anti-American teacher. Ted says he fully backs the school budget and believes it should be passed.

Mr. Duval, the reporter from St. Louis, calls Miss Narwin at home and asks for permission to tell her side of the story. At first Miss Narwin is hesitant, but then agrees to sit with Mr. Duval if he flies out to interview her.

Chapter 17, Wednesday, April 4: Miss Narwin calls in sick for the day and Philip tells his parents he doesn't want to go to school. He tells his parents all the kids hate him and he wants to switch schools. They convince their son to go to school. On the walk to the bus stop, Ken Barchet tells Phil about a plan Allison Doresett and Todd Becker have to get a petition together in favor of Miss Narwin. Phil goes home instead of school and Mrs. Malloy calls Mr. Malloy at work. She says she agrees maybe Phil should change



schools, even if it means spending the money they have been saving for college. Miss Narwin meets with the reporter, Robert Duval. She tells her side of the story, explaining she strongly objected to Phil being suspended. She says she's been made the scapegoat and has been asked to resign. Miss Narwin concludes she is considering resigning.

Chapter 18, Friday, April 6: The Manchester Record reports the results of the Harrison School District elections. The budget is defeated by a 1,784 – 645 vote. Ted Griffen and Gloria Harland are among the people elected to the school board and only twenty-two percent of voters cast ballots. Miss Narwin calls Mr. Duval and asks if her story has run in the newspaper yet. He explains the story was cut because of breaking news in South America. He says there is little chance the story will run, with so much other news taking place. Miss Narwin is disappointed and says she is leaving for Florida to take some time to think.

Chapter 19, Monday, April 9: Philip begins his first day at the private school Washington Academy. The principal explains there is no track team, but the school has an excellent soccer team. In Phil's homeroom class, his new teacher Miss Rooney asks him if he would like to lead the class in singing the national anthem. Phil begins to cry and admits he does not know the words to the song.

## Analysis

The hype surrounding the incident at Harrison High School begins to crumble the lives of everyone involved. No one is a winner in the hysteria, least of all Philip Malloy. Instead of standing in a united front, everyone takes a selfish approach to the attention and in the end, no one benefits.

Despite putting Miss Narwin on leave and publically condemning her actions, the school district budget does not pass. Phil feels hostility from his peers, teachers and Coach Jamison and it overrules the support he is receiving from total strangers. He no longer feels like he can attend Harrison High School. Phil's parents, who believed the attention was beneficial for their family, begin to see moving Phil to a private school with no track team basically ruins the college plans they have for their son. Ted Griffen appears as the only winner – the person least involved in the incident but who used it best to his advantage.

## Vocabulary

crackerjack, ballot, mugged, assaulted, naïve, petition, one-sided, fiscally, prudent, rational, equitable, misguided, refresher course, sabbatical, tenure, misunderstanding, cooperation, misconstrue



# Characters

## Philip Malloy

Philip is a ninth grader who is considered a “class clown,” at least when the class is English. He is a good runner and talks often about wanting to run with the track team and follow in his father’s footsteps. As the story’s protagonist, Phil’s thoughts and struggles are described through his diary entries. While he may appear to lack focus externally, his diary entries show he is enthusiastic about running and even learning about math. Phil is naïve at times, a sign of his immaturity. Despite the national coverage and hysteria caused over his homeroom incident, Phil believes he can return to school and everything will be back to normal – a thought that is nowhere near reality. Phil possesses common characteristics of youth: invincibility, lack of life experience and inability to take responsibility for his own actions, especially when presented a chance to blame his troubles on other people. Readers can feel the helplessness of Phil’s situation and realize his inability to speak up effectively and recover from the aftermath of his school incident are due mainly to his youth.

## Margaret Narwin

Miss Narwin is an English teacher at Harrison High School, where she has worked for twenty-one years. She is considered to be a good and fair teacher by many of her students, though readers know Miss Narwin lacks confidence in her teaching abilities because of her letters to her sister. It is revealed during the book that statistics show students from Miss Narwin’s English classes score higher on standardized tests and writing/literature programs in higher education. Despite Philip Malloy’s disrespectful attitude toward her and her class, Miss Narwin calls him a good kid, one she does not want to give up on. Even after she has been asked by the school to take a leave of absence, due to Philip’s comments to a reporter, she continues to maintain she thinks Phil has a lot of potential. At the beginning of the book, Miss Narwin feels slighted by her school district’s lack of support for her teaching ability at the and by the end of the book, feels completely abandoned.

## Dr. Albert Seymour

Dr. Seymour is the superintendent of the Harrison school district and focused solely on the upcoming school budget election. Though funding is tight, Dr. Seymour grants funds to popular programs like the marching band and turns down requests for continuing teachers’ education. He is so desperate to have the school budget passed by voters he turns Miss Narwin into the bad guy of the incident, to the point of lying about school policy. Though he appears dishonest to readers, Dr. Seymour’s intentions are to provide his district with the most possible funding in order to benefit everyone from administration down to students.





## **Dr. Gertrude Doane**

Dr. Doane is the principal of Harrison High School. She is torn between standing up for good teachers, like Miss Narwin, and the demands placed on her by the superintendent and school board. When she denies Miss Narwin's request for funding for a continuing education summer course, she calls Miss Narwin into her office to praise her teaching abilities and explain the decision is unfortunately based solely on lack of money. Miss Narwin had Dr. Doane as a student and describes her as being one of her best and brightest students. While other administration seems to act with no regard toward the feelings of teachers, Dr. Doane defends her staff and shows remorse when she is overruled.

## **Dr. Joseph Palleni**

Dr. Palleni is the assistant principal of Harrison High School and in charge of discipline issues. He is the person who suspends Philip Malloy, though Miss Narwin is the one who is blamed. Dr. Palleni adheres strictly to rules and does not negotiate when a student questions the rationale of school policies. Despite Miss Narwin's suggestion Phil not be suspended, Dr. Palleni tells her a "rule is a rule." He also shuts down Mrs. Malloy's questioning when she comes to pick up her son from the school, telling her Phil broke a rule twice in the same week and there is no room for discussion.

## **Ben Malloy**

Ben is Phil's father and he lives vicariously through his son. A promising runner in his youth, Ben was forced to drop out of college because he could not afford it. He is unhappy at his current job but does not stand up for himself out of fear of losing it. Ben pushes Phil to join the track team and saves money so Phil can attend college and get noticed for his running ability. Ben tells his son to stand up for himself against Miss Narwin, a task that Ben feels incapable of doing with the authority in his own life. He is proud of the attention his son receives for the national anthem incident, concluding if so many people agree and support Phil then he must be in the right.

## **Susan Malloy**

Susan is Phil's mother and is more reserved than her husband. She is surprised to learn Ben has encouraged their son to be disrespectful in class and tells Phil his suspension disappoints her. Susan can sense Phil's discomfort at all the attention he is receiving for the national anthem incident and she is ultimately makes the decision to send him to a private school at the end.



## **Ted Griffen**

Ted is a neighbor of the Malloys and running for a spot on the Harrison school board. Though he once yelled at Phil to get off his lawn, Ted becomes supportive of Phil when he learns about his suspension after he sang along to the national anthem at school. Ted's intentions are selfish and he sees Phil's plight as a political gain for his school board campaign. He is elected to the school board following a series of speeches all over Harrison touting patriotism in the schools and downplaying the need for funding for things like computers.

## **Ken Barchet**

Ken is a school friend of Phil and his running partner. During walks to the school bus each morning, Ken fills Phil in the track team, girls and how other students are reacting to the national attention focused on Phil. Ken thinks that the attention on Phil is funny, noting the things being printed aren't the truth but are humorous.

## **Bernard Lunser**

Mr. Lunser is Phil's original homeroom teacher. He is loud-mouthed, and talks throughout school announcements and during the national anthem. While Phil says Mr. Lunser allowed him to sing along to the national anthem, it is unclear if Mr. Lunser ever actually heard Phil singing along due to his own antics.

## **Coach Jamison**

Coach Jamison is the track coach at Harrison High School. He explains to Phil he must take responsibility and improve his grade in English to participate on the track team. He is one of the few adults that does not agree with Phil's notion the problem is Miss Narwin and Phil needs to change his own attitude to succeed.

## **Allison Doresett**

Allison is a girl who rides Phil's bus and is in his English class. While she shows some attraction toward Phil early on, she becomes disenchanted with him after he harms Miss Narwin's reputation. She tells the principal that Phil was being rude in Miss Narwin's class and she believes the whole incident stems from a personal problem he has with the teacher.

## **Jennifer Stewart**

Jennifer is the education reporter for the Manchester Record, the newspaper that runs the original story about Phil being suspended after singing the national anthem at



school. She attempts to be fair in her reporting but is shut down by every administrator and teacher she calls for a comment and the resulting story is one-sided.

## **Steve Hallick**

Steve is a high school runner from Pittsburgh that Philip Malloy idolizes. He strives to run as fast as Steve and maybe even compete against him in a high school track meet.

## **Robert Duval**

Robert is a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch who calls Harrison High School after seeing the national wire story about Philip's suspension. He interviews Miss Narwin in an attempt to hear her side of the story but his article never runs because it is not newsworthy enough.

## **Anita Wigham**

Anita is Margaret Narwin's sister who lives in Florida. The sisters exchange letters and Anita often encourages her sister to retire early and move near her. Anita calls her sister after she sees the national story about the suspension in her newspaper in Tampa and is upset at how the article implies Miss Narwin is at fault.

## **Jake Barlow**

Jake is the host of a conservative radio show who asks listeners to start a letter-writing campaign to Miss Narwin. Though Jake asks for callers of all opinions to weigh in, he quickly shuts down a conversation with a caller who asks points out the national story is one-sided. Jake blasts Miss Narwin for being unpatriotic and agrees with callers who say she should be removed from her teaching position.



# Objects/Places

## Harrison School District

The Harrison school district is set in quiet Harrison, New Hampshire and the setting for the story's main controversy. The school board and school board budget election is at the top of the school district's priority list, at the detriment of teachers and students. Communication among administration, teachers and students is inefficient and as a result, the district handles the national anthem controversy poorly and with inexperience.

## School district budget

The proposed school district budget has already failed once with voters and the superintendent, school board and administrators feel the pressure to have voters approve the funding they feel is necessary for their schools. The budget takes precedence over teacher support and other issues of the school district and causes characters in the book to act selfishly.

## Harrison High School

Harrison High is the setting for the controversy and aftermath surrounding Phil being suspended after humming along to the national anthem. The small school receives hundreds of telegrams calling for Miss Narwin's resignation and fields phone calls from national news outlets regarding the scandal.

## Memos

Rather than speak directly, much of the communication in the Harrison School District is done via memorandums, or memos. The name of the superintendent and chairman of the school board grace the top of the letterhead, next to the words "Harrison School District: Where Our Children Are Educated, Not Just Taught." Many times the same information is presented in slightly different ways depending on who is receiving the memo and a chain of inconsistent communication is formed through the memos in the book.

## Homeroom class

Many of the most important moments in the book occur in homeroom. The contrast between Mr. Lunser's homeroom class and Miss Narwin's sets the stage for the controversy surrounding the playing of the national anthem and requested silence.



## **The Star-Spangled Banner**

The national anthem is at the center of the controversy that clouds the Harrison School District. Teachers are told students are required to stand at silent attention as the national anthem is played over the intercom during morning announcements – a fact denied later by administration who says singing along is encouraged. Issues of patriotism arise as people across the nation are appalled that a student is suspended over singing the national anthem in a public school.

## **The Call of the Wild by Jack London**

This classic book is despised by Philip Malloy who thinks it is just a stupid book about a dog. He writes a sarcastic answer on an exam question about the symbolism of Buck the dog in the book that ultimately earns him a “D” in the class and keeps him from trying out for track.

## **The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton**

This book is given to Philip to read by his school friend Sarah Gloss, who claims it is the best book she has ever read. While Phil fails to connect with *The Call of the Wild*, he seems to relate to the themes of teenage independence and angst presented in *The Outsiders*. He reads it on his own even though it is not assigned schoolwork.

## **Jake Barlow’s radio show**

Jake Barlow hosts a national talk radio show presented as being conservative in nature. He challenges “ultraliberals” to try to defend Philip Malloy’s suspension and concludes the whole incident is a simple lack of respect for patriotism by Miss Narwin. As a result of Jake’s condemnation on his show of Phil’s suspension, letters and telegrams nationwide are sent to Harrison High School, Miss Narwin and Philip Malloy.

## **Morning announcements**

The morning announcements at Harrison High School follow a strict format outlined by school memo. A tape of the national anthem is played daily and students are asked to listen in silent respect.

## **Rowing machine**

Philip Malloy often works out on his father’s rowing machine. He uses it to get fit and also as an outlet to relieve stress and anxiety. As he feels more pressure in his life, the amount of time he spends on the rowing machine goes up.

## Washington Academy

Philip Malloy originally calls Washington Academy a “geeky private school” but later opts to attend it after he no longer feels comfortable attending Harrison High School. Washington Academy is expensive and does not have a track team.

# Themes

## Snowball Effect

The book examines how a minor incident can grow exponentially, or snowball, especially if it hits upon a hot-button issue like patriotism. Philip Malloy's suspension happened because he broke a school-wide rule three times and then refused to apologize to his teacher. Yet people who heard about the national story did not care about school policies or Phil's prior disrespect toward Miss Narwin; all that people selectively heard was a student was kicked out of school for singing along to the national anthem. The outrage started in Harrison Township with the article in the local newspaper and spread throughout the nation, gaining momentum, with the publishing of a national wire story. The ire grew even more as radio hosts like Jake Barlow denounced Miss Narwin and thrust the scandal further into the spotlight.

The people at the heart of the incident were ill prepared for the onslaught of attention the incident garnered. Harrison High School administrators did not know how to respond to reporters asking critical questions and the superintendent and school board were quick to deny school policy without an accurate investigation. Miss Narwin did not know how to present her side of the story and chose to rely on her administration and school board for support, a decision effectively ending her teaching career. Even Phil, who received nothing but support from people across the nation, did not know how to handle the attention and became despondent and overwhelmed with helplessness.

## Challenging Authority

The book examines challenging authority on several levels. The most obvious is Philip Malloy's challenge of Miss Narwin's place of authority. He lacks interest in the literature Miss Narwin presents and so he convinces himself it is okay to treat it disrespectfully. Miss Narwin, after all, is the person Phil believes is at fault for his poor showing in English class and convinces himself her assignments and teaching methods are outdated and irrelevant. Humming along to the national anthem is Phil's public challenge of Miss Narwin's authority after he discovers his English grade will keep him from the track team. When he sees how upset the act makes Miss Narwin, he deliberately continues to do it as a challenge to her classroom authority and believes that at least on some level, she will be chastised and he will be validated. Phil does not stand up against authority, however, when he feels guilt about the misrepresentation of his story and that leads to anxiety and helplessness eventually causing him to change schools.

Another example of challenging authority actually comes in the lack of it between Miss Narwin and her administration. Though she complains to her sister about the school's policies regarding financial grants, Miss Narwin does not challenge Principal Doane and certainly does not challenge Superintendent Seymour. Miss Narwin disagrees with Dr.



Palleni's decision to suspend Phil but does not push for him to reverse his decision. When the school begins receiving nasty telegrams and letters about Miss Narwin, she naïvely puts her faith in the idea that her school administration will stand up for her and at the very least, protect her job. Miss Narwin's lack of questioning authority makes her a casualty of the scandal and ends her teaching career.

## Distortion of Reality

The book opens with two questions: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Does anyone say no?" This sets up the examination of real truth that presents itself through the book. The documentary format of the book gives the illusion just the facts will be explored; while the facts of what people say are true, the things those people say and write are not always honest. It is rare anyone in the book blatantly lies; instead, Avi shows the more common way that people are dishonest – by telling half-truths. Phil is not lying when he says Miss Narwin kicked him out of class after he was humming along to the national anthem; what he doesn't mention to his parents or the reporter is Miss Narwin was simply enforcing a school-wide rule. Phil also leaves out the information that he has been disrespectful toward Miss Narwin and her class in the past, allowing his parents, Ted Griffen and the reporter to believe Miss Narwin is picking on Phil for no reason. The reporter for the Manchester Record does not lie in her article but does not wait to hear back on the school's official position before she prints Phil's story. The resulting one-sided story causes national outrage and by the time Miss Narwin is able to tell her side of the incident, it is "old news" and no one cares. The damage to the characters by that point is irreversible.

The times that characters flat-out lie coincide with desperation. When the Harrison School District releases an official statement it states not only is there no rule against students singing along to the national anthem, teachers are supposed to encourage students to participate audibly. It is true the rule about respectful silence is not in the school's handbook, but the statement makes no reference to the memo all teachers received outlining the silence policy. This statement is given by the district mere days before the budget election, as outrage toward the school system is high. In the end, lying and half-truths are beneficial to only one person, Ted Griffen, who is more enraptured in the passion of the controversy than his actual school board campaign platform. The school district budget is defeated, despite the lies, and Phil and Miss Narwin are driven from Harrison High School.





# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this book is omniscient, in a documentary style. The author uses the exact words of characters through diary entries, letters, memos and conversations to present the facts of the story. There is no narration or commentary by the author; direct words in a variety of formats are presented. Readers are able to chart the words and actions of characters as the story progresses and how those things change as the scandal snowballs.

Though Philip Malloy is the protagonist, other points of view are explored and they shed light on Phil's feelings and situation. Next to Phil, Miss Narwin is the character whose psyche and involvement in the controversy are explored the most. Readers are able to see she cares about Phil and his success in her class, though administrators, other students and Phil himself may not be aware of her feelings. Similarly, readers can see Dr. Doane remains loyal to Miss Narwin and defends her to the superintendent though Miss Narwin feels betrayed by Dr. Doane in the final outcome of her teaching career. The contrast of what characters say behind the scenes and what they actually say to each other highlights the notion that situations are not always what they seem on the surface.

## Setting

This book is set primarily at Harrison High School in Harrison Township, New Hampshire. At the start of the book, Harrison High is a relatively sleepy school with a monotonous feeling. The students of Harrison could be students at any high school and the teachers are also typical. Life at Harrison High is a slice of life at high schools throughout the country. The concerns of Harrison students involve sports and social events; the concerns of Harrison teachers and administrators include budget constraints and discipline issues.

Harrison Township itself is similar to suburban areas throughout the country. Middle class families like the Malloys struggle with financial stresses and opposing schedules while trying to maintain a happy home. Church assemblies and rotary club meetings are important to residents of Harrison and the state license plate reads "Live free or die." Harrison is ill-equipped to deal with the attention it receives from the national anthem controversy though townspeople band together in support of patriotism. Like many areas in the U.S., a small percentage of residents (only twenty-two percent in this case) cast their ballots in the election.



## Language and Meaning

The language of this book is reader-friendly and varies in complexity depending on whose words are being presented. Conversations between students at Harrison High are direct, though the speaker is often left without the right words to express what he or she is feeling. This is especially true with Phil who cannot find the words to explain the emotions he feels throughout the story. Though less refined than the adult conversations of the book, the language between the students is effective in its simple delivery of the truth, like when Ken Barchet sums up the controversy by saying “It ain’t true. But it’s funny.”

The language of the adults, through conversation, letter writing and the exchange of memos, is heightened but often loses its accuracy in the complexity. As memos regarding the facts of Phil’s suspension move up the administrative ladder, the facts become more diluted and blame shifts from Phil, to Phil’s home life, to Miss Narwin’s lack of teaching prowess. Though Superintendent Seymour never directly says he wants to get rid of Miss Narwin to help improve the school budget’s chance of passing, his conversations with Principal Doane and Ted Griffen more than imply it. Conversations between Phil’s parents also seem to miss the mark and their severe lack of communication with each other is cringe-worthy at times. The more complicated the language, the more ineffective communication becomes in this book.

## Structure

The book is divided into 19 chapters, each representing the events of a day. The book begins on Tuesday, March 13 and ends on Monday, April 5. Events of the day are presented in chronological order and the scenes skip around based on what takes place next in the day. Within a chapter, a reader may find a diary entry by Philip Malloy, a memo between administrators at Harrison High School, a letter written by Miss Narwin to her sister and dialogue on the walk to the school bus between Phil and his friend Ken Barchet. The snippets of time in different settings give an overall view of the day and not just one character’s interpretation.

The book focuses on the individual struggles of Philip Malloy and Miss Margaret Narwin. Phil’s diary entries give readers an accurate idea of what he is thinking about though he often does not express himself outwardly in the same vein. Miss Narwin’s knowledge, concern for students and lack of confidence in her teaching methods are examined in her letter writing and phone conversations with her sister, though she often comes off jaded to others. The combination of chronological real words make the book a documentary and not a narrative.



## Quotes

The significance of Buck in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* is that Buck is symbolic of a cat. You might think cats have nothing to do with the book, but that is the point. (Chapter 4)

You – along with your fellow students – are required to give it your respectful, thoughtful attention. In short, you are being asked to be more than lazy in your thinking. (Chapter 4)

An informed voter is a wise voter. (Chapter 6)

A rule is a rule. It isn't always easy. (Chapter 8)

The real world doesn't have a laugh track. (Chapter 8)

I suppose marching bands make a big show. Bread and circuses, Anita. Bread and circuses. That's all it is. (Chapter 9)

I realized two things that make me want to puke. Track practice starts tomorrow and I'm not on the team. (Chapter 9)

I'm sure we agree we can't have kids deciding which rules to follow and which rules not to follow. I really don't wish to discuss it. (Chapter 11)

Our society is always asking schools to do what is not done at home. (Chapter 12)

While it may appear to be an April Fools' Day joke, tenth grader Philip Malloy of Harrison High School was suspended for singing "The Star Spangled Banner. (Chapter 14)

What is the point of installing computers – which my generation never seemed to need – and at great cost – if our young people are not allowed to practice the elemental values of American patriotism? (Chapter 14)

I mean, there are the three R's – reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic – and the three P's – prayer, patriotism and parents. At least, that's my notion of schooling. (Chapter 15)

I sense there's something more here. I'm not even sure what. I confess that interests me. I sure would appreciate your cooperation. (Chapter 16)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Who is Philip Malloy? What interests Phil? In what ways does Phil exercise? What is Phil's job? What does he think about having to read *The Call of the Wild* in his English class? What runner does Phil idolize? What girl does Phil try to win over by being funny? Describe Phil's feelings for Miss Narwin. What book does Phil end up reading and liking? Describe Ben and Susan Malloy. What comment does Phil make about Ted Griffen when his dad suggests he go talk to Ted? What does Phil call Washington Academy when his mother first suggests that he should have gone to school there? What does Phil admit in the final line of the book?

## Topic 2

Who is Miss Margaret Narwin? What subject does she teach? How long has Miss Narwin been a teacher? Who does she write letters to? What does Miss Narwin ask for school district funding to do? Where does her sister live? Which administrator used to be a student in Miss Narwin's class? Explain Miss Narwin's feelings toward Philip Malloy. What is the decision Miss Narwin makes at the end of the book?

## Topic 3

Describe the atmosphere of Harrison High School. Describe the following people associated with Harrison High School: Principal Doane, Assistant Principal Palleni, Superintendent Seymour, Mr. Lunser, Mr. Benison, Coach Jamison and Mrs. Harland. What is the main form of communication between staff members of the Harrison School District? What is the motto of Harrison schools? What is the symbol on the top of school letterhead?

## Topic 4

Name the friends of Philip Malloy. Describe the attitude of Ken Barchet. How does Allison Doresett's attitude toward Phil change over the course of the book? Who is Phil's rival – both for track and for Allison's attention? What are some of the responses of students at Harrison to Phil's involvement in the national anthem controversy? Which students does Principal Doane interview when getting information on the incident that got Phil suspended? What do these students say happened?



## Topic 5

Describe your view of patriotism. Is Phil Malloy patriotic? Do you agree with Harrison High's rule of students listening to the national anthem in respectful silence? What is the overwhelming reaction across the nation toward Phil as a result of his suspension? What is the general reaction to Miss Narwin? What are the words to the national anthem? Describe Phil's feelings toward the attention he garnered from the national anthem controversy.

## Topic 6

What formats are used to tell the story in this book? Is there a specific narrator? Which format did you enjoy reading the most? The least? How are the chapters divided in the book? On what date does the book begin? On what date does the book end? On what date was Phil's story published in the Manchester Record? What percentage of voters cast their ballots for the school board and school board budget?

## Topic 7

Explain the timeline of events leading to Phil's suspension. Explain the comments Phil's story instigated, beginning with the article in the Manchester Record. Did Phil like the attention his story brought? How did Phil's parents feel about the attention? Was Phil satisfied with what transpired after telling his story? Name the direct results of the controversy – to Phil, to Miss Narwin and the Harrison School District.