

The Schwa Was Here Study Guide

The Schwa Was Here by Neal Shusterman

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

[The Schwa Was Here Study Guide.....1](#)

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

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Chapters 1-2, 'Manny Bullpucky Gets His Sorry Butt Hurlled off the Marine Park Bridge' and 'The Weird and Mostly Tragic History of the Schwa, Which is Entirely True if You Trust My Sources'..6](#)

[Chapters 3-4, 'Quantizing the Schwa Effect Using the Scientific Method, and All That Garbage' and 'Making Big Bucks off of Stealth Economics, Because Maybe I Got Some Business Sense' 9](#)

[Chapters 5-6, 'Which Is Worse: Getting Mauled by a Pack of Dogs, or Getting Your Brains Bashed Out by a Steel Poker?' and 'As If I Didn't Already Have Enough Annoying Things to Do Every Day, Now I Gotta Do This'.....13](#)

[Chapters 7-8, 'The Lowest-Paid Male Escort on the Entire Eastern Seaboard, Except for Maybe the Bronx' and 'Are Those Your Fingers in My Mouth, or Are You Just Happy to Not See Me?'. 16](#)

[Chapters 9-10, 'Maybe They Had It Right in France Because Getting My Head Lopped Off by a Guillotine Would Have Been Easier' and 'Earthquakes, Nuclear Winter, and the End of Life as We Know It, over Linguini'.....19](#)

[Chapters 11-12, 'The Youngest Doctor in Sheepshead Bay Gets Held Hostage When He Least Expects It' and 'A Horror Movie Blow-by-Blow, with the Undisputed Queen of the 3-B Club'.....22](#)

[Chapters 13-14, 'A Russian Train, a Pulsing Vein, and My Mother's Bag of Snails' and 'More Than I Ever Wanted to Know About the Schwa's Childhood'.....26](#)

[Chapters 15-16, 'Vortex in Aisle Three - Can Someone Please Clean Up the Ectoplasmic Slime?' and 'A Late-Night Trip to the Land of Beef That Could Turn a Person into a Vegetarian'.....30](#)

[Chapters 17-18, 'A Traumatic Experience I'll Live to Regret, Assuming I Live' and 'Larger Than Life, in Your Face, Undeniable Schwa'.....34](#)

[Chapters 19-20, 'The Schwa Gets Radiation Therapy in a Room That Doesn't Smell Too Good No Matter How Much It's Disinfected' and 'The Weird Things Kids Do Don't Even Come Close to the Weird Things Parents Do'.....37](#)

[Chapters 21-22, 'Why I Started Vandalizing Brooklyn' and 'My Anonymous Contribution to Popular Culture and to My Parents' Phone Bill'.....41](#)

[Characters.....44](#)

[Objects/Places.....53](#)



Themes..... 57

Style..... 65

Quotes..... 69

Topics for Discussion..... 71



Plot Summary

'The Schwa Was Here' is the story of how a young Italian teenager called Antsy meets a boy called Calvin Schwa, nicknamed the Schwa. The Schwa is so ordinary that he gets ignored by almost everybody and is functionally invisible in a crowd. Antsy and the Schwa use this 'Schwa effect' to make money by carrying out dares, but this backfires when the Schwa sneaks into Old Man Crawley's apartment and is caught. Crawley sets them to work as his dog-walkers, and pays Antsy to be his blind granddaughter's escort. Antsy and the Schwa soon become rivals for her affection. Eventually, Antsy manages to help the Schwa by finding out the truth about his mother's disappearance. The Schwa realizes that he is not going to just disappear from lack of attention and so begins to be able to come to terms with his 'invisibility.'

Antsy's father works for a plastic-making company and has given his 'indestructible' plastic dummy to his son to test. Antsy, and his friends Howie and Ira, decide to throw it off a bridge to see if it will break. While doing this, they suddenly become aware that another boy has been watching them. He introduces himself as Calvin Schwa. Ira tells Antsy all about 'the Schwa effect,' which makes it difficult for others to notice Calvin.

Antsy begins to notice the Schwa a lot more around school and soon makes friends with him. He decides to use the Schwa effect for their own gain by charging students at school for tasks that only the Schwa can carry out. They also take bets on dares. This is going well until the Schwa is dared to go into the apartment of a reclusive old man called Crawley, and steal one of his dog bowls. The Schwa does this, but he is caught by the old man. Antsy runs in to help his friend, and soon both of them are in trouble. Crawley decides not to tell the police, but to give them 'community service' instead. They will work as his dog walkers to pay off their debt to him.

One day Crawley tells Antsy that he has another job for him. He will pay him to be his blind granddaughter's escort. The granddaughter is called Lexie, and soon both Antsy and the Schwa begin to have feelings for her. This causes some rivalry and bad feelings between them. Lexie decides to fire Antsy as her escort and promote the Schwa instead. The Schwa thinks she likes him, but she was actually giving Antsy the opportunity to ask her out properly. Antsy and Lexie begin to date, and when the Schwa finds out he is extremely upset. Antsy tries to apologize, and the Schwa explains why getting Lexie's attention was so important to him. He thinks he is going to vanish one day like his mother did. She disappeared while they were in the supermarket, and the Schwa believes that this is his fault for forgetting about her for a few moments.

Antsy wants to help his friend, so begins to look into his mother's disappearance. He finds the Night Butcher at the supermarket, who is willing to tell them the truth about that day. Meanwhile, the Schwa is determined not to let himself disappear like his mother, so he tries to demand attention by putting his face on a billboard over the expressway. This costs him his college fund. However, the traffic from the expressway is diverted and nobody sees the billboard. The Schwa is distraught. Antsy takes him to see the Night Butcher, who explains that the Schwa's mother actually ran away with the butcher. The



Schwa is angry at first, but later he is relieved to know that he will not simply vanish into thin air.

The Schwa confronts his father about his mother, and finds letters that she wrote to him. One day the Schwa disappears and his house is up for sale. Antsy spends a long time looking for him, eventually realizing that he has gone to find his mother. Later Antsy receives a letter from the Schwa saying that he found his mother and is travelling with her for a while. He is finally happy. Meanwhile, Crawley has become very fond of Antsy and through his friendship has learned to appreciate the world again. He gets Antsy's father fired from his old boring job, then offers him a much better paid one running his new restaurant. This is a happy ending for everyone.



Chapters 1-2, 'Manny Bullpucky Gets His Sorry Butt Hurlled off the Marine Park Bridge' and 'The Weird and Mostly Tragic History of the Schwa, Which is Entirely True if You Trust My Sources'

Chapters 1-2, 'Manny Bullpucky Gets His Sorry Butt Hurlled off the Marine Park Bridge' and 'The Weird and Mostly Tragic History of the Schwa, Which is Entirely True if You Trust My Sources' Summary

'The Schwa Was Here' is a story about how Antsy comes to know and be friends with the Schwa, a boy so ordinary and forgettable that he is almost invisible to other people. Antsy thinks they can use the Schwa effect for their own gain, but this backfires when the Schwa is dared to enter Crawley's apartment and is caught. The mean and reclusive Crawley puts them to work walking his dogs. Through this they meet Crawley's blind granddaughter Lexie. Lexie and Antsy start dating, which upsets the Schwa. He becomes obsessed with the idea that he will disappear one day if everybody forgets him, as he thinks this is what happened to his mother. Antsy and Lexie set about finding the truth behind his mother's disappearance, in order to prove to him that he will not cease to exist.

Anthony Bonano, nicknamed Antsy, is a young teenager living in Brooklyn, New York. His father works for Pisher Plastics, and has instructed Antsy and his friends to test a new 'unbreakable' dummy. They name the dummy 'Manny Bullpucky' and decide to drop him off the Marine Park Bridge to see if he breaks. Howie throws him off while Antsy watches and Ira films it with his video camera. The head of the dummy breaks off, and a voice asks if they are looking for it. A boy is stood there holding the head. He introduces himself as Calvin Schwa and says he is in Antsy's science class. He asks if he can help test the dummy, but Ira is very unfriendly and so he decides to leave. Ira explains to the others that he has heard weird rumors about Calvin, who he calls 'the Schwa.' He explains that the Schwa is almost invisible and that people forget about him, not realizing that he is there.

Antsy, Howie and Ira meet at Antsy's house to discuss the Schwa. Antsy tells them what he has heard, that the Schwa's family came over from the 'old country' to the USA. Great-grandpa Schwartz died while giving his name to the immigration official, and it was just put down as 'Schwa.' Ira then tells them that he heard the Schwa's mother disappeared one day at the supermarket. He says there is also a different version of the



story, in which the Schwa's father cut his wife into little pieces and mailed one to each state. Antsy does not really believe this, but the other two are clearly freaked out.

Chapters 1-2, 'Manny Bullpucky Gets His Sorry Butt Hurlled off the Marine Park Bridge' and 'The Weird and Mostly Tragic History of the Schwa, Which is Entirely True if You Trust My Sources' Analysis

These first two chapters introduce the reader to the main characters of the book. The story is narrated by a young teenage boy called Anthony Bonano, who goes by the nickname Antsy. He comes from an Italian family, who live in a mainly Italian and Jewish area of Brooklyn. He is easy going and good natured, and seems to make friends easily. He is confident and spunky, and will stick by his opinions and views. He is more sympathetic and naturally friendly than his friends, Ira and Howie, who judge others more quickly than he does. Antsy's personality is very large and likeable, and it immediately draws the reader in. The reader sympathizes with him and cares what happens to him.

Antsy's personality is contrasted with the Schwa's. Calvin Schwa appears in the first chapter and hangs around with the group for a while, and the second chapter discusses him and his past. However, despite this attention, the Schwa is very forgettable. Not much of his personality comes across, except that he is curious about things and seems to want to make friends. He can tell when he is not wanted and leaves, but does not seem angry with the boys for not noticing him. His personality so far is very bland, like his looks. He is completely ordinary. When compared to Antsy, who is interesting and spirited, the Schwa is easy to look over or forget. It is therefore important to establish Antsy's larger than life personality straight away, as it helps to draw the reader's attention away from the Schwa. This neatly demonstrates the Schwa effect, which will become very important in the story. The Schwa effect is that the Schwa is so bland that people do not even realize he is there. Despite the fact that the reader knows the story is about the Schwa, and that it is his name in the title, they are still more interested in Antsy at the moment. This cleverly demonstrates that the Schwa effect even affects the reader.

The strange history of the Schwa helps add a sense of mystery to his character, making the reader wonder what his real story is. Antsy and Ira relate various rumors that they have heard, none of them particularly nice or complimentary to the Schwa's family. This also makes the reader feel a little sorry for the Schwa, as it is obvious that other children are afraid of him or do not like him, and that they spread mean rumors about him. He is treated like a weird loner who is best avoided, as shown by Ira's reaction to him. However, the reader saw how open and friendly the Schwa was, and how he just seemed to want to make friends. Ira's treatment of him seems a little cruel. This also introduces the reader to the personalities of Ira and Howie. Ira is a determined and ambitious boy who is not very understanding of others and quick to judge. He is not interested in helping others or opening up his circle of friends. Howie seems to go along



with this quite happily, and is obviously a follower rather than a leader. He is intelligent, but seems to lack a lot of common sense. He takes things very literally and can be a frustrating person to hold a conversation with. Despite this, he seems well meaning.

All the main characters seem to come from a minority or marginalized group of society. Antsy comes from a family with Italian roots and Ira is Jewish. The Schwa's family comes from the 'old country,' meaning that they immigrated to America from somewhere in Eastern Europe. He is also marginalized because of being too bland and ordinary. All of these families moved to the United States to start a new life in a new place, bringing aspects of their old life and culture with them. They are all groups of people who are sometimes looked down on, and considered 'different' and so somehow bad. They all know what it is like to feel separate and pushed away because they are different. However, they also show how many different types of people can be accepted and can form one community. Part of the identity of the United States is about different people and cultures merging and becoming one, celebrating what makes them unique, but at the same time accepting one another. This acceptance has not been extended to the Schwa yet. It is his differences that make him scary to the other children, as they do not understand what causes the Schwa effect. They call him a freak and ignore him. Even when they are not doing so on purpose, they overlook him and do not acknowledge his existence. This is similar to what many marginalized and 'different' groups in the country experience every day.

Calvin Schwa's name is very significant. A 'schwa' is a vowel sound in the English language that sounds like 'uh.' For example, the 'o' in 'somewhere' is a schwa, as is the 'e' in 'overlook.' It is a short, neutral sound that is not usually stressed in words. This vowel sound is the most common in the English language, yet is easily forgotten about. In fact, in some words the schwa is often missed out altogether in speech, such as the second 'o' in chocolate. Calvin Schwa's last name therefore perfectly reflects his character. He is unstressed and easily forgotten, and sometimes missed completely. He can stand in a room and people will genuinely not know that he is there. Antsy even lost sight of him when he turned away for just a few seconds, and Calvin had to jump up and down and wave his arms to get Antsy to see him again. Like a schwa, Calvin is very ordinary. Antsy remarks that he looks like a generic kid, so that if he looked up 'kid' in the dictionary, Calvin's picture would be there. He is therefore very common, like the schwa, but too dull to notice. Despite this, like the schwa his presence is important, and he wants to be seen and remembered.



Chapters 3-4, 'Quantizing the Schwa Effect Using the Scientific Method, and All That Garbage' and 'Making Big Bucks off of Stealth Economics, Because Maybe I Got Some Business Sense'

Chapters 3-4, 'Quantizing the Schwa Effect Using the Scientific Method, and All That Garbage' and 'Making Big Bucks off of Stealth Economics, Because Maybe I Got Some Business Sense' Summary

Antsy is sat in science class when the Schwa taps him on the shoulder, and Antsy notices for the first time that he is sat next to him. The teacher asks a question and the Schwa raises his hand, but the teacher does not notice him until Antsy points him out.

The next day Antsy, Ira and Howie meet up to set fire to Manny Bullpucky. They discuss the Schwa and his weird invisibility. The Schwa then says something, and they realize he has been standing there the whole time. He agrees with Antsy that he is functionally invisible and that people tend not to notice him, like he is in their blind spot. Howie suggests experimenting with him in order to quantify the Schwa effect. The Schwa agrees.

First, they see how many students notice the Schwa in a classroom. They conclude that four out of five people do not see him. Next they get him to dress in a weird costume and a bright orange sombrero and sing a patriotic song in the boys' bathroom. People notice a kid acting strange, but cannot say what he was wearing or what he was singing. Even when acting strangely and trying to get attention, the Schwa is barely noticed. Antsy thinks they could use his talent for money-making schemes.

The third experiment they carry out is their last, as it nearly gets them into trouble. The Schwa sees if he can pass through airport security with an iron bar in his pocket. He manages to get past the security unnoticed, but the machine detects the iron bar and beeps. This calls attention to the Schwa and the security guards immediately surround him. They are very suspicious, and insist on calling the boys' parents. The boys conclude that the Schwa goes unnoticed until something forces a person to be aware of his presence.

When they present their findings in class, the teacher is not impressed but the children are intrigued. A girl agrees to pay to see the Schwa appear from thin air. Antsy points out that the Schwa is stood right next to her, which allows her to see him. She is



impressed. The student officers agree to pay ten dollars a week to keep the Schwa on retainer, and other children put bets on the Schwa doing dares such as walking into the girls' locker room unseen.

One day Wendell Tiggor dares the Schwa to sneak into Old Man Crawley's apartment. Crawley is a reclusive and bad tempered old man who owns a restaurant and lives above it. He owns a large pack of Afghan dogs, and Tiggor dares the Schwa to bring back a dog bowl from inside the apartment. After some persuasion from Antsy, the Schwa agrees to do it.

Chapters 3-4, 'Quantizing the Schwa Effect Using the Scientific Method, and All That Garbage' and 'Making Big Bucks off of Stealth Economics, Because Maybe I Got Some Business Sense' Analysis

Antsy finds that he can sympathize with the Schwa because he understands how he feels. Antsy is often ignored and taken for granted at school and in his own family. He is nothing particularly special, has no great talents and is not academic, and is not even a problem kid. In other words, he is quite normal, and so receives little attention. He is not given as much attention and time as his brother and sister, and his parents seem to feel that he will never go far in life. This attitude upsets him, as he would like his family to treat him like he is somebody important and special. However, things are not as bad for him as they are for the Schwa. At least Antsy is still remembered, though often taken for granted. The Schwa is not just ignored, he is completely forgotten. For the Schwa, it is like he never even existed. This must be very hurtful to him, and Antsy feels sorry for him. At the same time, though, Antsy also feels better about himself when he is around the Schwa. He likes to be with someone who is ignored more than he is, as it instantly makes him feel more important and special. He knows that things could be worse, which makes him feel happier about his own situation. This is a slightly selfish reason for being friends with the Schwa, but in Antsy's defense, he is much more compassionate and sympathetic than anyone else is willing to be. He gives the Schwa something he has never had and so desperately wants: friendship.

This is not something that Antsy's friends are so willing to give. Ira and Howie do not feel the same sympathy and so do not understand what it is like to be ignored. They see the Schwa as a fun experiment, and they enjoy taking advantage of the benefits of his weird 'talent,' such as winning basket ball games, but this is as far as it goes for them. They do not want to hang around with the Schwa as actual friends, and they become irritated whenever the Schwa seems to be overstepping these bounds. They are annoyed that Antsy is spending time with the Schwa, and seem to be a little jealous. They want to keep their group of friends how it has always been. Antsy also thinks that Ira feels a little threatened by the Schwa. Ira is a boy who likes to be the centre of attention, and wants to become someone important one day. He wants to make it big and make a name for himself. He seems to be afraid that the Schwa effect will rub off on him, making him less popular and more ignored. He does not want to be someone who



goes unnoticed in a crowd. He also does not want to be thought of as a loser, or to associate with those he considers to be 'freaks' or losers. The Schwa fits into this category for him. Antsy's assessment of Ira's feelings here shows how perceptive and smart he can be. Antsy may not be academically clever, but he understands the world and often sees things that others do not. This is probably another reason why he pays particular attention to the Schwa, and why he is determined to help him.

Ira and Howie are also annoyed at the idea of stealth economics. They pretend to think it is a stupid idea, but in reality they are clearly worried about losing Antsy's friendship, and unwilling to admit another member into their gang. They are also annoyed because their 'Schwa experiment' got them an F grade, as the teacher thought they were not being serious. Unfairly, they seem to be blaming this on the Schwa. Antsy ignores them, and really gets into the idea of stealth economics. He decides to use the Schwa effect for gain, and sets about taking money from his classmates as bets over dares. He also hires out the Schwa's talents to people who want certain things done. For example, the student officers hire him to sneak into the kitchen to find out who is stealing the snack cakes, as the students are getting the blame. He does so, and finds that it is the school's security guard. Antsy and the Schwa are doing well out of this and making a lot of money. The Schwa seems happy, as this is a way for him to get something positive out of the Schwa effect, rather than seeing it as a miserable curse. More than anything, he seems to enjoy the attention he is getting, as well as the friendship of Antsy. It is clear that the Schwa's strange ability upsets him more than he is willing to admit to Antsy, but for now at least he can try to enjoy it, and he has someone to share it with.

Antsy is also getting more than money out of the relationship. The Schwa makes him feel important, and it is nice for him to have a friend who does not steal all the attention from him. Most importantly, the Schwa praises his business sense, and the stealth economics proves that he can succeed at something if he puts his mind to it. Antsy has always been made to feel like he is a failure and will never succeed at anything. His parents are not very encouraging, and even being asked to test out Manny Bullpucky made Antsy happy, as he was being trusted with something by his dad. Now he has a chance to prove that he can make something work. Howie and Ira are not supportive, but the Schwa is very complimentary, and he makes Antsy feel that he could be good at something after all. This is a mutually beneficial relationship between the two boys, as both of them are gaining new confidence and happiness from the friendship.

However, Antsy does not always think about his friend's feelings. He sees the Schwa effect as a strange but cool superpower and enjoys using it however he can. He does not stop to think about whether the Schwa sees it this way or not. He sympathizes with the Schwa and understands how he must feel very alone and ignored, but he does not realize quite how much the Schwa hates the Schwa effect. The Schwa is sick of being ignored and forgotten. He shows this when he agrees to do Tiggor's dare. He had been reluctant at first, but when Antsy pointed out that he would become a legend, the Schwa agreed, because 'people remember legends' (p42). This demonstrates how much the Schwa desperately wants to be remembered and actually seen for who he is. Despite the fact that Antsy is quite a perceptive boy, he fails to see the Schwa's real feelings here. He is wrapped up in how much he is enjoying his stealth economics, and pushes

the Schwa to accept the dare. There is a sense of foreboding in this chapter. The reader can sense that the dare is not going to go well, and that their lives will be changed forever.



Chapters 5-6, 'Which Is Worse: Getting Mauled by a Pack of Dogs, or Getting Your Brains Bashed Out by a Steel Poker?' and 'As If I Didn't Already Have Enough Annoying Things to Do Every Day, Now I Gotta Do This'

Chapters 5-6, 'Which Is Worse: Getting Mauled by a Pack of Dogs, or Getting Your Brains Bashed Out by a Steel Poker?' and 'As If I Didn't Already Have Enough Annoying Things to Do Every Day, Now I Gotta Do This' Summary

On Sunday morning, a bunch of kids gather outside Crawley's apartment to watch the Schwa's dare. Antsy begins to worry, but the Schwa is determined not to back down now. He sneaks into the apartment and tries to steal a bowl, but all the dog-bowls are nailed down. Outside they hear dogs barking and a man shouting, and Tiggor laughs that they lost the bet.

Antsy runs into the apartment. The dogs immediately run up to him, and Crawley rolls up in a wheelchair, brandishing a poker. He tells the Schwa to come out from behind the curtain, and Antsy is amazed that he knew the Schwa was there. Crawley tells them that he called the police, then begins to insult Antsy's heritage, saying his 'breeding' is bad. Antsy insults him right back.

The police arrive, but Crawley sends them away. He then tells Antsy and the Schwa that they will have to work off their debt by walking his dogs for him. He says he will not pay them, and that he will have their fathers fired from their jobs if they do not turn up to work each day after school. Crawley is a rich and connected man, so Antsy believes his threat. Crawley puts Antsy in charge of walking the seven dogs named after the seven deadly sins, and the Schwa in charge of walking the seven virtues. Antsy and the Schwa soon find that they can only walk one dog each at a time, so their task is a very time-consuming one.

Antsy goes round to the Schwa's house for dinner. The Schwa's father is very vague and forgetful, and the Schwa explains that he has had head trauma and never been the same since. In many ways, the Schwa has to look after him rather than the other way around. His dad also seems to suffer under the Schwa effect, not even noticing when



his own son is in the room. The Schwa has to put on dinner, and then shows Antsy his paperclip collection. Each one is from a very famous or important document, such as a clip that held together the Nuclear Arms Treaty, and a paperclip that has been in space.

The next night Antsy is having dinner with his father. He thinks about the Schwa's sad life and asks his father if he can invite him round for dinner.

Chapters 5-6, 'Which Is Worse: Getting Mauled by a Pack of Dogs, or Getting Your Brains Bashed Out by a Steel Poker?' and 'As If I Didn't Already Have Enough Annoying Things to Do Every Day, Now I Gotta Do This' Analysis

Crawley is exactly what Antsy expected, but at the same time quite different. He is a mean old man who seems to take great pleasure in insulting Antsy. The reader is given the impression, however, that his mean attitude is actually a mask for vulnerability underneath. Crawley is too perceptive to miss the Schwa entirely, but he does seem to largely ignore him. It is Antsy who he is interested in. Antsy admits that the old man is growing on him, and Crawley also seems to be warming to Antsy. Although they argue, Antsy enjoys irritating him and Crawley seems to like being challenged. It is likely that Crawley is actually a very lonely old man who secretly likes having them around. He is too proud and grumpy to ask them to stay, so he forces them into a position where they have to work for him. There is certainly more to him than either of the boys had originally thought.

Antsy thinks about his own invisibility in chapter five. At home he is the middle child and is very often ignored. No one expects much of him, but they also don't pay attention when he does anything wrong either. He feels that he is the equilibrium that holds the family together, as it is often he who resolves arguments or helps the others to get along. Despite this, he is ignored and often forgotten. This is proved by an incident at dinner one night. His parents begin to bicker about what kind of floor to put in the basement. Antsy interrupts them and gives his own suggestion, which immediately derails the argument. His parents are distracted and forget what they were discussing, moving on to other topics. Antsy successfully halts an argument in its tracks before it blows out of proportion, keeping the atmosphere around the dinner table pleasant. Despite this, he is forgotten the instant he stops speaking. He is completely taken for granted. He compares this to the Schwa effect, thinking that even normal people like him can be invisible sometimes too.

Antsy thinks he understands what it is like to be the Schwa, because he knows how it feels to be ignored. However, the Schwa's situation is so much worse than simply being taken for granted. Now that they are no longer having fun with the Schwa effect, the Schwa becomes upset and depressed about it again. Antsy begins to realize that the experiments they did, which had seemed interesting and harmless at the time, actually



just proved to the Schwa how unimportant he is in most people's eyes. The fact that nobody even noticed he was wearing an orange sombrero really upsets the Schwa. He must feel that he is a very boring and uninteresting person to be ignored to such an extent. Antsy tries to reassure him that he is special and has an interesting power, but the Schwa does not think of it this way. He tells Antsy that everyday things such as catching the bus are difficult, and that even his own father completely ignores him at home. He sees the Schwa effect as a disability, not an ability. Antsy thinks he must be exaggerating, so decides to visit his house to find out more. At first he is driven by curiosity more than anything else, but when he sees how bad things really are for the Schwa, he begins to feel very sorry for him. He realizes that the Schwa must have a very difficult and lonely life. Not only does his dad tend not to notice him because of the Schwa effect, he also has a brain injury that makes him vague and forgetful all the time. As the Schwa explains, it is often more like his dad is the kid, and he has to take care of him. Antsy thinks this is a very sad situation. Looking after his father is a big responsibility for a kid, and the Schwa faces it maturely even though it upsets him. He has been forced to grow up too quickly, and does not even have friends or family to help him. He has gone unloved and ignored for a long time. Antsy realizes that his own life is much better. He may go ignored at home sometimes, but nothing he experiences is as bad as this. He understands now that the Schwa effect is a real disability, and that the Schwa needs help and support with it. He decides to reach out to his friend and to try to help him. He invites him round for dinner, a gesture that will show the Schwa that he is wanted and that he has at least one friend.

At the Schwa's house, the Schwa shows Antsy his paperclip collection. This bizarre hobby perfectly reflects the character and situation of the Schwa. His paperclips are incredibly interesting, as they all have exciting stories behind them, but at the same time incredibly boring because they are just paperclips. This reflects the Schwa himself, who is at the same time extraordinary and very ordinary. He has a weird power that seems completely unique, but that seems to be caused by the fact that he is so ordinary and generic that he blends into the background. The Schwa is a living contradiction. Paperclips also reflect the Schwa because they are something that is important, but that tends to go unnoticed. It is the same with the schwa, the vowel sound that is so common and important and yet ignored. Just like the paperclips and the schwa, Calvin Schwa is important but ignored. He is a person with real feelings, who wants to find a place for himself in the world, but who can never seem to get people to notice him. Paperclips are therefore a perfect analogy for him and his situation, which makes his hobby extremely ironic.



Chapters 7-8, 'The Lowest-Paid Male Escort on the Entire Eastern Seaboard, Except for Maybe the Bronx' and 'Are Those Your Fingers in My Mouth, or Are You Just Happy to Not See Me?'

Chapters 7-8, 'The Lowest-Paid Male Escort on the Entire Eastern Seaboard, Except for Maybe the Bronx' and 'Are Those Your Fingers in My Mouth, or Are You Just Happy to Not See Me?' Summary

One day Crawley tells the Schwa he has another job for him. He tells him his granddaughter will be coming to stay with him, and that he wants Antsy to be her companion and to entertain her. He will pay Antsy to do this. Antsy, Howie and Ira discuss this over video games, concluding that there must be something very wrong with the girl for Crawley to pay someone to hang out with her and pretend to like her. The Schwa arrives, and shows Antsy a newspaper clipping announcing the birth of Lexis Crawley. By the date on it, they know that Crawley's granddaughter is their own age.

Howie and Ira ignore the Schwa and ask Antsy if he is going to play. The Schwa gets annoyed and begins shouting at them, but they still ignore him. He ejects the game and breaks it in half, then storms out. Antsy yells at Howie and Ira and runs after the Schwa. The Schwa tells him that he is afraid he will end up like something, but does not finish his sentence. Antsy realizes he was going to say 'his mother.' He goes back into the house and tells his friends he is not feeling very well anymore. They leave.

The next morning Antsy dresses up smartly and goes to Crawley's apartment. He meets Crawley's granddaughter Lexis, nicknamed Lexie, who it turns out is blind. Antsy thinks she is quite pretty, and is happy to hang out with her. They walk the dogs together. Lexie touches Antsy's face to see what he looks like, and even puts her fingers in his mouth.

Suddenly, the Schwa says hello and Antsy jumps. Lexie, however, could tell he was standing there all along because she could hear his breathing. She touches the Schwa's face and tells him he has a face like sweet-cream ice-cream. Antsy comments that sweet-cream has no taste and that nobody likes it, but Lexie says the flavor is subtle and that it is her favorite. Antsy takes her to dinner. He ensures that the Schwa cannot join them by bringing down two dogs for him to walk.



Chapters 7-8, 'The Lowest-Paid Male Escort on the Entire Eastern Seaboard, Except for Maybe the Bronx' and 'Are Those Your Fingers in My Mouth, or Are You Just Happy to Not See Me?' Analysis

Antsy is growing up very quickly in this story. He feels that he has outgrown Howie and Ira, and he realizes that the simple amusement of his video game is no longer fun. His time with the Schwa and with Crawley has changed him. He is no longer an oblivious and innocent child, and is beginning to see some of the real problems people face in the world. Seeing what the Schwa has to put up with at home had a large impact on him. Through helping and trying to understand the Schwa, he has also learnt some truths about himself. He realizes that he is often taken for granted at home, but that he should be very grateful for all the things that he does have. He is learning compassion and is growing in confidence. Howie and Ira have not experienced these changes, and are not growing up as quickly. They are drifting apart as friends, and at the end of the chapter even Antsy realizes that he will probably not spend much time with them in the future.

Howie and Ira show their immaturity in the way they treat the Schwa in chapter seven. They pointedly ignore him, asking Antsy if he wants to play the game but leaving the Schwa out. As he gets annoyed and starts shouting at them, they just continue to play the game. It soon becomes apparent that this is not the Schwa effect at work but something much crueler. The boys are deliberately ignoring the Schwa because they do not want to include him. They are not interested in being his friend and do not even want to make the effort to be nice. This is especially appalling behavior because they are doing it in Antsy's house, knowing that he is the Schwa's friend. They do not care whether Antsy likes him or not, and seem to be treating the Schwa meanly in order to force Antsy to make a choice. They expect him to choose their friendship over the Schwa's, but Antsy does not do so. He has grown up too much to accept this kind of behavior. He cannot even feel angry with the Schwa for breaking his game, as he sees how desperate and upset the Schwa has become. This is effectively the end of Antsy's close friendship with Ira and Howie.

Antsy makes quite a large sacrifice for the Schwa in giving up his friends for him. He does not want to make another sacrifice by sharing Lexie with him. He has tried to help out the Schwa a lot lately, and it must feel like his life has become about the Schwa. He is a little sick of the Schwa taking all the attention away from him, which is ironic considering the Schwa's affliction. Antsy enjoys getting some attention that is entirely his own, especially as it comes from a pretty girl. When the Schwa muscles in on this, Antsy is not happy. He wants all the attention from Lexie himself, and feels jealous when she gives it to the Schwa. This is the first hint of any real tension in their friendship, and it causes Antsy to act a little meanly. He attempts to put the Schwa down, but Lexie lifts him right back up with compliments, which only annoys Antsy further. Antsy stops the Schwa from joining them at dinner by forcing two of the dogs on him. This seems a little mean, and Antsy feels guilty for it, but it is also understandable. Antsy has just lost two



of his old friends, and his life is changing quickly. This is because of the Schwa, and although Antsy is friends with him, he does want to have some things that are just his.

The Schwa is unlikely to take the hint or to stay away from Lexie, however. Lexie can tell that the Schwa is there when even Antsy cannot. She does not have the same distractions of sight getting in her way. She can sense the Schwa because she can hear his breathing. It would not occur to her to ignore him, and she seems incapable of overlooking him. She has to rely on her other senses, and needs to be aware of everything around her in order to get by without her sight. She is the perfect friend or partner for the Schwa, as she will never ignore him or forget he is there. There is also a lot of poetic irony in the fact that the only person who can 'see' the invisible boy is the blind girl. The Schwa is not used to getting any attention at all, and to be noticed and complimented by a girl must be incredible for him. He grins when Lexie is nice to him, and it is clear that he is already smitten. The reader can sense that there is trouble around the corner, and that Lexie will be a source of conflict between Antsy and the Schwa.

Lexie is another character who fits into the theme of marginalized people. She has a disability, which means that many people will treat her differently than 'normal' people. People with disabilities are also often overlooked and ignored, just as people of minorities are, and of course as the Schwa is. These characters all have something in common, and can all relate to the idea of struggling to be noticed. The theme of disability is also important in this book. The Schwa sees the Schwa effect as a disability and has difficulty living and dealing with it. Lexie has an actual disability, but seems to cope very well. Everyday things in her life are made more difficult because of being blind, just as everyday things like catching the bus are difficult for the Schwa because of the Schwa effect. The problems of being invisible are ironically similar to the problems of being blind, and will be compared and contrasted throughout the book.



Chapters 9-10, 'Maybe They Had It Right in France Because Getting My Head Lopped Off by a Guillotine Would Have Been Easier' and 'Earthquakes, Nuclear Winter, and the End of Life as We Know It, over Linguini'

Chapters 9-10, 'Maybe They Had It Right in France Because Getting My Head Lopped Off by a Guillotine Would Have Been Easier' and 'Earthquakes, Nuclear Winter, and the End of Life as We Know It, over Linguini' Summary

The Schwa invites Antsy round for dinner and shows him a new clip he got that was supposedly on the Titanic. He offers to give it to Antsy if he will let him have Lexie. Antsy argues that Lexie is a person, not a thing, so he cannot let him have her. The Schwa tries to appeal to Antsy on grounds of their friendship to let him hang around with Lexie on his own, but Antsy refuses.

While round at Crawley's apartment one day, Lexie tells Antsy and the Schwa that she wants to change her granddad. She thinks he is lonely and unhappy, and that he is not living his life as he should. The Schwa says that trauma can change people, and Antsy suggests focused trauma in the right dose in order to help him rather than hurt him. Lexie says she will think about this.

Antsy takes Lexie to a salsa concert. Antsy calls it a date but Lexie points out that it isn't a date when one of them is getting paid to do it. They discuss the Schwa's invisibility, then Lexie suggests that Calvin start being her escort while Antsy goes back to walking the dogs. Antsy is hurt, but he agrees.

The next day Antsy's parents have a big fight. Antsy's dad is an excellent cook, but Antsy's mother likes to be in charge in the kitchen. They argue about who cooks the best food. Antsy cannot stand it anymore and yells at them to stop arguing. His mother asks him who makes the best sauce and he decides to tell the truth rather than try to make peace. He tells her that his father makes the best sauce. His mother is stunned, then dumps the sauce she made down the drain and storms out of the house. Antsy waits up late, but does not hear her come back. The next morning, however, she is at



the kitchen table. Things are still tense, and Antsy does not know if his parents will make up.

At school Antsy sits alone at lunch, but the Schwa comes up and finds him. He tells Antsy that Lexie told him he gave up his position as escort so that the Schwa could do it. He thanks Antsy and tells him he is a good friend.

Chapters 9-10, 'Maybe They Had It Right in France Because Getting My Head Lopped Off by a Guillotine Would Have Been Easier' and 'Earthquakes, Nuclear Winter, and the End of Life as We Know It, over Linguini' Analysis

When Antsy witnesses another of his parents' rows at home, he realizes that he is also like a paperclip. He is the clip that holds the family together, but that goes unnoticed and unappreciated. He is sick of this, so rather than make peace in the argument, he decides to tell the truth and let the argument come to a head. He feels guilty about this later, as he feels like he acted selfishly and now his whole family is suffering. He was upset, and did not think about the consequences of his actions. Now his family are like a pile of papers with the no paperclip, with the pages flying away in the wind. However, Antsy's actions here might actually be a good thing. By constantly diffusing arguments, he is just keeping the resentment alive. More arguments just develop, and nothing is ever resolved. Sometimes conflict is necessary in order to solve problems, and now Antsy's parents can actually begin to deal with the underlying problem that caused their argument in the first place. This is the first example in this book of what will become a recurring theme, that sometimes hard truths are unpleasant but necessary, and can be better in the long run. This will prove to be the case with Antsy's parents, as well as with the Schwa and Crawley. Both the Schwa and Crawley will have to face unpleasant situations and truths in order to get past their fears and difficulties to become happier people. Sometimes a person has to be a little cruel to be kind.

Lexie comes to the same conclusion about hard truths when considering her grandfather. She tells the Schwa and Antsy that she wants to change her grandfather, to make him a happier person with a fuller life. He is lonely and isolated, never leaving his apartment or interacting with other people. He seems frightened of the world and of life, and would rather ignore it. He is grumpy and pessimistic, always seeing the worst in people. He needs something to shake him up and make him appreciate his life and the world again. As Antsy notes, many older people are stubborn and have become set in their ways, and this is certainly the case with Crawley. He does not think he needs to change, and convincing him will be very difficult. This is why they will need to do something extreme, like a trauma to force him out of his established ways. Lexie does not want to hurt him, just to shock him into seeing things from a different point of view. This means that they will have to plan carefully in order to come up with a focused trauma that will achieve what they want without making things worse.



In these chapters, the rivalry between Antsy and the Schwa over Lexie gets worse. Antsy really likes Lexie, and his selfish streak begins to show itself. The Schwa is his friend, but he cannot give up everything he has to help him. This makes him act a little unpleasantly, trying to discourage the Schwa from hanging out with them. The Schwa also acts a little selfishly, not considering Antsy's feelings because he is so focused on his own. He is desperate for attention, and Lexie gives it to him. He thinks it is more important for him to have Lexie's affections because of his problem, but this does not really give him the right to expect Antsy to sacrifice everything for him. Both boys are approaching the problem completely wrong. They should not be trying to push each other away, but should let Lexie choose for herself and remain friends whatever decision she makes. As Antsy points out, Lexie is a person, not a thing, so she cannot be claimed or passed around as if she doesn't have feelings of her own. If the boys continue to treat each other as rivals, it could easily destroy their friendship.

It is not clear which boy Lexie likes best. She clearly has a problem with the fact that Antsy has been paid to keep her company, as she mentions at the concert. She does not reply when Antsy calls it a date, and it is hard to tell whether she liked this idea or not. She shows curiosity in and sympathy for the Schwa, and gives him compliments. She tries to make sure the two boys stay friends. She also seems slightly oblivious to the fact that both boys like her as more than a friend. At the concert she decides that she would like the Schwa to be her escort from now on, and that Antsy should go back to walking the dogs. This hurts Antsy a lot as he thinks he has been rejected and that Lexie likes the Schwa better. The Schwa is thrilled because he thinks Lexie likes him better too. However, Lexie's preferences and character are not so clear, and the reader cannot be sure of her feelings. She asks the Schwa to be her escort from now on, but tells him that it was Antsy's idea. Perhaps she is simply trying to mend the boys' relationship, or perhaps she really does like the Schwa better. It is also possible that Lexie likes Antsy as more than a friend, but is not comfortable with him being paid to hang around with her. She could be testing him, to see if he will choose to be her friend when he is not being paid to be.



Chapters 11-12, 'The Youngest Doctor in Sheepshead Bay Gets Held Hostage When He Least Expects It' and 'A Horror Movie Blow-by-Blow, with the Undisputed Queen of the 3-B Club'

Chapters 11-12, 'The Youngest Doctor in Sheepshead Bay Gets Held Hostage When He Least Expects It' and 'A Horror Movie Blow-by-Blow, with the Undisputed Queen of the 3-B Club' Summary

Antsy goes round to Crawley's apartment to walk the dogs, and Lexie answers the door anxiously. She says she needs Antsy's help and leads him to the bathroom where Crawley has slipped in the shower. Antsy takes charge and gives the old man some of the painkillers and anti-inflammatory pills that were prescribed the last time he broke his hip. The paramedics arrive and Crawley insists that Antsy come with him in the ambulance.

At the hospital Antsy calls his mother to explain where he is, and says he will get a cab home. Crawley tells him to stay with him instead and that he will pay him time-and-a-half to stay. Antsy realizes that he is scared, and Crawley tells him that his son wants to put him in a care home, which he really does not want. Crawley also tells Antsy that Lexie is upset with him, and Antsy is confused.

The next day Antsy goes to the Academy of the Blind to meet Lexie after school. He asks why she is upset with him and she explains that when she told him to go back to dog walking, it was so that he would stop being paid to be with her. That would mean they could go out on a real date, but he never asked her. Antsy is amazed, as he thought she didn't want to be with him. She kisses him. He tells her that the Schwa will be upset because he thinks he is dating Lexie, but Lexie tells him he is being silly and that the Schwa will understand.

Antsy takes her to the movies on their first date. He has to describe the film to her in detail as they are watching it. At the restaurant Lexie asks for a Braille menu. When she is told there isn't one, she demands the manager come out and read the entire menu to her. Antsy laughs, and she tells him she is a member of the Four-S club, which stands for the four senses other than sight. The Four-S club takes on establishments that are anti-blind, such as organizing pickets outside. She also tells him that she has come up with an idea for giving her grandfather 'trauma therapy' but will not tell him what it is yet.



Chapters 11-12, 'The Youngest Doctor in Sheepshead Bay Gets Held Hostage When He Least Expects It' and 'A Horror Movie Blow-by-Blow, with the Undisputed Queen of the 3-B Club' Analysis

When Crawley falls and fractures his hip again, he insists on Antsy coming with him to the hospital. He then tries to get Antsy to stay with him by offering to pay him time-and-a-half. Antsy correctly guesses that Crawley is afraid to be alone. He is afraid to go out into the outside world, preferring to stay in his apartment, but he seems especially afraid of hospitals. This seems to be because they are places associated with death and weakness. Crawley is afraid to show weakness because his son wants to put him into a care home. Crawley desperately does not want this. He wants to be independent, and he feels that if he goes to a care home he will not be respected anymore, but thought of as a pathetic and weak old man. He likes to be thought of as fierce, and he loves the fact that he is something of a legend in his area of Brooklyn. He does not want to be forgotten and ignored. This is yet another person who, like the Schwa, is afraid of disappearing. Crawley's whole mean persona has been established to make sure that he is talked about and remembered. Crawley is also afraid of the hospital because he is afraid of death. This is because he does not live his life as he should, enjoying every moment and making the effort to talk to new people and try new things. He is afraid of death because he does not really live.

Antsy shows that he is very astute and perceptive by picking up on this. Crawley likes to have him around because Antsy is actually quite smart, and so represents an intellectual equal who Crawley can talk to. He enjoys arguing with Antsy, and even likes the insults and nicknames Antsy gives to him. He has come to admire Antsy a little, particularly because of his spirit and his naturally charming personality. Having Antsy around brightens things up and makes Crawley's days interesting. He would never admit this to Antsy, however, as that would be showing weakness. Crawley does not know how to be vulnerable or to open up to people, so he pushes them away instead and resorts to paying people to be around him. He tries to bribe Antsy to stay with him by offering money, but really he just wants a friend and does not know any other way to express this. Antsy stays anyway, claiming that he does not need to be paid for his time. This is because Crawley is growing on him and he actually does care about him. He can see that Crawley needs him and that the old man is too afraid to admit it.

Lexie tells Antsy that she wants to be with him, and he is amazed and pleased. However, trouble is lurking just around the corner because like Antsy, the Schwa has also misread the situation. Lexie approached their relationship in a way that made sense to her. She did not want to be with Antsy while he was still being paid to hang around with her, so she quickly changed this by firing Antsy. This was meant as an opening for him to ask her out, but he misunderstood and thought she was choosing the Schwa over him. The Schwa also thought this, as both boys tend to see things more literally than Lexie does. Lexie is used to having to 'see' things from different angles. Lexie's actions were confusing to Antsy, and he correctly guesses that the Schwa will be



confused too. He tries to tell Lexie that the Schwa thinks he is dating her, but she thinks he is being ridiculous. She thinks she is just friends with the Schwa and that he understands this. As Antsy points out, she is not always as perceptive as she thinks she is. The Schwa will be really hurt by Antsy and Lexie's relationship, and will see it as a betrayal. Antsy sees this even if Lexie does not, meaning that he has a dilemma on his hands. He chooses Lexie because he really likes her, and is not willing to sacrifice his happiness to keep the Schwa from being hurt. Antsy cannot necessarily be blamed for this, but it is obvious that he should be honest with his friend rather than try to hide his relationship with Lexie. The reader can sense disaster coming soon.

Antsy goes on a proper date with Lexie, and it becomes apparent that the two are good for each other. Antsy admires Lexie's spirit and courage, and how she does not let her disability stop her from living. She likes Antsy's sense of humor and his charming personality. The two have a very similar spirited personality, and both have quite loud, almost forceful characters. The Schwa, on the other hand, has a much blander personality. He is a nice person, but is easily forgotten, even by the reader. He does not seem to enjoy life in the same way as Lexie and Antsy, and unlike Lexie he spends too much time dwelling on his disability and letting it affect his life. He is a little too sorry for himself most of the time, which can make him difficult to be around. He is obviously not the right match for Lexie, and seems to be more interested in the attention she gives him than her actual personality. This helps the reader to understand why Antsy acts as he does and betrays his friend.

Disability and ability is a strong theme in this book. Lexie does not let her handicap stop her from doing what she wants and from living her life. She will not let others ignore her or mistreat her because of her blindness, and will always stick up for herself. She approaches her disability like a challenge that she can face and overcome, and she refuses to let it be a hindrance. Her handicap still makes everyday things harder for her, but she simply gets on with them and does not dwell on the problem. She seems to enjoy life, and is a very happy person. Despite being disabled, she is a very able person. The Schwa is completely different. He dwells on his handicap, the Schwa effect, and lets it get him down. He is miserable a lot of the time, and does not cope well when the Schwa effect makes others ignore him. He cannot face it or think of it as a challenge in the same way Lexie deals with her blindness. He tries to force his friend to help him out instead of helping himself. The fact that he asks Antsy to 'let' him have Lexie, rather than just trying to charm her himself, shows how little confidence and self-esteem he has. He accepts defeat and thinks he cannot do anything for himself, unlike Lexie who holds on to her independence as fiercely as she can. Even though Lexie has a more life-affecting handicap than the Schwa, the way she deals with it makes it a lighter burden to bear. Other people also deal with difficulties in different ways. Crawley is afraid of the world, and responds with gruffness, isolation and unfriendliness. He pushes people away, and makes his situation worse for himself. Most of Crawley's problems are self-inflicted. Even the other children at the blind school deal with disability differently, as Lexie points out. Some find it harder than others, and some refuse to be beaten down by it. She claims that she is good at being blind, and this certainly seems to be the case. It is this positive attitude to disability that is shown as the best way of dealing with it.



Other people's attitudes to disability are also explored in this book. Some people are intolerant, some just don't understand, some are kind and accepting, and some are ignorant and unwilling to help. Lexie deals with an ignorant restaurant that has no Braille menus. The waitress seems surprised that she even asked, as if she should know better than to think that a small burger place would bother to think about blind people. There is really no excuse for this, as Lexie makes apparent. She demands that the manager come out to read the entire menu to her. She does not need this, as Antsy offers to read it to her, but this is not the point. She wants the manager to understand that a simple thing is made so much harder because he has not provided for disability. A simple thing such as printing some Braille menus could make such a difference for people like her. The Schwa also faces some bad reactions to his disability. Ira and Howie were deliberately mean to him and did not want to go near him, as if associating with him could somehow make his handicap rub off on them. This is a ridiculous but unfortunately common reaction to disability. Others simply ignore the Schwa, just as many disabled people tend to be ignored in real life. Perhaps the worst reaction to disability in the book comes from Crawley. He wants to help Lexie, and acts out of kindness, but shows a terrible attitude. He pays boys to hang around Lexie and to pretend that they like her. This suggests several things about his attitude. It suggests that he doesn't think she can look after herself, that she is weak and vulnerable, and that her blindness would cause others to not want to be around her. He thinks he actually has to pay someone to be with her. Lexie is not angry with him because she knows he actually cares and is just trying to help, but his attitude is quite appalling. Lexie is clearly a capable and independent young girl. She needs some help to get by in life, such as a chauffeur to drive her home from school, and a guide dog to help her find her way, but she does not need a body guard and personal servant. She is also quite capable of making friends on her own. The biggest mistake Crawley makes is thinking of disability as something shameful that would stop others from wanting to get to know Lexie of their own accord.



Chapters 13-14, 'A Russian Train, a Pulsing Vein, and My Mother's Bag of Snails' and 'More Than I Ever Wanted to Know About the Schwa's Childhood'

Chapters 13-14, 'A Russian Train, a Pulsing Vein, and My Mother's Bag of Snails' and 'More Than I Ever Wanted to Know About the Schwa's Childhood' Summary

A woman in the neighborhood finds Manny Bullpucky's head in her hedge, and Frankie gets it back for Antsy. They pop the head back onto the body. Antsy calls Ira and Howie to plan their next destruction test for it. They decide to push it off a subway platform into the path of an oncoming train. Lexie asks if she can come and Antsy says yes, but is surprised when she arrives with the Schwa. Lexie tells Antsy that she enjoyed their date, then kisses him. She doesn't realize that the Schwa is standing right next to them. Antsy tries to tell the Schwa that he is sorry, but he just looks devastated. Howie yells that an express train is coming, so Antsy pushes Manny Bullpucky off the station. The dummy completely shatters. When Antsy turns round, the Schwa has gone.

Antsy walks Lexie home. He asks her how she could hurt the Schwa like that, but she says that she didn't know he liked her so much. Antsy realizes that she has not had much experience with boys, and that she didn't mean to hurt the Schwa. He still likes her, but he tells her they should just be friends, as he doesn't want to upset the Schwa even more.

He repeats to himself over and over that he needs to go see the Schwa, as he does not want the Schwa effect to cause him to forget. However, when he gets home his dad calls a family meeting. He tells the children that their mother is going to start taking French cookery classes, and that they all have to be completely honest with her about how the food tastes. Antsy is relieved because he thought his dad was going to say that they were getting a divorce. All thoughts of the Schwa go out of his head, and he only remembers him the next day when a paperclip falls on the floor from his mother's recipe cards.

He runs to the Schwa's house and asks his father where he is. He doesn't know, and Antsy starts telling him off for not being a good father to his son. The Schwa tells him to stop, and Antsy realizes he was in the house all along. The Schwa tells him that he quit working for Crawley and that he is ending his friendship with Antsy too, so Antsy doesn't have to pretend anymore. Antsy tells him he is his friend and was never pretending. He



sits in the room with the Schwa, refusing to leave. The Schwa relents and decides to tell him the story of what happened to his mother.

The Schwa was five years old when she went missing. He was in the supermarket with his mother when she went to get the beef, leaving him sitting in the cart in the frozen food aisle. He got distracted, and for a moment forgot why he was there. He forgot his mother. He remembered her again straight away, but by then it was too late. She never came back for him. He cried and cried, but no-one else in the shop noticed or helped him. He doesn't remember what happened next, just his dad filling out paperwork at the police station. It made him mad that the cop didn't notice him, so he took the paperclip from the paperwork. He still has it, and shows it to Antsy now. Antsy tries to persuade him that he will not just disappear someday, but the Schwa does not believe him.

Chapters 13-14, 'A Russian Train, a Pulsing Vein, and My Mother's Bag of Snails' and 'More Than I Ever Wanted to Know About the Schwa's Childhood' Analysis

Both the Schwa and Manny Bullpucky are tested to destruction in this chapter. The Schwa is similar to Manny Bullpucky in several ways. Both are generic looking and seem featureless. A shop dummy is designed to represent 'every person' and so is made to look person-shaped but without any distinct personality or memorable features. The Schwa is so ordinary looking that he seems to represent the idea of a generic kid. His personality is subtle to the point of being almost non-existent, so that sometimes he can seem like an expressionless and emotionless dummy. Like a dummy, people tend to glance over him and not really notice that he is there. A dummy is not human, and many people also treat the Schwa as if he is an object rather than a human, and this is something that he cannot stand. Manny Bullpucky is put through a series of trials in this book in order to test him to destruction. The Schwa also faces many difficult and upsetting things, and like Manny he pushes through them and keeps on going. However, in this chapter Manny is proved to be destructible after all. He is thrown from the station platform and hit by a train, which shatters him into pieces. The Schwa is also hit with a devastating revelation in this chapter. He sees Lexie kissing Antsy, and the shock is like being hit by a train. He realizes that Lexie never liked him as more than a friend, and that he was fooling himself when he thought they were dating. Lexie is the only person who treats him as if he is not invisible, but in some ways he still is. She never even considered him as a date, but focused all her romantic attention on Antsy. Even when the Schwa is noticed, he is still ignored in favor of others. His personality is just not interesting enough to make someone prefer him. He sees Lexie kiss her dog on the forehead in the same way she kisses him, and realizes her affection for him is exactly the same. He is someone she likes to have around, but in the same way she likes to have her loyal pet dog around. She will never like him in the way she likes Antsy. This revelation is extremely upsetting for the Schwa, and he feels as if he has shattered into pieces just like Manny. When Manny is destroyed, the Schwa also disappears.



Here, the indestructible Manny Bullpucky finally breaks, and proves destructible after all. The reader wonders if the same will be true for the Schwa.

Lexie is blind to the Schwa effect, which is the main reason the Schwa likes her so much. She cannot see him, but she can always hear him and sense that he is there. Because she is blind, however, she does not see how the Schwa appears to others, and does not see other people's reactions to him. She doesn't really believe in the Schwa effect, and does not understand when Antsy or the Schwa refer to his invisibility. To her, everyone is visually invisible, but at the same time completely present. It is no different with the Schwa. However, although this makes her a good friend for the Schwa, it also makes her blind to his problem and his feelings about it. She does not understand a lot of his motivations, and does not realize how much the Schwa effect upsets him. She does not understand that he has latched so much importance on to her because she is one of the few people who does not make him feel invisible. If she knew how desperate he feels, and why he considers their relationship so important, she would have acted very differently. She never wanted to hurt the Schwa, and honestly did not understand that her choosing Antsy over him would be so crushing for him. As Antsy points out, she does not have much experience with boys and is never purposefully cruel. She just does not really know how to act around them, and tries to hold on to both their friendships in the only way she can. She is not being manipulative. The reader can feel very sorry for her here, as she is genuinely upset about causing the Schwa pain.

Antsy proves that he is a very good friend in these chapters. He did keep his relationship secret from the Schwa, even though he knew this would end up hurting him, but he feels very guilty about this now. He likes Lexie a lot, which is why he was willing to hurt the Schwa to go out with her in the first place, yet he actually decides to end their relationship here. This is because he knows how much he has upset the Schwa, and is determined not to hurt him anymore. He knows that a large part of what hurt the Schwa was seeing his friend betray him. He cannot continue to shove this in his friend's face, which is what he would be doing if he continued to date Lexie. He is determined not to give in to his selfish streak any longer, but to be a good friend instead. The Schwa does not have many people who are there for him in his life, and he needs every friend he has. Antsy does not want to be responsible for breaking him. Antsy puts his friend's feelings ahead of his own here, proving that he can be compassionate and self-sacrificing when it really matters. Antsy is determined to look after the Schwa, and forces himself to remember him despite the Schwa effect nearly making him forget. He runs to his house, and will not accept the Schwa's dismissal. He sits silently with him in his room, trying to convey his solidarity and friendship. He needs to prove to the Schwa that he is truly his friend and has not been pretending because he feels sorry for him. The best way he can do this is to just be there for him. He does exactly this, sitting with the Schwa until he relents. This works, and the Schwa finally decides to open up to him about his mother, showing that he has accepted Antsy as his friend again.

The Schwa tells the story about his mother's disappearance, and it reveals a lot about the Schwa's feelings and motivations. He is terrified that he will disappear one day just like his mother. He thinks that the Schwa effect caused it, and he compares it to a tree falling in a forest. If a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it make



a noise? This is a very old and well-known riddle. At first, the answer seems simple; of course the tree makes a noise. Noise is not dependent on a person being there in order for it to exist. However, when thought about more deeply, the riddle becomes trickier. If there is nobody there to hear the tree making a sound, how can anyone say for sure that it did? There will never be any proof. Noise is something that is heard, so if there is nobody to hear it, can noise actually exist? This is a complicated problem, and the riddle is not actually meant to have an answer. The Schwa uses it here to illustrate his point. If nobody remembers a person, do they simply stop existing? Antsy does not think this is possible, as existence does not depend on other people. The Schwa points out that like the tree, without anyone else to remember or notice a person, it is impossible to say if they exist anymore. Antsy begins to wonder if the Schwa might be right, as he thinks about all the other weird results of the Schwa effect. He does not tell the Schwa about his doubts, as he does not want him to feel even more anxious.

The Schwa's dilemma is an interesting one as it says a lot about what he thinks of himself. The Schwa seems to think that his existence depends on other people. He thinks that if others do not know he exists, then he will not exist. This puts a lot of importance on other people, and it is clear that it matters a lot to the Schwa what other people think of him. He might be approaching the problem completely wrong. Perhaps the Schwa's problem has always been a lack of self-confidence. If the Schwa can learn to love himself and not to care what other people think, perhaps he will even become more visible. He is terrified that one day he will just disappear, which explains why he is so desperate for attention. This explains why he hates the Schwa effect so much, and why he clings on to Lexie. The Schwa was devastated when she picked Antsy over him because he thought it was a kind of death sentence. When he is with Lexie, he does not have to worry about disappearing because she always knows he is there. Without her, he risks vanishing like his mother. This shows that the Schwa probably likes Lexie for her attention more than who she actually is. In other words, he does not really like Lexie for Lexie as Antsy does. Everything the Schwa does is to try to be noticed and remembered. This makes him seem desperate and depressed, and he can often come across as a little clingy and whiney. His behavior and emotions are self-destructive, as they only bring him pain. Because of all this, the reader can feel very sorry for the Schwa but very frustrated with him at the same time. He has carried around a lot of fear and a great deal of guilt, even blaming himself for his mother's disappearance. He has had to grow up without love and attention. The Schwa effect is definitely real, but that does not mean he will stop existing if people do not remember him. The only way the Schwa can solve his problem is by learning to accept himself and stop basing his self-image on what others think of him. However, this is exactly what the Schwa will not do, as he thinks that his very existence depends on being noticed.



Chapters 15-16, 'Vortex in Aisle Three - Can Someone Please Clean Up the Ectoplasmic Slime?' and 'A Late-Night Trip to the Land of Beef That Could Turn a Person into a Vegetarian'

Chapters 15-16, 'Vortex in Aisle Three - Can Someone Please Clean Up the Ectoplasmic Slime?' and 'A Late-Night Trip to the Land of Beef That Could Turn a Person into a Vegetarian' Summary

The Schwa told Antsy that he means to do something big to get himself noticed and never forgotten again. Antsy worries about what he will do, and confides in Lexie. They decide to try to find out exactly what happened to the Schwa's mother. Antsy knows a dowser, a spiritual man who uses metal rods to find the presence of water and spirits, and asks him for his help. They go to the supermarket and the dowser wanders around for awhile, but he does not find anything unusual.

Antsy and Lexie go back to the supermarket the next day and ask to speak to the manager. They tell him they are doing a report on the history of the shop and ask him if any newsworthy or strange events have ever happened there. He mentions that a child was abandoned there, but he does not know what happened to the mother. The security cameras were facing the wrong way at the time too, so there is no evidence of where she went, or even if she left the shop.

When Antsy gets home he helps his mother with the cooking and tells her that her hard work is appreciated. He says he would never want her to disappear and she says she is not going anywhere. He realizes that her cooking classes are a way for her to feel like she has something for herself, so she does not get lost in her family and feel like she has disappeared.

Antsy goes over to Crawley's and brings him some of his dad's focaccia. He decides to hang out with him after walking the dogs to keep him company. He tells Crawley about the Schwa and his problem, and Crawley tells him that the Schwa is doing it to himself. Crawley suggests cutting the Schwa loose before he takes Antsy down with him, and Antsy is horrified at his attitude.

Antsy decides to go back to the supermarket at night to talk to the butcher, who he remembers looked away as if he knew something when Antsy was questioning the manager. He cannot go during the day because the manager has banned him from the



shop for asking too many awkward questions. He slips into the back of the supermarket and finds the Night Butcher, who is a creepy looking German man. The Night Butcher tells him he remembers the day the little boy was abandoned and that he knows what happened to his mother. He refuses to tell Antsy until he brings the Schwa with him to hear the story.

Chapters 15-16, 'Vortex in Aisle Three - Can Someone Please Clean Up the Ectoplasmic Slime?' and 'A Late-Night Trip to the Land of Beef That Could Turn a Person into a Vegetarian' Analysis

Now that the Schwa is upset about losing Lexie, and thinking about his mother's disappearance a lot, he also seems to be fading further out of existence. Antsy finds that it is harder to spot him in class and around school, and that he has to make a huge effort to remember him. This could be a progression of the Schwa effect, leading to his own disappearance like his mother. However, the reader begins to suspect that the Schwa's increasing invisibility is at least partially self-inflicted. He is upset and keeping himself to himself a lot more, not talking to his friends and making himself scarce. He has very little confidence or feelings of self-worth. He makes no real effort to interact with the world as he seems far too intent on his own problems. Being this withdrawn and introverted will not encourage people to notice him or talk to him. Antsy finds it harder to see him and remember him because the Schwa is deliberately being quiet and not making himself known. By acting in this way, the Schwa is only amplifying the Schwa effect further. Crawley also seems to agree with this view, as he says that the Schwa's invisibility is self-inflicted. Crawley knows something about this, because he also likes to withdraw from the world. He makes sure people talk about him and remember him, as he does not want to be forgotten, but he deliberately separates himself from the outside and from other people. He does this on purpose, and is fully aware that his kind of invisibility is self-inflicted. He calls it being hidden, rather than being invisible, as people might not see him but they still know he is there. He claims that if the Schwa is disappearing fully, then it is through his own actions. He explains that the Schwa is not dealing with his problems in the proper way. The Schwa is trying to combat the effect when he should be trying to deal with the symptoms. If it is the Schwa's attitude that causes his invisibility, then he needs to change this attitude, rather than make continually more desperate attempts to be noticed. If this is true, then the only way to help the Schwa is to find out what happened to his mother in order to prove to him that he will not simply disappear. He can then begin to face up to what the causes of his invisibility really are. Only then can he be happy. Antsy realizes this, and shows himself to be a very good friend by trying to help the Schwa in any way he can. He knows the key is finding out what happened to the Schwa's mother, and follows every lead he can come up with to do this.

Although Crawley is helpful to Antsy in this chapter, his attitude shocks the boy. Crawley suggests cutting the Schwa loose so that he will not pull Antsy down with him. He says



that if the Schwa is determined to self-destruct, then Antsy will only be hurt too. It will cause him less pain in the end if he stops being the Schwa's friend now. He points out that friends can be replaced, just like pets, and confesses that most of his dogs are second or third generation. When they die, he just buys a replacement and gives it the same name. Antsy thinks this is wrong, as it shows a horrible disregard for friendship and for life. It shows that the old man does not put worth into friends, but simply uses them for his own pleasure and gain. This attitude suggests that it is better not to care about anyone except yourself. Antsy does not believe this and does not want to be this kind of person. He recognizes that this is a sad attitude to have, and that it will never make a person's life happy or fulfilled. He realizes just how much Crawley needs help. He needs the trauma therapy that Lexie has been planning for him, in order to show him that life is not as bad as he imagines and that some things like love and friendship have tremendous value.

Antsy is right to feel disgust at Crawley's attitude here, but the reader can also notice that Crawley is not as gruff as he seems. He showed affection to his dogs, and has made it clear many times that he likes Antsy and values his friendship. Much of Crawley's mean behavior is actually just an act. He feels like he has to put up walls to keep others away, because he is afraid of getting hurt. This is why he says what he does about replacing people. He is afraid to admit how much he really does value good friends and pets, and he also wants to shock Antsy. He is pushing Antsy away, not because he does not like him, but because it is how he has always behaved in order to protect himself. Underneath Crawley's pretence and gruff exterior there is a good person and a vulnerable old man. Antsy is correct in thinking that Crawley needs a shock or trauma in order to change him. Hopefully his trauma therapy will break down the walls he has put up and allow him to admit that he needs others. Only then can he begin to be happy. Just as the Schwa needs to see that his unhappiness is partially self-inflicted, so Crawley needs to learn exactly the same lesson.

In chapter fifteen, Antsy talks to his mother about her cookery classes. He learns that there is another form of invisibility that a person can experience. This is the invisibility brought on by a feeling of losing oneself to something or someone else. For Antsy's mother, this is losing oneself to one's family. She explains to him that sometimes a person can become so focused on the needs of their family that they forget about themselves, and their own personality and individuality begin to disappear. She was afraid that this was happening to her, which was the underlying emotion that really caused her argument with Antsy's father. Now she has taken on the cookery class as a way to deal with this. She is learning something new, experiencing new things, finding new interests and meeting new people. She has a life beyond her family and feels as though she has found herself again. She no longer feels like she is disappearing. She explains this as putting her eggs into different baskets. If all her focus is put into just one thing, like too many eggs in one basket, then that one thing is in danger of becoming overloaded and heavy, and might break. She might realize that she has nothing at all. Now she is putting her eggs into a few different baskets. She has her family, but she has other interests too. This is a mature way of dealing with her problem, and has helped her to be much happier. This is what the Schwa needs to do. Rather than combating the invisibility head on, he needs look at what is causing his problem and fix it at the roots.



He needs a better attitude in order to feel happier and more fulfilled. This discussion with Antsy's mother also mirrors the story of the Schwa's mother, and so foreshadows some of the revelations later in the story. The Schwa's mother was also beginning to feel like she was losing herself. Rather than finding an outlet for her emotions as Antsy's mother did, the Schwa's mother let the feelings build up too long and took drastic action. This shows that if the Schwa can only face his problems sensibly and maturely rather than let them build up, then he can avoid disaster.



Chapters 17-18, 'A Traumatic Experience I'll Live to Regret, Assuming I Live' and 'Larger Than Life, in Your Face, Undeniable Schwa'

Chapters 17-18, 'A Traumatic Experience I'll Live to Regret, Assuming I Live' and 'Larger Than Life, in Your Face, Undeniable Schwa' Summary

Lexie calls Antsy early in the morning to tell him that she has trauma therapy planned for her grandfather that day. She tells him to call the Schwa to invite him too. Antsy calls the Schwa, who tells him that he has big plans today. Antsy leaves it at that without trying to persuade the Schwa to come, or to confide his plans to him. He realizes later that he should have done, but he doesn't want to deal with the Schwa's problems today.

Lexie pretends to have fallen in Crawley's restaurant in order to get him to come down from his apartment. Antsy and Lexie's driver then grab him and force him into the car. They blindfold him, then drive to a pier where there is a helicopter waiting. They get in, and begin to fly over the city. Lexie asks Antsy to describe what he is seeing, but she really hopes that his descriptions will excite her grandfather and encourage him to remove his blindfold. This works; Crawley removes the blindfold and looks at the sights in wonder. They fly around for awhile, then land and go home.

The next day Antsy plans to tell the Schwa about the Night Butcher but he is not home. Antsy returns to his house and the Schwa is waiting there for him. He tells Antsy he has something important to show him and Antsy knows this must be his big plan to get himself noticed. They travel on the bus to an abandoned and run down bit of the city. They get off the bus, and the Schwa takes him to an abandoned warehouse. They look out the window which has a view over to the expressway. As the streetlights come on, Antsy sees a huge billboard over the expressway with a picture of the Schwa's face on it and the words 'Calvin Schwa was here.' The Schwa explains that he spent his whole college fund to rent the billboard for a month and that he will never be ignored or forgotten again, as so many people will see his face.

Antsy suddenly notices that there is no traffic on the expressway and realizes that it has been closed for construction. All the traffic has been diverted. The construction will take at least a month, and nobody will see the Schwa's billboard. He tries to make the Schwa leave before he notices this problem, but unfortunately the Schwa does. He walks silently to the expressway and sits in the middle of it, staring up at his billboard. Antsy finds the nearest pay phone and calls Lexie, asking her to come to the expressway to help the Schwa.



Chapters 17-18, 'A Traumatic Experience I'll Live to Regret, Assuming I Live' and 'Larger Than Life, in Your Face, Undeniable Schwa' Analysis

These chapters see both Crawley and the Schwa undergoing trauma therapy. The former is deliberate and the latter is unintentional, but both have a large effect on the people undergoing them. Crawley is kidnapped by Lexie, Antsy and Lexie's driver, and taken to a helicopter. He is flown all over the city to see the sights. Crawley does not respond well at first, as he is too frightened to remove his blindfold, but eventually takes it off and begins to stare in wonder at the city underneath him. This trauma is well planned. It takes Crawley out of his apartment, which he has not left in a long time, and forces him to face the world. It shows him the city and makes him see that it is an interesting and wonderful place. It shows that the world can be special and amazing, and that it is worth experiencing. There is still joy and worth in life. This is exactly what Crawley needs to shake him up and make him change, in order to become a happier person.

The Schwa's trauma comes from the fact that his big plans to be noticed fail completely. He sees that no matter how much he tries to be noticed, he cannot demand attention without being the kind of person people want to pay attention to. Buying a billboard is not the right way to go about it, and so he has not been rewarded with results. He cannot simply buy attention. He cannot force others to like him or remember him. This is very traumatic for him, as he thinks he has failed and will disappear just like his mother. He does not yet realize that he has missed the point entirely. As Antsy points out, Crawley was correct when he said that people are not rewarded for going about things the improper way. The Schwa tried to force people to pay attention to him, without doing any of the difficult things along the way that make people want to pay attention to him. He wanted to jump straight to the result without any of the actions. He does not realize that he has two people, Antsy and Lexie, who already pay attention to him and care about him, and who would not forget him as long as he is a good friend to them too. He has earned their friendship and their attention. This is not enough for the Schwa, as he wants the world to notice him too. He needs to realize that he cannot get this without earning it. He should learn to be happy with what he does have, and not worry about what everyone else thinks of him. He needs one final piece of trauma therapy in order to make things clear to him, and this will come in the form of hearing what really happened to his mother.

Antsy does not always act as a good friend should. In these chapters, he does not push the Schwa to join him and Lexie, and does not try to find out what he has planned. He also does not mention the Night Butcher, despite knowing how desperate the Schwa is to find out what happened to his mother. Antsy most likely acts in this way because he does not want to deal with the Schwa's problems that day. He has spent most of his time recently looking for answers about the Schwa's mother, and worrying about what the Schwa intends to do. Antsy has been focused on nothing but the Schwa, and looks forward to a day spent with Lexie thinking about other things. He shows his selfish



streak again, and puts himself over his friend. Antsy could have stopped the Schwa from spending all his college money and from getting hurt, if he had only told him about the Night Butcher sooner. Antsy knows that he has messed up and blames himself. He feels very guilty. However, he does not abandon the Schwa, and tries everything he can to help him. He is perhaps a little too hard on himself, as he could not have anticipated what would happen. He had focused everything on the Schwa for a long time and needed a day to focus on himself, like his mother. Antsy needs a life of his own too, and not everything can be about the Schwa all the time. Ironically, for a person who claims he never gets attention, the Schwa certainly demands a lot from his friends. Most of the time, Antsy is willing to give it, which proves that he is a good and caring friend. Sometimes he could do more to help, but the reader cannot expect him to, and does not dislike him for the occasional mistake.

Antsy refers to the Schwa as Calvin for the first time in the story. For the first time he truly recognizes him as a person and not a strange power. Names can be powerful things, and by never using the Schwa's, Antsy was not acknowledging that the Schwa has individuality. 'The Schwa' makes him sound like a thing rather than a human being. Although Antsy never realized it, his attitude to the Schwa probably only added to the problem. Lexie has always called him Calvin, and now Antsy realizes that he should too. It is a mark of respect and shows that he really cares about his friend. Calvin needs to be made to understand that he is not going to just disappear because other people do not notice him. He needs more confidence in himself. He is special and unique and it does not really matter what everyone else thinks. He does not need the world's attention to have a happy life. He just needs good friends and he already has those.



Chapters 19-20, 'The Schwa Gets Radiation Therapy in a Room That Doesn't Smell Too Good No Matter How Much It's Disinfected' and 'The Weird Things Kids Do Don't Even Come Close to the Weird Things Parents Do'

Chapters 19-20, 'The Schwa Gets Radiation Therapy in a Room That Doesn't Smell Too Good No Matter How Much It's Disinfected' and 'The Weird Things Kids Do Don't Even Come Close to the Weird Things Parents Do' Summary

Lexie arrives at the expressway and convinces the Schwa to get up and come with them. They drive to the supermarket to see the Night Butcher. The Night Butcher tells them that the Schwa's mother was extremely unhappy. On that day, she broke down crying at the meat counter. The other butcher tried to console her, and they talked about how they both felt like they were watching their lives from the outside and not experiencing them. The butcher told her about all the places he wants to visit but never has. They decided to run away together, so the butcher quit his job right there and they left out the back of the shop.

The Schwa is shocked at first, then very angry. He cannot believe his mother just abandoned her five-year-old son, and that he has felt guilty about it ever since, thinking it was his fault she disappeared. He begins to wail and shake, until Lexie and Antsy manage to calm him down and take him home.

When Antsy gets back to his house there are police cars outside. He goes inside and is told that his brother Frankie was arrested for drunk driving. Frankie will have his license revoked for a year and will have to do community service. Antsy's parents ask why he is coming home late, but he tells them not to worry about him and to take care of Frankie instead.

Antsy tells the reader what he thinks happened next at the Schwa's house. The Schwa goes home and his father is waiting up, worried about him. The Schwa asks where his mother is, and where all the pictures of her are. The Schwa's father shows him letters his mother wrote to him from many different states. He never gave them to his son, saying that if she had wanted to talk to him she should have come home.



Chapters 19-20, 'The Schwa Gets Radiation Therapy in a Room That Doesn't Smell Too Good No Matter How Much It's Disinfected' and 'The Weird Things Kids Do Don't Even Come Close to the Weird Things Parents Do' Analysis

The Schwa gets another dose of trauma therapy in these chapters, but this time much stronger and focused in exactly the right place. The Schwa needed to know the truth about his mother, and now he does. He may not like the truth very much, but it is important that he has found out. This is why the chapter is titled 'the Schwa gets radiation therapy...', as Antsy had used radiation as an analogy for trauma therapy earlier. Radiation can be a very bad and dangerous thing, but in the right dose and focused just right, it can also cure people. The Schwa has been hurt badly by the revelations here, but in the end it will help to cure him. He finds out that there is nothing supernatural or mysterious at all about his mother's disappearance. She simply ran off with the butcher. This is very ordinary, embarrassing and insulting for the Schwa. His mother showed an incredible lack of care for her family, even abandoning her five-year-old son in the supermarket. She did not just disappear; she actually chose to leave the Schwa. The Schwa was left feeling miserable and guilty because he thought her disappearance was his fault. He has also been worrying that the same thing will happen to him, and has gone to all kinds of extreme measures to try to make sure it does not. Now he knows that this was his mother's choice, and he blames her for everything. He shouts that he hates her, and lets all his emotions pour out. This is very cathartic and good for him. This is the first step to being able to heal. This information changes everything because it means that the Schwa does not have to worry about ceasing to exist if others do not notice him. He can stop caring about what others think and explore his own individuality and what he wants from life. Being so desperate to be noticed will only lead to a breakdown similar to his mother's. Thankfully, the Schwa is not alone, and his friends will help him through this.

This is another example in this story of how the hard truth can be better for a person in the long run, even if it hurts them initially. This was the case with Antsy's parents, when Antsy refused to play peacemaker anymore and told his mother that her cooking is not as good as his father's. At first, this seemed disastrous, and Antsy worried that he had done the wrong thing in speaking the truth. However, it brought his mother's real insecurities and worries out into the open, showing her why she was getting so upset in the first place. This allowed her to think about what she really wants and to deal with her problems maturely before they became too big to handle. Now his parents are happy again. The Schwa's mother clearly did not do this, and was not brave enough to face the truth about why she was so unhappy. This caused her to break down and take drastic measures, abandoning her own son in the supermarket. This is obviously not a good example of how to deal with problems. It is therefore clear that the truth, even when painful, eventually leads to a better understanding of oneself. It allows for problems to be handled before they become too big. Hiding from the truth will only make



a person more unhappy in the long run. This is similar to Crawley's problem. He hides away from the world and does not want to deal with the truth. He is trying to protect himself from being hurt, but in doing so he makes himself unhappy. Lexie and Antsy gave him trauma therapy in order to make him deal with the truth of his situation. He needs to appreciate life again or he will be unhappy. In all these cases, the difficult or painful truth ended up helping more in the end.

In these chapters, Antsy worries whether he did the right thing in showing the Schwa the truth about his mother. He sees that he has upset his friend, and blames himself. However, the reader can see from all these previous examples that the truth is better than lies. Even though the Schwa is hurting now, the truth will help him to deal with his issues better and to become a happier person. Antsy has done a very good thing for his friend. Antsy finally realizes this when he thinks about what the truth is really like. He compares it to a pretty girl seen from a bus window. She looks beautiful from a distance, just as the truth can look like a very appealing thing to know. However, when he gets off the bus and runs to her, she is actually not very pretty at all. In fact, she is quite ugly and unpleasant. This is like the truth, which is often much harder and more unappealing than we think it is going to be. This is certainly the case for the Schwa, who is currently staring the truth in the face and finding it very ugly and painful. As a person spends time with the ugly girl, though, they come to see that none of these things matter, because the girl is a good person to be around and they appreciate her company. This is also like the truth. When given time to consider it properly, we see that even if it is unpleasant, it is still better to know it than to delude ourselves. Through knowing and contemplating the truth, a person can be more honest with themselves and can begin to approach their problems in the proper way. This is how things are for the Schwa. Now that he knows the truth, he can finally try to be happy.

The Schwa is given a collection of letters from his mother. His father had been keeping them from him because he was angry with his wife and did not want her to have contact with a son she abandoned. He made a decision for the Schwa, never asking him his opinion. He thought he was protecting his son, but he actually just made things worse. He made the Schwa's mother disappear by never talking about her and cutting off all contact with her. The Schwa thought his mother had vanished, and this is his father's fault. By trying to protect him from the truth, his father hurt him more. Now that the Schwa knows his mother is out there and has tried to contact him, things are completely different. She is not a poor woman who was forgotten and disappeared. She is out in the world, exploring and making a new life for herself. The fact that each letter is from a different state shows that she is living her dream, and suggests that she may have found happiness after all. The Schwa is upset that this didn't involve him, and that both his parents let him down so badly. However, the letters also give him hope, as they show that just because he often feels invisible it does not mean that he is. Like his mother, he can find happiness.

Antsy also takes a message from recent events. He comes home to find police cars outside and is shocked to learn that his brother Frankie has been arrested for drunk driving. This is very out of character for the 'perfect' Frankie. Whether Frankie is getting straight A's or getting into trouble, he is always the centre of attention. Antsy finally



realizes now that not all attention is good. Sometimes attention can mean that a person has done something wrong, or let people down. Conversely, sometimes being ignored can mean that a person is trusted. Antsy's parents barely notice that he has been out late, but this is not because he is unimportant or forgotten. It means that they think he is responsible and are happy to let him make his own decisions. Antsy realizes that he is happy with who he is, and does not always need to be the centre of attention. Like the Schwa, he does not have to base his own self-worth and identity on what others think of him. Every person can make mistakes, and just as Frankie has done here, everyone can surprise you. Now it is time for Antsy and the Schwa to start surprising themselves.



Chapters 21-22, 'Why I Started Vandalizing Brooklyn' and 'My Anonymous Contribution to Popular Culture and to My Parents' Phone Bill'

Chapters 21-22, 'Why I Started Vandalizing Brooklyn' and 'My Anonymous Contribution to Popular Culture and to My Parents' Phone Bill' Summary

The Schwa brings the letters into school and tells Antsy that he is going to write back. He wants to meet his mother one day and tell her to her face what she did to him, and to hear her say sorry.

When Antsy goes home that day, his father is sitting in the living room looking glum. He tells Antsy that he was fired. Antsy asks him what happened and he says that an investor offered to give a lot of money to the company on the condition that they fire him. Antsy immediately suspects Crawley, who once threatened to do exactly this, and who also said he would have revenge for the helicopter incident.

Antsy goes to Crawley's apartment and yells at him that he is a monster. Crawley confirms that he had Antsy's father fired, but says he means to offer him a job in his new restaurant as his business partner. It will pay more than his old job did. Antsy is taken aback by this. Crawley also asks him to pretend he is dating Lexie when Lexie's parents come to visit, as they hate the concept of him, and Crawley likes to annoy them. Finally, he tells Antsy he has a new job for him. He wants Antsy to kidnap him once a month and to plan some kind of adventure, just like the helicopter incident.

Antsy calls the Schwa but the number has been disconnected. There is no forwarding number. Antsy hurries to the Schwa's house but sees a 'for sale' sign outside. He calls the realtor and asks for a contact number for the Schwas, but she tells him that the house is being sold by someone called Mrs. Margaret Taylor and that her notes show the house has been unoccupied for months. Antsy is worried that the Schwa might have disappeared after all and dragged his father with him.

Antsy is in the bathroom at a burger shop and notices the graffiti there. He decides to add to it and draws the Schwa's face, with an upside down 'e' on the forehead. This is the symbol for the schwa in the dictionary. He then wanders all over town drawing the same thing onto bus stops and walls and wherever else he can. When he gets home he is grounded. He tells his father to call Crawley about the job, then goes upstairs and begins to look up all the Margaret Taylors in the phone book.



Weeks pass and the Schwa does not turn up at school. Antsy continues to look for Margaret Taylors in the phone book. Schwa faces and symbols begin to turn up everywhere, not drawn by Antsy. Someone wrote 'the Schwa was here' in the school bathroom. Antsy even sees his sister drawing a schwa on her lunchbox.

One day Antsy manages to find the right Margaret Taylor. It turns out to be the Schwa's aunt. She tells him that the Schwa's father was having money problems, so they had to sell the house. He moved in with her, but the Schwa stayed in Brooklyn with a friend. Antsy asks who the friend is and she says it is Anthony Bonano. Antsy realizes that the Schwa disappeared by choice and that he should respect his decision to leave.

Howie and Ira begin work as new dog walkers for Crawley, and Antsy's father takes over his new restaurant. He decides to make it a joint Italian and French place and gets Antsy's mother on board too. During spring break Ira visits Hawaii and tells Antsy that schwa graffiti is there too. In fact, it has spread all over the States, and perhaps even the world. Eventually, Antsy gets a letter from the Schwa saying that he found his mother and she agreed to take him along with her. There is a postcard from Puerto Rico, but Antsy smiles because the paperclip has been to the moon.

Chapters 21-22, 'Why I Started Vandalizing Brooklyn' and 'My Anonymous Contribution to Popular Culture and to My Parents' Phone Bill' Analysis

The Schwa decides that he needs to meet his mother. He wants to understand her properly so that he can come to terms with her decision, and he wants to hear her say that she is sorry properly, and to his face. This is part of the healing process for the Schwa, and it is important to him. Suddenly everything has changed for him, and everything that he thought he knew about himself was wrong. Until now he has defined himself on what others think of him. Now he realizes that he can be who he is regardless of anyone else. He needs to figure out who he really is and what he really wants in life. He decides that he has to leave in order to do this, just as his mother made a similar decision long ago. He is like her in some respects, as he answers his problem with extreme measures, and like her, disappears without telling his friends or father. Unlike his mother, however, he spares his father feelings of hurt and rejection by pretending that he is finishing the school year in Brooklyn. It is unlikely that the Schwa will simply forget about his father, as he knows how it feels to be abandoned himself. He does leave Antsy completely in the dark, however. This seems to be the Schwa's final tribute to the Schwa effect before he leaves, and shows that he has a flair for the dramatic. He thinks it is appropriate if he just vanishes, and he wants to play with Antsy a little bit one last time. He is confident that Antsy will figure things out and know where he has gone.

In the Schwa's final letter to Antsy he sounds happy, and he is smiling in his photograph. His mother looks happy too. It seems that they are both fulfilled and have found what they want. Antsy smiles to see that the Schwa has attached the paperclip that went to



the moon. This is symbolic of the Schwa giving up the old Schwa. He has given up his hobby, and no longer associates himself with these small, unnoticed and unappreciated things. He does not need to identify with the paperclips anymore because he realizes that he is important, and that he does not need other people to prove that he is special. He has found his confidence and he has found himself. He has also found his mother, whose disappearance was the event that sparked his paperclip collection in the first place. The Schwa has resolved the problems in his life and has accepted himself for who he is. He does not need the paperclips anymore.

Antsy feels like he needs to do penance for the things he has done wrong. He feels terrible for taking advantage of the Schwa when he first met him, using him to get money and extra attention for himself. He did not properly consider the Schwa's feelings, and did not do enough to help him at first. He also showed his selfish streak, and hurt his friend by going behind his back about Lexie. Here, Antsy owns up to his mistakes and feels guilty for them. This is very mature behavior, and Antsy shows how much he has grown up since the beginning of the story. He also proves himself a good friend by going to extreme measures to find out what happened to the Schwa, and to ensure that he is not forgotten after all.

Even if the Schwa chose to disappear this time, Antsy still wants a permanent reminder of him. It is important to him that people know he was there. He makes the graffiti to symbolize the Schwa's existence, and the schwa symbol comes to represent all the forgotten people who feel ignored and rejected. It starts a craze, and the schwa symbols begin to turn up all over the world. The Schwa himself could never get attention by doing things like this, but Antsy can do it for him. This is because the Schwa was going about things the improper way. The proper way to be remembered is to make an impact on others and to be someone who they want to remember. Antsy wants to remember the Schwa, and so the Schwa has finally succeeded in making an impact.

The story ends with happy endings for everyone. Antsy has grown up a lot, and he understands himself and others a lot better. He is happier, and more accepting of the person he really is. He has more confidence to be whatever he wants to be. His family are better off now that everything is cleared and out in the open. His parents fight less and are happier, and his mother seems much more fulfilled as a person. Both parents are now doing what they really love to do. Crawley has finally accepted that the world and life are good, and now he is determined not to be a recluse any longer. He instructs Antsy to kidnap him once a month, showing that he wants to change and to be challenged. Lexie's trauma therapy plan worked. Lexie and Antsy are hanging out again and having fun. Ira and Howie are now walking Crawley's dogs and seem to be mending their friendship with Antsy. Finally, the Schwa is happy and appreciates himself at last. Most of these happy endings have been brought about through facing up to the truth, and through the strength and determination of good friends who want to help each other.



Characters

Antsy, Anthony Bonano

Anthony Bonano, nicknamed Antsy, is a young teenager living in Brooklyn. He comes from an Italian family, and lives in a house with his mother, father, brother Frankie, and sister Christina. He is a naturally friendly, charming, easygoing, and sassy boy, who sticks up for his opinions and his friends. He is observant and often very perceptive about people and their behavior. He is also very caring and will do anything to help his friends. He sympathizes with others easily and feels guilty when he hurts someone, whether it was intentional or not. His personality is more confident and louder than the Schwa's, meaning that he often takes the reader's attention away from the Schwa. This is important, as it demonstrates that the Schwa effect can even work on the readers themselves.

Antsy will sometimes refer to his 'selfish streak,' which causes him to put his own feelings and needs over others. This happens a few times in the book when he deliberately leaves the Schwa out or does not give him information, because he wants to spend time alone with Lexie. Antsy also takes advantage of the Schwa at the beginning of the story in order to get money and attention using the Schwa effect. He does not realize quite how much the Schwa hates being invisible at this point, or how much his new friend really needs his help. When he does understand this, he immediately stops using the Schwa effect for gain and feels sorry for not being a better friend. When Antsy puts his feelings for Lexie above his friend, he again feels very guilty. However, Antsy is always very mindful of the Schwa and his needs, and dedicates a lot of time to solving his problems. Now Antsy has found something that he wants to be just his, and he needs some time away from the Schwa. The reader cannot blame him for this, and Antsy is a little too hard on himself for his actions. The fact that he feels so guilty about it and is determined to make up for it, even to the extent of giving up a relationship with Lexie, shows what a self-sacrificing person and good friend he really is.

Antsy shows that he is naturally more willing to accept people, despite their differences, than many other people are. Howie and Ira are suspicious of and unfriendly towards the Schwa. His differences are interesting to them, but mean that he cannot be 'one of them.' They call him a freak and seem to be worried that his strangeness will somehow rub off on them. They show no compassion or thought for his feelings, even deliberately ignoring him to try to make him leave. Antsy never treats the Schwa this way, is friendly to him from the start, and confronts Howie and Ira about their behavior. Antsy also shows openness and acceptance towards Lexie. He never thinks she is weird because of her blindness, or treats her like she is inferior or fragile. This is the reaction of many people towards disability, including Lexie's own grandfather, but it never occurs to Antsy to be this way. He is very perceptive and understanding of other people, and knows straight away that Lexie just wants to be treated like any other person. Antsy is not the



kind of person who would ever be prejudiced or bigoted, unlike many other characters in the story.

Antsy feels like he can relate to the Schwa and his problems because he also sometimes feels invisible. In his family, he is never given much attention. He often plays the role of peacemaker, but is ignored and taken for granted. He feels like he is forgotten about because his brother and sister take all the attention. Antsy is not a straight A student like his brother, but he is not a problem kid either. He is simply very average, and thinks that his parents do not consider him very important. Antsy often finds himself diffusing arguments between his parents, and figures that his presence is actually very important as it holds the family together. Despite this, he goes unnoticed. He compares this to the Schwa's paperclips. Like a paperclip, Antsy is important and holds things together, but is not given enough attention and credit for the work he does. He gets annoyed about this, and decides that he will not be the paperclip in his family anymore. He lets an argument develop and does not defuse it, telling the truth and making it worse. In the end, however, this actually proves better for his family. Antsy learns the value of the truth and honesty, even if the truth seems difficult or painful. Through this incident, he also learns that if he wants people to notice him, he has to make them notice him with his actions. He cannot just sit around and complain about it. However, if he does make people notice him, he then has to accept the attention whether it is good or bad. He realizes that sometimes being invisible can be a good thing. Being ignored can mean that he is trusted. Through the Schwa's problems he also realizes that he does not always have to be the centre of attention. Antsy grows up a lot in this story, gaining confidence in himself and the world. He learns not to be bitter about things, but to accept the person he is and to change the things he does not like. Most importantly, he realizes that his self-worth is not based on what others think of him. He learns this long before the Schwa does, showing that he is a very mature, perceptive and sensible young man.

The Schwa, Calvin Schwa

Although the Schwa is not the narrator of the book, in a sense the story is about him. It is important that he is not the main character, however, as this would give him too much attention from the readers.

Calvin Schwa, nicknamed the Schwa, is a young teenage boy the same age as Antsy, who also lives in Brooklyn and attends the same high school. Nobody can remember when he moved here, or quite how long he has been at the school. He is easily missed or looked over, and many people simply forget about him. Often they will not even realize that he is in the room. He is ignored so often and so consistently that it almost seems supernatural. Antsy names this 'the Schwa effect' and says that the Schwa is 'functionally invisible.' In other words, he is not literally invisible, but he may as well be for the attention he is paid. Antsy and the Schwa find that they can use the Schwa effect for gain, as people are willing to pay to see him 'appear from nowhere' or to carry out dares such as walking into the girl's locker room unnoticed. When the Schwa does something to call attention to himself, he may be noticed but not remembered, such as



in the incident with the orange sombrero. When others point out his presence people can suddenly then see him, which makes it seem as though he has appeared out of thin air. Not everybody seems to be affected by the Schwa effect equally. Some people can see him much more easily, and both Crawley and Lexie never seem to miss his presence. Antsy also pays more attention to him than others, though he has to work hard to remember him at some points in the story.

The Schwa is described as a very ordinary looking boy with generic features. Antsy says that if you looked up 'kid' in the dictionary, a picture of the Schwa would be there. This is what makes him so easily ignored and contributes to the Schwa effect. Everything about the Schwa is bland with a very forgettable personality and lacking self-confidence along with pale skin and wispy hair. He does not have the same loud, charming personality as Antsy, which means that the reader's attention is often drawn to Antsy instead. The reader sometimes forgets what is going on with the Schwa because Antsy holds their attention, which perfectly demonstrates the Schwa effect in action. The Schwa effect is something between a supernatural force and a metaphor. It is a mysterious and unusual effect that has been stretched beyond what is normal in order to create a fun story with supernatural elements to it. However, it is also a metaphor for all the 'invisible' people in the world. These are people who feels ignored and let down constantly by others. They are the forgotten people whom society does not seem to care about. The Schwa is one of these. There is nothing interesting enough about him to make people pay attention to him, which makes him feel very inferior. He is a young boy who shows no particular abilities or talents, but who is just trying to get by in school. His mother has left and his father is mentally handicapped. Life is difficult for him, and it often seems as though there is nobody there for him. This means that he has very little self-confidence and does not like to speak up or make himself known in a crowd. His invisibility is partly caused by others, and partly caused by himself. If he cannot have the confidence in himself to make himself noticed, then he never will be. At the same time, his problem highlights how there are many people in the real world who are forgotten simply for being too ordinary, or who have no-one left to pay attention to them. The Schwa effect therefore is both a real, mysterious force, and a metaphor for feelings of isolation.

The Schwa hates being unnoticed and forgotten all the time, and complains to Antsy that it makes ordinary life very difficult. For example, he cannot even catch a bus because the driver simply does not notice him waiting at the stop. Worse than this, his own father often forgets about him, and he sometimes has to make his own dinner. He also often finds himself taking care of his father, who has had brain trauma and acts more like a child than the Schwa does. Life is difficult for the Schwa, and the Schwa effect only makes things worse for him. At first, he does not tell Antsy how much being invisible upsets him. He lets Antsy think that it is a cool superpower that he enjoys using. This is because he enjoys the newfound attention that he is getting, and he loves the fact that he finally has a friend. Antsy means a lot to the Schwa, as he has never been noticed enough by others to make friends. When he sees that the other children at school are still forgetting about him, however, he lets Antsy know how he really feels.



The Schwa does not always cope with his 'disability' very well. He is depressed and anxious a lot of the time, and seems constantly desperate for any kind of attention. He latches on to Antsy and Lexie, and often comes across as a little too needy when he is around them. This frustrates Antsy, who occasionally reacts a little angrily to it. When the Schwa realizes that Lexie is always aware of his presence, he becomes fixated on the idea of dating her. He chooses not to see how much Antsy likes Lexie, and that Lexie likes Antsy in return. He shows a lack of care for his friend's feelings, despite the fact that Antsy has always been very kind to him and tried to help him. When he finds out that Lexie is dating Antsy, he becomes even more depressed, and gets a little lost in his own self-pity. The Schwa does not deal with his handicap as well as Lexie deals with hers. She has a lot of confidence in herself and an inner strength that helps her to deal with whatever comes her way. She will not take abuse from others, and will not let herself be ignored. She is always ready to stick up for herself. Unlike her, the Schwa very rarely sticks up for himself, and wallows in his problems rather than really trying very hard to fix them. He is always just a little too sorry for himself. At the end of the book he does make an attempt to be noticed, but does not go about it in the right way. He tries to demand attention, and to force other people to notice him, by putting his face on a billboard. Rather than carrying out this bizarre solution, he should be trying to get people to remember him by his actions, through affecting their lives for the better. This is why Antsy and Lexie remember him; because he is their friend. The Schwa does not see that he doesn't need any more than this. He does not need to define himself by what others think of him. Eventually the Schwa does learn this, and it helps him to become a much happier and more fulfilled person.

The Schwa's home life is nowhere near ideal. He lives with his father, who has had a brain injury and is now mentally handicapped. Because of this, the Schwa often finds himself taking care of his father rather than the other way round. The Schwa's mother left when he was five years old, abandoning her family. Until the end of the story, the Schwa thinks that she disappeared because no-one remembered her. He blames himself, because he let her slip from his mind for an instant. He thinks it is his fault that she is gone. He carries a lot of guilt around about this, as well as terror that this will also happen to him. When he finds out the truth, he is extremely angry with his mother. Later, he finds out that his father kept letters from her away from him. Although she abandoned the Schwa, it was his father that made her disappear. Both have contributed to his fear and guilt over the years. He lets all his emotions wash out, and finally begins to deal with his problems pro-actively. He now understands that he does not need to worry so hard about other people's attention.

Although the Schwa has failings and can come across as quite a weak character, the reader can feel very sorry for him. The Schwa is a friendly and loyal boy who does not deserve the problems he has. By the end of the story the reader also realizes that the Schwa is stronger than he seems, to have faced some of the hard things he has had to put up with in his life.



Lexie, Lexis Crawley

Lexis, nicknamed Lexie, is the blind granddaughter of Crawley. She visits him for the summer and stays with him in his apartment, attending the nearby Academy for the Blind. She is the same age as Antsy and the Schwa. Crawley tells Antsy he will pay him to look after her while she visits him, and instructs him to take her out, entertain her and pretend to be her friend. Antsy agrees, but finds that he does not have to pretend to be her friend because he really likes her. She is a very confident and strong girl, who does not let other people walk over her or ignore her. She does not let her blindness become a weakness, but takes it in her stride and adapts. She never wallows in feeling sorry for herself like the Schwa does, but gets on with life sensibly and optimistically. She has a very positive attitude. It is this inner strength and colorful personality that makes Antsy admire and like her so much.

Lexie is a very perceptive and sensitive girl, but she has very little experience of boys and does not always know how to act towards them. She knows that her grandfather is paying boys to keep her company, and points this out to Antsy. She doesn't want this to get in the way of their growing relationship, so she fires Antsy as her escort. She thinks she is giving him the right signals, but this is too subtle for Antsy to understand, and he assumes that she does not like him after all. She often finds Antsy and the Schwa frustrating to deal with, but she never sets out to hurt them or to manipulate them. When she finds out that the Schwa likes her as more than a friend she is genuinely upset that she has hurt him.

Although Lexie is not so perceptive when it comes to boys, she can often 'see' what others cannot. She is always aware of the Schwa when he is present, and the Schwa effect does not seem to work on her. This is because she is blind, and so her other senses are more developed. She can hear the Schwa breathing when he is nearby. The Schwa effect does not work on her because in order to cope with her disability she always has to be very aware of what is around her. Many sighted people will ignore half of what they see, but Lexie will never ignore what she senses.

Lexie is a good friend and is determined to help the people she cares about. She understands when that help needs to come in the form of a painful but honest lesson. She forces her grandfather to leave the house and tries to show him that the world can still be valuable and meaningful to him. Through her persistence and love, Crawley does come to see this, and is determined to be less of a recluse. Lexie also helps the Schwa by insisting that he not wallow in self pity, and that he get up and try to solve things instead. She gives him friendship and comfort when he needs it the most.

Old Man Crawley, Mr. Crawley

Mr. Crawley is an old man who lives in an apartment above a restaurant in the area of Brooklyn where Antsy lives. He is a recluse who never leaves his apartment, but he is still well known in the neighborhood and many stories are told about him. He is very rich and influential, and will use his money and power to have things his way. He is famous



for an incident in which he took revenge for children egging his apartment by using his contacts to ensure there was an egg shortage in the area. When Antsy mentions this he seems proud of the fact that it is still being talked about. He clearly likes to be remembered and feared, and tells Antsy that although he is unseen, he is far from being invisible. He makes sure that his personality is loud enough that people have to pay attention to him, even when they do not see him. This makes him the Schwa's opposite, as he insists on being unseen but will never be invisible.

Crawley is a crotchety and mean old man, who seems to be constantly in a bad temper. He insults Antsy and threatens to get the boys' fathers fired. He gives the impression of hating other people and the outside world. However, a lot of Crawley's ill temper seems to just be an act. He insults Antsy, but he actually seems very attached to him. He enjoys being challenged and having someone to talk to, and thinks up excuse after excuse to keep Antsy around. When he injures his hip and goes to hospital, it is Antsy who he wants to come with him. This is Crawley's way of reaching out to someone, as he is actually very lonely and needs company. He does not know how to make friends properly, so tries to make Antsy stay with him by threatening or paying him. Antsy picks up on this quite soon, and quickly comes to like the old man. Crawley's bad temper seems to be a wall that he has put up to the rest of the world to keep it away, in order to protect himself from being hurt. However, in protecting himself he is also separating himself from life and making himself unhappy. Lexie recognizes this and is determined to help him. When she and Antsy kidnap him and take him for a helicopter ride over New York, Crawley is shaken out of his shell. His inner walls begin to come down, and he sees that life can be enjoyable and that people can be trusted after all. He shows that he wants to change when he tells Antsy to kidnap him once a month from now on. He also shows his affection for Antsy, and a moment of rare kindness, when he offers Antsy's father a job running his new restaurant. In typical Crawley fashion, however, he gets Antsy's father fired from his current job first. Although he is doing the man a favor, he insists on doing it in a slightly manipulative and underhand way. This is Crawley's way of saying that he may be willing to change, but he is still a force to be reckoned with and he will not turn into a soft old man. He will keep his fighting spirit.

Antsy's Father

Antsy's father is an Italian who loves to cook and is very skilled at it. He works for Pisher Plastics, a company that manufactures plastic products. He does not seem to mind his job, and is even vaguely proud of his achievements, but he does not love what he does either. He views it as a job and a way to provide for his family. What he shows passion for is cooking, but unfortunately his wife likes to be in charge in the kitchen. This means that he rarely gets to cook for the family, even though they all secretly think that his food is better. He gets into a huge argument with his wife over this, and Antsy brings things to a head when he tells the truth about his dad's food being better than his mom's. Antsy's father seems to feel bad about hurting his wife, and is very supportive when she decides that she needs interests outside the family. He seems like a very loving husband and a caring father. Sometimes Antsy wishes he would pay more attention to him instead of to Frankie or Christina, but when he does have his father's attention he



feels awkward and does not know what to say. Later, Antsy's father is offered a job running Crawley's new restaurant and he accepts. He is now actually doing something he loves for a living.

Antsy's Mother

Antsy's mother is an Italian woman and housewife who takes pride in her home and family. She has a fiery temper and often gets into arguments with her husband. She likes to feel that the kitchen is her place, as her role is to look after her family. When Antsy says that his father's cooking is better, it deeply upsets her. She storms out of the house and Antsy is afraid she will not come back. However, she does return home, and is honest with herself about what really caused the argument. She realizes that she is unhappy being just a housewife, as she feels like she is losing herself to her family. She spends so much time thinking about them that she does not even know what she wants anymore. She decides to remedy this by starting a French cooking class and getting a job. This will give her more avenues to explore herself and to express herself, and she will no longer feel like she only has her family. She explains this to Antsy as spreading her eggs between more than one basket. She has the exact same problem as the Schwa's mother, but unlike her she identifies it early and makes sure she takes sensible and mature measures to solve it. She is successful in this, and does not need to resort to extreme actions such as leaving her family. She seems much happier and more fulfilled by the end of the book.

The Schwa's Father

The Schwa's father lives alone with the Schwa in a house in Brooklyn. He has had brain trauma and so is mentally handicapped. He often acts more like a child than the Schwa does, and the Schwa finds himself having to take care of his father rather than the other way round. He is very forgetful, and the Schwa has to write post-it notes to remind him to do things. The Schwa effect also seems to work on him, as he often does not know where his son is, or will forget to feed him. Despite all this, he does seem to care deeply for his son, and it upsets him when he is missing or unhappy. When the Schwa tells him that he thought he was invisible, he cries to think of his son hurting in this way. He does not realize that his own insistence in keeping the Schwa's mother's letters from her son contributed to this, as the Schwa thought that she had actually vanished. At the end of the story the Schwa leaves his father to go find his mother. This is the second time the Schwa's father has been abandoned, which makes him a very pitiable character. However, the Schwa knows how it feels to be left behind, so the reader can hope that he will return to his father one day.

The Schwa's Mother

The Schwa's mother is a very mysterious character for most of the story. She disappeared when the Schwa was five, and the Schwa assumed that this was some



kind of horrible development of the Schwa effect. He thought that by forgetting his mother for an instant, he actually caused her to vanish. What actually happened turns out to be much more ordinary, but perhaps also much worse. She was a very unhappy woman, and one day she simply broke down in the supermarket. She confessed her feelings to the butcher, who felt a similar way and decided to run away with her. The idea of starting again appealed to her, so she left her five year old son in the cart and ran out of the back door of the supermarket with him. This was brought on by similar feelings to those explained by Antsy's mother. She felt she was disappearing, losing herself to her family. She felt ignored and taken for granted, and longed to experience more in her life. Unlike Antsy's mother, she let these feelings build until it was too late to fix them. This led to her taking very extreme action. She felt sorry for this and wrote the Schwa letters, but he never saw any of them. When he does find out about this, he tracks her down and goes to see her. She seems to be living her dream, visiting different states and enjoying her life. She agrees to take the Schwa along with her, and he seems very happy for the first time. She is finally making up for everything she has done to him.

Howie

Howie is one of Antsy's friends. He is a literal-minded boy who seems to store a lot of knowledge and facts in his head, but has very little common sense. He is not wise to the world and does not seem to understand other people very well. He is friendly, but only to a certain extent. He will tolerate others and be nice to them, but he does not like the idea of the Schwa joining their gang. He wants his group of friends to remain the same. He does not seem to have anything against the Schwa himself, but follows what Ira thinks. He seems to be a natural follower rather than a leader.

Ira

Ira is one of Antsy's friends. He is a Jewish boy living in Brooklyn. He likes to make short films with his video camera and has ambitions to be a director. He likes attention, and is determined to make it big one day. The idea of hanging around with someone who is ignored and unnoticed does not appeal to Ira, as he considers the Schwa a loser. He seems afraid that the Schwa effect could rub off on him. He is unfriendly to the Schwa and shows quite a lot of intolerance towards him and his problem. He even deliberately ignores the Schwa to make him go away. He is determined not to let the Schwa become part of their friendship group, and is jealous of the time Antsy spends with him. He does not seem to consider Antsy's feelings in this, and often comes across as quite a bad friend. Despite this, he is still interested in hanging out with Antsy whenever he wants to and seems to be mending his friendship with him at the end of the book.



Frankie

Frankie is Antsy's older brother. He is a confident and successful straight A student who seems to do well at everything he tries. He is the golden boy of the family and Antsy often resents the attention he receives. However, at the end of the story Frankie gets arrested for drunk-driving, proving that people can always be surprising, and that sometimes the pressures of always being the 'good one' can get too much.

Christina

Christina is Antsy's sister. She seems to be naturally bubbly and inquisitive, and she also demands a lot of attention from her parents, taking it away from Antsy. At first he is resentful of this, but he comes to realize that he does not need to be the centre of attention to be happy.

The Night Butcher

The Night Butcher is the butcher who works the night shift at Waldbaum's supermarket. Antsy meets him when he goes to investigate the disappearance of the Schwa's mother. He tells them what really happened to her. He is a Belgian who does not seem to understand other people very well and does not like to deal with others' emotions. At first Antsy is a little scared of him, until he realizes that he is harmless despite his weirdness.

The Day Butcher

The Schwa's mother runs away with the butcher who works the day shift at Waldbaum's. Like her, he is very unhappy with his life and feels as though he is observing it from the outside. He longs to run away, and decides to do so with the Schwa's mother.

Wendell Tiggor

Wendell Tiggor is a boy who goes to Antsy's school. He is not very bright, and his stupidity seems to be something of a running joke. He enjoys insulting Antsy and the Schwa. He is the one who dares the Schwa to go into Crawley's apartment at the beginning of the story.



Objects/Places

The Afghans (The Virtues and Sins)

Crawley owns fourteen Afghan hounds, which is a type of dog with a pointy nose and very long silky fur. Antsy and the Schwa are made to walk these dogs every day as their punishment for trespassing in his apartment. He has named seven of them after the seven sins, which are pride, envy, lust, gluttony (over indulging), avarice (greed), sloth (laziness), and anger. He has named the other seven dogs after the seven virtues, which are prudence (being sensible), temperance (restraint), justice, fortitude (courage), faith, hope, and charity.

Crawley does not explain why he has chosen these odd names for his dogs, but he does often accuse Antsy and the Schwa of several of the sins. Perhaps he thinks that in general people have become sinners and need to remember their virtues. Perhaps Crawley has named his dogs this to remind himself of important lessons. If so, it is ironic that Crawley displays most of the sins at one point or another, and very few of the virtues. Arguably the most important of the virtues is charity, which is shown to him by Antsy and his granddaughter, and which he tries to show towards Antsy's father at the end of the book.

Trauma Therapy

Trauma therapy is an idea that Antsy, Lexie, and the Schwa come up with when they are discussing how to change Crawley's attitudes and behavior. The idea is to inflict trauma on a person, focused in the right way and in just the right dosage, in order to inspire a change. This is similar to radiation therapy in medicine. Radiation can be very harmful, just like trauma can be, but if directed positively and given in the right dose, it can also cure people. Lexie tries this out on her grandfather, kidnapping him and taking him above New York in a helicopter. At first this shocks and frightens Crawley, but later he begins to enjoy himself. He realizes that life is worth living and that the world is not so bad after all. Later, the Schwa faces his own kind of trauma therapy when he finds out the truth about his mother's disappearance. The truth is painful and unpleasant at first, but in the end it helps him to get over his problem.

The Schwa Symbol

A schwa is the vowel sound that makes the noise 'uh.' It is the unstressed syllable in many words, such as the 'a' in 'forgettable.' It is the most common vowel sound in the English language but is often forgotten or overlooked. As such, it is the perfect symbol to represent Calvin Schwa, and just happens to also be his last name. The symbol for a schwa looks like an upside down 'e.' This is what Antsy begins to draw all over bus stops and bathrooms. This seems to cause a craze, and soon schwa graffiti can be found all over the country.



The Schwa Effect

The 'Schwa effect' is the strange effect that Calvin Schwa seems to have on others. The Schwa is 'functionally invisible,' which means that he is not literally invisible but may as well be because nobody ever notices him. Antsy, Howie, Ira and the Schwa decide to experiment with the Schwa effect in an attempt to quantify it. They find that four out of five students do not see the Schwa in a classroom, and that even if he calls attention to himself by doing something stupid or wearing something odd, people will vaguely notice but still won't remember anything about him. The Schwa effect also causes people, even Antsy, to forget about the Schwa very easily by becoming distracted with other things. Calvin hates the Schwa effect, and constantly worries that if he is forgotten about entirely, he will cease to exist. This is what he thinks happened to his mother. Later, he finds out that she simply ran away with the butcher.

Manny Bullpucky

Manny Bullpucky is the dummy made out of 'unbreakable' plastic that Antsy's father wants him to test. Antsy and his friends carry out several stress tests on the dummy to see whether it is actually indestructible. They throw it off a bridge, try to blow it up with explosives, and eventually throw it under a passing subway train. The latter finally destroys it. Manny Bullpucky is the name they give to the dummy because Frankie thought it was 'bullpucky' that anything could be unbreakable. Manny Bullpucky has some similarities with the Schwa, as both are featureless and often treated as though they are not human, and both are tested to the point of breaking.

Pisher Plastics

Pisher Plastics is the plastic-making company that Antsy's father works for. Their most famous product is the urinal strainer found in most bathrooms.

Brooklyn

Brooklyn is an area of New York City. It has the highest population out of the different New York boroughs, and a large number of different ethnic groups reside there. The story is set entirely within Brooklyn in various neighborhoods. This is where Antsy's school and home, the Schwa's house, Crawley's apartment and restaurant, and the supermarket are located.

Crawley's Apartment

Crawley's apartment is located above his restaurant in the same neighborhood as Antsy's house. This is where Crawley spends all his time with his fourteen dogs, refusing to leave and interact with the outside world. Lexie's 'trauma therapy' plans are



devised as a way to get Crawley to leave his apartment. It is Crawley's apartment that the Schwa is dared to trespass in, starting a chain of events that bind the Schwa, Antsy and Lexie's lives together.

Crawley's Restaurant

Crawley's restaurant is located beneath his apartment, in the same neighborhood as Antsy's home. Antsy brings Lexie here for dinner, and it is here that Lexie pretends to hurt herself in order to trick her grandfather out of his apartment. Despite owning the restaurant, it is clear that Crawley never steps foot in it.

The Helicopter Ride

The helicopter ride is Lexie's attempt to give her grandfather 'trauma therapy' to shock him out of his bad attitudes and behavior. She hires a helicopter to fly her, Crawley and Antsy all over New York City. At first her grandfather is too afraid to look, but eventually he gives in and enjoys the ride. The trauma therapy works, as Crawley decides he does need to interact with the world more often. He instructs Antsy and Lexie to kidnap him and take him on a similar adventure each month.

Antsy's Home

Antsy lives in a house in Brooklyn, in an area with a lot of different ethnic families. He lives with his mother, father, brother Frankie and sister Christina. His mother takes care of the house and the family, but feels like she is getting lost in her role as housewife. She decides to join a cooking class and to get a job, allowing her to explore new things besides her family. This makes her feel more fulfilled and happier. Antsy's home is generally a nice place, where he is loved and looked after. Even though he is sometimes ignored, he realizes that he has a much nicer family environment than the Schwa. He is thankful for this.

The Schwa's Home

The Schwa's house is much more depressing than Antsy's. Unlike Antsy's home, which always seems to be full of life, activity and noise, the Schwa's is lonely and quiet. The Schwa's mother left when he was five, and his father has suffered from a brain injury. This has left him mentally handicapped and unable to take care of the Schwa as a normal parent would. Sometimes the Schwa finds himself looking after his father. The Schwa has a room of his own, and does not have brothers and sisters.



The Billboard

Towards the end of the story the Schwa decides to make a desperate attempt to be seen by people. He puts a picture of his face onto a billboard overlooking the expressway. He spent his whole college fund and more on this billboard, and hopes that every passing motorist will pay attention to it. He is desperate not to be forgotten, as he thinks he will cease to exist if he is. Unfortunately, the expressway is closed for maintenance and the traffic has been diverted. Nobody will see the Schwa's billboard after all.

Paperclips

The Schwa collects paperclips as a hobby. These are not ordinary paperclips, but ones from important documents throughout history. For example, he has a paperclip that held together a nuclear arms treaty, and another that was supposedly taken to the moon. These paperclips symbolize the Schwa himself, as like him they are often overlooked. They are very interesting and special, and at the same time completely ordinary and boring. The Schwa could be described in a similar way. Antsy also feels like a paperclip at some points in the story. He thinks of himself as the clip that holds his family together, as he often diffuses the arguments that build up. He is therefore very important, but is taken for granted and ignored. At the end of the story the Schwa sends a letter to Antsy with a paperclip attached to it. It is the paperclip that was sent to the moon. This is symbolic of the Schwa letting go of his worries and insecurities and no longer caring what others think of him. He does not worry about being invisible anymore so long as the people he cares about remember him.

Moxie

Moxie is Lexie's guide dog, or seeing-eye dog. Moxie has been trained to guide Lexie around and make sure she does not walk into roads or other dangers. Moxie is also her pet and her companion, and is one of the things that has helped her to deal with her handicap. Moxie is named after 'amoxicillin,' an antibiotic that was often given to Lexie as a child. When she was sick she would ask for 'moxie' as she did not know how to pronounce the medicine's proper name. She called her dog Moxie because he makes her feel better, just like medicine.

Waldbaums

Waldbaums is the supermarket that the Schwa's mother disappeared in. This is where Antsy and Lexie go to try to uncover exactly what happened. They talk to the manager, who becomes suspicious of all their questions and bans them from the store. Antsy returns at night and talks to the Night Butcher, who says he will tell them the truth about that day. He explains to the Schwa that his mother actually had an emotional breakdown and then ran away with the butcher from the day shift.



Themes

Invisibility and Blindness

Invisibility and blindness are themes that run strongly throughout the story and are explored in many different ways. The main and most obvious person who is invisible is the Schwa. The Schwa effect causes him to go unnoticed in just about any situation and people will rarely even remember that he was in the same room as them. Sometimes he can perform a trick for them where he appears to pop out of thin air. He was actually standing there the whole time, but attention was only brought to him when he was actually pointed out. Antsy names this effect 'functional invisibility.' In other words, the Schwa is not actually literally invisible, but he may as well be for all the notice others pay him. The Schwa effect is very strange, and seems far too exaggerated to be anything normal. There is a hint of the supernatural or the magical about it. At the same time, however, it is also a metaphor for being ignored. The Schwa is such an ordinary boy, both in looks and personality, that nobody ever pays him any attention. He is simply too bland. He also lacks any self-confidence, and does not stick up for himself enough. He does not have the kind of personality that attracts attention. The Schwa's invisibility is therefore partly caused by others, and partly caused by himself. He represents all the people in the real world who often feel ignored and overlooked because they are nothing special. There are many children who are neither very clever nor very stupid, and who never get into trouble, who are ignored in this way. They must often feel like they are invisible. This is what the Schwa effect is a metaphor for, and it points out that these people are just as important as everyone else and should not be forgotten. It is the actions of other people that make the Schwa effect so upsetting for the Schwa, and this teaches the reader that they need to be more compassionate and careful towards others.

The Schwa is not the only person who feels invisible in this story. Antsy also often feels ignored and thinks that his parents forget about him. He does not have to suffer anything like the Schwa effect, but it is still upsetting for him when his parents pay more attention to his brother and sister and seem not to care as much about him. This upsets him because he sees himself as being important to the family. He thinks of himself as the clip that holds them all together. He is the one who usually defuses arguments, but this is taken for granted. He is like a paperclip, which has a vital role but is often overlooked and forgotten about. The paperclip metaphor is used several times in the story to refer to both Antsy and the Schwa. It is a good symbol of what it feels like to be an important individual but at the same time ignored. This frustrates Antsy. He thinks he is treated in this way because he is not as smart as his brother, and does not demand the same attention that his sister does. He is generally a good kid, but not talented or clever enough at anything to be thought anything special. His parents do not pay him much attention, but trust him and know that he will not get into too much trouble if left to his own devices. This can feel like being ignored, but later Antsy comes to see that it can also be a good thing. He likes the fact that his parents trust him and do not always have to be watching and questioning him. He gains confidence in who he is, and learns



to accept that he does not always have to be the centre of attention. This is a very mature way of dealing with his issues, and it teaches the reader how to cope if they ever think they are invisible in their own family.

The Schwa does not deal with his invisibility as well as Antsy does. He desperately tries to demand attention, and to force people to remember him. He plasters his face on a billboard over the expressway, but the traffic is diverted and nobody sees it anyway. This is depressingly ironic for the Schwa, but it also shows the reader that dealing with their problems in the wrong way will not solve them. A person should not try to gain attention for attention's sake. They should not try to demand it or force others to notice and remember them. The more honest and fulfilling way to get attention is through actions, and through making an impact on people's lives. People are remembered for their skills and talents, for their kind words or their friendship, or for other actions that matter. The Schwa cannot gain attention through trying to force it, but he can get Antsy's and Lexie's attention through friendship. They do not forget him, and it is because he has made an impact on their lives. When Antsy spreads the schwa graffiti, others begin to spread it too. This is symbolic of Antsy spreading word about the Schwa. The Schwa cannot demand attention for himself, but through his friend's love and friendship he begins to be noticed. It is only when the Schwa learns this lesson, and sees that the only attention he needs is from his friends anyway, that he can begin to be happy. The Schwa and Antsy both learn a very important lesson here, and this lesson is also being taught to the reader. The lesson is that a person's self-identity does not rely on what others think of them. People can be happier when they stop trying to be the centre of attention and realize what is important in life. In this age of quick celebrity fame, this is a very appropriate message.

Other people also have moments of feeling invisible in the book. Antsy's mother feels as though she is losing herself to her family, as she focuses everything she has on them. She feels like she is disappearing because of this. She also feels unnoticed and taken for granted by her family. Thankfully, Antsy manages to turn things around before it is too late. He brings an argument to his head, forcing his mother to admit these feelings to herself. She decides to take positive action and deals with her issues maturely and sensibly. She takes on a cooking class and decides to get a job. These are her ways of making herself visible again, and getting a life beyond her family and her house. In helping to make herself feel more confident and fulfilled, she also stops feeling invisible. She is similar to the Schwa in this, as it is only by accepting himself and trying to live his life properly that the Schwa stops worrying about being invisible. The Schwa's mother is not as lucky as Antsy's mother, and lets her problems build until she can only cope with them by taking drastic action. She also feels as though she is disappearing because her life is all about her family. Like Antsy's mother, she feels like she has lost herself. She decides to leave her family and pursue a life of her own, starting again completely. This is the only way she can feel visible and 'real' again. She runs away with the butcher from Waldbaum's, another person who often feels invisible. By the end of the book, it seems that many people feel invisible at different points in their lives. This is made worse by how others treat them, but in the end it seems to be caused mainly by their own lack of confidence and direction, and a loss of self-identity.



Crawley is a slightly different example. He is very confident in himself and likes to be a loud and well-known personality in the neighborhood. He makes sure nobody ever forgets him. However, he hides away in his apartment and does not interact with the rest of the world. He seems to be trying to protect himself from getting hurt, and so pushes other people away. He claims that he is 'hidden' rather than invisible, because he chooses not to be seen but is always remembered. He is correct, but he has also missed the point. His own denial of life and refusal to go out into the world makes him unhappy. He is hiding the person he really is, trying to keep himself from pain by pretending to be a mean uncaring old man. He is making himself just as invisible as the others in his own way.

The people who are not invisible in this story, such as Howie and Ira, are often blind to the suffering of others. Even those who do know what it is like to feel invisible can be blind to others' feelings and situations. Antsy does not see that the Schwa is really upset by the experiments into the Schwa effect. The Schwa does not see how much Antsy and Lexie like each other because he is too involved in his own problems. Both the Schwa and Antsy are blind to Lexie's feelings as she tries to maneuver them into a position where she can date Antsy and just be friends with the Schwa. In fact, they assume she is doing the opposite. Lexie herself is physically blind, but is often much more observant than sighted people. She can always tell when the Schwa is there, and can sense things that other people do not notice. Even she can be blind to the boys' feelings however, as she has very little experience of boys. Ignorance causes blindness in many other situations too. Lexie is often ignored and passed over by people who simply do not think about how hard being blind can be. In this way, she faces her own kind of invisibility. This is the invisibility that many disabled people face in the world, as bad attitudes from others mean that they are often ignored or overlooked. Some people even consider them inferior or too different to understand, which causes hurt and intolerance. Even Crawley displays his ignorance and blindness to his own granddaughter when he pays Antsy to be her escort. He is blind to the fact that she is perfectly capable of looking after herself, as well as of making friends without needing to pay people to be around her. Lexie stands up for herself when she is being treated as if she is invisible, such as when she demands to see the manager in the burger restaurant. She will not let herself be ignored or walked over. She is determined that just because she is blind, this does not mean that she has to be invisible too.

The Ugly Truth (Trauma Therapy)

There are several instances in this story of characters seeking the truth and not liking what they see or hear when they do. Later, Antsy provides a simile to describe what this is like. He compares truth to a beautiful girl seen from a passing bus. When the boy gets off the bus and runs to her, he sees that she is not so pretty from close up. In fact, she is actually quite ugly and unpleasant. However, after spending a while with her, he realizes that none of these things matter, because in the end it is better to know her. The girl is like the truth. The truth might seem very appealing from a distance, but when faced with it, it can suddenly seem quite ugly. It might even be unpleasant or painful. In the end, though, the truth-seeker comes to learn that although it was unpleasant to



learn the truth, it is better for them in the long run. This is an accurate observation of what many of the characters experience in the story.

When Antsy's parents are having an argument about whose food is better, they ask Antsy to tell them the truth. He would normally tell a white lie or talk around the question and not really answer it properly. This is because he plays the role of peacemaker and does not like his parents' arguments to become too intense. He usually diffuses the situation and stops the row from ever getting too big. This time he decides not to do this, as he is sick of being taken for granted. He tells them the truth, that his father's cooking is better. His mother is very upset, and storms out of the house. Antsy is horrified at first, thinking his truth has split his parents up. However, by finally hearing the truth, Antsy's mother can begin to deal with the underlying emotions that caused the argument in the first place. This is something she has never been able to do before because Antsy always diffuses the arguments before they get too big. The arguments therefore never got resolved, and so would simply re-emerge in a different form. Now his mother understands what causes them. She takes a hard look at herself and realizes that she is unhappy. She thinks she is losing herself to her family, and decides that she needs other areas in her life to focus on too. She joins a cookery class and gets a job, and this helps her to feel more fulfilled, which makes her happier. By telling the truth, Antsy actually helped his mother to be happier, and saved his parents' marriage. By bravely facing up to the truth, Antsy's mother managed to solve her problems without hurting herself or anyone else.

The Schwa and his mother are not this lucky. The Schwa's mother has similar problems to Antsy's mother, feeling that she is losing a sense of who she is and disappearing. However, she lets these feelings build up until it is too late to solve them the way Antsy's mother does. Instead, she chooses to abandon her family and start her life again. This drastic action could have been avoided if she had faced up to her own painful truth in time.

Lexie decides that they need to try to change her grandfather, as he has become a miserable and grumpy old man. He pretends that he likes his life this way, but she knows better. She can see that he is simply hiding behind a facade of meanness in order to keep himself from being hurt. He is actually very lonely, which is why he so desperately tries to keep Antsy around him. He simply does not know how to go about making friends in the correct way. He pretends to hate the world and to prefer to be a recluse, but he is actually just frightened of the world and of really enjoying his life. This is making him unhappy. He will not admit this to himself, so Lexie, Antsy and the Schwa decide to give him 'trauma therapy.' This is the idea that if they can shock him in just the right way and the right amount, he will be able to see the truth and begin to change. They achieve this by kidnapping him and taking him out on a helicopter ride over New York. At first he is terrified, but then he begins to realize how much fun he is having, and how wonderful the world really is. When he returns home, he begins to realize that he needs to change. He sees that he is unhappy, and that he should stop pretending to himself that he likes being a recluse. He instructs Antsy to kidnap him and take him on a similar adventure every month. For Crawley, the truth seemed painful and frightening at



first, but actually helped to set him free. 'Trauma therapy' is just another way of saying 'facing the hard-hitting truth.'

The Schwa faces his own trauma therapy later in the story. He has been longing to find out the truth about his mother his whole life. He thinks that she disappeared because of the Schwa effect, and blames himself for it. He carries around a lot of guilt and pain, as well as terror that this will also happen to him. When he finally does find out the truth, however, it is not what he expected at all. His mother did not vanish into thin air, but ran away with the butcher, abandoning her family and leaving her five-year-old son in the supermarket. The Schwa is shocked, then extremely angry. He shouts that this is worse than what he had thought happened to her. The truth is not glamorous or mysterious, but embarrassing and painful. In time, though, it does help the Schwa to cope with his problem. It shows him that he is not going to vanish like his mother, and that he can stop obsessing about being noticed. He can then begin to see that he does not need other people's attention to be happy. Through learning the truth, he finally understands a very important lesson, that his identity does not rest on what others think of him. Now that he knows the truth he can also begin to deal with his emotions better. He lets his feelings out and starts to properly process his mother leaving. He also finds out that his father kept letters from her away from him. When he reads them, he decides that he needs to go see her to talk to her about why she left. He does exactly this, and she invites him to come along with her. Now that he has come to accept who he is, stop worrying what others think, and has found his mother again, he is a much happier person. None of this could have happened had he not faced the ugly truth. Twice in the novel Antsy wonders if he has done the right thing in telling the truth, because he has hurt people he cares for. Both times, however, he is proved right. The truth might be painful, and it might be ugly, but it is always better out in the open, and without it people cannot begin to heal.

Identity

Identity is an important issue in this story. There are many characters with identities that might make them feel like one of a minority, or someone whom others ignore. Antsy is an Italian-American, Ira is Jewish, the Schwa suffers from the Schwa effect, Lexie is handicapped, and Crawley is old. Antsy's mother and the Schwa's mother are housewives who wonder where their own identity ends and their family's begins. Most of these people also struggle with feelings of being invisible, and with a need to make others pay attention to them.

Both Antsy and Ira have a cultural background that sometimes makes others discriminate against them. Antsy is insulted by Crawley about his background, and is even told that he has bad 'breeding.' This makes him sound like an animal, which is extremely insulting. Antsy is also looked down on and feared by Lexie's parents, who assume that he must have ties to the mafia. This is extremely ignorant and stupid. Prejudice of this kind can also make people feel invisible and ignored. Those who are 'different' might be deliberately avoided or overlooked. Ira seems to react against this by trying to be the centre of attention. He likes to make movies, and enjoys the position of



power and importance this gives him. He is determined to make it big. Antsy also hates being ignored, but seems to accept it better when it is not coming from his own family. To a certain extent Antsy lives up to his stereotype, but he resents it when this is all other people see in him. It is ironic that although Ira puts importance on attention, he shows intolerance towards the Schwa and deliberately ignores him. Ira considers him too different, and does not want a loser or a 'nobody' hanging around them. This is exactly the attitude that many people show towards members of minority groups.

The Schwa himself has the worst identity struggles out of any of the characters in the book. He is almost invisible most of the time, and is never given any attention. He is a very ordinary boy with a bland personality. Without friends or other people to talk to and bounce off, he cannot get a sense of who he really is. He spends too much time worrying about other people and how to gain their attention, and does not explore how he feels about himself. He has virtually no self-confidence and seems to have a very low opinion of himself. When he tries to force others to pay attention to him or to remember him, his attempts only end up backfiring. This is because he is not going about solving his problems in the correct way. When he learns that he is not going to simply disappear, he realizes that his existence does not depend on others after all. His identity is not based on what other people think of him, and it does not matter if no-one pays him attention. He is forced to stop and take a good look at himself. As he begins to be happier with the person he is, and to decide what he really wants from life, he becomes much happier.

Antsy's mother and the Schwa's mother both go through a similar identity crisis in the book. Antsy's mother explains that she feels like she is disappearing, as she is losing herself to her family. The Schwa's mother explains this as feeling as though she is watching her own life from the outside. Both struggle to come to terms with who they really are outside of their family roles, and what they really want from life. Antsy's mother decides to resolve these issues by giving herself more outlets for self-expression. She starts a cookery class and begins a new job. This helps her to realize that her identity is not reliant on her family, and that she can pursue her own goals and dreams. The Schwa's mother leaves her identity crisis unresolved for too long, and this eventually leads to her breakdown. This shows how vitally important self-identity is to a person. In the end, the Schwa's mother can only cope with her problem by abandoning her family. She decides to start her life completely afresh, leaving everything behind that clouded her identity before. She is now happier, but she caused her son and her husband a lot of grief and pain in the process.

Identity is also an issue for Crawley. He is a grumpy old man who seems to be afraid of the world. He puts up a wall inside himself, being mean and pushing other people away in order to protect himself from getting hurt. However, it is clear that he is actually very lonely and unhappy, and that he is fooling himself about his own identity. He thinks of himself as Crawley, the mean old recluse who everybody fears, and he thinks it makes him happy to be talked about this way. He likes the idea of being remembered. However, this identity is a pretence, and it is making him miserable. When he begins to accept that he needs to change, and shows Antsy that he does actually like him, he begins to open up to the world more and is a happier man because of it. This shows



that fooling oneself about one's identity can be just as bad as losing it. Identity is closely linked to happiness in this story.

Disability

Disability is a recurring theme in this story. There are three people with obvious handicaps. Lexie is blind, Crawley is a frail old man, and the Schwa is burdened by the Schwa effect. There are also the children who attend the Academy for the Blind with Lexie. Different people deal with disability in different ways, and this is certainly true of the characters in this story. Lexie explains that some people are good at being blind and others are not. There are some people at her school who do not cope with it very well at all. Lexie is one of the people who does cope well. She has the right attitude to get by and not let her disability get her down. She refuses to ever let herself be a victim, and will not allow others to ignore or walk over her. When she goes to a burger restaurant with no Braille menus, she insists that the manager come out and read her the entire menu. She then tells him where he can purchase Braille menus in future. This shows an unwillingness to let others' ignorance be an excuse to treat people with disabilities unfairly. Lexie also adapts well to her blindness, relying on her other senses instead and finding joy in different things. She always has a very positive outlook and even though ordinary things are made more difficult for her, she never complains or gets down about this. Lexie just gets on with it, and takes as much enjoyment out of life as she can. This is a good attitude and the best way to deal with hardships.

Unlike Lexie, the Schwa does not deal with his handicap well at all. A lot of the time he is very depressed about it and seems to wallow in self-pity. He tries to use it to get what he wants, even asking Antsy to give up Lexie for him. He is treating himself as if he is incapable of getting friends or a girlfriend without Antsy's help. In other words, he is making himself the victim and is failing by not even trying. He has little self-confidence and rarely sticks up for himself. Unlike Lexie, he cannot just get on with things, and he cannot enjoy or appreciate life while he still has to deal with the Schwa effect. He tries to deal with his difficulties in the wrong way, attempting to force others to pay attention to him. Later, he realizes that he has been completely wrong. He does not need to care what others think of him, and when he stops trying to get attention he is a happier and stronger person. When he learns to appreciate himself he gains confidence, and no longer views the Schwa effect as a life-destroying handicap. It is only when he stops thinking of his disability as a disability that he can learn to accept it and be happy.

Other people's reactions to disability are also explored in this story. Antsy shows a good attitude. He is tolerant of both the Schwa and Lexie, and he shows sympathy for them without being patronizing. He understands that what the Schwa needs most is a friend, and that Lexie wants to be treated like any other person. She does not want her blindness to be a constant issue, but she also does not want other people's ignorance of it to be a hindrance to her. Antsy soon learns how to describe things to her without using 'sight' words, and shows a willingness to adapt to the way she needs things to be done. This is easy enough for him to do and so he is happy to do it to make Lexie's life a little easier. This is more tolerance than a lot of people in the real world are willing to show.



Lexie's grandfather shows a much worse attitude. He hires Antsy to be Lexie's escort and tells him to pretend to like her. This suggests two things. Firstly, it suggests that Crawley thinks Lexie cannot look after herself and that she is not capable. This is obviously completely untrue, and is an ignorant conclusion to come to. Secondly, it suggests that he thinks he needs to pay someone to be friends with Lexie. In other words, she is incapable of making friends herself. He thinks her blindness is too different for others to tolerate, and that nobody will be able to look past it. This shows a lack of faith in his granddaughter, as well as everyone else in the world. It also suggests that he thinks there is something wrong with Lexie. She might be different from sighted people, but she is still a normal human being who can easily make friends. Lexie is tolerant of her grandfather's attitude as she knows that he means well. However, it teaches the reader that sometimes a bad attitude to the disabled can be just as hurtful as bad actions.

Style

Point of View

The story is told from Antsy's point of view in the first-person narrative. Antsy is the main character of the book, despite the fact that most of the actual story revolves around Calvin Schwa. Even the book's title refers to the Schwa rather than Antsy. However, it is vitally important that the story is told from Antsy's point of view and not from the Schwa's point of view. The Schwa is supposed to be ordinary and forgettable, to the extent that people rarely notice him. If the story were told from his point of view he would be too prominent in it. He would constantly be talking to the reader, and so demanding attention on every page. This would be completely at odds with his character, as well as a bad representation of what life is actually like for him. With Antsy narrating, however, the Schwa can fade into the background and even be forgotten at points. Antsy is a very loud and interesting character, which means that the reader is often distracted by what is happening to him. This causes the Schwa to slip from the reader's mind, neatly demonstrating that the Schwa effect can even affect the readers themselves.

Antsy is a very charming and bubbly character, which makes his descriptions and explanations of things a pleasure to read. He is lighthearted and funny, which lends the book humor. This is important because the story is actually quite depressing at points. Antsy is also a very relatable character as well as a likeable one. He lends the story a lot of heart, and allows the reader to place themselves in his position. It would be too hard for many people to relate to the Schwa, as his problems are almost supernatural. Antsy represents the average boy, which shows the reader that even those of us who are 'in the middle' can still overlook others and cause pain to them. Antsy's point of view allows for the reader to see what is happening to the Schwa and to feel a lot of sympathy for him, while at the same time keeping the Schwa a very isolated figure. This is very effective.

Setting

The story is set in Brooklyn in New York City. This is where Antsy's home, the Schwa's home, the school, Crawley's apartment and restaurant, and the supermarket are located. Some of the locations help to sum up the differences in the characters' lives, and the various problems they face. For example, the Schwa's house is very quiet and lonely, emphasizing the fact that he is isolated and ignored. Nobody pays attention to him or even sees him in a room, which means he has no friends or people to care for him. His mother abandoned her family, and his father is mentally handicapped. The Schwa sometimes has to look after his father, and cannot act like a normal kid in his house. It is a place that seems devoid of life and emotion, which makes the reader feel very sorry for the Schwa. From his house, the reader can see the everyday difficulties he faces, and how depressing the Schwa effect must be for him.



Antsy's house is different from the Schwa's. It is full of people and is always loud and chaotic. The unfinished basement demonstrates the fact that his family are always so busy with life they never have time to finish things. Antsy has interesting siblings, and parents who care for their children. He is always cooked a good meal and is looked after as a child should be by their parents. This is so different from the Schwa's home, it helps to emphasize how much the Schwa is missing. It also shows Antsy that he has a lot to be thankful for. However, Antsy's house also demonstrates how Antsy can sometimes feel invisible in a different way from the Schwa. Antsy has so much going on around him that he is sometimes lost amongst it. He feels that his parents do not pay him attention because they are always thinking or worrying about other things. In a place so full of life and activity, Antsy cannot demand much attention because he does not stand out enough. In the Schwa's house, the Schwa cannot get attention because there is simply none to be had.

Crawley's apartment is different from either of the boys' houses. It is an apartment above a restaurant, removed from the street below and closed off to the rest of the world. Crawley lives inside it and refuses to go out. He has a reputation as a recluse and his apartment is feared by many in the neighborhood. However, inside it is nothing evil or dramatic. It is a normal apartment where an old man sits and often feels very lonely. Antsy and Lexie bring life into it, and Crawley is desperate to get them to stay with him. The fact that he has filled his apartment with dogs, and even offers to pay Antsy to make him stay with him, reveals how much Crawley does actually long for company. In the end, Antsy and Lexie finally manage to persuade Crawley that he will be happier if he comes out of his apartment now and again. He sees it as a place of safety and protection from the pain of the outside world, but it has actually become a prison denying him a proper life. When he realizes he needs to change and stop being such a recluse, Crawley immediately seems happier and more alive.

Language and Meaning

The story is told by Antsy in his bubbly, humorous manner and his Brooklyn accent. He explains at the beginning of the story that his accent and his heritage have given him a tense problem when speaking, and a tendency to drop vowels. This has been written into Antsy's narration too, which gives the book a sense of authenticity. This also helps the reader to relate to Antsy, as he is not a literary writer with perfect grammar and spelling, but a normal boy with his own quirks. Antsy's style of speaking is easy and fluent, which helps the story to flow well and makes it very enjoyable to read. He often uses colloquialisms, which also helps to make him seem more real and relatable. His language perfectly matches his charismatic character.

The Schwa's speech is much less quirky than Antsy's. The Schwa uses fewer colloquialisms and does not tend to make long speeches. The exception is when he is telling stories about his past, but even then he tends to get to the point very quickly. His speech is very ordinary and sometimes a little bland, which perfectly suits his character. Whereas the room seems to light up when Antsy speaks, the Schwa's dialogue makes very little impact. Crawley speaks differently from the younger characters in the book,



occasionally using old fashioned words and idioms. This reminds the reader that he is an old man, and that he is a grumpy recluse who does not like to interact with the modern world.

The story is not told using complicated language, but there are some very complex and important meanings behind a lot of what Antsy says. Antsy seems to be very fond of using metaphor and similes to get his point across, and these occur many times in the story. These metaphors and similes are used to link different characters together and to compare different attitudes and situations. For example, Antsy compares the Schwa to his paperclip collection, observing that he is both interesting and incredibly boring. Later, he also compares himself to a paperclip, saying that he is the clip that holds his family together but like a paperclip he is ignored and taken for granted. The paperclip analogy helps the reader to compare the different ways in which the Schwa and Antsy are ignored. Later, the paperclip becomes symbolic of the important lesson that both the Schwa and Antsy learn; that their identity does not have to rely on getting attention from others. In this way, a simple simile becomes a recurring motif with a great deal of symbolism attached to it.

Another good example of this is the trauma therapy that Lexie and Antsy come up with. Antsy compares this to radiation therapy, in which dangerous radiation can actually cure a person if focused correctly and give in the right dosage. This is like trauma, or the truth, which can seem painful but will help to cure the person in the end if given to them in the right way. This proves to be true, as trauma therapy helps several people in the story including Crawley, Antsy's mother and the Schwa himself. Later, Antsy comes up with a different simile for this, comparing truth to a beautiful girl seen from a bus. She seems appealing from the distance, but when the person comes face-to-face with her, she is actually ugly and unpleasant. Despite this, she is a good person to get to know, and she will eventually prove that her ugliness does not matter at all. This simile perfectly describes what happens to Antsy's mother, the Schwa's mother, and the Schwa himself. This painful but beneficial truth is like radiation therapy, but also like an ugly girl. Antsy uses similes in this case to help the reader to understand why something painful might be good for them in the end. The story might sometimes seem very straight forward and easy to understand, but there is a lot of hidden meaning such as this to be found within it.

Structure

The story is told in small chapters that relate to one particular event, or focus on a character's life or feelings in more depth. The short chapters are easy to read and break up the story into manageable sections. Each chapter moves the plot forwards in some way, and the whole story flows very easily. Just as one problem or event is resolved, another emerges, keeping up a quick, snappy pace that is enjoyable to read. Each chapter title also reflects what will happen in it, generating anticipation and adding humor.



In the middle of the story, the chapters begin to veer away from the Schwa's story and feelings, focusing more on Antsy and Lexie. This causes the reader to forget about the Schwa and lose interest in him for a while, which demonstrates the Schwa effect in action. This also cleverly manipulates the reader into feeling guilt and more sympathy for the Schwa when the narrative returns to him and the tragic story of his mother's disappearance is revealed.



Quotes

"Oh, yeah - the Schwa. See, that was the whole point with the Schwa: You couldn't even think about him without losing track of your own thoughts - like even in your head he was somehow becoming invisible" (Chapter 1, p. 2).

"He wasn't good-looking; he wasn't ugly; he wasn't buff and he wasn't scrawny. He was just, like, average. Like if you looked up "kid" in the dictionary, his face would be there" (Chapter 1, p. 6).

"They say his eyes change color to match the sky. They say his shoes are always the same color as the ground. They say if you stare at him long enough, you can read what's written on the wall behind him" (Chapter 1, p. 9).

"'If I stand in a room and no-one sees me, it's like I was never there at all. Sometimes I even wonder if I was there myself.' Calvin Schwa speaking" (Chapter 3, p. 22).

"I guess this fascination I had with the Schwa was because in some small way I knew how he felt. See, I never stand out in a crowd either." (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"I couldn't help but think about the Schwa, and how he came home every day to a father who might or might not feed him. That wasn't my dad. I might go unnoticed, but never unfed. And I never had to be the one taking care of him." (Chapter 6, p. 66).

"Dad and I never had problems talking to each other when there are other people around, but when it's just the two of us, it's like we're together on a stage and we've forgotten our lines." (Chapter 6, p. 66).

"Last year, my science teacher said that when a bamboo plant is established enough, you can actually watch it growing before your eyes. I wondered if it was sometimes the same with humans - because I was feeling this weird vertigo, like I had suddenly sprouted far beyond Howie and Ira." (Chapter 7, p. 75).

"The Schwa was on the cusp of being there and not being there, which I guess is why he clung so tightly to Lexie and me." (Chapter 9, p. 91).

"In spite of my wisecracking, pain-in-the-neck ways, I was the clip that held things together. Unnoticed. Taken for granted. Okay, maybe I'm giving myself too much credit here, but I'd be damned if I was gonna keep on being the family paper clip" (Chapter 10, p. 107).

"'The tree falling in the forest. If nothing and no one is there to hear it, then it doesn't really make a sound, and if nothing and no one remembers you, then you were never really there,' Calvin Schwa speaking." (Chapter 14, p. 150).

"That's why she was taking classes. That's why she was getting a job. It was all about spreading out those eggs. She had to feel she had a place in her own life, or else



maybe she thought she'd disappear somehow, too. Maybe not all at once like the Schwa's mom, but a little bit every day" (Chapter 15, p160).

"I had to smile, too. The postmark was from Puerto Rico, but the paper clip had been to the moon" (Chapter 22, p. 228).



Topics for Discussion

Why is the Schwa invisible? Is any of this self-inflicted? How do others contribute to his invisibility?

Are any other characters besides the Schwa invisible? Who is invisible and why? Are they always like this or is it caused by a specific person or event?

Discuss identity in this story. Who is struggling with a sense of who they really are and how do they cope with this? Does anyone change their opinion of themselves, or learn something about themselves in the story? What does the author have to say about people who base their identity on what others think of them?

Is Antsy a good friend to the Schwa? Is the Schwa a good friend to Antsy? Could either of them have done any more to help their friend, and do they sometimes hurt each other on purpose? Give reasons for your answer and back them up with examples from the book.

Discuss the symbolism of paperclips in the story. Why does the Schwa collect paperclips and how are they special? How do they represent the Schwa and his problems? Is anyone else in the story like a paperclip?

Discuss the idea of hard truths. Is it bad to expose someone to a difficult or painful truth? Who is faced with the truth in this story and how do they react to it? Does the truth help any of the characters, and if so, how?

In what ways is the Schwa similar to Manny Bullpucky? Do either of them prove to be indestructible? What might the dummy symbolize about the Schwa?

Is Old Man Crawley as mean as he makes out? Discuss his behavior in this story, and the various emotions and attitude he displays at different points. In what ways does he change, and how are these changes influenced by the people around him? Do you like his character by the end of the book?

Discuss 'trauma therapy' in this story. What is it and which characters are given it? How does trauma help them?

Discuss the author's choice of narrator. Why is Antsy the main character in this story and not the Schwa? Who is the story really about? Does the reader ever find that the 'Schwa effect' is working on them?

Do you like the character of Calvin Schwa? Give reasons for your answer and use examples from the story to illustrate your points. Do you think it is important for the reader to like/dislike the Schwa? Are there things the Schwa could have handled better or situations he should have acted differently in?



Discuss disability in this story. Who is disabled and how do they cope with this? In what different ways can people be 'abled' and 'disabled'? What does the author have to say about people's attitudes to those with handicaps?

How does the author use metaphor, similes, and symbolism effectively in this story? Give examples from the text.