

WITH Q&A FROM
NEWBERY MEDALIST
JERRY CRAFT



TEACHING NEW KID

BY
JERRY CRAFT

"Funny, sharp, and totally real!
Jordan Banks is the kid
everyone will be talking about!"

—Jeff Kinney

Author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

Grades 3-7

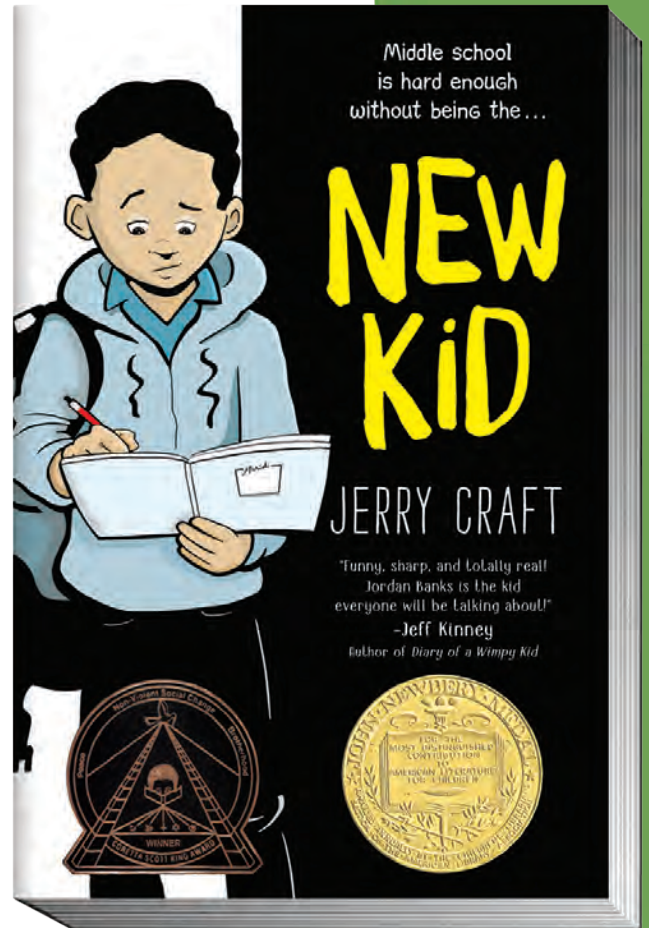
Themes: Fitting
In. Friendship.
Race. Class. Family
Dynamics. Bullying



ABOUT THE BOOK

Seventh grader Jordan Banks loves nothing more than drawing cartoons about his life. But instead of sending him to the art school of his dreams, his parents enroll him in a prestigious private school known for its academics, where Jordan is one of the few kids of color in his entire grade.

As he makes the daily trip from his Washington Heights apartment to the upscale Riverdale Academy Day School, Jordan soon finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one. Can Jordan learn to navigate his new school culture while keeping his neighborhood friends and staying true to himself?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerry Craft is a *New York Times* bestselling author-illustrator who has worked on numerous picture books, graphic novels, and middle grade novels, including the Newbery award-winning graphic novel, *New Kid*. Jerry is the creator of *Mama's Boyz*, an award-winning syndicated comic strip. He has won five African American Literary Awards and is a cofounder of the Schomburg Center's Annual Black Comic Book Festival. He received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts and now lives in Connecticut. Visit him online at www.jerrycraft.com.

Photo by Hollis King



Art © 2019 by Jerry Craft

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jordan's mom puts pressure on him not only to attend Riverdale Academy Day, but also to enjoy being there. Drawing helps Jordan cope with the pressure from home and the feelings of loneliness at school. What activities do you do to make yourself feel better when you're stressed or not feeling like yourself?
2. When Jordan returns home on the first day of school, his friend Kirk is waiting for him, but things between the two of them get uncomfortable when Kirk sees Liam: why do you think that happens? Later, Jordan tells his dad it was "kinda weird" (p. 50). What do you think Jordan is really feeling?
3. "Jordan's Tips for Taking the Bus" (pp. 56-57) show Jordan changing his appearance over the course of his ride to school. Discuss the concept of code switching. What do you notice in each frame? What is different about his clothing, body language, and the people around him? What do you think Jordan gains by code switching in this way? Can you think of a time where you felt you needed to code switch?
4. Jordan is nervous when he decides to try out for the soccer team because he hasn't played the sport or been on a team before. Have you ever had to try something you didn't want to? How did you manage to start? By the end of the season, Jordan finds that he actually likes soccer. Have you ever changed your mind about something after trying a new experience?
5. Why do you think it takes so long for Drew and Jordan to start talking? Discuss the friendship dynamic when Jordan, Drew, and Liam are together.
6. Liam asks Jordan not to judge him before coming over to his house during holiday break. What do you think Liam is worried about?
7. Do you think Andy is a bully? In your opinion, why does Andy act the way he does?
8. It takes a lot of courage for Jordan to stand up and say what really happened during the altercation between Drew and Andy in the cafeteria (Chapter 12). Why do you think Jordan saying something made others step up to report the truth, too?
9. When Ms. Rawle reads Jordan's sketchbook she fails to understand how she is making her African American students feel unseen (Chapter 13). Why do you think she gets defensive?
10. On Jordan's last day of school, his parents comment on how different he looks, and try to figure out exactly what's different. "Whatever it is, you look like a *new kid*" (p. 245). Jordan doesn't see it at first, but in what ways do you think Jordan has grown and changed through the school year? In what ways does he stay the same?



Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

Original interview was conducted by Bianca Schulze, founder of *The Children's Book Review*

Which five words best describe *New Kid*?

Jerry Craft: Funny. Thought-Provoking. Conversation-Starter. Honest. Comforting. (I know technically that's seven words, but I'm hoping the judges will rule in my favor.)

Can you share a highlight from the book? Or maybe your thoughts on, or an excerpt of, your favorite sentence, paragraph, or page?

One of my favorite scenes from *New Kid* is when Jordan Banks is waiting for his Dad (who is running late) to pick him up (pages 180-187). Then, to make matters worse, it begins to rain. But just when Jordan thinks that it can't get any worse . . . BAM! Here comes Alexandra, the kid who everyone thinks is probably the weirdest kid in the whole grade. And she sits down next to him. The only good thing is that she offers to share her umbrella.

I like this scene because I "Crafted it" (pun intended) to take my readers through a whole range of emotions. First, it's the awkwardness of having to talk to someone who you really don't want to talk to. Then there's the slow realization that maybe it's not as bad as you thought. And finally, there's the comfort that happens when you open your mind, and your heart, to see who that person really is! And that many of your preconceived notions couldn't be

further from the truth. I think that's an important lesson for both kids and adults to learn. Plus I put in one silly panel to get my readers to laugh and relax.

If you had to take a vacation with one of the characters from *New Kid*, who would it be? Why?

Well, it wouldn't be Andy, that's for sure. I think I'd jump out the plane before reaching our destination.

Jordan would be cool, because we'd spend the day drawing. Liam would also be a good choice. But I think I'd pick Drew because he's always aware of his surroundings, and is very protective of his friends. So he'd allow me to let my guard down long enough to enjoy the vacation.

Creative tools: computer, pen and paper, or all of the above?

I did *New Kid* exclusively in Photoshop.

What books are on your nightstand right now?

Born A Crime by Trevor Noah, *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky* by Kwame Mbalia, and *Octopus Stew* by Eric Velasquez

What does it mean to you that *New Kid* is the first graphic novel to receive the Newbery Medal?

It wasn't until I was in the middle of a school visit that the significance of being the first graphic novel to receive the Newbery Medal really dawned on me.

Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR CONTINUED

I always begin my assemblies by telling kids that I did not like to read books when I was a kid. I basically only read Marvel Comics. But my teachers hated comics and would confiscate them whenever they saw us reading one in class. They would say such terribly judgmental things such as, "comics aren't real reading!" Or "comics will rot your brain!" Their actions shaped my thought process into thinking that reading could NEVER be fun. That "real" reading meant having to suffer through the books that the literary world had anointed to be classics. Unfortunately, my jaded view of books did not change until I was in my late twenties. Don't get me wrong, I **COULD** read, I just didn't want to. I think that a lot of people think that nonreaders are incapable. Many of us are just unwilling. In fact, I could read an 800-page book on how to use Adobe Photoshop without giving it a second thought, but I **NEVER** considered books as a form of entertainment. So what **WOULD** have been my reading time was quickly replaced by video games.

So when I got to the point in my presentation when I began to talk about *New Kid*, it suddenly dawned on me that winning the Newbery Medal had helped the format (not genre) to overcome the seemingly insurmountable hurdle that comics / graphic novels are indeed real reading. I couldn't help but think that the same kid, who was born in Harlem, and told that "comics aren't real reading," would

one day grow up to prove them wrong. I remembered asking myself, "had I brought balance to the Force?!" "Was I, in fact, the chosen one?" And then the theme song from *Star Wars* began to play in my head. Fortunately, I snapped back to reality before I began to make lightsaber sounds onstage. But that was a total AHA moment!

Then over the next few weeks, my awareness grew exponentially as I read tweets from booksellers who witnessed parents telling their kids to "put the graphic novels back on the shelf and get a real book instead." But **NOW** my book-selling buddies are able to break that parental spell with magical incantations such as, "Do you know a graphic novel just won the Newbery?"

"Oh," said the parent, "in that case get whatever you want."

And last but definitely not least, I felt honored to win this medal for all the great graphic novels that have paved the way: *American Born Chinese*; *El Deafo*; *Roller Girl*; *Stitches*; *Hey, Kiddo*; and literally everything by Raina Telgemeier. When both the Newbery and Coretta Scott King posters come out next year, I hope that they can all take pride that a graphic novel will be in the top spot.

So to answer the question in one short line, it feels pretty good!



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