The Bully Book

An adaptation of the novel by Eric Kahn Gale

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Prologue:

Lights up on a student and three boys, JASON, DONOVAN, and ADRIAN. This student the new Bully Booker. The three boys (also referred to as THE EVIL THREE) are leaving the new student, who now has the sole copy of The Bully Book in their hands. The student begins to read. ERIC appears upstage.

STUDENT: To whom it may concern…

ERIC: You must have gone through a lot to get this book in your hands, and I’m not sure what you think you’re about to read. But whatever it is, you’re wrong. This is a record of The Bully Book and what it did to me. How I fought it, and the way it fought back. Once, I thought The Bully Book was a myth. Then maybe a mystery I could solve. Now I know it’s a monster and I’m trying to defeat it. Are you with me…or the book?

STUDENT: Chapter One. “How to make trouble without getting in trouble, rule the school, and be the man.” Long title. “Get the job done. I’m in sixth grade. I’m an observer. I see what works and what doesn’t. Why does a joke sound funny coming from one kid but seem stupid when someone else says it? Why do some kids have to eat alone with others are rolling in friends? These are the questions I’ve been thinking about. I’m here to tell you…I’ve got the answers. This year, I survived the school district merger, outsmarted kids ten times my size, and completely conquered sixth grade. I’ve got a ton of friends, everybody does what I say, and teachers don’t mess with me. This has been the best year of my life and I made it all by myself. How’d I do it? That’s what I’m about to tell you.”

Journal 1:

As the student and ERIC speak, the scene is set up. It’s the first day of sixth grade. JASON is standing in front of MELODY. This is a “karate demonstration” being watched by a crowd of kids.

JASON: Kah-hah-yah! (Kicks at MELODY’s face, bows. Crowd applauds.)

RUTH: That’s amazing!

ADRIAN: Kung-Fu! You could demolish somebody with that.

JASON: Ka-ra-te, and it is only used in self-defense. (Crowd leaves)

MELODY: Thanks for saving me, Eric. Were you just standing there the whole time?

ERIC: Sorry! What could I do? I don’t wanna mess with Crazypants.

MELODY: You’re a lame-o, and he’s a butthole. (To everyone) Everybody in this grade needs to grow up! We’re not little kids anymore. When will you get that through your thick heads, people?

ERIC: Hey, hey, hey… (ushers MELODY into the classroom)

Homeroom. The teacher, WHITNER, is trying to get their attention, but everyone is busy saying hi to friends they hadn’t seen all summer.

Ms. WHITNER: Good morning, students, and welcome to the first day of school. My name is Mr. Whitner, and I’ll be your homeroom teacher, as well as your English teacher. I, uh, wanted to start by
saying…well, pick your seats for today. And know that they’re going to be permanent. *(The classroom explodes as people scramble for seats)*

**MELODY:** *(To ERIC)* Hey, come on! *(ERIC and MELODY find seats and Eric blocks Colin from sitting nearby)*

**COLIN:** S-sorry.

**ERIC:** I’m saving this seat for Donovan. Where is Donovan?

**MELODY:** Working on sausage number four. *(DONOVAN enters)*

**ERIC:** Donovan! I saved you a seat, man. What happened to you?

**ADRIAN:** Big D! Over here, man! *(DONOVAN sits with ADRIAN)*

**ERIC:** Donovan, hey, I saved you a seat!

**JASON:** *(to ERIC)* Grunt! Shut your dumb mouth.

**ERIC:** What did he say?

**MELODY:** Don’t listen to him. He’s a jerk.

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**Paperwork:**

**STUDENT:** Let me tell you about something called the Social Order. You can’t see it, but it’s everywhere and it controls everything. It says who’s cool, who’s lame, and who’s not worth talking to. What is it saying about you? If you’re at the top, you can probably stop reading this book right now. But if you’re not, and 99 percent of people aren’t, then the Social Order probably isn’t too fun. What if I told you that you have control? That there’s a way to change it all? Draw up a chart. Let’s call it a Class Coolness Chart. At the top, write the name of the most popular kid in your class and then every other kid in order until you get to the least popular kid. But here’s the catch: don’t write how it actually is. Write how you want it to be. The name at the top should be you, and if it isn’t, throw this manual away. You don’t have the heart to do what’s next. Still with me? Good. The second most important name is the one on the bottom. The Grunt. The Grunt is the key to the entire plan.

**Journal 2:**

*Music classroom.*

**MELODY:** What are you gonna pick?

**ERIC:** A trumpet.

**MELODY:** Yeah. Hopefully the real thing will sound less fartlike.

**ERIC:** Depends on which end I play it from.

**MELODY:** Ewww! *(They go to their assigned seats; ERIC is stuck with THE EVIL THREE, who have ignored their assigned seats)*

**ERIC:** *(To DONOVAN)* What instrument are you gonna pick?

**MUSIC LADY:** Okay, everyone. Let’s pass these out! A recorder! It’s like a clarinet, but made of plastic, so it’s cheap enough that everyone can have one! *(During this time, ERIC dropped his pencil and had to get it. JASON quickly takes his recorder. When ERIC gets up, his recorder is gone)*

**MUSIC LADY:** Excuse me, young man. Where is your recorder?

**ERIC:** Uh…I don’t know.

**MUSIC LADY:** You just received it a minute ago. What is your name?

**ERIC:** Eric Haskins.

**MUSIC LADY:** Well, Mr. Haskins, that recorder is school property. You’ll do well to find it.
ERIC: Yes ma’am. *(ERIC begins searching everywhere. He gets on his hands and knees)*
MUSIC LADY: We can wait.
JASON: *(covers himself)* Don’t look at my nuts, man.
ERIC: I wasn’t…
ADRIAN: Ugh, get away from me, gaywad!
MUSIC LADY: We’re still waiting.
ERIC: I think you guys took it.
JASON: What’d you say?
ERIC: You guys took my recorder. One of you three.
MUSIC LADY: Boys, did you take Mr. Haskins’ instrument?
ERIC: They did. They’re not even sitting in their assigned seats.
JASON: *(Has returned the recorder)* You’re tripping, Haskins. You’re recorder is right there.
MUSIC LADY: Oh! Too quick to blame, Mr. Haskins. Now back to our instruments!
JASON: You gonna cry, Haskins?
ADRIAN: You’re a loser.
ERIC: I am not.
JASON: You can’t help it. It comes with being unpopular. It comes with being the Grunt.

**What Is the Grunt?**

STUDENT: The Grunt is a person. But it is also something that you create. By the time you’re done, the Grunt will be the loser of all losers to everyone in your class. Your job is to make that happen, and the best way to do that is to make fun of the Grunt in front of everybody. Eventually, the class will catch on, and they’ll start working on the Grunt for you. But in the beginning, putting the Grunt on the bottom is a nice way to show you’re on top. And it can be pretty fun.

**Journal 3:**

*THE EVIL THREE and ERIC are offstage. MR. WHITNER is ushering kids to the other side, to class, when he overhears:*

ADRIAN: *(off)* Toxic!
JASON: *(off)* Sick! This gaywad’s toxic!
WHITNER: What’s going on in there? *(THE EVIL THREE ENTER. ERIC COMES OUT SOON AFTER, ASHAMED)*
JASON: It’s Eric Haskins! He peed on himself! *(All exit but MR. WHITNER and ERIC)*
WHITNER: Here. Pat yourself dry.
ERIC: Sorry you’ve gotta see this.
WHITNER: Don’t worry about it.
ERIC: No, seriously, I’m not usually like this.
WHITNER: Bad things can happen to anybody, Eric. Trust me. Would it be better if you got to go home?
ERIC: Like you wouldn’t believe.
WHITNER: *(Walking ERIC to the Principal’s Office)* I don’t have the authority to send you home, so we’ll have to talk to Principal Clark. It’s one of the New Rules.
Principal’s Office. CLARK, the Principal, gives them very sudden attention.

CLARK: I’m dropping everything…literally! What’s going on?
WHITNER: Hello, Ms. Clark. You know Eric Haskins.
CLARK: I never forget a face. Like an elephant that way. Except the only trunk I’ve got is in the back of my car.
WHITNER: Right. Look, Eric seems to have had an accident in the bathroom—
CLARK: Well, it’s better to have aimed and missed than never to have aimed at all.
WHITNER: Yes. Quite right. Well, anyway, I think it’d be best if Eric was able to go home for the day—
CLARK: No change of clothes?
ERIC: Sorry, sir.
CLARK: That should be one of the New Rules—Be Prepared for Anything. Hard to enforce, though…
WHITNER: Sometimes the best thing is to just try it again tomorrow. Why not let Eric phone his mother?
CLARK: Eric. What about your gym class? This is one of my favorite New Rules—All sixth graders must keep gym clothes at school. Now that probably seemed like a hassle when you first heard about it. But now it’s covering your butt, literally.

The Inner Circle:

STUDENT: You need to pick lieutenants, loyal friends who can help you carry out my instructions. You should have at least two. Pick them out carefully. Find people who can help you but won’t be a threat. Avoid kids who might get jealous. Pick kids who are dumber than you so they’ll listen. Pick kids who are stronger than you. Pick kids who are followers and tell them the secrets you learn in this book, but only what they need to know. You are its keeper.

Journal 4:

ERIC: You’re a real traitor, you know.
DONOVAN: Why’d you follow me?
ERIC: ‘Cause you’ve been following me! With your new friends, torturing me.
DONOVAN: Listen, it’s not how I wanted—
ERIC: We were friends, Donovan. Now you won’t even talk to me.
DONOVAN: I am talking to you.
ERIC: Out here you are, when no one’s watching. Why are you doing this to me?
DONOVAN: It’s not me, Eric. I swear. It’s The Book.
ERIC: It is you, Donovan. You’re the one doing it.
DONOVAN: It’s The Book! It’s the one that chose you, not me. We’ve got no choice who’s the Grunt!
ERIC: I don’t understand what you’re saying.
DONOVAN: You’re the only one that fit the description. I told them not to choose you, but you’re the only one that fits the Grunt. It’s in The Book!
DONOVAN: Get out of here! You can’t talk to me now. You’ll ruin it. Go!

In the Family:
**STUDENT:** This book isn’t something you can just read alone in your room. You’re going to talk to your lieutenants about it. You’re going to have meetings about it. But you’re not going to be stupid about it. Don’t meet where people can hear you. Information like this is worth more when fewer people know about it. So keep your mouth shut. Keep other people’s mouths shut.

**Journal 5:**

_The scene is now at COLIN Greene’s house._

**COLIN:** Before we start on the assignment, we can play video games or read comics. (*COLIN stops when Ricky enters*) Ever learn to knock?

**RICKY:** What are you two losers doing?

**ERIC:** Ummm…..reading comics.

**RICKY:** Oh. Well, that’s dumb.

**COLIN:** If it’s so dumb, Richard, then why don’t you get out of my room!

**RICKY:** You get out of your room.

**COLIN:** It’s mine!

**ERIC:** Hey! Cut it out, you idiots!

**RICKY:** And who do you think you are?

**ERIC:** Well, I think my name is Eric. Eric Haskins.

**RICKY:** Eric Haskins. You’re in Colin’s grade. Lemme ask you, how big of a loser is my brother?

**ERIC:** Not as big a loser as you.

**RICKY:** Hey, don’t you call me that. (*To COLIN*) You’re in for it this year, Colin. You don’t even know. You’re in for it. You’re going to be the Grunt.

**ERIC:** What did you just say? Did you just say Colin is going to be the Grunt?

**RICKY:** No…

**ERIC:** That is what you said.

**RICKY:** Who wants to know? Are you one of Them? You can’t be. They wouldn’t be caught dead hanging out with Colin.

**ERIC:** One of who?

**COLIN:** Yeah, who wouldn’t be caught dead with me?

**RICKY/ERIC:** Shut up, Colin.

**RICKY:** Okay. But you gotta promise not to tell. (*to COLIN*) How about you?

**COLIN:** I promise.

**RICKY:** Have either of you ever heard about The Book?

**ERIC:** The Book?

**RICKY:** Yeah. When I was in sixth grade, like you guys, everything went bad for me. See, I was a normal kid before. Everything was good. But things changed when some guys got hold of The Book. They made fun of me, laughed at me, got other kids to do it. The whole class turned against me, like their goal in life was to make me miserable. The guys started calling me Grunt. I could hear them talking about me when they thought I wasn’t around. “The Grunt did this, the Grunt did that. We gotta do this to the Grunt.” They had some plan for me. They were having secret meetings in one of the classrooms after school. One day, I hid in the garbage can to see what they were talking about.

**COLIN:** In the garbage can?

**RICKY:** They were ruining my life! I needed to know.
ERIC: What were they talking about?
RICKY: Me. How I was coming along. How they were doing, according to The Book.
ERIC: The Book?
RICKY: The Bully Book, that’s what I call it. Teaches you to be cool. Tells you to pick one kid. Make his life miserable.
ERIC: (Realization) It tells you how to pick him.
RICKY: Yeah. (pause) How’d you know that?
ERIC: Just guessed.
RICKY: Well, I wish you could guess how they pick you. I can’t figure it out. I was normal. I was different before all this. I was just a normal, regular kid. Anyway, however The Book says to pick the Grunt, they picked me. And Colin’s a littler, stupider version of me…
COLIN: Shut up!
RICKY: So this year, Colin, the Grunt…is you.
ERIC: Gotta get home.
COLIN: But we haven’t done the--
ERIC: Forget the assignment. Forget everything, Colin. You’re going to be fine this year. Just…I’ll do it myself at home. I’m leaving.
COLIN: You need a ride.
ERIC: I’ll walk, Colin. I’ve got to think.

Going Public:

STUDENT: Once you’ve got your lieutenants on board with the plan, you need to get the rest of the class involved. You need to invent a game. Have the kids in your class hide the Grunt’s things, or only talk to the Grunt in a secret language, or act like the Grunt has a disease that no one wants to catch. Just make sure it’s about the Grunt and make sure you’re having fun.

Journal 6:

SUB: For your weekly vocab assignments, you have to spell and use a word from the list in a sentence.
(JASON stands and spells from his seat)
JASON: Yonder. Over yonder field, I can see Eric Haskins’ big head.
RUTH: (loudly, to ERIC) Your face is all red!
ADRIAN: Whenever I see Eric Haskins, I circumambulate him to avoid the smell.
DONOVAN: If I see Eric Haskins…if I only see Eric Haskins biannually, it’s too much.
RUTH: Eric Haskins is generally stupid.
NICK: I will not mourn Eric Haskins’ funeral.
MELODY: (Angrily stands) Blissful. A state of extreme happiness or joy. It would be blissful if everyone in this room would stop acting like buttholes.
SUB: Language!
MELODY: But--
SUB: Next. Next student.
MELODY: Don’t listen to them, Eric. Act like they don’t even exist.
ERIC: (Stands) Hazardous. Many things in this world are hazardous.

Dust the Target:
STUDENT: Everyone has at least some friends, even the biggest losers. It’s something you have to deal with when you’re making the Grunt. You’ve got to ruin the Grunt’s friendships. It’s not easy to do, and it’s not pretty, but it’s an important part of the strategy. Once you get the Grunt’s friends to leave, you need to reward them. Invite them to your lunch table, show them how much cooler life is without the Grunt. Make their lives so good that they’ll never want to go back. They’ll be happy, you’ll be happy, and the Grunt will be alone. It’s a win-win.

Journal 7:

RUTH: Eric, Melody has something she needs to say to you.
ERIC: Um…okay.
MELODY: You can’t send me stuff like that, Eric.
ERIC: What do you mean?
MELODY: It’s embarrassing and I don’t…
ERIC: What? What did I do?
MELODY: Eric, I just don’t like you like that! You can’t come to my house! (Exits)
ERIC: What is she talking about?
RUTH: Like you don’t know what you did.
ERIC: I don’t, Ruth—so why don’t you tell me!
RUTH: Don’t play so dumb. Why would anyone want to accept a Facebook relationship request from you? Melody doesn’t like you like that, Eric, and she doesn’t want to sit next to you in class anymore. We already talked to Mr. Whitner about it and he changed the seats. Don’t be shocked, Eric. You’re pathetic and you’re gay. Melody will never like you.

Lying About the Truth

STUDENT: If you want to make trouble for your Grunt, don’t just make up lies. Work with problems the Grunt already has. Let’s say your Grunt calls some kid a moron in class and the teacher gets mad. This is a situation you can work with. When everyone else is at lunch, leave a note that says “moron” on the kid’s desk. Everyone will think the Grunt did it and because he’s the one who called the kid a moron earlier, it’ll be hard to deny it. The same works if the Grunt obviously likes someone. If you’re always making up crazy stories about people, you’ll get a reputation as a liar. It’s better to lie about the truth.

Journal 8:

At Colin Greene’s house

ERIC: (RICKY enters) I need to talk to you about The Bully Book. Richard, I’ve gotta shake this thing. They’re ruining my life. It’s like how you said it would happen.
RICKY: I don’t know what you’re talking about.
ERIC: They made me the Grunt…not Colin!
RICKY: (Scared) You can’t be here. I can’t talk to you.
ERIC: Ricky, what is wrong with you?
RICKY: You can’t talk to me about this anymore. You got me in a lot of trouble, you moron. If they see you talking to me, they’ll…
ERIC: What? I can’t talk to you or what? I didn’t get you in trouble, Richard. Who is they?
(RICHARD exits)

Magic:

STUDENT: By now, you should know why this book needs to stay secret. Having a book about how to rule your class will make people suspicious. That’s obvious. But the way the Grunt is picked has to stay confidential. Don’t let the Grunt find out. This book is like a magic trick that gets you to the top of your class. But if people figure out how it’s done, it won’t work anymore. And you’ll just be a loser with a book.

Journal 9-10:

ERIC: Colin. (ERIC has cornered COLIN) Colin…what did you do—you dumb turd? Who did you talk to?
COLIN: Uh…I don’t know what you mean.
ERIC: Don’t gimme that crap, Colin! Who did you tell about The Bully Book?
COLIN: I don’t know. Nobody. I mean…I mean, uh…really, I uh…I didn’t…I didn’t…I didn’t ask anybody about it—I swear!
ERIC: Ask anybody about it? Who’d you ask about it?
COLIN: No one!
ERIC: Listen, Colin. I’m not mad at you. No one’s mad at you. I just want to know who you talked to. Whoever it was, it got back to Ricky.
COLIN: Ricky knows?
ERIC: Yes, Ricky knows. Whoever’s in charge of all this stuff, they got to her. That’s why I need to know who you talked to. I think they might be part of it.
COLIN: No, no that’s not true.
ERIC: It is true, Colin. Now tell me who you talked to. Who?
COLIN: No one! (COLIN tries to run off; the boys run into each other. COLIN shouts out and holds his hands to his face, over his nose)

Trouble:

STUDENT: Never get physical with your Grunt. Marks on the body are impossible to explain away. Use only words. If words are what got you into trouble, then words can get you out of it. Always tell your own side of the story. If the Grunt says you were making fun of him, don’t call the Grunt a liar. Say he misunderstood. Say you should have been more sensitive, that you know the Grunt is kind of thin-skinned. Get your friends to back up this story. Adults want to think that everybody’s nice to each other and all the bad stuff happens by mistake. None of them can remember what it’s really like, and none of them can do anything about it, either.

Journal 11:
Principal’s Office

CLARK: Now, I know you said it was an accident, but we put ourselves into situations that allow accidents to happen.
ERIC: He spit on me. That’s not a situation I can control!
CLARK: Sometimes, if we’re in an agitated state of mind, we do things we don’t mean to. Like you bloodying Colin’s nose.
ERIC: It was just an accident.
CLARK: I know, but it’s the second time you’ve been in my office for ‘an accident’ this year.
ERIC: This has nothing to do with that.
CLARK: Maybe it does. A lot can change in sixth grade. It can be hard to adjust. And your detention form isn’t signed, so I’m going to have to call your mother.
ERIC: But I came to detention! What does it matter if she knows or not?
CLARK: Sorry, bud. That’s the New Rules. This is for your well-being.
ERIC: Wait! Can’t you just call my dad? He’s my parent too.
CLARK: I’m sorry, Eric. Your mother is listed as the primary guardian. (Dials the phone, waits) Mrs. Haskins, it’s Principal Clark. Very well. I’m calling about the cookies you made for the Booster Bake Sale. I’d like to order two dozen more! Actually, I’m calling about Eric. He’s gotten into some trouble at school. He served a detention, but forgot to get the slip signed. It’s not that big of a deal. New Rules just dictate that I… alright, Mrs. Haskins. That’s great. Okay. Have a good day. (hangs up, to ERCIC) That wasn’t so hard. Your mother’s quite a woman. Now just hang tight here and enjoy the ambience. Mrs. Bellemont will let you know when it’s alright to leave. Good talk today.

Liars:

STUDENT: Someone is lying to you if: when they look into your eyes, they blink a lot. They talk slower than usual. When you walk into a room they immediately stop what they’re doing. Questions bother them. They’re voice gets higher. Their body freezes.

Journal 12-13:

COLIN: Your mom’s really nice. I can’t believe she made you ask me to come to dinner. And I get the feeling she kind of wants to send you to my math tutor, Matt. He’s really good. I talked to him the other day and he’s just really cool--
ERIC: (Takes a spoon and shoves it into COLIN’s side) What did Matt Galvin tell you about The Bully Book?
COLIN: Nothing. I never mentioned it to anybody.
ERIC: This fork says you did mention it.
COLIN: Ahh! Okay, okay! I’ll tell you, just don’t stab me!
ERIC: No problem. (Pulls away) It was only a spoon. Now confess.
COLIN: Okay. When Ricky told us about everything, I was scared. I didn’t want to get made fun of. I hate being made fun of. So the next day at school, I was really nervous. I kept looking around, seeing
bullies everywhere. I couldn’t believe somebody would have such an evil book. I got so worried that after school I threw up. I sat in the bathroom for a while just feeling awful. And then I remembered I was late for Math Buddies. When Matt asked me where I’d been, I just told him the whole thing.

ERIC: So, you told Matt Galvin about The Bully Book? About the Grunt? What did he say?

COLIN: Well, he listened to the story. Then he looked at me and said, ‘I’ve been a Boy Scout for a long time, so I know a lot about secret codes, and old books, and all sorts of different clubs and oaths and everything. And I’ve never heard of a Bully Book. And even though “Grunt” is a name you might call someone you don’t like, there’s no such thing as the kind of Grunt you’re talking about. It’s probably just Richard’s imagination. Just a crazy conspiracy theory.’

Being Myself

STUDENT: Everybody says to find people you can be yourself around. What they don’t tell you is who “yourself” is. Whenever I tried to “be myself,” I could never come up with anything to say. I think I know why that is. Everyone acts different around different friends, and everyone is telling you who to be. This isn’t bad if everyone expects you to be the coolest kid in class. But some people are expected to be losers, or idiots, or punching bags, and because they don’t know any better, that’s how they act. I did. But not anymore. I realized being yourself isn’t something that just happens. You have to create yourself. And to keep yourself safe, you have to create other people too, like the Grunt. Make them how you want them to be.

Journal 14-16:

Middle school playground. ERIC has skipped class and snuck on the bus to the middle school to inspect MATT GALVIN. ERIC runs into a kid.

ERIC: Sorry. Didn’t see you there.

DANIEL: Maybe that has to do with the direction your eyes were pointed. Front way’s usually the best.

ERIC: Sorry.

DANIEL: Oh, it happens. Happens. Happens. Happens all the time.

MATT: (With a group of kids. Playing some kind of ball game) You’re out! You idiot! Somebody get that.

GROUP OF KIDS: Demolish this kid, Matt! Knock him out! Come on! Do something, you wimp! Hit it! Hey kid, you’re up. I’m talking to you, kid. You gonna play or not?

MATT: Ready?
ERIC: Yes. *(ERIC knocks the ball away and it lands next to Daniel)*
KIDS: Dang. Where’d it go? There it is!
MATT: It’s by the Grunt! *(Daniel looks up, fearful, and runs away)*

**Not All Bad:**

STUDENT: My Grunt hates me, but I’m actually making his life easier. Life is not easy in sixth grade. Every choice you make might be a wrong one and you can never go back. But my Grunt never has to make any hard choices at all. I’m constantly on top of my game so I can get what I want. It’s exhausting. My Grunt never gets what he wants, so he can just relax. He doesn’t need to worry about what he’ll say or do in class, because he’ll get made fun of no matter what. He doesn’t need to worry about making friends, because I’ve made sure that’s not possible. In the beginning, he tried to fight it, but he got the picture after a month or two. The best advice I could give to any Grunt would be: relax. Enjoy the lack of choices. Don’t fight it.

**Journal 17-18:**

*ERIC is waiting outside for DANIEL to go by. DANIEL doesn’t know he’s there. ERIC suddenly shouts:*

ERIC: HEY, GRUNT!

DANIEL freezes. *Then, he runs.*

Wait! Daniel. Daniel!

*ERIC notices other students walking by. He overhears RUTH.*

RUTH: And now they’re going out with each other.
ERIC: *(Stops COLIN)* Who’s going out with who? What’s going on?
COLIN: I know, Eric, I know! I heard it on the bus today! You’ll never believe it!
SUB: *(Ushering them inside)* Quiet down there. Time for Vocab Words now.
ERIC: Great…
JASON: (Stands. He looks at MELODY. Reluctant) Someone who cannot pass fifth-grade English is an imbecile.

ERIC is confused. MELODY smiles and touches JASON’s hand.

COLIN: (leans over) Jason and Melody. They’re the ones dating.

Class dismissed. MELODY and the other students exit, but the EVIL THREE corner ERIC.

JASON: By the way: Eric Haskins is an imbecile.

Working the Class:

STUDENT: You need to remember that this is about happiness. About making the world better for yourself and the kids in your class. So everyone should see you as a pretty nice guy. The Grunt’s gonna hate you; there’s nothing you can do about that. But make sure that everyone else loves you. If you’re getting a reputation as a mean person, you’re not doing this right. There’s a balance between putting the Grunt in his place and being a leader in the classroom. It’s all about appearances.

Journal 19:

ERIC is getting ready for school. It’s slow. He’s exhausted. ERIC is going through the routine until he has to pick out a shirt. He holds one in his hand and stops. Quiet. Then…

ERIC: (Quiet epiphany) I don’t like being me anymore. (Pause) “Anymore” makes it seem like there was a time I did like being myself. But that’s not it. It’s not like I was the kid who looked in the mirror every morning and shouted, “I love myself, and it’s gonna be a great day!” Instead, I thought, I want Cheerios for breakfast. I didn’t think about me at all. And I never thought about liking myself or not. I always considered myself normal. Nothing bad, nothing wrong. But now, it’s clear to me. I don’t like myself. Not my face, my hair, my nose, the dark circles under my eyes, the bushy eyebrows. I’ve got thick thighs, skinny arms, and a big round butt. I hate my voice, the way that I talk, the things I say. I hate the thoughts I think. I’m not really good at anything, and I’m not even funny. I act like I am, but really I’m not. There are a ton of people way funnier. And…I’m mean. I’m kind of mean to Colin, even though people are mean to me. I wanna change myself. I don’t wanna keep on being this person. I don’t want to be the Grunt.
Journal 20-21:

DANIEL leads ERIC onstage, who is blindfolded. They are at DANIEL’s fortress.

DANIEL: Walk. Here. (takes off ERIC’s blindfold) Welcome to my fortress. I make sure to prepare for anything now.
ERIC: I didn’t mean to scare you. I just…I needed to know if you were the Grunt, too. I came to see Matt Galvin, because this kid named Colin blabbed about The Book to him, and--
DANIEL: Matt Galvin. I hate him.
ERIC: Are you afraid of him?
DANIEL: If you think I ran away from you because I was afraid, then you’re wrong. I was only trying to lead you into the woods, where I could come here and defend myself. No one ambushes me anymore.
ERIC: They came to you at your house?
DANIEL: Only once.
ERIC: What happened?
DANIEL: (Ignoring the question) You’re chasing The Book? What would you do if you had it?
ERIC: Read it. See why I was picked for the Grunt and change. I’d change myself so I didn’t fit the description. So I wouldn’t be the Grunt anymore.
DANIEL: That’s what I should have done when I had it.
ERIC: What?!
DANIEL: I had it. Once, they locked me in the handicapped bathroom, but Matt forgot his backpack. I was really afraid of being trapped over the weekend, because it was a Friday, so I started searching through his backpack for a cell phone or something. But inside I found a leather bound binder with “The Book” stenciled onto the cover. I was going to read it but as soon as I opened it, Matt burst through the door and ripped the book from my hands. I managed to rip out a page from The Book, but then…later, someone stopped me on the way home. He said…

CLARENCE: (From upstage) Are you the Grunt? You have something that doesn’t belong to you. Something very dangerous. Keep it, and I promise…you will get hurt. Give it to me, and I can make sure you won’t be harmed. Refuse, and I can’t be held responsible for what happens. You forget about this now, if you know what’s good for you. You never saw The Book, and you never saw me. (Exits, if onstage)
ERIC: I can’t believe you had a page of The Bully Book!
DANIEL: I didn’t know what it was.
ERIC: What did it say?
DANIEL: That’s just it. I can’t remember. The page just said something about being a manual on how to be cool. That’s honestly all I know. It was the first page of the book.
ERIC: And the boy who ambushed you. You’ve got no idea who he was?
DANIEL: I don’t know. Never wanted to know.
ERIC: He’s got to be a Bully Booker. For all we know, he’s the kid who wrote it. You tear out a page and this old guy shows up. He might be the head of the whole organization.
DANIEL: Maybe.
ERIC: You don’t care about this? If he’s the author, we’ve got a key to the whole thing!
DANIEL: Hey, I came when you mentioned The Book, didn’t I?
ERIC: Yeah, but this is something bigger. We’ve got to get a name on him.
DANIEL: Look…I don’t want to play detective here. I have enough trouble just going to school with these guys. I’m on defense only.
ERIC: Maybe that works for you, but this isn’t over for me. I’ve got half of 6th grade left to go, and I don’t want it to be miserable.
DANIEL: Not like it stops after 6th grade.
ERIC: Then help me. If I bring you some yearbooks, can you pick out this guy? If he’s the author of The Book, that might get me closer to reading a copy.
DANIEL: Yeah…okay. But I don’t want you to contact me anymore. News travels fast with these guys, and I don’t want anything happening to me like it did with Ricky Greene.
ERIC: You heard about that?
DANIEL: Hard to miss. So here’s what you can do. Photocopy your yearbooks and put them in my mailbox. I’ll look through the pictures and get a name back to you somehow. That sound good?
ERIC: Yeah, Daniel. Thanks.
DANIEL: No, thank you.
ERIC: For what?
DANIEL: For being polite enough to do this again. (places the blindfold over ERIC’s eyes again)

Maintenance:

STUDENT: If this book is going to last, you’ll need to take care of it. Fix holes in the paper so they don’t fall out of the binder. Get new metal rings when they stop snapping into place. Retype pages that are getting hard to read. Do this accurately. Burn the old pages being replaced. Do NOT leave these around. Don’t get lazy about this.

Journal 22-25:

ERIC is seen onstage, searching through yearbooks for the kid that cornered DANIEL.

ERIC: Bingo.

ERIC goes to CLARENCE’s house. CLARENCE’s mother, MRS. CORBINDER, greets him.

MRS. CORBINDER: Excuse me! Can I help you?
ERIC: Uh…Mrs. Corbinder?
MRS. CORBINDER: Yes. That’s me. What are you doing at my house, young man?
ERIC: Um…me?
MRS. CORBINDER: Yes, you. What’s your name, son?
ERIC: My name, that’s…it’s Colin Greene, ma’am. My name is Colin Greene.
MRS. CORBINDER: Well, Colin. What are you doing wandering around my backyard? Oh, you must be looking to shovel the walk! Well, I’ll tell you, I’ll need it. The weatherman says we’ve got about ten inches of snow coming down next week, and my Clarence is just about as lazy as a sack of potatoes! Spends all his time down in the basement doing his homework or God knows what else!

They enter the household.
MRS. CORBINDER: Shoes! Shoes! Colin, this is a no-shoes house!
ERIC: Sorry. Where’s Clarence?
MRS. CORBINDER: Oh, I’d imagine she’s where she’s always at. Down in the basement.
ERIC: What does she do down there all the time?
MRS. CORBINDER: Oh, homework. Writing things.
ERIC: Writing things?
MRS. CORBINDER: Oh, yes. Always writing in notebooks down there. Has stacks of paper everywhere. Never shows anything to me, though. Have you met Clarence? I can call her up if you like, but I don’t think she’ll come. Never usually leaves the basement till dinnertime.
ERIC: No, no, that’s okay. (pauses) I hear that Clarence’s 16th birthday is coming up.
MRS. CORBINDER: We’re having a party for her here at the house.
ERIC: That’s great. I love birthday parties.
MRS. CORBINDER: Well then, uh…you should come.
ERIC: Really? Oh man—that would be great!
MRS. CORBINDER: Of course, Colin. It’ll be wonderful to have you. The more the merrier.

Journal 26-27:

Location is now in MR. WHITNER’s classroom

MR. WHITNER: Come on, guys. This is supposed to be fun. I give you a speech topic and you talk for sixty seconds. Just loosen up and talk. Eric Haskins, you’re next, buddy.
JASON: Get up there, buddy.
ERIC: “What if people didn’t have any thumbs?” First, Roger Ebert would be out of a job. He’d give good movies one mangled knuckle up. And playing basketball, everybody’d be like, ‘Hey man, high four!’ There’d be no more rules of thumb. Humans and monkeys would have nothing to brag about. Video games would be impossible to play and babies would be sucking on their fingers, which probably isn’t nearly as satisfying. (During the speech, MELODY reacts. Laughs when appropriate. She gets the class involved. At the end, everyone breaks into applause.)
MR. WHITNER: That was really excellent, Eric. You’ve got real talent as a speaker.
ADRIAN: (as ERIC walks by) Eric Haskins can be funny when he wants to be.
RUTH: Yeah.
ERIC: Thanks!
ADRIAN: Hey, get yourself outta here, Grunt.
JASON: (As ERIC sits down) That was pretty good. But I’m glad we still have thumbs (pinches ERIC). And Grunts.

Two of Me:
STUDENT: My school self and my family self. At school, I am in control of what people know about me, how they see me, and how we interact. My family knows me from a less intelligent time. I’ve got my kingdom at school and that’s enough. My aunts can treat me like a baby and my uncles can think I’m a weakling. There’s nothing I want from them anyway. But you will have a problem when family and school friends mix. Put a sick person near a healthy person, and the healthy person gets sick. I don’t want the way my family treats me to catch on with my friends. So I never let them mix. You shouldn’t either.

Journal 28:

MRS. CORBINER: Colin! Colin Greene! Thanks for coming, have a treat. Have you seen Clarence yet?
ERIC: No, I haven’t had a chance.
MRS. CORBINDER: Oh, I’ll go get her, then. Stay right here.

ERIC waits until MRS. CORBINDER is out of sight before running. He is searching for anything of the Book. Anything at all. In his search he finds a piece of paper and pockets it. He starts to leave but is stopped by MRS. CORBINDER.

MRS. CORBINDER: Colin! There you are, Colin Greene! I’ve got Clarence right here! Clarence, this is Colin Greene. He’s been doing our walks.
CLARENCE: Are you Ricky Greene’s little brother? You don’t look like her.
ERIC: Well…I’m glad about that.
CLARENCE: That is something to be glad about. But why are you here? I don’t know you.
MRS. CORBINDER: Clarence, Colin does our walks, I told you. You be nice.
CLARENCE: I’m being nice, right?
MRS. CORBINDER: Well, I need to attend to our guests. You two play nice (Exits).
CLARENCE: Really. What are you doing here?
ERIC: Just like your mom told you. I do your walks…I like birthday parties.

After Me:
**STUDENT:** I hope you understand what I’m saying. I wish I could talk to you. I would tell you these things and I would check on you. But I can’t do that. This book will stay here at the school, but I’m moving on to bigger things. I don’t want to be forgotten. But I also know I can’t be connected to this. I’m going to be an important person someday, a lawyer or politician—maybe the president. And I’ll get there using the lessons in this book. So just like you’ve got to keep this book secret, I have to guard my identity. And I just hope the book can live on its own. You have to keep it going.

**Journal 29:**

*The EVIL THREE are picking on COLIN during recess. ERIC notices.*

**DONOVAN:** You’re the grossest, Colin. You’re a slimeball. You’re wet like you just came out of your mom. Do you still kiss your mom, Colin? Are you that gay?

**ERIC:** Hey! Why don’t you shut up, Donovan?

**DONOVAN:** What did you say?

**ERIC:** Stop making fun of Colin. It makes you sound like an idiot. And stop calling people gay. I don’t even know why that’s an insult. There are real gay people in the world, you know, and there’s nothing wrong with them. Calling someone gay, like it’s a bad thing, is like calling someone a dentist—it doesn’t make any sense.

**DONOVAN:** Eric. We were friends. But you’re the Grunt now. I’m cool and you’re not. You can’t talk to me, and you can’t touch me.

**JASON:** *(cuts in)* You better be watching your back, Grunt. ‘Cause if you keep stepping like this, we’re gonna get ya. I’m serious. *(EVIL THREE exit)*

**COLIN:** You think they’ll really come get you?

**ERIC:** I don’t know.

**Paint a Pretty Picture**

**STUDENT:** You’re going to be messing with the Grunt pretty bad. One day, it will blow up in your face. Unless you’re careful. Make the Grunt look bad to your teachers, to the recess monitor, to the principal. Take the time when things are calm and make little complaints about the Grunt. Don’t wait until the Grunt’s gotten you in trouble. Mention he’s swearing at recess. Nothing that will get the Grunt
called to the office, but enough so the teacher’s don’t trust him. And then, one day, when the Grunt tries to get you in trouble and you have to tell a story to get yourself out of it, it will be much easier because nobody will trust him over you. You’ve only been accused once, and the Grunt has a million little black marks on his record. That’s being prepared.

Journal 30:

ERIC is leaving school. MELODY comes up to him.

MELODY: What’s up, Eric? (ERIC stares at her for a moment, then walks away) Eric, are you mad at me?
ERIC: (to himself) You have no idea.

What People Want:

STUDENT: If you think shy people don’t want to be noticed, you’re wrong. Everybody wants to be seen in their own way. That’s why they choose the clothes they do, talk how they do, and lie how they do. Everybody is acting the way they want you to see them. Shy people aren’t dumb. They know how easy it is to see through that stuff. They don’t want you to see through them, so they disappear. Figure out how the kids in your class want to be seen. Then treat them that way. Even though you know it’s a front. They’ll be grateful.

Journal 31:

ERIC is leaving school after a long night of Bully Book research and is stopped. He is cornered.

CLARENCE: You have something of mine. You have something of mine and I want it back.
ERIC: Clarence!
CLARENCE: Do you have what you took from me?
ERIC: Um…yeah, in here (hands over the page he took).
CLARENCE: Are you going to be all right getting home?
ERIC: Yeah, I think so.
CLARENCE: I’m sorry for scaring you. It’s just…been easier in the past when I need my stuff back.
ERIC: Well, it worked…
CLARENCE: Eric…you and I have a lot in common. More than you know. Come by my house this Saturday. I imagine you know…how to get in.

Standing on My Shoulders:

STUDENT: Nobody helped me with any of this. I want you to remember that. My life has not been easy. This year, we did American history in social studies. We learned all about the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and started the Revolutionary War. A kid in my class, a real idiot, asked our teacher, “Why do we need to learn about these old, dead guys?” Everyone in the class started laughing. I got so mad. “Because,” I said to this idiot, “they invented the entire country you’re living in. They made it up. You can just sit back because they spent their entire lives making a country that’ll last ten thousand years. You better know their names.”

Journal 32:
The scene opens on the middle of a conversation between ERIC and CLARENCE in CLARENCE’s basement.

CLARENCE: *(Through laughter)* I don’t believe it! Thought I was a Bully Booker, oh my God! You thought that when we were on the same mission all along. I’m the 10TH grade Grunt! Look, look, Eric, read this note.

ERIC: *(reading the note handed to him)* “Keepers of the Book—tonight we’ll met again in the dark part of the parking lot. Clarence is doing well as the Grunt, but we still need to study the book and strategize. Neil Armand is forming a base of power separate from ours. We need to take him down.”

CLARENCE: This was the start of my collection. Most of it’s junk, but every so often, you find something worthwhile. Here, read this one.

ERIC: Kevin Bushwald. Kevin was suspended for attacking two other boys…Kevin, however, claims that the boys attacked him and the entire class is part of a conspiracy…claims the boys possess a book…I am recommending Kevin for psychological counseling.

CLARENCE: That’s a ten-year-old report. I’ve been trying to contact Kevin Bushwald since I got it, but all I know is that he moved out of the state.

ERIC: Ten years old? He and his Bully Bookers are in college by now. I didn’t know how far back this goes.

CLARENCE: No one knows. Can’t believe you thought I started it.

ERIC: You freaked Daniel out pretty bad.

CLARENCE: I know, but it was for his own good. I’d like you to join with me, Eric. You’ve gotten this far. I think we could help each other.

ERIC: What do you mean?

CLARENCE: I’m saying we should combine forces, share information. I promise you, The Bully Book keeps its claws on you well past sixth grade. I still have a stake in this. You can help me, and I, you. I want you to read the archives. I’ve been through them a hundred times already. I need fresh eyes. Maybe you’ll find something I’ve missed. Maybe together we can finally take this home.

ERIC: Take it home. You mean find The Bully Book?

CLARENCE: What else is there? Shake on it?

ERIC: Shake on it.

Didn’t Hear It Coming:

STUDENT: If a tree falls in the forest and nobody’s there to hear it, what does it matter? There’s stuff happening in the world that you can’t see or hear. Maybe right now one of your lieutenants is off somewhere making fun of you. Laughing at you, and you won’t even know it. I think this is happening all the time. That why I make all my lieutenants report to me whenever they hear my name mentioned. It’s why I make sure I’m friends with the most gossipy kids in class. I need to know what people think about me in my kingdom. The scariest thing about the world is knowing it goes on when you’re not there. If a tree falls in the woods, I want to hear it come down.

Journal 34-35:

ERIC: Melody, do you want to be my partner?

MELODY: Sounds great! *(jokes)* If Eric and Melody have 15 story problems left between them, and they each take 2 ½ minutes to solve, but Melody can only take another half hour of this before going
insane, how many problems will Eric and Melody solve before her brain explodes? *(they both laugh)*

Eric, we’re okay now, right?

**ERIC:** What do you mean?

**MELODY:** Like…are you still mad at me?

**ERIC:** Mad about what?

**MELODY:** I don’t know. For whatever was wrong this year. You’ve been avoiding me.

**ERIC:** You were avoiding me!

**MELODY:** I tried talking to you. You just ignored me.

**ERIC:** Well…it makes it kind of hard for us to be friends when you’re dating him.

**MELODY:** I know that you don’t like Jason, but he’s getting better.

**ERIC:** He’s evil.

**MELODY:** I’m trying to make him better. That’s one of the reasons I said I’d go out with him.

**ERIC:** Oh, great reason!

**MELODY:** I tried to make things better for you, too.

**ERIC:** Well, it hasn’t worked! *(Jason cuts in)*

**JASON:** Why don’t you step away from my girlfriend, gaywad?

**MELODY:** *(ignoring MELODY)* Jason, cut it out.

**JASON:** *(ignoring MELODY)* She doesn’t like you, Grunt.

**ADRIAN:** What do you think, Haskins? You think you’re cool?

**DONOVAN:** You’re gay.

**JASON:** *(To the CLASS)* He’s the Grunt! He’s gay! We’re gonna make him pay!

**KIDS:** *(chanting)* He’s the Grunt! He’s gay! We’re gonna make him pay!

**MELODY:** Stop it! Shut up! *(ERIC looks at MELODY, who runs off. ERIC runs off the opposite direction.)*

**JASON:** *(as ERIC runs away)* Mind your place, Grunt!

### Getting Your Hands Dirty:

**STUDENT:** It’s a very risky thing to hit a kid. It doesn’t fit the image we’re going for. So if you have to do it, absolutely no one can know. There aren’t too many rewards. The only one is controlling your Grunt. And if it comes to that, it’s worth it. An out-of-control Grunt is one who talks back to you or your lieutenants. A Grunt who doesn’t do what you say. You need to take quick action, and physical violence might be what you have to do. If you’ve done your job giving the Grunt a bad reputation with the teachers, he won’t tell on you. Leave no marks. They speak, too.

### Journal 36:

*ERIC runs onstage, obviously running from a pursuer. He stops and stares, reading a plaque (that is shown on the projector screen): In the summer of 1987, Arborland Elementary School was expanded. Under the supervision of Superintendent Irving Davis, a new wing was added, providing modern classrooms and an administrative center. These welcome additions were made possible by a generous gift from the family of Ronald and Harriet Stullman.)* and he grins. *ERIC pulls out his cell phone.*

**ERIC:** Clarence, we need to meet. Now.

### Looking out the Window:
STUDENT: The older I get, the stranger the world seems. Maybe I just understand it better. Last night I saw a TV movie about a nuclear bomb hitting us. The movie got good after the nuke went off. My mom cried during this part where a baby dies. At the end, they kept saying the survivors had to band together and make a new society from the rubble. I wonder what it’d be like if a bomb did go off and destroy everything. I don’t want people to die, but when the survivors were talking about a new society, I got excited. I’ve already got a ton of ideas about how to make a better society. We could stop all the wars and things that make life suck. We could build it from the plan that’s in your hands right now.

Journal 37:

ERIC and CLARENCE meet onstage. They have many of the pages from the archives with them.

ERIC: Look here. Read the thing about 1987. Read the 7th paragraph.
CLARENCE: “This year, I survived the school district merger, outsmarted kids ten times my size, and completely conquered sixth grade. I’ve got a ton of friends, everybody does what I say, and teachers don’t mess with me. This has been the best year of my life and I made it all by myself.” I don’t believe it…
ERIC: You better. This is the break we needed. I went to the school library after lunch today. The ’87 yearbook’s not there, so I asked the librarian about it.
CLARENCE: (Suddenly guarded) She want to know why?
ERIC: I told her I was doing a project on the history of the Arborland School District. She said the school doesn’t have any yearbooks or student lists before 1998. That’s the year they sent everything to the city to be digitized. There’s an archive room at City Hall that keeps all the old stuff, but they can’t afford a full-time librarian, so the hours are awful.
CLARENCE: When are they open?
ERIC: 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on weekdays and 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays.
CLARENCE: So this week’s out. We’ll be in school.
ERIC: Right.
CLARENCE: All right. (uneasy) Saturday, then.
ERIC: Do you wanna go get something to eat? You know, celebrate or something?
CLARENCE: Actually, I’ve got a lot of work to do today. Homework, you know? So, I can’t really…
ERIC: Okay. I guess I’ll see you Saturday?
CLARENCE: Yeah. For sure.

Journal 38:

ERIC has gone to the City Hall by himself. He walks in and surprises the LADY working, who falls off her chair and flails. She is quickly apologetic.

LADY: Young man! Young man! I’m sorry, young man. I didn’t mean to frighten you. You just startled me. No one usually comes in here. But we are open.
LADY: Right. Now, be careful with that, if you please. You can read it over there, but I’m afraid you
can’t leave the room with it.

ERIC: That’s okay.

ERIC begins to look through the pictures. On the projector, different pictures show, and one catches ERIC’s interest. It’s Ms. WHITNER.

Everything in Place:

STUDENT: When the school districts merged, a lot of new kids came into our sixth-grade class. And they brought trouble. Everyone got freaked out about it. The whole Social Order was turned upside down. It was a nightmare. I developed my system out of this craziness to put my house in order, like my mom would say. It took a lot of observation and thought and trial and error, but eventually, I modeled my classroom into a nice, well-ordered place, where I was on top and everybody knew it. It really has been a great year and I couldn’t have done it without my Grunt. Good luck to you, Keepers of The Book.

From here on out, the story is told to the new Keeper of the Book through ERIC’s journal entries. Set changes are shown on a projector screen to make it easy to stage.

Journal 39-40:

ERIC is sitting in the back of the classroom, waiting for Ms. WHITNER to enter the classroom. ERIC has written the words “HEY GRUNT” on the board (as seen on the projector). When WHITNER enters, she freezes. She drops her lunch on the ground, enraged.

MR. WHITNER: You childish, ridiculous…all these years. (crosses to Clark’s office DSL) You’re the same Tony Clark. My father’s dying and you’re calling me names! Like we’re still in grade school!

ERIC crosses DSR to City Hall. ERIC has run there to look at the yearbook again.

ERIC: I’m sorry, but I need to see the Arborland Elementary yearbook again. 1987.

LADY hands ERIC the book and he searches through again. The projector screen shows a picture of TONY CLARK. ERIC is in shock.

ERIC: Principal Clark. She wrote the book.

Journal 41-42:

In CLARK’s office

ERIC: Thanks for agreeing to be my interview subject, Ms. Clark. When Mr. Whitner told us to interview the Person We Admire Most, I couldn’t think of anyone better.

CLARK: I’m flattered, Eric.

ERIC: Well…yeah. Cool. What were you like at my age, Ms. Clark?

CLARK: Well, I think I was a fairly average kid. Certainly a bigger reader than most. A happy
childhood.

ERIC: Were you a writer, also?


ERIC: Yes, let’s talk about you and Ms. Whitner. I understand the two of you went to school here together?

CLARK: That’s true. How’d you know that, Eric?

ERIC: Were you friends?

CLARK: We didn’t really run in the same circles.

ERIC: Would you say you were…enemies?

CLARK: No, Eric. No. And honestly, I don’t even know why you’d ask me something like that.

ERIC: So you never made fun of her, tortured her, humiliated her in class?

CLARK: Eric! I don’t know where you’re…Ms. Whitner hasn’t been…

ERIC: She hasn’t say anything to me, Principal Clark. I’m just asking generally. I’m trying to get a sense of what school was like when you were a kid because, see, at school nowadays, that kind of stuff is fairly common.

CLARK: Are you having trouble at school, Eric? Because you know we’ve got mechanisms to deal with that sort of thing.

ERIC: Yes, I’m sure you do. But it’s nothing compared to what they have, Principal Clark.

CLARK: They? Who is they?

ERIC: You know. The ones who have it.

CLARK: Have what?

ERIC: There’s a legend at our school, Principal Clark. About a book that will teach you how to rule the class. It’s said to be passed down from grade to grade. The Book instructs its Keeper to pick one kid, of specific description, to be the lowest of the low. It calls this one the Grunt. In your time at our school, Mr. Clark, did such a legend exist? Have you heard about a Book? Have you heard of the Grunt?

CLARK: (Quiet) You know, Ms. Whitner’s had trouble lately in her classroom. Heard about it?

ERIC: No.

CLARK: Because this ‘legend’ you’re talking about, it sounds a lot like some abusive graffiti that was written on her whiteboard. You know the New Rules. Zero Tolerance. Any student defacing school property receives a 60-day suspension. Plus the 60 days for harassing a teacher. You couldn’t even make it up in summer school.

ERIC: But The Book…

CLARK: What about it?

ERIC: You covered it up, didn’t you? How could you not know? How could you forget?

CLARK: Mrs. Bellmont. Would you come in and escort Mr. Haskins back to school.

ERIC: Thanks for the interview, Mr. Clark. There sure is a lot about you to admire.

CLARK: I try to be good at what I do, Eric. I can’t explain it. You know. It’s hard…when you’re a kid.

ERIC: Yes, Ms. Clark. It is. And you’re not making it any easier.
Journal 43:

ERIC is trying to call CLARENCE after his meeting with CLARK. Finally, CLARENCE picks up the phone.

CLARENCE: Hey, Eric.
ERIC: Clarence! Where have you been—I’ve been calling you all week! I even came to your house! Clarence, listen to me, Clarence. I found the author of The Bully Book.
CLARENCE: Yeah…
ERIC: Yes! It’s Tony Clark, Clarence! Principal Tony Clark!
CLARENCE: Oh.
ERIC: What do you mean, ‘oh’? This is the biggest news we’ve ever got!
CLARENCE: I’m moving, Eric. I didn’t want to upset you. My mom and I are moving to Petoskey. High school ended two weeks ago, so we’ve been packing up the house and making trips in the van. Everything’s moved now. We’re leaving tonight for good. Sorry I didn’t have time to say goodbye. It was all really sudden.
ERIC: So you’re getting out.
CLARENCE: What do you mean?
CLARENCE: Well…
ERIC: You’re done with it. Moving on. But I can’t leave. I’m stuck here! This is my world now, Clarence! Get out of it!
CLARENCE: Eric, calm down. You’ve got to listen to me.
ERIC: What do you have to say?
CLARENCE: Listen. What do you want me to do with the archives? I don’t need them now. If you want, I can--
ERIC: I don’t want the archives, Clarence. What is want is to be free from this nightmare. Burn them for all I care.

Journal 44:

A little time has passed. The students are signing yearbooks. COLIN is writing in ERIC’s yearbook while Melody approaches him.

COLIN: (reading aloud) Good knowing you this year. Let’s still be friends in middle school. (He hand ERIC back his yearbook)
MELODY: (To ERIC) Jason and I broke up. He says he wants to be single for middle school.
ERIC: Oh.
MELODY: It’s okay. (They exchange yearbooks) He was a jerk anyway.
ERIC: Sure.
MELODY: Well, you knew that, I guess. (she begins writing in ERIC’s yearbook) I really don’t know what I was thinking. (pause) What are you doing this summer? (pause) Eric? What are you doing this summer? We should hang out. (pause) Do you think I’m bad?
LOUDSPEAKER: Eric Haskins to the office. I repeat. Eric Haskins to the office.
MELODY: Eric, are you in trouble?
ERIC: (They exchange yearbooks again) Always.

The scenes quickly changes to CLARK’s office.

CLARK: Have a seat, Eric.
ERIC: Okay.
CLARK: Our conversation the other day. Do you remember it?
ERIC: How could I forget?
CLARK: I’ve been thinking…for a very long time. You’ve reminded me of things.
ERIC: Yeah?
CLARK: Yeah. Things I’d prefer to forget. I always thought I understood this school. Better than anyone. That’s why I went into education, Eric. That’s why I came back. You know I could’ve been anything? Could’ve been a doctor, a lawyer. I had the grades. Why do you think I made all the New Rules, Eric? Because I wanted this school to be great. I’ve wanted that since I was eleven years old. But sometimes you hurt people when you’re trying to do good. And when I do something wrong, I try to make up for it.
ERIC: That why you gave Ms. Whitner a job?
CLARK: I don’t know what he’s been telling you, Eric. But I’m trying to do right here. I’m trying to put at rest your fears.
ERIC: I’m not afraid of you, Principal Clark. What have you got to say to me?
CLARK: I’m sorry, Eric. When I was your age, I think I had some problems. At home, in school. I was confused. And I did something strange. I made this…I had these gym socks.
ERIC: What?
CLARK: I had a pair of gym socks. Terrible ones. I got the idea that I could pass these things down. To the kids in the grade below me, and that they could pass them down, and that could go on for..
ERIC: For 25 years.
CLARK: So I put the gym socks in my locker. With instructions to pass them down, and directions to keep them there. Locker 337, my favorite number.
ERIC: Locker 337.
CLARK: But, I went there this morning. I’d forgotten them years ago. Couldn’t believe they’d still be there. I went to the locker, I’ve got a master list of all the combinations. I opened it up, Eric. This morning. It’s empty, Eric! Empty! The socks were lost years ago, there’s no truth to that legend, Eric. There’s nothing there!
ERIC: Nothing?
CLARK: Nothing, Eric!
ERIC: What is the Grunt? How. Do. You. Pick. The. GRUNT?! Listen to me, Principal Clark. I don’t want this life forever. Tell me how not to be the Grunt!
CLARK: Eric, I don’t know what you’re asking.
ERIC: You do! Why won’t you tell me? Bully Bookers forget, Mr. Clark! You grow up! We live this life forever!

Journal 45-46:
ERIC is sitting in front of lockers (projector screen), looking through all he can from the archive papers. He is desperate. On the projector, we see locker 337. ERIC looks up from his papers.

ERIC: Wait... (reading from a paper) “1989: 28 lockers are added to the locker room to accommodate an expanded athletics program.” (excited pause) This isn’t the right locker. This isn’t the right locker!

The projector changes to a new locker. ERIC approaches it, but then the EVIL THREE enter. ERIC hides.

Journal 46:

The STUDENT begins to read ERIC’s narration as we watch the events unfold.

STUDENT: This will be my last entry in this journal.
JASON: Get The Book.
DONOVAN: I don’t know why we’re doing this before school clears out. If we waited an hour...
JASON: I don’t want to have to come back here. I’m done with this school. I’m never coming back.
DONOVAN: But it’s so early. What are we gonna do with it until it gets dark?
ADRIAN: We take it up to the old cabin and chill until it’s time to start the ceremony. Don’t worry about it. The ceremony’s fun. For us, anyway.
DONOVAN: Those 5th graders are in for it!
JASON: Yeah. Bag it. Let’s go.

ERIC follows the group. JASON is ahead of everyone. They place the book on a table (now in the cabin) and JASON exits.

ADRIAN: Remember when we did this last year?
DONOVAN: I was scared.
ADRIAN: Me too, but it worked out real good. I’m glad the Keepers picked Jason. Or this year would’ve sucked.
DONOVAN: I’m just glad Jason picked us as lieutenants instead of Grunts!
ADRIAN: Yeah, Haskins did pretty good, didn’t he?
DONOVAN: The Book was right. He was the perfect one.
ADRIAN: Don’t you feel stupid!
DONOVAN: Get off me!
ADRIAN: Say it! Say, ‘I was wrong!’ Say, ‘I’m stupid!’
DONOVAN: I was wrong! I’m stupid!
ADRIAN: It’s been a good year, bro.
DONOVAN: Yeah.
JASON: Get in here, fools! There’s work to do.

ERIC waits for them to exit. Then he begins going to work on the book. He disassembles his journal and combines the pages with The Bully Book while the STUDENT reads an excerpt from the book.

What is the Grunt?
**STUDENT:** The Grunt should be the person in your class who is not ugly or good-looking. Stupid or smart. Mean or nice. Funny or boring. He should be the one person in your group most defined by what he is not. Because, of course, the point of creating a Grunt is to demonstrate your own power over the way things are. The only obvious reason for him being the Grunt should be that you picked him. The Grunt is someone who does not know who he is. And you are someone who tells him who he is. He is the Grunt.

*ERIC stops working on the book, looking satisfied, and he pulls out his yearbook. He reads the note MELODY left him.*

**MELODY:** *(from upstage)* Dear Eric, I am so sorry for what happened this year. At first it seemed to me like we were both embarrassed and avoiding each other. And then I kinda got over it, but thought you still didn’t want to talk. Then the thing with Jason happened, and that’s, like, a whole other story, but I still thought about you and was trying to make things better for you any way that I could. I know that it didn’t work out the way that I planned. I should have stopped going out with him when I realized that. I just want to say that I’m sorry and I feel terrible…but you’re still one of the best friends I’ve ever had. I really hope I didn’t screw it up completely and that we can be back to how we were someday. Have a really good summer, Eric. Call me if you want to hang out.

**ERIC:** I should have been nicer to her. And Colin. We could’ve gone through this year together. *(COLIN appears in the background and stands next to MELODY. They’re proudly watching their friend, ERIC.)*

**STUDENT:** The Bully Book commanded and I obeyed. I followed every rule. The Book changed me.

**ERIC:** And now I’m going to change it.

**STUDENT:** I’m adding my journals to The Book, starting from the beginning. I’ll blend them with the pages of The Bully Book itself, so they can’t be easily unlinked. *(CLARENCE, MR. WHITNER and RICHARD enter with MELODY and COLIN)* This is the other half of the story.

**THE GRUNTS:** The Grunt speaks.

**STUDENT:** The Evil Three won’t read The Book before they pass it on. The first people to read this blend will be next year’s Bully Bookers. I don’t know how they’ll react to it or what they’ll do with it.

**ERIC:** Future Bully Bookers, I’m talking to you.

**COLIN:** I don’t know if my story will speak to you.

**MR. WHITNER:** If you have any heart at all, you’ll stop.

**RICHARD:** If you have any brains at all, you know I WILL STOP YOU.

**CLARENCE:** If you’ve read this blended Bully Book, you’ll know what I’m capable of.

**MELODY:** I’ve solved the mystery. I know your plans.

**ERIC:** And I will do everything in my power to make sure there is never again another Grunt. *(The group begins to walk to ERIC. They join together)* I’m going back to my friends. I’ll make up with Melody and I’ll bring Colin into our circle. I’m taking back my life. No one’s dictating to me anymore. And I’m exposing the madness.

**STUDENT:** If you are holding this book in your hands, I have a message for you: The Grunt knows your secrets. He can’t be contained. He has everything to gain…and you can only lose.

**ERIC:** This is a record of The Book and what it did to me. How I fought it, and the way it fought back. Once, I thought the Bully Book was a myth. Then maybe a mystery I could solve. Now I know it’s a monster and I’m trying to defeat it. Are you with me…?

**ALL:** Or The Book?
The End