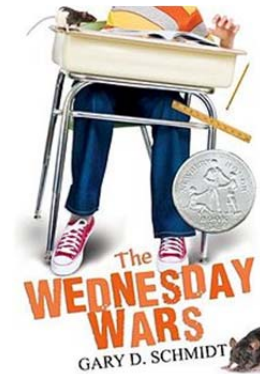


The Wednesday Wars

By Gary D. Schmidt



About This Book

Meet Holling Hoodhood, a seventh-grader at Camillo Junior High, who must spend Saturday afternoons with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, while the rest of the class has religious instruction. Mrs. Baker doesn't like Holling; he's sure of it. Why else would she make him read the plays of William Shakespeare outside class? But everyone has bigger things to worry about, like Vietnam. His father wants Holling and his sister to be on their best behavior: the success of his business depends on it. But how can Holling stay out of trouble when he has so much to contend with? A bully demanding cream puffs; angry rats; and a baseball hero signing autographs the very same night Holling has to appear in a play in yellow tights! As fate sneaks up on him again and again, Holling finds motivation in the most unexpected places and musters up the courage to embrace his destiny, in spite of himself. Gary D. Schmidt has written a wonderfully witty and compelling novel about a teenage boy's mishaps and adventures over the course of the 1967-68 school year.

Visit:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtv3UOi9HNg&feature=player_embedded

Watch a video interview with author Gary D. Schmidt in which he discusses his latest book, *Okay for Now*.

<http://www.hmhbooks.com/schmidt/faq.html>

Read author Gary D. Schmidt's responses to some frequently asked questions from readers.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the plays Holling reads with Mrs. Baker mirror events in the book?
2. After reading *The Tempest*, Mrs. Baker tells Holling that defeats help us grow. What defeats does Holling suffer in the seventh grade, and how do they help him mature?
3. Discuss Holling's relationship with his parents, especially his father. What expectations does Mr. Hoodhood have for his children? Is he involved in Holling's life? Would you consider him a good father or not? Why? How does Holling finally stand up to his father?
4. How does Holling's rescue of his sister begin to change their feelings toward each other? By the end of the book, how do they feel about each other? Discuss the events between the two that created their closeness.
5. Why does the section concerning Mickey Mantle inspire Holling to say that "When gods die, they die hard" (p. 92) Even though Holling is devastated over the treatment he receives from one of his heroes he is astounded by the loyalty of a friend. How does Danny prove his honor and friendship that night? Has a friend ever stood up for you? How? Are the boys ultimately rewarded? How?

Assorted Reviews

School Library Journal:

This entertaining and nuanced novel limns Holling Hoodhood's seventh-grade year in his Long Island community, beginning in the fall of 1967. His classmates, half of whom are Jewish, the other half Catholic, leave early on Wednesdays to attend religious training. As the sole Presbyterian, he finds himself stranded with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, whom he's sure has it in for him. She starts off creating mindless chores for him but then induces him to read Shakespeare—lots of Shakespeare. Chapters titled by month initially seem overlong, relating such diverse elements as two terrifying escaped rats, cream puffs from a local bakery, his dad being a cheapskate/cutthroat architect, and Holling's tentative and sweet relationship with classmate Meryl Lee. The scary Doug Swieteck, and his even more frightening brother, and the Vietnam War are recurring menaces. A subplot involves a classmate who, as a recent Vietnamese refugee, is learning English and suffers taunts and prejudice. Cross-country tryouts, rescuing his older runaway sister, and opening day at Yankee Stadium are highlights. There are laugh-out-loud moments that leaven the many poignant ones as Schmidt explores many important themes, not the least of which is what makes a person a hero. The tone may seem cloying at first and the plot occasionally goes over-the-top, but readers who stick with the story will be rewarded. They will appreciate Holling's gentle, caring ways and will be sad to have the book end.—Shoemaker, Joel (Reviewed July 2007) (*SLJ*, vol. 53, issue 7, p.110)

Kirkus Reviews:

It's 1967, and on Wednesdays, every Jewish kid in Holling Hoodhood's class goes to Hebrew School, and every Catholic kid goes to Catechism. Holling is Presbyterian, which means that he and Mrs. Baker are alone together every Wednesday—and she hates it just as much as he does. What unfolds is a year of Wednesday Shakespeare study, which, says Mrs. Baker, "is never boring to the true soul." Holling is dubious, but trapped. Schmidt plaits world events into the drama being played out at Camillo Junior High School, as well as plenty of comedy, as Holling and Mrs. Baker work their way from open hostility to a sweetly realized friendship. Holling navigates the multitudinous snares set for seventh-graders—parental expectations, sisters, bullies, girls—with wry wit and the knowledge that the world will always be a step or two ahead of him. Schmidt has a way of getting to the emotional heart of every scene without overstatement, allowing the reader and Holling to understand the great truths swirling around them on their own terms. It's another virtuoso turn by the author of *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (2005). – Staff (Reviewed 5-15-2007) (*Kirkus*, vol. 75, issue 10)

Publishers Weekly:

On the first day of the 1967–68 school year, Holling Hoodhood thinks he's made a mortal enemy of his new teacher when it turns out he's the only seventh-grader who does not leave early every Wednesday to attend Hebrew school or catechism. (Holling is Presbyterian, and though eminently likeable, he does have a knack for unintentionally making enemies.) Mrs. Baker first gives him custodial duties, but after hilarious if far-fetched catastrophes involving chalk dust, rats and freshly baked cream puffs, she switches to making him read Shakespeare. He overcomes his initial horror, adopting the Bard's inventive cursing as his own to dress down schoolyard bullies. Indeed standing up for himself is the real battle Holling is

waging, especially at home, where his architect father has the entire family under his thumb. Schmidt, whose *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* won both Printz and Newbery Honors, delivers another winner here, convincingly evoking 1960s Long Island, with Walter Cronkite's nightly updates about Vietnam as the soundtrack. The serious issues are leavened with ample humor, and the supporting cast—especially the wise and wonderful Mrs. Baker—is fully dimensional. Best of all is the hero, who shows himself to be more of a man than his authoritarian father. Unlike most Vietnam stories, this one ends happily, as Schmidt rewards the good guys with victories that, if not entirely true to the period, deeply satisfy. – Staff (Reviewed 4-16-2007) (*Publishers Weekly*, vol. 254, issue 16)

Booklist:

On Wednesday afternoons, while his Catholic and Jewish schoolmates attend religious instruction, Holling Hoodhood, the only Presbyterian in his seventh grade, is alone in the classroom with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, who Holling is convinced hates his guts. He feels more certain after Mrs. Baker assigns Shakespeare's plays for Holling to discuss during their shared afternoons. Each month in Holling's tumultuous seventh-grade year is a chapter in this quietly powerful coming-of-age novel set in suburban Long Island during the late '60s. The slow start may deter some readers, and Mrs. Baker is too good to be true: she arranges a meeting between Holling and the New York Yankees, brokers a deal to save a student's father's architectural firm, and, after revealing her past as an Olympic runner, coaches Holling to the varsity cross-country team. However, Schmidt, whose *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (2005) was named both a Printz and a Newbery Honor Book, makes the implausible believable and the everyday momentous. Seamlessly, he knits together the story's themes: the cultural uproar of the '60s, the internal uproar of early adolescence, and the timeless wisdom of Shakespeare's words. Holling's unwavering, distinctive voice offers a gentle, hopeful, moving story of a boy who, with the right help, learns to stretch beyond the limitations of his family, his violent times, and his fear, as he leaps into his future with his eyes and his heart wide open. – Engberg, Gillian (Reviewed 6-1-2007) (*Booklist*, vol. 103, issue 19/20, p.71)