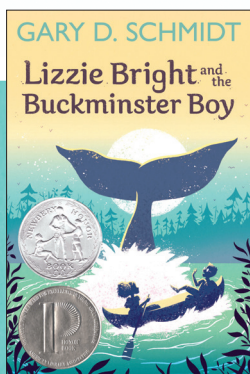
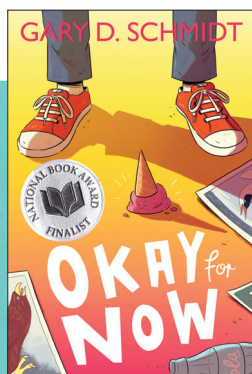


**HOLLING HOODHOOD** isn't sure he'll survive the school year. He's just started seventh grade with Mrs. Baker, a teacher he knows is out to get him. Why else would she make him read Shakespeare . . . outside of class?

The year is 1967, and he has bigger issues to worry about: the war going on in Vietnam, for one, and the Hoodhood family business, which—according to Holling's father—is more important than anything else. The Hoodhoods must be on their best behavior at all times; the success of Hoodhood and Associates depends on it. But how can Holling stay out of trouble when he has Mrs. Baker to contend with?





the  
**WEDNESDAY  
WARS**

**GARY D. SCHMIDT**

Clarion Books  
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Summary: During the 1967 school year, on Wednesday afternoons when all his classmates go to either Catechism or Hebrew school, seventh grader Holling Hoodhood stays in Mrs. Baker's classroom, where they read the plays of William Shakespeare and Holling learns much of value about the world he lives in.

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Of all the kids in the seventh grade at Camillo Junior High, there was one kid that Mrs. Baker hated with heat whiter than the sun.

Me.

And let me tell you, it wasn't for anything I'd done.

If it had been Doug Swieteck that Mrs. Baker hated, it would have made sense.

Doug Swieteck once made up a list of 410 ways to get a teacher to hate you. It began with "Spray deodorant in all her desk drawers" and got worse as it went along. A whole lot worse. I think that things became illegal around Number 167. You don't want to know what Number 400 was, and you *really* don't want to know what Number 410 was. But I'll tell you this much: They were the kinds of things that sent kids to juvenile detention homes in upstate New York, so far away that you never saw them again.

Doug Swieteck tried Number 6 on Mrs. Sidman last year. It was something about Wrigley gum and the teachers' water fountain (which was just outside the teachers' lounge) and the Polynesian Fruit Blend hair coloring that Mrs. Sidman used. It worked, and streams of juice the color of mangoes stained her face for the rest of the day, and the next day, and the next day—until, I suppose, those skin cells wore off.

Doug Swieteck was suspended for two whole weeks. Just before he left, he said that next year he was going to try Number 166 to see how much time that would get him.

The day before Doug Swieteck came back, our principal reported during Morning Announcements that Mrs. Sidman had accepted “voluntary reassignment to the Main Administrative Office.” We were all supposed to congratulate her on the new post. But it was hard to congratulate her because she almost never peeked out of the Main Administrative Office. Even when she had to be the playground monitor during recess, she mostly kept away from us. If you did get close, she’d whip out a plastic rain hat and pull it on.

It’s hard to congratulate someone who’s holding a plastic rain hat over her Polynesian Fruit Blend-colored hair.

See? That’s the kind of stuff that gets teachers to hate you.

But the thing was, I never did any of that stuff. Never. I even stayed as far away from Doug Swieteck as I could, so if he did decide to try Number 166 on anyone, I wouldn’t get blamed for standing nearby.

But it didn’t matter. Mrs. Baker hated me. She hated me a whole lot worse than Mrs. Sidman hated Doug Swieteck.

I knew it on Monday, the first day of seventh grade, when she called the class roll—which told you not only who was in the class but also where everyone lived. If your last name ended in “berg” or “zog” or “stein,” you lived on the north side. If your last name ended in “elli” or “ini” or “o,” you lived on the south side. Lee Avenue cut right between them, and if you walked out of Camillo Junior High and followed Lee Avenue across Main Street, past MacClean’s Drug Store, Goldman’s Best Bakery, and the Five & Ten-Cent Store, through another block and past the Free Public Library, and down one more block, you’d come to my house—

which my father had figured out was right smack in the middle of town. Not on the north side. Not on the south side. Just somewhere in between. "It's the Perfect House," he said.

But perfect or not, it was hard living in between. On Saturday morning, everyone north of us was at Temple Beth-El. Late on Saturday afternoon, everyone south of us was at mass at Saint Adelbert's—which had gone modern and figured that it didn't need to wake parishioners up early. But on Sunday morning—early—my family was at Saint Andrew Presbyterian Church listening to Pastor McClellan, who was old enough to have known Moses. This meant that out of the whole weekend there was only Sunday afternoon left over for full baseball teams.

This hadn't been too much of a disaster up until now. But last summer, Ben Cummings moved to Connecticut so his father could work in Groton, and Ian MacAlister moved to Biloxi so his father could be a chaplain at the base there instead of the pastor at Saint Andrew's—which is why we ended up with Pastor McClellan, who could have called Isaiah a personal friend, too.

So being a Presbyterian was now a disaster. Especially on Wednesday afternoons when, at 1:45 sharp, half of my class went to Hebrew School at Temple Beth-El, and, at 1:55, the other half went to Catechism at Saint Adelbert's. This left behind just the Presbyterians—of which there had been three, and now there was one.

Me.

I think Mrs. Baker suspected this when she came to my name on the class roll. Her voice got kind of crackly, like there was a secret code in the static underneath it.

"Holling Hoodhood," she said.

"Here." I raised my hand.

"Hoodhood."

“Yes.”

Mrs. Baker sat on the edge of her desk. This should have sent me some kind of message, since teachers aren't supposed to sit on the edge of their desks on the first day of classes. There's a rule about that.

“Hoodhood,” she said quietly. She thought for a moment. “Does your family attend Temple Beth-El?” she said.

I shook my head.

“Saint Adelbert's, then?” She asked this kind of hopefully.

I shook my head again.

“So on Wednesday afternoon you attend neither Hebrew School nor Catechism.”

I nodded.

“You are here with me.”

“I guess,” I said.

Mrs. Baker looked hard at me. I think she rolled her eyes. “Since the mutilation of ‘guess’ into an intransitive verb is a crime against the language, perhaps you might wish a full sentence to avoid prosecution—something such as, ‘I guess that Wednesday afternoons will be busy after all.’”

That's when I knew that she hated me. This look came over her face like the sun had winked out and was not going to shine again until next June.

And probably that's the same look that came over my face, since I felt the way you feel just before you throw up—cold and sweaty at the same time, and your stomach's doing things that stomachs aren't supposed to do, and you're wishing—you're really wishing—that the ham and cheese and broccoli omelet that your mother made for you for the first day of school had been Cheerios, like you really wanted, because they come up a whole lot easier, and not yellow.

If Mrs. Baker was feeling like she was going to throw up, too, she didn't show it. She looked down at the class roll. "Mai Thi Huong," she called. She looked up to find Mai Thi's raised hand, and nodded. But before she looked down, Mrs. Baker looked at me again, and this time her eyes really did roll. Then she looked down again at her list. "Daniel Hupfer," she called, and she looked up to find Danny's raised hand, and then she turned to look at me again. "Meryl Lee Kowalski," she called. She found Meryl Lee's hand, and looked at me again. She did this every time she looked up to find somebody's hand. She was watching me because she hated my guts.

I walked back to the Perfect House slowly that afternoon. I could always tell when I got there without looking up, because the sidewalk changed. Suddenly, all the cement squares were perfectly white, and none of them had a single crack. Not one. This was also true of the cement squares of the walkway leading up to the Perfect House, which were bordered by perfectly matching azalea bushes, all the same height, alternating between pink and white blossoms. The cement squares and azaleas stopped at the perfect stoop—three steps, like every other stoop on the block—and then you're up to the two-story colonial, with two windows on each side, and two dormers on the second floor. It was like every other house on the block, except neater, because my father had it painted perfectly white every other year, except for the fake aluminum shutters, which were black, and the aluminum screen door, which gleamed dully and never, ever squeaked when you opened it.

Inside, I dropped my books on the stairs. "Mom," I called.

I thought about getting something to eat. A Twinkie, maybe. Then chocolate milk that had more chocolate than milk. And then another Twinkie. After all that sugar, I figured I'd be able to come



up with something on how to live with Mrs. Baker for nine months. Either that or I wouldn't care anymore.

"Mom," I called again.

I walked past the Perfect Living Room, where no one ever sat because all the seat cushions were covered in stiff, clear plastic. You could walk in there and think that everything was for sale, it was so perfect. The carpet looked like it had never been walked on—which it almost hadn't—and the baby grand by the window looked like it had never been played—which it hadn't, since none of us could. But if anyone had ever walked in and plinked a key or sniffed the artificial tropical flowers or straightened a tie in the gleaming mirror, they sure would have been impressed at the perfect life of an architect from Hoodhood and Associates.

My mother was in the kitchen, fanning air out the open window and putting out a cigarette, because I wasn't supposed to know that she smoked, and if I did know, I wasn't supposed to say anything, and I *really* wasn't supposed to tell my father.

And that's when it came to me, even before the Twinkie.

I needed to have an ally in the war against Mrs. Baker.

"How was your first day?" my mother said.

"Mom," I said, "Mrs. Baker hates my guts."

"Mrs. Baker doesn't hate your guts." She stopped fanning and closed the window.

"Yes, she does."

"Mrs. Baker hardly knows you."

"Mom, it's not like you have to know someone well to hate their guts. You don't sit around and have a long conversation and then decide whether or not to hate their guts. You just do. And she does."

"I'm sure that Mrs. Baker is a fine person, and she certainly does not hate your guts."

How do parents get to where they can say things like this? There must be some gene that switches on at the birth of the first-born child, and suddenly stuff like that starts to come out of their mouths. It's like they haven't figured out that the language you're using is English and they should be able to understand what you're saying. Instead, you pull a string on them, and a bad record plays.

I guess they can't help it.

Right after supper, I went to the den to look for a new ally.

"Dad, Mrs. Baker hates my guts."

"Can you see that the television is on and that I'm watching Walter Cronkite?" he said.

We listened to Walter Cronkite report on the new casualty figures from Vietnam, and how the air war was being widened, and how two new brigades of the 101st Airborne Division were being sent over, until CBS finally threw in a commercial.

"Dad, Mrs. Baker hates my guts."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. She just hates my guts."

"People don't just hate your guts unless you do something to them. So what did you do?"

"Nothing."

"This is Betty Baker, right?"

"I guess."

"The Betty Baker who belongs to the Baker family?"

See what I mean about that gene thing? They miss the entire point of what you're saying.

"I guess she belongs to the Baker family," I said.

"The Baker family that owns the Baker Sporting Emporium."

"Dad, she hates my guts."

"The Baker Sporting Emporium, which is about to choose an

architect for its new building and which is considering Hoodhood and Associates among its top three choices.”

“Dad . . .”

“So, Holling, what did you do that might make Mrs. Baker hate your guts, which will make other Baker family members hate the name of Hoodhood, which will lead the Baker Sporting Emporium to choose another architect, which will kill the deal for Hoodhood and Associates, which will drive us into bankruptcy, which will encourage several lending institutions around the state to send representatives to our front stoop holding papers that have lots of legal words on them—none of them good—and which will mean that there will be no Hoodhood and Associates for you to take over when I’m ready to retire?”

Even though there wasn’t much left of the ham and cheese and broccoli omelet, it started to want to come up again.

“I guess things aren’t so bad,” I said.

“Keep them that way,” he said.

This wasn’t exactly what I had hoped for in an ally.

There was only my sister left. To ask your big sister to be your ally is like asking Nova Scotia to go into battle with you.

But I knocked on her door anyway. Loudly, since the Monkees were playing.

She pulled it open and stood there, her hands on her hips. Her lipstick was the color of a new fire engine.

“Mrs. Baker hates my guts,” I told her.

“So do I,” she said.

“I could use some help with this.”

“Ask Mom.”

“She says that Mrs. Baker doesn’t hate my guts.”

“Ask Dad.”

Silence—if you call it silence when the Monkees are playing.

“Oh,” she said. “It might hurt a business deal, right? So he won’t help the Son Who Is Going to Inherit Hoodhood and Associates.”

“What am I supposed to do?”

“If I were you, I’d head to California,” she said.

“Try again.”

She leaned against her door. “Mrs. Baker hates your guts, right?”

I nodded.

“Then, Holling, you might try getting some.”

And she closed her door.

That night, I read *Treasure Island* again, and I don’t want to brag, but I’ve read *Treasure Island* four times and *Kidnapped* twice and *The Black Arrow* twice. I even read *Ivanhoe* halfway through before I gave up, since I started *The Call of the Wild* and it was a whole lot better.

I skipped to the part where Jim Hawkins is stealing the *Hispaniola* and he’s up on the mast and Israel Hands is climbing toward him, clutching a dagger. Even so, Jim’s in pretty good shape, since he’s got two pistols against a single dagger, and Israel Hands seems about to give in. “I’ll have to strike, which comes hard,” he says. I suppose he hates Jim’s guts right at that moment. And Jim smiles, since he knows he’s got him. That’s guts.

But then Israel Hands throws the dagger, and it’s just dumb luck that saves Jim.

And I didn’t want to count on just dumb luck.



Mrs. Baker eyed me all day on Tuesday, looking like she wanted something awful to happen—sort of like what Israel Hands wanted to happen to Jim Hawkins.

It started first thing in the morning, when I caught her watching me come out of the Coat Room and walk toward my desk.

By the way, if you're wondering why a seventh-grade classroom had a Coat Room, it isn't because we weren't old enough to have lockers. It's because Camillo Junior High used to be Camillo Elementary, until the town built a new Camillo Elementary and attached it to the old Camillo Elementary by the kitchen hallway and then made the old Camillo Elementary into the new Camillo Junior High. So all the rooms on the third floor where the seventh grade was had Coat Rooms. That's where we put our stuff—even though it was 1967 already, and we should have had hall lockers, like every other seventh grade in the civilized world.

So I caught Mrs. Baker watching me come out of the Coat Room and walk toward my desk. She leaned forward, as if she was looking for something in her desk. It was creepy.

But just before I sat down, I figured it out: She'd booby-trapped my desk—like Captain Flint would have. It all came to me in a sort of vision, the kind of thing that Pastor McClellan sometimes talked about, how God sends a message to you just before some disaster, and if you listen, you stay alive. But if you don't, you don't.

I looked at my desk. I didn't see any trip wires, so probably there weren't any explosives. I checked the screws. They were all still in, so it wouldn't fall flat when I sat down.

Maybe there was something inside. Something terrible inside. Something really awful inside. Something left over from the eighth-grade biology labs last spring.