

Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Almost True Stories of Growing up Scieszka

By Jon Scieszka

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How did Jon Scieszka get so funny, anyway? Growing up as one of six brothers was a good start, but that was just the beginning. Throw in Catholic school, lots of comic books, lazy summers at the lake with time to kill, babysitting misadventures, TV shows, jokes told at family dinner, and the result is *Knucklehead*. Part memoir, part scrapbook, this hilarious trip down memory lane provides a unique glimpse into the formation of a creative mind and a free spirit.

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Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Almost True Stories of Growing up Scieszka By Jon Scieszka Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal
Starred Review. Grade 3–6—Jon Scieszka is well-known for his quirky sense of humor and ability to connect with adolescent readers, especially boys, and was named the first National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. His autobiography (Viking, 2008) is clearly aimed at his target audience and it hits an easy bulls-eye. Scieszka reads his book, explaining about growing up in a family of six boys in Flint, Michigan. Growing boys and common sense don't usually go together, and the author's tales from his boyhood offer plenty of evidence. Peppering the nativity scene with army soldiers, peeing on the space heater, dealing with vomiting cats on car trips, being required to write a list of bad words for his teacher (a nun), and explosions both small and large clearly explain how Scieszka turned out the way he did. There's plenty of bathroom humor here as well as wanton destruction. More than one of the many short chapters quickly overwhelms listeners with a feeling of impending doom as the boys come up with yet another "good idea." Yet through it all, there's the unmistakable feeling of togetherness, unity, and a sense of the security felt as part of a large and very forgiving family. There's even a short addendum where Scieszka talks about his writing. Listeners will laugh out loud and feel an uncontrollable urge to repeat bits of these stories to anyone who happens in range. Isn't that the best recommendation?—*Teresa Bateman, Brigadoon Elementary School, Federal Way, WA*
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From Booklist
In this arch, glib, unapologetically shame-free outing, Scieszka, who grew up as the second of six sons, has written an autobiography about boys, for boys and anyone else interested in baseball, fire, and peeing on stuff. The format of the book is perfectly suited to both casual and reluctant readers. The text is divided into two- to three-page nonsequential chapters and peppered with scrapbook snapshots and comic-book-ad reproductions. The accessibly irreverent language pushes the boundaries of moderation even as it reflects a sort of skewed wholesomeness. But the real testosterone payoff here is in the stories, which range from losing battles with fractious parochial-school nuns to taking turns “watching” little brothers (wherein the author watched brother number six eat a cigarette butt and charged neighborhood kids to watch him do it again). By themselves, the chapters entertain with abrupt, vulgar fun. Taken together, they offer a look at the makings of one very funny author—and a happy answer to the dreaded autobiography book report. Grades 4-7. --Thom Barthelmess

Review
"Just try to keep kids away from this collection. Inspired book design makes the volume look like an old-school comic. The front cover features an elementary-aged Scieszka popping up out of a military tank, surrounded by explosions and bombers, while the back advertises a "Treasure Chest of Fun" and displays chapter titles and excerpts along with nostalgic graphics. Scieszka answers the oft-asked question, "Where do you get your ideas?" with a slew of childhood anecdotes and his family's escapades that have given him plenty of material from which to draw. Born in 1954, the second of six brothers, he writes about Catholic and military schools, buying gifts, chores, and hand-me-downs-all familiar experiences related with a specific Scieszka twist. His mother, a nurse, insisted that her sons use proper terms for anatomy ("rectum" rather than "butt") and bodily functions ("urinate" rather than "pee"), making way for several laugh-out-loud moments. Some stories are just amiably funny, such as wearing recycled Halloween costumes, while others help readers understand more about how the author developed his unique sense of humor. Although it includes the car trip story from *Guys Write for Guys Read* (Viking, 2005), *Knucklehead* is aimed at a younger audience.

Family photographs and other period illustrations appear throughout. Entertaining and fast-moving, silly and sweet, this homage to family life is not to be missed."–***School Library Journal***

"Offering an answer to the perennial query about where his ideas come from, the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature looks back to his early 1960s youth. Fans will not be surprised to learn that, except for his mother (a nurse, fortunately) he grew up in an all-male household: father, five brothers and "even our dogs and cats and fish." The resulting memories include group pukes in the back seat, slipping toy soldiers into the Christmas creche, playing neighborhood games like "Slaughterball" and idyllic summer expeditions into the woods around his grandparents' cottage-not to mention the pleasures of random dips into the household children's encyclopedia and spurning "those weirdos Dick and Jane" to "find out more about real things like dogs in cars and cats in hats." Illustrated with truly dorky school-yearbook photos and family snapshots, this account of a thoroughly normal childhood doesn't match Gary Paulsen's memoirs for hilarity or Tomie DePaola's for cultural insight, but it will draw chuckles of amusement from middle-graders (particularly less eager readers) and of recognition from their parents and grandparents."–***Kirkus Reviews***

"In this arch, glib, unapologetically shame-free outing, Scieszka, who grew up as the second of six sons, has written an autobiography about boys, for boys and anyone else interested in baseball, fire, and peeing on stuff. The format of the book is perfectly suited to both casual and reluctant readers. The text is arranged into two- to three-page nonsequential chapters and peppered with scrapbook snapshots and comic-book-ad reproductions. The accessibly irreverent language pushes the boundaries of moderation even as it reflects a sort of skewed wholesomeness. But the real testosterone payoff here is in the stories, which range from losing battles with fractious parochial-school nuns to turns “watching” little brothers (wherein the author watched brother number six eat a cigarette butt and charged neighborhood kids to watch him do it again). By themselves, the chapters entertain with abrupt, vulgar fun. Taken together, they offer a look at the makings of one very funny author—and a happy answer to the dreaded autobiography book report."–***Booklist Reviews***

Users Review

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