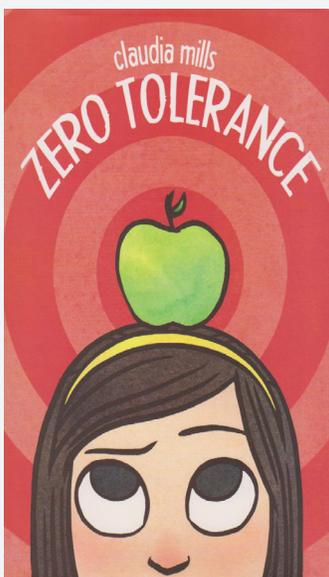


First Opinion: Zero Tolerance: The Absurdity of Blanket Statements

Mills, Claudia. *Zero Tolerance*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

Connie Ables-Rigsbee



Zero tolerance is the policy of adhering to strict and uncompromising treatment to even minor infractions of a rule or law. *Zero Tolerance*, written by Claudia Mills, addresses the issue of the importance of *wording* within rules and laws. The wording that a school system chooses when dealing with a zero-tolerance policy impacts students of all walks of life—even bright, popular honor students. From the beginning, this book encourages the reader to pull for Luke, the tall, broad-shouldered seventh grader who would have played football if his grades had been better. The main character, Sierra, has her own group of friends and her own issues. When she meets Luke, her world broadens.

The book's author addresses not only the policy of zero tolerance, but also the stigmas that can be detrimental unless we turn and look at all students as worthy of our help. As Sierra finds herself thrown into the complicated world of suspension and expulsion, though by her own innocent actions, she begins to see other students in a different light. She finds that we are all in this together.

Zero Tolerance acknowledges the teenage worries of relationships, family influence, and school culture. The book also addresses the prejudices that exist for students who find themselves in detention or suspension procedures. Mills weaves together a story that easily relates to any middle schooler and will have them cheering for Sierra.

A point made in the book by its author is that zero-tolerance policies can cause ramifications that lead to missing class, missing tests, missing labs, and just plain missing everything that encompasses school; therefore, the very student who is supposedly being disciplined falls further behind. Mills addresses how the accidental violations that occur should be thoroughly investigated to ensure that our schools remain safe, yet reasonable, institutions. Adolescents make mistakes as a natural part of their learning and development. Mills challenges preteens to think about that policy and what it could actually mean to them someday.

Zero Tolerance leaves the reader with a sense of a call to action, a yearning to do something to stop the nonsense. Preteens will enjoy this book, not only as the story of Sierra and the dilemmas of preteen life, but also as a larger context regarding school policies as being fair or unfair. Teachers may regard the book as a way to discuss important issues of rules, laws, and how the democratic process and caring individuals have the power to shape our world.

About the Author

Connie Ables-Rigsbee, PhD, is Assistant Professor of education at Franklin College in Franklin, Indiana. Franklin College is an elite liberal arts college in the Midwest. In 2008, she was awarded the Armstrong Excellence of Teaching Award in Indiana, and after teaching for twenty years in the field of social studies in the public schools, she completed her graduate work under Lynne Boyle-Baise, Keith Barton, and Terry Mason at Indiana University. She is committed to social justice and among other courses teaches a human diversity in education class at Franklin College. She is also a member of ICSS and NCSS.