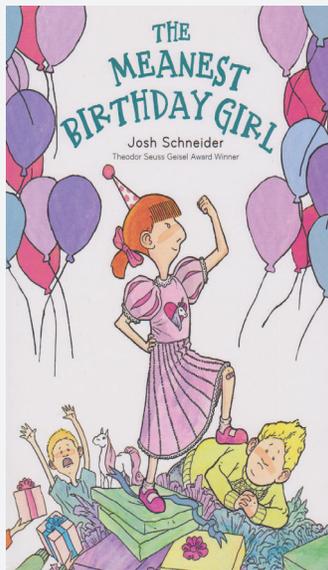


## Second Reaction: Be Careful What You Wish For

Schneider, Josh. *The Meanest Birthday Girl*. Boston: Clarion Books, 2013.

Emily Bible-Ramsey



*The Meanest Birthday Girl*, written by Josh Schneider, is an excellent example of a book that I would use to discuss social issues with students as well as strengthening communication through language. A large population of children struggle with pragmatics of communication. This book can be used as a tool for enhancing awareness and comprehension of appropriate social interactions, such as respecting others and their possessions as well as teaching empathy for others, as witnessed through the interactions of the characters and the development of their behaviors. The underlying theme in Schneider's book is the importance of responsibility and selflessness, and how sometimes we make sacrifices for the benefit of others.

While reading with Lily, my nine-year-old daughter, it was evident very early in the book that the main character, Dana, was a bully. When Dana called Anthony an "Icaborse," Lily questioned the meaning of this word and concluded that this was not a nice name to call anyone, especially a friend. Lily further disliked Dana when she pinched Anthony for her own selfish pleasure and took his desserts after obviously having more than her share. Lily used these words to describe Dana: "bratty, bully, selfish, and mean."

Lily was impressed by Dana's change in behavior after she received the white elephant from Anthony. Now Dana demonstrated selfless behavior and sacrificed food, sleep, energy,

and time while caring for the elephant, which caused her to have a different view of others, including how she was being treated by another friend, Gertrude. Dana became more aware of how her previous behavior toward Anthony may have been hurtful. Her new insight about the effects of her bullying prompted her to apologize to Anthony. She had developed empathy.

As a speech language pathologist, books such as these are used for teaching language structure and grammar, in addition to teaching pragmatics of communication. Posing questions while reading to the student and creating a dialogue related to bullying and empathy aids awareness and comprehension of appropriate behaviors in social situations. Questioning how the student thinks about Anthony's feeling, questioning ways one could change the behavior, questioning if the reader would also like an elephant and what he or she may have to sacrifice to care for the animal, and finally, why did Dana eventually give Gertrude the gift of the big, white elephant?

After reading this book, an easy transition from Dana's experience to the reader's life experiences can be made and can create an environment for discussion and more connections. In the end, Lily enjoyed the fact that she had predicted all along that Dana would give the elephant to Gertrude, a testament to her engagement with the story and the illustrations.

### **About the Author**

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