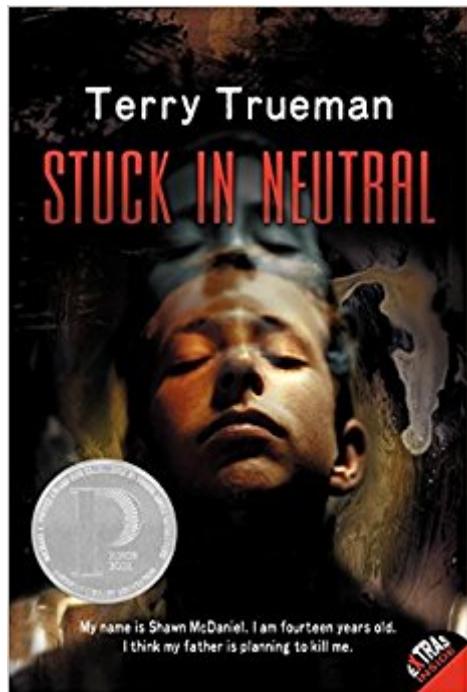


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Stuck In Neutral



Synopsis

Shawn McDaniel's life is not what it may seem to anyone looking at him. He is glued to his wheelchair, unable to voluntarily move a muscle—he can't even move his eyes. For all Shawn's father knows, his son may be suffering. Shawn may want a release. And as long as he is unable to communicate his true feelings to his father, Shawn's life is in danger. To the world, Shawn's senses seem dead. Within these pages, however, we meet a side of him that no one else has seen—a spirit that is rich beyond imagining, breathing life. The paperback features an Extras section, giving readers even more insight into Shawn's life, and includes a Q&A with Terry Trueman, as well as a sneak peek at the sequel to *Stuck in Neutral*, *Life Happens Next*. Supports the Common Core State Standards

Book Information

Series: *Stuck in Neutral* (Book 1)

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: HarperTeen; Reprint edition (July 24, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0064472132

ISBN-13: 978-0064472135

Product Dimensions: 0.2 x 5 x 6.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 260 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #30,804 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Special Needs #62 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Emotions & Feelings

Customer Reviews

Fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel loves the taste of smoked oysters and his mother's gentle hugs. Unfortunately, it's impossible for Shawn to feed himself or to hug his mom back. Shawn has cerebral palsy, a condition he has had since birth that has robbed him of all muscle control. He can't walk, talk, or even focus his eyes on his own. But despite all these handicaps, despite the frustration of not being able to communicate, Shawn is still happy to be alive: "Somehow all the things I think about and remember turn to joy... favorite movies... pinecones... chocolate pudding... the scent of Comet in a stainless steel sink.... Life can be great, even for me. Even for me." That is why he panics when he begins to suspect that his father is thinking of killing him. Shawn knows that his

father is trying to be kind; he imagines that his son's life is an endless torment. His dad has no idea of the rich life that Shawn lives inside his head. And Shawn, helpless and mute, has no way of telling him. Stuck in Neutral is a truly unique journey into the mind of a truly unique character. Shawn McDaniel, who is literally trapped in his own body, will serve as a powerful metaphor for teens who feel cornered by circumstances or their own physical shortcomings. Terry Trueman's first-person portrayal of Shawn is made all the more poignant by the fact that Trueman's own son, Henry, also suffers from cerebral palsy. This is an original and moving debut. (Ages 11 to 15)

--Jennifer Hubert --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

First-time novelist Trueman raises ethical issues about euthanasia through the relationship between 14-year-old Shawn McDaniel, who suffers from cerebral palsy, and his father. In a conversational tone, narrator Shawn explains that when he was born, a tiny blood vessel burst in his brain, leaving him unable to control any of his muscles. What no one knows is that Shawn is a "secret genius" who, while unable to communicate, remembers everything he has ever heard. His condition, which includes violent seizures, overwhelmed his father, who moved out when Shawn was three years old; the man later won a Pulitzer Prize for a poem based on his experiences as parent to a victim of C.P. Weaving together memories with present-day accounts, Shawn describes the highs and lows of his day-to-day life as well as his father's increasing fascination with euthanasia and evidence that the man is working up the courage to personally "end [Shawn's] pain." The strength of the novel lies in the father-son dynamic; the delicate scenes between them carefully illustrate their mutual quest to understand each other. The other characters (Shawn's brother and sister, mother, teachers) lack this complexity. As a result, many of the scenes feel more contrived than heartfelt ("I always feel so guilty complaining about it at all!" says his sister). All in all, the book's concepts are more compelling than the story line itself. Ages 10-up. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I watched a kid perform a portion of this book at the National Championship for Speech and Debate sometime ago, and I was intrigued by the story so I bought the book. I had no idea it was as short as it was, but it did give a more complete story (compared to the 10 minute Dramatic Interpretation). I will tell you right now that the ending is like "Inception" - it leaves you hanging!!! So if you hate those kinds of stories where the ending is unresolved, DO NOT READ THIS BOOK. It'll leave you extremely frustrated!

Terry Trueman's *Stuck In Neutral* was inspired by his son Sheehan, who has cerebral palsy, is not able to communicate, and has been labeled profoundly developmentally disabled. Trueman recently penned *Sheehan: Heartbreak and Redemption*, about his own personal struggle with his son's severe cerebral palsy that inspired *Stuck in Neutral*. Trueman's protagonist Shawn McDaniel is in much the same boat; he's unable to communicate or control any of his muscles, including his eyes, and even his family has chalked him up as profoundly retarded. But *Stuck in Neutral*, told from Shawn's point of view, reveals a witty narrator with a photographic memory and a zest for life, even if he's not able to communicate it to his family. There's not a trace of self-pity, even though he's at the mercy of family and caretakers for everything from feeding to bathrooming, and he's in a class of profoundly retarded classmates. The plot revolves around the suspicion that Shawn's father is planning to kill him out of "mercy" for Shawn's suffering and his ever-present seizures. The binding link that weaves throughout the story centers on his father's poem about young Shawn that won numerous awards including the Pulitzer. Now his father, who deserted the family years ago, is a celebrity for his poem that presents Shawn as a helpless, pitiable object, not the funny, smart teenager that he's become, if only in his head, and his father seems inspired by a recent "mercy killing" of another handicapped child. Trueman does a masterful job of leaving the ending open (he penned a novel written from Shawn's brother Paul's perspective, *Cruise Control*, that explores Paul's feelings towards his brother and his situation, which is also open-ended in its final decision), and Shawn is an utterly hip, real narrator that shows us how easy (and dangerous) it is to judge someone based on appearances.

My 7th grade students LOVE this audiobook because it is thought provoking and funny. The reader's voice really suits the man character. You will enjoy it!

THIS is a book that seems real and makes me so want to be able to understand and communicate with the handicapped people I help. We/I don't understand what they could tell us if they could talk to us. My favorite part is where he says he appreciates his big brother for putting taco chips in his mouth because, unlike his normal mush-stuff, they have an exciting taste. And [SPOILER ALERT] when he has seizures and floats above what's happening and can go anywhere he wants.

In a phenomenally personal story Terry Trueman takes us into the mind of a profoundly, developmentally disabled cerebral palsy sufferer who's also a quirky, insightful, vibrantly alive 14 year old. However this kid is pretty much input only. Who can tell what goes on in the mind of a child

who cannot even control his own eye blinks? While the protagonist in this story is unable to communicate with anyone in his world, this book gives us an inner monologue that shows us a unique individual who's glad to be alive and who is relishing each and every new life experience with the wonder of a child (and sometimes that of a horny kid). This kid's inner monologue connects with the reader on a level that books seldom do. Written by the father of just such a boy, this book may even afflict the reader a bit too, only the body parts that the sympathetic reader will be unable to control are the tear ducts. And yet for the most part this is NOT a sad, maudlin, tear-jerker of a book. One really needs to read this oneself to experience the full effect but even the visceral dread that one experiences as the kid describes his fear that his father may end his life in order to spare him continued suffering is only accentuated by the feel of having so few pages remaining unread in the book. I've rated Terry Trueman's other book *Inside Out* as being an unsung work of genius, this, his first book, is perhaps even better. If you ever wanted to really fulfill that old adage about understanding someone by walking a mile in his moccasins, pick up one of these books.

I purchased other books by Truman and my reluctant readers (in this case, boys in grades 8-10) actually fought over who got to have the copy next. That's absolutely a reading teacher's dream. These are the boys who I've had in classes for several years and have always had to struggle to get them to read. They would rather take the dropped grade than read anything longer than two pages. They are "eating-up" the books by Terry Trueman. That's worth 4 stars right there.

I have taught this book to 8th graders 5 times over the past 10 years. The voice and themes of the protagonist, Shawn, make us all in the abled-world stop and think. It also raises complex, difficult, and unanswerable questions about mercy, grace, dignity and love. Terry Trueman created Shawn with a voice that fits his 14 year-old protagonist. The digital version has some extras like what would Shawn's iPod playlist be and his favorite movies--cool stuff.

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