

A Work in Progress

by Jarrett Lerner

An Educator's Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

Will is a big kid in a school of not-so-big kids. So he hides...in baggy jeans and oversized hoodies, in the back row during class, and anywhere but the cafeteria during lunch. But shame isn't the only feeling that dominates Will's life. He's also got a crush on a girl named Jules, who he knows he doesn't have a chance with, but he can't help wondering *What if...?* Will the monster inside Will's mind allow him the motivation and patience to change his habits? Or will it make his shame even worse?

VOCABULARY WORDS

Scowling (p. 2)

Oblivious (p. 26)

Dawdle (p. 44)

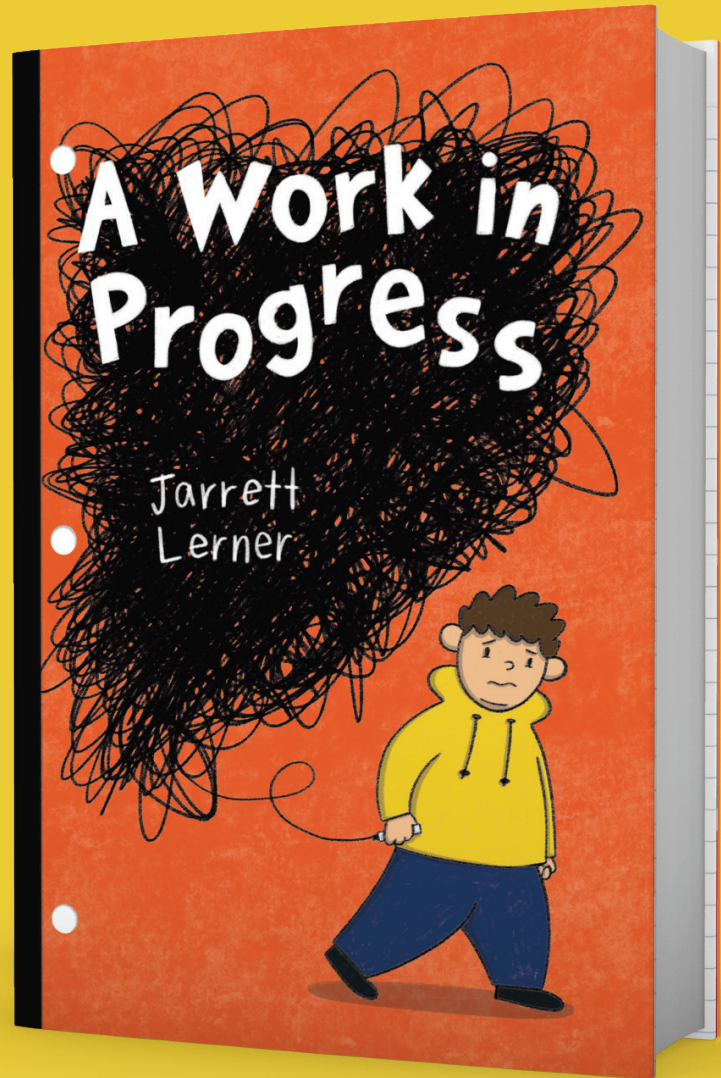
Fascinated (p. 63)

Crook (p. 69)

Devour (p.122)

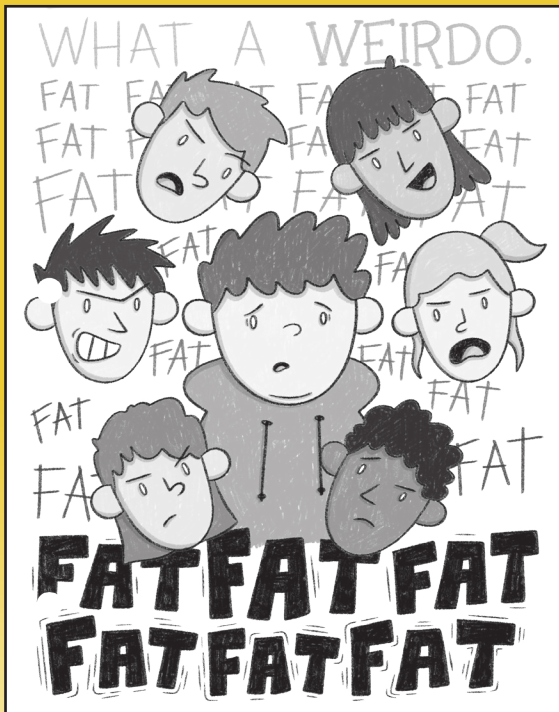
Obliterated (p. 153)

Dumbfounded (p. 203)

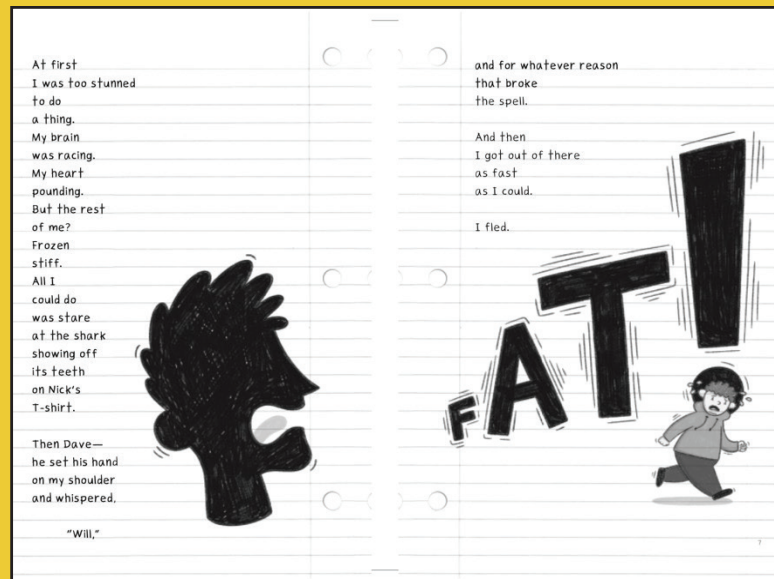


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

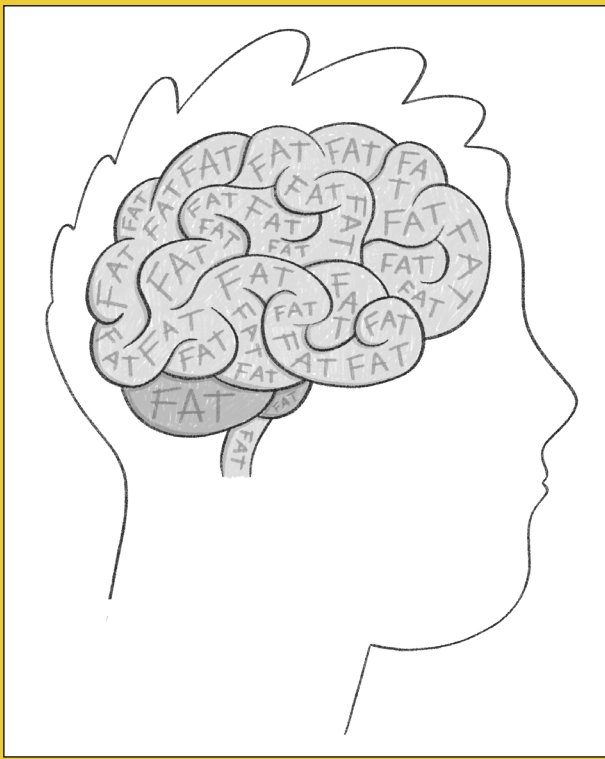
1. Will uses the phrase "halfway to angry." What does that mean to you? How can you be halfway to an emotion? Have you ever been halfway to angry?
2. On page 4, some of the words are in all capital letters. Why do you think the author did that? How does seeing those specific words capitalized impact the meaning of that stanza?
3. Have you ever experienced a moment where someone said something mean to you in front of other people? What was that like? How did it make you feel? Have you ever seen this happen to someone else?
4. Looking at the illustration on page 5, what different emotions do you see on the faces drawn there? How do the fonts and word size impact the meaning and feeling of what you see?



5. On pages 6 and 7, Will is stunned by what has happened, and then a friend tries to help. Dave "breaks the spell," and then Will flees the hallway. Look at the way the words are written. There's a significantly large illustration across the spread of pages. How does that image tie in with what is happening on the page? Why are the letters the way they are? Why is Will so small in comparison to the letters? How does the illustration of the words make you feel?

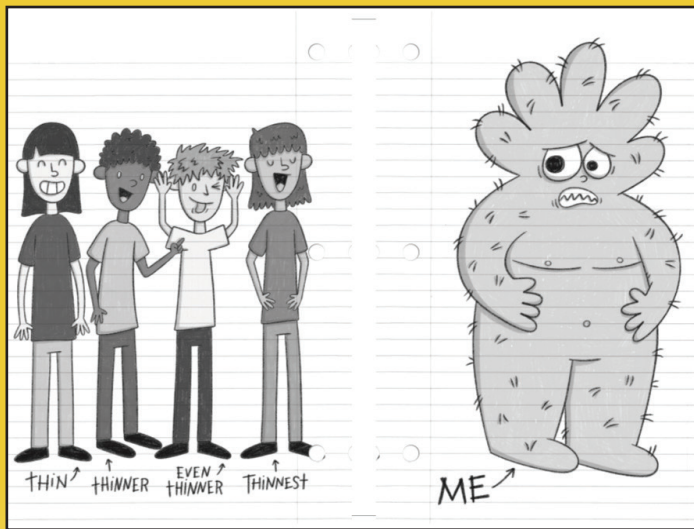


6. Will says that what he experienced is now permanently in his brain. When something is permanent, how does that impact you? What does it mean for an experience to be permanent? Look at the image of Will's brain on page 9. What do you see? Have you ever had negative thoughts or feelings about yourself? If so, did it seem like your brain would look similar to Will's if it were drawn out?



7. In school, there's a lot of discussion about bullying and what that looks like and what the process is to report it. Will says he became his own bully. Why do you think it's so easy to see the worst in ourselves? What should we do about it when we become our own bully? Do you think schools should offer resources to stop self-bullying as well?
8. On page 13, the author intentionally leaves a significant space between the words "and" and "tried." Why do you think he did that? What purpose does that pause serve? Why is the space there instead of in another spot in that stanza?
9. Will says his friends said all the right things—maybe not the "RIGHT" things, but what he wanted to hear. What would be the "RIGHT" things to say to a friend in this situation instead of what they want to hear? Would it take courage to say those things?
10. Have you ever felt like someone was doing you a favor by being your friend? Did it feel as if you owed them something?
11. Will said he learned how to hide in plain sight. How do you think kids hide in plain sight? What does that look like? Why do you think someone would want to hide? How might you spot this? What are some things you could do to befriend or encourage someone that you notice is hiding in plain sight?
12. Will says that for years he'd been living like he was as good as anyone else—eating lunch in public, raising his hand in class, etc. Why would his size impact whether he could participate in class? Why would he suddenly feel like he's not allowed or qualified to learn and to respond to class questions?
13. On page 25, we see a sketch of a black scribble. Why a scribble? Why that shape? Why do you make scribbles like that? When you've made a big scribble like that, what kind of emotions were you feeling? What kind of emotions do you think Will felt when he made this scribble?
14. Will's mom asked him if he was really sure those were the clothes he wanted, and he said it was what he wanted because it was what he "needed." Why did he "need" these clothes? Will these new clothes fix Will's problems? Why or why not?

15. Have you ever drifted away from a friend? Did it feel the same as what Will describes when he starts drifting away from his friends? Was it gradual for you or faster? Was it a good thing, a neutral thing, or a bad thing when you and your friend drifted apart?
16. Will says that he's thought about that handful of "never-ending moments" in fourth grade (p. 37). How can a moment be never-ending?
17. Reflect on the image that covers pages 42 to 43. Will sees himself very differently from everyone else. Other than size, what differences do you see between the kids on the left and how Will sees himself? Have you ever felt like you were different from everyone else? If you were to draw that, what would it look like?



18. Think about your school cafeteria. How would you describe it? Is it similar to how Will's cafeteria is described or different? Is there a spot where kids who don't have a group "hide"

to eat their lunch? How do you think schools could change lunchtime to make students feel more comfortable and to allow for a break during the day while still keeping everyone safe and supervised?

19. On page 47, there's a sketch of an angry monster. Will is talking about how awful the lunch line would be. Why do you think there's an angry monster there? What could it represent? Do you think Will feels angry? Why or why not?



20. Describe Jules. How is she similar to the other characters introduced in the story by the time Will talks about her? How is she different?
21. What makes someone capable of being a love interest? What does society say makes someone worthy of being a love interest? What should really determine if someone has the potential to be a love interest?
22. Describe what relief feels like. Is it a positive thing or a negative thing?

23. How can taste buds be overwhelmed? Have your taste buds ever been overwhelmed? What's that like? Can you describe it?

24. On page 113, we see another black scribble. This time it's even larger and even darker. What do you think that means?

25. On page 138, the scribble almost overtakes the page. Were you surprised by this? Were your predictions correct?

26. On pages 152 through 163, Will is having what appears to be a discussion. We see two different fonts and can tell a conversation is going on. Who do you think Will is talking to? What makes you think that? Describe the differences between the two fonts and their "speakers." Does the bolder one make you sense any kind of emotion? What about the other one?

27. Describe Markus. Markus seems different from other people we've met in the story. How do you think Markus might be different from Will's old friends or the other kids at school?

28. Why do you think Markus felt so comfortable telling his story to Will, a kid he just met? Would you be that open with someone you just met? Why or why not?

29. Beginning on page 267 we see Will start to spiral and then start to go in and out of consciousness. Over the next several pages, how does the author

use the word space, the white space, and the black space to walk us through what's happening? Would the scene have the same impact if the author had used regular spacing and a regular verse format to tell us this part of the story? Why or why not?

30. After Will wakes up and talks to his parents, what kind of emotions do you think he feels? Nervous? Scared? Angry? Sad? Hurt? Relieved? What evidence from the text and illustrations makes you think this?

31. We can see that Markus is different—he's a friend that stays. He's a friend that wants to be a real friend. Why do you think he did that? Why do you think Will matters to him?

32. At the end of the book, Will learns that he's "a work in progress." What does that phrase mean to you? Do you see yourself like that? Do you think there will ever be a point when you are all done—a finished product?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- On page 27, Will talks about how he ruined all his clothes and then went and asked his parents to take him shopping for new clothes—clothes he could hide in. Use your creativity and compassion and design a hoodie for Will that would help him feel comfortable but encouraged.
- On page 45, Will describes what it feels like to squish into his desk and how they aren't meant for all students. The desk makes him feel out of place and

unwelcome. Think about the variety of kids who are in a school and all the needs they may have. Some kids are tall, some are very short, some are larger, and some are smaller. Some students have mobility needs. Design a better desk that will make ALL students feel like they belong in the classroom. Do some research on what kinds of desks most schools have, what kinds of new desks have been developed, and then see what you can come up with.

- Markus shares his life story with Will and asks Will what his story is. Will has to think about that. What would you say if someone asked you what your story was? Write out what you think Will should say if he were to tell his story. As an extension, if you are comfortable, you can write out what your story is, too.
- Work on a cafeteria redesign. In pairs or small groups, and using paper or digital tools, redesign a school cafeteria where everyone has a place to be. Consider all the groups of people that are in the cafeteria for lunch. Create a place where kids want to be and can feel safe and valued.
- Throughout, the author uses words, illustrations, different fonts, and the space on the page to help you feel the emotions in the story. Go back and look through some of those moments. Focus on how he uses all those things mentioned to accomplish the task. Now, write your own poem about a time when you felt big emotions using some of those same strategies.

- Will loves to draw, and at the end of the book we see that Will is learning to love skateboarding. A lot of skateboarders cover their skateboards with stickers. Design a skateboard filled with stickers that would fit Will's personality. These could be from things you know about him, images he draws, etc. Make it something Will would love. (See additional pages for skateboard printout you can use). Afterward, design a skateboard you would love, and write two to four sentences about why you would include your various stickers.
- There are a lot of big issues that students deal with at this age, including body image and self-worth. Choose an issue that is important to you and do some research on the topic using library and trusted internet sources. How many students are affected by it? How many adults? Are there resources or programs to help? What are the leading causes? Once you've done your research, compile the information in a way that can be shared with the class to educate your peers on the topic. Develop some ideas of ways your school or community could help address these issues and the needs students have related to it in a way that might be impactful. Share those ideas at the end of your presentation and then share what you've learned.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources and those included by the author and publisher in the book will help you learn more about body image and recognizing and preventing eating disorders.

nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/general-information/ten-steps

betterhelp.com/advice/body-dysmorphic-disorder/coping-with-body-image-issues-in-the-modern-world/

montana.edu/oha/blog/mind_blogs/how-to-help-friend-struggling-with-body-image.html

kidshealth.org/en/teens/body-image.html

cedars-sinai.org/blog/promoting-positive-body-image-in-children.html

For students who would like to learn how to draw or would like to expand their skills, check out the author's website and his YouTube page, [youtube.com/@JarrettLernerBooks](https://www.youtube.com/@JarrettLernerBooks)

jarrettlerner.com/activities/

Note: Page numbers refer to the hardcover edition of this title.

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SKATEBOARD DESIGN ACTIVITY



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