

**CYRM Resource Book
Middle School/
Junior High Nominees
(Grades 6-8)
2007-2008**

Chicken Boy

by Frances O’Roark Dowell

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2005.

Day of Tears

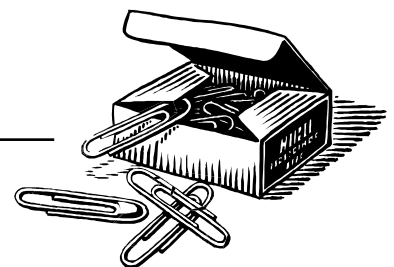
by Julius Lester

Hyperion Books for Children, 2005.

The Schwa Was Here

by Neal Shusterman

Dutton Children's Books, 2004.



California Young Reader Medal
Middle School/Junior High
Ballot
2007-2008

_____ *Chicken Boy*

_____ *Day of Tears*

_____ *The Schwa Was Here*

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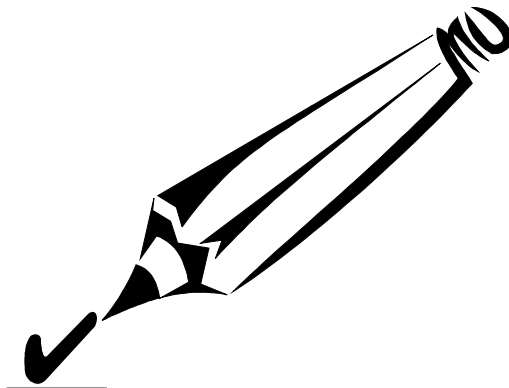
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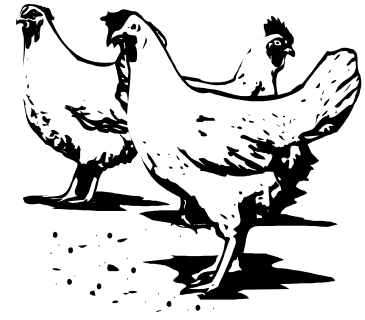
_____ *Day of Tears*

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Chicken Boy

by Frances O’Roark Dowell



Synopsis

Seventh-grader Tobin McCauley has a chip on his shoulder as wide as a barn. He and his dysfunctional family live in an “old brick shoebox” of a house in Raleigh, North Carolina. The house is filthy as a pig sty, and there is rarely any food in the cupboards. His family has a well-deserved reputation for being foul-mouthed rednecks. His father is always working, or watching NASCAR on TV or fishing up at Uncle Rob’s on the weekends. Tobin’s older brother and sister are frequently on the wrong side of the law. The family has pretty much been a mess since Tobin’s mother died of cancer five years ago. Tobin’s loud-mouthed, eccentric Granny drops him off at school his first day of seventh grade and gets herself arrested for driving up on the sidewalk. His father and Granny have an ongoing feud which threatens to tear the fragile family apart.

At school Tobin mostly likes to hover under the radar of both teachers and students, occasionally stealing pencils or cheating on a test just to keep up the family reputation. But new kid, Henry Otis, befriends Tobin and introduces him to his passion of raising chickens. Henry’s enthusiasm for chickens catches on with Tobin, and chickens become a science project as well as an egg business. Henry says that “when you learn about chickens, you will learn about life.” And the chickens indeed seem to give Tobin new purpose and direction.



Hooks

- Henry Otis is the new kid in seventh grade. Have you ever been the new kid in school? Tell about it.
- If you could come up with your own business, what would it be? Would you sell a product or perform a service? Write out a business plan that describes your business. How you would get it started? What you would need? How you would find customers? How much money do you think you could make?
- What kind of a pet do you think a chicken would make?

Meet the Author—Frances O’Roark Dowell



Frances O’Roark Dowell started writing poetry when she was in first or second grade. She did not always want to be a writer. She thought about being a cartoonist, painter, and radio disc jockey. She was almost thirty when she decided she wanted to write children’s books. Ms. Dowell has written other books – including *Dovey Coe* and *The Secret Language of Girls*. Her advice for young writers? Read, read, read, write, write, write. Ms. Dowell lives in North Carolina with her family. She writes mostly at night – as her children are still pretty young and make it hard to write during the day.

You can find out more about Ms. Dowell at:

<http://www.francesdowell.com>.



Connections for *Chicken Boy*



Chickens

- Korman, Gordon. *The Chicken Doesn't Skate*. Scholastic Press, 1996.
Morgan, Nicola. *Chicken Friend*. Candlewick Press, 2004.
Wiles, Deborah. *Love, Ruby Lavender*. Harcourt, 2001.

Self-Esteem

- Dessen, Sarah. *Keeping the Moon*. Viking, 1999.
Flake, Sharon. *The Skin I'm In*. Jump at the Sun, 1998.
Han, Jenny. *Shug*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006.
Headley, Justina Chen. *Nothing but the Truth (and a Few White Lies)*. Little, Brown, 2006.
Hobbs, Valerie. *Letting Go of Bobby James, or, How I Found Myself of Steam*.
Farrar Straus Girous, 2004.

Family Problems

- Baskin, Nora Raleigh. *Almost Home: A Novel*. Little, Brown, 2003.
Choldenko, Gennifer. *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. Putnam's, 2004.
Dee, Barbara. *Just Another Day in my Insanely Real Life: A Novel*. M. K. Elderry, 2006.
Fogelin, Adrian. *The Big Nothing*. Peachtree, 2004.
Maynard, Joyce. *The Cloud Chamber*. Simon & Schuster, 2005.
Peters, Julie Anne. *Define "Normal": A Novel*. Little, Brown, 2000.
Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Becoming Naomi León*. Scholastic, 2005.

Related Website:

- A website that shows and defines breeds of chickens is:
<http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/poultry/chickens/>

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Chicken Boy*



- Tobin’s siblings have a history of always getting in trouble. Around town, the McCauleys are known for getting in trouble. Why do you think Tobin was trying to “live up to his family’s name” at the beginning of the story?
- When Tobin gets into a fight with Cody, Henry comes to his aid. Henry says he respects Tobin for standing up to Cody and their English teacher. This is the beginning of a friendship, although reluctantly for Tobin at first. Henry draws him in with a little help from Granny, and soon, Tobin’s life changes. Is there anyone in your life who came to your aid and changed your life? It could be a friend, family member, a stranger, or even a character in a book that helped you and changed the way you went about your life. Write about this person. What did he or she do to help you? How did your life change after the incident?
- Tobin is a loner at the beginning of the story. Henry befriends him and eventually Henry and Tobin make more friends at school. One could call them the “kids who didn’t fit in.” If you were at school with Tobin and Henry, what would you do to befriend them and make them feel more comfortable at school?
- Tobin visits Henry’s house often but has never invited Henry to his house. At one point, Tobin says, “Going from Henry’s house to mine was like walking out of a color movie into one that was nothing but black and white.” What does Tobin mean by this statement and why do you think he has never invited Henry over to his house?
- Tobin’s granny tried to use legal channels to allow Tobin to live with her, which inadvertently caused Tobin some problems. Was there ever a time when you tried to do the right thing but unexpected “negative” things happened before there was a good outcome? Describe the situation, what you tried to do, the course of events, and what the final outcome was.
- Tobin says, “Maybe I got to liking chickens because my chickens were like me. Not as dumb or prehistoric as you might think after you studied on them some.” In this statement, he compares himself to chickens. Why does he say this? How has his life changed due to the chickens? Support your answer with examples from the story.
- If you were going to compare yourself to an animal, what animal would it be and why?
- In spite of Tobin’s rough exterior, Henry sees something in Tobin to admire. How does Tobin’s suspension lead to friendship with Henry?
- Tobin asks to move in with Granny. She rejects his request, yet later on tries to gain custody of Tobin. Why does she change her mind?

Day of Tears

by Julius Lester



Synopsis

The largest slave auction in U.S. history took place in Savannah, Georgia during two days of torrential rain in March of 1859. This novel, based on historical events, recounts from multiple points of view how this event affected individuals involved. Plantation owner Pierce Butler's marriage to famous English actress Frances Kemble ended because of her abolitionist opinions. This rift over slavery was passed down to the two Butler daughters, Sarah siding with her mother and Frances siding with her father. Deeply in debt due to gambling, Master Butler had to sell all of his 429 slaves. Ambitious slave auctioneer George Weems lost his voice, calling the auction over the pounding rain, and was never able to call an auction again. House slave Sampson believed a better life was in slavery, but his son Charles and daughter-in-law Winnie took advantage of the Underground Railway to run away to freedom. Jeffrey watched his lover sold to a different master and ran away many times to find his beloved Dorcas. Emma, nursemaid to Sarah and Frances, is the central character and ties all the individual tragedies together and thrusts the story into the future. She escaped to freedom in Canada and tells her granddaughter the story of the "Weeping Time."



Hooks

- What do you know about slavery? What is wrong with slavery?
- This story is based on a real event, the largest slave auction by one owner in the U.S. Why do you think a person would suddenly *sell* all his slaves?
- Even though you may feel slavery is wrong, what justification might a person give for buying or selling slaves?
- As you are reading, keep a list of quotes that are interesting or intriguing to you. Select one of these quotes. Explain what that quote means to you and why you chose that quote. Why did it draw your attention and what other thoughts or questions does it bring to your mind?

Meet the Author— Julius Lester

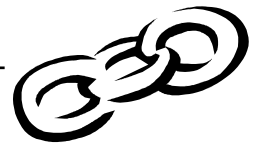


Julius Lester is a photographer and a writer. His photographs have been exhibited at the Smithsonian Institute. Mr. Lester has published over 30 books, two-thirds of which are for younger readers. He has won many awards, including the Newbery Honor Medal, National Book Award Finalist, and National Jewish Book Award Finalist. Mr. Lester is a professor at the University of Massachusetts, where he teaches History, Judaic, and Near Eastern Studies. Mr. Lester believes that his main purpose as a writer is to educate. His writing often offers an insider view of the African-American experience. Mr. Lester also has recorded two albums of original songs.

To find out more about Mr. Lester, visit his website and blog at:
<http://members.authorsguild.net/juliuslester/>.



Connections for *Day of Tears*



Point of View

- Asch, Frank. *Mr. Maxwell's Mouse*. Kids Can Press, 2004.
- Bruchac, Joseph. *Geronimo*. Scholastic, 2006.
- Hicks, Betty. *Out of Order*. Roaring Book Press, 2005.
- Koa, Kathe. *Going Under*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. HarperCollins, 1999.

Slavery and Slave Auctions

- Hurmen, Belinda. *Tancy*. Clarion Books, 1984.
- Masters, Susan Rowan. *Night Journey to Vicksburg*. Silver Moon Press, 2003.
- McMullan, Margaret. *How I Found the Strong*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- Lyons, Mary E. *Letters From a Slave Boy : the Story of Joseph Jacobs*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007.
- Lyons, Mary E. *Letters From a Slave Girl : the Story of Harriet Jacobs*. Scribner's, 1992.
- Reed, Stephanie. *Across the Wide River*. Kregel, 2004.
- Reeder, Carolyn. *Across the Lines*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1997.
- Woods, Brenda. *My Name is Sally Little Song*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2006.

Related Website

A brief description of the actual event:

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/reform/jb_reform_slaveauc_1_e.html

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Day of Tears*



- Choose one of the characters from the book, *Day of Tears*. Write a letter from the viewpoint of that character to another character in the story. Decide in which time period you are writing; are you writing in the time of slavery or years later?
- Master Butler made the choice to sell his slaves due to his gambling debts. He believed that was his only choice. Do you believe it was his only choice? What else do you think he could have done to get out of his gambling debt?
- What are your thoughts about the slave-seller? Many people in the South felt the same about slavery as the slave-seller, back in the days of slavery. Even Frances believed in slavery and felt the Southern people were doing what was best for the slaves. If you lived back in the days of slavery, what would you have done to help change this way of thinking?
- The author intersperses chapters with “The Auctioning Continues.” How do these catalog descriptions of slaves, including their ID number, name, age and attributes, contribute to the inhumanity of the auction?
- Charles disrespects his father’s attitude toward slavery. Yet, Sampson plays a role in Charles and Winnie’s escape. How is this consistent with Sampson’s style of coping with life under slavery?
- How does the rift between Pierce Butler and his wife Frances Kemble and between the daughters Sarah and Frances signal the future of the country?
- Pretend you are Master or Frances Butler. Write a letter to Sarah or Mrs. Butler explaining why the sale is your best choice and how it is good for the slaves.
- In the beginning of the book, Will, Master Butler’s manservant, says, “This isn’t rain. This is God’s tears.” (p. 3) He goes on to say how the rain came down with lightning and thunder as soon as the slave-seller called the first slave. He uses the analogy of the rain coming down as hard as sorrow. Emma, Will’s daughter, later recalls the hard rain was “so loud it was like it was doing the grieving for us.” (p. 15) Why do you believe Will and Emma use these words to describe weather during the slave auction? What image does this draw up in your mind?

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Day of Tears* continued...

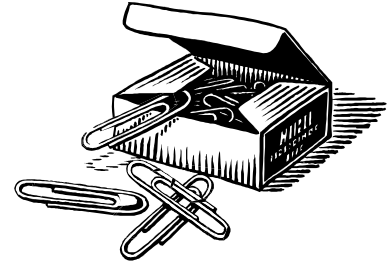


- Due to the weather and all the noise of the hard rain on the roof, plus the lightning and thunder, the slave-seller had to raise his voice in order for the auction to take place. The slave-seller consequently lost his voice and was unable to work as a slave-seller ever again. In fact, his life went downhill after the slave auction. Do you believe this was a coincidence or not? What are your thoughts about the slave-seller and what happened to him as a result of his participation in this slave auction?
- Sampson, Mistress Henfield's slave, thinks "that slavery's the best thing ever happened to (us) niggers." (p. 97) He believes this because he has a good owner; one who feeds, clothes and houses him plus lets him earn a little money for himself. Do you think Sampson is justified in his thinking? Why do you think he believes this? How did Sampson come to these beliefs?
- Sarah was clearly against slavery and the buying and selling of slaves. As a little girl, she tried her best to express her feelings to her father to no avail. When Sarah's father sold Emma, Sarah's only source of comfort, she treated her father with disdain through the day he died. Do you believe Sarah was correct in her belief and behavior? If you disagreed with your parent's beliefs, would you be able to treat your parents as Sarah did her father? How, if at all, do you think Sarah and her father could have made amends?
- Sampson claims he is a content slave. He says he has a good life and deserves the life he has been given. On page 131, Sampson says, "Mistress Henfield think she own me, but I'm the one what own her." What does Sampson mean by this statement? Do you think Sampson is really content? Support your answer with examples from the story.



The Schwa Was Here

by Neal Shusterman



Synopsis

Eighth-grader Anthony “Antsy” Bonano is the middle child in a lively Italian family living in Brooklyn. His father works in a plastics factory and frequently brings home products to test for indestructibility. One day while Antsy and his friends are trying to destroy a plastic mannequin, Antsy notices a kid, Calvin Schwa, who sat next to him all year in science class. Curious as to how Calvin escaped his notice all that time, Antsy decides to conduct a series of experiments called The Schwa Effect to see just how invisible Calvin really is. Once Antsy determines that Schwa can wear a cat costume, a day-glo orange sombrero, and sing “God Bless America” in the boy’s bathroom and still remain unnoticed, they decide to enter into a business partnership. This business involves taking bets on pranks Calvin can get away with, due to his “functional invisibility.” One prank however, lands both Antsy and Schwa in over their heads, in deep trouble with the neighborhood’s cranky, “outdooraphobic,” wealthy restaurant owner “Old Man Crawley.” The boys are sentenced to walk Crawley’s fourteen Afghan hounds daily. When Crawley’s blind granddaughter Lexie visits, the boys get an added task of entertaining her. Being the lowest paid escort for Lexie begins as a chore, but changes to a competition for her affections between Antsy and Schwa.



Hooks

- Look up the word schwa in the dictionary. What kind of person do you think a character named Schwa might be?
- What makes people popular or unpopular? Who seems to decide that in your school or community?
- Have you every felt invisible or insignificant? What did you do about it?
- Have you ever done community service?

Meet the Author—Neal Shusterman



Neal Shusterman has a unique outlook on life. He feels that “Writers are a lot like vampires. A vampire will never come into your house unless invited—and once you invite one in, he’ll grab you by the throat, and won’t let go.” Mr. Shusterman is a successful novelist, screenwriter, and television writer. He has written several hour-long prime time specials for the “Goosebumps” TV series, and he wrote for the “Animorphs” TV series. Mr. Shusterman says he is always at work creating new stories to tell. When asked why he writes, Shusterman says it is because he wants to affect people -- to somehow change them for the better. Words can change the world. Mr. Shusterman has always loved reading, and feels that stories aimed at adolescents and teens are the most important stories that can be written – that’s the time when we choose paths for ourselves.

Read more about Mr. Shusterman and his ideas in:

Something About the Author, Volume 140, pages 179-193, Gale.

or visit his website at:

<http://www.storyman.com/>.



Invisibility, Social or Other

- Clements, Andrew. *Things Not Seen*. Philomel Books, 2002.
- Gardner, Sally. *The Strongest Girl in the World; The Invisible Boy*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2007.
- Hautman, Pete. *Invisible*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2005.
- Parkinson, Siobhan. *Something Invisible*. Roaring Brook Press, 2006.
- Paulsen, Gary. *The Schernoff Discoveries*. Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers, 1997.
- Ruby, Laura. *The Wall and the Wing*. Eos, 2006.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Crash*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

Blind People

- Coleman, Michael. *On The Run*. Dutton Children's Books, 2004.
- Denenberg, Barry. *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: The Diary of Bess Brennan*. Scholastic, 2002.
- Scrimger, Richard. *From Charlie's Point of View*. Dutton, 2005.

Self Image

- Arrington, Aileen. *Paper Heart*. Front Street, 2006.
- Evangelista, Beth. *Gifted*. Walker & Co., 2005.
- Meehl, Brian. *Out of Patience*. Delacorte Press, 2006.
- Paulsen, Gary. *The Amazing Life of Birds: (the Twenty-day Puberty Journal of Duane Homer Leech)*. Wendy Lamb Books, 2006.
- Sonnenblick, Jordan. *Notes From the Midnight Driver*. Scholastic Press, 2006.
- Wolfson, Jill. *What I Call Life*. Holt, 2005.

Related Website

- For a quick definition and examples of the schwa sound, go to:
<http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000383.htm>

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *The Schwa was Here*



- People often don't see what is right in front of them. Either their mind is elsewhere or the item they are looking for just blends into the background. Tell about a time this has happened to you. Be sure to include who helped you see what was right in front of you and how it made you feel afterwards.
- Choose your favorite scene in the story and rewrite it from the viewpoint of Calvin, the Schwa.
- Look up the word "schwa" in the dictionary. Why do you think the author chose Schwa for Calvin's last name? How does Calvin's personality relate to the definition of the word "schwa?" Why do you think all the other kids don't see him?
- Why do you think Anthony's father brings home the plastic mannequin for Anthony to test and see if it is indestructible? Why didn't Anthony's father just have some lab people run experiments on it? Do you believe this was a good idea? Why or why not?
- The Schwa has a paper clip collection. What is something you or someone you know collect? Does it have sentimental value, monetary value, or self-interest value? Describe some of the pieces in this collection and how the collection began.
- Anthony and Calvin are caught by Mr. Crawley for trespassing in his apartment. When the police come, Mr. Crawley changes his mind and does not turn in the boys. Instead, he makes up his own community service punishment. Why do you think Mr. Crawley did this? Do you think the punishment fits the crime? What would you have done if you were Mr. Crawley? Explain your thinking.
- As the middle child in the Bonano family, what is it about Antsy that makes it possible for him to notice The Schwa when everyone else does not?
- The Schwa's only family members are his absent-minded father, Aunt Peggy, and a missing mother. How does the fact that his mother has been missing since he was five contribute to the Schwa's "functional invisibility?"
- Antsy's two friends are "observationally challenged;" Schwa is seemingly invisible and Lexie is blind. How much of our self-image depends on what others see in us?

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *The Schwa was Here* continued....



- In his effort to be noticed, Calvin spent his college fund money and more to rent and put up his billboard. After he had it all finished, he took Anthony to see it. His moment of success immediately turned to failure when he realized there were no cars and no one would see his billboard. Many times people work towards a goal only to have it not turn out the way they wanted. Write about a time you worked towards a goal only to have it not be successful. What was your goal? What steps did you take to accomplish it? Why was it not successful? What did you do afterwards?
- Was there ever a time you wished you could be invisible? Write about the incident and what happened. Share what you would do if you could go back and do it over again.
- Lexie and Anthony surprise Mr. Crawley with a helicopter ride. If someone were to surprise you with an adventure, what would it be? Who would you want to surprise you? What would you want them to do and what adventure would you have?
- Lexie is blind and perceives things differently. Some people think being blind is a disadvantage, but there are advantages to having the other senses “heightened.” How does Lexie’s blindness affect the way she “sees” other people? Why do you think the author chose to have a blind character in this particular story?
- In his efforts to make up for what he thought he had done, Anthony started writing graffiti to leave the Schwa’s mark on the world. Does the end justify the means? Meaning, is it okay to do something wrong or illegal if it is helpful to a friend? Explain your reasoning.

