



Another Planet: A Year in the Life of a Suburban High School

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With a novelist's eye, Elinor Burkett takes readers behind the school system's closed doors, revealing a world of mixed messages, manufactured myths, and political hype. In the wake of school shootings across the country, one question haunted America: What is going wrong inside our nation's schools? To find out, award-winning journalist Elinor Burkett spent nine months -- from the opening pep rally to graduation day -- in a suburban Minneapolis high school. She attended classes, hung out with students, listened to parents, and joined teachers on the front lines.

She soon discovered that, post-Columbine, fears about loners and misfits, "Smoker's New Year" (a pot holiday), "Zero Tolerance" policies, and school lockdowns have become as much a part of a teen's high school experience as dating and Clearasil. But Burkett goes even deeper and makes some startling conclusions in this poignant exposé of the real problems facing educators, parents, and the children they try to teach.

Another Planet: A Year in the Life of a Suburban High School Details

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From Reader Review Another Planet: A Year in the Life of a Suburban High School for online ebook

Gary Braham says

I wrote a review, and it was a good review, but for whatever reason would not save.

Edit: Of course this one saved no problem

Joyce says

Although a bit dated in reason for being written (the fall after Columbine), it is an interesting look at a year in the life of a typical public suburban high school. The scary part is that there doesn't seem to be a lot of education happening. The smart kids are pretty much learning on their own. Everyone else — teachers and students — seem to be stuck in a bureaucratic nightmare. Many of the students don't see any real reason to learn and openly defy their teachers and this is the behavior of the good kids. The teachers are defensive about all the regulations the state is imposing. The whole thing is pretty frightening.

PRINCESS says

Breaking with energy, Burkett's statement is a good measure of high school for those who have been away for a while, confused, unbalanced, and unpredictable, with a group of survivors shine as graduates.

Kevin says

This is a book that had been on my shelf for several years, and I had never gotten around to reading it. However, this is also a book with a quickly expiring timeliness factor, so I finally picked it up for a read. It's a nice book, with a cute look into a suburban, middle-income, white-bred, mid-western community. But that's really all it can claim. There's distressing information, mostly concerning the reduction of actual knowledge taught and the degradation of our youth of America. However, considering the privileges and accessibility of this specific community's denizens, we're not talking about gangs, violence, teen pregnancy, or other school scandals. It seems that the faults within the specific school examined in this book come from the suburban climate itself; they are quickly politicizing themselves to death.

But again, as intriguing as this is, and as unfortunate as this promotion of sloth and ignorance is for our future leaders, it's pretty small potatoes compared to the more inner-city environments. Also, unfortunately, "Another Planet" is not entirely revelatory to those of us who stay updated on the news or have had any recent experience in the American school system. As such, Elinor Burkett's book reads much like reality TV, focusing on major events (first day, prom, graduation, etc.), and specific stock characters (the first teacher, the homecoming king, the troubled intellectual, etc.). For a light read, and for those tacitly interested in the downfall of the iGeneration, this is interesting. For those seeking broader knowledge or looking for problem solving, I'm sure there are other reads available.

Allison says

One year in an excellent, suburban Minnesota high school in the immediate post-Columbine era. Why can't American teenagers compete with their peers around the world? Burkett hopes her research can provide some answers.

You sense that Burkett really knows and understands the people (students and staff) with whom she spent 1999-2000. The writing is engaging. The book is framed as a post-Columbine profile and it is interesting to consider that nearly all the famous school shootings have been in "good" suburban high schools. There is no examination of bullying, ADHD, or any of the other supposed hallmarks of the suburban experience.

For me, the must-read section of this book is an afterword reflecting on September 11, 2001. In the post 9-11 era, Burkett argues, the structure and content of American high-school education (with its emphasis on values and emotions and effort over rigorous content) is dangerously self-indulgent: "Certainly, we cannot be indifferent to the emotional and moral development of our children. But we've expended so much energy debating how schools should train them to feel, how much patriotism they should learn, how much tolerance they must be taught, how sensitive they should be to our diversity, that we've ignored how terrifyingly little they know. It is knowledge they need."

Cj says

I myself attended Prior Lake High and Ellie's interpretations were very off par. The teachers she so bashed were some of the most liked and kind ones. They did their jobs perfectly and many of the portrayals (especially Streges's) are way off kilter. Also many of her stereotypes (like the only black kid in school) were very wrong. My friend's sister was featured in this book and even she agrees that her high school years here were nothing like how Ellie wrote it. She hung out with the crowd that genuinely hated school and never applied themselves, leaving room for disapproval. Not to mention her 'favorite' teacher that had just started no longer works in the district, and not by said teachers choice. She was very unfair in some of her accusations and assumptions, ultimately writing from her own perceptions and opinions rather than fact. It's a good cliché book to read on your spare time, but still very inaccurate and down right wrong on most of the scenarios.

Uncle Tootie says

In 1999, a journalist embedded herself in a typical suburban high school to find out what was really going on between the brick walls. It's a year after Columbine and society is struggling to distinguish teen angst from teen terrorism. The book was extra intriguing to me because I graduated high school in 1998 and the late 90s seem like a distant memory of somebody else's life. As a prospective teacher, this book is a reminder that high school kids are equally fascinating as they are terrifying. It would be interesting to install this text into an 8th or 9th grade classroom to see if and how students would be effected by reading a true story about a high school that reflects their own. Maybe it would help teachers gain more respect in the classroom if students could see them as something other than just grade dispensers. Probably not; nonetheless, a worthwhile and quick read.

Brenda says

I stopped reading this book about 50 pages into it. I felt the author tried to portray the book as a journalist documenting life in a high school, but it was evident early on that the text was filled with personal opinions and the author's perceptions of what others were thinking rather than their actual thoughts. Disappointed!

Ritarose says

Interesting because it's about a local high school, but the author seems to have come in with an agenda - no one appears useful in this book, from the the teachers, to the kids, to the parents.

Staci Martin says

Read this just before my student teaching....should have run screaming from education after putting it down but no, I "had to make a difference"! Great book to read even if you are not "in" education. Although, I feel that we are all "in" education since in our country everyone is entitled to a public education and "public" should not equate shotty, and insignificant!

Sara says

Very disturbing take on life in an American high school, made even more interesting to me because my husband is from this town, graduated years back from this same high school, and has relatives in the book. A devastating critique of what our kids graduate NOT knowing.

In a strange aside, author Elinor Burkett's the woman who hijacked a speech at the 2010 Oscars after she and Roger Ross Williams won the award for best documentary (short subject) for "Music By Prudence," which she produced.

See if you remember this awkward acceptance speech moment:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yv86n...>

<http://popwatch.ew.com/2010/03/09/bur...>

Kelly says

Honestly, if you've been to high school in the last 10 years, this book is incredibly boring. At least, the first 3 chapters are. That's the most I could read before moving on.

Barb says

Depressing look at public schools

Lisa Faye says

An interesting in depth look at a high school in America the year after the Columbine shootings. The author spent a year embedded in a "typical" American high school to see what the culture of high schools in America looks and feels like at that time. If this is a true reflection of a "typical" American high school (which I somehow doubt it is) then it is a bit frightening!

In terms of the writing, the author never really got me into the characters and I had to go back to the list at the front of the book again and again to remember who was who. So that wasn't cool. I also found it hard to trust her - like she wanted to find out that education in the States was bad and so that is what she found.

Overall, an interesting, but not great read. Maybe teachers or people with kids in high schools in the States would find it interesting?

Sneha Srinivasan says

High school. The first word that comes to mind? Homework. Loads and loads of homework. Assignments based on research in which the handy dandy computer comes in hand. But what else? High school is such a broad topic and there isn't much to writing about it than crude teachers and disciples running sweat down their backs because of (gasp) a 99%. The author of Another Planet, takes a new twist on high school life without all the excessive drama with boys or the little knot of girls crowded over the bathroom mirrors with different types of makeup. On the contrary, Elinor Burkett focuses on those whose frame of minds are different than most others and opinions of many students. She takes a topic in each chapter that she recognizes in most high schools. One was drugs and tobacco, which there are always several students in each school; no matter the standards, that decide to take up this deterring attitude. She recognizes how each student makes up the student body and doesn't go with the well-known people. She seeks out the hidden answers from those that barely wish to speak.

A plethora of characters are mentioned but only several come back up to the surface again. More than a "storybook" of some student's high school, it is of different changes in different types of people and if those changes meant something significant. Some of the characters, do indeed change later on in the story but most rather stay stuck to their opinion and thoughts and their personality qualify them as such. For example, to avoid spoilers I won't use anything from the book but rather make something up; Sophia Fuzzbuckets was the girl who liked to smoke and chew gum in the teacher's class because she just wanted to get the school year over with. Their personality may not reflect their characterization and etc, but it does show their thoughts and their stand on a topic.

With the pace, she, is jumpy to say the least. At some points, she comes back to discuss what she had talked about in previous chapters and most of the time these are the teachers and their opinions and thoughts as the

plot moves forward. However, more often than not, in each chapter a new character is introduced giving them a specific role, minor or major, comes to play with this Prior Lake High School.

Overall, the book was interesting but not something I would read over and over again. The jumpy pace threw me off as well as the overabundance of new characters and their changes. It was hard to keep track of who was who and they just kept coming. The thoughts and opinions of such an exuberant amount of people was starting to give me second doubts of reading the book but it was unevenly balanced with other interesting research facts that i still manage to ponder about. What "Another Planet" it is.
