



# The Meanest Birthday Girl

*Josh Schneider*

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## **The Meanest Birthday Girl** Josh Schneider

It's Dana's birthday, so she can do what she likes. And what Dana likes to do is pinch. And call people names. And steal her classmates' desserts. You probably know a kid like Dana. What can stop her from being so mean? In this story, it's not what you might expect. Because sometimes, it takes a little creativity (and possibly a very large pet) to change a mean kid's ways. Five short chapters with comical full-color illustrations offer a fresh, fun take on bullying and birthdays (and pet elephants).

## **The Meanest Birthday Girl Details**

Date : Published May 7th 2013 by Clarion Books

ISBN : 9780547838144

Author : Josh Schneider

Format : Hardcover 48 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Humor, Fiction

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# From Reader Review The Meanest Birthday Girl for online ebook

## Morgan Colon says

The book, "The Meanest Birthday Girl" by Josh Schneider is a wonderful example of a children's realistic fiction book. This is a circle story. It starts out on a young girl named Dana's birthday. Dana is very selfish and rude on her birthday and picks on a young boy. The young boy gives Dana an elephant for her birthday, which she is very excited about at first. After a while, the elephant becomes too much to handle, and Dana gives the elephant to a rude girl named Gertrude on her birthday, so it becomes Gertrude's problem.

I think this is a great book. It teaches kids not to be selfish and rude, or you will pay the price later on. Most of the illustrations are full bleeds, while some parts of the book contain borders. It is a nice mix, so every page isn't the same.

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## Alice says

**3.75 Stars** This was on the list of the top picture books of 2009-2014 by Gene Nelson of Provo City Library. I have to say I think I get it.

What appeared to be a gesture of friendship, I think is really a lesson to be learned.

I don't want to get too deep but I think the Elephant is metaphorical.. you know the elephant in the room everyone is ignoring type of thing.

This birthday girl is so mean on her birthday to everyone she is surprised when the boy she was mean to brings her a large elephant. ON the surface this seems like an awesome girl...but is it.

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## Christiane says

It's rare to find a reader that is this good! Short chapters and lots of illustrations make this a perfect choice for kids just getting into chapter books. It was Dana's birthday and she could do whatever she liked, like call Anthony names and pinch Anthony and steal Anthony's dessert. Dana liked dessert. And pinching. Then Anthony gives her the most wonderful birthday present ever...an enormous white elephant! Not everyone deserves an elephant...

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## Samantha says

It's Dana's birthday and she does whatever she likes, including some not-so-nice things like pinching and

name-calling. Despite her behavior she receives a wonderful gift, a white elephant, from a classmate she picked on. Caring for the elephant proves to be too much for Dana and right when she's looking to offload the elephant another birthday rolls around, that of another classmate who has been teasing her. Dana lovingly prepares the elephant as a gift for her frenemy.

Watercolor, pen and ink, and colored pencil illustrations.

The text is more chapter book than easy reader though the size of the book is that of an easy reader. Funny and a good read aloud for grades 2-4.

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### **Teresa says**

This is a story about Dana and the story takes place on her birthday. Dana is mean to a boy named Anthony. Anthony responds to Dana's meanness by giving her a birthday present that proves to be a changing force for Dana and her mean ways.

This story is entertaining and delivers a powerful message at the same time. Dana is an entertaining character who sees the error of her ways.

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### **Barbara says**

Dana is a bit of a bully, and since it's her birthday she feels that she has free rein to do whatever she likes, including pinching her classmate Anthony, calling him names, and snatching his dessert. At the end of the day, though, Andrew surprisingly brings her a present. The enormous white elephant proves more than she can handle. The message in this humorous book is spot-on, and the watercolor, pen and ink, and colored pencil illustrations show an increasingly harried Dana as her life is given over to the care of her new pet.

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### **Kara Belden says**

3.5!

I give this a 3 and Delaney gives it a 4 because she "just likes it" and she likes birthday presents.

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### **Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says**

I don't ever remember reading books about mean girls when I was a little reader, but I seem to be reading more and more about them these days and I'm glad. It's Dana's birthday and she is a mean girl. One of her friends gives her an elephant for her birthday. It's not a good gift. Dana seems to deserve it somehow, and she suffers greatly before finally, in a mean gesture, giving it as a birthday gift to another friend.

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## Lindsey Blazek says

Early Chapter Book:

The Meanest Birthday Girl by Josh Schneider

This book is about Dana and it is her birthday so she thinks she can do whatever she likes. She chooses to pinch Anthony, call him an Ickaborse, and steal his dessert.

Later, Dana has a birthday party. Once the party is over and Dana is getting ready for bed she gets a knock at the door, it's Anthony. Anthony has a gift for her, a giant white elephant with beautiful ivory tusks and toe nails painted Dana's favorite color pink. Dana was in awe, she thought it was the best present ever and felt sort of bad for being mean to Anthony.

Over the next couple days Dana was so wore out. The elephant required so much food, so it ate all of Dana's, it needed a nice bed so Dana had to sleep on the floor, and it broke her bicycle. Then to top it all off Gertrude was picking on Dana and threw a mud ball at her.

Dana found out from Anthony that it was Gertrude's birthday. So that evening she showed up to Gertrude's door with a present. What could it be?

Schneider, J. (2013). *The Meanest Birthday Girl* (p. 48). New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

Analyzing: How would you compare the way Dana acted on her birthday to the way Gertrude acted on hers?

Creating: What do you predict will happen with the elephant next?

Applying: How is Gertrude similar to Dana?

Evaluating: Would you recommend giving someone an elephant for their birthday? Why or why not?

Evaluating: What is your opinion of the elephant and why do you feel that way?

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## Betsy says

Life is easier when you can categorize it. When you can slot it in a distinct category and reduce everything to black and white terms. Gray is problematic and messy, after all. This type of thinking certainly applies to how people learn how to read. If you're a library you separate your written fiction into five distinct locations: Baby & Board Books, Picture Books, Easy Readers, Early Chapter Books, and Middle Grade Fiction. Easy peasy. Couldn't be simpler. And it would be an absolutely perfect system if, in fact, that was how humans actually learned how to read. Wouldn't it be great if you could make mental leaps in difficulty from one book to another with sublime ease? Yet the fact of the matter is that for all that "leveling" a collection or trying to systematically give each book a Lexile reading level makes life easier for the folks who don't want to bother to read the books themselves, it's not so hotso for the kiddos. Not everything written in this world can be easily summarized. For this very reason I like books that don't slot well. That are neither fish nor fowl. And I particularly like extraordinary books that fall into this category. Behold, then, the magnificent *The Meanest Birthday Girl*. Simple, straightforward, and smart as all get out, it's too long for an easy book, too short for

an early chapter book, and entirely the wrong size for a picture book. In other words, perfect.

As Dana sees it, birthdays are great for one particular reason. "It was Dana's birthday and she could do whatever she liked." Fortunately we're dealing with a young kid here, so Dana's form of Bacchanalian abandon pretty much just boils down to eating waffles for breakfast and dinner, showing off her birthday dress, and torturing fellow student Anthony. So it's with not a little surprise that Dana finds at the end of the day that Anthony has shown up on her stoop with the world's greatest birthday present. There, in the gleam of the house lights, stands a white elephant with pink toenails and a pink bow. Dana is elated and thinks that this is the best gift a gal could receive. It isn't until she spends a little time with her white elephant gift that she begins to understand not just what a jerk she's been, but how to spread the elephant "love" to those who need it the most.

I'll confess to you right here and now that sometimes when I'm reviewing a book I find it helpful to look at the professional reviews so that I can nail down exactly WHY it is I like such n' such a book. I mean, I liked the art and the story and the characters here, sure. But what I really liked was what the book was trying to say. Small difficulty: I'm not entirely certain what that was. Is this a book about the selflessness of parenthood or is the elephant a metaphor of unchecked desires? So I turned to the professionals. PW said the book "both makes amends and pays it forward". SLJ eschewed any complex interpretations just saying that this was "more a story about a girl and her pet than it is about birthday shenanigans". The Horn Book Guide (the book didn't even rate a proper Horn Book review) found the message confusing while Kirkus gave the book a star and saw the elephant as simply a delivery system for a lesson about kindness. None of these really do the plot justice, though. I sympathize with Horn Book Guide's confusion, but I disagree that the message doesn't make any sense. It just requires the reader to dig a little deeper than your average Goosebumps novel.

Here's how I figure it. Dana's mean. She's given an elephant (I love the idea that Anthony, the victim, may have previously been himself a pretty nasty customer to have had the elephant in the first place). The elephant demands constant attention, but subtly. It could just be Dana's projections of what the elephant wants that undo her. That means she's capable of empathy, which in turn leads to her feeling bad for what she did to Anthony. And then much of why this book works as well as it does has to do with the fact that the elephant isn't, itself, a bully. If it were then the message of the book would be pounded into your skull like a hammer on a nail. Far better then that this particular elephant is just quietly insistent. It isn't incapable of emotion, mind you. I was particularly pleased with the look of intense concentration on its face as it attempts to ride Dana's rapidly crumpling bicycle. The slickest elephant moment in the book visually is when its trunk makes a sly play for Dana's sandwich when she falls asleep under a tree, but the last image as the elephant stands in front of its new owner is of equal note. There you'll see its trunk making the gentlest of movements towards the girl's slice of birthday cake. It doesn't take a Nostradamus to know that that's the last the girl will ever see of her cake from here on in.

It was the PW review that probably did the best job of honing in on what makes this book special. Said they, the author "serves justice, [and] subtly (and quite cleverly) lets readers see another side to Dana ..." That's not something that occurred to me on an early reading but it's entirely true. You meet Dana, her head resembling nothing so much in shape and size as those birthday balloons on the cover, and she does unlikable thing after unlikable thing. Then she gives up everything she has, from sandwiches to her bike, for a pachyderm. Kids may not make an immediate leap in logic between what Dana does and what they themselves sometimes have to do (willingly or unwillingly) for their little siblings, but it's there. Schneider's best move, however, is to show Dana being teased by a fellow classmate. Nothing cranks up the sympathy vote quite like someone suffering at the hands of another. Hence, by the time Dana formally apologizes to Anthony we're completely Team Dana.

The art is all done in a simple execution of pen, ink, colored pencil, and watercolor. All of Schneider's kids look like escapees from "L'il Orphan Annie" comic strips. They sport the same pupil-less eyes. Normally eyes without pupils are downright scary in some fashion, but Schneider shrinks them down so that they're little more than incredibly expressive Os. Eyebrows go a long way towards conveying emotion anyway (the shot of Anthony raising one very cross eyebrow as Dana systematically nabs his cupcake is fantastic). Because Schneider's books all have a tendency to look the same (*Tales for Very Picky Eaters* looks like *The Meanest Birthday Girl* looks like *Princess Sparkle-Heart Gets a Makeover*, etc.) there's a temptation to discount him. Resist that urge. His is a star that is rising with rocket-like rapidity. I see great things for this guy. Great things.

The age level for this will cause no end of sorrow amongst the cataloging masses. I don't care. The same could have been said for *Sadie and Ratz* (another preternaturally smart early early chapter book with a psychological base worth remembering) and a host of other books out there. What it all boils down to is the fact that *The Meanest Birthday Girl* is one of the rare books that makes for really intelligent fare. Odd? Certainly. But it's willing to go places and do things that most books for kids in the 6-9 age range don't dare. Not everyone will get what it's trying to do. And not everyone deserves to. One of the best of 2013, bar none.

For ages 6-9.

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### **Lara says**

Not a picture book, but not a typical easy-reader-chapter book. More words (and mini-chapters) compared to the former, but more pictures than the latter. A transition book?

Simple story, with the rather diva-ish heroine learning a bit of a lesson. The illustrations are fun watercolors, with Dana becoming more and more stressed by her wonderful new pet.

And yes, I'm sure the elephant is symbolic. It's a White Elephant for starters, and of course, the Elephant in the Room. For what it's worth, it's actually a pretty cute elephant.

For me, only three stars. This level of book is a hard sell for me. I can't use them for a story time, they're not the type of picture book I like (I like fantasy or humor or beautiful/adorable/remarkable illustrations), and they're usually a bit too simple for me to read for fun (I like more solid mid-grade or YA for that). I know they're an important step in developing reading skills, so would never turn a patron away if they wanted to check it out. Would even recommend this book for someone looking for this level. It's just not my particular cup of tea.

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### **Andrea Lorenz says**

The pictures in this book are absolutely beautiful and delightful. The story isn't bad either. When Dana receives a big white elephant for her birthday from someone she had bullied, she gets more than she bargained for. Schneider's pictures are ink (I believe) with watercolor. The children look real - not all the same, not all perfect smiley faces. Each picture is superbly detailed. Dana's room is filled with the detritus of childhood - plastic ponies, rubber balls, and dirty clothes. I like that the lesson is a little subtle here - Dana learns through experience that bullying sucks, but also is able to get her revenge.

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## **Laney says**

Title (italicize): *The Meanest Birthday Girl*

Author and Illustrator: Josh Schneider

Genre: Early Reader Fiction

Theme(s): Birthday, friendship, attitude

Opening line/sentence (type directly from text): It was Dana's birthday and she could do whatever she liked.

Brief Book Summary (2-3 sentences in your own words): This book is about a young girl, Dana, who was not very nice on her birthday. She wasn't treating her classmates nicely, and she was being a diva. One of her classmates, Anthony, gave her a large white elephant the night of her birthday. The elephant taught Dana a valuable lesson, and she apologized for being so rude to her classmates. Dana then gave the elephant to a girl in her class, Gertrude, on her birthday to teach her a lesson as well.

Professional Recommendation/Review #1 (cut & paste):

Ann Kelley (Booklist, May 1, 2013 (Vol. 109, No. 17))

Dana's birthday has gone to her head. Because it's her Special Day, Dana could do whatever she liked, which includes calling Anthony a name (Ickaborse), pinching him, and then eating his dessert at lunch. But Dana gets her comeuppance when Anthony gives her a birthday gift: an elephant, whose toenails are painted pink and pink is Dana's favorite color. The elephant is a novelty at first, but soon its taking over Dana's life by eating her food, sleeping in her bed, and riding her bicycle. Luckily, after apologizing to Anthony, he reminds her that it's Gertrude's birthday. Wonder what she is getting as a gift from Dana? In five short, humorous stories, with whimsical watercolor illustrations, this beginning chapter book by a Geisel Award winner should appeal to every new reader's sense of fun, especially if they've ever had a diva moment. And, really, who hasn't? Grades K-3

(PUBLISHER: Clarion Books (Boston:), PUBLISHED: 2013.)

Professional Recommendation/Review #2 (cut & paste):

Bonita Herold (Children's Literature)

Since it is her birthday, Dana feels she can do anything she wants. She eats her favorite breakfast, puts on her fanciest dress, and walks to the bus stop where she pinches Anthony and calls him an Ickaborse. It is her right. She shows off her dress and steals Anthony's dessert. As the birthday girl, she deserves it. When her friends leave her party, she has one last surprise visitor. Anthony turns up with a white elephant with toenails painted in Dana's favorite color. But is the elephant the wonderful present it seems (at first) to be? In this story as much about selfishness as it is about payback, Dana comes to the conclusion that maybe, just maybe, she was a little bit mean. Beginning readers--including divas, bullies, victims, and just about anyone in between--are bound to love this story about growing up and finding out that the world does not necessarily revolve around them. As a Theodor Seuss Geisel Award Winner, Schneider illustrates his own story beautifully. 2013, Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, \$14.99. Ages 6 to 9.

(PUBLISHER: Clarion Books (Boston:), PUBLISHED: 2013.)

Response to Two Professional Reviews (3-4 sentences in your own words): Both reviews give an overview of the book as a whole and then praise the story for its humor. Both believe that all children would love this book, and I agree. Everyone can be a diva at times- both boys and girls. This story teaches children that the world doesn't revolve around them while using humor that they would enjoy.

Evaluation of Literary Elements (3-4 sentences in your own words): The plot of this story is easy for beginning readers to understand, as well as humorous. The illustrations in this book are catching to the eye



because the colors used on the white pages truly stick out. There is a lot of pink and orange when Dana is being a diva, and then a lot of blues and purples when she is learning her lesson and not as happy. This is a good use of color to express emotion. The characters in this story are easy to follow, and there is a main boy character, Anthony, that makes this book not only appealing to girls, but to boys as well.

Consideration of Instructional Application (3-4 sentences in your own words): I would use this book in a second grade classroom as a read aloud. I would use this as a read aloud because it teaches a valuable lesson in a fun way. I can picture my class enjoying this. After reading this story, I would discuss it with my class and have them write a paragraph about when they learned from the book.

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### **Shawna says**

It is Dana's birthday and she gets to do whatever she wants, including calling Anthony names, pinching him, and eating his dessert. Dana is then surprised to see Anthony at her door with a birthday present, a beautiful white elephant. When Dana gets a little of what she's been dishing out, she sees the error of her ways. So who now deserves this white elephant gift?? A great read aloud and will provide opportunities for discussions on being a good friend.

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### **Colette says**

I hope I treat my friends better than Dana, because not everyone deserves an elephant! Dana is the epitome of mean! Taking things that don't belong to her, calling names, and a show-off. Anthony, who understands the value of friendship, helps Dana to understand how others would like to be treated. Funny, wonderfully clever, outrageously humorous situations, an easy reader that my students moving into chapter books will love.

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