



Word Nerd

By Susin Nielsen

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Twelve-year-old Ambrose is a glass-half-full kind of guy. A self-described “friendless nerd,” he moves from place to place every couple of years with his overprotective mother, Irene. When some bullies at his new school almost kill him by slipping a peanut into his sandwich — even though they know he has a deadly allergy — Ambrose is philosophical. Irene, however, is not and decides that Ambrose will be home-schooled.

Alone in the evenings when Irene goes to work, Ambrose pesters Cosmo, the twenty-five-year-old son of the Greek landlords who live upstairs. Cosmo has just been released from jail for breaking and entering to support a drug habit. Quite by accident, Ambrose discovers that they share a love of Scrabble and coerces Cosmo into taking him to the West Side Scrabble Club, where Cosmo falls for Amanda, the club director. Posing as Ambrose’s Big Brother to impress her, Cosmo is motivated to take Ambrose to the weekly meetings and to give him lessons in self-defense. Cosmo, Amanda, and Ambrose soon form an unlikely alliance and, for the first time in his life, Ambrose blossoms. The characters at the Scrabble Club come to embrace Ambrose for who he is and for their shared love of words. There’s only one problem: Irene has no idea what Ambrose is up to.

In this brilliantly observed novel, author Susin Nielsen transports the reader to the world of competitive Scrabble as seen from the honest yet funny viewpoint of a boy who’s searching for acceptance and for a place to call home.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Starred Review. Grade 5–7—Twelve-year-old Ambrose Bukowski and his widowed, overprotective mother, an adjunct professor, move frequently. When he almost dies after he bites into a peanut that bullies put in his sandwich, just to see if he is really allergic, Irene has had enough, and she decides to homeschool him. While she teaches at night, Ambrose gets to know 25-year-old-Cosmo, recently released from jail and the son of the Bukowskis' warmhearted Greek landlords who live upstairs. Ambrose discovers that he and his neighbor both love Scrabble, so, without his mother's knowledge, he talks Cosmo into taking him to a Scrabble Club. For the first time, Ambrose has a friend, but when his mother finds out, she starts packing up to move again to get him away from the ex-con. This prompts Ambrose to run away, determined to get his mother to listen to him. Ambrose is a neat kid who is comfortable in his own skin, despite always being an outsider. Cosmo knows he made some wrong choices, but he is regretful, as well as caring and thoughtful, and a great morale booster for Ambrose. This is a tender, often funny story with some really interesting characters. It will appeal to word nerds, but even more to anyone who has ever longed for acceptance or had to fight unreasonable parental restrictions.—*Shannon Seglin, Patrick Henry Library, Vienna, VA*

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Review

“This is a tender, often funny story with some really interesting characters. It will appeal to word nerds, but even more to anyone who has ever longed for acceptance or had to fight unreasonable parental restrictions.”

— Starred Review from *School Library Journal*

“...a beautifully drawn character.... [a] funny, wry tale, a tale that involves a lot of Scrabble (at the championship level), the reformation of an ex-con/druggie and the coming-into-himself of a boy. And there's a bit of love, too, actually.”

— *The Globe and Mail*

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Gemini Award-winner Susin Nielsen got her start feeding cast and crew muffins and bologna sandwiches on the popular television series, *Degrassi Junior High*. They hated her food (a fact that's memorialized forever in a poem the cast wrote: “An ode to Susin, the Bran Muffin Queen, we eat them, we die, then we turn green”). Luckily for Susin, they saw a spark in a spec script she wrote. Nielsen went on to pen sixteen episodes of the hit television show, and four of the books in the *Degrassi* book series. Since then, Nielsen, who has received two Canadian Screenwriter awards, has written and story-edited many TV series, including *Ready or Not*, *Madison*, *The Adventures of Shirley Holmes*, *Edgemont*, and two animated series, *What About Mimi* and *Braceface*. She co-created the pre-school series *Franny's Feet*, and is the co-creator and showrunner of the critically acclaimed series *Robson Arms*. She also adapted author Susan Juby's book, **Alice, I Think**, into a TV series. Nielsen has also published three children's books: **Hank and Fergus**, winner of the Mr. Christie's Silver Medal Award, **Mormor Moves In**, and **The Magic Beads**. She lives in Vancouver with her husband, Goran, son, Oskar, and cat, Sam.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Walter Goodwin:

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