Nothing but the Truth by Avi

Avi, born December 23, 1937 in New York was five minutes earlier then his twin sister, Emily. Early in their childhood Emily nicknamed her brother Avi, to this day he doesn’t know what the nickname stands for, but it is the only name he goes by. Growing up in Brooklyn Avi’s father was a doctor and his mother a social worker, they supported reading in Avi’s life and made reading an essential part of the daily rituals and library visits a weekly trip. Avi struggled in school because of a learning disorder called dysgraphia, which affects a person's ability to write correctly. Some of the common symptoms that are attributed to dysgraphia is writing letters backwards, incorrect spelling, unusual sized and spacing of letters, and the mispronunciation of words. This was especially difficult because Avi’s twin sister and older brother were accomplished students; (his older brother was admitted to college at 15) and Avi was failing out of his high school classes. Avi eventually changed schools and attended a high school that was tailored to helped students with writing problems. The school helped to correct Avi’s problem, but he decided to really focus on the problem when he was seventeen. To combat his problems he wrote very often, and was writing plays. Avi later became a librarian and worked for twenty-five years at the New York public library and the Trenton State College in New Jersey. When Avi’s oldest son was born, Avi changed his focus from plays to writing young adult literature. He was published for the first time in 1970, since then he has more then thirty books published. When it comes to his readers Avi is quoted, “I want my readers to feel, to think, sometimes to laugh, but most of all I want them to enjoy a good read.” Avi currently lives in Denver, Colorado.

WebQuest Steps:   
Summary of Nothing But the Truth

Classrom and Extended Activities

Other Works by Avi

Related Links

Quiz questions

Rubric and Grading Scale

Summary

Philip Malloy is a typical ninth grader—he wants to join the track team and impress the cute girl in his English class. His grades aren’t the best they could be, but he’s trying to improve both his grades and his running times. As the reader learns in the beginning of the novel though, Philip’s “D” in English will prevent him from even trying out for the track team. Suddenly, things aren’t so great in Philip’s life: his parents are arguing a lot, his dad is pressuring him to practice for track, and he just can’t seem to get along with Ms. Narwin, his English teacher. Philip thinks Ms. Narwin just doesn’t like him and that’s all there is to it. One morning in homeroom, Philip hums along to The Star Spangled Banner and is reprimanded by Ms. Narwin for creating a disturbance in the classroom. These seemingly innocuous events spiral out of control and before he realizes what is happening, Philip is deemed a repressed patriot and Ms. Narwin is a national pariah. The reader must decide who is to blame and what it means to tell the truth.

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| Classroom & Extended Activities  These activities are meant to be used as anticipatory sets or reading enhancements. | | |
| Classroom Activities:  **Dangerous Dialogue**  Students are asked to write a dialogue in the same format as the book—between student & teacher / parent.  **The Blame Game**  Students list common problems in their lives and match up easy scapegoats.  **How to Write Memos**  Students choose a memo in the book and write a similar one with a real context.  Patriotic Collage  Students cut and paste articles that pertain to the flag, the anthem, or other national symbols.  Editorials  Students are asked to respond to a local article and write an editorial response.  **Principal’s Panel**  The class interviews the principal about common behavioral concerns and options.  For Extended Use |  | **Extended Activities:**  **Walk to the Flag Pole**  Class walk to the flagpole where a student reads a patriotic story or sings the national anthem.  **Parental Interview**  Students are to interview their parents using guided questions created in class.  Writing a Screenplay  Given the proper formatting, students are asked to write 1-3 scenes of a high school misunderstanding.  Mile Walk / Run  Students must walk / run around the school track and then listen to a coach talk about sports & grades.  Digital Field Trip to…  A cemetery to count service men’s and women’s graves; or a veteran’s museum--both with a camera for a report.  Tell me a Story  Students must find a veteran and request a story, which they must report to the class. |

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| |  | | --- | | **Nothing but the Truth -** [Avi Wortis](http://www.classzone.com/novelguides/authors/avi.cfm)  **Theme:** The Fight for Truth **Grades:** Grades 7-8   **Summary:** *Nothing but the Truth* is a "documentary novel"—told in the form of school memos, diary entries, letters, radio talk show transcripts, and dialogue. Philip, a high school goof-off, hums along when the National Anthem is played over the school intercom. This gets him caught up in a battle with the forces of patriotism and school policy, eventually against the backdrop of the national media. His struggle for justice teaches him more than he ever bargained for. | |
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| |  | | --- | | **THEME OPENERS**   1. **Role-Playings.**  Call on volunteers to role-play one of the following situations: (1) Imagine you did something that seemed morally right to you at the time, but that you later regretted. Everyone you know finds out what you did and is critical of you. How would you feel? Would you change your mind about what you did? Given an opportunity to lie about what you did, would you tell the truth? Tell your story to a friend who is questioning you. (2) One of your friends has done something that you believe is right. However, everyone at school is angry with your friend. You realize that if you remain loyal to your friend, you will lose all the other friends you have. What will you do? Will you abandon the friend who is being shunned? Will you remain loyal and risk losing your other friends? Will you try to explain why you believe in what your friend did? Dramatize a telephone discussion with a friend who does not live in your town. (3) In one of your classes, a teacher you admire has suspended one of your friends. You believe your friend was at fault. The principal calls you in to find out what happened. What will you do? Will you tell the truth about what happened? Will you offer a story that will help get your friend out of trouble? Role-play your conversation with the principal. 2. **Linking to Today: Telling the Truth.**  Lead a discussion about the two questions at the beginning of the book. Encourage students to discuss what message they think the author wants to convey with the two questions. If necessary, you may prompt with questions such as the following: (1) Is telling only part of the truth dishonest? (2) Are there situations in which unfairness to an individual is justified? (3) Should a person always tell the truth even if the truth will hurt others? (4) Does justice require more than the enforcement of rules? (5) Are there circumstances when rules should be broken?   **CROSSCURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**   1. **Reporter's Report.** Invite a reporter or an editor from your local newspaper to address the class. Ask the reporter to explain how news stories are selected and prioritized, and what procedures they must follow to confirm reports they hear. For example, if a student told a story such as Philip's, what would the reporter feel was necessary to confirm the story before it could be printed? How would they handle conflicting reports? If it later turned out that the incident was less serious than their article suggested, or a person accused was innocent, would they print a new story with the whole truth? Allow time for students to ask questions. 2. **Express Yourself.** Have students choose a free-expression issue that is in the news. Suggest they read the Constitution of the United States to see in which part freedom of expression is guaranteed. Ask students: What are some examples of relevant court cases in the news? Do you favor one side or the other? Have them summarize their findings and express their views.   **RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS**   1. **Mock Election.**  In this project, students will conduct a mock election for the school board in your district. The issue of "free speech" was central to the novel. Include this or another controversial topic in the campaign. Their task is to work cooperatively to research election and campaign procedures, choose issues in the district, create campaign platforms and literature, and walk through the procedure and forms. After the campaign, students should elect the candidate who has best addressed the issues.   **Suggested Procedure:**   * Divide students into groups to research school board election procedures in your district. Assign groups different questions such as: How and when should an interested candidate announce candidacy for the election? What forms must be filed? By what date? What public forums are available for candidates to address the public? Do local groups hold candidates' nights? Are they televised? Does the local paper print a statement for every candidate? How may candidates obtain funds for the campaign? Are any sources of funding forbidden? What issues were addressed in the last campaign? Are any issues under discussion for the next campaign? Have groups report their findings to the class. * After research is completed, groups become campaign committees. Each committee should select a school board candidate. Allow the class to brainstorm and discuss what they perceive as major issues in the school district. As a class, have students select three to five major issues for candidates to address in their platforms. * Circulate the campaign literature. Stage a candidate's forum where each candidate presents his or her platform and views. Encourage class members to ask questions. When forums have finished, have each member in the class vote for the candidate who presented the best platform, and did the best job of addressing the campaign issues. Have students use the same method of voting now used in your district, such as secret ballot.  1. **Philip's Favorite Book.** In *Nothing but the Truth,* the novel Philip likes best is *The Outsiders.* Have students read *The Outsiders.* Instruct them to decide what elements in the novel appeal to Philip and why. Have them write a critique of the book from Phillip's point of view, explaining why he likes it. | |