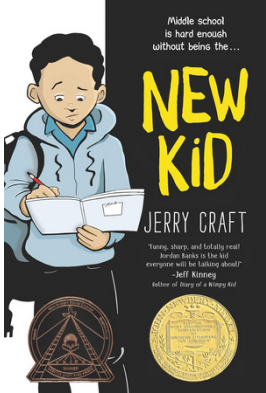


## ***Winner, Middle School Category***



Essayist: Kenyatta “KJ”, age 13, Walker Mill Middle School  
Advocating for: *New Kid* by Jerry Craft

In *New Kid*, Jerry Craft takes you into the world of seventh-grader Jordan Banks, an African American boy who dreams of going to art school but ends up at a private academy instead. As one of the few kids of color in his grade, Jordan has to navigate a whole new culture while figuring out where he fits in. Through awkward lunches, confusing microaggressions, and balancing life between two different worlds, Jordan uses his sketchbook to make sense of it all and find his voice.

This book was powerful and real. Jerry Craft brought me into a world that felt like my world when I went to a private school. I knew what Jordan was going through. I experienced the awkward stares, other people getting off the hook easier than me, getting called by the wrong name, and the feeling of being the “only one” in the room. I felt his frustration, his confusion, and his need to just be himself. As a Black boy, this book meant a lot to me. It told a story that doesn’t get told enough, and did in a way that made me feel seen. Jordan’s drawings, thoughts, and voice all felt so real. I saw myself on those pages, and for once, it felt like someone really understood what that’s like.

Books like these can be overlooked, but *New Kid* is one that really speaks to people, especially kids like me. It shows what it’s like to be one of the only Black kids in a mostly white school, and how hard it can be to balance being yourself with fitting in.



It's important for other people to read this book because it helps them understand the challenges Black kids face every day. Not just the big things but also the small moments that build up. This book shows how strong you have to be when you feel like you're always being watched, judged, and/or misunderstood. It gives people a glimpse into what it's like to live between two worlds, and how that shapes who you are. For kids who live this every day, it's more than just a story, it's real, it's powerful, and it's the feeling of being understood when nobody else can understand you.

I think that this is a powerful and important book. It made me feel proud that somebody finally told the story of my early life. Having books written by Black authors, or authors from different backgrounds, is something that means a lot. It gives people the chance to be seen and heard. The struggles shown in *New Kid* will speak to anyone who's ever felt out of place, who's had to stay strong when people didn't understand them, or who's had to carry the weight of other people's expectations. I hope this book gets shared with more people, so they can hear Jordan's story, see the world through his eyes, and maybe understand a little better what it's like to walk in his (and my) shoes.