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Mal's thrilled with the subject of the new Short Takes class: Children's literature, her favorite! But when the course begins, she couldn't be more disappointed. It's all discussions and no writing, which she hates. When she does raise her hand, the teacher, Mr. Cobb, ignores her.

## Don't Give Up, Mallory Details

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# From Reader Review Don't Give Up, Mallory for online ebook

## Ciara says

this book is so fucked up. but maybe that's why i liked it. it's rare that a babysitters club book actually makes me get angry along with the characters.

so mallory is excited because she is beginning a new short takes class about children's books. as we all know, mallory aspires to one day write & illustrate children's books, so this is right up her alley. her teacher is mr. cobb, a foxy new young dude who just graduated from princeton. i am pretty sure that they just recycled the model who played mr. ellenburg in the cover illustration for stacey's big crush, because these dudes look exactly alike.

it is worth noting that mallory does well in school & takes pride in it, but recently, some of her classmates have been teasing her about being a "brain". it's making her a little bit self-conscious.

mallory shows up in her first children's literature class all ready to take notes & write great papers, but mr. cobb instructs the students to put away their notebooks. he says they will each write one paper at the end of the class term, but they will mainly be graded on class participation. he wants them to have discussions about great works of children's literatures, share opinions, & debate ideas. basically, this guy has seen "dead poet's society" one too many times. he is imagining them all leaping on to their desks at the end of the short takes term & reciting hop on pop, i guess.

mallory is befuddled by this. she LIKES to take notes & write papers. that's where she's a viking. she's never had a class that relied so much on participation & discussion, but she decides she's game. she certainly has plenty of opinions about children's literature. she tries to participate in the very first class, raising her hand every time mr. cobb throws a question out to the class, but he doesn't call on her once. mr. cobb is an assistant coach for the boys' baseball team, & some of the players are in mallory's class. mr. cobb is already clearly all buddy-buddy with them, & they feel pretty comfortable just shouting answers out without raising their hands & engaging in lengthy conversations with mr. cobb, while the other students just sit around twiddling their thumbs.

every day, mallory walks into mr. cobb's class with big plans to participate. every day, she raises her hand & waits to be called on. & every day, mr. cobb passes her over in favor of students (almost all boys) who just shout their answers out & make jokes. eventually mallory starts to lose confidence in herself. she wonders if maybe mr. cobb can tell she's going to say something stupid & that's why he doesn't call on her. one day he picks her to read a section of hop on pop out loud (yes, really) & she totally flubs it. the kids in the front row can't hear her, she's reading too fast, & she skips a line. she's totally confused, because she reads out loud to her siblings at home all the time & she's great. she feels like a total idiot in mr. cobb's class.

while all this is going on, mallory is also involved in organizing the sixth grade class fundraiser. because she is secretary of the sixth grade. i remember writing the review of kristy for president & saying that we will never again hear anything about mallory being elected secretary of the sixth grade, but i guess i stand corrected. well played, scholastic. well played. last year's sixth graders sold candy for a week, but sales had dropped off precipitously by the end of the week. to avoid that problem, mallory has decided to have a different kind of fundraiser everyday, in order to keep excitement high & keep raising money. they're going to sell candy, but they're also having a dunk-the-teacher booth, they will be selling hearts & flowers for people to send to their crushes, etc etc. now the student council members just need to decide what to spend

their funds on.

the student council president, justin (mallory refers to him as "the cutest boy in the sixth grade"; WHAT ABOUT BEN HOBART?), suggests that mallory look in the school records to see what previous classes bought & see if it sparks any fresh ideas. so mallory goes through the old minutes & learns that the sixth graders five years previous raised over \$1000 to be spent on building a student lounge in the school library. mallory is confused because there is no student lounge in the library. she brings this to the attention of the other student council members, including sandra, who is vice-president & in mallory's children's literature class. together, they sneak into the financial records in the basement before school one day. sandra's dad is an accountant & she's a whiz at deciphering the records. they discover that that \$1000 those sixth graders raised was spent on some roofing & plumbing repairs the following years. mallory is outraged. if those kids had wanted to raise money for the roof, they would have earmarked the money for the roof. sandra calls it "misappropriation of funds," but urges mallory to just forget about it. sandra doesn't like to make waves. but mallory tells the other student council members what they found out, & they decide to confront the principal.

the principal is all, "yup, we spent the money on the roof & on some new pipes. what'cha gonna do?" the kids are like, "dude, that's fucked up! return the money & build a lounge!" the principal is all, "they money's gone. & even if we did have it, \$1000 wouldn't be enough to build a lounge anymore. we'd need twice that." the kids go talk to the school librarian, who confirms that a student lounge would cost about \$2000. but he also tells them that the school has a fund for discretionary money, & maybe the school could refund the \$1000 in misappropriated funds from that. the kids pitch that idea to the principal, & he basically scoffs at them & says, "i'll tell you what. if your fundraiser makes \$1000, we'll match you dollar for dollar & build the lounge." no word on what they'll do with the money if the kids make under \$1000. coke & hookers, i assume.

meanwhile, in mr. cobb's class, mallory begins to realize that mr. cobb mainly calls on boys. every now & again he calls on a girl, but if she takes more than two seconds (literally) to formulate an answer, he calls on someone else. meanwhile, he will give recalcitrant boys as much time as they need to come up with answers. he routinely cuts girls off mid-sentence, while letting boys talk as long as they like. there are some girls in the class that have NEVER spoken in class, & this is a big problem if they're being graded on participation.

mallory requests a conference with mr. cobb & points all of this out to him. he's all, "really? you think i favor the boys? that's RIDICULOUS. i would NEVER do that. you're just upset because you're not doing well." seriously. as mallory leaves his classroom, she thinks that on a scale of one to ten, her conference rated a two. it got a point for the fact that mr. cobb did not pick her up & physically throw her out of the room.

but during the next class period, mallory sees mr. cobb making more of an effort with the girls. he starts to call on a boy over a girl & then calls on the girl instead. he starts to cut a girl off to listen to a boy who is shouting out an answer, but then he tells the boy to raise his next time & allows the girl to finish. at the end of the period, he tells the kids that this is his first year teaching & he knows he's not perfect, but that he is trying to get better & if any of them ever have any feedback about his teaching style, they should let him know & he'll do his best to listen. he gives mallory a little nod to let her know he's taking her criticisms seriously. she thinks to herself, "mr. cobb is a good guy."

UM, NOT REALLY, MALLORY. he's a sexist dick. he spent four years getting a teaching degree at princeton so that he could introduce students to a participation-based grading system & then blatantly favor boy participation! just because he TRIED not to do that for one 45-minute teaching period one time does not make him a "good guy". especially after he totally shat all over your feedback in the conference. jesus.

anyway, the sixth grade fundraiser happens & it's a huge success. the kids raise over \$1300. the principal

calls an assembly to announce the final tally, & he actually gets up onstage & says, "we told these kids we didn't think they could do it, but they did!" really? you actually TOLD them, "we don't believe in you"? STONEYBROOK MIDDLE SCHOOL IS THE WORST SCHOOL EVER. they hire sexist teachers, they nakedly undermine kids' self-esteem, they pass kids on to the next grade & then make them repeat a grade in the middle of the year...this school is a fucking mess. anyway, the principal announces that the school will match the sixth graders' contributions dollar for dollar (which means they DID have \$1000 just sitting around) & build the student lounge.

mallory writes her final paper for the children's literature course & receives her grade. she has earned a B+ for the entire course. she's a little bit bummed that her straight-A average is blown, but she thinks that's it's okay because, she says, "i did my best." NO, YOU DIDN'T. your "best" was undermined by your sexist teacher who prevented you from participating in a class that grades on participation. if mallory had been allowed to contribute in class from day one, she easily would have earned an A. mallory says something about how mr. cobb was a hard grader & only two students earned As. WELL, I WONDER WHY THAT IS. maybe because the only kids that he allowed to participate were baseball-playing knuckledraggers who don't do well in any class. they scored high on participation & bombed the final paper. the kids who are good students were polite & raised their hands & never got to talk in class, so they were marked down on participation & high on their papers. maybe there were two kids in the class that were confident enough to speak in class & also do well on written assignments. JESUS. FIRE THIS ASSHOLE.

also, mallory has a heart-to-heart with sandra. throughout the book, sandra is mallory's foil. she smiles at everyone all the time & always acts cheerful. she doesn't want to confront the administration about stealing the sixth grade fundraising money five years earlier. in mr. cobb's class, she giggles at the boys' jokes & doesn't volunteer any original ideas. while mallory & sandra are staffing the candy booth together, sandra complains that her feet hurt. mallory asks why she's wearing heels & sandra explains that they make her look more feminine. mallory asks if it's worth "looking more feminine" if she is in pain. the booth has a halloween theme, with papier machie jack o' lanterns with different creatures on them: a vampire, a frankenstein's monster, a black cat. trevor sandbourne asks which creature sandra would be & she chooses the cat. mallory points out later that sandra chose the weakest creature to represent herself. sandra says it was the most feminine choice. mallory asks why sandra thinks "feminine" equals "weak". basically, this is mallory's big fat feminist awakening book, & it is AWESOME, if perhaps a bit ham-fisted.

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### **M.M. Strawberry Reviews says**

Definitely one of the better BSC book in the way it tackled the issues in this book (mainly hypocritical adults) I mean yeah, the ending was cheesy, but the storyline was more solid and stirred more emotion and outrage than some of the other books.

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### **Nancy says**

In which Mel-ry has to deal with a teacher who favors boys, and we, the readers, learn about sexism and why it's wrong to dumb yourself down for boys. Not bad, actually. But Mal still sucks.

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## Shira says

in this book by the team responsible for some of my least favorite bsc books ever (such as Dawn Saves the Planet and Mallory and the Dream Horse), Jahnna Beecham and Malcolm Hillgartner, mal is on top of the world: as 6th grade class secretary, she's planning a week-long FUNraiser to raise money for the class gift. her recent report card shows straight a's. perhaps most excitingly, her new short takes class (see Stacey and the Mystery at the Mall, Jessi's Horrible Prank, and Claudia and the First Thanksgiving for more on short takes) will be focusing on one of her favorite subjects: children's literature. unfortunately, though, the short takes teacher seems to only want to call on the more vocal boys in the class, and mal starts to doubt herself and her opinions. it doesn't help that her classmates make fun of her for getting straight a's and she's been spending a lot of time with sandra hart, another 6th grade student government member, who is only concerned with how attractive she seems to boys. when trying to determine what previous 6th grade classes have given as their class gifts, she discovers that a class had raised \$1000 for a student lounge in the library, which never ended up happening. mal and the other 6th grade student government members talk to the administration, who say that the school appropriated the funds for fixing the roof, and that they can't now afford to make the student lounge since inflation would make it cost double what it would have when the class raised the money. they say they'll contribute \$1000 if mal's class raises the other \$1000 (which they do because mal's FUNraiser is really epic). between this and the support from her bsc friends, mal finally starts to feel confident enough to confront the short takes teacher about how he favors boys. at first he doesn't respond well and says that if mal doesn't feel comfortable talking in class she can't blame it on him, but later in class he notices himself calling on boys and letting them call out without raising their hands, and he actually apologizes to the class for how he's been behaving. in a totally frustrating subplot, buddy barrett lies to the people organizing a memorial day parade and claims that he's in a marching band and that they want to march. instead of letting him suffer for his bad decision to lie, the bsc form a marching band of a bunch of bsc kids. then a bunch of parents drop off kids at the parade without having spoken to the bsc members about how they wanted their kids to participate in the first place, and the bsc let them get away with it again, because they're annoying doormats who let people do whatever to them and then get complain but never do anything about it.

### highlights:

- honestly, the whole toxic masculinity plotline. it's handled well. I appreciate that the authors seem to understand the nuances of these things: sometimes conversations can be a boys' club, and the boys/men in question don't notice that they're the only ones talking, and it's not because they have bad intentions, they just aren't always aware of it. I like how mr. cobb responds poorly to mal at first, because being reactionary about this stuff is pretty common, but then reflects on it and grows and is transparent about it to his class. nicely done.
- two sms boys, woody and trevor, pick candy out of pumpkins (one of mal's FUNraising activities) that are carved to look like vampires and tarantulas, and this quote happens: "if trevor and I are vampire..." it's almost the same as I am a vampire and...
- at one point mal has to do homework instead of fun things with the other class officers, and justin calls her a brain. sandra, who has spent most of the book talking about how if you're too brainy boys won't like you and just generally being the most shallow ever actually stands up for mallory. because personal growth triumphs and Boys Are Stupid, Throw Rocks at Them!

### lowlights/nitpicks:

- why does the bsc bail out buddy when he lied about being in a marching band? why don't they hold him accountable for lying and not help him out? they're such enablers.
- the sandra hart plotline is overdone and dry. she straight up tells mal that guys don't like girls who are

brainy. she wears heels because she claims they're feminine, and because "guys don't like girls who look like jocks". it's just cheesy. nobody is that transparent about their self-hating girlhood.

-how in the world could the administration have gotten away with stealing the money the 6th graders raised a few years ago for the lounge in the library? these are sixth graders, meaning they would have gone to the school for two additional years and would have noticed that construction didn't start. also they act like everything's forgiven because they will contribute \$1000 now, but it doesn't make it okay that they literally stole money/misappropriated it. this is something you get fired and/or sued and/or arrested for.

-trevor sandbourne says "if trevor and I..." but he was talking about woody. or maybe it was supposed to be woody saying "if trevor and I..."

-parents just drop off kids who hadn't told the bsc they were marching in the parade. it's awful. but the bsc just lets them get away with it and accommodates the extra kids. once again, why don't the babysitters do anything about this? they are SUCH ENABLERS in this book.

-for her project, mal designs a reading plan for 1-3 grades, including a mix of different cultures and of "boy" books and "girl" books -- but throughout the book there are multiple moments where the boys club in mal's class says that dinosaurs are for boys, for example, and mal thinks about how her sisters like dinosaurs. I liked that mal didn't believe in the book gender binary, but now it looks like she does.

### **outfits**

claudia outfits:

*"On that day she was wearing denim overall shorts, a short black T-shirt, red-and-white-pinstriped stockings that came over the tops of her knees, red thick-soled patent leather shoes, and a black felt derby."*

*"Claudia wore shorts and a rainbow tie-dyed T-shirt. Her hair was pulled into a thick ponytail held by a matching tie-dyed scrunchie. Since this was to be a work party, she sported her favorite work shoes, red high-top sneakers."*

stacey outfit:

*"Stacey was dressed in a "Let's build something" outfit -- jeans with rolled-up cuffs, an oversized blue denim work shirt, and a painter's cap turned backward."*

### **snacks in claudia's room**

-pretzels (n.s.)

-cheez whiz in a shoe box at the back of her closet

-chocolate stars (n.s.)

-reeses pieces (n.s.)

-sugar-free punch (n.s.)

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## **Nicky says**

Kudos to Ann M. Martin for tackling sexism in schools, however I think the depiction was oversimplified and resolved a little too easily. It did do a good job of demonstrating that sexist people aren't always aggressive or obvious in their sexism, though.

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## **Tiffany says**

I'd forgotten how inspirational Baby-Sitters Club books can be, or try to be. In this book, Mallory learns how to stick up for herself (to a teacher, a principal, and other students), while at the same time knowing she has

the intelligence to lead a major project, and also has to remind herself that being a "brain" isn't a bad thing. At the same time, Kristy's sub-plot (creating a marching band for kids who don't belong to any clubs) is about inclusiveness, creativity, stick-to-it-ness, and teamwork.

I could see how young readers get some good lessons from these books... even though I don't remember every learning or being inspired by them. I always just thought they were fun, light stories.

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### **April says**

Fantastic books for young girls getting into reading!! Great stories about friendship and life lessons. The characters deal with all sorts of situations and often find responsible solutions to problems.

I loved this series growing up and wanted to start my own babysitting business with friends. Great lessons in entrepreneurship for tweens.

The books may be dated with out references to modern technology but the story stands and lessons are still relevant.

Awesome books that girls will love! And the series grows with them! Terrific Author!

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### **Samantha says**

This book always made me mad when I was a kid on Mallory's behalf. The shit she went through in class was infuriating, and I just always wanted to stand up for her. This book still makes me mad as an adult, and I just wish that I could reaching inside the pages and strangle Mr. Cobb. He was not only a tool, but he also didn't really learn any sort of actual lesson by the end. Rage!

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### **M says**

This was a good babysitters club book. So Mallory gets all exited that her short takes class is going to be children's literature. But her teacher Mr. Cobb favors the boys. Which makes Mallory upset. She is also working on the a fundraiser to build a student lounge.

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### **Susie says**

Mallory is taking a new Short Takes class, analyzing children's literature. It doesn't take her long to realize that the teacher, Mr. Cobb, is favoring the boys in the class! She and the other girls are having trouble being heard. Mallory gathers her courage and talks to Mr. Cobb. He is surprised and not very happy. The trouble with Mr. Cobb is not the only thing going on at Mallory's school. She and her fellow sixth graders are busy raising money to get a student lounge. I liked reading this book, I think it's great that Mallory stood up for her rights.



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## Logan Hughes says

Mallory is thrilled to be taking a "Short Takes" class in children's literature, her favorite topic, but to her surprise, the class quickly becomes her least favorite. The class is 100% in-class discussion and participation, and the teacher, a coach, doesn't call on her, even though she raises her hand for most of the class. When she finally does get a chance to talk, he doesn't give her time to think, and she sounds stupid. She theorizes that he is much more lenient with the boys. Meanwhile, she is also finding it difficult to voice her opinions in sixth-grade council meetings, since the president is so cute and the treasurer, a dopey girl, agrees with everything he says and asserts ridiculous opinions such as "Boys don't like pushy girls." Mallory discovers an injustice she just can't ignore in the school accounting of past sixth-grade school gifts, and she forces herself to speak up. She then screws up her courage and asks for a meeting with her teacher, where she tells him she's noticed him giving more attention to the boys. He denies being sexist, but she notices him making an effort to be more egalitarian in his next class.

Mallory's characterization is extremely problematic in this book; although she's a long-established nerd, admittedly, her problems asserting herself seem out-of-character for the practical, mature, eldest-of-eight we usually know. She seems to be representing The Generic Girl, like someone did a survey of the things girls don't like in school, and just dumped them all on Mallory for one book to make a Point About Sexism In School, which is probably actually how this book was written. The problem is, they DO have a shy, unassertive character who hates being the center of attention and would certainly do poorly in a class-participation centered class, and that is Mary Anne!

Lingering Questions: I don't understand how the "Short Takes" program works. I understand it's supposed to allow students to take short-term classes in addition to their normal courseload, but how? and when? During study hall? It doesn't seem to be optional, and Mallory says specifically that the topic is the same for everybody, which seems dumb. It would require less coincidence if Mallory had chosen to study children's literature because she likes it so much. And how much worse when she discovers the class she chose is so hateful, and she could have been in a different one. Also, do sixth graders really give school gifts? Since Mallory is super-secretly in college now, I guess it doesn't matter.

Timing: April and early May

Revised Timeline: If the older crowd is in their senior year of college now, that puts Mallory in her sophomore year of same, so in this case Short Takes really means a college class.

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## Amy Holcomb says

The Baby-sitters Club series was my favorite growing up! :)

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## Claire says

...again, I got really frustrated by, um, everyone. Although I did like that the sexist teacher both admitted his faults and started changing his ways. And the sub-plot where Mallory taught her friend that it was better to be herself instead of changing so boys would like her was nice. Mostly I think I shouldn't read 90s YA of this ilk while I'm cranky, though.

