



NEW KID

by Jerry Craft

★ “Should be required reading in every middle school in America.”

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

Grades 3–7

Themes: Fitting In, Friendship, Race, Class, Family Dynamics, Bullying

About the Book

Seventh grader Jordan Banks loves nothing more than drawing cartoons about his life. But instead of sending him to the art school of his dreams, his parents enroll him in a prestigious private school known for its academics, where Jordan is one of the few kids of color in his entire grade.

As he makes the daily trip from his Washington Heights apartment to the upscale Riverdale Academy Day School, Jordan soon finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one. Can Jordan learn to navigate his new school culture while keeping his neighborhood friends and staying true to himself?

Discussion Questions

1. Jordan's mom puts pressure on him not only to attend Riverdale Academy, but also to enjoy it. Drawing helps Jordan cope with the pressure from home and the feelings of loneliness at school. What activities do you do to make yourself feel better when you're stressed or not feeling like yourself?
2. When Jordan returns home on the first day of school his friend Kirk is waiting for him, but things between the two of them get uncomfortable when Kirk sees Liam; why do you think that happens? Later, Jordan tells his dad it was “kinda weird” (p. 50). What do you think Jordan is really feeling?
3. Jordan's “Tips for Taking the Bus” (pp. 56–57) show Jordan changing his appearance over the course of his trip. Discuss the concept of “code switching”. What do you notice in each frame? What is different about his clothing, body language, and the people around him? What do you think Jordan gains by code switching in this way? Can you think of a time where you felt you needed to “code switch”?
4. Jordan is nervous when he decides to try out for a sports team because he hasn't played any of the sports before. Have you ever had to try something you didn't want to? How did manage to start? By the end of the season, Jordan finds that he actually likes soccer. Have you ever changed your mind about something after trying a new experience?
5. Why do you think it takes so long for Drew and Jordan to start talking? Discuss the friendship dynamic when Jordan, Drew, and Liam are together.
6. Liam asks Jordan not to judge him before coming over to this his house during winter break. What do you think Liam is worried about?
7. Do you think Andy is a bully? In your opinion, why does Andy act the way he does?
8. It takes a lot of courage for Jordan to stand up to say what really happened during the altercation between Drew and Andy in the cafeteria (Chapter 12). Why do you think Jordan saying something made others step up to report the truth, too?
9. When Ms. Rawle reads Jordan's sketch book she fails to understand how she is making her African American students feel unseen. Why do you think she gets defensive?
10. On Jordan's last day of school his parents comment on how different he looks, and try to figure out exactly what it is, “Whatever it is you look like a *new kid*” (p. 245). Jordan doesn't see it at first, but in what ways do you think Jordan has grown and changed through the school year? In what ways does he stay the same?

Extension Activities

Middle School Superhero. Jordan imagines himself as a superhero so he can confront Andy in the lunch room and tell the truth to the teachers about what he saw. Using arts and crafts supplies, create your own middle school superhero. What is your superhero's name? Does your superhero have powers? What are the things that make your superhero able to stand up to a bully?

Not so new kid: The story ends with summer break starting; can you imagine what's in store for next year? Create your own comic book panel showing the first day of 8th grade for Jordan and his friends at RAD.

