

Code Orange
Realistic Fiction by Caroline B. Cooney
Random House Publishers
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About the Author:

It seems that the most important feedback author Caroline B. Cooney has received was from a twelve-year-old girl who hated reading. After being forced to read one of Ms. Cooney's books, she wrote to the author saying, "I have come to an important decision; I am writing to tell you that I have decided to read a second book."

Caroline B. Cooney was born in New York and grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut. She lived with her parents Dexter Mitchell and Martha Bruce (who later divorced) and her brother. She loved school and loved to read. Although she never graduated college, she attended Indiana University, Massachusetts General Hospital School of Nursing, and the University of Connecticut. She soon married and had three children, Louisa, Sayre, and Harold.

Ms. Cooney states that she had to find a way to entertain herself staying home with her three children so she began to write during naps. She was first published in *Seventeen* and after that she began writing for young adults. Her first book, *Safe as the Grave*, was published in 1979. One of her books, *The Face on the Milk Carton*, was made into a TV movie. Ms. Cooney has written over 100 books and has won many awards.

Author's Webpage: was unable to find one.

Publisher Webpage: <http://www.randomhouse.com/teens/cooney>

Books: *The Face on the Milk Carton*, *Goddess of Yesterday*, *Among Friends*, *Both Sides of Time*, *Burning Up*, *Driver's Ed*.

Annotation:

Code Orange. Mitty Blake is not your academically motivated student. He attends St. Raphael's, a Manhattan prep school in New York City where he does just enough to get by. He hangs with his friend Derek and his almost girlfriend Olivia. Olivia is the reason he doesn't want to get kicked out of advanced biology so when assigned a research paper on infectious disease, he realizes he must do something. While at his parent's weekend country home, he realizes once again, that he has failed to do any work on his class assignments. However, he discovers so old medical text books from his mother's interior design business. Inside he finds an envelope containing scabs from the 1902 smallpox

epidemic in Boston. He considers this good luck, but his luck seems to change the more he discovers about smallpox.

Caroline B. Cooney does an amazing job of combining educational material within a thriller that anyone would enjoy reading. She draws you in with her uncanny ability to look at the world from a teenager's perspective. I know this young man! And, although Mitty comes from an obviously rich family, the reader is able to identify with him. His love for his city and its people comes through from the beginning. I like her technique of telling this teenager's story, but adding a factual section about smallpox at the end of the chapters. This story has a powerful message woven into life of a teenager.

Booktalk:

A teenager who doesn't like school, New York City, the threat of contracting smallpox, and a kidnapping come together for a great thriller from Caroline B. Cooney. Mitty Blake is a New York City teenager who is late getting started on his advanced biology report on infectious disease. He would rather hang out with his friends or listen to his iPod, but doesn't want to be kicked out of class because Olivia (his almost girlfriend) is in the same class. Fortunately, or maybe unfortunately, Mitty finds an envelope in an old medical text that contains scabs from the 1902 smallpox epidemic in Boston and decides to do his report on smallpox. He soon finds himself caught up in the research because he may be infected. Will Mitty seek help? Will he commit suicide to save those around him? Will he spend the rest of his life locked up as some kind of experiment? Will New York City survive? Read *Code Orange* to find the answers to these questions. You will not be disappointed.

Theme: life and death choices, bio-terrorism, heroes, teenager "finding himself"

Setting: Contemporary New York City, New York

Point of View: The story is written from the point of view of the main character, Mitty who is a teenager living in New York.

Characters:

Mitty Blake: a New York City teenager who attends a private school, but doesn't like school. Although not academically motivated, he begins researching furiously after discovering smallpox scabs.

Mr. and Mrs. Blake: Mitty's wealthy parents

Derek Skorvanek: Mitty's best friend who doesn't like Olivia.

Olivia Clark: Mitty's "almost" girlfriend; she is academically motivated.

Mr. Lynch: Mitty's science teacher

Mrs. Abrams: Mitty's English teacher

Dr. Larkin: Headmaster of St. Raphael's prep school.

Agent Anthony Finelli: FBI agent

Agent McKay: FBI agent

Dr. Barb Graham: Center for Disease Control epidemiologist

Conflict: The main internal conflict centers on Mitty and his decisions of what to do after he discovers smallpox scabs which may or may not be contagious. There are a few external conflicts with his parents, friends and teachers.

Conflict Resolution: Mitty decides he does not want to be responsible for infecting the people he loves or the people of New York City with smallpox. He then considers his options (one of which is suicide) and decides he will go somewhere to be by himself to see if he has actually been infected by smallpox.

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Interest Level: Grades 7 - 12

Reading Level: 6.2

Read-Aloud Passages:

Chapter 1, p. 14: This passage is the first passage to describe Variola major (smallpox) as a virus and what it can do. It sets the tone for the rest of the book.

Chapter 2, p 20: This passage shows the reader how much Mitty cares for his parents and lets the reader know that he is on his own a lot of the time.

Chapter 4, pp. 46-47: This passage describes in gory detail what a person looks like who has had cowpox.

If you like *Code Orange*, you will like: The Face on a Milk Carton, Whatever Happened to Janie, Burning Up (all by Caroline B. Cooney), Jackie's Wild Seattle by Will Hobbs, Listening for Lions by Gloria Whelan

Curriculum Connections:

Subject/Activities:

1. **Science:** "How Viruses Travel." Grades 5-8. Contains an interactive classroom exercise to demonstrate how viruses travel.

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/ScienceHowVirusesTravel58.htm>

Resources:

One film canister, dark with lid, for each student, numbered 1-4
Flour
Baking soda
Vinegar
Paper for note taking

2. **Science:** The Spread of Disease. Grades 6-12. This exercise demonstrates how quickly diseases, such as AIDS can spread.

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/PEScienceOTheSpreadOfDiseaseLikeAids612.htm>

Resources:

- One clear plastic cup for each student.
 - Safety goggles for each student.
 - Gloves for students may not be a bad idea.
 - About 2 Liters of 0.3 M sodium hydroxide (dissolve 26.6 grams of NaOH in 2 Liter of COLD water).
Be very careful doing this, the solution may get very hot!! Sodium hydroxide can cause severe burns. If you spill any on yourself, rinse first with vinegar and then with plenty of cool water. Red Devil Lye, which can be bought in many grocery stores, is essentially sodium hydroxide. Sodium hydroxide may also be purchased from any science supply. If you are a Health/P.E. person interested in doing this lesson, check with chemistry/science instructors in your building because they may have some sodium hydroxide.
 - A solution of phenolphthalein indicator (sold by any science supply). Again, it may be helpful to check with chemistry/science instructors in your building for some phenolphthalein.
 - Overhead projector.
 - Medicine dropper.
 - Plenty of water.
 - Vinegar (for safety purposes)
3. **Geography:** The Five Boroughs of New York City. Grades 6-9. Study the Five Boroughs of NYC (Manhattan, The Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island) with your students.
http://www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Social_Studies/Geography/GGR0054.html

Resources: Official travel guide of NYC; posters and markers

Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC is mention in the book. This site contains information on disease control and prevention, including smallpox.

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

Terrorism Research Center. This site included detailed information related to terrorism.

<http://www.lterrorism.com/>

FEMA: Terrorism. This site includes basic information about terrorism.

<http://www.fema.gov/hazard/terroism/index.shtm>

***Last Child* by Michael Spooner.** This book could be read for extra credit or the class could be divided (half read *Last Child* and half *Code Orange*)

A mixed-race girl must grow up quickly when danger threatens her world. Rosalie's biggest problem used to be her own divided feelings. The constant tug-of-war between her white half and her Native American half is hard. She even has two names: Rosalie when she's at the fort with her father and Last Child when she's in the village with her mother. But now a steamboat has carried smallpox into Rosalie's world--and the Mandans have no resistance to the disease. Suddenly the name Last Child is all too real. Set during the smallpox epidemic of 1837, this is the powerful story of a mixed-race girl fighting her way into adulthood against all odds.

Activities:

1. **Literature Circles:** This is a student centered reading activity for groups of 4-6 students at any grade level. It provides an opportunity for students to control their own learning, share thoughts, concerns and their understanding of the novel. See Basic Literature Circle Model and Talking Sticks Literature Circle that can be used. I would suggest having students read other books of Caroline B. Cooney for this activity.

<http://home.att.net/~TEACHING/litcirclemodels.htm>

Resources: access to Ms. Cooney's books, notebook for journaling, taking notes, etc. May use forms provided at this site.

Standards:

Language Arts/6th grade: 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.6, 6.3.8, 6.4.1, 6.5.4

Language Arts/7th grade: 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.4, 7.3.5, 7.3.7, 7.4.1, 7.4.5, 7.5.2

Language Arts/8th grade: 8.3.2, 8.3.3, 8.3.4, 8.3.5, 8.3.6, 8.3.8, 8.3.9, 8.4.1

2. Common Vaccinations. Students will understand how vaccinations work and create class posters describing different kinds of vaccines. Lesson plan can be accessed at:

<http://school.discovery.com/lessonplans/programs/vaccinations/>

Resources: Internet access; poster board for each group; markers, colored pencils

Standards:

Science/6th grade: 6.4.11, 6.6.1

Science/7th grade: 7.1.3, 4.1.4, 7.1.5, 7.4.12, 7.4.14

Science/8th grade: 8.2.7, 8.4.8

Health/6th grade: 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.6, 6.3.6

Health/7th grade: 7.1.1, 7.1.2, 7.1.6, 7.6.2

Health/8th grade: 8.1.1, 8.1.2, 8.7.1, 8.7.2, 8.7.3

Chapter Discussion Questions:

Pre-reading:

What do you think the title *Code Orange* means?

What do you remember about 9/11? Where were you and what did you do?

What do you know about vaccinations? Do you know what vaccinations you have had?

If you had to choose between doing what was best for you or saving the people in your city, what would you do?

During reading:

Chapter 1:

How does the setting of New York City contribute to the story?

Although Mitty's family is very wealthy, Mitty takes time to give money to the subway performers. What does this tell you about Mitty?

Chapter 2:

Have you ever watched your parents sleep? Why do you think the author uses this situation in the story?

On page 28 the author describes Mitty's room. Can you relate to this? Why or why not?

Chapter 3:

This chapter includes a great deal of information on the history of smallpox. Is this new information to you? Do you think this information foreshadows events to come? Why or why not?

Do you think Olivia is insulting Mitty by giving him a beginner's book on viruses?

Chapter 4:

Read the descriptions of people who had been infected with cowpox on p.46. Below list words or phrases that visually describe the people who had cowpox.

Chapter 5:

On page 50 as Mitty reads about variola major or smallpox, his mouth feels dry and uncomfortable. Is this a prediction of what may happen next? How?

One of the students is doing his paper on polio and states that it is now back in nine countries because people stopped being vaccinated. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Chapter 6:

As Mitty begins to have more symptoms of smallpox, he states, "This is what happens when you do your homework. It makes you sick." How does the author's use of humor impact the story?

On page 68 Mitty talks about Olivia sitting in the front of the class to avoid looks of scorn from the other students. Why do the students give Olivia "looks of scorn?"

On page 71 in the middle of the page is a paragraph Mitty has written for his paper. Do you believe this is possible? Why or why not?

Chapter 7:

Mitty's oversleeps and his mother assumes he is cutting school. Mitty claims this has happened only once last semester and is the first time this semester. Have you had similar "communication problems" with your parents? Describe one.

When Mitty thinks he finds good news in the library, he sings "Celebrate good times, come on!" If you were in a similar situation, what song would you sing and why?

Chapter 8:

On page 85, the author uses a paragraph to describe the snacks that Mitty likes. Write a paragraph of your own describing the snacks that you like.

On page 93, Mitty discovers that all things that have been near a person infected with smallpox should be burned. As the story progresses, Mitty finds bits of pieces of information at a time and some of it is contradictory. What does this tell you about the process of research and gathering information?

Chapter 9:

In this chapter, Mitty receives responses to the e-mails he has sent. He also receives a response to one that he did not send. Is this realistic?

Chapter 10:

What are the internal conflicts Mitty now faces? What are his choices?

Chapter 11:

On page 120 Mitty describes his belief about teen suicide. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Chapter 12:

What happens in this chapter to change Derek's attitude about Olivia?

Chapter 13

"Mitty's skin crawled. He could feel the virus forming little viral troops, gathering into armies and attacking the next essential organ inside him."

What literary technique is used here and what is the effect?

Find 1 -2 examples of the author's continued use of humor in a stressful situation.

Chapter 14

Knowing what you do about Derek and Olivia, is what they decide to do in this chapter reasonable? Why or why not?

Chapter 15

In this chapter, Mitty shows he is resourceful in many ways. Describe two ways. Is his resourcefulness realistic? Explain.

Chapter 16

The author “tricks” the reader in this chapter. Did you feel tricked? Was it an effective writing tool?

Chapter 17

As someone who has had little serious life challenges, Mitty finds his true strength of character in this chapter. What do you think may have prepared him for this?

Chapter 18

Derek and Olivia discuss Mitty’s definition of a hero. Do you agree with Mitty or Olivia?

Chapter 19

Why is symbolism an important part of writing? Would it have been as effective to end the book with this line: “The bad guys didn’t win.” Why or why not?

Post-reading:

Writing can be a creative process. Ms. Cooney includes an “Author’s Note” that gives the reader a glimpse of the research and resources need to write a realistic fiction book. Did any of the resources surprise you? How would this book have been different if the author had used old medical texts instead of fictional texts?

Would you read another book by Caroline B. Cooney? Explain.

Language/vocabulary:

Ebola (p. 3): a virus that can cause death and there is not vaccination

Autism (p.4): a disorder that is characterized by language problems and problems with social interactions

Pinnacle (p. 5): the peak or top of something; the best

Alzheimer’s (p. 10): a premature mental deterioration which causes loss of memory

Concierge (p. 17): a person in an apartment building who performs services for the tenants

Eradicate (p. 21): exterminate; completely get rid of

Papule (p. 29): a small conical lesion of the skin

Rigor (p. 30): a tremor caused by a chill

Scourge (p. 40): the worst cause of pain or distress such the plague

Vaccus (p. 40): comes from the Latin word cow; the vaccination is derived from this word

Valiant (p. 48): having personal bravery; heroism

Mercenary (p. 77): soldiers for hire

Insufflation (p. 81): a term used by the Chinese; a process in which they ground dried smallpox scabs into a powder and would breathe them up their nose to build immunity

Epidemiologist (p. 133): someone who studies disease

Overall Indiana Academic Standards:

Science/7th grade: 7.1.5, 7.4.12

Health/6th grade: 6.1.1, 6.1.2

Health/7th grade: 7.1.1, 7.1.2, 7.6.2

Health/8th grade: 8.1.1, 8.1.2

Language Arts: Reading is an integral part of this subject; however the standards are related to more than just reading so specific standards are listed only under the activity.

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