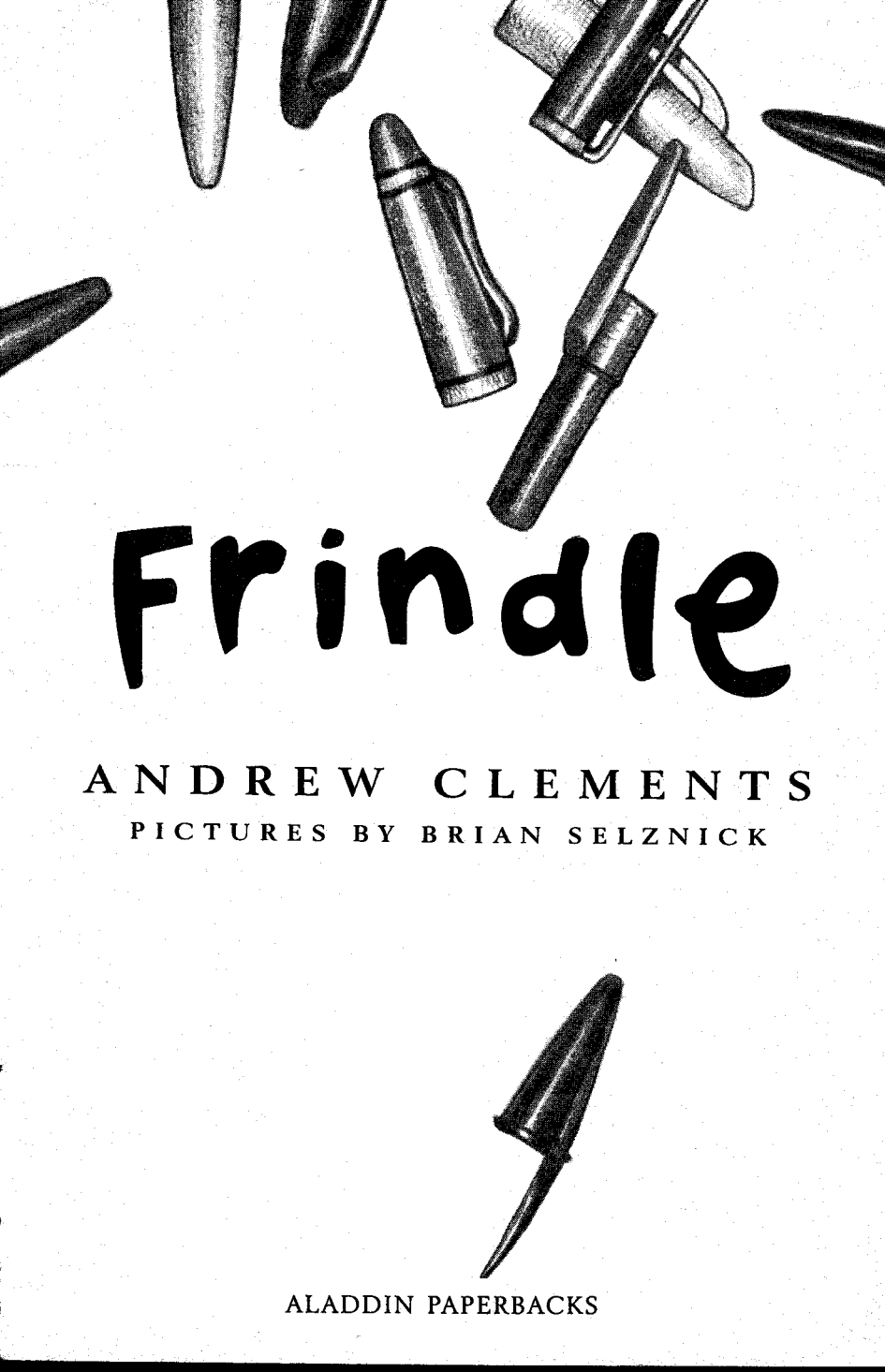


Frindle



Nick, age 2 months



Frindle

ANDREW CLEMENTS

PICTURES BY BRIAN SELZNICK

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For Becky, Charles, George, Nate, and John
—A. C.



Nick

IF YOU ASKED the kids and the teachers at Lincoln Elementary School to make three lists—all the really bad kids, all the really smart kids, and all the really good kids—Nick Allen would not be on any of them. Nick deserved a list all his own, and everyone knew it.

Was Nick a troublemaker? Hard to say. One thing's for sure: Nick Allen had plenty of ideas, and he knew what to do with them.

One time in third grade Nick decided to turn Miss Deaver's room into a tropical island. What kid in New Hampshire isn't ready for a little summer in February? So first he got everyone to make small palm trees out of green and brown construction paper and tape them onto the corners of each desk. Miss Deaver had only been a teacher for about six months, and she

was delighted. "That's so *cute!*"

The next day all the girls wore paper flowers in their hair and all the boys wore sunglasses and beach hats. Miss Deaver clapped her hands and said, "It's so *colorful!*"

The day after that Nick turned the classroom thermostat up to about ninety degrees with a little screwdriver he had brought from home. All the kids changed into shorts and T-shirts with no shoes. And when Miss Deaver left the room for a minute, Nick spread about ten cups of fine white sand all over the classroom floor. Miss Deaver was surprised again at just how *creative* her students could be.

But the sand got tracked out into the hallway, where Manny the custodian did not think it was creative at all. And he stomped right down to the office.

The principal followed the trail of sand, and when she arrived, Miss Deaver was teaching the hula to some kids near the front of the room, and a tall, thin, shirtless boy with chestnut hair was just spiking a Nerf volleyball over a net made from six T-shirts tied together.

The third-grade trip to the South Seas ended. Suddenly.

But that didn't stop Nick from trying to liven things up. Lincoln Elementary needed a good jolt once in a while, and Nick was just the guy to deliver it.

About a year later, Nick made the great blackbird discovery. One night he learned on a TV show that red-wing blackbirds give this high-pitched chirp when a hawk or some other danger comes near. Because of the way sound travels, the hunter birds can't tell where the high-pitched chirp is coming from.

The next day during silent reading, Nick glanced at his teacher, and he noticed that Mrs. Avery's nose was curved—kind of like the beak of a hawk. So Nick let out a high, squeaky, blackbird “peep!”

Mrs. Avery jerked her head up from her book and looked around. She couldn't tell who did it, so she just said, “Shhh!” to the whole class.

A minute later Nick did it again, louder. “Peep!” This time there was a little giggling from the class. But Mrs. Avery pretended not to hear the sound, and about fifteen seconds later she slowly stood up and walked to the back of the classroom.

Without taking his eyes off his book, and without moving at all, Nick put his heart and soul into the highest and most annoying chirp of all: "Peeeeep!"

Mrs. Avery pounced. "Janet Fisk, you stop that this instant!"

Janet, who was sitting four rows away from Nick, promptly turned white, then bright crimson.

"But it wasn't me . . . honest." There was a catch in Janet's voice, as if she might cry.

Mrs. Avery knew she had made a mistake, and she apologized to Janet.

"But someone is asking for big trouble," said Mrs. Avery, looking more like a hawk every second.

Nick kept reading, and he didn't make a peep.

At lunchtime Nick talked to Janet. He felt bad that Mrs. Avery had pounced on her. Janet lived in Nick's neighborhood, and sometimes they played together. She was good at baseball, and she was better at soccer than most of the kids in the whole school, boys or girls. Nick said, "Hey Janet—I'm sorry you got yelled at during reading. It was my fault.

I was the one who made that sound.”

“You did?” said Janet. “But how come Mrs. Avery thought it was me?”

So Nick told her about the blackbirds, and Janet thought it was pretty interesting. Then she tried making a peep or two, and Janet’s chirps were even higher and squeakier than Nick’s. She promised to keep everything a secret.

For the rest of Nick’s fourth-grade year, at least once a week, Mrs. Avery heard a loud “peeeep” from somewhere in her classroom—sometimes it was a high-pitched chirp, and sometimes it was a *very* high-pitched chirp.

Mrs. Avery never figured out who was making that sound, and gradually she trained herself to ignore it. But she still looked like a hawk.

To Nick, the whole thing was just one long—and successful—science experiment.

And Janet Fisk enjoyed it, too.

Mrs. Granger

FIFTH GRADE WAS different. That was the year to get ready for middle school. Fifth grade meant passing classes. It meant no morning recess. It meant real letter grades on your report cards. But most of all, it meant Mrs. Granger.

There were about one hundred fifty kids in fifth grade. And there were seven fifth-grade teachers: two math, two science, two social studies, but only one language arts teacher. In language arts, Mrs. Granger had a monopoly—and a reputation.

Mrs. Granger lived alone in a tidy little house in the older part of town. She drove an old, pale blue car to school every morning, rain or shine, snow or sleet, hail or wind. She had a perfect attendance record that stretched back farther than anyone could remember.

Her hair was almost white, swept away from her face and up into something like a nest on the back of her head. Unlike some of the younger women teachers, she never wore pants to school. She had two skirt-and-jacket outfits, her gray uniform and her blue uniform, which she always wore over a white shirt with a little cameo pin at the neck. And Mrs. Granger was one of those people who never sweats. It had to be over ninety degrees before she even took off her jacket.

She was small, as teachers go. There were even some fifth graders who were taller. But Mrs. Granger seemed like a giant. It was her eyes that did it. They were dark gray, and if she turned them on full power, they could make you feel like a speck of dust. Her eyes could twinkle and laugh, too, and kids said she could crack really funny jokes. But it wasn't the jokes that made her famous.

Everyone was sure that Mrs. Granger had X-ray vision. Don't even think about chewing a piece of gum within fifty feet of her. If you did, Mrs. Granger would see you and catch you and make you stick the gum onto a bright yellow index card. Then she would safety-pin the card

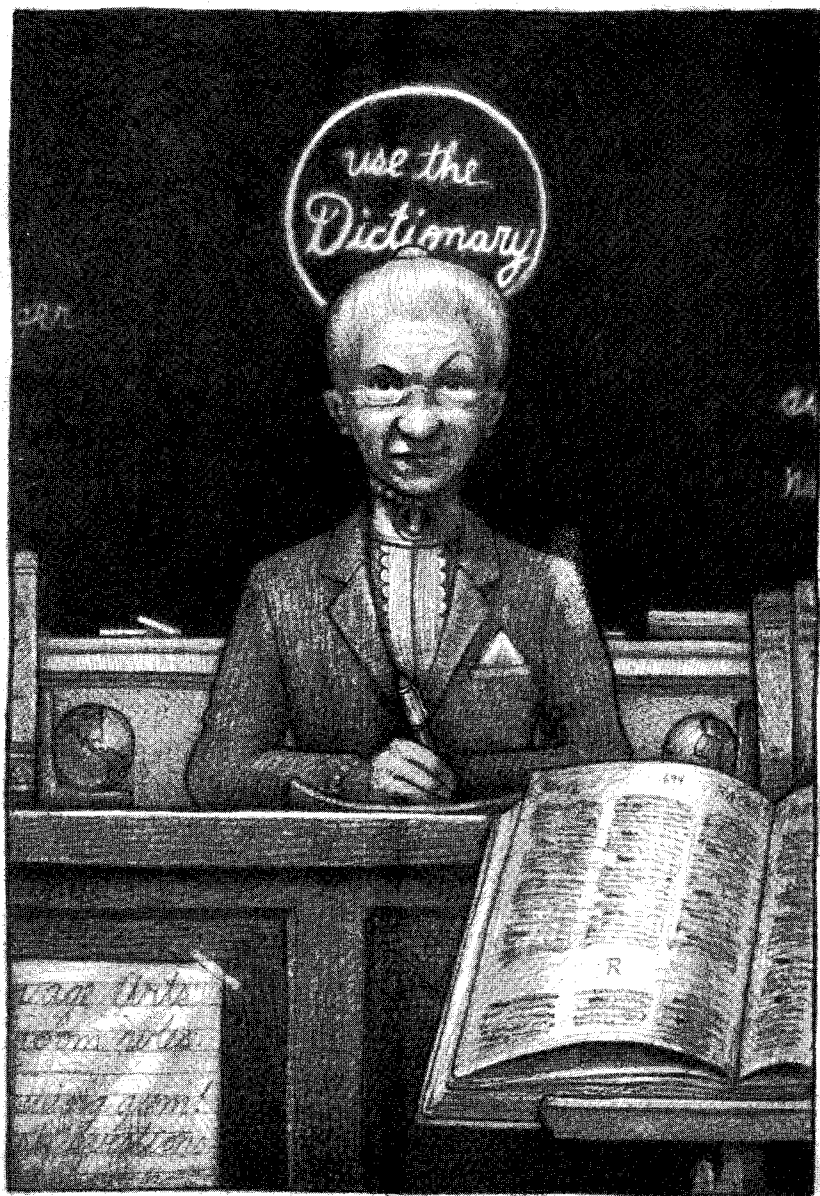
to the front of your shirt, and you'd have to wear it for the rest of the school day. After that, you had to take it home and have your mom or dad sign the card, and bring it back to Mrs. Granger the next day. And it didn't matter to Mrs. Granger if you weren't in fifth grade, because the way she saw it, sooner or later, you would be.

All the kids at Lincoln Elementary School knew that at the end of the line—fifth grade—Mrs. Granger would be the one grading their spelling tests and their reading tests, and worst of all, their vocabulary tests—week after week, month after month.

Every language arts teacher in the world enjoys making kids use the dictionary: “Check your spelling. Check that definition. Check those syllable breaks.”

But Mrs. Granger didn't just enjoy the dictionary. She *loved* the dictionary—almost worshipped it. Her weekly vocabulary list was thirty-five words long, sometimes longer.

As if that wasn't bad enough, there was a “Word for the Day” on the blackboard every morning. If you gave yourself a day off and didn't write one down and look it up and learn



Mrs Granger loved the dictionary

the definition—sooner or later Mrs. Granger would find out, and then, just for you, there would be *two* Words for the Day for a whole week.

Mrs. Granger kept a full set of thirty dictionaries on a shelf at the back of the room. But her pride and joy was one of those huge dictionaries with every word in the universe in it, the kind of book it takes two kids to carry. It sat on its own little table at the front of her classroom, sort of like the altar at the front of a church.

Every graduate of Lincoln Elementary School for the past thirty-five years could remember standing at that table listening to Mrs. Granger's battle cry: "Look it up! That's why we have the dictionary."

Even before the school year started, when it was still the summer before fifth grade for Nick and his friends, Mrs. Granger was already busy. Every parent of every new fifth grader got a letter from her.

Nick's mom read part of it out loud during dinner one night in August.

Every home is expected to have a good dictionary in it so that each student

can do his or her homework properly. Good spelling and good grammar and good word skills are essential for every student. Clear thinking requires a command of the English language, and fifth grade is the ideal time for every girl and boy to acquire an expanded vocabulary.

And then there was a list of the dictionaries that Mrs. Granger thought would be "acceptable for home study."

Mrs. Allen said, "It's so nice to have a teacher who takes her work this seriously."

Nick groaned and tried to enjoy the rest of his hamburger. But even watermelon for dessert didn't cheer him up much.

Nick had no particular use for the dictionary. He liked words a lot, and he was good at using them. But he figured that he got all the words he needed just by reading, and he read all the time.

When Nick ran into a word he didn't know, he asked his brother or his dad or whoever was handy what it meant, and if they knew, they'd tell him. But not Mrs. Granger. He had heard all about her, and he had seen fifth graders

in the library last year, noses stuck in their dictionaries, frantically trying to finish their vocabulary sheets before English class.

It was still a week before school and Nick already felt like fifth grade was going to be a very long year.