

## Inside Nick

ON THE OUTSIDE, Nick was still Nick. But inside, it was different. Oh sure, he still had a lot of great ideas, but now they scared him a little.

For instance, Nick learned in social studies class that people who buy stuff are called *consumers*. If consumers stop buying, stores and shops and restaurants go out of business.

Then—boom—a new idea hit him.

All the kids loved lunchtime. But the awful part about lunch was the eating part—school food. And the food was never a surprise—you had to smell it all morning and then go eat it. The food was always bad.

*Well, thought Nick, the school cafeteria is sort of a restaurant, isn't it? And the students are the consumers, right? And we don't really have to buy our lunches there, do we?*

Nick could see it all: He would get all the kids to bring their lunches from home every day until the ladies who made the lunches cooked better food. He was sure those women didn't cook food like that for their own families. The kids were the consumers with \$1.35 in their pockets, and until the food was better, that's where their money would stay.

Great idea! Nick was sure it would work, and he got all excited about it.

But then Nick remembered what had happened with *frindle*. It stopped him cold. He was sure that if all the kids stopped buying lunch, sooner or later someone would figure out that it was all Nick Allen's idea. He would get in trouble. People would write about it in the newspaper. The principal would call his parents—anything could happen.

So for the first time in his life, Nick kept a good idea to himself. He never even told John or Chris.

And that changed Nick.

His mom was the first to notice. "Are things okay at school, honey?" she asked one day in early March. He had seemed kind of down, a little sad. It worried her.

"Sure," said Nick. "Everything's fine."

"Everything's okay with your friends? They haven't been hanging around here very much."

"Mom, honest. Everything's fine. It's winter. Everyone's really busy with hockey and basketball—that's all." And Nick went to his room and shut the door.

Mrs. Granger noticed the change, too. The clever little rascal who had looked her in the eye and said, "But I really didn't have a frindle with me—" that boy wasn't in her class anymore. Now a quieter, more careful Nicholas Allen came into class every day. He did all his work perfectly, didn't speak unless she called on him, and didn't laugh and joke with his friends like he used to. School would be over in a few months, and it seemed like there was nothing she could do to help him.

Toward the end of the year, Nick remembered the letter that Mrs. Granger had asked him to sign on the back when the frindle business was just getting started. The chess game was over, so he was expecting to get that letter from Mrs. Granger any day. But all spring it didn't come, so he thought she must have forgotten about it. Nick was afraid to bring it

all up again, but he was dying of curiosity.

So on the last day of school, Nick knocked on Mrs. Granger's classroom door. She was straightening up the textbooks on the bookcases below the windows. Without turning around she sang out, "Come in."

Nick said, "Hi, Mrs. Granger."

Mrs. Granger stood up and turned to face him. "Oh, it's you, Nicholas. I'm so glad you stopped by. I've been meaning to talk to you, and this will save me having to send you a letter this summer."

Nick gulped and said, "That's what I came for—the letter."

Mrs. Granger looked puzzled for half a second, and then she said, "Oh! That letter." Then she paused. "You will recall, Nicholas, that I said I would send you that letter when all this was over . . . and it's not over."

"It's not?" Nick tilted his head to one side, and asked, "When will it be over?"

Mrs. Granger smiled and said, "Oh, believe me, Nicholas. You'll know when it's over. I wanted to talk to you about something else."

She walked across the room and stood about two feet from him. Nick had grown during the

year, and their eyes were almost on the same level. Nick noticed that the eyes were softer, but just as powerful. "I've noticed that you've been very quiet for the past few months. You know, Nicholas, you didn't do anything wrong this year. I know a lot of things happened, and a lot of things were said, and you must have had some difficult days here and there. But your idea was a good idea, and I have been very proud of the way you behaved—most of the time."

Nick was embarrassed, but Mrs. Granger kept on talking. "And Nicholas, you have great things to do in this life. I'm absolutely sure you do, and you mustn't let a few hard days trick you into clamming up."

Then Mrs. Granger reached out and shook Nick's hand, and looked him in the face. Her eyes were turned up brighter than Nick had ever seen them before. She said, "Nicholas Allen, I have enjoyed having you as a student. Now you go out there and have a wonderful summer. And I expect to hear remarkable things about you, young man."

Mrs. Granger watched Nick start to leave. But before he got to the door, he turned and

said, "Thanks, Mrs. Granger. You have a great summer, too." Then he grinned and said, "And don't forget to buy some new frindles for next year."

Thanks to his little talk with Mrs. Granger—along with a healthy dose of summer vacation—Nick made a full recovery. He was proud that he had made up a new word, and he enjoyed thinking about all the commotion it had stirred up. That one little word had made fifth grade a year to remember.

Before he started sixth grade Nick was Nick again, and all through junior high and high school and college, he proved it.

For example, two years later, all the school cafeterias in town were serving delicious food at least four days a week, all because of Nick the Consumer. And the state superintendent of schools had made a special trip to Westfield to learn why this little town had the most successful school lunch program in the state.

And in high school, well, the stories about Nick's other adventures could go on and on and on. But that would delay the end of this story, the one that started when Nick was in fifth grade.

Because the end of this story came later—  
ten years later.

And what was happening to Nick's word  
during those ten years? Nothing fancy, nothing  
exciting. Words don't work that way. Words  
either get used, or they don't. And *frindle* was  
being used more and more. It was becoming a  
real word.