

## Anthony

**Harold J. Fischel**

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*Amid a series of interesting twists that keep the pages turning, topics like schoolyard bullying are covered with a straightforward pragmatism that helps the moral message stand out clearly.*

In *Anthony*, Harold J. Fischel chronicles the life of the title character as he grows from being a troubled but well-intentioned boy to a responsible and understanding parent. The story is full of rich, engaging characters and surprising twists.

The narrative follows Anthony from humble beginnings as the child of a high-profile affair. Growing up in a rough part of New York, he is continually challenged by the violence and betrayal around him. Emotionally lost and desperately seeking affection after losing a loved one, he finds solace in the arms of an older woman, which nearly costs him everything.

Although the novel features a series of interesting twists that keep the pages turning, it lacks a central tension and dominant plot line to move it forward organically. Without a strong story arc, the book feels more like a series of loosely connected vignettes that follow the protagonist's life. With that said, the scenes are engaging in their own right, and they often tackle difficult and familiar topics like schoolyard bullying and navigating a budding relationship. These areas are covered delicately and with a straightforward pragmatism that helps the moral message stand out clearly.

Fischel does an excellent job building realistic relationships, but the stilted dialogue causes some situations to feel forced. Despite this, Anthony is a charming and likable character who gains readers' trust as he navigates a series of traumatic setbacks with grace and confidence. The book is generally well written and accessible, though some areas feel emotionally detached, partly due to the lack of contractions in dialogue and a verbal formality between even intimate characters.

By not relying on a standard structure, Fischel leaves room to build a genuine and matter-of-fact portrayal of Anthony and his family. Turns in the plot feel dramatic and important, but not overblown or showy, which gives the novel an appealing realism. This realism brings with it scenes that may shock some readers, including sexualized violence and profanity. However, the author avoids making these events central to the narrative, and instead treats them as opportunities to lend further depth to Anthony's character. A story that relies more on character development than on cheap points from racy scenes and taboo situations is refreshing.

Overall, *Anthony* is an enjoyable and easy read. Despite a lackluster central story line, the book attracts attention with its own strengths that keep readers involved to the end.

ERIC ANDERSON (May 5, 2014)

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