



Big Nate: Nailed It!

Lincoln Pierce

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A sixth grader navigates life's hard knocks with wit, some wisdom, and experience in *Big Nate: Nailed It!*, the latest collection of the long-running syndicated comic strip.

Nate, seeking to better his fortune, decides he needs a good luck charm and sets about finding it. When he concludes that a particular pencil will do the trick, he embarks on a series of bold undertakings, only to see his luck soon return to normal. Elsewhere, Nate also grapples with school, hair, dating, and animals, including a chess match against a cat. At times the humor tests the limits of middle school topics, as when Nate and his friend stand in what they think is a line for snacks, only to find out it's the autograph queue for an author of erotica. But with a delicate touch, the joke remains on the "safe" side of middle school sensibilities, as Nate's friend wonders: "But isn't erotica pudding?"

The illustrations are marked by an elegant simplicity, providing necessary details but remaining clear and uncluttered. Passing a tried-and-true test for comic art, most pages provoke a laugh even without reading the words. The text adds additional cause for amusement, from outright jokes to small touches like a lispy first-grader's response when Nate tells the boy that his mother has hired Nate to babysit: "Well, she'sh washting her money."

The "joke per page" format, and the continuous nature of the strip's original publication schedule, have benefits other than frequent opportunities for chuckles: no prior knowledge of the characters is required, and although some story lines unfold over multiple pages, it's always in small, easy-to-digest doses, so the book can be put down and picked up again at leisure.

The graphic novel *Big Nate: Nailed It!* places twenty-first-century laughs into a classic format.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2023)

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