

Nickel

Robert Wilder

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High School has not been kind to outcast duo Coy and Monroe, but while things may be looking up for one, the other continues in a downward spiral. *Nickel*, from Robert Wilder, explores the complicated relationships and balance between friends and family while avoiding all the typical teenage drama and angst.

As if being named Coy wasn't difficult enough, he also has a mother living in a psychiatric hospital, a well-meaning but tragically uncool stoner stepdad, and his best friend Monroe's increasingly debilitating illness has left her with painful sores around her mouth and all over her body. When Monroe's health continues to decline and Coy connects with a popular classmate, a simple school project takes on a whole new depth of meaning as a report on the duckbilled platypus turns into a desperate attempt to diagnose Monroe with everything from nickel poisoning to a severe reaction to mold.

Narrated from Coy's perspective, the dialogue is fun and fast, with a humorously clever inner voice often at odds with his mumbled responses like "I'm real good at paying attention. Not so good at talking or whatever." Coy's fascination with all things '80s, creative use of vocabulary words, and ability to find himself in extremely awkward situations will inspire simultaneous laughter and wincing.

Insightful and heartfelt, Coy's struggle to find his place is easy to recognize and relate to while his interactions with adults and other teens perfectly capture the spirit and struggle of adolescence, "everybody struggling to define their version of normal, and how it all [keeps] shifting, all the forking time."

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (Winter 2017)

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