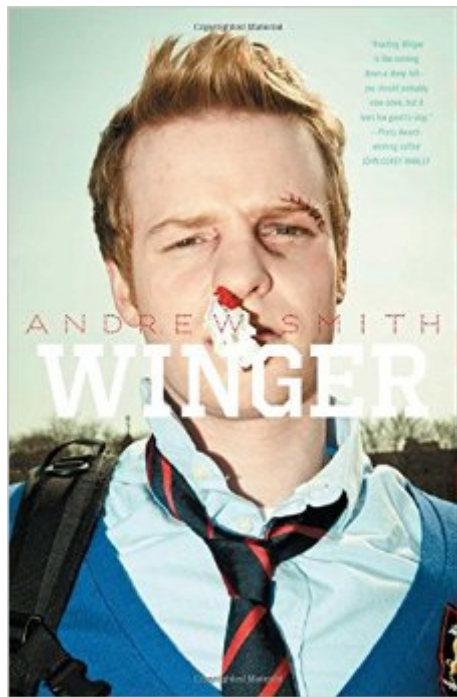


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# Winger



## Synopsis

A teen at boarding school grapples with life, love, and rugby in this unforgettable novel that is alternately hilarious and painful, awkward and enlightening • (Publishers Weekly, starred review). Ryan Dean West is a fourteen-year-old junior at a boarding school for rich kids. He's living in Opportunity Hall, the dorm for troublemakers, and rooming with the biggest bully on the rugby team. And he's madly in love with his best friend Annie, who thinks of him as a little boy. Ryan Dean manages to survive life's complications with the help of his sense of humor, rugby buddies, and his penchant for doodling comics. But when the unthinkable happens, he has to figure out how to hold on to what's important, even when it feels like everything has fallen apart. Filled with hand-drawn infographics and illustrations and told in a pitch-perfect voice, this realistic depiction of a teen's experience strikes an exceptional balance of hilarious and heartbreaking.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 890 (What's this?)

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (September 2, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1442444932

ISBN-13: 978-1442444935

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (153 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #44,108 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > LGBT Issues #56 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Gay & Lesbian #106 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Boys & Men

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

This was my first Andrew Smith book and after reading it I finally realized why he has so many devoted fans. Winger was heartbreaking, honest, and hilarious. I don't mean smile while you're reading funny, I mean that I laughed so hard at parts of this book that I woke up my husband because my laughter was shaking the whole bed. (Any book that has a haiku about getting kicked in the balls will always be number one in my heart, ok?) The hilarity is artfully combined with moments

of painful honesty that go perfectly with Ryan Dean's raw and unapologetically hormonal narrative voice. The book is also filled with the cartoons and infographics that Ryan Dean creates, which adds to the humor and overall experience of reading this book. For me, it brought me even further into the story because I wasn't just reading about the cartoons that Ryan Dean was drawing for his friends, I was getting to see them, as well. (I would like a graphic novel that tells Screaming Ned's back story, please.) The thing about Ryan Dean that I loved was that even though he is riddled with a lot of self-doubt, he really doesn't let it hold him back. He's younger and smaller than all of the guys, but he plays rugby with everything he's got, anyway. He's rooming with the biggest bully on the team, but that doesn't stop him from crushing on said bully's girlfriend. The girl he loves thinks of him as a "little boy" but he never gives up. Although some of his decisions made me cringe, I could not help but fall in love with the way he just decided to go big or go home. Although Ryan Dean alone was entertaining enough, the people he interacts with at school were a big part of the reason why I loved this book so much. Every relationship in this book was a treasure. Even the most unsympathetic residents of Opportunity Hall eventually found a place in my heart, which I think is a testament to Andrew Smith's writing and his ability to flesh-out the characters. That ability to make you care about everyone is the reason why, more than halfway through the book, you will find yourself going from laughing to crying. I wasn't prepared for that and it made the book a very intense read, but if anything, I think it made me love it even more. In my mind, *Winger* was ultimately a story about love and acceptance that was framed within the context of the complicated and confusing feelings of a hyper-intelligent teenage boy. There are very few books that get it right the way that *Winger* does. I am so glad that I read this story. Read this book and you won't be sorry. Trust me on this one, folks.

Ryan Dean West may be the most realistic 14 year old narrator I have ever read. Horny, funny, and horribly self-absorbed, he muddles through his junior year, managing to pick fights with just about every male he comes into contact with. But while I liked the voice and style of the narration, I didn't feel any great emotional connection to Ryan Dean. He was supposedly the smartest kid in school (a junior at age 14), a varsity rugby player, receiver of the affection of the two hottest girls at the school, and friends to some of the most popular kids, yet somehow he was supposed to be pathetic? I didn't buy it. He seemed just as douchey as all the other kids on the Rugby team, even more so, maybe. Perhaps that was the point, but on further reflection, I guess I missed the point of the story entirely. It takes a lot of fights, drunken nights, sex jokes, and make-out sessions before anything of real substance happens in the plot, and then when it does, despite the fact that it is

earth shattering, it somehow feels anti-climactic. It was funny, and I will recommend it to my high school students, but I didn't love it like other reviewers did.

Right now I'm having a difficult time figuring out what I want to say about Winger because Andrew Smith left me heartbroken and hopeful at the same time. I can say that Ryan Dean West is now one of my favorite characters and Winger is now one of my favorite books. I absolutely love finding books with guy appeal. Winger falls into this category perfectly. Ryan Dean's voice struck true from the first to the last page. He's a fourteen-year-old boy and he talks, thinks, and acts like one. Believe me, I've taught freshmen boys for the past six years.

There's bathroom humor and humor from things that probably aren't supposed to be funny, but Ryan Dean's reactions and thoughts make this a laugh out loud book. For the first 400 pages I was constantly laughing and smiling. Andrew Smith's writing in this book made me think of Geoff Herbach's writing in Stupid Fast. Both stories are funny, include sports, and will get guys reading, but they also delve into a deeper story. When I read that this is heartbreaking, I kept waiting for something heartbreaking to happen and wondering what it would be. I was both prepared and unprepared for the moment. I'm not going to go into too much detail because I don't want to take away from that experience for you when you read Winger. I read the page and sighed because I expected something like that to happen. I turned the page, let the moment and scene hit me, and then I cried. Not long after I finished reading this I still had to keep taking deep breaths. I wasn't sobbing or anything, but I had to let myself digest what I read. I spent so much time loving this book and getting to know the characters that this moment felt like a punch in the face. And I mean that in the best possible way. I have mixed feelings about where this scene is placed, but I understand the reasoning for it. When you read it, which I hope you will, we should discuss it. Now, on to the whole John Green thing. I can already see the comparisons to John Green's writing and one of his books in particular. I get it. BUT, Winger is not that book and Andrew Smith is not John Green. I love John Green and all, but I don't think I've ever read one of his books and thought, "Yeah, my kids are just like (insert character name)." I've read his books and thought of students who would like reading them, but I've never been able to picture one of my students as a character. The characters in Winger are REAL. I pictured a number of former students and others when I was reading this. I'm confident that my students will appreciate this when they read it. The copy of Winger I read belongs to my local library, but you can be sure that I plan on buying at least two copies of this book for my classroom library. It's that kind of book. Andrew Smith has written something

special.Similar Reads: Stupid Fast by Geoff Herbach, Leverage by Joshua C. Cohen

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