



## Special Edward

Eric Walters

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 3.2

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### Book Summary

Edward is a classic slacker. He's got better ways to spend his time than toiling over homework, and as long as he gets passing grades, he's happy. When his fifty percent average is threatened, he has to find a way to pull up his grades without applying himself. Edward discovers that special-education students get more time to complete tests, and he thinks he's found the perfect scam. Little does he know that manipulating everyone around him will take more work than he ever imagined.

### Author Biography

**Eric Walters** is a best-selling author, teacher and social worker who also loves basketball. His many books for juveniles and young adults include these Orca titles: *Laggan Lard Butts* and *In a Flash* from the Currents series; *Stuffed*, *Juice*, *Grind*, *Overdrive*, *Caged Eagles* and *War of the Eagles*; and the Basketball Series, *Triple Threat*, *Underdog*, *Off Season*, *Full Court Press*, *Road Trip*, *Hoop Crazy!*, *Long Shot* and *Three on Three*.

## Connecting to the Text

### Character and Novel Study

To engage students with the characters in *Special Edward*, use the following as discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

- Edward said, “I was pretty fast at running off my mouth...I could talk myself out of any trouble. Of course, most of the time talking got me into the trouble to begin with” (p. 6). Does Edward’s nickname, Fast Eddy, accurately describe him? Think of examples in the novel.
- When Edward was in grade nine, his brother was in grade twelve, and “that was a major boost on the cool scale” (p. 19). Now his brother has moved on to university, “on a scholarship, of course” (p. 20). Teachers say his brother was a bright student. Edward complains that “They never said, ‘And why aren’t you?’, but it was implied” (p. 20). Why would Edward be uncomfortable with the teachers’ comments about his brother? Since Edward doesn’t try his best, could he be feeling guilty?
- Invite students to reflect on the following quotes, answering the questions below:
  - (p. 25) *“It is time for me to make a move from underachieving slacker to special education...I’m about to take advantage of this whole special-education scam.”*  
How do you feel about Edward exploiting the special education system and lying to Mrs. Flanagan and Dr. McClintock to make things easier for himself?
  - (p. 27) *Cody laughed. “You don’t take notes because you’re lazy, you don’t take school seriously and you don’t care if you get good marks.”*  
Cody seems to know Edward well. What kind of advice could Cody give Edward to encourage him to try harder?
  - (p. 30) *“...they wanted me to do my work, show up on time, show respect for stupid teachers and get better marks. They were all just misunderstandings.”*  
Edward gets in trouble a lot, but always maintains that there are misunderstandings. Do you think that’s true? Why, or why not? What kind of trouble do you think Edward has been in?
  - (p. 31) *“The best indicator of what is going to happen in the future is to look at what has happened in the past.”*  
What do you think this means for Edward, Cody and Ahmad? What do you think their futures hold? Imagine ten years have gone by since grade ten. What are they all doing now?
  - (p. 51) *“Some students are resistant, even upset and angry. Some refuse to talk to me.”*  
Why do some students not want to talk to Dr. McClintock? What is holding them back or making them uncomfortable?
  - (p. 61) *“For a microsecond, I wondered if I should just confess. I tried to imagine just how much trouble that would get me in. I couldn’t do that. And really, who was this going to hurt?”*

By trying to fool his parents, his teachers and the psychologist, who is Edward hurting? What would have happened in the story if Edward had confessed? Would he have been punished? Would he have received the help he needed?

(p. 84) *“Just because you’re here doesn’t mean you’re not smart,” [Elizabeth] said. She sounded offended.*

Why was Edward surprised to find out that Elizabeth had learning disabilities?

(p. 92) *“I’ve assessed hundreds and hundreds of individuals, and I’ve never seen a test quite like this.”*

Dr. McClintock said Edward tried very hard to fail. Did he convince the psychologist? What tests and methods did she use to assess Edward? Could he ever really have fooled her?

(p. 104) *“With a learning disability you have to try harder, study more, work longer if you want to succeed. And you can succeed.”*

By studying for the history test, what lesson did Edward learn about success and achievement? Do you think he’ll keep studying now he understands the connection to his success?

- Edward said, “I knew if I worked harder I could get a higher grade, but so far nobody had given me a convincing argument that it was worth the extra work” (p. 9). Ask students to write a letter to Edward to talk him into trying harder. What’s in it for Edward if he does? What might be ahead for him if he doesn’t? Include examples from the novel in your letter.

### Plot Study and Building Vocabulary

- Edward’s intention was to fake his way in to see Dr. McClintock, get a designation as exceptional and continue on as an “underachieving slacker.” In the end, he was diagnosed with learning disabilities, and he got the help he needed all along. Using the vocabulary below, tell the story of Edward’s journey.

Did things go according to his plan?

Did Edward get what he wanted, or did what he wanted change?

allowed	candidates	exceptional	misunderstandings	pretend
answers	concentrate	gestures	multiple	punctual
applause	concerned	guarantee	nickname	questions
appreciate	confess	hyperactivity	obvious	resistance
argue	diagrams	intelligence	officially	situation
assessment	difficulties	miraculously	opinion	typical
attitude	exaggeration	mistake	potential	understanding

## **Connecting to the Curriculum**

### **Language Arts—Personal Planning**

1. Edward's drama teacher encourages students to create stories. "You could roll into her class halfway through and as long as you gave her what she called 'a good lie,' she didn't worry about it. I loved coming up with stories. Sometimes I was late on purpose so I could tell a story" (p. 2). As a personal planning exercise, challenge students to complete the following.
  - Since Edward likes creating stories, what kind of profession might suit him? Make a list of three ideas. (Examples could be professional storyteller, public speaker, comedian, writer, etc.)
  - A professional storyteller must have skills in writing/composition and performance/drama. They must also be skilled at engaging and reading their audience. Could a natural storyteller like Edward use his skills in professions such as education, business, politics, religion/faith or healthcare?
  - Choose two professions—one with a clear link to storytelling, such as comedian, and one without a clear link, such as nurse. Write a paragraph describing how Edward could utilize his natural talent for storytelling in both professions.
2. While Edward calls himself an underachieving slacker and is disinterested in school, he also lacks some key skills that would make his school life easier, particularly in time management and test-taking. Complete the following as a group activity, drawing connections to *Special Edward*, where appropriate.
  - Read aloud the passage beginning on page 7, "I looked down at my test. I was still only three quarters of the way through the third page..." and ending on page 9 with "No, steroids would only help me run away from work faster...maybe that would have helped today."
  - Brainstorm a list of strategies Edward could use that would help him develop skills in test-taking, and record ideas on the board or on flipchart paper. Cody suggested Edward "could study and show up on time" (p. 23). Other examples could include: read the directions first, scan the whole test quickly before answering any questions, answer the easy questions first.
  - Encourage students to think of ideas outside of the context of the actual test, such as get a good night's sleep the night before, wear comfortable clothes, be sure to bring a pencil and scrap paper.
  - When the brainstorm is finished, ask students to cluster the ideas. What is the best way to organize the ideas? For example, use a timeframe of before-test, during-test, after-test.

- Following the group discussion, you may wish to have students record the ideas and keep them handy, or prepare a poster illustrating the ideas. The next time the class has a test, encourage students to use the strategies, debriefing afterwards. Did the strategies help? Does anyone have a new idea to add to the list?

### Art

1. As an art project, invite students to recreate one of the settings or scenes from *Special Edward*, choosing from the list below or another scene of their choice. What color palette, textures and media would suit each scene?
  - Edward loves the activity in the cafeteria. “I loved watching people. People were just about the most interesting thing in the world, and no two were the same” (p. 19). Create an art project that captures the vibrant activity of the cafeteria.
  - Edward’s mom described her office as “always buzzing. People talking, yelling, laughing, and phones ringing” (p. 44). Create an art project that captures the noise and energy of the office.
  - When Edward made his way to the history test, he said, “We shuffled our way through the maze of tables, chairs and kids” (p. 67). Create an art project that illustrates this metaphor.
  - The support room is different than usual classrooms. Using the description on pages 70 and 71, compare this room to a usual classroom. How can you capture that difference visually?
2. Eric Walters says, “We are not defined by what we can’t do, but what we *can* do.” He also says that everybody has abilities...and disabilities. Encourage students to create an art project that demonstrates what Eric Walters says in a way that is personal to students. Do you have something you’re good at or something that challenges you? What is your attitude toward them? What inspires you?

## **Connecting to the World**

### **Special Education**

1. Edward's school provides support and services for kids who have been designated exceptional. Some students get to use spell-checkers or laptops, or they have scribes to assist with tests. Invite a special education teacher or other expert in your school or district to speak to the class about different kinds of learning styles, learning challenges and learning disabilities. How and when are kids tested in your school? What happens to the test results? Does your school or district have a learning center, support center or tutoring center that students can go to for extra help?
2. Mrs. Flanagan says that "report cards aren't a complete indication of intelligence" (p. 34). You may wish to introduce students to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, listing and explaining each intelligence: bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, naturalistic, intrapersonal, visual-spatial and musical.  
Edward said, "A big chunk of school was social. I was exceptionally good at that part. They just didn't give out marks for it" (p. 9). What intelligence do you think Edward is strongest in?
3. Encourage students to learn more about the learning disabilities and challenges explored in *Special Edward*, such as test anxiety, dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, auditory and visual processing, and memory processing issues. Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Edison, Winston Churchill and John F. Kennedy are mentioned in the novel. Challenge students to research these historical figures, discussing their learning disabilities and how they coped. What help was available in their times?