



# Break These Rules: 35 YA Authors on Speaking Up, Standing Out, and Being Yourself

*Luke Reynolds (Editor)*

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If you're a girl, you should strive to look like the model on the cover of a magazine. If you're a boy, you should play sports *and* be good at them. If you're smart, you should immediately go to college after high school, and get a job that makes you rich. Above all, be normal.

Right?

*Wrong*, say 35 leading middle grade and young adult authors. Growing up is challenging enough; it doesn't have to be complicated by convoluted, outdated, or even cruel rules, both spoken and unspoken. Parents, peers, teachers, the media, and the rest of society sometimes have impossible expectations of teenagers. These restrictions can limit creativity, break spirits, and demand that teens sacrifice personality for popularity.

In these personal, funny, moving, and poignant essays, Kathryn Erskine (*Mockingbird*), Matthew Quick (*The Silver Linings Playbook*), Gary D. Schmidt (*The Wednesday Wars*), Sara Zarr (*Story of a Girl*), and many others share anecdotes and lessons learned from their own lives in order to show you that some rules just beg to be broken.

## Break These Rules: 35 YA Authors on Speaking Up, Standing Out, and Being Yourself Details

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## From Reader Review Break These Rules: 35 YA Authors on Speaking Up, Standing Out, and Being Yourself for online ebook

### Rachel says

What an important, empowering book for young people!! I wish I'd been given permission to break these rules. It would have been nice to have this kind of candid insight into the inner lives and struggles of other people when I was young. Anyone who reads this will be wiser for doing so.

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### Ed says

Reynolds, I. Editor. (2013). Break these rules: 35 YA authors on speaking up, standing out, and being yourself. Chicago: Chicago Review Press. 213 pp. ISBN 978-1-61374-784-1. (Paperback); \$12.95.

If one were to look through all of the reviews in this column over the years, one would quickly see that many books deal with teens learning to speak up, stand out, and be themselves. In the more than ten years I have been working with high school book groups, I have read hundreds of teen reviews and teen letters to authors. These authors become something akin to royalty or even divinity to their teen fans. Many of the teens I know crave a connection with their favorite authors. This is a book for these students (as well as a book for teachers to share with classes). Not only do the 35 young adult authors tell stories about breaking rules, they hint at ways in which to develop a unique voice and style. Many of these are perfectly suitable as a read aloud; all of them are short enough to be read in a class period. Favorites of mine include Matthew Quick's experience in Namibia and learning to deal with the fear of being a minority (white) in a mostly black part of the world. Margo Rabb writes about what to wear and manages to define fashion in a teen-friendly way (and, when we think about it, she is also giving us writing advice). Sara Zarr longs for real conversation with our friends and peers about religion in which we don't sling labels and judgments, but discuss this hugely important subject thoughtfully and carefully. Gary Schmidt speaks up about religious persecution. And there are MORE! Not every student will like every essay, but there is enough good in this book to warrant purchasing copies for high school English classrooms and high school libraries all across the country. The essays listed here are worth the price of admission on their own!

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### Erin says

When I was in the 5th grade, my friend Lauren fell in love with golf. After a few weeks of her latest obsession, she dragged me out to the golf course to play with her. I was terrible at it, (not to mention it was the first and only time a bird has deemed fit to do its business on my head), but I had a lot of fun. So I kept going with her out to the golf course, clubs in hand, day after day. My father, who is a golfer, got really excited about this and offered to pay for lessons for me. And I hate to admit this, but that was the end of my infatuation with golf. I've never liked the idea of people telling me how to do things.

So honestly, I'm not sure what to rate this one. It's a fine book, full of good advice from some authors I really love. But I probably shouldn't have picked it up in the first place, since I'm not exactly the unsolicited-advice-seeking type.

## Rose says

Read from 26th August to 7th July 2013 up until 29%.

This one was such a disappointment. First off, even though I didn't DNF this one out of my own choice (my ARC expired), I will say that it probably would have taken me quite some time to get through this essay collection and it would probably continue to feel like a chore if I would have continued.

The essays' theme in this collection is breaking rules. There are quite a lot of different issues/topics the 10 essays I read talked about (to name a few: bullying, speaking up, loneliness etc.) but they always end with some way to break a certain rule connected to these issues.

Out of the 10 (from 35) essays in this collection I read, I only kind-of-liked one, which was Neesha Meminger's *DON'T TELL*. Which kind of suprised me. I was so sure that I would love (or at least like) A.S. King's and Sara Zarr's essays (their contribution to this essay collection was actually the reason I wanted and did read this) but they were actually the ones I was most disappointed by. Not so much by King's as I was by Zarr's. While King's piece on not letting people shut you up/silence you only lacked some impact it should have had on me, Zarr's piece on talking about religion left a bad taste in my mouth.

I think the problem I had with most of the essays was that I either couldn't connect with them or they were too preachy for my taste. The connection every author made to the theme of breaking rules (mostly at the end of their essays) wasn't always fitting in my opinion, which is why it sometimes made the essays sound even more preachy than some of them already were to begin with.

I probably loved the idea of this essay collection more than its execution. I wanted to read something I can relate to and that could make me look at things in a new light. Maybe even something that would make me want to change something but that just isn't what I got in the end. Especially in the case of Zarr's and King's essays that makes me feel quite sad because those were the ones I was looking forward to the most.

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## Liviana says

First off, this title is slightly misleading: it's a mix of young adult and middle grade authors writing about breaking rules. I'd name and link to all of the authors, but last time I did that I decided the effort wasn't worth it. Second off, most of the authors are worth looking up.

Each author focuses on a different rule, which titles their essay. Therefore, a quick scan of the table of contents is probably enough to help you decide whether this collection is for you. I quite enjoyed it, and thought that much of the advice wasn't quite what I expected. I liked Wendy Mass advising people to be bored sometimes. (She's not the only one.) I groaned when I saw the title "Follow the Money, Not Your Heart" (Lisa Schroeder) since I currently am in a position where I really wish I had followed the money, but the advice tends more towards balance. There are times to follow your heart and times to follow the money. (Too bad figuring out which is which is hard!)

There's a nice mix of well-known names (A.S. King, Matthew Quick, Carl Deuker) and more obscure authors (Sayantani Dasgupta, Natalie Dias Lorenzi, Anna Staniszewski). There were enough familiar names

to draw me in, and enough unfamiliar ones that sounded like they wrote cool stuff that I have plenty of new books to track down and read.

BREAK THESE RULES is unlikely to be a revelatory experience for adults, or even for the teens its aimed at. But it's less pat than you might expect. Some advice is pretty common - speak up or not having to look like a model. Other advice is something a young person might not hear much, like it's okay not to go to college. Others were unexpected, like Sara Zarr advocating talking about religion with people.

And, of course, the many authors in the anthology note that some rules are worth following. (I don't know about you, but I'll stick to driving the right way down the road and not touching the power line with bare hands.) But in the end, we all break rules. What rules have you broken lately?

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## **Julie says**

Read my review on Reading Lark: <http://readinglark.blogspot.com/2013/...>

As a whole, Break These Rules was a bit of a disappointment. I wanted to love it, I really did, but most of the essays just weren't for me. The majority of the 35 YAL authors included in this collection, some whom I recognized by name and most of whom I didn't, try too hard and just don't hit the balance of inspiration and real-life honesty that I was hoping for when I received the book.

The essays in this collection are targeted at teens and they encourage them to go break traditional and long-standing rules, to question the norm, and to go against the status quo - all things I encourage both my own children and my teenage students on a regular basis. One overwhelming message running throughout the collection was the idea to be still, embrace calm, and be bored - ideas that are important and should be encouraged in everyone. There is also the standard advice to not worry about your appearance, not second guess yourself, and to trust your judgement and your instincts. So my disappointment isn't with the subject matter, but the collection misses the mark in its delivery of the message.

The authors' life experiences range from speech disorders to trips across Africa to hospital ER visits to being flat chested, but many of them had the same tone and I just can't get on board with that. A parent committing suicide and finding a note that says a boy thinks you're not pretty both have an impact, don't get me wrong, but not to the same degree or in the same way. This collection presents the authors' experiences without giving appropriate deference to more weighty topics or having the perspective to acknowledge differences between a one day struggle and a life altering event. And because of this, many of the authors seem like they are reaching and trying too hard to connect with their YA audience.

There are some good pieces in the collection (see Final Word for my favorite), but for me, unfortunately the essays I had difficulty getting through outweighed the entertaining and/or inspiring ones. It just goes to show that being able to write fiction doesn't always translate into nonfiction or memoir writing.

Final Word: Not really for me, though there are a few gems hidden in its pages that are worth finding (like Matthew Quick's "It's Better To Be Safe Than Sorry").

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## **Alex (not a dude) Baugh says**

When my Kiddo was growing up, I taught her to always be herself, and to question anything that doesn't feel

right to her. Both of these must have sunk in somewhat because she is her own person to a pretty good degree (would that 100% your own person were attainable). I think that some like this was the goal of this book, but it didn't quite make it. First of all, there was too much lecturing, too often the well meaning advise came across as a command, not a bit of sage advice, and in the end, the message was "be like me and be different." See what's wrong with that?

This was a well-meaning, well-intentioned book of life stories by well-known authors that kids would recognize. Some of their true life stories are good, but the whole book could have been done better. I don't think this would hold the interest of most kids today.

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### **Janet says**

These YA authors suggest breaking rules like stop daydreaming and shhh. I wish I had read this when I was a teen. Great book to pick up for short spurts, each author's section is just a couple of pages long. There is a section in the back 'About the contributors' which I found helpful to learn about authors that I am not familiar with.

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### **Kathleen Brunnett says**

YA - Not sure if this will find a solid audience with my middle schoolers, but certainly food for thought in these essays.

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### **Jennifer says**

I've discovered a few authors to check out based on their writing and personality in this collection, so that's always exciting. Some of these mini-essays are more relevant and well-written than others, but they all center around the basic truth that people don't seem to truly grasp until after the period of time when they most need it<sup>2</sup> (aka high school): to follow the beat of your own drum.

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### **Ietrio says**

I was curious about the title. And then I have read a few stories. And it was so nice. Tell the people: be yourself. And you can only be yourself by following your dreams and whims as well. But then I got to the religious stuff.

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### **Genevieve says**

3.5 stars. Reading advanced copy from Netgalley. I like the idea (Here's a "rule" and here's why you should break it), but like with any anthology, it's somewhat uneven. Sometimes too serious, like a boring graduation speaker trying to be inspirational, but also at times quite funny and on the mark (Wendy Mass, for example).

## orangerful says

Just read the story by A.S. King (because I am a little obsessed at the moment). It was good, especially for a collection like this, which is truly for teens turning into young adults trying to figure out how the world works.

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## Eva says

First-reads win: I truly think this book would be a great read for adults who want to remember their youthful self and "take off the cranky pants", as my mom says. Even though this book is by different Young Adult authors, don't think it isn't meant for all ages! I'm going to pass this copy on to a friend; when over at my house recently she read the first chapter and immediately wanted to borrow it. Good life lessons and interesting, funny stories make up a conglomeration of the many ways we should indeed Break the Rules.

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## Eustacia Tan says

This is one of those rare books that I managed to finish in one day. I used to read at least one book a day, but with university coming up, well, I've slowed down a lot. So this is currently the highest praise I can give a book when it comes to addictiveness and readability.

While I don't read much YA (because of how every book seems to have a heroine that's gorgeous but doesn't know it, with two guys after her), I was very pleasantly surprised. This really are "rules" that ought to be broken.

For example, "Listening is a waste of time" or "Don't clash with the crowd" (guess which one I break really often?). Some rules are more of unspoken social norms, like "Look like a magazine cover" - they're not said, but it's more implied that everyone should follow them. Again, I'm starting to feel pretty good of myself - I break that rule too! (Ok, I break it because I'm too lazy to put on make up and I prize comfort more than anything, but still!)

There are some that I have doubts about, or actually thing are worth holding, like "Dress appropriately" (ok, I know this is about personality, but it's always good to wear, say a suit to your entrance ceremony rather than fbts and flip flops), and "There are firm rules in life". Personally, I do think there are firm rules in life - the basic ones being stuff like "Don't murder", "Don't steal", "Respect your parents" (I could just list the Ten Commandments here), "Love your neighbour", etc. To say "do what feels right, right now" is to me, impractical. What if taking my friends stuff is what feels right to me? Or what if I feel like I should punch/insult someone who's annoying me? Those may feel right at that time, but they're definitely not the right things to do.

But what really impressed me though, were the books that the authors had written. Quite a few of them made reference to their books, and they were really different from what I've come to characterise YA as. I really need to go and pick up those books.

Probably not just for teens/young adults, this book is suitable for everyone.

Disclaimer: I got a copy of this galley from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for a free and honest review.

This review was first posted to Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

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