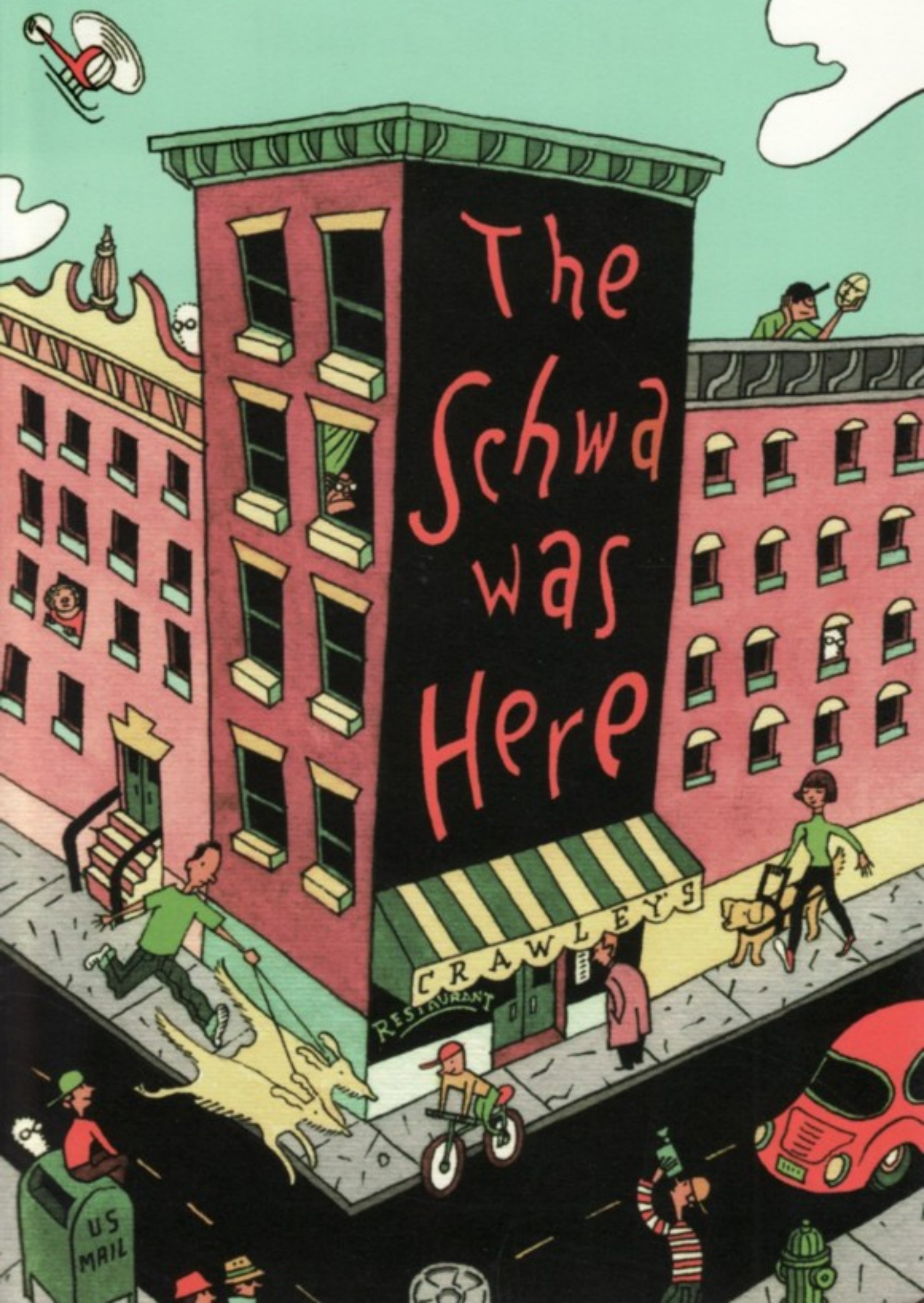


# Neal Shusterman





## Manny Bullpucky Gets His Sorry Butt Hurled Off the Marine Park Bridge

**1** I don't really remember when I first met the Schwa, he was just kind of always there, like the killer potholes on Avenue U or the Afghans barking out the windows above Crawley's restaurant—a whole truck load of 'em, if you believed the rumors. Old Man Crawley, by the way, was a certifiable loony tune. A shut-in, like Brooklyn's own Howard Hughes, almost as legendary as the lobsters served up in his restaurant below. See, there was this staircase that went up from the restaurant to the residence on the second floor, but with each step it got darker around you, so when you tried to climb it, you kept thinking you heard the horror audience behind you yelling, "No, don't go up the stairs!" Because who but a moron would go up to search for Old Man Crawley, who had fingernails like Ginsu knives that could dice, slice, and julienne you, then serve you up in like fourteen thousand plastic dog bowls. Those bowls, by the way, would probably be made by my father, the Vice-Executive Vice-Vice-President of Product

Development for Pisher Plastic Products. If you're a guy, I'm sure you already know that their most famous product is that little plastic strainer at the bottom of urinals, and you probably still laugh every time you look down while taking a leak and see PISHER® written in happy bold letters, like maybe it was to remind you why you were standing there.

But what was I talking about?

Oh, yeah—the Schwa. See, that was the whole point with the Schwa: You couldn't even think about him without losing track of your own thoughts—like even in your head he was somehow becoming invisible.

Okay, so like I said, I don't remember when I met him—nobody does—but I can tell you the first time I remembered actually noticing him. It was the day Manny Bullpucky jumped from the Marine Park Bridge.

It was a Saturday, and my friends and I were bored, as usual. I was hanging out with Howie Bogerton, whose one goal in life was not to have any goals in life, and Ira Goldfarb, who was a self-proclaimed cinematic genius. With the digital video camera his grandparents had gotten him for his bar mitzvah last year, Ira was determined to be Steven Spielberg by the time he got to high school. As for Manny Bullpucky, we kinda dragged him along with us to various places we went. We had to drag him around, on accounta he was a dummy. Not a dummy like Wendell Tiggor, who had to repeat the fifth grade like fourteen thousand times, but a real dummy. More snooty people might call him a mannequin, or even a *prosthetic personage*, because nobody calls things what they really are anymore. But to us normal people in Gerritsen Beach, Brooklyn, he was a dummy, plain and simple.



As for his name, it came in the natural course of human events. Dad had brought him home from work one day. "Look at this guy," he says proudly, holding him up by the scruff of his neck. "He's made of a new ultra-high-grade lightweight plastic. Completely unbreakable."

My older brother Frank looks up from his dinner. "Bull-pucky," he says—although I'm editing out the bad word here, on accounta my mother might read this, and I don't like the taste of soap.

As soon as Frankie says it, Mom, without missing a beat, hauls off and whacks him on the head in her own special way, starting low, and swinging up, like a tennis player giving a ball topspin, just grazing the thin spot on his head that's gonna be bald someday, probably from Mom slapping him there. "You watch ya mout!" Mom says. "Mout," not "mouth." We got a problem here with the "th" sound. It's not just us—it's all a Brooklyn, maybe Queens, too. My English teacher says I also drop vowels like a bad juggler, and have an infuriating tense problem, whatever that meant. So anyway, if you put the "th" problem and the vowel thing together, our family's Catlick, instead of Catholic, and my name's Antny instead of Anthony. Somehow that got changed into Antsy when I was little, and they've called me Antsy ever since. It don't bother me no more. Used to, but, y'know, you grow into your name.

Anyway, Dad tosses me the dummy. "Here, take it," he says.

"Whadaya giving it to me for?"

"Why do you think? I want you to break it."

"I thought you said it was unbreakable."

"Yeah, and you're the test, *capische*?"

I smile, proud to figure in my father's product development



# The Schwa

**T**hey say his clothes blend into the background, no matter where he stands. They say if you stare at him long enough, you can see what's written on the wall behind him. They say a lot of things about the Schwa, but one thing's for sure: No one ever noticed him. Except me. My name is Antsy Bonano—and I can tell you what's true and what's not, 'cause I was there. So if you all just shut up and listen, I'll tell you everything there is to know about the Schwa, from how he got his name to what really happened with his mom. I'll spill everything. Unless, of course, "the Schwa Effect" wipes him out of my brain before I'm done....

Winner of the *Boston Globe / Horn Book Award*

An ALA BBYA

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★ "Antsy tells his story in a bubbly Beastie Boys-meet-Bugs Bunny Brooklynese that keeps the pages flipping, and Shusterman's characters [are] reminiscent of those crafted by E. L. Konigsburg and Jerry Spinelli."  
—*SLJ*, starred review

"This is the kind of offbeat story I love best."

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ISBN 978-0-14-240577-2



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© Steven Guarnaccia, 2006  
Cover design by Jay Cooper

U.S.A. \$6.99 / CAN. \$7.50

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