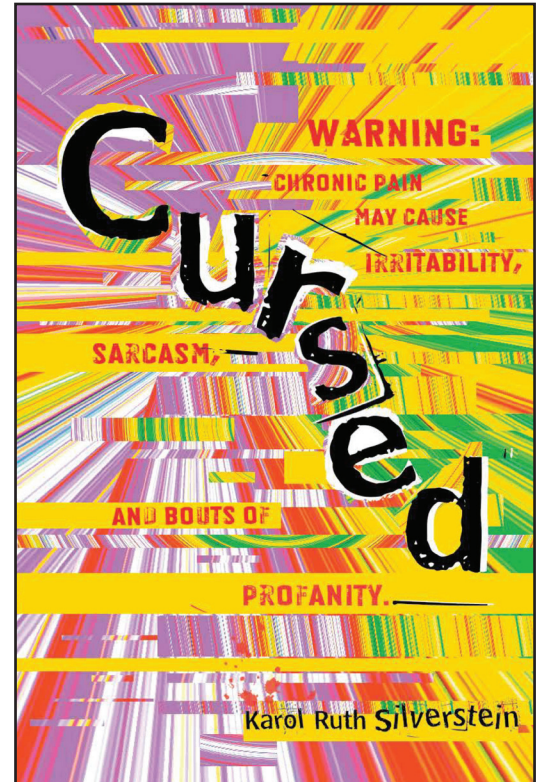


I COULD NEVER LOOK LIKE THEM. EVER. I'M NOT LIKE THEM.

About the Book

Fourteen-year-old Erica “Ricky” Bloom is newly diagnosed with a painful chronic illness. She’s pretty pissed off about it. Her body hurts constantly, her family’s a mess (thanks to the poor choices of the Disaster-Formerly-Known-As-Her-Parents) and the boy she’s crushing on is completely clueless. The best coping mechanisms that fiercely independent Ricky can come up with are cursing (a lot) and cutting school (also a lot).

When her truancy, a.k.a. The Charade, is finally discovered, Ricky struggles to catch up in school to avoid repeating ninth grade. With the guidance of her super-strict speech teacher and the moral support of a cute classmate, Oliver, who’s a childhood cancer survivor, Ricky might just learn something as important as her classwork—how to start accepting help.



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About the Author



Karol Ruth Silverstein attended the American Film Institute and works as a writer and screenwriter in Los Angeles. *Cursed* is her debut novel.

About the Title

- Why would the author call this book “Cursed”? Why put a warning on the cover?
- Ricky curses a lot—why? How do others react to her language? What do those reactions tell us about these characters?
- What role does swearing play in your own life? In what spaces do you feel it is appropriate and not appropriate to swear? Are there swear words you don’t use?
- How does Ricky feel “cursed” by her situation? Could other characters be considered “cursed”?

About Chronic Illness

- How does Ricky feel about her illness? What obstacles does she encounter that her classmates and family members don’t notice or think about?
- How do you think Ricky’s life would be different if she had a visible illness or disability, for example if she used a wheelchair?
- For able-bodied readers: What parts of your daily life would change if you developed a chronic illness or disability? For example: Would your family need to modify your home for wheelchair access? Would you need to move to a different neighborhood or state for better access to healthcare?
- Take a look around your school, library, or community center. What accommodations are in place for people with chronic illnesses and disabilities? Ricky’s school has an elevator, but it’s not convenient to her classes—are the accommodations in your facility as convenient to use as stairs or other nonaccommodating features?

About Family

- How does Ricky feel about her parents? Why? How do those feelings change over the course of the book?
- Would you view Ricky differently if this book were narrated by her dad? By her mom? By her sister?
- In the first chapter, Ricky thinks about how uncomfortable her bed is at her father’s apartment and why she doesn’t complain about it. Have you ever refrained from complaining about a serious problem? Why? Have others found out about this problem? How did they react?
- Have you ever found out about a serious problem someone else had but didn’t complain about? How did you feel about it? What did you do or say?

About School

- Ricky’s truancy is a big part of this story. Have you ever skipped school? Why?
- What would you consider a “good” or “bad” reason to skip school?
- Ricky is enrolled in “. . . the only seven-eight-nine school left in Philadelphia, maybe the only one left in the country.” Did you or anyone you know attend a 7–9 school? How do you think this experience would differ from a 6–8 or K–8 school?
- When Ricky returns to school, she encounters a lot of bullying. Which insult or action did you find the most hurtful or intimidating? Why? What do you think of how teachers, parents, and other adults in the story handle bullies?
- What policies does your school have in place about bullying? Are these policies always followed? Are they fair?