

★ *“A hard-hitting and ultimately insightful tale”*

— Kirkus Reviews

ABOUT THE BOOK

Charlie is thirteen, isolated, and desperate for a friend. For a full school year, Mark humiliated him publicly, ran a weekly “Charlie Day” with his friends, and left Charlie believing the cruelty was somehow his own fault. Then, the first day of summer, Mark shows up at Charlie’s door — to apologize, and to be friends.

What follows is a trauma-informed, emotionally precise account of coercive control in an adolescent male friendship: manufactured dependency, identity erosion, unpredictable punishment balanced with reward, and the slow dismantling of a boy’s sense of self. By the end, Charlie doesn’t defeat Mark with a fight — he chooses who he wants to be when he finally holds the power.

THEMES & ISSUES ADDRESSED

- **Coercive control** in peer relationships — control of hygiene, clothing, behavior, and emotional responses
- **Manufactured dependency** — exploiting loneliness to create compliance
- **Identity erosion** — a child internalizing a manipulator’s narrative about who he is
- **Social isolation** as a tactic — reputational damage that keeps others away
- **Suicidal ideation** — Charlie discloses that Charlie Day made him want to kill himself (handled with care; no graphic content)
- **Resilience and agency** — recovery of self-worth without adult rescue
- **The complexity of forgiveness** — the novel ends with “not yet,” not a tidy resolution

A NOTE ON THE PSYCHOLOGY

Mark’s behavior maps closely to documented patterns of coercive control: he uses isolation, criticism, intermittent reinforcement, and public humiliation to maintain dominance. The book does not name this clinically, but the pattern is clear enough for adolescent readers to recognize — including in their own lives. The final reveal (Mark lost his own friends after going too far) reframes the story: the aggressor was also damaged. This creates space for nuanced discussion rather than simple villain-victim framing.

BOOK DETAILS

Author:	Rich Samuels
Genre:	Realistic Fiction / YA
Age Range:	11–15 Grades 6–10
Lexile:	690L
Themes:	Bullying, peer manipulation, SEL
Content:	Trauma-informed; suicidal ideation (responsibly handled)
Format:	Paperback & Kindle
Dist.:	IngramSpark & Amazon
Rating:	4.4 stars · 66 Amazon reviews

“An honest and unabashed look at the dynamics of bullying.”

— Suzanne Rogers
Founder, Hill View Montessori Charter Public School

WHY THIS BOOK FOR YOUR OFFICE

- Opens conversations about **friendships that feel wrong** — a common unspoken concern in middle school counseling
- Addresses **male victims of peer manipulation**, underserved by most anti-bullying literature
- Trauma-informed narrative depicting **suicidal ideation from peer cruelty** — handled responsibly, crisis resources included
- Models **help-seeking behavior**: Charlie eventually discloses, and is believed
- Ends with **moral complexity**, not a tidy resolution — ideal for discussion

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Charlie didn’t tell any adults for so long?
- Mark told Charlie he was “immature.” How did that word work as a tool of control?
- Charlie has the power to destroy Mark in front of his parents. Why doesn’t he?
- What does “Not yet” tell us about where Charlie is emotionally?
- Have you been in a friendship that made you feel worse about yourself?

CURRICULUM & SEL CONNECTIONS

- **ELA**: First-person unreliable narration, character arc, theme analysis
- **SEL**: Self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills (CASEL framework)
- **Health/Counseling**: Peer coercion, consent in friendships, help-seeking
- Free **Study Guide** at RichSamuelsAuthor.com