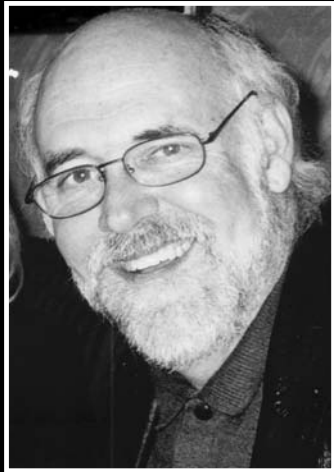


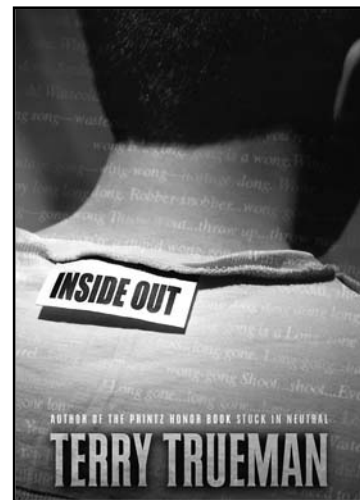
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Terry Trueman was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He attended the University of Washington, where he received his B.A. in creative writing. He also has an M.S. in applied psychology and an M.F.A. in creative writing, both from Eastern Washington University. The father of two sons, Henry and Jesse, Terry Trueman and his wife Patti make their home in Spokane, Washington, where he has lived since 1974.



Tr 0-06-623960-5 \$15.99 (\$23.99)  
Lb 0-06-623961-3 \$16.89 (\$25.89)  
**Teen Fiction**

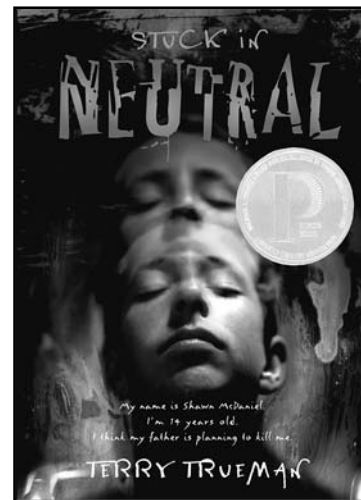


Tr 0-06-623962-1 \$15.99 (\$23.99)  
Lb 0-06-623963-X \$16.89 (\$25.89)  
Pb 0-06-447376-7 \$6.99 (\$9.99)  
**Teen Fiction**

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers

"The events unfold with an edge of danger that provides riveting suspense. A plot line that grabs and doesn't let go."

—*Kirkus Reviews*



Lb 0-06-028518-4 \$16.89 (\$21.89)  
Pb 0-06-447213-2 \$6.99 (\$9.99)  
**Teen Fiction**

- Michael L. Printz Honor Book
- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers
- ALA *Booklist* Editors' Choice

"An intense reading experience."  
—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The author biography, plot summaries, pre-reading activities, and discussion questions are intended to spark discussion about these thought-provoking books.

 **HarperTempest**  
An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

1350 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10019



Visit our website at [www.harperteacher.com](http://www.harperteacher.com)  
and sign up to Be a Harper Teacher!

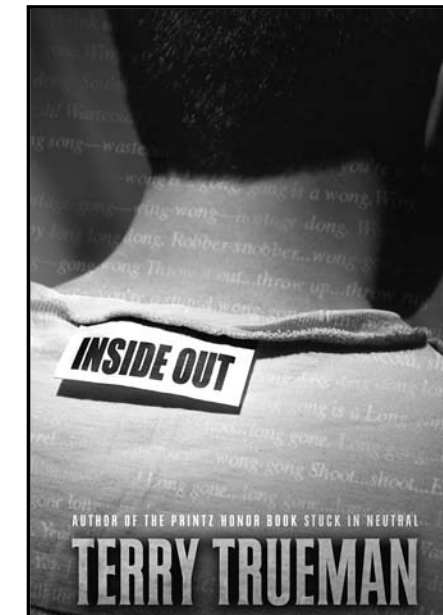
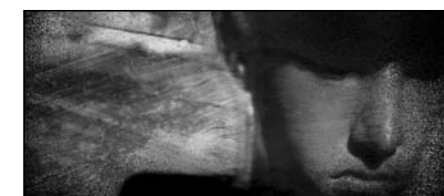
# A Guide to Teaching TERRY TRUEEMAN'S

**CRUISE CONTROL • INSIDE OUT • STUCK IN NEUTRAL**



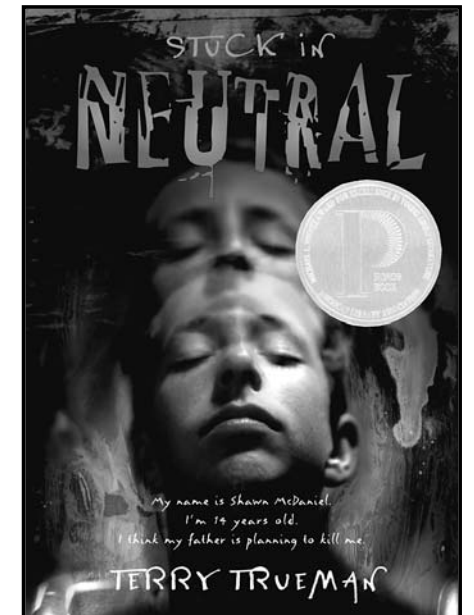
### About The Book • *Cruise Control*

Paul McDaniel feels trapped into staying at home rather than going away to college on an athletic scholarship. He feels responsible for taking care of his younger brother, Shawn, who has cerebral palsy, because their father left when he couldn't handle Shawn's disorder. The anger Paul feels about his father's abandonment erupts in violent outbursts, with his victims barely able to crawl away from the beatings. His anger level escalates when Mr. McDaniel exposes their family situation to the world on a daily talk show. Paul's best friend, Tim, has family problems of his own but tries to help Paul deal with his anger, both on and off the basketball court. A showdown with his father finally brings Paul the peace of mind he needs to get on with his own life. This novel is a companion to the Printz-honor winning book *Stuck in Neutral*.



### About The Book • *Inside Out*

Sixteen-year-old Zach Wahhsted is battling schizophrenia, which includes hearing the vicious voices of Dirtbag and Rat in his head telling him he is worthless and should take his own life. Symptoms somewhat controlled by medication, Zach waits in a coffee shop after school one day for his mother to pick him up and give him his afternoon dose. But before she arrives, two teenaged boys attempt to hold up the coffee shop. Zach, experiencing the lack of emotion typical of schizophrenics, doesn't fear the two robbers and engages them in disjointed conversations that both frustrate and help them. Ultimately, Zach and the two brothers safely walk out of the coffee shop and into police custody. Sadly, Zach's story doesn't end as happily as that of the teenaged brothers he helps save.



### About The Book • *Stuck in Neutral*

Fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel loves his life, even though he has had cerebral palsy since birth and cannot control any of his bodily functions. What his family doesn't know is that Shawn is an intelligent teenager with a dry sense of humor and the ability to remember everything he hears, sees, and reads. His parents divorced when he was very young because his father could not handle Shawn's disability, especially the seizures. Mr. McDaniel is sure his son is in pain, but Shawn loves the seizures, as they allow his soul to fly away, leaving his useless body behind. Shawn wishes he could communicate to his father that he is very much alive inside and wants to stay that way.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## *Cruise Control*

### Pre-Reading Activity

*Cruise Control* is a companion novel to *Stuck in Neutral*, with many of the same events occurring in both books. Have students compare the books in relation to the differences between Shawn and Paul's perceptions of the same events. Have students discuss who they think is the more credible narrator.

1. Even though Paul knows how profoundly disabled Shawn is, he says that he envies him (pp. 5–7). Why would a smart, athletically talented older brother envy a younger brother with cerebral palsy?
2. Paul acknowledges that he has a problem controlling his temper and enjoys beating up other guys. To whom is he actually giving the “bloody, vicious” beatings in his mind (p. 11)? If he beat up the person he really wants to, would it ease his anger?
3. Eddie Farr is one of those geeky guys Paul would never hang out with. Why does Paul drive him home and admit that Eddie has “built up a lifetime of protection and credit” with him (p. 23)? What has Eddie done to garner this kind of support from Paul? Do you have anyone in your life like Eddie?
4. How does Paul react to his father's visit to the school? Why is Mr. McDaniel at the school? What does it have to do with Paul's family? How would you feel if your father brought this type of public scrutiny to your family's problems?
5. Shawn attends the same school as Paul. How does Paul react when he sees Shawn at school (pp. 32–33)? If you were in Paul's place, how do you think you would react?
6. Paul unmercifully beats up the driver of the Camaro. What does Paul mean when he says, “This guy is everything wrong with the world . . . everything wrong with *my* world” (p. 52)?
7. Mr. McDaniel has asked Paul and Cindy if they will go on a TV talk show to discuss what it is like to live with Shawn. Paul is furious and says he isn't going on any freak show to talk about his brother. Cindy agrees to go. Reread Cindy's discussion of what it is like to live with a handicapped sibling (pp. 69–70). Why is Paul so surprised by what Cindy says? Does he agree with her?

8. Mr. McDaniel gets angry when Shawn starts to loudly vocalize and have a seizure on the way home from an outing and shouts that he can't stand it. Paul is also angry, but not at Shawn. He shouts at his father, “YOU can't stand it, huh? What about Shawn?” (p. 83). Do you think Paul has a right to be angry with his father?
9. Even though Paul's mother has told him that he does not need to stay at home, why does Paul need to hear his father say, “Shawn is your mother's and *my* responsibility, not yours” (p. 120), and that he should go away to college?
10. What does Paul confide to Shawn about the incident when the bullies were picking on him? What happened that Paul is ashamed of? How does this confession change the relationship between the two brothers (pp. 121–124)?

## *Inside Out*

### Pre-Reading Activity

Zach has schizophrenia, an often misunderstood and sometimes feared condition. Trueman includes information about schizophrenia on his website, [www.terrytrueman.com](http://www.terrytrueman.com). Introduce students to Trueman's website, allowing them time to explore the information on schizophrenia and engage in discussion about what they have learned.

1. Who are Dirtbag and Rat, and why is Zach afraid of them? What kinds of things do they say to him? Are they more dangerous than the students at school who also call him names? Why or why not?
2. Why doesn't Zach fear the two teenaged brothers with guns? How is his interaction with the brothers different from that of the other hostages? Do they appreciate his interaction with the boys? How do the other hostages react to Zach's comments?
3. Zach is self-aware enough to realize that some of his comments are very inappropriate, but they just burst out of him. Have you ever been in a situation where you burst out with a comment that was inappropriate? How did the people around you react?
4. Why do you think Zach says, “I'm not retarded,” when the older brother asks him what is wrong with him (p. 14)? How does Zach offer to prove his intelligence? Is it appropriate for the situation?

5. Who is Dr. Curtis, and why does he write letters to Zach's mother? Do you think Dr. Curtis is surprised when Zach calls him from the coffee shop and asks him to help the brothers? Why do the brothers trust Zach when he says Dr. Curtis can help?
6. The incidents in the novel are told from Zach's perspective. Do you think he is a reliable narrator of events? Why or why not?
7. Zach has learned that saying he is sorry when people get upset with him calms them down. Do you think Zach understands what being sorry means? Is he capable of feeling remorse?
8. During the attempted escape from the coffee shop, the voices in Zach's head have taken over, telling him that he deserves to die. Cornered by a figure with a rifle, Zach thinks to himself “yes, please, fire” (pp. 95–96). Do you think Zach really wants to die?
9. Alan feels sorry for Zach and says, “Zach's brain is all upside down and inside out” (p. 105). Although simplistic, is this an accurate description of how Zach's brain works?
10. The brothers decide to set free all but one of the hostages. If Zach had not volunteered to stay, which of the other hostages do you think might have volunteered? Does Zach understand what he has offered to do (p. 52)?
11. Alan and Joey lie down on the pavement, pushing their guns away from them, when Zach turns around and runs back into the coffee shop. What does he run back in to get (pp. 110–111)? Is his behavior surprising to the reader?

## *Stuck in Neutral*

### Pre-Reading Activity

Shawn has cerebral palsy, a condition that students may not be familiar with. Discuss with students how this condition affects people physically. Also address how people are often uncomfortable interacting with a disabled person and how knowledge of the condition can alleviate some of this discomfort.

1. Shawn is able to remember everything he has heard since age five. No one else is aware that Shawn is a near genius. How does this lack of understanding of Shawn's mental abilities influence how people interact around him? Would they talk as openly if they knew he understood what they were saying?

2. Shawn talks directly to you, the reader. He says he may have overheard the fight you had with your girlfriend or what your father said when you were shopping for a particular baseball glove (p. 3). How would you feel if you knew someone could remember, in detail, an incident in your life you would rather forget?
3. Shawn states: “My dad didn't divorce my mom, or my sister, Cindy, or my brother, Paul—he divorced *me*” (p. 4). Is Shawn correct in his assessment of the situation? Why or why not?
4. Mr. McDaniel won the Pulitzer Prize for the poem he wrote about being a parent of a child with cerebral palsy. Shawn is “introduced” to an audience his father has brought to tears with the poem. How does Shawn react to this situation (pp. 27–29)? How would you feel in Shawn's place?
5. Unable to handle his feeling that Shawn is in great pain during his seizures, Mr. McDaniel is considering the option of euthanasia. Are Mr. McDaniel's feelings justifiable? Is there ever a time that euthanasia is acceptable?
6. Shawn ponders, “I do sometimes wonder what life would be like if people, even *one* person, knew that I was smart and that there's an actual person hidden inside my useless body; I *am* in here, I'm just sort of stuck in neutral” (p. 11). What does Shawn mean by being stuck in neutral?
7. Shawn's father loses control of his anger when a crow lands near the porch where Shawn sits. He fears that Shawn cannot always be protected (p. 21). Do you think the same type of fear is a factor in the severity of the beating Paul gives the two bullies who try to burn Shawn (pp. 91–92)?
8. Reread Shawn's description of his father (p. 23). Is his assessment accurate? Would most fathers fit into Shawn's description to some degree?
9. With his father sitting beside him verbalizing his uncertainty about the quality of Shawn's life, a seizure hits. Shawn knows he can do nothing—either way he will be soaring (p. 114). What does Shawn mean by this comment?