



BOOK RESUME: ALT ED

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Susan Calloway, bullied and overweight, faces daily humiliation at the hands of her classmates - and she's had enough. With her anger about to reach the boiling point, Susan lands in an alternative education class, a sort of group therapy for the nearly expelled. School is bad enough, but facing off with five peers, including her cruelest tormentor, is worse. Now Susan is being forced to do something she's always avoided - talk about herself and listen to what other people have to say about her. She has two choices: find her voice, or be prepared to take the insults in silence. It won't be easy, but alt ed may be just the last resort Susan needs.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★“Carefully nuanced connections between characters plus insight into the adolescent ability to use low self-esteem as a cruel weapon catapults Atkins's (*When Jeff Comes Home*) novel of troubled teens well above the familiarity of its trappings (e.g., *The Breakfast Club*). Narrator Susan Calloway opens with a scene from her freshman year in high school in which classmate Kale Krasner taunts her, sending her scurrying to the library and a chance meeting with Brendan Slater, who shows her kindness. Fast forward in the next chapter to a year later, when Susan is in trouble and Mr. Duffy, school counselor ("aka Puffy, Doofy, Doofdork, and Lardass"), tells her he has saved her from expulsion by enrolling her in his Vocational Ed class with five other students in the same predicament. Yes, Kale and Brendan are also in the group—Kale is a bully, Brendan is gay and Susan is fat. The other two members of the group: popular jock Randy Callahan (on whom Susan has an enormous crush), beautiful cheerleader Tracee Ellison, who dates quarterback Justin Wright, and Amber Hawkins (labeled "slut" and "skank" on the bathroom walls). Oh, and Susan's widowed father is the football coach. Atkins exploits the stereotypes brilliantly, weaving together these small-town students' histories in unexpected ways. She reveals brief episodes from the past with quartz-like precision, setting off a series of small epiphanies. Teenagers will find themselves re-examining peers they had written off, as each of Atkins's characters emerges, fully formed from these pages.”—*Publisher's Weekly*, starred review

“When earnest, pumpkin-faced school counselor Roy Duffy creates a behavioral group in the vocational ed trailer of Wayne High School, Susan Callaway, a smart, overweight outsider, joins her partner in crime, Brendan Slater, gay "school freak" and penultimate outsider, in the weekly remediation sessions. Johanna Parker's versatile reading captures the strong personalities of the six group members who gather to talk about their problems rather than face expulsion for their various infractions. While Randy Callahan struggles toward honesty and friendliness, hot girl Tracee Ellison irritates with phony sincerity. Amber Hawkins cleaves to her tough-girl stance as Kale Krasner sneers every syllable. Susan's desperation and slow blossoming over the 12 weeks shine through Parker's reading.”—*Kirkus*

Title: Alt Ed

Author: Catherine Atkins

Imprint: G.P. Putnam's
Sons Books for Young
Readers

Publisher: Penguin Young
Readers

On sale date: April 14,
2003

ISBN: 9780399238543
and 9780142402351

Format: Hardcover and
Paperback

Age Range*: 12 Up

Grade Range: Gr 8 Up

(Recommended by *School Library
Journal*)

Updated 3.30.2026

Penguin Random House

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