

21 Proms



Book Summary

This book has short story collections, edited by David Levithan and Daniel Ehrenhaft, featuring 21 distinct prom stories written by various popular young adult (YA) authors.

Summary of Concerns

This book contains; alternate gender/sexual ideologies, alcohol, blackmail, bullying, controversial cultural and social commentary, derogatory terms, drugs, dubious consent, lying, poisoning, profanity, sexual activities/sexual nudity, sexual assault, stealing, and toxic relationships.

YA

By David Levithan

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Youth Restricted

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31	<p>They're going to spike the punch. This is a prom prank of epic proportions. Danny won't be part of it. He'll be slow-dancing like an idiot. He'll feel left out. "In vodka veritas," I say and tilt back my bottle, pouring the last of it down my throat. I choke a little, but I swallow anyway. In vodka is truth. Ms. Esposito doesn't smile, but she does hand me a vial of the whatever-it-is. I'm thinking Everclear. "Nunc est bibendum," she says. Now it's time to drink.</p>
32	<p>He tilts his head toward the stage and the DJ. The shimmering lights of the dance floor reflect in the lenses of his glasses, obscuring his eyes. "They think they're so smart, but all they do is screw up, screw around, and screw off. Tonight, they'll see their own true natures. You'll love it. One steaming-hot plate of revenge coming right up." Across the room, I see Ms. Esposito lift her hands. She starts chanting, and next to me, Xavier starts chanting, too, with a wink in my direction. They're speaking low and I can't make out the words over the music. I feel weird, violent, and too hot. I want to yell at Danny; I want to feel my knuckles bruise against his jaw. Xavier smacks the side of my arm. I look at him and he's miming at me to drink something. I remember the vial in my pocket and take a sip. It tastes too sweet, like fortified wine. Immediately, I notice that I'm breathing like I'm already in a fight. I shake my head. Everything's fine. I'm fine. I turn toward the dance floor. Couples are grinding against each other, hands roaming over satin. Boys start unlacing their ties and shrugging off jackets. That's funny, I think. Across the room, Jenny and Mike are leaving. Ashley takes a picture of the headmaster as he leans down to kiss Ms. Perez, our newest and youngest English teacher. Surprisingly, neither of them seems to notice the camera. Behind me, Xavier laughs. I start walking toward where I saw Danny and Daria last. Couples are no longer dancing — they're kissing and groping. A few have moved to lying on the floor together. The captain of the football team knocks the shells and plates off the table and throws Missy Carthage on it. He climbs on top of her.</p>
33	<p>"What's happening?" someone asks. There's a girl in a shimmering green dress with one sleeve and a heavy ruffle on the bottom. Her hair is spiked up and saturated with glitter and her eyes are heavily outlined in black kohl. Her skin looks blotchy around the neck like she's getting hives. She slouches against the doorway. She doesn't even go to this school. "You should leave," I say, but then a boy catches her hand and pulls her into a kiss. She groans. I grab her hand and pull her back to me. The boy lets go and she slides into my arms. Her mouth comes against mine and we're kissing. I've only kissed three girls before and none of them kissed me like this, like they never wanted to stop, like they don't care about breathing. I pull back from her and she frowns, like she doesn't know where she is. I shake my head, but that just makes me dizzy. The floor is carpeted in sequined gowns and black tuxedos. On top of them, bodies move together. I see the math teacher, Mr. Riggs, among them, writhing around with Jacob White and Nancy Chung. Amy Gershwin's purple bra is around her waist, like a belt, as she crawls toward them. Across the room, three cheerleaders corner another cheerleader and swipe at her with their long, manicured nails. Scratches mark both her cheeks. I stumble forward and see Danny. He's lying half underneath a table, kissing Hannah Davis, who turns and kisses Daria Wisniewski. None of them is very dressed. Hannah is wearing Wonder Woman underpants. There's a part of me that figures Danny deserves whatever happens to him at that point. I know it's an asshole thing to think, but isn't this what he hoped would happen at one of the prom afterparties anyway? Would he really have turned down a threesome with two girls? I mean, sure, everyone is going crazy, but aren't they just giving in to what they really desire? Isn't he?</p>
34	<p>I have no idea what to say to him. "The Latin Club is totally evil," I blurt. "The Latin Club?" I can understand why he's confused. "We have to stop them," I say, but they're not even here anymore. They've already succeeded, taken photographic evidence, and gone home. Danny picks up a pair of pants. Three kids are doing body shots off the limp form of the assistant headmaster. I don't even know where they got the liquor, but I think I see blood near his neck. "What can we do?" Danny asks. Daria pulls at his pant leg and he stumbles, wide-eyed. "This is nuts." "I know where they keep their stuff," I say, and he follows me from the banquet hall and out into the night. We run across campus to Smythe Hall. A few kids are out on the lawn, dancing around naked to the delight of the underclassmen hanging out the windows of their dorm.</p>

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155	<p>I suppose there had always been clues about me and my ape tendencies. There were the monkey pajamas I wore till they fell apart. The nature shows on a Friday night in the dark privacy of my own room. The time my mom caught me blowing kisses to my Curious George books. I watched the entire King Kong oeuvre millions of times. I'm talking stinkers like King Kong versus the Backup Singers from Mars and It's a King Kong Fourth of July! (That one was a variety show where Kong screeched and pounded his way through a bunch of comedy skits, a couple of patriotic songs, and one rap number with a big teen pop star named Justin Time. Kong wore a backwards cap and break-danced in front of a new theme park. It was Ape Old School, and the crowd dug it. They turned the fountains yellow just for the occasion. It was all cool till the fireworks went off and freaked Kong out. But truthfully, Justin Time was so over, and his CDs sold like crazy after they had to put him in that iron body cast thing that breathes for him.) I never told anybody how I felt. When I turned eleven, my dad threw away my National Geographic collection and handed me a baseball glove in its place. That night, while my parents slept, I dug them out of the trash and stored them under my mattress. When the house was still, I'd pull them out and stare at those pictures of apes in the wild. I'd imagine myself with them, grunting and grooming, scurrying through thick jungle on leg-hands, banging my chest in defiance. I suppose it would have been all right if I hadn't left the e-mail from Carter lying around. It was pretty innocent, really. Just a big Photoshopped picture of Carter and me hugging, with "Gorilla My Dreams" in the subject line. Of course, there was the fact that their son was cozily arm in arm with a primate. Any illusions my parents had about my "cute Curious George" obsession pretty much vanished then.</p>
157	<p>"Flash told me about this movement. It's called Primate the Prom. It started in Kansas, after what happened to William Lamb." William Lamb was a band-boy-cute seventeen-year-old from some small town in Kansas. He had a gorilla boyfriend named Johnny. The two of them tried to make a statement by crashing their prom. A mob of kids in tuxes and prom dresses beat them</p>
158	<p>bloody and tied them to the flagpole. They shaved Johnny of all his fur. And William Lamb ended up with serious brain damage. He won't date another ape. He won't date at all.</p>
159	<p>Mom: Sometimes kids go through a phase. It doesn't mean it's a life choice. Dad's fingers uncurled, revealing themselves like the small animals that live inside shells. He gripped his knees. He looked pale and murderous. Mom: I'm sure those magazines under your bed belonged to someone else. Just because you have (whisper) National Geographics ... doesn't mean you're ... She couldn't finish. Dad stood, his fingers balled again and hanging at his sides. Dad: No son of mine is going to be a Gorilla Lover. When I got up to my room, the magazines and e-mail were gone, and in their place was a book called God Wants to Fix You. It had testimonials from other people my age, about how they'd completely kicked their unnatural, ape-loving urges. There were glowing, happy pictures of them being all popular at school and shit, pictures of them dating the right species. They wore a lot of sweater vests. I thought they looked creepy and sad and terribly lost. I tore out the pages and used them to make chap books of poetry. Then I IM'd Carter. Things suck here. Miss you. Twenty seconds later, he sent me back a photo of him in his jeans jacket that had highly evolved across the back. Miss you, too, it said.</p>
160	<p>DJ Flash purred into the mic. "Here's a little song for all you ape lovers out there." Carter moved through the crowd, dragging his knuckles along the floor. God, he was one beautiful ape, and when he offered me his paw, I took it. There were some gasps and a few ohmigods. People moved away from us on the floor. But we stood our ground. It seemed like forever that we were out there alone, turning around to The Smiths under a glittering gym sky. But soon, others followed. Nick and his chimp boyfriend. Sally and her baboon girlfriend. There was an orangutan holding hands with a sweet faced guy in a gray suit. I counted six couples, then eight, then ten. Ten. It was a start. Some guy stepped out of the shadows lining the dance floor. "Ape lovers, go home!" he shouted. He was joined by a few more red-faced guys.</p>

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203	<p>And other times he would grab me right there by my locker and thrust his mouth onto mine, and we'd be tonguing it up for everyone to see. It was so screwed up, because the thing that made us the most powerless also gave us such power. We could make them turn away. We could bother them and challenge them and mess them up. You think people are afraid of two boys in love? To hell with that. What people are really afraid of is two boys screwing. And even though we weren't about to drop trou in the halls, we were going to let them know we were doing it whenever we could. We always played it safe, condom-wise. But location-wise? Safety was not the first concern. The first floor boys' room. The showers in the locker room when everyone was in class and we were skipping. The couch in the faculty lounge. The boiler room. The second floor boys' room. The lighting room in the auditorium, against the movie projector. Room 216, second lunch block. The roof of the cafeteria when everyone else was under us, chattering. The art room, with paints. The third floor girls' room. The 400 aisle of the library. We were only caught twice. Once I said I was helping to look for his contact lens, which must have fallen on his fly. The other time the art teacher found us. I thought he'd been watching for a while before letting us know he was there, but Dutch said his shock was real. He didn't say a word to us. Just saw what was going on, turned red, and left.</p> <p>We weren't the prom types, but as the time approached, Dutch said to me, "Wouldn't it be cool to screw at the prom?" and I said, "Yeah, I guess it would." I kinda wanted to go anyway, but never would have told him that. I didn't want him to think I was taking anything too seriously. He'd already told me we were going to split up at the end of the year, because in college there would be new dicks to play with. He said it like he was joking, but you can't tell a joke like that without meaning it at least a little.</p>
204	<p>He found the most expensive coat in that coatroom, then took it to the back, threw it on the floor, and led me on top of it. Button fly, yeah. Condom, nice to meet you. I could hear everyone outside not hearing us. I could hear the empty hangers pinging against one another as my shoulder hit into the racks again and again. Dutch would stop and smile, and I would smile back and keep quieter than usual.</p>

Profanity & Sexual or Derogatory Terms	Count
Ass / Jackass / Asshole etc.	32
Bitch	4
Breast / Tit	1
Dick	10
Fuck, Fucked, Fucking etc.	6
Piss	10
Shit / Bullshit etc.	31
Slut	1
Sacrilegious & other offensive language usage	Count
Damn	13
God / God damn etc.	26
Hell	11
Jesus	3
Lord	6