



## Nothing but the Truth: A Documentary Novel

By Avi

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### Patriotism or practical joke?

Harrison, NH -- Ninth-grade student Philip Malloy was suspended from school for singing along to *The Star-Spangled Banner* in his homeroom, causing what his teacher, Margaret Narwin, called "a disturbance." But was he standing up for his patriotic ideals, only to be squelched by the school system? Was Ms. Narwin simply trying to be a good teacher? Or could it all be just a misunderstanding gone bad -- very bad? What is the truth here? Can it ever be known?

Heroism, hoax, or mistake, what happened at Harrison High changes everything for everyone in ways no one -- least of all Philip -- could have ever predicted.

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## Nothing but the Truth: A Documentary Novel By Avi Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Structured as a series of journal entries, memos, letters and dialogues, this highly original novel emerges as a witty satire of high school politics, revealing how truth can easily become distorted. After Philip Malloy, a clownish, rather unmotivated freshman, is punished for causing a disturbance (humming "The Star Spangled Banner"), facts about the incident become exaggerated until a minor school infraction turns into a national scandal. Philip's parents, several reporters and a neighbor (who happens to be running for the school board) accuse the school of being unpatriotic. Philip gains fame as a martyr for freedom; his homeroom teacher, Miss Narwin, however, faces dismissal from her job. After gleaning the points of view of many characters, readers will side with Miss Narwin and will recognize the hollowness of Philip's eventual victory. It is clear that Avi ( *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* ) is attuned to the modern high school scene. With frankness and remarkable insight, he conveys the flaws of the system while creating a story that is both entertaining and profound. Ages 11-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 6-9-- Ninth grader Philip Malloy finds himself unable to participate on the track team because of his failing grade in English. Convinced the teacher, Margaret Narwin, dislikes him, he concocts a scheme to get transferred from her homeroom: instead of standing "at respectful, silent attention" during the national anthem, Philip hums. Throughout the ensuing disciplinary problems at school, his parents take his side, ignore the fact that he is breaking a school rule, and concentrate on issues of patriotism. The conflict between Philip and his school escalates, and he quickly finds the situation out of his control; local community leaders, as well as the national news media, become involved. At this point, the novel surges forward to a heartbreakin, but totally believable, conclusion. Avi carefully sets forth the events in the story, advancing the plot through conversations between students, Philip's parents, school personnel, and community politicians, while Philip's point of view is revealed through his diary entries, and Margaret Narwin's through letters to her sister. Also enriching the narrative are copies of school memos and newspaper articles, transcripts of speeches delivered, and copies of letters received by both Philip and his teacher; each document provides another perspective on the conflict and illuminates the many themes that beg to be discussed--most notably the irony of lives destroyed because of the misuse of power and the failure of people to communicate. Admirably well crafted and thought provoking. --Ellen Fader, Westport Public Library, CT

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From Kirkus Reviews

Ninth-grader Philip has never been in trouble, but he's upset because his English grade is keeping him off the track team. Meanwhile, though the rule is ``respectful, silent attention," he hums along with the daily playing of the national anthem--a habit ignored by his jocular homeroom teacher. Then he's moved to the homeroom of Miss Narwin, his English teacher- -well-liked because she's fair but rigid, humorless, and out of touch with modern kids. When she tries to enforce the silence rule, Philip responds with offhand rudeness borne of his distress about track plus his chronic tongue-tied style; the ensuing confrontation escalates into a two-day suspension followed by national media attention based on the erroneous belief that Philip has been denied the right to express his patriotism. Skillfully composing his story from school memos, news clips, dialogues, and Philip's diary, Avi shows how well-meaning people can generate misinformation through a combination of interrupting or simply not listening, shaping facts to suit their own goals, letting preconceptions muddy thought, or just lacking the will and the skill to get things straight. The garbled conversations here are all too believable; only one reporter makes an intelligent effort to find out what really happened, and his story is

never printed. Nobody wins: Philip transfers to a school that doesn't have track, and Miss Narwin is forced to take leave. Wryly satirical: nothing but the deplorable truth about our increasingly inarticulate, media-driven society. (Fiction. 11+) -- *Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

## Users Review

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