

A CONVERSATION WITH PETE HAUTMAN

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

The novel *Shane* by Jack Schaefer. I've always been fond of the classic Western in which a stranger with a mysterious/dark past comes to town, befriends a vulnerable party, and defends him or her from the forces of evil using raw courage and remarkable fighting skills. But I didn't want to write a Western, so I set the book in a present day city, traded the horses for motorcycles, and used tasers instead of Colt .45s.

How long did it take you to write *Blank Confession*?

A couple of years, working on it on and off. I usually keep several projects going. As I was working on *Blank Confession*, I was also writing a love story called *The Big Crunch*, and a sci-fi trilogy.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Mostly technical stuff. The structure of the book is rather odd—it's half in first person, from Mikey's point-of-view, and half in a sort of third/second person hybrid, in which Shayne tells his half of the story to Detective Rawls. Although the book is inspired by *Shane*, it's structured more as a mystery and a

psychological study. It took some time to puzzle it together in a way that made sense and would be satisfying to read.

"I aspire to brevity. For me, the ideal novel is one that can be read in an evening. Not that I don't appreciate "big" books, but it's the short ones like *The Remains of the Day*, *Damage*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *Leaving Cheyenne* that really knock me out."

What do you like most about *Blank Confession*?

Its length. I aspire to brevity. For me, the ideal novel is one that can be read in an evening. Not that I don't appreciate "big" books, but it's the short ones like *The Remains of the Day*, *Damage*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *Leaving Cheyenne* that really knock me out. Having said that, I'm now working on a thousand-pager. I'll probably like that one for its length as well.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I could go on forever about that. The short version is I wanted to write ever since I was a teenager, but I got distracted by a bunch of other stuff for twenty years before I got serious. Once I made writing a priority, it took about five years for me to write something I thought was publishable. I found an agent who agreed with me, and I've been doing it ever since. It was hard back then, and it's still hard. But I love it.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature
General Nonfiction
Genre Fiction
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
Minnesota Novel & Short Story
Poetry
Young People's Literature


THE FRIENDS OF THE SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY
325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242
www.thefriends.org

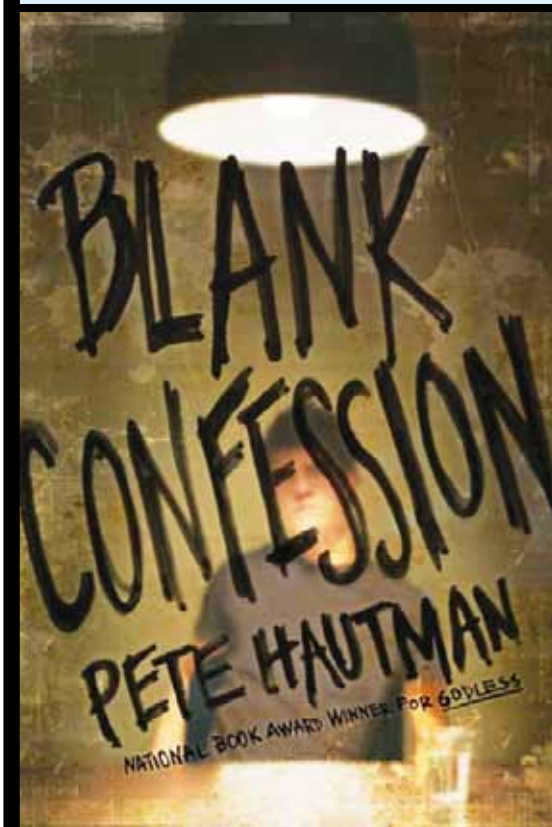
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by The Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of The Saint Paul Public Library

23RD ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Young People's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Sit Investment Associates



Blank Confession
by Pete Hautman

SIMON & SCHUSTER

Blank Confession



SUMMARY

Shayne Blank walks into a police station and confesses to having killed someone. How could the quiet, unassuming new kid in town be a murderer? It's hard to believe, but as Shayne tells his story, Detective Rawls is forced to face the reality that Shayne may be a lot more than he seems. But who is he? Pete Hautman spins a story that has readers on the edge of their seats, unsure of who or what to believe, until the very last page.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. According to the author, *Blank Confession* was inspired by a Western novel and movie, *Shane*, from sixty years ago. In what ways, if any, does the book remind you of a Western?
3. The author says he used many metaphors in the book including the storm, the tree stump, and Mikey's suits. What do these represent? What are some of the book's other metaphors?
4. Why has the author chosen to write in both first and third person? How would the book read differently if it was written in just one voice?
5. Mikey's sister comes from a "good" family, but she's seriously messed up. Why do you think this is?
6. Most of the characters in *Blank Confession* have radically transformed themselves in some way—Mikey with his suits, Shayne with his avenging angel persona, Rawls shifting from being a teacher to a cop. Why do people do that? Or do they?
7. Which of the characters do you find most likeable, and why? In what ways do the teens in the book seem like typical teens, and in what ways do they strike you as atypical?
8. To what extent did the story unfold in a predictable

9. Several reviewers have said that *Blank Confession* is about bullying. The author asks, "Is it really? Or is bullying just the hot new talking point, replacing ADHD and anorexia as the number one thing for parents and teachers to fret over?"
10. If you wrote a book for a teen audience, what topic and title would you choose?

ABOUT PETE HAUTMAN

Pete Hautman is the author of Godless, winner of the National Book Award, and many other critically acclaimed books for teens and adults including All-In, Rash, No Limit, Invisible, and Mr. Was. He grew up in St. Louis Park and attended both the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and the University of Minnesota. Hautman and his partner, novelist and poet Mary Logue, split their time between Golden Valley, Minnesota and Stockholm, Wisconsin.



Learn more about the author and his work at www.petehautman.com or petehautman.blogspot.com.



The 23rd annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. Presenting sponsor: RBC Wealth Management. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/ State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).

The 23rd annual Minnesota Book Awards is also supported by: Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Common Good Books; Graywolf Press; HarperCollins Publishers; Lerner Publishing Group; The Loft Literary Center; McGrann Shea Carnival Straughn & Lamb, Chartered; Metropolitan

Library Service Agency (MELSA); Milkweed Editions; Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Historical Society Press; Minnesota Library Foundation; MLBA Children's Fund; MS&R; The Red Balloon Bookshop; *Saint Paul Almanac*; University of Minnesota Press; and Voyageur Press/MVP Books. Media sponsors include Minnesota Public Radio; the *Pioneer Press* and *TwinCities.com*; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); and TPT-Minnesota Channel. Generous support for the Book Awards has been provided by The Boss Foundation; City of Saint Paul Cultural STAR Program; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; The Huss Foundation; and the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation.