

**Title:** *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*

**Author:** Carolyn Mackler

**Publisher and Date:** Candlewick Press, 2003

**Reading Level:** 6.8

**Interest Level:** Grades 8 – Up

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Awards:** Printz Award Honor Book  
ALA Best Book for Young Adults  
New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age  
YALSA Teens' Top Ten Book  
*Publishers Weekly* Cuffie Award for Best Book Title

**Main Characters:** Virginia, Shannon, the Shreves Family, Mrs. Crowley

**Setting:** New York City, Present Day

**Censorship Issues:** Teen Body Perceptions; Some Sexuality

**Major Themes:** Insecurities, Self Discovery, Teen Relationships, Renewal

**Brief Summary:**

15-year old Ginny (Virginia Shreves) is not a *model* Brewster High School student (i.e., MBS) and doesn't aspire to be. Yet she desires to be simply noticed as a worthwhile human being at Brewster and in her family. When readers met Ginny, her best friend has moved thousands of miles away, she is unseen at school, and she believes that she is an outcast among her beautiful and fit family of two perfect older siblings and successful parents. Ginny is overweight, has a very poor self-image, and has determined the best way to manage life is to withdraw and become "numb."

When her brother Byron is involved in an "ordeal" at Columbia University, Ginny is emotionally impacted and cannot understand why everything in her family is "brushed under the carpet and [her parents] never deal with what's really going on (p.158)." This way of life is particularly troublesome because Ginny's Mother is a therapist specializing in adolescent behavior. The incident at Columbia, while tragic, serves as a catalyst for change in the Shreves' house of denial and simultaneously ushers in a new way of thinking and doing for Ginny as she learns that "...outside appearances can be deceiving and sometimes people aren't all they're cracked up to be (p. 184).

**Classroom Uses:**

I do not think this book is a whole-class read although one teacher with whom I work will use it as a whole-class read next fall. If read in class, teachers and librarians

can find many ways to use this novel from analyzing the title of the book to creating occasions for teens to discuss social issues and health issues. Teachers can incorporate music and current events. Further, teachers can find many opportunities to teach literary elements, especially plot and characterization.

**Personal Reflection:**

I enjoyed this book, and I believe it is an accurate characterization of the lives of teenagers today. I would recommend *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* to teachers, counselors, librarians, parents, and teenagers.

**Reviewed By:** B. Joyce Stallworth

For more information on *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*, go to:

<http://www.carolynmackler.com/The-Earth-My-Butt-and-Other-Big-Round-Things-by-Carolyn-Mackler.asp>

[http://aol.teenreads.com/guides/earth\\_my\\_butt1.asp](http://aol.teenreads.com/guides/earth_my_butt1.asp)