*Nothing But the Truth* Essay Questions

1. YA lit like Children’s lit relies on a particular narrative technique. Keeping this technique in mind, discuss the relevance of Avi beginning the book with a "Memo" addressed to all homeroom teachers. Look specifically at the motto, "Where our children are educated, not just taught" and at #3, "Please all rise and stand at respectful silent attention for the playing of our national anthem" (1). The structure of epistolary, "confessional," or reporting style of Nothing. . . is part of the theme and style of this YA novel. Discuss.

2. Avi begins the first sentence in Philip Malloy’s diary with "Coach Jamison saw me in the hall and said he wanted to make sure I’m trying out for the track team" (3). This desire Philip is aware of. Discuss what other problems, needs, desires emerge from his first two diary entries (3-4; 9-10). Refer to specific quotations.

3. Difficult economic situations further create problems in this book. List quotations which illustrate several areas where this is true. What about Philip’s college fund? Look carefully at the irony here, not just for Philip but for his father.

4. The book points out different types of literature being read. Discuss the problem here (if you perceive any) and give examples from the book to support your views. What are some of the themes in the literature?

5. Communication between parents and their children, between students themselves, and certainly between Philip and his peers seems to be disfunctional. Give specific instances of this miscommunication. What happens to Philip and his peers, to Philip and his parents? Is there a positive example given in the book?

6. Discuss the difficulties with the discipline procedures that occur. Are these procedures connected with the relationship which is described between the school board, the parents, and the teachers? What are some of the tensions inherent in this situation? Is this common today? Give examples. What about the principal’s actions?

7. Discuss the pros and cons of the media’s role in this book. Look at specific examples (120-21 ?). Give a current example. Discuss the implications for Ted Griffen’s actions and reactions. How does his intervention escalate the problem?

8. Mr. Duval asks at the end of the novel, "Ma’am, do you think there’s some reason that this has happened?" (207). What do you think?

9. Should Ms. Narwin have taken the sabbatical which Dr. Gertrude Doane offers her? Is the problem tenure as Griffen implies (187)? What different decisions should/could Ms. Narwin have made along the way? What might you do in similar circumstances? Is her decision connected to her teaching style? What are the differences in teaching techniques between Lunser and Narwin? Is this relevant to Philip’s game plan? to education?

10. Can this novel be considered a YA tragedy? Why? Look closely at Philip’s own development? Does he sense some self awareness, some inner knowledge of events gone awry? Give quotations and examples to support your view. What might be some of the criteria for a modern tragedy for YA?