

How to Write Cringe-Humor

Tips from Dan Richards, author of *Stu Truly*

To be honest, I discovered by accident that middle grade students LOVE “cringe-humor.” A fourth-grade teacher introduced me to the term after reading my book, *Stu Truly*, to his class. He explained that his students loved the story because Stu, the main character, kept getting into socially awkward, embarrassing situations.

For some reason kids, and adults, too, love watching someone else squirm. I know I do. Which is why Stu ends up in so many embarrassing situations in my story.

So, how do you write cringe-humor? Here are a few tips:

1. **What secret would you hate to have exposed in front of your friends?** Write down a list of things you’d like to keep secret. Are you afraid of spiders? Prone to crying during sad movies? Have a secret crush on a classmate? Make a list and check it twice.
2. **Where would be the worst place to have your secret revealed?** Now write down a list of places where you’d hate to have your secret made public. During a school dance? In the cafeteria? During a sleepover? The more public the better.
3. **Write a story with a main character who has one of the secrets from your list.** Have the secret revealed in one of the places where you’d be most embarrassed to have your own secret revealed.
4. **Don’t let them off easy.** Make your main character squirm. But do it in a way that gives room for your audience to both cringe and laugh as the character works their way through the embarrassing moment.
5. **Have them gain something from the experience.** For extra credit, end your story with a moment of discovery. Do they end up making a new friend? Discovering their own inner strength? Learning to laugh at their own embarrassment? The best cringe humor moments lead to the main character gaining something from the experience. What does your main character gain/learn/discover?

Does cringe-humor really matter? Yes! Cringe-humor is a great way to face our fears of being embarrassed by watching others go through embarrassing situations. If they can survive an embarrassing moment, so can we. And when our turn comes, the best way to survive a cringe-worthy moment is with a keen sense of humor!