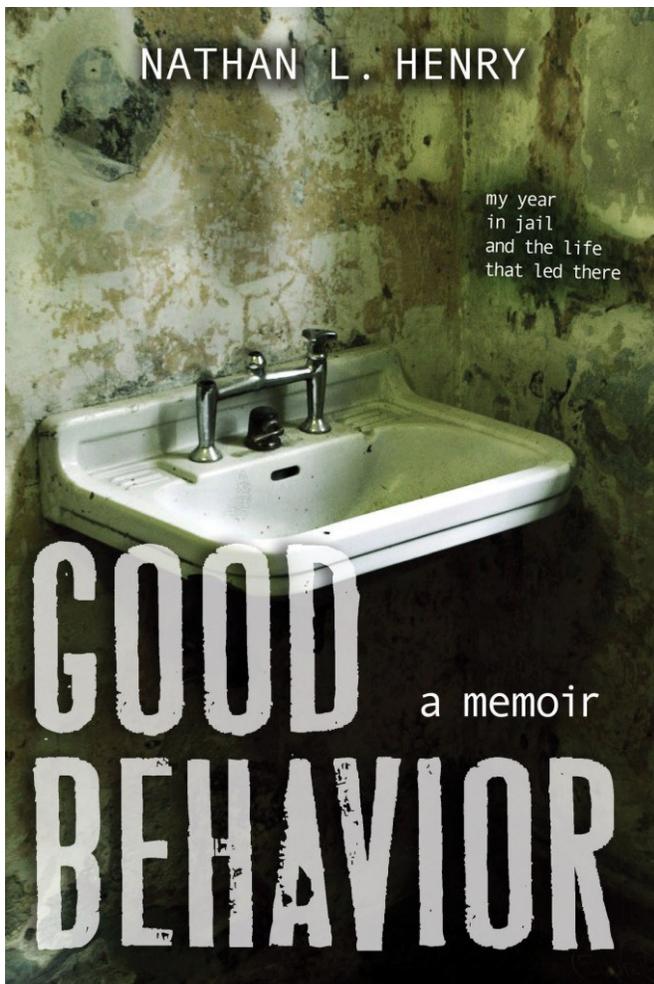




# Good Behavior: A Memoir

by Nathan L. Henry  
A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



## About the Book

Jailed at age sixteen for armed robbery, Nathan Henry was the kind of teenager most parents and teachers have nightmares about. His crime was the culmination of a life lived on the edge: guns and drugs, sex and violence, all set against the ordinary backdrop of a one-stoplight town in rural Indiana. Nate's personal history is both disturbing and fascinating. A rough childhood becomes an adolescence full of half-realized violent fantasies that slowly build to the breaking point. But these scenes alternate with chapters about Nate's time in jail, where through reading and reflection he comes to see that his life can be different from all he's known up to this point.

Nathan's story of his year in jail and the life that led him there combine to create a powerful portrait of an American youth gone bad – and a moving story of redemption.

## Book Details

**Good Behavior: A Memoir** by Nathan L. Henry.  
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2010. ISBN 9781599904719.  
<http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/good-behavior-9781599904719/>



## About the Author

I grew up in a small Midwest town with oppressive parents. I was stifled, watched a lot of gangster movies, and decided the best thing to do would be to become a criminal. I succeeded at that, and ended up in jail, where I decided that I no longer wanted to be a criminal. It was a singular experience in that my incarceration actually did rehabilitate me, or at least gave me enough time alone to think about myself and what I wanted, and thanks to the jail librarian, I discovered literature.

I think it was Kerouac's ***Vanity of Duluo*** that convinced me that I could be a writer. I'd always felt different, like I would never 'fit in,' never thrive in a culturally traditional sense, and I don't. I'm a socially awkward individual. It was that book that taught me, and this was later reinforced when I discovered Henry Miller, that artists and authors can thrive on the fringes, that indeed they do their best work when they go their own way, regardless of culture or tradition. I learned that an individual has to ask his or her own questions, and to have the integrity to accept the answers they come to, no matter how uncomfortable those answers are. And if they are serious, then they have an obligation to share those answers.

Literature is a conversation about what it's like to be a person with people you'll probably never know, and writing is hoping that those people you'll never know might find something in what you've created that helps them, or clears some things up for them in some way, or at the very least lets them know that they aren't alone. That's what my heroes did for me, and it's why I will always write and I couldn't stop reading if I wanted to. I've been to the cities I dreamed about when I was young. I've done the things I feared I'd never have the opportunities to do. Now I spend my days quietly with my wonderful wife and our amazing cats. It's an honor to have had **Good Behavior** chosen as a CTRO book.

*Biographical sketch courtesy of Nathan L. Henry. Photograph by Chris Casella; used with permission of Nathan L. Henry.*

## Author Resources:

**Nathan L. Henry: meaningless associative symbolism**

<http://www.nathanlhenry.com/>

Please note that Henry's blog assumes an adult audience.

## For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact Nathan L. Henry directly at [majenikabooks@gmail.com](mailto:majenikabooks@gmail.com), or contact Katy Hershberger, Director of Publicity at Bloomsbury and Walker Books for Young Readers: [katy.hershberger@bloomsbury.com](mailto:katy.hershberger@bloomsbury.com).

## Talk About It!

Topics for discussion, and ideas for extending the experience of reading **Good Behavior**.

Henry's book is about his year spent in jail and the events that led him there. Discuss the spiral of events that occurred before Nate finally winds up incarcerated. How did the structure of the book, told in alternating "before" and "during" chapters, influence your response to Nate's trajectory?

What did you consider the scariest incident in this memoir? What was the most hopeful?

Nate reads several books while he is incarcerated, books that inspire him and, arguably, change the course of his life. Share the story of how a book or author profoundly impacted you or someone of your acquaintance.

In school, Nate's only passion is art. What is/was your favorite subject in school? Develop a project centered around it and share your creative work with your reading group.

As you read **Good Behavior**, did you identify any missed opportunities for intervention among the events leading up to Nate's crime and incarceration? Was there any person in Nate's environment who might have influenced him to make different choices? What does this book have to say to adults who work with at-risk teens? To adults in general?

While **Good Behavior** is marketed as a book for teens, the author did not have this audience in mind when writing it. Henry has written:

"**Good Behavior** was published as a YA memoir. I find it in the library and bookstore under "teen non-fiction" and nowhere else... A memoir it is, but it was not written specifically for a YA (meaning young adult) audience. I wrote it as a piece of autobiographical literature, in the vein of Kerouac and Henry Miller and Bukowski and all the other great guys who made their very lives the material of their work. **Good Behavior** was a serious attempt to get to the core of my experiences as a child, as a juvenile delinquent, an armed robber, and this necessarily had to include lots about family and friends. It was, is, a funny piece of art that shows unabashedly what it's like to become a psychopathic teen-aged boy, and then to become humane again."

("Good Behavior Is Not a YA Book" by Nathan L. Henry,

<http://www.nathanlhenry.com/2011/09/good-behavior-is-not-ya-book-by-nathan.html>)

What do you think? Do you consider **Good Behavior** a book for teens? What does this book have to say directly to teens?

The publisher describes **Good Behavior** as a "story of redemption". Do you agree? What behaviors does Nate exhibit in prison that point to his eventual rehabilitation? Does Henry's biographical sketch (included in this toolkit) influence or change your view of **Good Behavior** as a redemption story?

Discuss your responses to the Epilogue. What do you imagine becomes of the kids Nate accosts in the video store? Does the Epilogue affirm or complicate the idea of redemption in this book?



<http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>

## Explore More!

*Additional ideas and resources to use with **Good Behavior**.*

### **“Nathan Henry's 'Good Behavior' shocks and inspires” by Rollie Welch**

[http://www.cleveland.com/books/index.ssf/2010/07/nathan\\_henrys\\_good\\_behavior\\_sh.html](http://www.cleveland.com/books/index.ssf/2010/07/nathan_henrys_good_behavior_sh.html)

A book review on Cleveland.com. Rollie Welch is acquisitions manager at Cleveland Public Library.

### **New & Noteworthy: Good Behavior: A Memoir**

<http://brodartvibe.wordpress.com/2010/07/23/new-noteworthy-68/>

This 2010 review from Brodart's prepublication book review blog includes a note from the book's editor and a brief appearance by Belinda, the prison librarian.

### **Donating Books to People in Incarceration**

Numerous independent organizations have a mission to provide books to prisoners and to correctional institution libraries. Among those who serve Ohio prisoners and facilities are:

Appalachian Prison Book Project: <http://apisonbookproject.wordpress.com/>

Athens Books To Prisoners: <http://athensbookstoprisoners.weebly.com/index.html>

Midwest Pages to Prisoners Project: <http://www.pagestoprisoners.org/>

Women's Prison Book Project: <http://www.wpbp.org/>

### **Ohio Central School System**

[http://www.drc.ohio.gov/ocss/ocss\\_home.htm](http://www.drc.ohio.gov/ocss/ocss_home.htm)

The Ohio Central School System provides educational programs and library services to the inmates of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

### **American Library Association: Prison Libraries**

<http://www.ala.org/tools/prison-libraries>

A clearinghouse of articles, standards, websites, and other resources for and about library services to individuals who are incarcerated in the United States.

### **“If you were to ask me... what books should I read, Nate?”**

On his blog, Henry lists the writers whom he considers “true revolutionaries” and his heroes, along with selected lists of their works: Henry Miller, Charles Bukowski, Hunter S. Thompson, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac. Explore their books at your library or bookstore.

### **About Choose to Read Ohio**

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library Association, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

This toolkit revised June 2013.