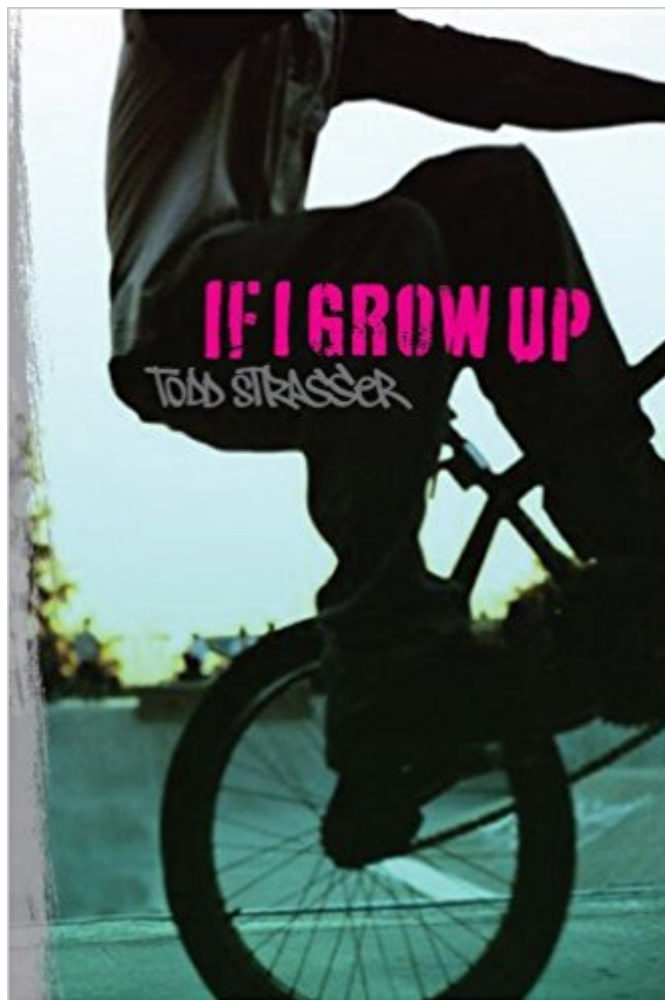


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# If I Grow Up



## Synopsis

In a gripping novel with a plot pulled from the headlines, Todd Strasser turns his attention to gang life in the inner-city projects. DeShawn is a teenager growing up in the projects. Most of his friends only see one choice: join up to a gang. DeShawn is smart enough to want to stay in school and make something more of himself, but when his family is starving while his friends have fancy bling and new sneakers, DeShawn is forced to decide--is his integrity more important than feeding his family?

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 650L (What's this?)

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (February 23, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1416994432

ISBN-13: 978-1416994435

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 18 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #192,858 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #30 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Drugs](#) #49 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Violence](#) #73 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Drugs & Alcohol Abuse](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

In this superficially compelling but heavy-handed book about gang culture, narrator DeShawn faces tough circumstances and limited choices. Readers first meet DeShawn as a smart 12-year-old with potential; four years later, he is a gang member in charge of operations at his housing project. While the story has a Law and Order-style type drama, it also runs on cliché: the determined grandmother, the star-crossed love, the jealous second-in-command, the concerned cop and the teacher who reaches out knowing his offer will be rejected. The plot serves the author's agenda, which Strasser (Give a Boy a Gun) puts in plain sight: he opens each section with a statistic plus a rap lyric, and his foreword and last chapter argue that significant numbers of American

citizens—mostly minorities, and many living in impoverished inner-city areas—are doomed to fail. Given that Strasser's foreword explicitly defines himself and his audience as more privileged than his characters (we forget that millions of inner-city denizens are just like us), it's hard to escape the feeling that his story is more well-meaning than authentic. Ages 12–œp.  
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Grade 8–10 • For DeShawn, joining a gang seems like a terrible decision—why would he want to work for a pittance running drugs when the inevitable consequences are jail or an early death? A bright boy, he does well in school and tries his best to obey the grandmother who has raised him since his mother's accidental death in gang crossfire. But as DeShawn enters adolescence, the lure of the streets becomes a stronger force, pulling him away from his seemingly meaningless academics and toward the glamour of life in the Douglass Disciples, his housing project's premier gang. He knows he's risking his life, but DeShawn sees no other hope for supporting his pregnant girlfriend and growing family without the fast money life as a Disciple can provide. But when he finds himself entangled in a series of political struggles and murderous schemes within his own crew, the wisdom of his choice becomes less clear, and the danger of imminent death or life in prison looms closer than ever. Strasser's didactic purpose for this novel couldn't be more obvious; the events that it chronicles are unrelentingly grim to the point of unbelievability, and characters sometimes seem to exist only to demonstrate the miscellaneous horrors of housing-project life. Tight plotting and a crisp style will satisfy readers looking for nonstop action and plenty of urban drama. However, for a more subtle take on inner-city poverty from a teen's perspective that shows more depth and compassion, try Coe Booth's *Tyrell* (Scholastic, 2006).  
Meredith Robbins, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School, New York City  
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I got this for my kids, as a recommended read from a teacher. They liked it.

This fast paced all to real book will keep you up all night. Death, drugs, and poverty are all to real in our society today. The consequences of circumstance are shown beautifully and honestly in this novel, a favorite of mine and one of the best Todd Strasser has to offer. Worth every penny.

This book is a true coming to age novel and so real to what today's teenagers are dealing with in today's society. My 9th grade class read this book and they could not put it down. They were wishing the book could be turned into a movie. Student's would volunteer to read and class discussion were turn into debates, but it made my kids want to read more books written by this author. A must read!

I love it!!

I'm an 8th grade teacher in an urban district, and my reluctant readers (especially boys!) love this book. I've had many copies stolen over the past few years, so whenever I find a cheap copy, I buy it. It's a great story with a sad (but realistic!) ending.

This is one of my go to books for reluctant readers. One of my students called this book bada\*\*. I had to tell him to use appropriate school language, but his recommendation got some other kids to pick it up.

I bought this book for some of my students who wanted to read it. I have not read it, but I know a few of them have read it and passed it on.

Great Moral, suspenseful and keeps you wanting more. I read the whole book in one day. I just couldn't put it down.

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