

## Frindle: A Review for Agricultural Communications Courses

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## Frindle: A Review for Agricultural Communications Courses

### Abstract

Review of Frindle.

### Keywords

Book review, social construct, diffusion of innovation

Clements, A. (1996). *Frindle*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.  
ISBN-13: 978-0689818769

*Frindle* is a book targeting 8-to-12-year-olds about a kid who makes up a word and causes a ruckus in the process. This children's book could be useful for explaining high-level concepts in graduate education.

The book follows Nicholas Allen who likes to play harmless pranks before running into a no-nonsense language arts teacher who adores the dictionary, especially its rules and structure. After learning in class that words are given meaning because people collectively decide they have meaning, Nicholas gets his classmates to start referring to pens as frindles as a prank on the teacher. The word begins to take on a life of its own, spreading across the school, pitting the teacher against students in a disagreement over the use of this new word. Eventually the frindles become a bit of a phenomenon, spreading beyond the school, culminating in a trademarked term that leads to royalties from product sales.

Despite being a children's book, there are two concepts related to graduate education in agricultural communications. The first is that language is a social construct. The social construct concept is applicable for communication theory and research methods courses for explaining that meaning is not always inherent; meaning can be something that groups of people are knowingly and unknowingly co-creating (West & Turner, 2018). For research methods courses in particular, this idea of social construction can help provide contrast between the positivism's objective realities (e.g., it is a pen because it has certain qualities inherent to pens) and interpretivism's socially construction and multiple realities (e.g., it is a frindle because we decided as a group to rename it).

The second is the idea of social contagions, which are ideas or behaviors that spread from person to person like a virus would (Marsden, 1998). Social contagions have a clear application in the planned change courses that are commonly required for agricultural communications students across the country. In the book, you can watch as the idea starts with one kid who then convinces others to join him. More kids begin using the term before the social contagion spreads to people the kids have never met. And of course, there are people who oppose the change to give an example of people impeding change. The book documents the spread of an innovation before it culminates in the word frindle finding its way into the dictionary (sorry for the spoiler), as many new words and slang words in society do.

While the book does not present concepts that would be new to graduate programs in agricultural communications, such as discussion of positivism and interpretivism in West and Turner's (2018) communication theory book, the ideas are presented in an accessible manner and could provide a unique avenue to start discussions. In terms of Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, *Frindle* could allow students to engage with the concepts at a level that requires less instructor guidance before introducing students to higher-level resources, such as Rogers (2003) to address diffusion of innovations, that require more instructor guidance to utilize (Allal & Ducrey, 2000). And because the book has been out for more than 20 years, many students may have already read the book, allowing them to see something old in a new light. That childhood familiarity is what led to the book being reviewed for this purpose in the first place.

A caveat is that as a children's book, it is possible students in graduate courses may feel that the book is beneath them, but that is a risk of any activity or assignment that could be described as fun instead of serious. This book can be a fun experience, but it should lead to a serious conversation in the classroom to show its utility.

*Frindle* is 105 pages. While not an excessive length, it would be possible to assign a few chapters of the book to get across some of the concepts if you did not want students to spend an hour or two on the book, especially if you were only interested one concept instead of both. This is a children's book that is worth considering for classes.

### References

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