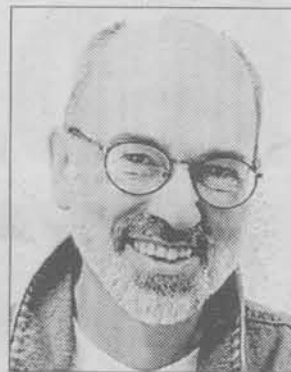


# Tales of misery and imagination



HOWE

Powerful anthology helps teens deal by keeping it real

*"13: Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen" edited by James Howe (Atheneum, \$16.95).*

By CARA NISSMAN

Cringe though they might at recalling these torturous years, readers will value the honesty and insight of "13: Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen," an anthology of intuitive tales written by today's leading young-adult authors, including Meg Cabot and Carolyn Mackley.

As demonstrated in the hit indie film "Thirteen," which chronicles the downward spiral of an impressionable teenage girl, peers can easily puncture the purity of guileless youths.

What sets the book apart from other young-adult anthologies is the authors' commitment to "keeping it real," even when spinning a yarn about a "teen fairy."

From the stunningly smooth use of slang in "Black Holes and Basketball Sneakers," in which a poor kid discovers the path to his peers' approval is paved with ruthless envy, to the sharp, suspenseful writing in "Kate the Great," in which a girl realizes she's grown apart from her childhood friend, these stories feature nuanced plots and three-dimensional characters that set the book apart from those with only angst-ridden cardboard cutouts.

Perhaps the best example is the hilariously touching "Jeremy Goldblatt Is So Not Moses" by the anthology's editor, James Howe. Bouncing seamlessly among a half-dozen voices, including a prissy teenage

princess, a verklempt, kugel-making mom, a progressive rabbi and Jeremy, a well-meaning mensch with intentions as sweet as a Three Musketeers bar, this story conveys the power of selflessness and acceptance.

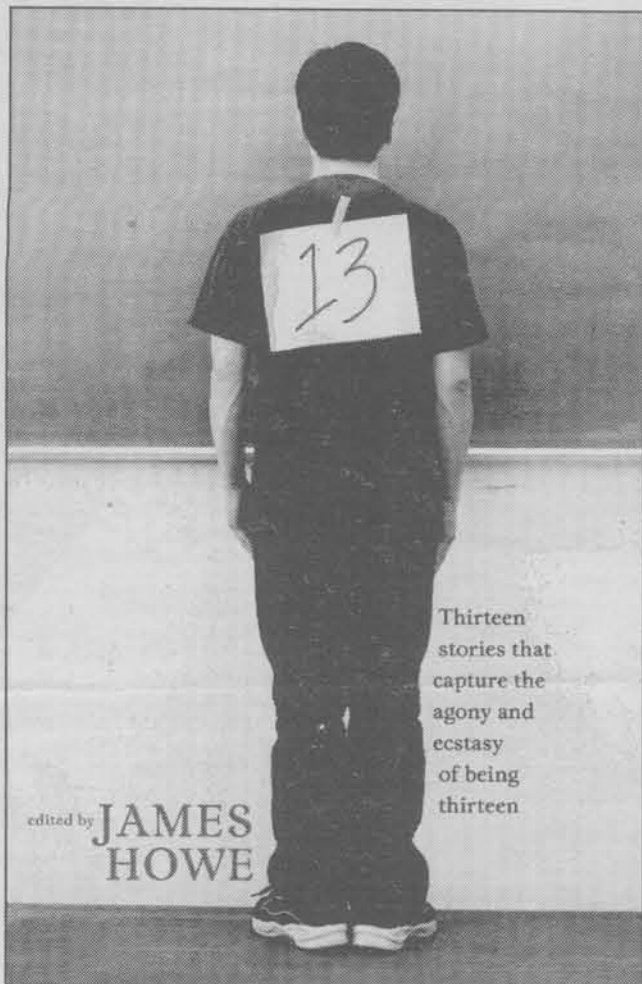
These stories offer lessons without patronizing young readers, and challenge them with words such as "odiferous" and "recalcitrant." This faith in readers also allows adults to see themselves in these tales, whether they want to remember their adolescence or wish to forget it.

To show the authors haven't forgotten their adolescence, the book features their yearbook pictures and recollections of their trials and triumphs at 13. Rachel Vail shares:

"I felt like I was on a boat: off balance and kind of lurchy/nauseated, though excited. And although I was eager to get where I was going (adulthood, or even teenager-hood, with all its power and passion), it was also difficult to watch my familiar childhood world grow more distant and less my own as I pulled away from its safe shore."

These aren't simple stories about babysitting and hanging out on the basketball court. Instead, these situations unravel into challenges of the heart and conscience as kids discover human weakness. The tales might leave readers squirming, wondering which path they might have chosen, or more likely, cheering that they survived puberty.

Cara Nissman is the Boston Herald's teen reporter.



Thirteen stories that capture the agony and ecstasy of being thirteen

edited by  
**JAMES  
HOWE**