# Big Mouth and Ugly Girl

 Matt Donaghy has always been a BIG MOUTH but it's never gotten him in trouble - until one day when two detectives escort him out of class for questioning. Matt has been accused of threatening to blow up Rocky River High School. Ursula Riggs has always been an UGLY GIRL A loner with fierce, staring eyes, Ursula has no time for petty high school stuff like friends and dating - or at least that's what she tells herself. Ursula is content with minding her own business. And she doesn't even really know Matt Donaghy. But Ursula is the only person who knows what Matt really said that day . . . and she is the only one who can help him. In her first novel for young adults, acclaimed author Joyce Carol Oates has created a provocative and unflinching story of friendship and family, and of loyalty and betrayal.

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 Ever make a stupid comment or joke, or say something you obviously didn't mean? Of course you have -- we *all* have. Was it ever taken out of context? Written in the wake of some highly publicized school shootings, *Big Mouth & Ugly Girl* takes a look at the shock waves that emanate from an overheard comment muttered in sarcasm, and the overzealous reaction of the school and surrounding community that follows.

 High school junior Matt Donaghy is considered an okay guy. He gets good grades, writes for the school paper, is in the Drama Club, and is known for his witty, if immature, humor. Students and teachers seem to like him. But one day he says something that makes a few classmates think he's out to bomb the school. The school principal is notified, the police are called in, and rumors are abuzz. Even his buddies doubt his innocence, and none of the guys come forward in his defense. There is, however, someone else who overheard Matt's statement and understood his mocking intent. School renegade Ursula Riggs, or "Ugly Girl" as she refers to herself, doesn't know Matt very well but reveals what she heard and the context in which it was said -- even though her parents instruct her to mind her own business. But even if Ursula can help Matt clear up this misunderstanding, will life at Rocky River High School ever be the same again?

 In her first novel for young adults, acclaimed author Joyce Carol Oates delivers a striking story about friendship, family, community, support, betrayal, and self-confidence. This powerful novel makes us think carefully about what we say, to whom we say it, and what we mean. After closing this book, you'll ask yourself the same question I did: What if *I'd* said such a thing?

**Big Mouth & Ugly Girl**

 [](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0066237564/writerswrite)Joyce Carol Oates has turned her considerable talents to writing a novel about teenagers in a contemporary American high school, and her portrait of them is both accurate and fascinating. The American public high school offers a wonderful experience for the privileged few who are popular, but the remainder of the student body has to find their way through the purgatory of adolescence when one is no longer a child and not yet an adult. This emotional and physical no man's land must be traversed and then, if one survives, one emerges stronger and wiser and ready to take on adulthood. Ms. Oates has entered this world to tell a compelling story of how two teens, both outsiders, solve these problems and find solace in a deepening friendship.

Big Mouth & Ugly Girl

by Joyce Carol Oates

 Hard-hitting, page-turning and celebratory of friendship in unlikely circumstances, Joyce Carol Oates' sure touch with small town life hits home in her first young adult novel. Matt Donaghy is the class joker, and Ursula Riggs is the misfit loner. Neither knows the other. But when Matt is suddenly arrested on a charge of threatening to blow up the school and massacre the students, Ursula is the only one who sees through the hysteria and hypocrisy, and corroborates Matt's story. The case is dropped, but Matt's old friends avoid him, and his teachers treat him with kid gloves. Even Ursula, apparently his only friend during the crisis, can't meet his eye. But Ursula can't remain aloof when she catches Matt contemplating suicide -- and a strange friendship is born.

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Meet Ursula Riggs, who takes after her father who is way over six feet tall. Ursula has made her peace with being anything but a cute, petite charmer like her mother and her little sister. Ursula, who is a top student, decides to become Ugly Girl, big, roughly dressed and definitely defiant. No one messes with big Ursula because she doesn't care what others think of her and she definitely does not put up with anyone, and that includes teachers. Ursula has her hair cut short, and lots of earrings in her ears. She is the best basketball player on the girls' team, and she plays with skill and ferocity. Ms. Oates lets Ursula tell her story in first person.

Matt Donaghy is also a top student who likes to make people laugh. He is tall and gangly, freckle- faced and pretty much a straight arrow. Matt writes for the school paper and has been elected vice president of his class by a margin of eleven votes. Matt's story is told in the third person because he is much less self-absorbed than Ugly Girl. One day in the lunchroom Matt jokes that if his play is not chosen for the drama festival, what might he do, blow up the school? His friends all laugh because Matt is a just being silly. Unfortunately, he has been overheard and his innocent joke is taken so seriously that he is arrested. Matt is dumbfounded, and his family is devastated. Rumors fly all over the school and everyone is excited and full of groundless speculation. Suddenly, Matt is a pariah, and he is deserted by all his friends. Only Pumpkin, his beloved dog, does what all good dogs do. She keeps Matt company and she does not judge. But Pumpkin cannot discuss all the emotions racing through Matt's head, and he feels deserted by everyone. Then he receives and email from Ursula Riggs. Ugly Girl does not like the injustice of how Matt has been treated, so she has decided to make a stand.

Ms. Oates skillfully takes the reader through the emotions, self-doubt, and rage that come with the teenage years. The characters reveal their innermost feelings through emails, most deleted, but some sent. The story moves along as both students develop as they suffer through rejection and betrayal and become stronger. The understanding that this writer brings to this story will be appreciated by young readers, and it will be revealing to adults who must watch the new generation deal with problems that they never had to face.

*--Sarah Reaves White*