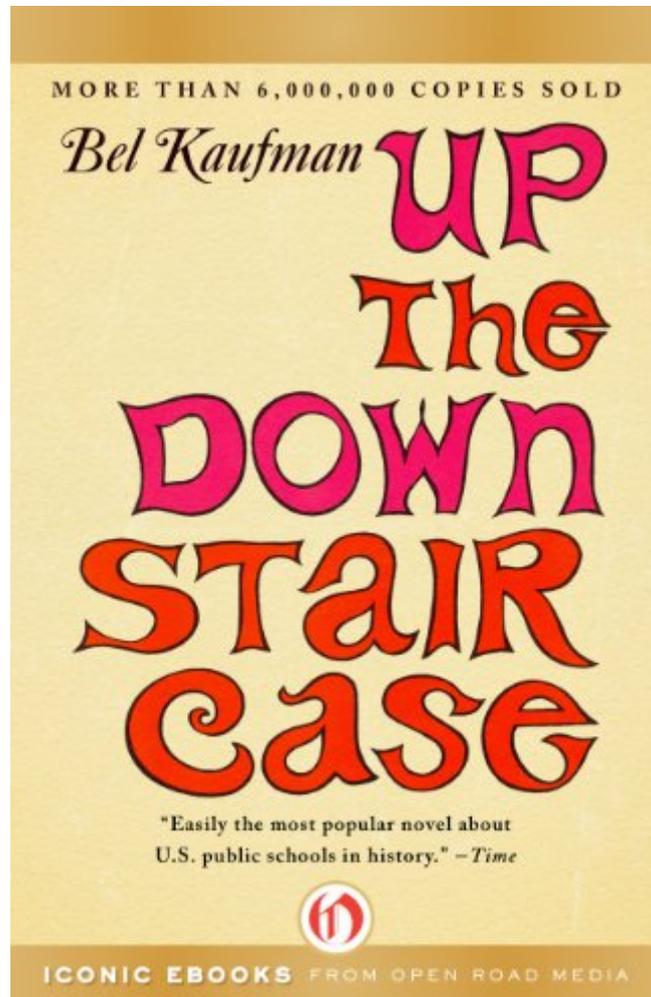


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# Up The Down Staircase



## Synopsis

Sixty-four weeks on the New York Times bestseller list: "The most enduring account we have of teachers' lives" (The New Yorker). When Sylvia Barrett arrives at New York City's Calvin Coolidge High, she's fresh from earning literature degrees at Hunter College and eager to shape young minds. Instead, she encounters broken windows, a lack of supplies, a stifling bureaucracy, and students with no interest in Chaucer. Narrated in "an almost presciently postmodern style" through interoffice memos, notes and doodles, lesson plans, suggestion-box insults, letters, and other dispatches from the front lines, *Up the Down Staircase* stands as the seminal novel of a beleaguered American public school system perpetually redeemed by teachers who love to teach and students who long to be recognized (The New Yorker). Hailed as "the funniest book written in America since *Catch-22*," *Up the Down Staircase* has been adapted for the stage and was made into an award-winning feature film starring Sandy Dennis (New York Herald Tribune). It remains an essential and highly enjoyable read that will leave you laughing and shaking your head at the same time. This ebook features an illustrated biography of Bel Kaufman including photos from the author's personal collection.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Schoolteachers make up a pretty small percentage of the population, but "Up the Down Staircase" gives us a little glimpse of exactly what it is like to be one. Especially an idealistic-to-a-fault one who has to deal with a... well, shall we say, interesting group of students. (That is to say, more than a little insane) Miss Barrett arrives at Calvin Coolidge High, to teach English to a motley band of students. Among them are: Hormone-addled Linda; resentful, angry Joe Ferone; woman-hating Rusty (who repeatedly tells Barrett that he would like her if she weren't "a female"); Edward Williams Esq., who thinks that everything is racially-prejudiced; soporifically romantic Alice, and a slew of others. Miss Barrett realizes over time that the kids are screaming out not just for education, but for love and understanding. But will her idealism break through to them? This isn't really a novel as people generally think of it -- it's composed of skits, letters, notes, and occasionally stretches of dialogue between the teachers and students. Sounds awful? It isn't. Instead it's cute and quirky, and if you get past the odd format it will become immensely enjoyable and coherent. The dialogue is funny, especially since quite a few of the students don't spell-check. ("Fuk"?). There are also suggestion box excerpts ("You think it's fair when a teacher takes off 5 points on a test just because I misspelled his name wrong?"; "We're behind you 85%!") and book reports ("We study myths to learn what it was like to live in the golden age with all the killings"; "We read it because it's a classic").

Last fall, I saw that one of the books that I loved as a high school student, *Up the Down Staircase* by Bel Kaufman, was being reissued as an ebook. I can vividly remember reading the slim book, a fictionalized account of Kaufman's experiences teaching in the New York City schools system in the 1950s and 60s. The book became a movie starring Sandy Dennis, and I loved that too. Although at times it paints a very bleak portrait of NYC public schools, what shines through is the main character Miss Sylvia Barringer's love of teaching and her students. This book was responsible for many young women choosing teaching as a career. The book covers Miss Barringer's first year teaching in a poor city high school. Most of the students came from poverty stricken families, and had so many other problems at home that school was either a refuge for them or a place they went to until they dropped out to get a job to help support their families. Miss Barringer is baffled by the students' actions and the ridiculous clerical work required from the administration. She quickly learns the language: "Keep on file in numerical order" means throw it in the wastebasket. "Let it be a challenge to you" means that you're stuck with it; "interpersonal relationships" is a fight between kids; "ancillary civic agencies for supportive discipline" means call the cops. "Non-academic minded" is a

delinquent and "it has come to my attention" means you're in trouble. She makes friends with an older teacher, Bea, who shows her the ropes and encourages Sylvia to hang in there and try to reach her students. (I think the author is a combination of Bea and Sylvia.) She puts a suggestion box in her classroom and she shares many of the notes that her students leave there.

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