



[books](#)

[about](#)

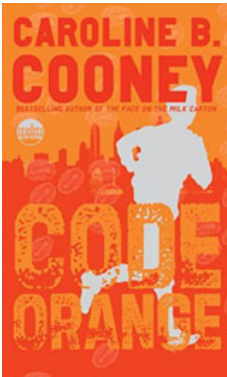
[contact](#)

[home](#)

Caroline B. Cooney

bestselling author

books



Code Orange

Walking around New York City was what Mitty Blake did best. He loved the city, and even after 9/11, he always felt safe. Mitty was a carefree guy—he didn't worry about terrorists or blackouts or grades or anything, which is why he was late getting started on his Advanced Bio report.

Mitty does feel a little pressure to hand something in—if he doesn't, he'll be switched out of Advanced Bio, which would be unfortunate since Olivia's in Advanced Bio. So he considers it good luck when he finds some old medical books in his family's weekend house that focus on something he could write about.

But when he discovers an old envelope with two scabs in one of the books, the report is no longer about the grade—it's about life and death. His own.

Delacorte
Random House, 2005

- buy the hardcover ▾
- buy the paperback ▾
- buy the e-book ▾
- buy the audio book ▾

Awards and Recognition

- Alabama Emphasis on Reading
- Florida Sunshine State
- Florida Sunshine State
- Georgia Peach
- Golden Sower Nebraska
- IRA YA Choice
- Kentucky Bluegrass
- National Science Teachers Outstanding Science Trade Book Award
- Nevada Young Readers
- New Mexico Land of Enchantment
- NYPL List of the Teen Age
- Pacific Northwest
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina Association of School Librarians
- Texas Lone Star
- Washington State Evergreen

You'll enjoy reading:

[more thrillers](#)

[back to books page](#)

The idea behind ... *Code Orange*

A librarian in Santa Fe was going through old medical books donated to her library and out of one book fell a hundred year old envelope marked "smallpox scabs." Smallpox was a grotesque and terrifying infectious disease, a plague upon this earth for thousands of years. Smallpox patients endured horrible systemic agony, and were covered with blisters, which scabbed over. If you survived, you were disfigured by the pock marks that had developed under each scab, often so severely that even your own family could not bear to look at you. But the World Health Organization successfully and entirely destroyed smallpox in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We don't get vaccinated against it anymore because it isn't a threat because it doesn't exist. But were it suddenly to exist again, it would be a true Weapon of Mass Destruction.

The librarian was sensible and did not open the envelope, but e-mailed other librarians to ask if they knew whether the virus would be viable after a century. The internet is astounding. That message was passed on, and in the morning, the librarian had the CDC and the FBI on her doorstep to collect the envelope, take the scabs and have them tested for viability.

Part of being a writer is just staying alert. I've always been puzzled that while everybody in America has seen missing child posters, nobody but me thought of writing a book where the kid recognizes herself (*Face on the Milk Carton*). The smallpox incident demanded to become an action adventure. Right away I thought, "what if the person to find that envelope is a sixteen-year-old boy?" Perhaps a boy rather like my own, doing a biology research paper in which he has no interest, and which he hopes will write itself, so he doesn't have to do anything. Were this boy to stumble on smallpox scabs, first of all he wouldn't have the faintest idea what smallpox is, or that it has scabs. Second, he'd open the envelope, pour the contents into his hand, sniff it, break it up. Possibly, knowing my son, taste it. He would not wash his hands when he was done.

In his desire to write his paper quickly and easily, perhaps he will go on line and ask for help, because why labor on homework if you can get somebody to do some of it for you? And perhaps on line he will state that he just came into possession of smallpox scabs—doesn't know if the virus is still alive—who out there can help him?

Everybody is on the internet. Good guys and bad guys. And what if this smallpox scab is viable, and could bring back this ghastly disease? And what if it's set in New York City, where you would be on the subway and the bus and the sidewalk, and launch the infection of eight million people?

This book became *Code Orange*.

Reviews

"In top, utterly terrifying form, Cooney leads a gregarious New York City teenager to a century-old sample of smallpox scabs. As dedicated to avoiding study as he is to getting closer to classmate Olivia, Mitty is oblivious to the danger he, she, and everyone else in the crowded city is in from his possible exposure to this hyper-contagious, utterly devastating disease—until he starts looking into smallpox for a school project. Drawing from several medical resources, which she lists at the end, Cooney lays out the illness's history and symptoms in precise, gruesome detail as a horrified Mitty writhes on the horns of a dilemma: Is the virus still active? Can he find a way to prevent an epidemic if it is? Should he tell the authorities, and look like a total dork if it isn't? Then, in a heartstopping twist, Mitty is kidnapped by terrorists intent on using him as a biological weapon. Readers won't soon forget either the profoundly disturbing premise of this page-turner or its likable, ultimately heroic slacker protagonist."

—John Peters, *Booklist*