



Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead

Reviewed by Amanda



Historical Fiction

Give a summary without spoilers!

Nickel Boys is a non-fiction book about two boys, Elwood and Turner, who are sent to a terrible reform school in the 1960s. The reform school, called Nickel Academy, is supposed to help troubled kids but instead is full of abuse and cruelty. Elwood tries to stay hopeful and do the right thing, while Turner is more focused on surviving. The story shows their friendship and how they cope with the brutal treatment they face. It's about racism and injustice.

What drew you to this book?

I think what drew me in the most about the story were the characters. Elwood, the main character, had a somewhat better life compared to Turner's, he was raised to always see the good in things, while Turner was more realistic. Their dynamic in the story is shown through how both of them perceive the academy's abuse and their ideals. Their friendship was pure and special, and because they were living in such harsh conditions, it was beautiful to see a friendship blossom out of such despair.

Did it remind you of something that you've previously read?

This novel is very similar to the book, "Just Mercy", written by Bryan Stevenson. "Just Mercy" is a story about the fight for those who have been wrongfully convicted or unfairly treated by the legal system. The book focuses on Walter McMillan, a black man who was sentenced to death for a crime he didn't commit, similar to the story of Elwood. The book talks about issues like racial bias, unfair trials, and the harsh treatment of the poor and people of color in the justice system, all having to do with the story of "Nickel Boys."

To whom would you recommend this book?

I would recommend "Nickel Boys" to anyone who wants to educate themselves further on the harsh conditions of reform schools in the 1960's, mostly located in the south. It's not something that is touched on very often, but still incredibly important to our history. This book is heart wrenching and heavy, but beautiful, often depicting some elements of violence, all of it creating a book that truly depicts how racism has affected many lives.

Overall, did you like it and would you recommend it to others?

I believe "Nickel Boys" to be an incredibly good novel that I thoroughly enjoyed reading. It's beautiful but sad depiction of friendship in a place where only evil occurred was something I found very touching. It helped create a much needed light on the sad truth of injustice throughout the legal system in the United States. I would recommend the story to anyone who feels as if they would enjoy something like it.

Anything else that you would like to add to this review? What made you choose it? Did you like the cover? Was it recommended to you? Did you find it at the library?

"Nickel Boys" was given to my English class to read as an assignment. We were given a three-week period to read the book, and I found myself really enjoying the story fairly quickly. I probably would have never picked up the story to read on my own, based on how sad it is, so I am so glad that it was given to us as an assignment, because it's an incredible read.