**Book Title: *The Watsons Go To Birmingham – 1963***

**Book Author: Christopher Paul Curtis**

**Reviewed By: Maria Lee, Age 20**

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The Watsons are an African American family consisting of the narrator Kenny Watson, his parents, older brother Byron, and younger sister Joey. The family’s life in Flint, Michigan is filled with Byron’s mischief, ranging from getting his mouth stuck frozen on a car mirror to bullying other children at Clark Elementary School to playing with matches. Finally, the parents decide that they have had enough of Byron’s misbehavior, and so the family drives down to Birmingham, Alabama to drop Byron off at his Grandma Sands’ house for the summer. They hope that her strict demeanor will make Bryon behave better and become more mature. When the Watsons arrive in Birmingham, the events that they encounter portray the era of the Civil Rights Movement and its impact on the deep South.

One of my favorite aspects of *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* is its character development, especially for Byron’s character. In the beginning, there exists a juxtaposition between the tough, older Byron who feels no remorse when bullying and torturing other students, and the younger Kenny whose smaller physique and lazy eye renders him a victim of bullying. At first glance, this may seem like a common and overly-used dynamic between characters in literature; however, as Byron begins to show compassion and maturity by cry over a dead bird, warning against danger, and even saving his sibling’s life, he transitions from a juvenile delinquent to a caring, reliable older brother. By the end of the novel, Byron plays an integral role in Kenny’s mental and emotional recovery from the terrifying incident at Joey’s church. As a result, the brothers develop a deeper bond and appreciation for one another.

In addition to maturity and family, the book covers many other important themes such as racism. Some parts of the plot are based on true events that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement in America. Through these plot details, Paul Curtis depicts the racism elements of society during this time, especially in the South, and the fear that it instilled in African Americans. However, the book also portrays love and endurance despite the racism; the Watsons are shown to gradually overcome their trauma by being resilient and taking care of one another. Overall, I recommend this Newbery Honor-winning book for students in grades 6-8 (ages 12-14), for there are many important lessons to be learned through its engaging plot and dynamic characters.

**Other Recommended Books:**

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

*Animal Farm* by George Orwell

*Black Boy* by Richard Wright