

Lockdown

By Author: Walter Dean Myers

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This book follows the life of an urban, African American, 15-year-old named Reese, through his juvenile detention sentence. It's a real look at the harsh realities and emotions experienced by teens in a lockdown facility for young criminals, narrated in first person. He's the son of a drug-addicted mother and an abusive father. Reese is a smart boy who has potential to achieve something better in life, but in a desperate financial situation, he made the mistake of stealing a few prescription pads from a doctor's office and selling them to a local drug dealer. Reese was caught and placed in a detention facility for two years as punishment and given a permanent criminal record. Jail personnel recognized Reese's potential and placed him in a work program where he assisted at a nursing home. Reese encounters all-out racism by one of the residents who ultimately becomes an endearing friend. Continuing the theme of friendship and relationships, Reese is entangled in a couple fights in the detention center as he defended a smaller, weaker inmate nick-named, Toon. The fighting eliminated Reese's early release possibility, even though he demonstrated good work performance, understanding of his crimes and being reformed with a good forward life plan. It is noted that Reese is not seen or evaluated as a human, rather he merely a label of a crime he committed.

When I began reading this book, I wasn't sure I liked it. It was unrelatable from my growing up experience. However, having completed the read, I know I loved it. It took me out of my comfort zone and provided me perspective on something I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams. The poor use of the English language by Reese (the narrator) was so impactful and relevant in driving home the point that education is NOT the same in low-income, urban environments. You still see Reese's intelligence through the absence of a 'good education'. This is an important read for all, especially given the BLM movement that is so prominent right now. It gives perspective on the impoverished, black, coming-of-age experience that is all too common in America. It delves into the idea that society has is set up for this subset of the population to achieve nothing beyond their neighborhood's boundaries.

The appropriate target audience for this book is grades 9 and up. There is graphic language, fighting, gangs, drug references, physical abuse, racism and crime at the heart of the story. While all these things were relevant to the story, I think that younger readers might not understand or grasp the message being conveyed. Guidance is highly recommended so that sensitive topics, such as racism and slavery, can be discussed in a healthy manner. By healthy manner, I mean to educate on the topics, rather than propagating them. I would suggest this book as a great gift for those interested in understanding and/or changing the black experience in America.

Recommended Titles:

Bad Boy: A Memoir by Walter Dean Myers

Tyrell by Coe Booth

Bronxwood by Coe Booth

They Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne