

The Nickel Boys

Colson Whitehead

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Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*, inspired by the Dozier School for Boys, follows Elwood Curtis, a black man in the 1960s. Elwood is intelligent and hardworking with a love for Martin Luther King Jr., but is sent to the Nickel Academy, a juvenile reformatory, for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Upon first glance at the reformatory, it appears fair and safe, both to Elwood and to outsiders. But as he spends time in the academy, he realizes that, instead of being just a reformatory school, it is also a corrupt, nightmarish facility where anyone going "out back" is never seen again. His morals and ideas are tested as he is faced with multiple instances of discrimination and punishment, both through his own experience and through the experiences of the men around him. Readers follow Elwood's time in the Nickel Academy, seeing all the hardships and relationships he makes during this period of his life.

I believe that this is a book that should be read by as many people as possible, both because it is a well-written book and, more importantly, because of its subject matter. The book switches back and forth between the 1960s and the present day, with the majority of the book staying in the 1960s, but it does not make the pacing awkward. The academy in the book was based on a real place, and while as a white person, I cannot comprehend what it must have been like, Whitehead makes it somewhat easier to understand what it was like to be in this situation for so long. I would recommend this book to teenagers and older, as it can have language and content matter that is not appropriate for younger readers.

Recommended Titles

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

Speak No Evil by Uzodinma Iweala