

Title: *The Black Kids*
Author: Christina Hammonds
Genre: Realistic Fiction

Reviewer Name: Yujay A., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: December 29, 2021

The Black Kids is a realistic fiction novel set in 1992 Los Angeles, during the Rodney King Riots. The novel's protagonist is a teenage girl named Ashley, who is a senior at a wealthy private high school. Ashley spends most of her time with her close group of friends, Heather, Courtney, and Kimberly. Ashley is African American living in a predominantly white neighborhood in Los Angeles, and all her friends are white. While Ashley rarely thinks about her race, occasionally she experiences racism. Ashley lives with her mother, father, and nanny Lucia. Ashley's father is a successful businessman and her mother is an architect, which is why Ashley is able to live in a wealthy neighborhood and attend a private school. Lucia has been looking after Ashley while Ashley's parents are not home for as long as Ashley can remember. Ashley's sister Jo lives with her husband Harrison and has dropped out of college, causing her to have a bad relationship with her parents. The novel begins with Ashley hearing about Rodney King, who was an unarmed African American man who was viciously beaten by police officers. Ashley does not think much about the trial, and goes to hang out with her friends. They skip school to break into a private pool and drink. The girls meet up with Kimberly's boyfriend Michael and his best friend Trevor. Trevor is Ashley's date to prom, but Michael cheated on Kimberly with Ashley recently. The group is caught and the police are called. Ashley's friends blame Ashley and her race for them getting caught. At school, we are introduced to LaShawn, the school's star basketball player who is going to Stanford on a full scholarship. Ashley does not associate with the African Americans in her school, likely because Ashley comes from a very wealthy background while her African American peers are less fortunate and are at the private school on scholarships. The policemen who beat Rodney King are acquitted, causing national outrage and riots. Ashley's sister Jo declares that she is a communist and begins to join in on the riots. The mob grows more and more violent, and looting and killings happen. Throughout her last days of high school, Ashley must deal with the effects of the riots and re-evaluate her understanding of race and racism, while making new friends and losing old friends along the way.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot was a bit hard to keep up with as there were many directions that the novel tried to go in. However, there was suspense, action, and humor which definitely kept me interested.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was too slow at points and too fast at other times, which made it difficult to fully understand everything that was going on.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grade levels 9 and up, as there is a lot of strong language, violence, and drugs and alcohol in the novel.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to all readers as it is important to understand current day issues such as racism and police brutality.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

The novel has three parts: "Before", "During", and "After".

I would rate *The Black Kids* 4 stars because it was a very important book which explained life during the Rodney King trials and was very interesting. However, it was difficult to understand everything going on and I felt that there were many unnecessary parts in the story that did not contribute to the plot. Overall, I enjoyed reading this novel and believe that everyone should read it to better understand racism and discrimination.