

Title: *Ain't Burned All the Bright*
Author: Jason Reynolds
Genre: Young Adult, Realistic Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Shrey G., Grade 9

Date Reviewed: 03/15/2024

Ain't Burned All the Bright by Jason Reynolds and Jason Griffin is a powerful verse novel that explores the experiences of a young African American narrator navigating a world in crisis. Unlike a traditional novel, it weaves a tapestry of emotions and experiences through his eyes.

Set against the backdrop of the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest, the story portrays the impact on a single family. We see the narrator's parents work hard to maintain a sense of normalcy for their children. His younger siblings grapple with a new reality of social distancing and canceled activities, while the narrator himself confronts the anxieties of adolescence alongside the weight of current events. Reynolds' raw and poetic voice shines through the short, free-verse stanzas. The language is honest, reflecting the realities faced by the characters. The narrator experiences moments of frustration over limitations imposed by the pandemic, yearning for a return to the way things used to be. He also grapples with important issues that are constantly present in the world around him.

Griffin's evocative illustrations add another dimension to the story. These fragmented collages, a mix of collage, painting, and text, mirror the fragmented and uncertain world the characters inhabit. While the challenges are real, the book isn't without hope. The narrator finds solace in the love of his family, the strength of his community, and his own creativity.

Ain't Burned All the Bright is a story that transcends a simple plot summary. It's a story about family, identity, and finding your voice in a world that can feel overwhelming. It's a story that explores the complexities of growing up during a time of significant change, but also the enduring strength of family and community. It's a story that will stay with you long after you turn the last page.

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

The short poems and illustrations can be very engaging. The story is told through emotions and images, rather than a traditional plot.

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

The pace of the book was not extremely fast but it was quick. The pacing reflects the narrator's experiences. There are moments of reflection and moments of intensity, mirroring life during a pandemic and social unrest.

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

This book would be a good choice for teens who are interested in real-world issues, coming-of-age stories, or poetry. So grades 7 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

This book would be a good choice for teens who are interested in real-world issues, coming-of-age stories, or poetry.

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

Ain't Burned All the Bright won the Caldecott Medal in 2022 for its illustrations. Another thing is the book deals with serious topics like racism, police violence, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would rate this book 3.5 stars because the unique storytelling with poems and illustrations is engaging, and the way it tackles serious topics can be impactful. However, there's no traditional plot, and the pacing reflects real-life experiences which can be uneven at times.

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Nitya M., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 17, 2024

The book *Ain't Burned All the Bright* is a young adult literature written by Jason Reynolds. It is not just a typical book as it is illustrated by Jason Griffin and written in poetic prose. The book is divided into 3 sections called "Breaths". The story is about a young African American narrator and his family as they travel through the many challenges provided by the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the story the family struggles with many common problems that happened during the pandemic such as fear, uncertainty, and isolation away from other humans. They also struggle with the present realities of Racism towards African Americans. The narrator explains and describes the pandemic through his own eyes showing the confusion and anxiety of this situation. The illustrations provided by Jason Griffin make the story even more interesting and add more mood and tone towards the story. The story starts out when the narrator, whose name is not clear with the sudden shift of online schooling where the narrator struggles with online schooling. The story takes a turn when the narrator's father catches COVID-19. The narrator struggles with distancing himself and his father as they have a bond and the illness and fear of losing his father take a toll on the narrator's mental and physical health. In the story it is not revealed whether the father lives or not but is rather kept open-ended for the reader to decide. The story highlights the importance of family as the narrator helps his mother and siblings battle through tough times. In the story they create moments of joy and have normal moments even though this pandemic is greatly affecting the family. The narrator witnesses the strength of his mother as she navigates through challenges of job insecurity and access to healthcare. In the book the illustration of fire is used quite a lot to represent imagery of the destruction the pandemic is causing and the racial injustices. This book is not just a book about hardship but also a testament towards a brave and strong family. The book shows that there is still the ability to find light in the darkest of times.

Did the plot keep me interested?

Not really during the beginning but I feel like the rising action made it better.

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

The pace of the book was a little fast but still manageable, it is more of a quick read.

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

This book should be suitable for 7th grade and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this to someone who maybe wants to have more insight into the pandemic and its problems.

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

The book may seem boring at first but it is much better towards the middle and end so I would keep reading it instead of finding a different book.

Rating: This book deserves 5 stars because it is fantastic and shows struggles that a lot of families went through during the time of the pandemic and shows insight into the pandemic itself. Although it is not a real story it is realistic fiction and is very relatable.