



'89 Walls

Katie Pierson

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This mature novel for young adults explores growing up and developing political opinions, even while bringing the decade of boom boxes and big hair to life.

The 1980s was a unique decade in American social and political history, and Katie Pierson does a stunning job of weaving much of it together for young adults in *'89 Walls*. There is enough pop culture, music, fashion, and teen angst to make it a fun read, yet Pierson doesn't water down her political debate or the bittersweet undertones of her story.

Seth and Quinn are typical star-crossed lovers. Pierson builds on this familiar framework with the story of the young girl born into a privileged conservative family living in the nicest neighborhood and the boy from the other side of town raised by a more liberal single mom with MS. Once their unlikely love is discovered, they tangle with the expected challenges—passing judgment on each other's friends and hurting each other's feelings with the typical "I'm sorry my blue-collar future isn't good enough for you."

The two young lovers are very different from each other, but Pierson doesn't depend on this formula to carry out her agenda. Her characters are acutely aware of what's happening in the world around them. They try out their own political opinions in conversations with their parents. When Quinn is in real trouble, she reaches out to them.

Every bead of sweat and exhale of breath brings a tantalizing physical passion between Seth and Quinn to life, but things get real when she approaches her mom about getting an abortion. Quinn appears uncommitted to how she should feel about her decision, which does little justice to the reader by making sex so palatable and exciting and abortion no worse than "I napped for a day. That was it." Besides shying away from the opportunity to connect on some of the larger issues, Pierson still opens the door for independent thinking and adult responsibility.

'89 Walls is a firestorm of hot topics from Apartheid and Tiananmen Square to college applications and lost innocence. With a thoughtful glossary, further reading list, and complete bibliography, Pierson invites young readers to disagree, to learn more, and to make sure that they understand what they believe.

SARA BUDZIK (Fall 2015)

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