



Clarion Review

Poetry

Fireside Chats: A Surrealist's View of the World, Volume 1

Frank O'Neal

Charlene Potter, illustrator

Jack Thompson, illustrator

LJAC Press

978-0-9817964-3-7

Three Stars (out of Five)

A rich life filled with productivity can be the perfect backdrop for creative inspiration. Immersion in the process of living is the best way to feel the joy and pain of positive and negative experiences. In *Fireside Chats: A Surrealist's View of the World*, a poet and two illustrators deliver an emotional presentation.

Written as a tribute to his parents, Frank S. O'Neal gives the perceptive reader a glimpse of his soul, his inner voice. Though written from an African-American viewpoint, O'Neal's work will attract an ethnically diverse audience with a genuine appreciation for cultural projects in a broad-based humanities curriculum. Its academic merit may not be apparent at first glance, but this short, collage-style compilation with freestyle black and white sketches has educational as well as artistic value. The cover projects a hard-hitting human rights message with its watercolor depiction of an anonymous man carrying a quill dripping ink and a sword trailing blood.

This book has a strong religious slant, which may not appeal to all poetry connoisseurs. Many of O'Neal's verses make references to the Bible and take on a clichéd, preachy tone typical of Christian liturgy. His tendency to repeat familiar phrases often used in church make some of his pieces less original than they potentially could have been, while his finest works reflect his deepest thoughts and spiritual perceptions without an overt message rooted in organized religion.

"White Bird in the Morning Rain," an outstanding, poignant reflection on our feeble attempts to achieve world peace, is O'Neal at his best. "For You I Wish I May" is a touching note to his lover and a subtle reference to a divine bond between them. "Stop the Rain," a

plaintive description of the black experience in America, expresses the agony of ongoing injustice.

Published by the North Omaha Loves Jazz Cultural Arts & Humanities Complex, Fireside Chats is the first volume of an anticipated series. O'Neal is a well-traveled writer and musician whose multiple careers have taken him in many directions. He was employed by the US Coast Guard, has worked as an industrial paramedic, and held a position in the telecommunications and cellular industry.

Not intended for casual perusal, this heartfelt collection is for any enlightened individual with a serious interest in our country's history from a contemporary standpoint.

Julia Ann Charpentier