



Junie

Chelene Knight

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An observant girl navigates adolescence in a vibrant neighborhood in Chelene Knight's coming-of-age novel *Junie*.

In 1933 in Vancouver, Junie and her mother, Maddie, move to the East End, a neighborhood teeming with life and color. It's quite different from the white neighborhood where they lived before. A jazz singer, Maddie lets Junie explore the neighborhood by herself while she sleeps, smokes, drinks, and works. Junie becomes fast friends with Estelle, who is beautiful and friendly, and whose mother, Faye, pursued her dreams of owning a juke joint at the cost of her family relationships.

The prose is lush and descriptive, reflecting Junie's artistic, near synesthetic way of absorbing and processing information. Her fixation on colors, like the browns and creams of skin tones and the reds and berries of lip colors, act as indicators of her growing awareness of the intricacies of race and her burgeoning sexuality. The colors that she does not name are those associated with facts that she wishes she did not know, like that of her mother's worsening alcoholism.

Maddie, Estelle, and Faye share in the emotional weight of the story. Their individual struggles with mental health, fears, regrets, and realizations are shown both in interstitial pieces and full chapters told from their perspectives. Maddie's chapters start in the past before joining the present and showing her slow decline. The multiple perspectives give context to the older women's actions, which Junie, and Estelle by extension, do not understand in their childhoods. The narrative changes and matures as the girls grow into young women and confront their relationships to themselves, with each other, and with their mothers.

Junie is an engaging historical novel about the resilience, discoveries, and courage of women.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (September / October 2022)

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