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Juvenile Fiction

Nettie Parker's Backyard
C. V. Smith
Avid Readers
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C.V. Smith's protagonist in her novel *Nettie Parker's Backyard* breaks with traditional book format, creating a three-dimensional adventure wherein she invites the reader directly into her story: "Why don't you meet me there?" asks Halley. The second-person narration is one of the literary devices that Smith handles deftly throughout her book about intolerance throughout history, whether by race, religion, or disability.

The novel's message cuts a wide swath, taking events from a global perspective to the personal experience of the heroine, Halley's elderly neighbor, Nettie Parker. Shifting from Halley's point of view to Aunt Nettie's, the novel reaches back in time to the Middle Passage, the Holocaust, segregation in the US, and more. All are recounted in Nettie's calm voice during an interview she gives to Halley for a history project.

The Middle Passage, as presented by Nettie, is a compelling and accurate history, relating the capture of Africans and the horrific conditions of the boats carrying them to the United States where they were sold into slavery. The details of this first leg of indentured servitude are not soft-pedaled for the young reader.

Segregation on the scale it once existed is incomprehensible to young people today. Nettie, exposes the reader to Martin Luther King, Jr. and other well-known events not well known to those born before the 1970s. Swinging back to the personal, Nettie tells Halley's class of the humiliation she and her mother experienced during their annual shopping trip to Beaufort, South Carolina.

Nettie also speaks of her husband, Jonas, to focus on the history of the Tuskegee soldiers. Her telling illustrates that African-Americans were obviously deemed fit to fight in World War II, but nonetheless did not reap the benefits of white soldiers.

The novel continues to peel the layers of history from the horrors of the Holocaust to the celebration of Bar Mitzvah, a rite of passage for thirteen-year old Jewish children. Nettie's

stories about prejudice go beyond racism to detail the sub-standard treatment of physically challenged people.

"I wrote this book for children aged nine to twelve, the time when one questions everything," says Smith. An educator for thirty years in the Los Angeles Unified School District, she worked with ESL and Special Education students and authored *Stuff*, an anthology of rap, poetry, and prose for children in crisis.

Dindy Yokel