

The Way It Works

William Kowalski

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William Kowalski's *The Way It Works* is a contemporary Horatio Alger tale, featuring a determined young man who succeeds because of his goodness and ingenuity.

Walter Davis is biracial, twenty years old, and homeless in New York City. He is jettisoned to the streets through circumstances beyond his control. The financial woes stemming from his mother's illness and death have left him nearly penniless but not without his integrity, pride in his appearance, and faith in his ability. Armed with these qualities and a copy of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, he sets out to prove to himself and to Yolanda, the young postal clerk he falls for, that he can achieve his dream of a home and financial security.

Walter's journey is not without setbacks. The car he lives in is impounded. He becomes innocently involved in a Ponzi scheme. Yolanda turns her back on him when he doesn't show up for a date. However, as in all romantic myths of upward mobility, Walter finds true love, learns self-reliance, and recognizes that substance is more important than appearance.

With fewer than 120 pages, *The Way It Works* is one title in Raven Books' Rapid Reads series, designed for adult readers functioning at the most basic level of literacy. Adults with only a few hours to commit to reading may also find this book appealing. The first-person narrative offers a minimum number of characters, little introspection or detailed description, and a pleasantly predictable plot. It is a quick and easy read, aimed at urbanites.

Educators who work with adults seeking to improve their reading skills should also find this book and series intriguing. *The Way It Works* deals with contemporary issues: homelessness, greed and dishonesty, the health care crisis, and interracial marriage. The plot may be structured simply, but the story could support fruitful discussion. It offers an uplifting message with a touch of romance.

William Kowalski has written six novels, including two for the Rapid Reads series. In addition to writing, he teaches communication skills to adults at Nova Scotia Community College. No doubt this experience has given him some insight into the needs and tastes of this audience. *The Way It Works* is uncomplicated, but it works well at skillfully delivering an engaging character and story.

GERALDINE A. RICHARDS (November / December 2010)

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