

This Is How We Change the Ending

Vikki Wakefield

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Teenagers take charge in Vikki Wakefield's coming of age tale, *This Is How We Change the Ending*.

Nate and his best mate Merrick take the scenic route home each day from school to avoid the local tough guys. The back roads make for a much longer commute, but Nate isn't in a hurry to be home. His father and stepmother keep their household in a state of dysfunction—his father by taking over Nate's bedroom to harvest illegal marijuana. Nate now shares a room with his three-year-old twin brothers, with his stepmother overwhelmed and ill-equipped to navigate the situation.

Like other kids in his school, Nate doesn't have high expectations for the future. But then a single teacher, Mr. Reid, takes interest in Nate's potential. Still jobless after submitting one hundred applications, Nate spends his free time at YouthWorks, a youth center, and works to blend into the background.

Then Merrick takes a sudden, dangerous turn, dropping out of school and teaming up with local petty criminals to earn a living. YouthWorks' future is threatened, too, and Nate's private writings wind up as protest graffiti. Nate knows it's time to take a stand for YouthWorks, himself, and his brothers.

The novel evokes frustration with, and sympathy for, its characters, detailing neglect and the social hierarchy at the school. Commentary on opportunities arises: Mr. Reid takes students to a job fair at a well-resourced private school, but the students come away dejected, not inspired, because of the rich kids and the recruiters' lists of education requirements. Still, Mr. Reid's mentorship is not without effect: he coaxes Nate out of obscurity to speak for the truly voiceless.

In the complex novel *This Is How We Change the Ending*, examinations of disadvantage and hopelessness lead to brilliant revelations.

TANISHA RULE (May / June 2020)

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