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Why I Fight (Richard Jackson Books (Atheneum Hardcover))



Synopsis

Wyatt Reaves takes the seat next to you, bloodied and soaking wet, and he is a big-fisted beast. Tell him to stretch out like an X across asphalt and you've got a parking space. But Wyatt's been taking it lying down for too long, and he is NOT happy. Since he turned twelve and a half, he's been living with his uncle, a traveling salesman of mysterious agenda and questionable intent. Soon, Uncle Spade sees the potential in "kiddo" to earn cash. And that's enough to keep the boy around for nearly six years. But what life does Wyatt deserve? Alcohol? Drugs? Bare-fisted fights? Tattoos? No friends? No role models? Living in a car? If you're brave enough to stay and listen, you'll hear an astounding story. It's not a pretty road Wyatt has traveled, but growing up rarely is.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up
Wyatt Reaves opens his soul to an unnamed stranger on a bus taking him away from his bleak past and negligent parents, Fever and Ma. When he was 12, he burned down his family home. For the next five years, he is taken on a circuitous road trip by Uncle Spade, Fever's brother, an unscrupulous, hard-drinking traveling salesman with girlfriends in several locales. Stopping in Arkansas, Wyatt makes friends with Clark, a small, bespectacled boy. Together

they invent a game of cruelty to polliwogs, but soon the beat-up Chevy is back on the road heading wherever Spade's shady deals take them. Wyatt's height and developing musculature belie the fearful, lost child inside, who is unable to cry. His thwarted emotions coalesce into an intense rage that is often violent and out of control. Spade eagerly becomes Wyatt's manager, coaching him, sending him on long beer runs, and collecting the cold cash flowing from Wyatt's dominance as a fist-fighter. They stop to visit one of Spade's girlfriends, whose kindness touches Wyatt, but things go badly when Spade batters her on her front lawn, and Wyatt begins to question his own sanity when he feels a compulsion to go and kill his one friend, Clark. He demands to return to Fever and Ma, a move that only confirms the harm and hurt of a family culture laced with vulgarity, mockery, and insults. Characterizations are strong in this searing, yet affirming first novel of a young man determined to define himself and make a new life.

—Susan W. Hunter, Riverside Middle School, Springfield, VT Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review Ever since he turned 12-and-a-half, Wyatt has been on the road with his cool uncle Spade, who lives by his wits and has a different ladyfriend in every new town they visit. For six years his uncle's Chevy "was my house." Wyatt tells the reader, and "all his ladyfriends was my mom." It's Spade's idea that Wyatt, who is unusually tall and strong, should start bare-knuckle fighting for money, and the boy, heartbreakingly eager to please, complies, winning fight after fight . . . until the last one. Oaks's first novel is a breathtaking debut with an unforgettable protagonist, a boy who may claim he hates the word love but is nonetheless desperately in search of it and of himself. The voice Oaks has created for Wyatt to tell his painful and poignant story is a wonderful combination of the unlettered and the eloquent. One example, his description of Spade: "I looked at him real good: his skin like a greasy diner, his black eyes like spiders in holes, his body like a starved bird." Will Wyatt ever find himself? Readers who meet him will care desperately about the answer. Grades 8-12. --Michael Cart

Meet Wyatt Shreaves. Ever since he turned twelve-and-a-half, Wyatt hasn't seen his parents (the neglectful ma and Fever) or gone to school. Together with his itinerant uncle Spade, a traveling salesman with questionable morals, Wyatt crisscrosses the country, weaving in and out of cities, towns, trailer parks and suburbs selling unknown goods. Rootless and with uncle Spade's chevy as his home, Wyatt grasps at any fragile trace of friendship or family he encounters. One day, uncle

Spade spots Wyatt throwing a powerful punch and the dollar signs in his eyes light up. Thus begins Wyatt's life as uncle Spade's meal ticket and an underground fighter. As the wins, money, and injuries roll in, Wyatt begins to feel estranged from his once-admired uncle. Without anyone to talk to and without anyone who truly cares for him, Wyatt withdraws deep into himself, finally making the ultimate decision to return home. Wyatt's authentic and gritty voice tells you a dark and heartbreaking story about a lost boy who has slipped through the cracks. The end of the novel is despairing--yet contains hope and optimism--and the reader is left with the question: What is Wyatt going to do now? I highly recommend this book to everyone, but be warned that it will grip you tightly and wrench your heart. Filled with complex characters and ambiguities, the book will keep readers thinking of Wyatt and his fate long after the story is finished.

Definitely worth your time, this is now my new favorite book! Would very touching in some parts, and hilarious in others.

This is the only book I have picked up and did not put down until I finished it. It is hard to find a book like this that really grabs your interest and doesn't let it go. I loved the character and the things he went through were relatable on a psychological level. I would have died for a book like this as a teen, but loved it in a different way, being an adult, than I think I would have. I would buy this book for anyone who likes a good read, and has some depth to them.

Great book. Fast delivery

This book was written in such bad grammar but wait a minute that is a good thing. This boy 14 year old Wyatt grew up in an unfriendly neighborhood and hardly ever went to school so he never really learned good grammar. Now that makes it realistic, very realistic. Now that we are done with the topic of grammar let's get to the fight action in this book. I liked how the author really expressed the feeling of the character and while threw some hard punches. Overall this was a good read.

Despite being a "young adult" novel, this book has a compelling story and rich characters that held my (adult) attention strongly. I read it rapidly and found complex emotions in every page turn. The images are so immediate and accessible that it was like reading a screenplay. I was an avid reader during my "young adult" years (and beyond) and I do not recall ever reading anything like this. There exists unique and different gender and class perspectives in this book that are not often

found in this genre. I highly recommend it for female or male readers of any age, but especially think it could be used as a jumping off point for heavier educational discussions with teens about class, race, violence, communication about emotions, and more.

I read to experience, to feel something, and "Why I fight" by J. Adams Oaks creates an opportunity to do just that. This story is about the hustle that is life, the upsides and downsides, the wins and the losses. It's a tale of longing, and from the first page, you care about Wyatt, the quiet, thoughtful yet fierce and intense, protagonist, and how, where, and when he'll get all the things he longs for, which admittedly, are the things we all long for: love, redemption, connection, and identity.

When I was a kid I died for books like Oak's. In my day there wasn't a lot of options that mirrored the same voice driven plot of 'Why I Fight'. It was refreshing to be introduced to a world that most YA topics won't divulge in. But it's not just the story and voice that succeed. The author gets "it". He sees everything so clearly that his descriptions will place the reader so close to the story that it hurts to put the book down. With a mixture of serious topics mixed with emotional relevance, you can't help but think of another book intended for this age group that could ignite the same insights. Perfect for a classroom or even better for a starter reader-- this book will engage any audience.

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