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# The Watsons Go To Birmingham--1963 (Newbery Honor Book)



## Synopsis

The Newbery and Coretta Scott King Honoree about the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan from Christopher Paul Curtis, author of *Bud, Not Buddy*, a Newbery Medal and Coretta Scott Award Winner. Enter the hilarious world of ten-year-old Kenny and his family, the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan. There's Momma, Dad, little sister Joetta, and brother Byron, who's thirteen and an "official juvenile delinquent." When Byron gets to be too much trouble, they head South to Birmingham to visit Grandma, the one person who can shape him up. And they happen to be in Birmingham when Grandma's church is blown up. AN ALA TOP TEN BEST BOOK AN ALA NOTABLE CHILDREN'S BOOK AN IRA YOUNG ADULT'S CHOICE A NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW BEST BOOK NAMED TO MULTIPLE STATE AWARD LISTS "Every so often a book becomes a modern classic almost as soon as it arrives on bookshelves. That happened in the mid-'90s when Christopher Paul Curtis released his first book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963*." NPR

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The year is 1963, and self-important Byron Watson is the bane of his younger brother Kenny's existence. Constantly in trouble for one thing or another, from straightening his hair into a "conk" to lighting fires to freezing his lips to the mirror of the new family car, Byron finally pushes his family too far. Before this "official juvenile delinquent" can cut school or steal change one more time, Momma

and Dad finally make good on their threat to send him to the deep south to spend the summer with his tiny, strict grandmother. Soon the whole family is packed up, ready to make the drive from Flint, Michigan, straight into one of the most chilling moments in America's history: the burning of the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church with four little girls inside. Christopher Paul Curtis's alternately hilarious and deeply moving novel, winner of the Newbery Honor and the Coretta Scott King Honor, blends the fictional account of an African American family with the factual events of the violent summer of 1963. Fourth grader Kenny is an innocent and sincere narrator; his ingenuousness lends authenticity to the story and invites readers of all ages into his world, even as it changes before his eyes. Curtis is also the acclaimed author of *Bud, Not Buddy*, winner of the Newbery Medal. (Ages 9 to 12) --Emilie Coulter --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Grade 6 Up?Kenny's family is known in Flint, Michigan, as the Weird Watsons, for lots of good reasons. Younger sister Joetta has been led to believe she has to be overdressed in the winter because Southern folks (their mother is from Alabama) freeze solid and have to be picked up by the city garbage trucks. Kenny, the narrator, does well in school and tries to meet his hard-working parents' expectations. After a string of misdeeds, Mr. and Mrs. Watson decide that tough guy, older brother Byron must be removed from the bad influences of the city and his gang. They feel that his maternal grandmother and a different way of life in Birmingham might make him appreciate what he has. Since the story is set in 1963, the family must make careful preparations for their trip, for they cannot count on food or housing being available on the road once they cross into the South. The slow, sultry pace of life has a beneficial effect on all of the children until the fateful day when a local church is bombed, and Kenny runs to look for his sister. Written in a full-throated, hearty voice, this is a perfectly described piece of past imperfect. Curtis's ability to switch from fun and funky to pinpoint-accurate psychological imagery works unusually well. Although the horrific Birmingham Sunday throws Kenny into temporary withdrawal, this story is really about the strength of family love and endurance. Ribald humor, sly sibling digs, and a totally believable child's view of the world will make this book an instant hit.?Cindy Darling Codell, Clark Middle School, Winchester, KYCopyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The Watsons go to Birmingham -1963 was overall my favorite book of 2016. I just recently read the book in my seventh grade reading class. Personally I thought the novel was a eye-opening, heart-warming, page-turning book. The way the whole book was laid out was brilliant, all of the characters played such an important part in the novel. For example, Byron is a juvenile delinquent,

but a softie at heart. In the book when Kenny, Joetta, and Byron went swimming Joey, and Byron listened to Grandma Sands, and stayed away from Collier's Landing. Kenny, on the other hand, did not. Before Kenny went swimming Byron told Kenny, and Joetta this long story about Winnie the Pooh's evil twin brother, the Wool Pooh. Once Kenny went swimming he got caught in the whirlpool. When Kenny got caught Byron came running after Kenny and jumped in after him. Under the water Kenny thought Byron was the Wool Pooh, and started trying to fight him off. Luckily, Byron was stronger than Kenny and managed to pull him back up out of the water. When he did Byron was kissing Kenny's head and thanking God that he got there in time. The chapter "I Meet Winnie's Evil Twin Brother, the Wool Pooh" is an amazing way to show how Byron and Kenny feel towards each other. It's also a great example to show how complex Byron's personality is. I also loved how Christopher Paul Curtis came up with all of these family moments that not only brought them closer together but made YOU feel like YOU'RE in the book watching them! The last thing I'm going to add on to my comment is that I would recommend this novel to other young kids my age. It's an amazing book that you'll never want to put down!

I met Christopher Paul Curtis in 1998 at the International Reading Association Convention. I bought a hardback of this book and got a picture of Curtis and me. I then had him sign my book. He was very nice, and I told him that I couldn't wait to read his book, because I had heard so many wonderful things about it. Fast forward 17 years, and I have just now gotten a chance to read it because I am teaching 6th grade. Overall, it was a really good book. I loved all the family stories and mischief the boys got into. Only thing I was disappointed in was that I had thought there was going to be more in it about what was going on in history during that time period, but there wasn't anything until the very end. There was so much great story telling in the first 3/4 of the book, and then the last fourth of the book seemed rushed and not fully "fleshed out". I was surprised to hear that my students felt the same way about this. But, nonetheless, it was a really good book, and I can't wait to watch the movie of it (which I don't think will be much like the book).

When I first chose this book to read, I only went by the brief description that told what the book was about. Little did I know that when I began to read the book, I would feel as if I, myself was living through the Watsons. They had normal family drama, sibling rivalry, behavioral issues (that now a days, we would put our child on medication for) There are high points in the book as well as low points. But the family pulls together to get through the tough times. Although the book takes place in

the 1960's, it seems to encompass some modern day problems in our society. Discrimination is still eminent in our society today but I feel it has gotten a bit better since the time frame in which this story took place. Through Kenny's eyes we are able to uncover what his feelings and fears are towards every day life, his brother and the incidents in Birmingham, Alabama. It is how this family comes through that has drawn me deeper into this book. The audience that I would gear this towards would be grades 5 - 7 because I feel at this age, they are most impressionable and would really allow the Watsons into their learning environment and minds.

A funny book with lively characters that teaches about an important event in US history. I've been teaching my class with this novel for many years, always get the same reaction from my students, they love it.

Well written, but only a small glimpse into the events. The characters could have been expanded on to enhance the story, to provide needed insight into their feelings and reasons for thinking as they did.

Christopher Paul Curtis has been my 10 year old son's favorite author for a few years now. There's so much humor and love - relationships between characters are affectionately but unsentimentally drawn. This book, in particular, had such an honest depiction of sibling relationships. From the teasing to the sometimes brutal way children treat those they're closest to to the underlying tie of complete loyalty and understanding, I never doubted the portrayal of any of the characters. Do be careful, though - if you're reading this out loud, you'll probably cry.

While reading this book I felt as if I was going through the life of the Watsons. Feeling their emotions and how they handled their own life. The detail the the author gives about the surroundings, sounds, and sights that the Watsons see. When Kenny would describe the blizzard test Buphead and Byron would give him it felt as if you were standing there watching it happen. I loved the book just by reading the description of the Watson family. Trust me this is one book you want on your reading shelf Sofia Williams

A profound and often hilarious account of a black family in Michigan and their (short-lived) visit to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. The young narrator's voice feels so authentic and the evolution of the sibling dynamics very realistic. Their visit South describes the terror of the church bombing that

killed innocent African-American Sunday School children and traumatizes the narrator. The older brother, formerly a tormentor of the narrator and a cut-up at school, comes to his rescue -- so love and family strength in the end wins out. Realistic dialogue and events throughout this highly readable classic that should be required in all 5th/6th grade classrooms. C.P Curtis is now a favorite author of my 10 year old grand-daughter and myself (a retired teacher & elem. principal).

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