



Noughts and Crosses

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

Editors Choice

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Fifteen-year-old Callum is a Nought, a member of a despised racial group which is also an underclass. Meggie, his mother, works as a servant for the Hadleys (rich Crosses who are members of the racial elite) so Callum has grown up knowing and being friends with their daughter, Sephy. But, now the pair are teenagers, can their friendship survive the strict sexual and racial taboos? So far, so very apartheid South Africa or segregated Southern States of America. However, Blackman's spin on segregation is to have the white people as the Noughts and the black people as the Crosses. Often used in drama workshops, this device is, as ever, starting and provocative - guaranteed to help young readers see events in a different way from the cultural and historical norm with which they have grown up.

Told alternately in the first person by Callum and Sephy, the reader is drawn subtly in as events unfold and both young people come to realise just how fundamentally the regime under which they live has succeeded in affecting their thinking about each other, despite the years of friendship. There are some telling school scenes reminiscent of the enforced desegregation of the education system in Alabama. That Callum and Sephy's friendship develops into uncompromising love despite all the odds, leaves the reader with some hope, despite the tragic ending.

Blackman is known for her tightly plotted, fast moving fiction. In this novel the theme of alcoholism (Sephy follows in her mother's footsteps by using drink as an escape) is perhaps not sufficiently explored. However, with its powerful them of racial injustice, *Noughts and Crosses* engages the reader at a greater depth and in a more demanding way than any of Blackman's previous work. I read it in one sitting, reluctant to put it down, and so, I'm sure, will many young readers.

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