



2009

The Heights

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James, Brian. *The Heights*. Macmillan, 2009. ISBN 9780312368531. \$16.99. 246 p.

Reviewer: Alison Canar

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Brothers and sisters--Juvenile fiction; Prejudices--Juvenile fiction; Family problems--Juvenile fiction;

A contemporary re-telling of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Heights* explores the twisted romance between Henry--the modernized Heathcliff--and his beloved Catherine. Raised as brother and sister, Henry and Catherine share a deep connection, but not the same blood. Henry is a Mexican orphan, and Catherine is a wealthy Caucasian. Nonetheless, Mr. Earnshaw loved them equally since bringing Henry into his home years ago. In fact, he seemed to favor Henry over his own biological son, Hindley. When Mr. Earnshaw passes away, Hindley becomes Catherine and Henry's legal guardian. Hindley is filled with bitterness and hatred towards Henry; he does everything in his power to tear Henry down and separate him from Catherine. Without Catherine, Henry spirals into destruction. Catherine is sorry to lose Henry, but she begins to turn her affections towards her new boyfriend, Edgar. Finally, in a desperate attempt to win back the love of his life, Henry ends up losing her forever.

The Heights only follows the first half of *Wuthering Heights*, but it captures the most famous story arch. Most of the original characters are here, but with roles more familiar to young adults. For example, the Nelly character transforms from a maid into Catherine's best friend. While the story of Heathcliff and Catherine was told second-hand, *The Heights* switches between Henry and Catherine's voices as they tell their own story. Despite the change of ethnicity and name, Henry's character is remarkably faithful to Heathcliff. On the other hand, Catherine's character is more noticeably changed. James' Catherine lacks the headstrong devotion to her "soulmate" that Brontë's Catherine displayed. For this reason, the novel is a good introduction to studying *Wuthering Heights*, but won't tell quite the same story. Teens should enjoy the modern version and find it much more accessible than the original.

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