



2018

Betty Before X

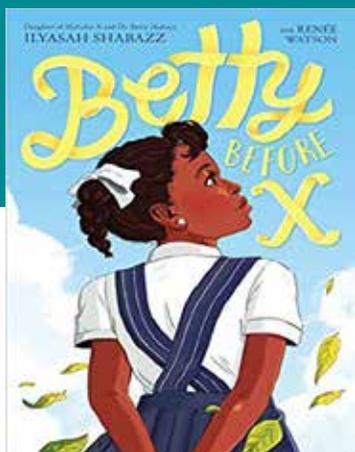
Taylor Harris

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Book Review

Betty Before X

Author

Ilyasah Shabazz

Illustrator

Reviewer

Taylor Harris

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate

Pages

216

Year

2018

Publisher

Farrar Straus Giroux

ISBN

9780374306106

No matter how hard she tries, Betty just can't get her mother, Ollie Mae, to love her. One day, Betty decides that she has had enough of the beatings and lack of love, and so she runs away. A kind, well-off couple takes her in as their daughter. Soon, Betty and her friend Sue-setta begin volunteering with the Housewives' League, an organization that encourages people to not shop at places where Negroes can't be hired. With all the prejudice, racism, and hate surrounding blacks at this time, Betty is determined to make a difference and learns from her new mother's example how to be a leader, be kind, and help those around you. When an African American boy is shot and killed, tensions are heightened. Betty resolves to help by aiding the family, because it is through caring for others that the best work is done.

This is an excellent work of historical fiction about the childhood of activist Betty Shabazz, written by her own daughter. The story is in first person, becoming much more real and personal, as it is as if we are hearing it from Betty herself. Set in the 1940s, readers will experience the turmoil and prejudice of the pre-Civil Rights period. Yet even with these difficult times as the background, this story emphasizes finding the good and counting your blessings, especially in bleak situations. This book follows Betty as she learns how to find her voice and make a stand, starting with small differences in the community. Her early experiences helped shape who Betty eventually became, and this story shows the development of both her leadership and her desire to help change come. An inspiring story of a girl seeking for belonging and a better world, Betty Before X is well worth the read.

*Briefly mentions lynching and a boy being shot.