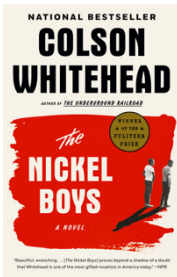


# The Nickel Boys

By Colson Whitehead



When Elwood Curtis, a black boy growing up in 1960s Tallahassee, is unfairly sentenced to a juvenile reformatory called the Nickel Academy, he finds himself trapped in a grotesque chamber of horrors. Elwood's only salvation is his friendship with fellow "delinquent" Turner. As life at the Academy becomes ever more perilous, the tension between Elwood's ideals and Turner's scepticism leads to a decision whose repercussions will echo down the decades.

## Things to think about

Here are some questions to think about. Feel free to answer as many as you like, or to come up with your own discussion points if you prefer. There is space below to write comments.

1. The prologue sets up the modern-day discovery of the horrors which took place at the Nickel. How did this affect your reading of the story?
2. Elwood knows he is "as good as anyone". How does this shape his story?
3. Elwood repeatedly returns to one of Martin Luther King's mantras, "Throw us in jail and we will still love you." Do you think there is a moment where he abandons this?
4. Elwood and Turner are real opposites in outlook and character. What do you think this signifies, especially given the book's ending?

5. What does Turner learn from Elwood?

6. The boys maintain a sense of humour in the face of terrible trauma and mistreatment. What do you think this signifies?

### **About the author**

Colson Whitehead is the author of 7 novels including *The Underground Railroad*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2017. His other books include *The Noble Hustle*, *The Intuitionist*, *John Henry Days*, and *The Colossus of New York*. He is also a Pulitzer Prize finalist and a recipient of the MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellowships. He lives in New York City.

**You can make any other notes about the book on the back of this page.**