



Down Sand Mountain

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In a tale full of humor and poignancy, a sheltered twelve-year-old boy comes of age in a small Florida mining town amid the changing mores of the 1960s.

It's 1966 and Dewey Turner is determined to start the school year right. No more being the brunt of every joke. No more "Deweyitis." But after he stains his face with shoe polish trying to mimic the popular Shoeshine Boy at the minstrel show, he begins seventh grade on an even lower rung, earning the nickname Sambo and being barred from the "whites only" bathroom. The only person willing to talk to him, besides his older brother, Wayne, is fellow outsider Darla Turkel, who wears her hair like Shirley Temple and sings and dances like her, too. Through their friendship, Dewey gains awareness of issues bigger than himself and bigger than his small town of Sand Mountain: issues like race and segregation, the reality of the Vietnam War, abuse, sexuality, and even death and grieving. Written in a riveting, authentic voice, at times light-hearted and humorous and at others devastating and lonely, this deeply affecting story will stay with readers long after the book is closed.

Down Sand Mountain Details

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Author : Steve Watkins

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From Reader Review Down Sand Mountain for online ebook

Nikki Warnke says

It's 1966, and 12 year-old Dewey Turner is planning on having the best school year yet. However, his first day is ruined in a tragic, yet funny, shoe polish incident that earns him the nickname, Sambo. The bullying increases when Dewey's father comes up with a sure-fire way of winning the local election. He's going to campaign for the local black vote. Dewey finds friendship in Darla, but she's a girl and leaves him confused most of the time.

In Dewey, Watkins creates a character that all of us can relate to. He is too short, too annoying, too young, and too confused; a perfect portrayal of the average 12 year-old. During his 7th grade year, Dewey's view of the world changes through his exposure to racism, the reality of the Vietnam War, sexuality, abuse, and death.

Cathy says

In this coming-of-age story about a young, too short, boy in a small Florida town in 1966, seventh grader Dewey is angry because another boy used his shoeshine kit to make his face black, Dewey wants to get that role next year so he paints himself and then is nervous about going to school. He just wants to have friends and not forget his locker combination. When he gets there kids call him Sambo and prevent him from using the whites only bathroom. Meanwhile things are changing around the country and about to change in Dewey's world and in more ways than one. We watch all the events through the naive eyes of Dewey adding to the occasional humorous incidents.

Walt says

I don't think Dewey Turner and his friend, Darla, ever make it together down Sand Mountain.

You'll have to read the book --- or, perhaps, you already have --- and tell me if they do. My recollection is leaning toward one conclusion about that issue --- it's been a while since I finished it, but you can let me know in your own review when you post it what you think.

It's like a lot of things about the book, though. There is not the easy this or that or black-and-white of easy thinkers there. It's not necessarily a read for the sanctimonious or for persons who would wrench all the color out of it. Hence, it can be said that the book moves a little slowly and perhaps a little delicately, but given the circumstances, maybe that's a good thing. After all, it was 1966, and even if it didn't seem to move so slowly back then, compared with today, it did.

I don't pretend to know whether the youth of today can tolerate a slow read or more complex issues than puritanical crap. Of course, I don't mean to lump them all together, for in my mind, to some degree that is the message of the book: to take your time, to make a careful and considered analysis, to decide what is important, and not to make quick and hasty judgments of people, but to value everybody for their

uniqueness.

I think there's a lot to say about an artificial mountain made of sand from the tailings of mining in the flat lands of Florida as it relates to Dewey and Darla and their respective trips down it. What do you think?

Int'l librarian says

The sights this book inspires are so pure and strong that, in one sense, nothing else matters. Dewey Turner is socially awkward, often scared, and naïve – even for a 7th grader. But most of all he's sincere. The setting is a struggling town in 1960s Florida, a wasteland built on the phosphate industry. Watkins closely sketches the land, its people, and the conflicts of the time. His eye for detail saves the story from miring itself in sermons against bullying, racism, or the traumas of the Vietnam War. Dewey's wide-eyed view and selective hearing make for a lot of funny moments – that's another welcome relief. Watkins doesn't sugarcoat his words, however, or gloss any of the action. There are some uncomfortable sexual allusions, and one graphic scene. Dewey may be only 12, but this is a book for teenagers, and their parents, or maybe anyone looking for a reminder of what it means to be innocent.

Philippe says

During the 1960s, a young boy named Dewey Turner struggles to be recognized in his school, but hope still remains in him that he will be popular someday. He does gain attention, but it is an embarrassment that causes insults and taunts from his peers. This novel portrays the typical experiences of teenagers who struggle to fit in within their community. It also talks about how a person can discover oneself through the individual's experiences as he/she grows up because of the lessons that it teaches the person. This book will be enjoyable to teenagers since most of the teenagers today can relate to this because of the similar problems that Dewey and the others experience.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Grandma Bev for TeensReadToo.com

It's 1966 and there is still a lot of racial tension and discrimination in this small Florida town. The Vietnam war is in high gear, and Dewey Turner has many personal issues to deal with.

Dewey desperately wants to be the "Shoeshine Boy" in next year's minstrel show at school, but dying his face with black shoe polish turns out to be the wrong thing to do because it won't wash off. The kids start calling him Sambo, and then the bullies won't let him use the bathroom that they have labeled "Whites Only," and continue to do so long after the shoe polish wears off.

He is ostracized by his classmates, picked on by bullies, and his father deals out discipline with his belt.

Dewey's brother, Wayne, is the only person willing to talk to him besides another outsider, Darla Turkel. Darla is a bouncy, Shirley Temple look-alike who befriends Dewey.

His problems escalate when his dad sends him and Wayne into Boogerbottom, the black section of town, to deliver campaign posters - and they run into more trouble than they can handle.

DOWN SAND MOUNTAIN is an authentic look back in history, and a riveting chronicle of the emotional issues of being a teenager. It does introduce some sexual complications in a couple of scenes that I thought should have been omitted - the story is great without those problems.

Overall, though, this is a fast-paced story filled with the emotional roller-coaster of teen angst. The characters are realistic and compelling. It is a complex story that is by turns funny, sad, lonely, and sometimes frightening, but one thing is for sure: it will stay with you long after the last page is finished.

Terry says

Dewey is the quintessential hero for this trek through puberty. Everyone who has passed through adolescence has subliminal memories of the period that are joyful and painful. In creating Dewey, the author has provided a real and believable person and a story that will keep readers glued to the book. The author has written a funny, sensitive, and realistic novel that sheds light on how adolescents cope while they pass through this difficult stage of their lives.

To read our full review, go to the Reading Tub.

Talia says

In his 1966 Florida small town, Dewey Turner is ready to start a new school year and he is determined to have a good one. But after watching the annual minstrel show, he decides to try out a costume for the "Shoeshine Boy", accidentally staining his face and earning him a new nickname, Sambo. He's picked on and bullied at school, and when Dewey's father, who is running for local office, starts campaigning in the local black neighborhood, things for Dewey get even worse. The only person who doesn't make fun of Dewey is another outcast, a Shirley Temple lookalike named Darla, and she has her own secrets.

I liked this book; it was an interesting, coming of age story with lots of historical and social elements. The ending wasn't terribly compelling, but I liked how there was no huge climax; it made the story more believable.

Sean says

I'm reading this off the shelf at the bookstore. It's a ya book, and it's actually quite good. I think the themes of coming of age, in the sixties appealed to me.

11.24.08

I finished this yesterday. It was just okay, after all was said and done. I understood a lot of the intention

behind the story; I felt like it was trying too hard in some way to be profound, and yet, it succeeded in communicating a *feeling*.

It had a clumsy allusion to "To Kill a Mockingbird", and a subplot involving rat poison was a little hard to stomach

[sorry, couldn't help me-self], but I enjoyed the characters a lot.

I would read another story by Steve Watkins, I just hope it would be better realised than this one.

Kirby says

My darling friend Karen Cushman recommended this, my darling friend Kaylan Adair edited it. And it won a Golden Kite!!

I love the way Steve Watkins stayed fully in Dewey's point of view. When big changes came for the family - - the lost election, the move away from Sand Mountain -- it was all perfectly within the m.c.'s POV.

This book did not knock my socks off however. Why did Darla have to ride off into the sunset, permanently? The bully getting poisoned and Dewey taking the fall didn't work for me either.

Disclaimer: I am in such a snit this summer that if someone sent me the manuscript of Hattie Big Sky, I'd give it two stars.

babyhippoface says

I struggled to finish this book, and when I was done, my immediate thought was, "Ugh. I didn't like it." Having said that, it's not horrible. I know, one star says, "HORRIBLE", but for me it was mainly tiresome.

I enjoyed hearing Dewey's thoughts in the beginning. But then this bizarre scene in Darwin Turkel's bedroom popped up, and I began to feel anxious about what later pages might hold. (And there was a little "sex scene" that was just... erk.) And by the time I was 3/5 of the way through, I mainly wanted Dewey to learn to be a little more, well, "succinct", shall we say. Too much rambling, rambling, rambling, and not enough doing. (There were times when I wanted to yell at the boy, "Shut up with all the talking inside your head and actually SPEAK to someone here!"

My main problem with the book was that there was never enough evidence to convince me of either an intended purpose or audience. Is it about race relations? Eh, there's a little bit there, but not so much. I don't think Dewey actually learned much of anything in this area, except that he didn't like it when he couldn't use the "whites only" bathroom. Not sure he ever crossed the bridge to understanding that those in the Boogerbottom lived with that every day.

Is it about bullying? Well, yes, and no. (Again, I wanted to scream, "Just eat the roll on your way to your table, or stick it in your pocket!!")

Is it about a boy experiencing first love? Um. No. First sexual awakenings, maybe.

It's sort of about all those things but just a little bit of each--not enough about any one of them to deserve the label. I guess it was just about Dewey. Which, now that I think about it, probably was the intended purpose: letting us walk around inside Dewey's head.

But I just wanted out of there.

As to the intended audience, I thought this was kid-lit, and every single bit of it was, except the freaky scenes with Darwin and Darla. Scene with Darwin--completely confusing to your average kid but still weird enough to know that something just wasn't right. Scene with Darla--ew, and completely inappropriate for your average kid. But I doubt the YA audience is going to pick this up, or make it past the first few chapters. Dewey's too young for teens to want to read it. So I'm still confused about what audience it wants to please. I just know it wasn't *this* one.

(And Darwin was just so freaky. I think he grew up to be Jame Gumb from Silence of the Lambs....)

Josiah says

This is an interesting and very unusual story that takes place during the racial unease of the 1960s, near the onset of the Vietnam War. Steve Watkins introduces a couple of characters that definitely hold some promise, Darwin Turkel and his sister Darla Turkel, and their interactions with the main character Dewey Turner are certainly unexpected and different. If the main character were a couple of years older I'm not sure if this would be classified as juvenile fiction, or even as young adult, due to the slow paced narrative and occasionally explicit writing. *Down Sand Mountain* might find itself on some lists of frequently challenged books, but it is an interesting read.

L. says

A student lent me this book. He said, "Ms. B, you haaaaave to read this." Yes, sir. On my way. And after two months of holding onto his book, i have finally finished a book without the traditional story arch for YA books. There was no resolution in terms of the strained racial tensions in this Florida community, and Dewey didn't seem very likable or realistic. Overall, Dewey is kind of like a 12 year old Holden Caulfield who is just as confused about life, love and trust.

Amy Kitchell-Leighty says

I didn't like this book right off the bat. In fact, I was annoyed with the first couple of chapters. The voice didn't feel believable to me and the events seemed forced. However, I either got use to the narrators' voice or the writing became better because by chapter eight I was engrossed. *Down Sand Mountain* is about a twelve year old boy named Dewey Turner coming of age in the summer of 1966. The book spans from the summer to March of the following year. Along the way Dewey encounters racism, death, fear, politics, girls, bullies, and family dynamics. We take the steps with him as he not only encounters these things, but learns to adapt to them as well. This was a quick read and it was fun. Great last chapter.

Sandra McLeod says

What I liked best about this novel were Dewey's relationships: particularly his relationship with Darla and his relationship with his brother Wayne. Dewey's voice was very real and his coming-of-age experiences were depicted with great poignancy. I felt the story moved a little slowly in some places but overall it was a very believable story of a 12-year-old boy growing up in a small southern town in the sixties.
