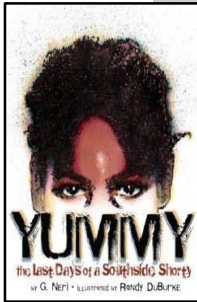




Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



Yummy: Last Days of a Southside Shorty, G. Neri;
illustrated by R. Duburke.
Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, February 22nd, 2012.

I have never liked books that dramatize hard core subjects like drug addiction or gangs and soften them up in order to attract a younger readership. There is nothing soft about these problems and I truly feel that if you are mature enough to read about them, you are mature enough to get the truth, in all of its ugliness. There is nothing soft about today's graphic book. It's about an 11 year old gang member from Chicago who was murdered in 1994 and it could just as easily have happened in Toronto or any of its suburbs, including Mississauga.

The boy's name was Robert Sandifer. His gang name was Yummy. He was removed, as a child, from his mother's care and was raised by his grandmother who could not keep him off the streets. He felt he belonged nowhere and so he was perfect prey for the local gang who looked for underage offenders, known as "shorties", to whom they could offer a sense of belonging and in turn could use to commit felonies, knowing that they wouldn't be sentenced to hard time in prison. The "shorties" are never savvy enough to realize that they are being used. During a shooting, Robert ends up missing his intended target and instead kills an innocent 14 year old girl. His gang family ends up murdering Robert to divert attention away from themselves. The narrator is a fictional friend who tells the story in an effort to understand why Robert ended up living such a short tragic life and he concludes that he didn't know which was worse, the way Robert lived or the way Robert died.

That pretty much sums up the life of a gang member anywhere in North America – kids literally dying to be accepted by other kids who feel they don't belong anywhere. There is no hope, no love and no glamour to it – just a very long line of coffins with the faces of boys who never grow to be men.

You've got to read this graphic book. I researched the true story on the Internet and couldn't believe how sad and senseless it all was.