

Heart Of The City



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From Publishers Weekly Ten-year-old Joy is upset and fearful when in June her artist father moves the family from affluent, all-white Woodland Hills into a house he has renovated in a rundown, mostly black neighborhood in central Los Angeles. To her relief, she quickly makes friends with Neesha, the only other girl on the block, who shows her the ropes on Ibarra Street while tartly disabusing her of common white misconceptions about African Americans. When gang members threaten to deal crack at an empty house on the block, the girls take the initiative and by August turn the house into a work of art that unites the multi-hued neighborhood and keeps the enemy at bay. Koertge (Confess-O-Rama) presents an inspiring vision of racial harmony and community solidarity, along the way skewering prejudices liberal and reactionary, white and black. It is, however, a bit of a stretch to believe that one

month of art and neighborly goodwill will keep the bad guys away forever. And observant readers may be dissatisfied that Neesha's important query, "Are you going to go with me, or are you going to private school?" is left hanging. Ages 8-12. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal Grade 4-7?When her artist father moves 10-year-old Joy and her mother from suburban Woodland Hills to a mixed inner-city neighborhood, the girl feels as though her blond ponytail sticks out like a sore thumb and her mother is sure something bad will happen. However, over the summer Joy finds new friends, including Mr. and Mrs. Park, who own the grocery store across the street, and Neesha, who is her age. She learns to talk to the homeless man, Dimitrios, and to stand up to the neighborhood tough boys. When the relative safety of the neighborhood is threatened by drug dealers who want to take over an empty house, Joy and Neesha work together with their neighbors to drive them away. Koertge's messages?the vitality of urban life and the strength of community cooperation?overwhelm this book, which lacks the humor of his books for older readers. The neighbors are representative types rather than fully developed characters: Neesha's strict grandmother; Mrs. Santiago, a fortune teller from the Caribbean; Mr. Lossi, left over from the area's Italian days; the Korean store owners; Mr. Jardin, who distrusts all whites. Joy and Neesha, themselves, don't really come alive as distinct individuals. The neighborhood's problem is real, but the resolution is too pat, even if Koertge allows the girls to realize that the gangsters from Nasty Street may not stay away forever. Paul Fleischman's Seedfolks (HarperCollins, 1997) makes the same points more effectively.?Kathleen Isaacs, Edmund Burke School, Washington, DCCopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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