

The Nickel Boys: Reading Guide

By Lisa Scherff

Essential and Guiding Questions

Essential Question #1: What are the different forms of racism in the novel?

Guiding Question: How does The Nickel Boys help us understand the experiences of boys of color?

Essential Question #2: How does power operate in the novel?

Guiding Questions: How is power wielded? How does a lack of power affect the boys, both short term and long term?

Themes/Topics

1. The capacity of friendship and interpersonal support to sustain people facing adversity, oppression, and intense hardship.
2. Isolation and a lack of support leads to hopelessness.
3. The lasting impacts of slavery.
4. Ignoring reality only allows racism and discrimination to grow.
5. Doing what's right often means making great sacrifices.
6. People in positions of power often use fear to suppress others.

Symbols

1. The Secret Graveyard
2. Martin Luther King at Zion Hill
3. The Encyclopedias

Point of View: Third-person omniscient

Characters

Elwood Curtis—

(Jack) Turner—

Harriet (Elwood's Grandmother)—

Mr. Macroni—

Mr. Hill—

Desmond—

Black Mike—

Jaimie—

Maynard Spencer—

Griff—

Lonnie—

Mr. Goodall—

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—

Corey—

Trevor Nickel—

Blakely—

Dr. Cooke—

Denise—

Chickie Pete—

Big Chet—

Director Hardee—

Hennepin—

Millie—

Harper—

Earl—