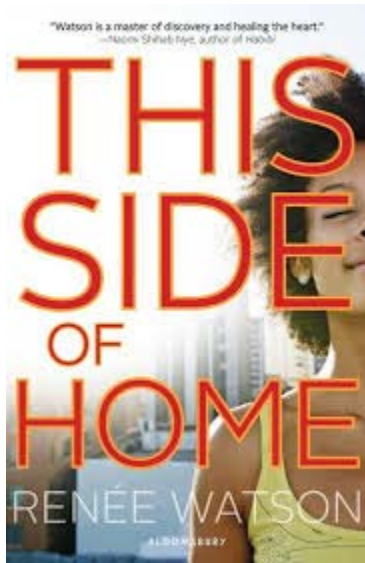


A Changing World



In Renée Watson's coming of age novel, *This Side of Home*, Maya Younger's world is changing. Essence, Maya's best friend and neighbor, is moving to different part of Portland. Maya and her twin sister, Nikki, are drifting apart. Her community is developing from rough to up and coming. Local African-American businesses are replaced by white-owned organizations. The new principal at Maya's high school seems determined to transform the image of the school and community instead of honoring its black heritage. Maya has to learn where she belongs as an young African-American girl in a changing world.

One theme Watson explores is how African-Americans are still treated differently, even though it is the twenty-first century. For example, Maya is afraid to date Tony, who is white, because of what people will say. Nikki tells Maya that white clerks would ignore her, and only talk and help Kate, who is white. These are just a few examples that there is still prejudice toward African

Americans.

Maya develops as a main character throughout the book, with the help of secondary characters Nikki, Tony, and Essence. They help Maya accept that times, places, and people change. They also showed her that not all change is bad. The new businesses bring people and money to Maya's community. There are more funds for Maya's school and houses are more modern and updated.

Watson's dialogue shows readers the relationship between characters, especially between Maya and her parents, Nikki, Essence, and Tony. Watson shows readers what these characters mean to Maya and the bonds between them. Readers can tell how close Nikki and Maya are with their special twin connection and how Tony and Maya are willing to sacrifice their reputations just to be together.

Another strong element of Watson's is her visuals. The visuals bring the book to life and creates a movie in reader's minds. Readers can picture the coffee shop and organic restaurant in Maya's community, the posters at school, the journalism classroom, the skyline of Portland, Essence's room, and Z's cart.

Watson's choice of a first person narrative voice is smart. This allows readers to know and connect with Maya on a more personal level. With each page readers feel like they are Maya: her problems, worries, thoughts, and emotions are their own.

Even though Watson's novel is character-driven, readers will turn page after page to answer questions in their heads. Readers will want to know if Tony and Maya get together. Will Maya, Nikki, and Essence remain best friends? Will black history still be celebrated at the high school? And will people realize the good in Maya's community, not just the bad?

This Side of Home is worth readers' time and money and an absolute ten. If you want a story that is perfect for young adults, love contemporary realistic fiction, and intrigued by a plot involving African American heritage, life, culture, and struggle, pick up a copy of Renée Watson's *This Side of Home*.

— Emma