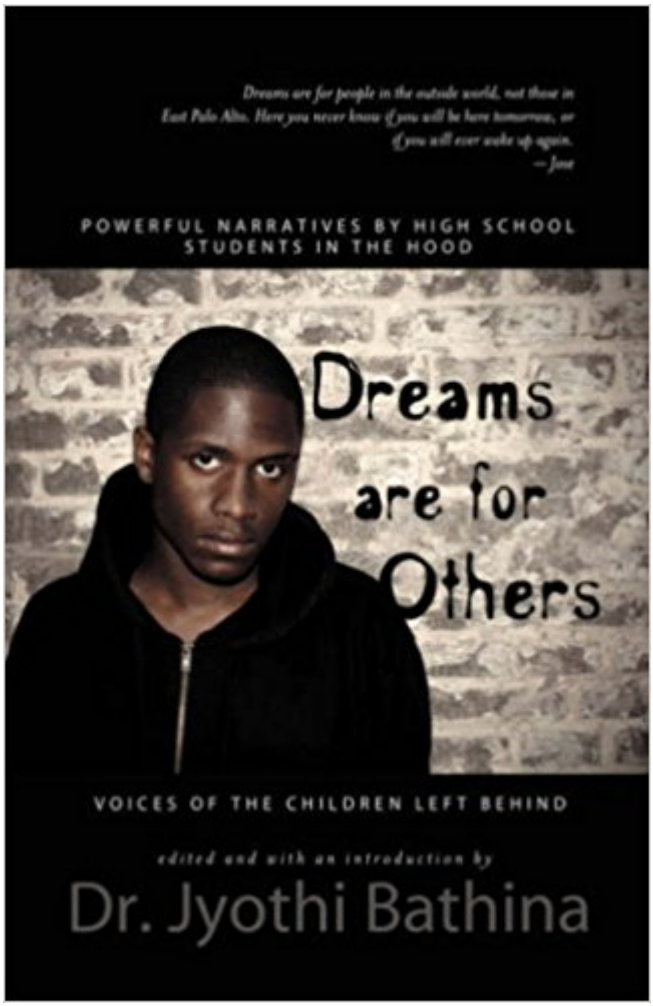
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DREAMS ARE FOR OTHERS: Voices Of The Children Left Behind - Powerful Narratives By High School Students In The Hood



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Synopsis

Welcome to East Palo Alto, former murder capital and a dangerous place to live. These collected voices of high school students in the hood are fierce, poignant and a moving testimonial to the value of bringing literacy to all students.

Book Information

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Booklocker.com, Inc. (October 20, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1601451733

ISBN-13: 978-1601451736

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.3 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces

Average Customer Review: Be the first to review this item

Best Sellers Rank: #5,978,793 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #93 inÃ Â Books > Teens > Social Issues > Homelessness & Poverty

Customer Reviews

From Struggling Readers to Expressive Writers Welcome to the world of East Palo Alto, California. It is a former murder capital and still a very dangerous place to live. On these pages, you will see high school students reflect on what it means to survive, go to school and try to build their own futures here. You will hear humorous voices, tragic voices, hopeful voices, and voices that rage against their circumstances. What emerges is the picture of a place where poverty, violence, drugs, gangs and broken families are the rule rather than the exception. Yet many of these young voices rise above their surroundings and look toward the future. In a world where fathers often abandon their children, thugs and gangsters are role models, violence is an everyday occurrence, and drug money is a quick and dangerous way out of daily despair, there is also fierce family loyalty, love and tenderness, and the eternal hope that there is a better way. What makes this collection even more triumphant is that students who were considered struggling readers produced the work. Despite the cruel and often shocking realities that fill these pages, the beautiful, eloquent voices that emerge here are an incredible cause for celebration. They are tangible proof that with the right motivation, every student can become an expressive writer. It is even more important, given the harsh realities they face, that such students be allowed to express their opinions on life and love and relationships. By pouring out their often raw and hitherto unexpressed emotions on the page, students find first

release and then self-awareness. This is not the place for value judgments or censorship. Students must have the capacity to articulate entrenched belief systems, values and outlooks before they can even begin to evaluate, examine or question them. The importance of teaching effective reading and writing strategies as a tool for improving individual lives, and as a result society as a whole, cannot be stressed enough. The immediate significance to students is much more far-reaching and urgent than the mere raising of test scores or passing of standardized tests. The ability to read other voices that speak to their experience, and to develop an individual voice with which to articulate their deepest desires and dreams, is crucial to every student's growth and success. When the students featured in this collection first entered the classroom, they were defensive and unwilling to learn. After years of being dubbed failures by the public school system, their armor was nearly impenetrable. It has been my privilege to work with each one of them, and on these pages, you will see them shed that armor. You will meet Gabriel, the battle-scarred warrior of the streets who wants nothing more than to be an artist. You will laugh at the brilliant humor of Cinque who expresses himself through exaggerated satire. You will ache for the loud, obnoxious Sarina who longs for the love and support of her family. Adilene's fear that her family is in danger of extinction and Liz's mixed emotions at being pregnant in high school, Reem's honest assessment of the brutality of the streets and Jose's resignation that his dreams have no future are heartbreaking but powerful views of the world from an urban adolescent perspective. Ashley loves her daddy unconditionally despite the fact that he is in jail for putting a gun to her mother's head, while Fabian's parents are his heroes for making him go to school. Bianca loves her mother for raising her as a single parent, and Reem resents his father for having abandoned him and his mother. There are many lives and many situations here, each equally poignant. What we witness on these pages is their first coherent expression by the students who live them on a daily basis. What it took to transform these formerly silent students into engaged readers and prolific writers was a consistent belief in their ability to succeed, guided instruction and practice, and a gradual introduction to other voices in print, voices that were more relevant to their own lives and circumstances. Authors like Junot Diaz, Sandra Cisneros and Sapphire spurred initially reluctant students to beg for copies to borrow, to go to bookstores to obtain their own, and to burst out in spontaneous applause at how "real'' the stories were. Such relevant instruction and motivation occurs more easily in schools like East Palo Alto Academy High School, and can be easily duplicated in any school where staff and administration work together to provide a rich learning environment, and students are surrounded by a positive and nurturing atmosphere. Our task as educators is twofold-to have the highest expectations for every child, and to present them with relevant engaging material that validates their own significance. We

often celebrate the achievements of our highest performers. Let's remember whether as parents or as educators, to recognize the power and individuality of every student at every level. With encouragement, with guidance, endless patience and an infinite belief in every individual's innate desire to learn, we can awaken the voices of all our children. Their voices are not to be underestimated. They have been silent for too long, left behind without adequate means to express themselves. Once awakened and given those means, these voices speak poignantly and with great wisdom about what it is to be young, to be poor, and to dream about a future that offers equal opportunity to succeed. We can pave a way for that future by first offering them equal opportunity to learn and to be heard. One of my students asked me as he finished writing his last chapter, "Miss, you think this will make a difference? You think someone will listen?" The biggest difference we can make as educators is to help students believe that they matter, that their voices deserve to be heard, and that when they speak somebody will, indeed, listen. Dr. Jyothi Bathina Assistant Professor of Education Adolescent Literacy Mount Saint Mary College New York

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