



Voices
from the
Gaps

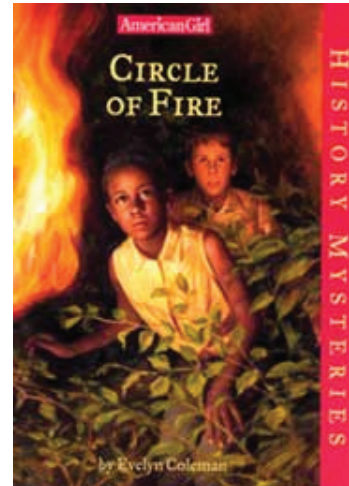
Circle of Fire

Evelyn Coleman

As a young black girl growing up in the South during the 1950s, Evelyn Coleman knew first hand the ugliness that racism brings. Though the story told in *Circle of Fire* is fictional, it based on real life situations at the time. Because of Colemans own racial struggles throughout her life, she felt honored to write about the topic and wanted to make sure her message got out to the youth of today. “I hope you will remember that hate is always dangerous. And that it is important to speak out when you see something wrong” Coleman states in her message to readers (149). Coleman cannot stand the idea of racism and makes it clear throughout the story, and so does Mendy Thompson, the main character in *Circle of Fire*.

Mendy is a young black girl living in the backwoods of Tennessee. With many of her siblings gone away for the summer because of work, she finds it tough to relate to anyone. This leads to Mendy’s finding a secret spot deep in the woods that she calls her own. Only two other creatures on the planet know of Mendys secret location: Mr. Hare, her pet rabbit who she recently set free in the woods, and Jeffrey Whitehall, a white boy from the next farm over, who is Mendys best friend. In the story, Mendy and Jeffrey have not been able to play as much as they were able to in the past. Both Mendys and Jeffrey’s parents say that the two can no longer hang out, and that if they are caught with one another, both Mendy and Jeffrey will be in serious trouble.

Mendy does not understand, nor does she like these new “rules,” but she obeys. One day while Mendy visits Mr. Hare, she notices that someone else has been to her secret hideaway. The trespasser left behind some trash, and Mendy hopes that this is the first and last time this trespasser decides to visit. A couple of visits later, however, Mendy discovers the trespasser had returned, but this time he was not alone. Evidence of more than one person is prevalent as trash litters the area. Not pleased, Mendy decides to use the trapping skills her father taught her to scare these trespassers away. What she finds because of her traps frightens her beyond what she could imagine.



Publisher: Pleasant
Company Publications,
2001



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Mendy realizes that these trespassers are hate-filled people, and she decides to use the clues they left behind to catch them and teach them a lesson. She keeps the secret from her mother and father as well as from Aunt Sis, an elderly black woman who survived slavery and is a friend of Mendy's mother. Mendy tells only Jeffrey about what has been going on in their secret place and asks for his help in figuring out who these people could be. Jeffrey initially declines to help because he knows it is too dangerous for them to be seen together. Mendy investigates and finds some rather shocking news. What does she find out? Who are the trespassers? What will become of her and Jeffrey's friendship? Read *Circle of Fire* and these questions and more will be answered.

I was impressed by how entertaining this book was. I am an elementary education major, so I felt it would be a good idea to look at what students might be reading. I also chose this story because I was not a member of the intended audience. I am a twenty-one year old male reading a story intended for younger girls, around the age of 12. I wanted to see if Coleman's story could appeal to those outside her intended audience, and it did.

The way Coleman narrates Mendy's story is entertaining for any age. The manner in which Coleman describes the landscape, the people, as well as the events occurring around the characters paints a wonderful and complete mental picture for the reader. More importantly, Coleman uses racism as the foundation for the story and directly expresses her views on how destructive and wrong racism is. By doing so, she allows readers to see, as well as feel, the power and negativity that racism brings to the lives of both the victims and the perpetrators. Though the events of racism in the story may not be as harsh as they were in real life during the 1950s, Coleman shows readers some of the consequences of racism.

An additional section in the back of the book gives historical facts about racism. It explains every-day life for blacks and whites in the South at the time and does so in such a manner that younger readers can understand. This section also talks about those who fought for civil rights, both white and black Americans, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This shows readers that in the past people spoke up for what was right and should continue to do so today because racism still exists.

Reviewed by Ross Thompson