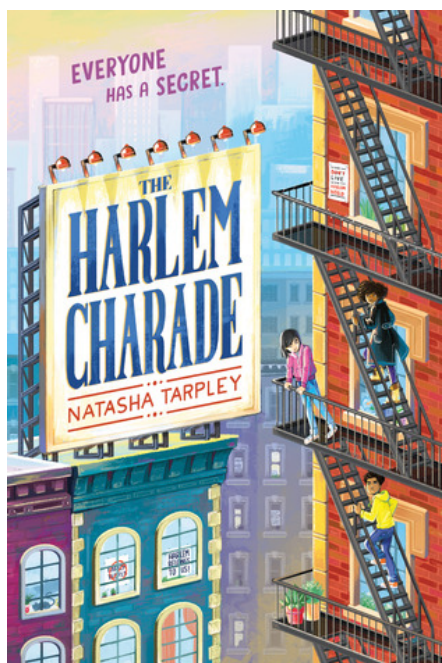




The Harlem Charade

Natasha Anastasia Tarpley

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WATCHER. SHADOW. FUGITIVE.

Harlem is home to all kinds of kids. Jin sees life passing her by from the window of her family's bodega. Alex wants to help the needy one shelter at a time, but can't tell anyone who she really is. Elvin's living on Harlem's cold, lonely streets, surviving on his own after his grandfather was mysteriously attacked.

When these three strangers join forces to find out what happened to Elvin's grandfather, their digging leads them to an enigmatic artist whose missing masterpieces are worth a fortune-one that might save the neighborhood from development by an ambitious politician who wants to turn it into Harlem World, a ludicrous historic theme park. But if they don't find the paintings soon, nothing in their beloved neighborhood will ever be the same . . .

In this remarkable tale of daring and danger, debut novelist Natasha Tarpley explores the way a community defines itself, the power of art to show truth, and what it really means to be home.

The Harlem Charade Details

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Author : Natasha Anastasia Tarpley

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From Reader Review The Harlem Charade for online ebook

Teresa says

Although this title suffers from a few plotting issues, it's an interesting mystery and an even more interesting look at an important neighborhood and time. This also speaks to the power and importance of art.

Jin has to do a school project on her neighborhood, and she's stumped. Several ideas appeal to her and then she comes across Alex, a mysterious girl who hands out free Metrocards and collects donations for a food pantry. Maybe they could do something about that? Adding Elvin (who's homeless since his grandfather was attacked in the park where a painting by a Harlem Renaissance artist was found) cements their goal: solving the mystery of the attack and the paintings becomes their project and mission. Along the way, they save the neighborhood from unscrupulous developers. And become friends.

The author has done a good job of introducing the Harlem Renaissance and its main characters, without bogging down the story, and the controversy about the "Harlem on My Mind" exhibit is thought-provoking. The idea of preserving a neighborhood, and that not all change is progress, is an important one for kids to consider. Jin's close adoptive family (protective grandparents) and their bodega are charming; Elvin and his sick mom and newly discovered grandfather, and Alex's desire to distance herself from her wealthy family all add interesting story wrinkles. Although the bad guys are bumbling, there's still real suspense as the kids search for information.

Meag McKeron says

2.5 stars. The messages in this story were great - the importance of art and the preservation of culture, supporting local businesses, and helping friends and those in need. The whole "kids exploring their neighborhood and trying to solve a mystery before the evil building tycoons do" sounded interesting enough. But this just bored me. It was full of information dumps (the kids overhear things one too many times), and overall it was just clunky and slow. It was a valiant effort - you could tell the author's passion for the story and the subject matter were there - but in the end it just didn't deliver for me. I don't think I'd have a hard time getting kids to pick it up (I will say, the publisher did a great job of selling me on the story from the jacket summary) but I don't think I'd have many finish it/come back raving about it. We shall see!

Michele Knott says

Fun mystery where the reader is constantly picking up new clues and having to figure out how they fit together. Also a story of unlikely friendships.

Barbara says

As other reviewers have noted, fans of Blue Balliett's Chasing Vermeer and other art-related mysteries will enjoy this book. Anyone who likes history or has ever pondered the effects of the past on the present or the future will also enjoy it. Set in modern day Harlem, the book features three seventh graders whose lives and family backgrounds couldn't be more different. But when a chain of unlikely events draws Jin, Alexandra

and Elvin together, they unite in an effort to solve the mystery of some missing paintings that somehow seem to be connected to an attack on Elvin's elderly grandfather and a city councilman's efforts to get reelected while turning parts of the neighborhood into a theme park. The path to friendship is not smooth as Jin and Alex constantly clash, and even the three youngsters are holding onto some secrets that might be best revealed. It's hard to know exactly who to trust at certain points, which made the book interesting to read. The fact that some developers would prefer to simply destroy historical sites in pursuit of progress and the sometimes unsavory side to the art world are explored honestly here. I raced through the book in a single sitting, eager to find out how everything would turn out. The ending seemed a bit hasty, but the rest of the book held my attention completely. Not only are the young characters interesting, but so are the secondary ones, proving yet again, how complex humans are and making it clear that everyone--perhaps even buildings--has a story to tell if only someone will take the time to listen.

Melanie Dulaney says

Solid choice for students in grades 4-6 or those with an interest in art history, Harlem, and/or realistic mysteries. Jin, Alex and Elvin have no common ground on which to base a friendship, but a lost-then-found painting by an historic Harlem artist, a mega building project that will completely change their Harlem neighborhood, and a goat Pez dispense bring the unlikely pair together to solve a mystery, reveal a criminal, and right a wrong. While mysteries are not a tremendously popular genre in my libraries, Harlem Charade adds enough friendship and family drama to the mix that many of my 4th and 5th graders will enjoy this one. Content note: no profanity, sexual content or excessive violence to worry about, but the main characters break into buildings and Jin is dishonest with her grandmother on numerous occasions. Jin even states that she "hated lying to her grandmother, but sometimes rules had to be broken for the greater good." As the trio never experience any real consequences for their infractions, some adults may be unhappy with the mystery solving methods used by the young sleuths.

Lauren says

Bluebonnet Book Reading 18-19. This was a great mystery book for kids. It has such great messages about not judging books by their covers, digging deeper, among other things.. this was a great read!

Rena says

Loved it. Review to come.

So. I feel as if the previous reviews have sincerely underestimated how wonderful, how significant this book is. The Harlem Charade is a mystery featuring three POC teens who rail when their neighborhood might be bulldozed to make way for an amusement park. The story also incorporates the history of 1960s Harlem artists fighting for inclusion in the mainstream art world.

Natasha Tarpley's writing is so deftly done, relating the significance of our past affecting our future without being preachy, and children of color will see themselves reflected in this book - which is a beautiful thing. I believe I would have loved this book as kid.

American Mensa says

The Harlem Charade is an interesting book. I think The Harlem Charade is unlike any other book I've read before. It provides a different type of action that everyone should put in a mystery book. I recommend this book for reader's ages 10-12 because even though there is no death there is a lot of moments that would potentially scare younger readers.

The Harlem Charade is about three teenagers: Alex and Jin, who go to the same school, and Elvin, who was homeless until he met them. Elvin's grandfather, Jacob, was found unconscious in a community garden. At first, Alex, Elvin, and Jin try to find out who clubbed Jacob. Then, they find a letter from a member of the Invisible 7, a group of famous painters. They find out that Jacob was one of the Invisible 7, and they start a whole new adventure.

Markum, the mayor of Harlem, proposes to create an amusement park/museum called Harlem World, but at the same time he plans to destroy homes and shops to build it. Alex, Elvin, and Jin must stop Markum and his crew. Markum knows of their attempts to stop him and tries to capture them. Alex, Jin, and Elvin must put their lives into the hands of their friends Rad and T.J. without knowing if they are good or bad. The leader of the Invisible 7, named Henriette Drummond, left her paintings behind when she mysteriously disappeared, which are the only things keeping Markum from taking making Harlem World. Watch this amazing mystery unfold right in front of your eyes as you try to solve the mystery with the characters, unlike most mystery novels.

I give this book 5 stars because the plot is stranger than most books, creating a different layer of suspense to the novel. My favorite part in the book is when they solve the most difficult part of the puzzles while trying to escape from Markum's crew, trying to get the paintings before Markum gets permission to open Harlem World.

Ryan S, 11, Mensa Alaska

Alexia Gordon says

Combined art history and Harlem history with a mystery that was edgier than I expected for a MG novel. The message was a bit obvious but I'm not 10-12 years old. It might not be obvious to a middle grader.

Kristie says

Review originally posted on www.yabookscentral.com

Jin's grandparents own a bodega in Harlem, and she likes to watch people from her out-of-the-way quiet nook and write her observations in a special notebook. Alex spends as much time as she can helping the needy in the neighborhood as she tries to hide the fact that her parents are ridiculously wealthy. Elvin was recently sent from California to New York to stay with the grandfather he didn't even know existed, and now his grandfather has been attacked and seriously injured, and Elvin is living on the streets to avoid Child Protective Services.

These three very different kids team up in THE HARLEM CHARADE first for a history project, and then to solve the mystery of Elvin's grandfather's attack and the disappearance of paintings that are a part of Harlem's history.

THE HARLEM CHARADE by Natasha Tarpley explores the rich history of the Harlem neighborhood, and

it weaves an interesting mystery into that. Jin, Alex, and Elvin are great characters with intriguing backstories, and Halmoni, Jin's grandmother, is wonderful, too. I really enjoyed the emphasis on community and the importance of art and history. Tarpley did a nice job tying those themes to the book's plot, and the pacing is such that my interest was held page after page.

Harlem is as much a character in the book as any of the people portrayed, and I enjoyed traveling the streets of it with Jin, Alex, and Elvin as they worked through the twists and turns of the mystery in which they found themselves. There are some Scooby-Doo elements to the book, and I kept expecting the adults to call Jin, Alex, and Elvin "meddling kids" (which thankfully didn't happen), and this is a fun read with some truly insightful moments. The

My thanks to the publisher and YA Books Central for a copy of the book in exchange for my honest review.

Jayce Senter says

Originally posted here at In the Senter of it All

A treasure hunt through the history of Harlem, this book is exciting and motivating. What a fantastic book! I loved it from the first page! I recently spoke to a friend who said, "I wish there were more books like this about different cities!" You learn the history of Harlem without feeling like it's a history lesson, but an adventure.

SUMMARY: Jin, Elvin and Alex find themselves unraveling the secrets of the Invisible 7! Along the way the discover art and history, foil a plot to turn Harlem into an amusement park, and save the legacy of an entire generation of artists.

CONTENT:

Language: none

Sexuality: none

Violence: mild-- the villains threaten to kill the kids and at one point tie them up and try to set the building on fire. One of them also threatens them with a gun.

Drugs/Alcohol: none

THEMES: history, family, friendship, art

THE BOTTOM LINE: I adored this book and I am so thrilled it is on the Texas Bluebonnet list next year. It will also be in our Quest for the Crown for 2019.

STATUS IN MY LIBRARY: We have 2 copies in the elementary and will definitely have it in the middle school as well.

READALIKES:

Blue Balliett

The Ring of Rocamadour

Liar & Spy

Sarah says

My absolute favorite types of stories are the ones about place. I adore novels in which the setting is so lively, so carefully and tenderly described that the place itself is one of the novel's central characters. This is a difficult thing to do, but when it is done well, it elevates a perfectly fine book to a great one.

Natasha Tarpley's 'The Harlem Charade' is just that sort of book. A young adult mystery novel set in what is arguably New York's most famous neighborhood, 'The Harlem Charade' follows Elvin, Jin, and Alex as they attempt to unravel the story behind a vicious attack upon Elvin's grandfather and the discovery of rare painting in a community garden. The truth behind both mysteries are of course related, and Tarpley weaves an intricate tapestry that shows the connections between art, inequity and power differentials, community engagement, grassroots organizing, and ownership and belonging.

Elvin and Jin (Elvin especially) were great characters. I had a harder time connecting with Alex and found it near impossible for me to do so. Readers have to suspend themselves in disbelief to imagine these three twelve-year-olds solving what is (in this fictive world) one of modern Harlem's greatest political scandals. Nonetheless, it was refreshing to read a novel in which young children learned about the injustice of racial and economic marginalization and were engaged in their community's political and economic well-being.

However, without shear doubt, Harlem was the novel's greatest character. Like the real Harlem, it was a city in the midst of drastic racial, economic, and cultural transition. The insidious effects of gentrification--the disempowerment and displacement of longstanding (often working-class) communities of color--however, had yet to take root in this fictional universe. Unlike the real Harlem, the Harlem in Tarpley's novel has not drastically lost its families, bodegas, community centers, cultural practices, etc. It's on the cusp, and the heroic action of these three twelve-year-olds help stave off (this particular) socioeconomic/sociopolitical shift. The real Harlem has not been so easily protected.

The novel does start to drag a bit by the second half, and there is a somewhat overly dramatic, unengaging climax in the penultimate chapters.

Tarpley's novel nonetheless inspires its readers to think deeply about space and belonging (amongst other themes). I couldn't help but wonder how a twelve-year-old me would have absorbed the text. Adult me likes it just fine.

Kate McCartney says

Jin, Alex and Elvin want to save their historic neighborhood from being turned into an amusement park tourist trap.

I really enjoyed this. Great characters, a great setting.

2017 Popsugar Reading Challenge- a book with a cat on n the cover

Donnette says

The Harlem Charade tells a fast paced story of three unlikely friends coming together to solve a mystery in Harlem. Jin, Alex, and Elvin - a Korean girl who lives with her adopted grandparents and helps out at their bodega in Harlem, a wealthy white girl who is desperate to help those in need as a way to deny her life of privilege, and a skinny black boy whose alone in the city because his mother is receiving cancer treatments

and his guardian grandfather has been mysteriously attacked in a neighborhood garden and is in a coma at the Harlem Hospital - are driven to solve first the mystery of Elvin's grandfather's attack, and then to follow the clues to discover lost art from the '60's and deny an evil councilman's dream of turning Harlem into a shallow theme park. They argue and get mad at each other and then bond again and move forward. They meet characters from the past and move steadily toward the surprising climax of the story. I enjoyed the pace, the characters, and the history embedded in the story. Natasha Tarpley did an excellent job of pulling me into the story and spurring me to learn more about the artistic diversity of Harlem past and present.

Shenwei says

3 compelling kids of color as MCs, a fun and thrilling mystery/adventure, a tribute to Black art and culture, and an accessible take on timely issues like gentrification. A++?
