



Hank

Claudette A. Peck

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Thirteen-year-old Hank Kemp is four-feet-nine inches and ninety-seven pounds of pure intelligence. Despite growing up in a poverty-stricken African American community in the 1950s South, Hank still dares to dream. Although he has been abandoned by his drifter father, his hard-working mother provides an endless supply of unconditional love and support. Shortly after he wins the spelling bee at his junior high, Hanks promising world shatters when his mother dies in a fire. Soon, his mothers friend, Lillie, takes Hank in and begins raising him as one of her own. While Hank struggles through his grief and rekindles his strong determination to succeed in life, he is helped along the way by a kindly teacher, an attorney, and the Spoorville community as they band together to keep Hank out of foster care. As his father reenters his life and Hanks journey propels him toward high school graduation and an exciting future, he learns that success is better achieved with help from those able to see what he can be. In this inspiring coming-of-age story, a young African American growing up in fifties America must carve his own path in life after his mother dies, with assistance from a caring community.

Hank Details

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Author : Claudette A. Peck

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From Reader Review Hank for online ebook

Sue (booknbeachbag) says

I received a copy of the historical fiction HANK from a goodreads.com giveaway in the hopes that I would give it a favorable review. I really wanted to like the book. The premise sounded really good.

Thirteen-year-old Hank Kemp is four-feet-nine inches and ninety-seven pounds of pure intelligence. Despite growing up in a poverty-stricken African American community in the 1950s South, Hank still dares to dream. Although he has been abandoned by his drifter father, his hardworking mother provides an endless supply of unconditional love and support.

Shortly after he wins the spelling bee at his junior high, Hank's promising world shatters when his mother dies in a fire. Soon, his mother's friend, Lillie, takes Hank in and begins raising him as one of her own. While Hank struggles through his grief and rekindles his strong determination to succeed in life, he is helped along the way by a kindly teacher, an attorney, and the Spoorville community as they band together to keep Hank out of foster care. As his father reenters his life and Hank's journey propels him toward high school graduation and an exciting future, he learns that success is better achieved with help from those able to see what he can be.

In this inspiring coming-of-age story, a young African American growing up in the fifties America must carve his own path in life after his mother dies, with assistance from a caring community.

My hopes and expectations were not met. First of all, I'm not 100% sure if this book was meant to be a middle grade historical fiction novel or if it was written for an older audience. My review is based on the assumption that this was a book meant to be grade by fifth graders learning about the Civil Rights Movement.

My biggest disappointment was the lack of historical context in the novel. There were passing references to historical events like school integration, the celebration of Juneteenth, the transition from party lines to dial-direct telephones. As an adult familiar with what was being referenced, I got it. I don't believe that a child would walk away knowing anything more about the south during the 1950s by reading this book other than the fact that black children in the 1950s needed to walk to school.

I don't think a child would understand the mentions of welfare or the system. As an adult, I want to know why Aunt Lillie who was relatively young with older children hadn't looked for a job prior to being told that she couldn't be a foster parent to Hank while she was collecting welfare.

There is little evidence of Hank's grief over the loss of his mother. A few times, Lillie seems as though she misses Hank's mother, Mary. This is another aspect of the story that would have benefitted from being much more fleshed out. The characters of Hank and Ruth Ann were the most developed of all the characters, but I really wanted to know them better. If I didn't know that Lillie was in her late 30s, I would have thought she was in her 60s.

After Ruth Ann moves, Mrs. Bennett (Lillie) misses her because she helped with housework. Hank and Billy Ray miss her because she used to cook for them. We are told repeatedly what a close knit family they are. Missing someone solely because of the chores that aren't getting done makes no sense.

Peck includes lots of little details that serve as distractions and don't add anything to the story. An example of this is when a different person speaks at the high school graduation than the one that was originally scheduled to speak and was listed in the program. That didn't serve to move the story ahead at all.

And finally, the paperback edition that I read was riddled with typos and capitalization and usage errors.

I think that the story of Harold Andrew Nelson Kemp Bennett held a lot of promise. The book I read would be a great starting point for his story but wasn't worthy as a finished product. I love children's historical fiction and I was hoping to find an appropriate novel about life in the south in the 1950s to pass along to my granddaughter who will be in fifth grade this coming fall. I won't be passing it on.

If Claudette A. Peck writes another historical fiction novel based on her own younger years, I would love to be a critique partner prior to publication.

You can read more of my reviews at <https://whatchareadingnow.blogspot.com>.

Jennifer Wrage says

Note: I received a free copy of Hank, by Claudette A. Peck, from Goodreads.

I am a lover of historical fiction and expected this book to be more political than it was. It really was a story about young Hank's personal struggles to succeed in a segregated South. The characters were very well developed and drew you into their lives and emotions. Hank's perseverance was inspiring and refreshing. This would be a great book for high school age students to read as they struggle with their own life choices.

Amy Ingalls says

I won this book in a giveaway. This book has a great premise, and Hank's story could have been really moving. The themes of grief and poverty and racism and the desegregation of the south are so rich and compelling, but they just weren't fleshed out enough here. I liked the characters but there wasn't enough to make me truly connect with them.
