

# **The Nickel Boys Book Summary, by Colson Whitehead**

by Allen Cheng

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Want to learn the ideas in The Nickel Boys better than ever? Read the world's #1 book summary of The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead here.

Read a brief 1-Page Summary or watch video summaries curated by our expert team. Note: this book guide is not affiliated with or endorsed by the publisher or author, and we always encourage you to purchase and read the full book.

## **Video Summaries of The Nickel Boys**

We've scoured the Internet for the very best videos on The Nickel Boys, from high-quality videos summaries to interviews or commentary by Colson Whitehead.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acdH3nKXolY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upRMoso0fw8>

## **1-Page Summary of The Nickel Boys**

### **Overall Summary**

During an archaeological study, the team found a secret graveyard on the grounds of what used to be Nickel Academy. The school has been closed for years, and there are many stories about it from alumni who were abused there. As the media reports these findings, more people talk about their experiences at Nickel. One person in particular is Elwood Curtis who lives in New York City and keeps tabs on the news related to his old school but doesn't go back because he thinks that confronting his past would only hurt him further.

Elwood grew up in Tallahassee, Florida during the 1950s and 1960s. He was raised by his grandmother who worked as a waitress at the Richmond Hotel. Elwood watched her serve black patrons in one room of the hotel while white patrons were served in another room. The Supreme Court had recently ruled that segregated schools are illegal, so he thought all of these "visible walls" would soon come down and everyone could be treated equally. However, his grandmother told him that it's not easy to tell people what they should do when they don't want to listen or follow your advice.

Elwood, a teenager, works at Mr. Macroni's cigar shop. Elwood is hardworking and has high morals because he wants to be like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., an African American civil rights activist who was assassinated in 1968. In one of his speeches, King urges African Americans to have self-respect by

working hard and rejecting racism. This idea inspires Elwood to work hard and develop good morals so that he can succeed in life without compromising himself or his values.

Elwood is a young boy in high school. His new history teacher, Mr. Hill, is involved in the Civil Rights Movement and quickly takes Elwood under his wing. Around this time, Elwood decides to attend a rally outside of the Florida Theatre because he wants to be part of something bigger than himself and fight for equality. He doesn't tell his grandmother because she's against it but goes anyway when he sees Mr. Hill at the protest as well as other dedicated activists who accept him into their group with open arms and make him feel like he belongs somewhere for the first time ever

A black college in Florida is looking for students who are motivated to take free classes while finishing their high school degrees. Elwood, a young African-American man, hears about this opportunity and pursues it. He gets into a fancy car driven by a black man before getting pulled over by the police. The driver of the car gets arrested, but Elwood does too because he's white and was riding with him in his stolen car. Instead of attending Melvin Griggs Technical College as planned, he goes to Nickel Academy instead where there's segregation between white and black students

On his first night at Nickel, Elwood walked into the bathroom to find two bullies named Lonnie and Black Mike beating up a younger boy named Corey. When he tried to intervene, a staff member reported all four boys to Superintendent Spencer. Spencer explained how Nickel worked when Elwood arrived on campus—students earn points for working hard and behaving well, which helps them move up ranks until they're released back into society.

At one in the morning, Spencer and his sidekick take four boys from their beds and bring them to the White House. There they torture students for fun. Elwood is beaten by Spencer who lashes at him with a whip until he passes out.

Elwood is in the infirmary for a long time after he gets beaten up. He meets Turner, who ate soap to avoid work and school. The schedule at Nickel shocks Elwood, because the students only attend class every other day and spend their time doing physical labor. They have no way of knowing when they will be punished or get merits if they do well academically.

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