

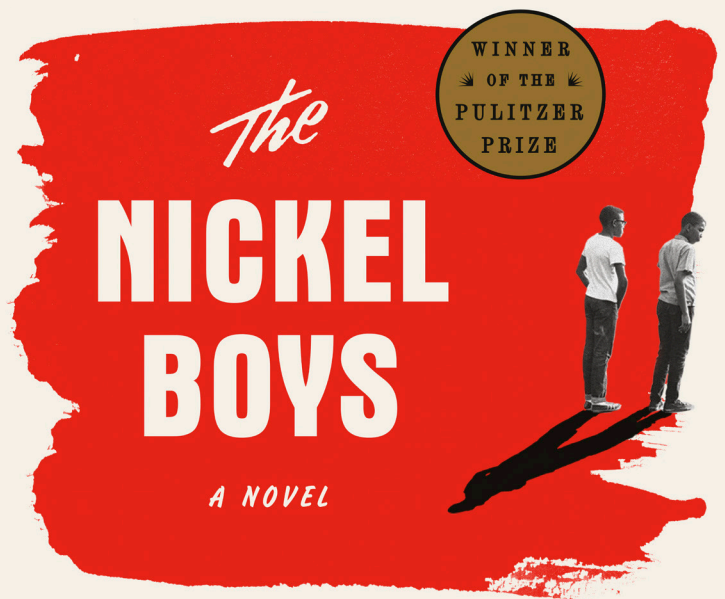


2026

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

# COLSON WHITEHEAD

AUTHOR OF *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD*



"Beautiful, wrenching . . . [The Nickel Boys] proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Whitehead is one of the most gifted novelists in America today." —NPR



DENVER  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

# This One Is for You

Somewhere between work, family, and the general pace of life, a lot of adults stopped reading. Not because we stopped loving books — but because the time and the headspace quietly slipped away.

One Book One Denver is your invitation to read just for the pleasure of it. One book. One city. Just for adults. Read on your lunch break; listen on your commute. Then come find us — at a park, a library, a theater — and talk about the book with people you've never met. Because something remarkable happens when a whole city reads the same story at the same time. Strangers find common ground. Neighbors become part of the same conversation. The distance between us closes.

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*"The Nickel Boys is one of the most powerful books I've read in the last decade. It tells a difficult, but necessary story about injustice, resilience, and the kind of truth we must confront to move forward. Programs like One Book One Denver give us a chance to come together as a community and have conversations that build understanding and shape a better future for our city."*

MAYOR MIKE JOHNSTON



Dear Library Community,

Last year, you, our library customers, welcomed One Book One Denver back with open arms. I am thrilled to invite you to *discover* the 2026 selection:

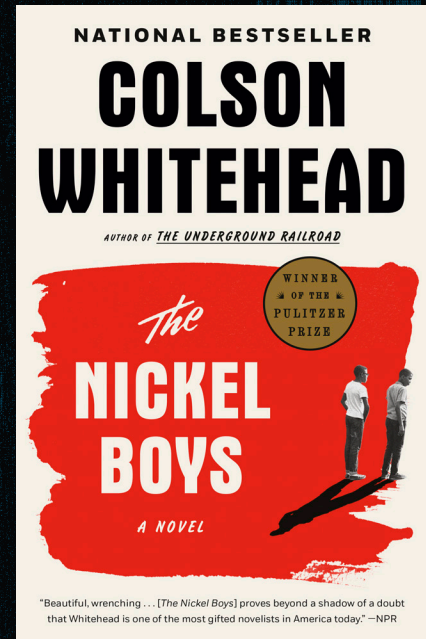
*The Nickel Boys* by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Colson Whitehead is a critically acclaimed novel that tells a powerful story of injustice and resilience.

We hope you join us for one or several of Denver Public Library's One Book One Denver events to engage in conversations, discover *community*, and connect with other readers across the city.

Warmly,



NICOLLE DAVIES  
CITY LIBRARIAN & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



2020 Pulitzer Prize  
for Fiction winner

*Time Magazine's*  
10 Best Fiction Books  
of the Decade

Kirkus Prize Winner

## ABOUT THE NICKEL BOYS

Based on the true story of a reform school that warped the lives of thousands of children for 111 years. The 1960s Nickel Academy traps Elwood Curtis, an innocent black teen, in a chamber of horrors. Elwood befriends Turner, a fellow student, who believes the only way to survive is to scheme. Life at the academy becomes more perilous. Tension between Elwood's ideals and Turner's skepticism grows. The two make a decision, the repercussions of which will echo down the decades. This novel will move and challenge Denverites to explore urgent themes of injustice and resilience together.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colson Whitehead is one of only four authors to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction twice. He is also a #1 New York Times bestselling author as well as a recipient of the MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellowships. His first prize winning work, *The Underground Railroad* (2016), also won the National Book Award and was named one of the Ten Best Books of the Year by publications such as *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, and several other major outlets. In 2020, he earned his second Pulitzer Prize for *The Nickel Boys* (2020).





# Events



EACH EVENT REQUIRES  
REGISTRATION.

[DENLIB.ORG/OBOD](https://denlib.org/obod)

“One of the most  
gifted novelists in  
America today.”

NPR

“Colson Whitehead  
continues to  
make a classic  
American genre  
his own.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES





# Meet Author Colson Whitehead

**Friday, September 25, 6:30-9 p.m.**

MCA Denver at the Holiday Theater,  
2644 W. 32nd Ave, 80211

Join Denver Public Library for a special evening with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Colson Whitehead. Whitehead will speak about *The Nickel Boys*, this year's One Book One Denver selection, and the work's lasting resonance. Books will be available for purchase. Registration required.

**Exhibition:**

## ***Site of Memory***

**Opening Event on August 7, 5-8 p.m.**

**Friday, August 7 - Saturday, September 19**  
Colorado Photographic Arts Center,  
1200 Lincoln St., Suite 111, 80203

Artists: Harlan Bozeman, Taylor E Edgerton,  
Letitia Huckaby, Justin A. Carney

Explore emotional and historical terrain as this exhibit of portraiture and landscape examines how trauma is embedded in place and carried across generations.

**Film Screening:**

## ***Justice, Youth, and Memory: If Beale Street Could Talk (2018)***

**Saturday, August 8, 1-4 p.m.**

Woodbury Branch, 3265 Federal Blvd., 80211

Adapted from James Baldwin's novel of the same name, the film is a story of love, family, and resilience in the face of injustice set in 1970s Harlem.

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## **Calligrams: Words That Shape You**

**Sunday, August 9, 2-3 p.m.**

Sam Gary Branch, 2961 Roslyn St., 80238

**Wednesday, August 12, 3:30-5 p.m.**

Ross-Cherry Creek, 305 Milwaukee St., 80206

**Saturday, September 19, 2-3 p.m.**

Ross-Phyllis Bigpond, 3570 W. First Ave., 80219

Use handwritten text, color, patterns, and collage elements to transform words and quotes into unique works that explore the connection between language, identity, and expression.

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## ***Liberty By Any Means***

**Sunday, August 16, 2-3:30 p.m.**

Buntport Theater  
717 Lipan St., 80204

A live performance about solitary confinement written and performed by Michael Clifton. Followed by a conversation with Michael and other formerly incarcerated individuals.

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## **Witness, Power, Futures**

**Witness:** Dr. Christopher Hunt on James Baldwin,  
Thursday, August 27, 6-8 p.m.

Pauline Robinson Branch, 5575 E 33rd Ave., 80207

**Power:** Dr. Jasmine Harris on bell hooks, Friday,  
September 11, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Shop at MATTER, 2114 Market St., 80205

**Futures:** Rick Griffith on Octavia Butler, Friday,  
September 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Bob Ragland Branch, 1900 35th St., Ste. A, 80216

This three-part series explores themes in *The Nickel Boys* through the legacies of influential Black American writers and thinkers. Presented in partnership with Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library and MATTER.



# Events

Continued

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## Preserving Legacies: How to Explore Family House Histories

Tuesday, August 25, 6-7:30 p.m.

Blair-Caldwell, Wilma J. Webb Reading Room,  
Second Floor

In *The Nickel Boys*, the land, the buildings, the rooms where lives were shaped and sometimes erased hold memories. Learn how to research family properties, trace Colorado migrations, and uncover the stories a house can carry.

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## From Page to Screen: *Nickel Boys* with Director RaMell Ross

Wednesday, September 2, 6:30-9:30 p.m. (screening)

Thursday, September 10, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (discussion  
with director RaMell Ross)

MCA Denver at the Holiday Theater  
2644 W 32nd Ave., 80211

Watch the film adaptation of *The Nickel Boys* and then continue the experience the following week as director RaMell Ross discusses the journey from novel to screen. This program is generously supported by The Denver Foundation.

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## *The Nickel Boys* and the American Juvenile Justice System

Saturday, September 5, 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Blair-Caldwell, 2401 Welton St., 80205

Panelists will examine the history and ongoing impact that the American juvenile justice system and sports have on the Black community.

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## Reflections in Motion: An Evening of Dance and Dialogue

Wednesday, September 23, 6-7 p.m.

Cleo Parker Robinson Dance,  
Center for the Healing Arts  
2025 N. Washington St., 80205

Cleo Parker Robinson Dance will explore *The Nickel Boys* through excerpts from its own 56-year history to encourage a deeper awareness and constructive dialogue.

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## Protest and Power

Sunday, August 23, 2-3 p.m.

Central Branch, 10 W. 14th Ave., 80204

Saturday, September 12, 2-3:30 p.m.

Park Hill Branch, 4705 E Montview Blvd., 80207

Explore how Civil Rights-era music expressed resistance, inspired change, and built collective identity and its connections to other social movements.

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## Soundtrack of Our Lives: A Listening Gathering in the Park

Sunday, September 20, 6-7 p.m.

Central Park, Picnic Site  
8801 M.L.K. Jr Blvd., 80238

Bring a song that has helped you through a meaningful moment or challenge and then listen with others in a relaxed outdoor setting. Hosted by Sam Gary Branch.



# Book Clubs

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## Book Clubs in the Park

Take the conversation outside. These facilitated outdoor book clubs are inspired by *The Nickel Boys* and presented in partnership with The Word, A Storytelling Sanctuary.

**Wednesday, August 26, 6-7 p.m.**

Berkeley Lake Park

Picnic Site 1, 4601 W. 46th Ave., 80212

Hosted by Smiley and Woodbury branch libraries

**Saturday, September 26, 3-5 p.m.**

Platt Park, 1500 S. Grant St., 80210

Hosted by Ross-Cherry Creek, Decker, and Virginia Village branch libraries

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## Tattered Cover

**Tuesday, September 1, 6-7 p.m.**

2526 E Colfax Ave., 80206

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## The Shop at MATTER

**Wednesday, September 9, 6-7:30 p.m.**

2114 Market St., 80205

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## West Side Books

**Saturday, August 29, 7-9 p.m.**

3434 W 32nd Ave., 80211

**Fable** VIRTUAL BOOK CLUB

Participate in chapter discussions and connect with others in the Fable app. Scan the QR code, download Fable, create a free account, and join the conversation.



# Reader's Guide

Discussion questions designed by  
Colson Whitehead

- 1** In the prologue, the narrator observes that after the truth about Nickel Academy comes out, "even the most innocent scene – a mess hall or the football field – came out sinister, no photographic trickery necessary." Can you think of a time in your life when discovering the history of a place (a particular building, a statue, a historical landmark, etc.) dramatically changed your perception of it?
- 2** Elwood says that both he and Yolanda King "woke to the world," or discovered racism, at six years old. How old were you when you became aware of racism and inequality? How do you think this experience is different for different people?
- 3** While in the infirmary, Elwood reads a pamphlet about Nickel that details the contributions the school has made to the community, including bricks from the brick-making machine "propping up buildings all over Jackson County." What do you think of the ways that the wider community seemed to benefit from labor performed by Nickel students? Do you see any historical or modern-day parallels to this symbiotic relationship?
- 4** One student, Jaimie, is half-Mexican and constantly shuffled between the "white" and "colored" sections of Nickel Academy. Why do you think the author included a character with Jaimie's ethnic identity in this story?
- 5** One of Elwood's takeaways from Dr. King's speeches is the importance of maintaining one's dignity in the face of oppression. Is Elwood's decision to escape (and risk the consequences of capture) rooted in the realization that he can no longer maintain his dignity in a place like Nickel?
- 6** At one point, the narrator writes that "laughter knocked out a few bricks from the wall of segregation, so tall and so wide." Does humor truly lighten the burden for the boys? Or is it merely one of the very few things that can't be taken away from them?
- 7** Who do you think was the true "villain" of the story? The teachers? The school itself? Something or someone else?



**Tell us about your experience.**

**DENLIB.ORG/OBOD-SURVEY**



# Recommendations

If you enjoy *The Nickel Boys*,  
check out these similar materials:

## BOOKS

### ***The Reformatory***

by Tananarive Due

### ***We Carry Their Bones: the search for justice at the Dozier School for Boys***

by Erin Kimmerle

### ***Stealing: a novel***

by Margaret Verble

### ***Friday Black***

by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

### ***The Boys Of The Dark: A Story Of Betrayal And Redemption In The Deep South***

by Robin Gaby Fisher, Michael O'McCarthy, and  
Robert W. Straley

## FILMS

### ***Moonlight***

(2016)

### ***If Beale Street Could Talk***

(2018)

### ***Do the Right Thing***

(1989)

### ***I Am Not Your Negro***

(2016)

### ***Fruitvale Station***

(2013)

# Acknowledgements

One Book One Denver belongs to Denver — to the readers who show up, the artists who interpret, the neighbors who gather, and the staff across every Denver Public Library location who bring it to life. The organizations below believed in this program and made it real. We are deeply grateful.

