

## Review-Whitgift-Wild East-Freddie

Wild East by Ashley Hickson-Lovence is a verse novel. It follows Ronny, a year 11 student, who is dealing with recent trauma, a move from Hackney to Norwich, and the unexpected prejudices that come with it. Throughout the book, we see how Ronny processes grief and anxiety, encounters new friendships, and experiences differences in behaviour towards people of colour than he hadn't experienced in Hackney. He faces new challenges of belonging and identity that come with his new life in Norwich.

Ronny aspires to be a rapper, but he never really liked English as a subject at school. But when he is forced to attend enrichment classes and introduced to spoken word poetry, it helps him to discover that rapping is just a form of poetry. When the teacher encourages Ronny's work, his confidence grows throughout the year, and he uses his poetry to deal with the grief of losing a friend.

Wild East is the first young adult verse novel by Ashley Hickson-Lovence, and explores themes such as grief, loss, maturity, racism and violence, specifically street violence and the complex nature of it, as well as the effect it has on people and their families. The book is surprisingly fast-paced and at times thrilling, shocking, emotive and heartfelt. Each chapter covers a month, and by the end of the book, Ronny has lived in Norwich for a year. This allows us to see how he gradually adjusts to life in Norwich, and how he gets used to the differences from his time growing up in Hackney.

The free verse nature of the novel creates a safe atmosphere that allows younger audiences to learn about more advanced topics in a relaxed environment, rather than the daunting and troublesome news articles we are all becoming too familiar with.

Ashley Hickson-Lovence has said that his own life has inspired the book, which is evidence of how the book seems so realistic. Ronny makes decisions and mistakes like humans normally would; he agonises over what he could have done, and how he could have prevented his friend's death, yet during the incident, it was clear that Ronny was caught up in the moment, and that everything happened so fast. He worries about things that he shouldn't have to worry about, makes false assumptions, but he learns and grows throughout the book. The book is also realistic in the fact that it isn't a perfect happy ending. Shocking things happen, and even if Ronny is having a better life, he still deals with grief, loss and accountability. Ronny also has so many more things left to do in life, and the book's ending fully capitalises on that. Ronny isn't the only character to change and develop, exactly like in real life.

Overall, Wild East is a fun and enjoyable read, and one that raises the bar for verse novels and young adult books in general. I would recommend this book to young people who might be struggling with change and growing up.

