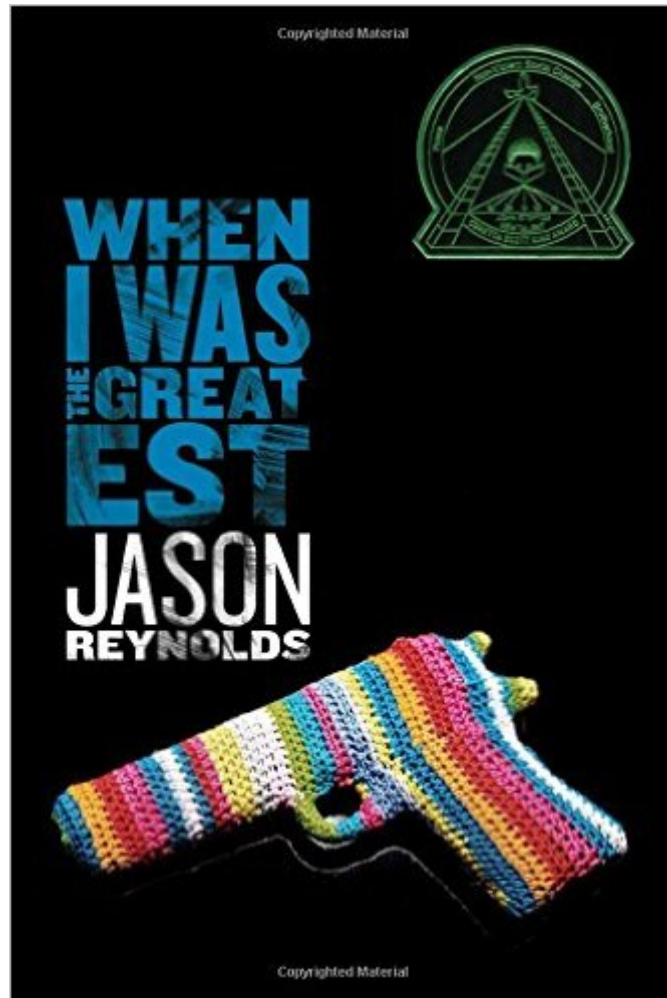


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# When I Was The Greatest



## Synopsis

In *Bed Stuy*, New York, a small misunderstanding can escalate into having a price on your head—even if you're totally clean. This gritty, triumphant debut that calls the city a funny and rewarding read captures the heart and the hardship of life for an urban teen. A lot of the stuff that gives my neighborhood a bad name, I don't really mess with. The guns and drugs and all that, not really my thing. Nah, not his thing. Ali's got enough going on, between school and boxing and helping out at home. His best friend Noodles, though. Now there's a dude looking for trouble—and, somehow, it's always Ali around to pick up the pieces. But, hey, a guy's gotta look out for his boys, right? Besides, it's all small potatoes; it's not like anyone's getting hurt. And then there's Needles. Needles is Noodles's brother. He's got a syndrome, and gets these ticks and blurts out the wildest, craziest things. It's cool, though: everyone on their street knows he doesn't mean anything by it. Yeah, it's cool—until Ali and Noodles and Needles find themselves somewhere they never expected to be—somewhere they never should've been—where the people aren't so friendly, and even less forgiving.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 740 (What's this?)

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Atheneum Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (August 18, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1442459484

ISBN-13: 978-1442459489

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (27 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #88,853 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in [Books > Children's Books >](#)

[Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Drugs](#) #48 in [Books > Teens > Literature &](#)

[Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Drugs & Alcohol Abuse](#) #48 in [Books > Teens > Literature &](#)

[Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Bullying](#)

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Jason Reynolds has written a diverse book all teens will want to read. I found this title on

#weneeddiversebooks. This book is urban fiction (my students loved urban fiction!!!), involves a black teen with Tourette Syndrome, the toughness of neighborhood and family but also the closeness of community. Ali is a teen who becomes friends with brothers, Noodles & Needles when they move into his neighborhood. They hang out on the steps of their Bed-Stuy block but these 2 brothers lives are so much more gritty than Ali's. Ali has a tough, loving mother who works 2 jobs, an 11 year old sister wise beyond her years, and a father who seems to be absent. Ali has scruples and looks forward to his days with Noodles and Needles even calling them The Three Musketeers. But as time goes on, Ali begins to struggle with the way Noodles treats his brother, Needles. It all explodes one night, causing Ali to question if he can be friends with Noodles ever again. The writing is unflinching but also extols family, friendship, loyalty and honesty. I loved everything about this book and am definitely diving right into Jason Reynolds next book, The Boy in the Black Suit. Highly recommended.

Ali is a kid growing up in Bed-Stuy with his strong Mom, Doris, and his younger sister, Jazz. His dad, a small time hustler sells stolen stuff out of his car (which he is living in), and the brownstone next door has disintegrated into a no-hope building for junkies and prostitutes after the long time owners have sold up and moved South (which happened a lot in Bed-Stuy in the mid 2000s when housing prices boomed, and owners who had gone through the hardest of times (Bed-Stuy = Murder City in the 80s) suddenly had golden tickets and moved away in their old age.) In his terrific Young Adult novel, Jason Reynolds captures the feel of Bed-Stuy, both the energy and the despair, all from the view of young guys whose futures may or may not have been set in stone already. Ali is part of a loving, if complicated, family, whereas his best friend Noodles who lives next door in the junky house with his checked-out despairing mother and his brother Needles who suffers from Tourettes. Both Noodles and Needles futures look bleak, but Ali and his level headed, warm hearted take on life could perhaps be their saving grace. Following there day to day activities, in a real, non-judgmental way, Reynolds creates a vision of families surviving, and love thriving in the cracks. Ali is mentored by a local boxing coach, a Vietnam vet missing his legs, but is perhaps to kind to really fight, while Noodles is already spiraling into petty crime and an anti-social rut which can only end badly if he can't turn around. Together with Needles they get invited to an underground party, and their preparation for it and what happens there will change all of their lives. So why are these guys called Ali, Noodles, and Needles? Well, I'm not giving that away, but I do want to give up that there is a whole, unexpected knitting subplot going on, and there is a scene where Noodles and Ali go to a knitting store over in Cobble Hill that had me rolling on the floor. Reynolds is

interested in the race and class divisions that form the veins of NYC, and just as Ali is aware he is living in a world within other worlds, Reynolds shows us that, too, and in an entertaining, human way. It's a wonderful book, and everyone should read it, regardless of age.

This novel, "When I was the greatest," was a refreshing take on kids who live in the urban core of New York. I appreciate the Jason Reynolds restraint in not portraying young African American males in a stereotypical way. His characters are well-rounded and compassionate. I definitely recommend this book.

Maci's Review-When I Was the Greatest by Jason Reynolds taught me a lot about the relationship between family members. When I Was the Greatest is about a guy named Ali and him telling the story of his best friends, Noodles and Needles. Ali and Noodles are best friends and they like to hang out and look out for Needles. Needles has turrets syndrome and so he is treated differently sometimes. Noodles always likes to always make sure that Needles is treated normally, but he does not treat Needles normally. This book is about Noodles coming to term with his brother having a syndrome. This book was sorta slow but it was still good. It really shows you the perspective of how some families deal with their kid having a disability or syndrome. I would recommend this book to any high schooler who wants to see how a small disability or syndrome can have a big impact on life. Zoe's Review-I got this book from a giveaway. I was not expecting much from it, although the cover design made me curious. Now that I have read it, I understand the cover design (sort of) and find that this book was not what I expected. It was not a really good book, but it showed a really neat perspective that I have never read about before. It has to do with bullying, but not the typical type. In this book it dealt with the issue of bullying between brothers, when one of them had Tourette syndrome and would blurt out random cuss words and the way the other brother treated him. I really liked the way the book showed this and how it got resolved. I think that the book did a good job of showing this, although there were some things about the book that did not make sense. One of these things was the fact that it seemed like the characters just hung out all day, I was not sure if it was during school or if it was summer. There was not a lot of action and I only liked it towards the end. I think that it is a really neat and unique book that anybody could like.

I bought the book after the author spoke to my class (I'm the teacher). The students were on the edges of their seats the whole time. I was so impressed that I bought 3 copies for my classroom at my own expense just to give my students a chance to read Jason's work. I also bought his other 2

books which look amazing too.

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