

America

E.R. Frank

3.94

1,377 ratings 144 reviews

Acclaimed author *E.R. Frank* writes provocative fiction. America, a foulmouthed, yet endearing 16-year-old, attempts suicide and is placed in the care of psychiatrists at Ridgeway mental hospital.

There he learns to cope with a past filled with neglect and mistreatment with the help of Dr. B. Alternating between Americas present-day stay at the hospital and his past, living in the care of his older brothers, America is a stark exploration of the mind of an inner-city youth.

Genres **Young Adult** **Realistic Fiction** **Banned Books** **Mental Illness** **Teen** **Mental Health** **Abuse**

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AMERICA

BY E.R. FRANK · RELEASE DATE: FEB. 1, 2001

It's hard to imagine what America has going for him. Abandoned at birth by a crack-addicted mother, abandoned again by the white family who wanted a white baby, he has found intermittent happiness with his guardian, Mrs. Harper, and her half-brother Browning. But these periods of stability are threatened, first by the birth mother who reclaims him only to abandon him yet again and then by Browning himself, who slowly turns from protector to victimizer, and who injures America almost beyond bearing. The reader first meets America at age 15, in a residential psychiatric program for youth after he has attempted suicide. As he embarks on his umpteenth course of therapy, the narrative takes the reader back and forth between "then" and "now," laying out in clinical, brutal detail how it is that America became the broken boy that he is, and then how he slowly comes

back to life. It's a heartbreaking story, softened only slightly by the human connections he manages to make, almost despite himself: his older brother Brooklyn, a drug addict like their mother; Lisa, a girl from his Special Ed class; Ty, the drug dealer who reads to him; and above all, Dr. B., the therapist who helps America restore his soul. America narrates his story in the present tense, lacing his speech liberally with street language; his attitude is endearing in its candor: "Food here sucks," he tells Dr. B. "Just because I'm crazy doesn't mean I have to eat shit." Frank (*Life Is Funny*, 2000) creates perfectly both America at five, unsure of anything except the hope that if he is bad enough, his mother will send him back to Mrs. Harper and the belligerent adolescent convinced that the world has nothing to offer him. A wrenching tour de force despite America's overly symbolic name, it is a work of sublime humanity. (*Fiction. YA*)

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