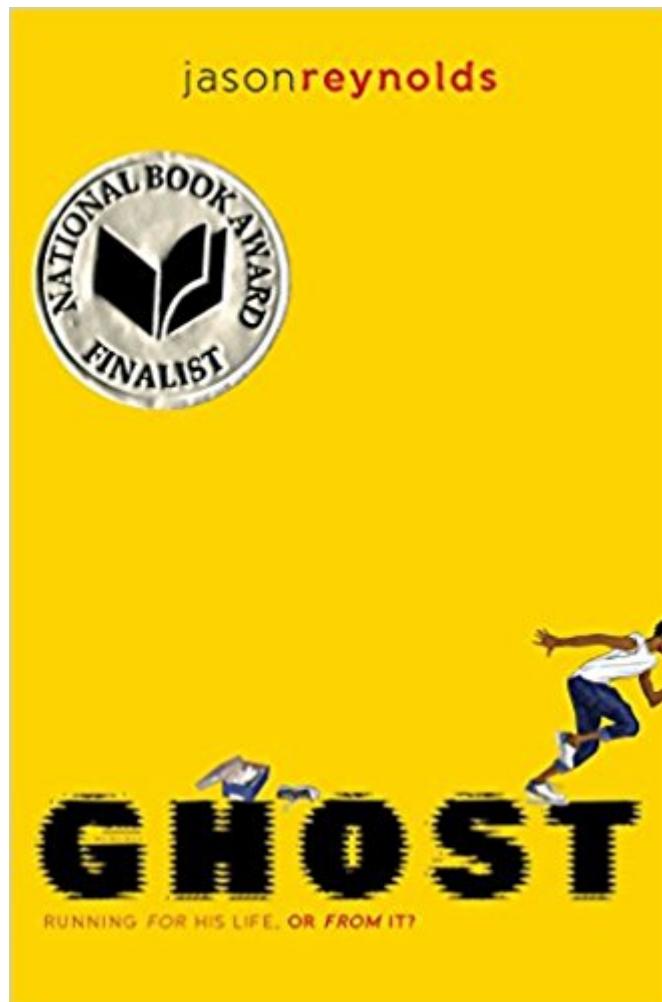


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Ghost (Track)



Synopsis

A National Book Award Finalist for Young People's Literature. Ghost wants to be the fastest sprinter on his elite middle school track team, but his past is slowing him down in this first electrifying novel of a brand-new series from Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award-winning author Jason Reynolds. Ghost. Lu. Patina. Sunny. Four kids from wildly different backgrounds with personalities that are explosive when they clash. But they are also four kids chosen for an elite middle school track team—a team that could qualify them for the Junior Olympics if they can get their acts together. They all have a lot to lose, but they also have a lot to prove, not only to each other, but to themselves. Ghost has a crazy natural talent, but no formal training. If he can stay on track, literally and figuratively, he could be the best sprinter in the city. But Ghost has been running for the wrong reasons—it all started with running away from his father, who, when Ghost was a very little boy, chased him and his mother through their apartment, then down the street, with a loaded gun, aiming to kill. Since then, Ghost has been the one causing problems—and running away from them—until he meets Coach, an ex-Olympic Medalist who blew his own shot at success by using drugs, and who is determined to keep other kids from blowing their shots at life.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 730 (What's this?)

Series: Track (Book 1)

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 71 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #17,744 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Books > Children's Books > Sports & Outdoors > Track & Field #45 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American #506 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Friendship

Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 5-9 •Castle "Ghost" Crenshaw lives with his single mother; his father is serving time in prison after firing a gun at Ghost and his mom three years ago •and Ghost has been running ever since. While running one day, he stops to watch a track practice and decides to crash the race. Impressed, the coach offers him a position on the team. His mom reluctantly agrees to let him join as long as he can behave himself and stay out of trouble in school. This is a struggle for the impulsive Ghost, but with Coach's help, he learns the advantages of diligent practice and teamwork. Reynolds paints a realistic picture of a boy who needs the support of his community to channel his talent and energy. Supporting adult characters, like shop owner Mr. Charles and Coach, are positive, nuanced, and well-developed. The diverse team members are dealing with their own struggles, which will be explored in three future installments. The consequences for Ghost's misbehavior are somewhat inconsistent, but the detailed and informative descriptions of running and training with an elite track team more than make up for this. VERDICT The focus on track athletics •a subject sorely lacking in the middle grade space •combined with the quality of Reynolds's characters and prose, makes this an essential purchase. •Karen Yingling, Blendon Middle School, Westerville, OH

Castle "Ghost" Crenshaw feels like he's been running ever since his dad pulled that gun on him and his mom •and used it. His dad's been in jail three years now, but Ghost still feels the trauma, which is probably at the root of the many "altercations" he gets into at middle school. When he inserts himself into a practice for a local elite track team, the Defenders, he's fast enough that the hard-as-nails coach decides to put him on the team. Ghost is surprised to find himself caring enough about being on the team that he curbs his behavior to avoid "altercations." But Ma doesn't have money to spare on things like fancy running shoes, so Ghost shoplifts a pair that make his feet feel impossibly light •and his conscience correspondingly heavy. Ghost's narration is candid and colloquial, reminiscent of such original voices as Bud Caldwell and Joey Pigza; his level of self-understanding is both believably childlike and disarming in its perception. He is self-focused enough that secondary characters initially feel one-dimensional, Coach in particular, but as he gets to know them better, so do readers, in a way that unfolds naturally and pleasingly. His three fellow "newbies" on the Defenders await their turns to star in subsequent series outings. Characters are black by default; those few white people in Ghost's

world are described as such. An endearing protagonist runs the first, fast leg of Reynolds' promising relay. (Fiction. 10-14) • (Kirkus Reviews 8/1/16) Castle "Ghost" Crenshaw has been running for three years, ever since the night his father shot a gun at him and his mother. When he gets recruited by a local track coach for a championship team, they strike a deal: if Ghost can stop getting into fights at school, he can run for the Defenders, but one altercation and he's gone. Despite Ghost's best intentions, everyone always has something to say about his raggedy shoes, homemade haircut, ratty clothes, or his neighborhood, and he doesn't last 24 hours without a brawl. Will Coach and his mom give him another chance to be part of something bigger than himself, or is he simply destined to explode? With his second fantastic middle-grade novel of the year (As Brave as You, 2016), the ferociously talented Reynolds perfectly captures both the pain and earnest longing of a young boy. The first in the four-book Track series, this is raw and lyrical, and as funny as it is heartbreakingly honest. It tackles issues such as theft, bullying, and domestic violence with candor and bravery while opening a door for empathy and discussion. An absolute must-read for anyone who has ever wondered how fast you must be to run away from yourself. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Is anyone else putting out so many stellar books so quickly? The author of *The Boy in the Black Suit* and *All American Boys* (both 2015) keeps dashing along. • Becca Worthington (Booklist, STARRED REVIEW 9/1/16) Reynolds (As Brave As You) uses a light hand to delve into topics that include gun violence, class disparity, and bullying in this compelling series opener. Seventh-grader Castle Crenshaw, nicknamed Ghost, knows nothing about track when a former Olympian recruits him as a sprinter for one of the city's youth teams. As far as Ghost is concerned, "whoever invented track got the whole gun means go thing right," something he learned firsthand when his father tried to shoot Ghost and his mother in their apartment three years prior. The trauma has had ripple effects on Ghost, including angry outbursts ("I was the boy.... with all the scream inside"), altercations at school, stealing, and lying. Joining the track team provides new friends, goals, and an opportunity for Ghost to move beyond his past. Ghost is a well-meaning, personable narrator whose intense struggles are balanced by a love of world records, sunflower seeds, and his mother. Coach's relationship with Ghost develops into a surrogate father-son scenario, adding substantial emotional resonance and humor to the mix. Ages 10+ (Publishers Weekly *STARRED REVIEW* August 8, 2016) Castle "Ghost" Crenshaw lives with his single mother; his father is serving time in prison after firing a gun at Ghost and his mom three years ago—and Ghost has been running ever since. While running one day, he stops to watch a track practice and decides to crash the race. Impressed, the coach offers him a position on the team. His mom reluctantly agrees to let

him join as long as he can behave himself and stay out of trouble in school. This is a struggle for the impulsive Ghost, but with Coach's help, he learns the advantages of diligent practice and teamwork. Reynolds paints a realistic picture of a boy who needs the support of his community to channel his talent and energy. Supporting adult characters, like shop owner Mr. Charles and Coach, are positive, nuanced, and well-developed. The diverse team members are dealing with their own struggles, which will be explored in three future installments. The consequences for Ghost's misbehavior are somewhat inconsistent, but the detailed and informative descriptions of running and training with an elite track team more than make up for this. VERDICT The focus on track athletics—a subject sorely lacking in the middle grade space—combined with the quality of Reynolds' characters and prose, makes this an essential purchase. (School Library Journal *STARRED* September 2016) Sometimes a whole life can change in one night. For seventh-grader Castle Cranshaw, that night was three years ago when his father tried to shoot him and his mother, when "the liquor made him meaner than he'd ever been." That's when Castle started to call himself "Ghost," because Mr. Charles, who let the terrified pair take refuge in his all-night store, "looked at us like he was looking at two ghosts." And that was the night he learned how to run... really run. Jason Reynolds (As Brave as You) has a playful, intimate and conversational style, and in Ghost, a middle-grade series debut, he tells the story of how an unforgettable flight of terror led to an African American boy's instinct to run--fast. One day on his walk home, Ghost sees a track team practicing with their short bald coach who looks like "a turtle with a chipped tooth." Keenly observant Ghost becomes annoyed with one of the runners others perceive as unbeatable, and decides to "keep up with him, if not beat him" even though he "ain't ever had a running lesson." He stubbornly persists until the coach relents: "Listen, you get one run, you hear me?" The story of Ghost's evolving relationships with his anger, with his ever-worried mother, with Coach Brody and with running is a joy to read. For a boy who's "got a lot of scream inside," Ghost can riff entertainingly on topics from eating sunflower seeds to 100-meter sprints. Ghost is about kids who are, in both senses, running for their lives, and the generous souls who help them along the way. **Discover:** In Jason Reynolds's excellent middle-grade novel, a boy learns to run when his father shoots a gun at him--and he never stops running. **(Shelf Awareness, STARRED REVIEW 9/6/16)** Castle Crenshaw discovered his fleet feet on the night his drunken father pulled a gun on his mother and him, and the pair took off running into the night. Now Dad is in jail, Mom is working too hard, but Castle's getting by—or he would be if the likes of seventh-grade bully Brandon would just leave him alone. Hanging out on the park bleachers one afternoon, Castle, who insists on the nickname

“Ghost,” watches a track team at their season opening practice, unimpressed. When he swaggered up to the starting line and showed the team hotshot that he’s really not all that, Ghost’s obvious talent catches Coach’s eye; after a quick meeting with Mom, he finds himself joining the Defenders, a city track team. Despite his speed, he’s a rank novice in terms of team playing, and his off-track conduct—fighting at school, stealing—isn’t all that great either, but Coach is merciful and doggedly insistent that Ghost can do better. A message-heavy scene in which the newbies bond over Chinese food and shared family secrets might play on tropes but successfully tugs at heartstrings. The final pages have Ghost lined up beside none other than the hated Brandon, but an ambiguous ending confirms that this is less about Ghost’s track success than his journey to self-worth. Readers (track stars or slowpokes) will find that the redemptive relationship among a supportive mom, a skillful coach who believes in second (and third) chances, and a determined young man comes through louder than the final “BOOM” of the starter gun. (Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books October 2016) When it comes to providing mirrors for contemporary African American teens, Reynolds (When I Was the Greatest, rev. 1/14; The Boy in the Black Suit, rev. 3/15) has proven himself to be an emerging leader. His latest offering is the first in a projected series about four middle-school athletes and their efforts to better themselves, on and off the track. The first leg of this literary relay belongs to our title character. Castle

“Ghost” Cranshaw is a young man with a taste for sunflower seeds, Guinness World Records, and people watching; he also has a proclivity for getting into trouble, fighting, and running, stemming from the night his father (now in prison) pulled a gun on him and his mother. When Ghost happens upon the citywide track team, the Defenders, at practice and impulsively bests its fastest sprinter, the coach sees potential in the seventh grader. Ghost’s path to seeing the same potential in himself is littered with stumbling blocks, including a pair of expensive silver running shoes Ghost can’t afford but is convinced will help him run faster. Reynolds has created a wonderfully dynamic character in Ghost; his first-person narrative is one with which young readers will readily identify. Conflicting emotions are presented honestly and without judgment—while Ghost works through the trauma of his father’s violent act, he is also able to hold onto positive memories. Reynolds’ introduction of the series characters—Ghost, Lu, Patina, and Sunny—will have readers rooting for the entire Defenders team. (Horn Book Magazine November/December 2016)

This is a generalization, but in my experience librarians really enjoy reading within their comfort zones. They'd all travel outside of them from time to time but always they return to the books that they like the most. Children's librarians are just the same. The fantasy readers stick to fantasy. The realism fans go with realism. Graphic novel readers with comics. When I served on a yearly committee of librarians in New York I'd notice that some books were difficult to get anyone to read. Horse books, for example, just sat on our shelves untouched. Nonfiction could take some prodding. And as for sports books . . . forget about it. Nobody ever got near them. Still, you can't give up on them. Mike Lupica and Tim Green may rule the field but that doesn't mean other people don't make a lot out of athletics. If our Newbery winning *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander taught us anything, it was that. Now Jason Reynolds, a young adult author until this year, has produced a middle grade novel centered on that most unlikely of sports: track. It skirts the clichés. It dodges the usual pitfalls. It makes you care about a kid who keeps messing up over and over and over again.

It'll make you like sports books, even if you can't generally stand them. And now we've got to find a way to get a lot of it into the hands of kids. Stat. Call him Ghost. You can call him Castle Crenshaw if you want to (that's technically his name) but he's been calling himself Ghost ever since the night his dad got drunk and threatened Castle and his mom with a gun. Ghost learned to run that night and you might say he's been running ever since. He's got a load of anger inside that he doesn't know how to deal with so he tends to take it out on others at school. Then one day he spots a track warm-up and takes an instant dislike to the albino kid in the expensive tracksuit. Without thinking about it twice Ghost beats the guy on the track, running on the outside, which gets the attention of the coach. Coach begs Ghost to join and Ghost reluctantly agrees but it isn't what he expected. The other kids there all have their own lives, few of them easy. The running is much harder than anything Ghost has ever experienced before. And then there's the fact that no matter how fast he is, Ghost can't run away from trouble. It follows him and if he's not careful it's going to follow him right onto the track. Baseball. Basketball. Even football. These are the sports of fiction. I doubt anyone has ever run any statistics on it, but if you were to gather together all the children's sports books and group them by type, the baseball books would undoubtedly outweigh all the others 2:1. That's because baseball is a game with a natural rise and fall to its action. Basketball has speed and football has brute force, all good things when writing a story. Track? In track you run and then you stop. At least

that's how I always looked at it. For Jason Reynolds, though, it's different. He didn't write this book with track as a single focus. He looks at what the sport boils down to. Basically, this is a book about running. Running from mistakes (forgive the cliché), from very real threats, for your life, and for your team. Why you run and where you run and how you run. And if that's where you're coming from, then track is a very good choice of a sport indeed. On paper, this book looks like it's the sort of story that's all been done before. That's where Reynolds' writing comes in to play. First off, it's worth noticing that Mr. Reynolds is blessed with a keen sense of humor. This comes to play not just in the text but also in little in-jokes here and there. Like the fact that one of the runners (that, I should mention, gets cut later in the book because his grades are slipping) is named Chris Myers. Christopher Myers is the son of Walter Dean Myers, and a friend to Jason Reynolds. I love Jason's descriptions too. Mr. Charles at the corner store, "looks just like James Brown if James Brown were white. . ." Or Ghost saying later, "for something to make you feel tough, you gotta be a little bit scared of it at first." There are some pretty fantastic callbacks hidden in the story as well. Right at the start, almost like some kind of superhero origin story, we hear how Ghost heard the gun go off that night he ran away from his home with his mom and "I felt like the loud shot made my legs move even faster." That ties in beautifully with the starter pistol that goes off at the very end of the book. But maybe what I like the most about Jason Reynolds' books is that he applies this keen sense of the complexity to his characters. I don't think the man could write a straight one-dimensional villain to save his soul. Even his worst characters have these brief moments of humanity to them. In this case, Ghost's dad is the worst character. You don't get much worse than shooting at your wife and kid after all. Yet for all that, Ghost still can't help but love the guy and eats sunflower seeds in his memory. Each character in the book has layers that you can peel away as the story progresses. Even Ghost, **ESPECIALLY** Ghost, who makes you want to yell at him and cheer for him, sometimes at the same time. There's been a monumental push for increased diversity in children's literature in the last few years. Diversity can mean any number of things and it often focuses on race. In a weird way, increasing the number of racially diverse books on a given publisher's release calendar isn't hard if the publisher is dedicated to the notion. Far more difficult is figuring out how you increase the economic diversity. Middle grade characters are almost always middle class. If they're working class

then they tend to be historical. Contemporary lower income kids in realistic novels are almost unheard of. For example, how many books for children have you ever read with kids living in shelters? I've read just one, and I'm a children's librarian. So I watched what Reynolds did here with great interest. Ghost isn't a bit destitute or anything but his single mom makes ends meet by working long hours at a hospital. Middle class kids are remarkably good at ignoring their own privilege while kids like Ghost become almost invisible. In the book, Ghost's decision to initially race Lu isn't solely based on how Lu struts around the track, thinking he does the bee. It's also on his clothes. Aficionado, Lu, was decked out in the flyest gear. Fresh Nike running shoes, and a full-body skintight suit . . . He wore a headband and a gold chain around his neck, and a diamond glinted in each ear. Later Ghost makes a decision regarding a particularly fancy pair of running shoes. That's an economic decision as well. Those are the most obvious examples, but the book is full of little mentions, peppered throughout, of where Ghost's class comes in to things. It's nice to see an author who gets that. We are often affected by forces outside our control, forces we don't even necessarily notice, particularly when we're children. If young readers see it, they'll be reading between the lines, just like Reynolds wants them to. Right at the beginning of the book, when Coach is trying to convince Ghost's mom that he should be running, Ghost realizes that he's in a situation that's played out in loads of sports films. He thinks, "If this went like the movies, I was either going to score the game-winning touchdown (which is impossible in track) or . . . die." Sometimes you can gauge how good a book is by how self-aware its characters are. But sometimes you just read a book, put it down, and think, "Man. That was good. That was really good." This is a book that actually made me tear up, and there aren't a lot of middle grade books that do that. I was rooting for Ghost hard, right until the end. I was caring about a sport that I'd never otherwise think about in a million years. And I was admiring it from start to finish for all that it accomplishes in its scant 180 pages. This is the book you hand to the kids who want something real and good and honest. There are a lot of Ghosts out there in the world. Hopefully some of them will discover themselves here. Run, don't walk, to pick this book up. For ages 10 and up.

I'm currently a fifth grade teacher with the gifted inclusion class. My school is

located in a low-income high minority area. My goal this year was to not just choose good books for them to read, but to choose good DIVERSE books. I read about someone saying something along the lines of everyone needs to be able to see themselves in a book and it resonated with me. I think it's equally important to learn about others and their circumstances too. To make a longer story longer, I wanted to choose something relevant to my students and their lifestyles and I wanted a MC who was African American. I'd read Jason Reynold and Brendan Kiely's *All American Boy* and when I heard about *Ghost* I knew I wanted it for my students. I chose to read the first chapter aloud to my students and it was a homerun for them from the very first page. They were drawn in by his use of language, writing style, and the plot itself. Castle is lovable and most importantly he's real. Whether my students are as economically disadvantaged as him, have a family member in prison, or have simply liked a sport or been in an "altercation" at school, every single student identified with him in some way. I pulled articles from online about albinism (to connect to Lu), the effects of a parent being in prison, and about the benefits of participating in after-school programs to show different relationships and connections to the text. It has been a great experience. I HIGHLY recommend this book for middle grades readers and up. Everything about it is worth reading and the end will leave you wanting more!

National Book Award Finalist, *Ghost*, is a powerful portrayal of a troubled teen who lacks direction. His choices are often wrong, wrong, wrong, but it's easy to understand why he keeps making the mistakes he does. Castle Cranshaw has natural talent for running. But he hasn't been running track; his experience is running for his LIFE! When an Olympic medal-winning track coach sees *Ghost*, potential, he inserts himself into the life of this angry teen. Castle's single mother struggles to provide what her son needs, but it takes the challenge of a track team, the support of a coach and a compassionate merchant to unleash what *Ghost* has been bottled up in the youth for far too long. Author Jason Reynolds is no stranger to award-winning books. Three of his works have received the Coretta Scott King award. Reynolds has introduced us to several diverse characters in *Ghost*. This book is the first in the Track series about a talented group of kids who have a chance at the Junior Olympics. They have a lot to prove, though, first to each other.....and then to themselves! This inspirational tale is headed to the sixth grade classroom

of my daughter, Jen. Not only is she a phenomenal reading teacher, she's also a track coach. All readers including her reluctant ones will be asking for more books by Reynolds. They'll eagerly await new titles in the Track series. So will I!

This is a wonderful book! Jason Reynolds tells a touching story of a boy struggling to find himself. The main character is an adolescent boy who has survived some traumatic experiences. He is a good kid but makes some mistakes. An experience with being on a team helps to teach him some important life lessons. I read this book aloud with my 8-year-old, and we are looking forward for the other books in the Track series!

I cared about Castle within the first few sentences. That's all it took to get me hooked. I love the voice of this book. It was written in a way that transported me directly into Castle's life and let me experience it through his eyes. Absolutely wonderful.

My fourth and fifth grade students are in love with this book. I have several young ladies on track, so it was right up their alley. The boys are enjoying it too. I sent a copy to my niece and she wouldn't put it down.

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