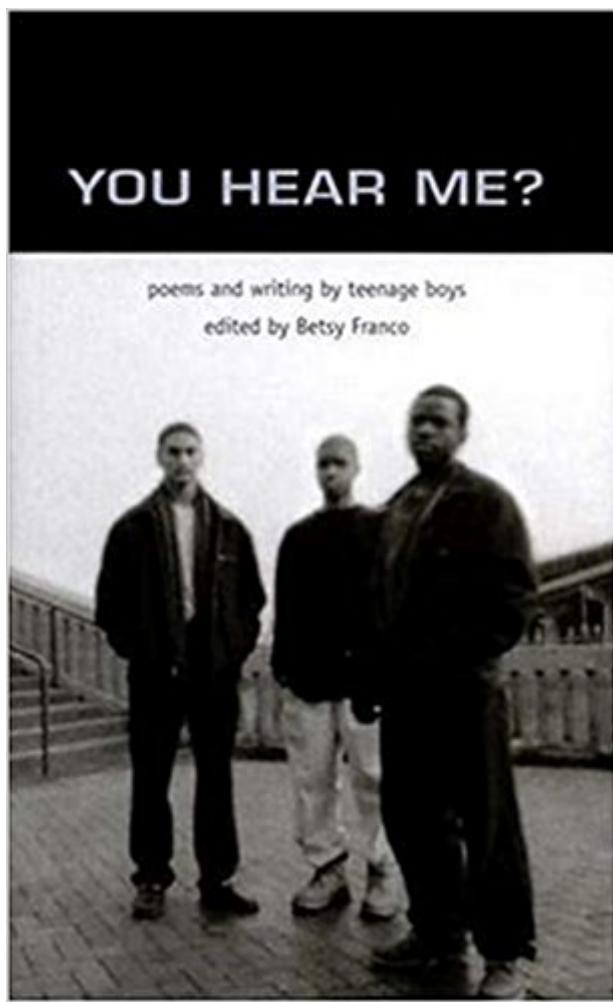


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# You Hear Me: Poems And Writing By Teenage Boys



## Synopsis

Teenage boys speak out—without the filter of adult sensibility—in a compelling collection of poetry and prose. In a powerful collection of more than seventy uncensored poems and essays, more than fifty teenage boys from across the country explore their many-layered concerns: identity, love, envy, gratitude, sex, anger, competition, fear, hope. Here, unadorned and without the filter of adult sensibility, is the raw stuff of their lives, in their own words. Isn't it time to listen?

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up-Through these mostly free-verse lines, the hopes, dreams, fears, and desires of young men from different cultures and backgrounds shine through. They pull no punches with their words in these openly honest, raw, and sometimes tender selections. They talk about what you'd expect-drugs, girls, AIDS, sex, parents-sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, 12-year-old Quantedius Hall's first stanza—"Time Somebody Told Me/That I am lovely, good and real/That I am beautiful inside/If they only knew/How that would make me feel." What do these boys want? "I want to live my life/through peace and knowledge./-I want to wake up/to clean, fresh air/blowing in my face," says 14-year-old John Merrell. Others speak of the fear of alternately being abandoned and loved, of being shunned or ridiculed. Obviously, there's some harsh language and tough situations

but they add to the believability and timeliness of the words. *You Hear Me?* is a fresh approach to hearing what today's youths have to say, and it's refreshing that the words came straight from them. Sharon Korbeck, Waupaca Area Public Library, WI Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr. 7-12. With more urgency than many YA novels, the poems and brief prose pieces in this fine anthology speak directly in teen voices about boys coming of age. They talk about love and anger ("I woke up pissed this morning"); about sex ("some good pussy") and jealousy ("You fell for gelboy and his hair"); about the "monster" drugs, family warmth, rejection; conformity, and bullying; about being gay ("queer is more than / cocks and A.I.D.S.") and accepting that your father is gay. The poetry is rooted in a wide range of neighborhoods, families, and classrooms, and the language is direct and frank, with a rhythm ("I'm / not a / hip hop / Dred / retro / 4-pierced brother") and a physical immediacy in the imagery. Some voices are more private, about secrets, sadness, the weariness of the blues, and the loneliness when a girlfriend leaves ("the photograph torn in half"). In one of the best pieces, a boy thinks about his birth mother ("What if . . . ?"). There are no intrusive illustrations, just the images and music of the words, and lots of white space that makes it easy to browse. Many teens will recognize their search for themselves. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Excellent book for young men, enabling them to recognize themselves in other young men's writing.

Fridays are poetry days in my classroom. Every few weeks, I pull out this book, or *Things I Have to Tell You*, and read a poem or two. Time and again, boys will approach me after class and ask to borrow the book. These poems say to kids what Whitman, Frost (sorry--you know I love you, Robert) and Tennyson just can't. Kids must speak to kids. These books assure tentative nascent poets that they can do it, too, and they deliver a strong peer message to kids who are struggling. Betsy Franco has done a great thing here.

My tough to reach students actually enjoyed this book. They each picked out a favorite and had to state why they liked it - many related to these selections.

Son loved this book. Had to read poetry book for school, this was not a girl-y book of poems.

Our teenage grandson, we were glad to see, enjoyed this as much as we did and is reading some of it to his poetry group.

I'm a high school teacher. I ordered this book, along with *Things I have To Tell You*, to use in my classes. In regards to most of the negative reviews: I'm not sure why middle school teachers would order this; teenage boys wrote it. Also, I think it's time people woke up and realized that children of most ages do swear, and people do talk about sex (yes, even when using an orange as a metaphor). Nobody really complains about dead, white authors swearing or using appalling language (Twain, Hemmingway, Conrad, anyone?). The king of all writers, Shakespeare, is probably the most inappropriate writer I've ever read. Here's the deal with this book: some poems are outstanding, and some poems are a bit ridiculous. I will probably use a few of the poems in my lessons, but there were some that probably needed more focus and imagery. A lot of the poems were very "teenager-y", meaning that they have something to say, but can not quite pull it off in poetry format. As a teacher, I would say "go for it", and use some of the poems while ditching the others. If you're the parent of a teenage boy, go for it. They will have something to identify with.

although i acted as a consultant for this book and thus had some familiarity with its contents before publication, i was pretty unprepared for how beautiful and effective the finished product was when it arrived in the mail. It's a jewel, from its restrained and lyrical cover photo to its soulful content --poems, stories and essays by teenage boys from around the country. My personal faves include Fred Brown's "The Bus Stop," a choppy, minimalist anecdote about a neighborhood domestic altercation with a knockout last line worthy of Hemingway or Raymond Carver; Rigo Landin's "Ode to My Hair Tail," in which a carefully-tended object of personal adornment becomes, in the final stanza, a spiritual offering; Kenny Weiss's "I Hate School," a brilliant all-out assault on verbal decorum and the social rules it helps to maintain; Seth Chappell's "Does My Mother Look Like This?", a wistfully speculative love-poem to THE most important missing person in the world; and countless others. This book is an activist intervention into all the current talk by "experts" \*about\* boys; it short-circuits all the static of debate by bringing boys' creativity and soulfulness to the fore and letting them speak for themselves. Already the book is being used in group-home workshops to inspire boys in serious need of speaking and being heard; I can't think of a better affirmation of its power than this, its use as a tool against despair and creative waste. Few books achieve such a perfect harmony of artistic and social value. This book is where it's at, and I'm happy to have had

even a small role in its development. (If you think this review represents a conflict of interest, check out the book and judge for yourself!)

This book is a genuine, heartfelt, and very honest portrait of teenagers in urban America. There are those, no doubt, who will be offended by its explicit language and subject matter. Nevertheless, explicit language is one of the hallmarks of teenagers grappling with issues of sexuality, drug use, disability, and a myriad of complex social relationships. This book will not expose teenagers to issues with which they are unfamiliar - despite its language, it will not taint innocent minds. Rather, it will model a healthy way (writing poetry) to grapple with the questions most teenagers face as they navigate the difficult path to adulthood.

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