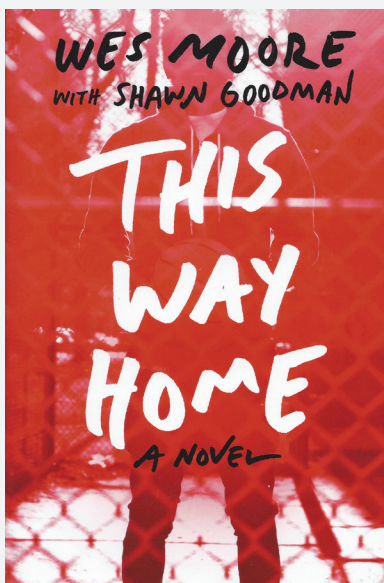


## Second Reaction: On the Way Home

Moore, Wes, and Shawn Goodman. *This Way Home*.  
New York: Delacorte Press, 2015. Print.

Jacqueline Bach



"Mom, why are you reading a sports book?" my son asked me. "A sports book?" I responded as I looked at the cover. I wasn't sure how he got sports book from the cover on which there is an image of a boy, dressed in sweats, standing behind a chain-link fence. He pointed to the spine of the book, and a picture of three balls with the words "sports" written under it. "Oh," I said, "I guess it is a sports book."

The second reaction of *First Opinions, Second Reactions* may be written by teachers who discuss how their students might respond to reading a book, would they recommend it, and so forth, but I am choosing to write this review as the parent of a child who might read this book. *This Way Home* is a book for adults to be read with their adolescent children. As someone who has hosted a mother-daughter book club, I can imagine the conversations that might occur between adults and adolescents, or just between adults who are raising teenagers, and I look forward to the day my son reads it and we can discuss it.

*This Way Home* is the story of three boys—Elijah, Dylan, and Michael—who have been friends since childhood, connected by their love of basketball. The plot is mainly focused on Elijah, who seems rather put together for a seventeen-year-old; he makes good grades, is an

excellent basketball player, and does what his mom tells him, which includes doing odd jobs for a man who attends their church. That man is Mr. Banks, and the two develop a touching relationship. As Elijah and Mr. Banks learn to trust one another, Elijah's relationship changes with Dylan and Michael, especially when Michael asks them to wear jerseys with a street gang's emblem during a basketball tournament.

Because of its focus on relationships and responsibility, I can overlook the fact that I knew who was going to die from the beginning of the story, and who would be the killer about half-way through the novel (to be honest, the inner cover gives away too much). I can also overlook the fact that, if their mothers had any clue, they would have never left their sons' sides after finding out about their involvement with a street gang. I found the boys' behavior reminiscent of some of my own son's, and I found myself relating to one of the moms who talks about her older son's responses to her questions about being in prison: "He says he's fine, but I don't ever really know what it's like for him in that place. I think he tells me things are fine so it will be easier for me. All you boys are like that. You don't want to upset us, then look what happens" (170). Sometime over the past year, my son's response to nearly every question I ask about his life became "good" and "pretty good."

I appreciate the book's theme on knowing when to ask for help and what the consequences are for not doing so. There is also a strong emphasis on adult-teenager relationships, but significantly, as implied in the title, there is a strong thread regarding home that connects the novel's characters. Some return home, some leave home, some are at home temporarily. And home becomes more than just a house—it can also be a community. Elijah finds his way home, but it takes several people to show him the way. *This Way Home* is a book I plan to share with my son in my usual way—by leaving it for him to find in the back seat of my car on our way home from school.

### About the Author

**Jacqueline Bach**, a former high school teacher, is the Elena and Albert LeBlanc Associate Professor of English Education at Louisiana State University and former coeditor of *The ALAN Review*, a journal dedicated to the study and teaching of young adult literature. Her scholarship examines how young adult literature engages educators and students in conversations about social issues, the ways in which popular culture informs pedagogy, and the preparation of secondary English/language arts teachers. Bach has published articles in *The English Journal*, *Changing English*, *Signal*, and *Voices from the Middle*.