

## Young Readers

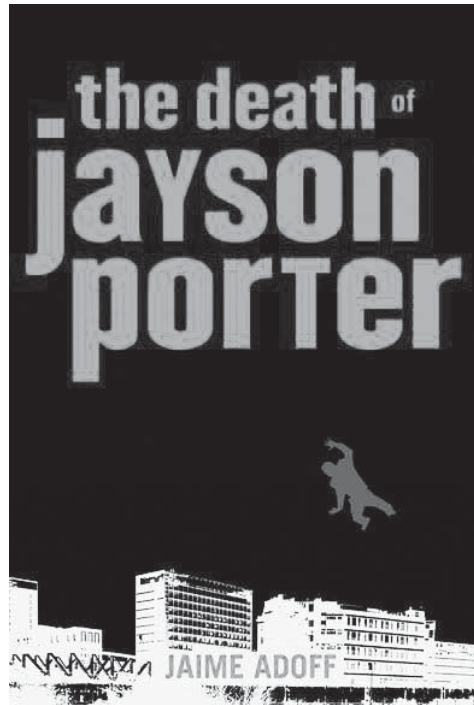
THE DEATH OF JAYSON PORTER BY JAIME ADOFF. HYPERION (NEW YORK NY), 2008. 259 P HB \$15.99.

*Reviewed by Sharon Schnall*

Jayson Porter will commit suicide. On the opening page of *The Death of Jayson Porter*, author Jaime Adoff not only reveals that this teenager wants to die, but the method he will use to do so. A simple, direct and jarring first-page poem excerpt describes Jayson's suicide:

I am a bullet  
screaming to the ground.  
The air rushing past me, so fast I can't breathe.  
I am gasping.  
The sound – like a 747 taking off in my eardrums.  
Getting louder and louder  
The ground getting closer and closer.

And so begins a disturbing, but well-crafted saga of a teenager, existing minute-to-minute and seemingly forgotten by society.



A neglectful existence overshadowed by family abuse is the constant for 16-year-old Jayson Porter. Occasional shards of hope appear but are further crushed by the actions of others: some cruel and calculating; others, unintended but harmful gestures of fragile, failed human beings.

Jayson lives in the 20-story Sunny Gardens apartment projects of Bandon, Florida, populated by single mothers, hungry babies and crack dealers. Jayson ruefully



JAIIME ADOFF

calls this low-income pocket of inland Florida “the real Third World” and names it - “abandoned” Florida.

And, with good reason.

With little provocation, Jayson’s mother beats him. The first-person narrative is filled with Jayson’s never-ending strategies to evade those beatings, and bypass stinging encounters with his mother’s equally unpredictable drunken and drugged friends.

Being alone in their apartment offers some solace. But Jayson is surrounded by the violent noises – fighting, screaming, crying - reminders of the tragic and dangerous lives of his neighbors and community.

Adoff, a musician by training, writes with a rhythmic, lean lyrical style using poetry, visuals and narrative to tell the story of an abandoned teen possessing dignity, intelligence and fortitude. The character portrayals never lapse into caricatures or stereotypes.

Visuals - words cascading down a single page column; other pages totally blackened; a few words appearing on an entire page - heighten Jayson’s tense and unpredictable encounters with: teen bus passengers thirsty for a fight; a crowd fight that unfolds while watching a fireworks display; and the ever-present struggle with his impending death.

Even Jayson’s so-called diversions of going to work and school or visiting a drug-addicted father each require survival strategies. Up to now, he survives by observing, thinking, calculating the next move, laying low; all done to not antagonize the volatile figures in his life.

Every move is about survival, but the desire for ending life encroaches on his ability to persevere. As the tale of his life unfolds, it becomes tragically clear why he wants to end it. Yet, the hope is that Jayson will fight his need to use suicide. But

will hope, what little there is, be enough to stop the suicide and ultimately sustain him?

Jaime Adoff was raised in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he and his family currently reside. Adoff studied drums and percussion and earned a bachelor's of music degree at Central State University of Wilberforce, Ohio.