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# Here I Stand: Stories that Speak for Freedom

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

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The title of this **Amnesty** sponsored collection of short stories suggests that it features stories of principled stands against injustice. The introduction by Jules Carey suggests that it may deal with legal and political freedoms. And anyone familiar with **Amnesty's** work with political prisoners worldwide might expect some miscarriages of justice or repressive foreign regimes to appear. And there is some of this. A comic strip (Mary and Brian Talbot and Kate Charlesworth) tells the story of the suffragette Constance Lytton; Neil Gaiman and Chris Riddell contribute an affirmation of the power of ideas over violent intimidation prompted by the Charlie Hebdo murders; Jack Gantos speculates that the enticements of the library might deflect a young suicide bomber from his mission; Sarah Crossan writes about the destructive effects of oil extraction in an unnamed African country; Ryan Gattis, in less a story more a personal reflection, contributes his thoughts about capital punishment and prison regimes; and, perhaps the most ingenious tale, Tim Wynne Jones imagines a rock anthem against the development of autonomous weapon systems. Finally, an interview with imprisoned United States whistle-blower Charlie Manning expresses the most familiar aspects of Amnesty's work. Otherwise, these are stories more likely to touch some of its young readers' lives directly, in which abuse and exploitation is suffered at the hands of adults and other young people, or (in Sita Brahmachari's story) as a result of social isolation, rather than through a repressive political regime. An impressive array of writers offer a variety of themes, including: the fate of refugees (Jackie Kay poems); racial discrimination and violence (poems by Amy Leon, story by Bali Rai); sexual abuse (John Boyne); the torture of children suspected of being witches (Francis Hardinge); the dangers of the stereotyping of Muslim teenagers in the government's anti-radicalisation programme (Sabrina Mahfouz); discrimination against gay people (Liz Kessler); bullying in school (A L Kennedy); and sexual trafficking (Elizabeth Laird). Usually the writers speak directly to teenagers. In only one or two stories ? dealing with gang violence and intimidation (Chibundu Onuzu) and female genital mutilation (Christie Watson) ? is the viewpoint adult. Often the writers speak in the voice of the victims, or as onlookers who fail to act to prevent tragic consequences, and sometimes as perpetrators of injustice, perhaps realistically accepting the relative powerlessness of children and young people and sometimes their culpability. The Amnesty postscript reminds readers that ?peaceful protest is, after all, your right?; but, in many stories, the question posed to readers, and the stand they are urged to take, is more about respect, tolerance and personal moral responsibility.

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