**16-19 Critical – Highly Commended**

**Cameren Birch-Ghose, Caroline Chisholm School: ‘dinosaurs in the hood’**

‘dinosaurs in the hood’ takes a refreshing look at the issue of misrepresentation in the media. It explores themes of racism, negative stereotyping, and innocence and criticises how media created by people of colour is stigmatised and forgotten. Smith’s interesting use of lower case letters and ampersands creates an informal, spontaneous tone; it is as if he is stripping language down to its bare parts in order to convey his message in a raw, powerful voice.

Smith explores how mainstream media often depicts black men as violent and hyper-masculine, and perpetuates the stereotype of the absent father. He expresses his rejection of this in stanza 2, ‘don’t let Tarantino direct this… the spitting image of his father.’ The speaker doesn’t want to create a dark, gritty movie portraying black children as continuing the cycle of corruption and violence, instead he wants to make a noisy, action-packed, upbeat dinosaur movie where the ‘little black boy’ is shown as hopeful, free and most importantly innocent, ‘& no one kills the black boy. & no one kills/the black boy. & no one kills the black boy’ the repetition emphasises the speaker’s desperate need for a movie, or even a scene, that can inspire hope in other black children.

Representation in the media is important as it heavily influences people’s ideas about what the world should look like. This is why the speaker is so desperate for even just one wholesome, positive scene, ‘the only reason/ i want to make… his eyes wide & endless/ his dreams possible, pulsing & right there.’ The last line of the poem is detached from the main body to symbolise how his dreams are ahead of him but still within reach.

The speaker also places emphasis on how Hollywood limits its representation of ‘strong black women’ to ‘funny, yet strong, commanding’ hot chicks, and ignores the real, complex strength of ordinary black men and women. The speaker’s need to make a movie with ‘grandmas on the front porch taking out raptors/ with guns they hid in walls & under mattresses’ shows not only how he wants to make a movie with positive representation of people of colour but how he wants it to be funny and uplifting and action-packed, ‘Jurassic Park meets Friday meets The Pursuit of Happyness’

Smith comments on how media produced by black creators is often lumped into the single category of ‘black movie[s]’ and ignored and stigmatised, ‘this can’t be a black movie. this movie can’t be dismissed / because of its cast or its audience’. Movies with an all-black cast should be normalised and appreciated in the same way movies with a predominantly white cast, such as Jurassic Park, are. None of the children in Jurassic Park died so why should the little black boy not get to live and have a fulfilling life? ‘his dreams possible, pulsing, & right there.’ Smith wants to create this movie in order to celebrate the strength, innocence and beauty of people of colour that Hollywood ignores.