



Tru & Nelle

A novel by G. Neri

*Based on the real-life friendship of
Truman Capote and Nelle Harper Lee*

Obviously, this book depicting the childhood friendship of authors Truman Capote and Harper "Nelle" Lee has poignant timing since Lee just died a few days before it hit stores. Capote had a surrogate for the tomboyish Nelle in his work while she offered up a version of Tru in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. So while there's precedent, it's still pretty gutsy to tackle the early years of two iconic writers who loom large in the imagination. That high wire act falters on two levels. While if anyone were shockingly precocious it would surely be Capote, the characters of Tru and Nelle still feel rather sophisticated in their dialogue, despite the occasional crying jag or other reminder that in the book he is eight going on nine and she's a year and a half younger. More problematic is when this book depicts events that Lee herself transformed for her enduring classic. One can't help feeling Lee already did it better and this spin offers no new insight. But set aside the historic import. As simply a book showing two misfits becoming fast friends, "Tru & Nelle" works just fine. Kids should enjoy it and one imagines that will lead them to "To Kill A Mockingbird" and (eventually) Capote's "In Cold Blood." When Neri underlines or winks at the ideas and character traits that would flourish later for Capote and Lee (throwing grand parties for Tru, avoiding the wide world for Nelle), however, you're just reminded of the literary shadows this whole novel labors under. -- Michael Giltz