



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS— FACILITATOR VERSION

Below each general question are sample moments in each book that can help you further the discussion for that book. These suggestions are far from everything you could talk about in each book, so it's great if your book club brings up something totally different, and feel free to add others as you prepare for your sessions.

In general, we encourage you to empower book club members to be the primary voices in your conversations. Some approaches to getting youth-led discussions going include:

- Starting by asking for general reactions to the reading and leading from emotional responses to rich moments in the text that reveal more about racialized histories and experiences in the US when you unpack them;
- Asking the group to quickly brainstorm as many answers to a discussion question as possible (or, in a multi-part question, just the first question), write the answers down where everyone can see them, then dig into each idea in turn;
- Quiet individual free writing that gives everyone the same amount of time to think (usually 5–10 minutes) and collect their thoughts before volunteering their ideas. For groups where not everyone has read the text, reading one section out loud and writing about that can be helpful.

Participant-led discussions should help youth see themselves as the sophisticated thinkers and observers of society and culture that they are. To facilitate this, you can consistently build on what they say throughout the conversation through encouragements like “Interesting, say more!”, questions like “why?” and “can you tell us where that happens in the book?,” and making connections between youth responses (“I love that. Can anyone think of another example of what Jane just talked about?”). You may also be able to weave the examples below into the discussion or read a relevant passage from one of them out loud to jump-start a discussion.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Is there something that happens in this book that reminds you of how race works in the United States today?** What is it? Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement? Why?

<i>Between the World and Me</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ White threats of weaponizing police against Black people – man telling Coates, “I could have you arrested!” (94-5) ■ The ongoing deaths of Black youth (112-13); Prince Jones’s killing
<i>Dreaming in Indian</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Indian residential schools and child border separation (30-1) ■ Stereotypes in media such as Pocahontas (43) ■ Reappropriating one’s own people’s style as fashion (50-3)
<i>Mother of the Sea</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Slavery and trafficking, especially of women
<i>Revolution of Evelyn Serrano</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ People afraid of change-makers, even in the communities they try to help (104) ■ Poor families immigrate to send money to country of origin in spite of facing racism in new home (109-10) ■ Police attacks on equality movements (114-5); ■ People being fed and cared for through social movements (Angel, 152, 185-6)
<i>Always Running</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Immigrants (Luis’s Mama) being told “you don’t belong here! This is not your country!” (19) ■ White police racism (67) ■ Police beatings and shootings (Miguel Robles, 201-2, Luis defending Licha 226-7) ■ White allies who listen and help (restaurant owner 144-5, Maureen Murphy 221) ■ Gang violence and drug sales within racial communities (Lomas/Sangra – Rodriguez addresses in epilogue, 250)
<i>The Shadow Hero</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Police detectives using racial slurs; common expectation that white police will not be interested in justice in some neighborhoods (119; 67-8)



2. Pick a moment when a character in this book uses information about the past to find a way forward. How does understanding the history of their family, community, or racial/ethnic group help this character decide how they want to shape their future? Do you think that it’s always better to know the truth about the past, or do you think it can hold people back? Who do you think should get to decide?

<i>Between the World and Me</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Malcom X (34-6) ■ Black history reading (43-8) ■ On breaking all the dreams and myths (whiteness and Africa both – 52-6)
<i>Dreaming in Indian</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knockwood learning about herself by asking her mother about her own people’s religion and practices during a vacation from the residential school that oppressed her Indian identity (30-1) ■ Maracle getting sober to share the Sun Dance with her mother, feeling connection stronger than any drug (76-7); ■ Louie Gong putting traditional Northwest Salish designs on shoes and launching a business (84-5) ■ Artists inspired by Native cultures (95)
<i>Mother of the Sea</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The girl (Aduke) meeting Yemoja at the end, joining her (in death? Or not? 45-6)
<i>Revolution of Evelyn Serrano</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Evelyn learns about the massacre of Nationalist protestors in Ponce, PR, and her grandfather’s role in it (78-80; 86-9) ■ Her mother’s memories of being abandoned when Abuela was away taking part in social movements (129-30)
<i>Always Running</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Luis and Esme learn <i>folklórico</i> dance techniques to create a dignified performance for “Joe and Josephine Aztec,” the school mascots, and win, changing the representation of Aztecs at school (174-6) ■ Luis learns about workers’ struggles across racial divides and throughout history, learns never to disdain his parents’ labor (184-5) ■ Luis uses pre-Colombian motifs with street images for murals that mark and transform the neighborhood, book from Chente (200-1)
<i>The Shadow Hero</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hank finds out that his father was a great fighter who gave it up to stop drinking, to have a quiet life and family ■ Learning that “sometimes a fight you cannot win is still worth fighting” (83-4)



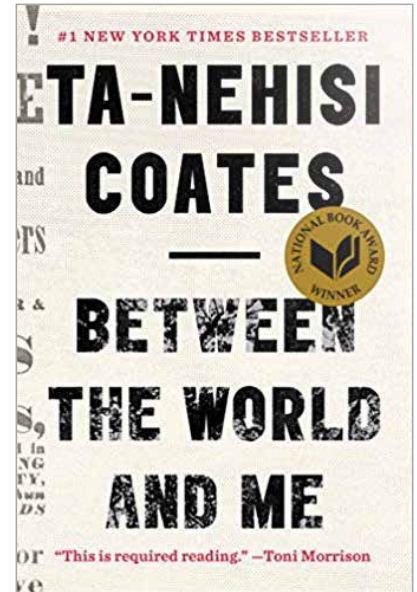
3. People can play different roles in the struggle for racial justice and healing. Name some of the ways of working towards positive change that you find in this book. Who does what kind of work? How do gender, age, money, ability/disability, personality, and other circumstances affect what roles people play in fighting for equality? What considerations affect how (or whether) you take part in social action?

<i>Between the World and Me</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Civil rights activists (30-2, 34-6) ■ Professors at Howard (53-5) ■ Girl with dreads and queer family at Howard (58-61) ■ Coates’s journalism (83-4 and throughout) ■ The mother of murdered Black boy turned activist (113)
<i>Dreaming in Indian</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Young people in the Idle No More movement (102-4) ■ Artists like Jeffrey Veregge (106-9), chef Robe (110-11) and youth whose work appears in this book
<i>Mother of the Sea</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The girl (Aduke) pretending to like Olu’s attention to get information (24) ■ Akinde from her village fighting (13-4) ■ The women caring for each other (33, 34, 40, 44-5)
<i>Revolution of Evelyn Serrano</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Abuela, the Young Lords, Evelyn, and her friends taking part in sweeping, protesting, collecting items for the community (68, 70, 121-3) ■ Mami and Papi, who care for Evelyn above all (193-4, 198) ■ Mami helping the community (163, 169, 178, 184) ■ The poet (160-2)
<i>Always Running</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Luis and Esme as activists at school and in the community ■ Luis as a gang member attempting to foster peace between Lomas and Sangra ■ Chente and Mrs. Baez as teachers, mentors, friends ■ The study group who commits to freeing their minds (184-5) ■ Mothers who work and support their families through everything (23) ■ White allies who listen and advocate for equality (Maureen Murphy 221)
<i>The Shadow Hero</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hank as a superhero seeking justice for his father ■ Hank’s mother, a busybody but inspires her son to dream big ■ Detective Lawful when he admits that he was racist and wants to be better (118, 148)



BOOK 1: *Between the World and Me*

4. Why do you think that this book takes on the big, historically complicated question of racism against Black Americans in the form of a letter from a father to his son? How does this choice make you think about your own family’s place in American history?
5. What do you think Coates means when he says that race – and especially whiteness—is a “modern invention” (7)? How could whiteness be created, as Coates suggests, through acts of violence against Black and other people of color (8, 103)? Compare this picture of whiteness with the peaceful images of “perfect houses with nice lawns,” “treehouses and Cub Scouts” (8) that appear in textbooks, movies, and on TV, usually associated with white America. How do you make sense of this contradiction?
6. While studying at Howard University Coates discovers that there are many kinds of Blackness and meets people who help him break down his desire for a single, united “myth” of Black identity. **How does getting to know the queer, multiracial household of one woman (58-61) change how he thinks about Blackness, love, and what it means to be a hero?** Are there people that face discrimination even inside of your racial or ethnic group? If so, what would it look like for your community to welcome them in?
7. When Coates travels outside of the US for the first time in his 30s, he calls the flight he takes to Europe “a starship” (121). What makes visiting another country like a journey into outer space for Coates? What makes the experience of *not* being connected with France’s history a kind of freedom for Coates? (124-7) **Can we ever truly escape the racial histories associated with our identities? Why or why not?**

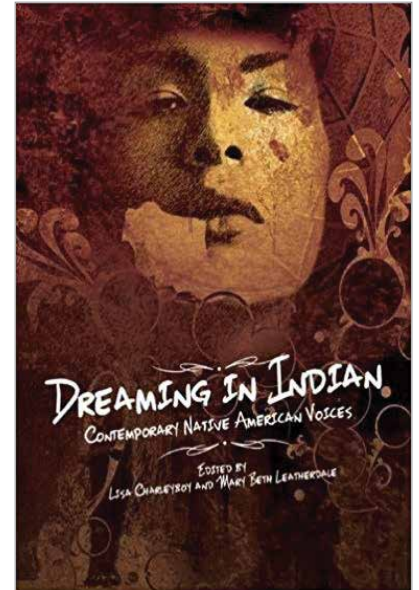




BOOK 2:

Dreaming in Indian: Contemporary Native American Voices

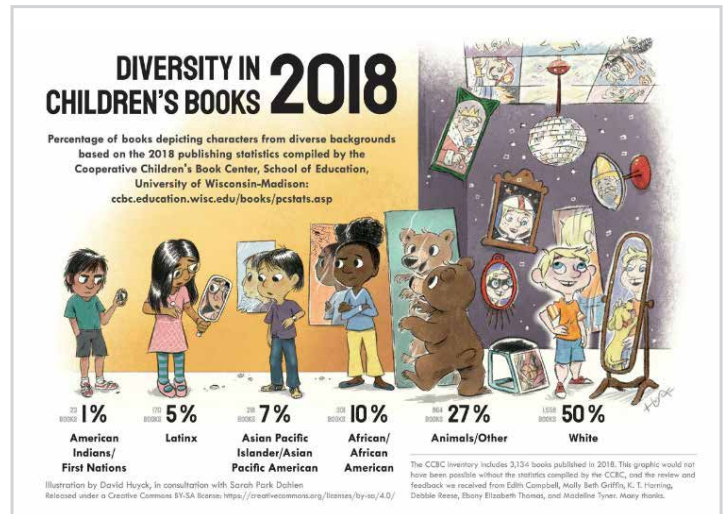
4. This collection is called *Dreaming in Indian*, but it includes contributors from different First Nations and Indigenous traditions across what we now call North America (for example, see contributor info on 124-5). **What kinds of experiences do many of the diverse individuals in this volume seem to share? What sets them apart from one other? Why do you think it is important to many Native Americans that people recognize there is not one single “Indian” culture?**
5. Isabelle Knockwood’s essay describes how hundreds of thousands of Native children were taken away from their families in North America and sent to residential schools where they were “assimilated into the white dominant society”: not allowed to speak their languages, practice their religions, or learn about their heritages. Many suffered trauma and abuse. **Knockwood asks, “why was it so important to destroy tribal society?” (30-1) What do you think is the answer to this question?** How can schools and youth services act as tools of racial oppression? How can they serve as sites of racial transformation and healing?
6. This collection uses poetry, essays, short stories, interviews, photographs, visual art, and more to convey Native American voices, emotions, and experiences. **How do these different formats give us different kinds of information?** For example, compare the essay about Indian residential schools (30-1) with the photos of graffiti on the ruins of one (28-9): what do the photos say that the essay cannot, and vice-versa? **What format(s) do you think would best capture your voice, emotions, and experiences, and why?**





BOOK 3: *Mother of the Sea*

4. Zetta Elliott calls *Mother of the Sea* a “mermaid story.” **Who do you think are the mermaids in this book?** (Yemoja, 45-6, and her daughter Eja-keke, “little fish”, perhaps Aduke at the end.) **How are they different from or similar to the mainstream images of mermaids that you have seen before?** What do you think of Elliott’s choice to combine a mermaid story with a tale about enslaved Africans crossing the Atlantic?
5. **Fantasy literature in English has historically featured white characters like Harry Potter or King Arthur, while stories about Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth often have realistic settings. Why do you think this is?** Do you see *Mother of the Sea* as more realistic or fantastical? Elliott has been writing fantasy that places Black youth in magical situations for much of her career but draws upon African-American histories and mythology instead of European ones; in this case, West African (Yoruba) traditions. **If you were going to write a fantastical story based on your life, where would the magic come from and why?**
6. In her afterword, Zetta Elliott mentions that she decided to publish *Mother of the Sea* herself instead of going through a traditional young adult publisher, because it is a faster and more reliable way to get an unusual book into print (at 45 pages long, and a fantasy with a Black girl protagonist, set in the Atlantic slave trade, it was very unusual when it first came out. See the diversity in children’s books graphic for mainstream publishers, at right). **What do you think are the benefits and drawbacks of self-publishing for writers like Elliott? Fantasy has been getting a lot more diverse in recent years; why do you think that might be?**



Huyck, David and Sarah Park Dahlen. (2019 June 19). Diversity in Children's Books 2018. sarahpark.com blog. Created in consultation with Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner, with statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: cbbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics. Retrieved from readingspark.wordpress.com/2019/06/19/picture-this-diversity-in-childrens-books-2018-infographic

DEEPER THAN OUR SKINS

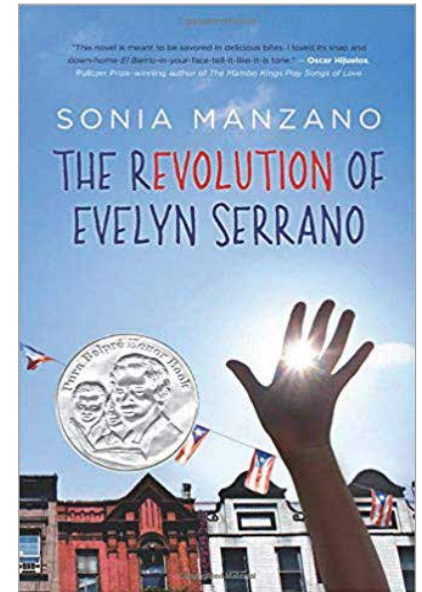
The present is a *conversation* with the past



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BOOK 4: *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*

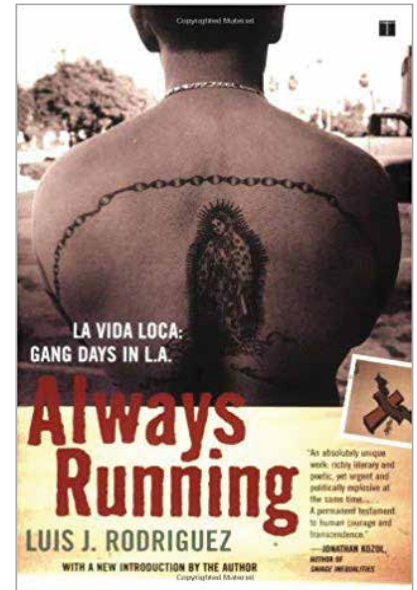
4. At the start of the novel, Evelyn decides that she doesn't want to go by her first name, Rosa, and instead asks to be called Evelyn, "the least Puerto Rican-sounding" part of her name (7-8). **Why do you think she wants to seem less Puerto Rican at first?** By the end of the book, however, she decides to go back to being known as Rosa. **What changes in her thinking to make her embrace her "Puerto Rican-sounding" name?**
5. Many people in Spanish Harlem initially think that the Puerto Rican activist group the Young Lords are a gang, and fear them. **What about the Young Lords might make them seem like a gang? Why are these qualities frightening?** What makes the Young Lords *different* from a gang? If they are not a gang, why do you think the police keep watching them and trying to shut them down?
6. Over the course of the novel Evelyn learns why her Abuela is such a passionate activist: because of her experiences seeing poor people oppressed and even killed for demanding equality back in Puerto Rico (78-80; 86-9, 138). However, Evelyn also begins to understand why her own Mami is suspicious of such dedication to activism: because Abuela often neglected Mami as a child when she left to take part in social movements (129-30). We see these mothers' different priorities when a bottle hits Evelyn in the eye and Mami rushes her to the hospital, but Abuela remains at the protest (193-5). Do you think that Abuela should have gone to the hospital, too? **What is more important in your life, big-picture change or caring for the people closest to you? Is it possible to have one without the other?**





BOOK 5: *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*

4. This book describes violence between Latinx and white youth (“the Tradition”), the Hispanic community and the police force, and within poor communities. **While the first two kinds of clashes are more obviously inspired by race and inequality, do you think that the violence within Latinx communities is, as well? Why or why not?** Why do kids as young as elementary and middle schoolers start their own mini-gangs (“clubs,” or “*clicas*”) in Luis’s neighborhood (40-41 and 250)? What do you think causes the gender-based violence that we see in this book (rape, domestic violence)?
5. In the later chapters of *Always Running*, we learn that Luis is not only a gang member with a history of drugs, violence, and illegal activity, but also an activist and leader who organizes walk-outs at school for Chicano student demands, negotiates with school officials and between gangs, and takes part in art, writing, and dance projects. Why do you think that the book only tells us this part of Luis’s life in the second half of the book? How does it affect how you think about him as a character? **Do you think it’s possible to be both a *cholo* and a voice for positive transformation in the community? Why or why not?**
6. In the Epilogue, written over 25 years ago, Rodriguez argues that society chooses to “criminalize” those that it cannot “accommodate”: “Outlaw their actions and creations. Declare them the enemy, then wage war. Emphasize the differences—the shade of skin, the accent in the speech or manner of clothes. [...] It’s convenient. It’s logical. It doesn’t work.” (250) Do you agree? **What do you think that it means for society to not be able to “accommodate” a group of people? What would true accommodation, inclusion, and equality look like for the people in your community? What power structures would have to change?**



→ **Note:** The 10 discussion questions at the back of the book are also excellent!



BOOK 6: *The Shadow Hero*

4. When Mock Beak kills Hank’s father, he tells Hank to “call the police,” knowing that the white police chief will not bother to pursue justice (67-8). Detective Lawful wants to help, but even he calls people of Chinese descent “sneaky slant-eyed bastards” when he doesn’t realize that the Green Turtle is Hank in disguise. **How can white racism and indifference contribute to crime and oppression within a racial community?** What steps towards racial healing do Hank and Detective Lawful take later in the comic? (119, 148)
5. At the end of the story, Red Center asks Hank if he really thinks that dressing up in a superhero costume can make him “a part of THEM”: mainstream white American society. Hank doesn’t know how to answer, but when the Anchor of Justice asks him to help in the war effort on behalf of the country, Hank immediately agrees (150-1). **Why would Hank be willing to fight for America, when white Americans exclude and belittle his people?** Why do you think the Anchor of Justice has devoted himself to good in America, even though his “parents aren’t from around here, either” (152)? **Do you think that it’s still worthwhile to commit to the US and its ideals, despite the country’s many flaws? Why or why not?**
6. In their notes, Yang and Liew explain that *The Shadow Hero* is their way of creating a Chinese-American backstory for the Green Turtle, a superhero from the 1940s whose face (and race) readers never see but who was written by Chinese-American cartoonist Chu Hing (154-8). **Why do you think Chu was not able to write about a Chinese superhero in his own time? What other hidden histories and backstories do you think need to be written for our own time?** What do you think of some of the ones that have come out recently?
 - **Some examples:** the women featured in the *Hidden Figures* movie; Lin-Manuel Miranda’s exploration of Alexander Hamilton’s Caribbean roots in the musical *Hamilton*, the *Spiderman* comics featuring Afro-Latino youth Miles Morales, *Ms. Marvel* comics featuring the South Asian-American Muslim teen Kamala Khan, etc.

