

finding your VOICE

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

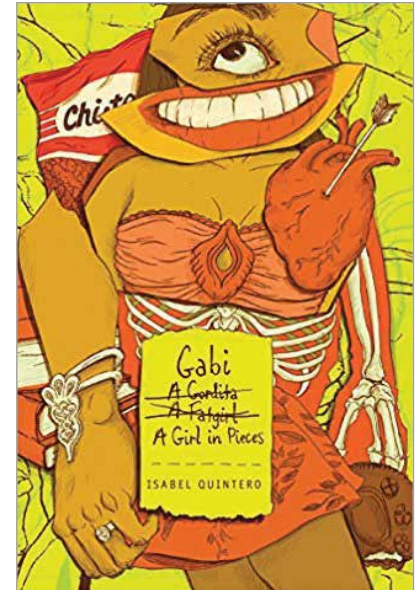


ALA American Library Association

BOOK 1

Gabi, A Girl in Pieces by Isabel Quintero

1. Gabi's family immigrated to California from Mexico, and she grows up in a tight-knit Mexican-American community. What aspects of her background and culture does Gabi most relate to? What are the aspects she struggles with? What do you think are the reasons for these feelings?
2. Gabi gets competing messages about how to behave as a young woman. On one hand, she is supposed to wear dresses and makeup. On the other hand, she should not be "too easy" or available to boys. What do you make of the messages that she receives? Do the boys in her life receive similar messages? Why do you think this is? Which if any of these messages are culturally specific?
3. As a fair-skinned Mexican-American, Gabi frequently discusses how others are surprised that she speaks Spanish and that she identifies with her heritage. How does this experience of colorism (prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group) inform how she understands herself and how she comes into her voice? Have you seen colorism at work in your community?
4. *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* is an epistolary novel, or one that is comprised of diary entries and letters. Throughout the novel Gabi writes in her diary and writes letters expressing how she feels. Is there a difference between the voice she uses in her letters versus her diary entries? How does writing a letter to her father and others in her life help her to find her voice?
5. Zines are self-published short magazines that anyone can make. Sometimes zines deal with controversial topics and are made for small audiences. Gabi creates a zine about women's bodies in school. What is controversial about Gabi's zine? If you made a zine, what would you focus on? What would it include? Who would you give it to?



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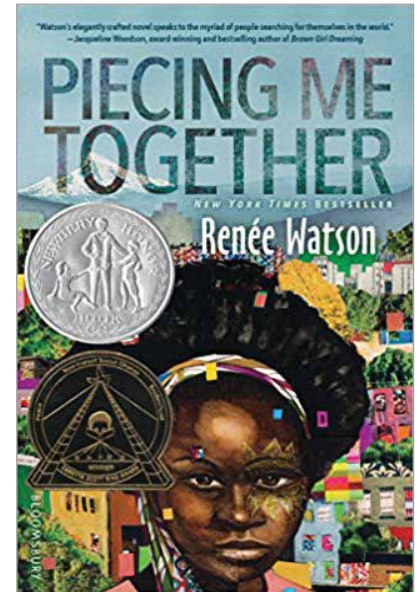


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BOOK 2

Piecing Me Together by Renee Watson

1. Collage is an art form that brings together different elements to create something new. How does Jade use collage as a creative outlet and as a way to express herself? How does visual art compare to speaking one's mind?
2. *Piecing Me Together* takes place in Portland, Oregon. How does the novel's setting and history inform Jade's life experience as a young black woman?
3. Jade finds a problematic but helpful mentor in Maxine. While they are both young black women, they have very different life experiences. How does Maxine's experience contrast from Jade's life? What do they end up learning about one another despite the differences?
4. There are moments throughout *Piecing Me Together* where Jade has to advocate for herself. How does she do so? Is she successful? How does she provide a possibility model of how to stand up for oneself?
5. Jade finds a friend in Sam. They bond over school, their shared love of the Spanish language, and family life. How does their friendship transcend issues of race? What are the ways in which race and racism affect their friendship? What does their friendship invite us to consider about interracial friendships?



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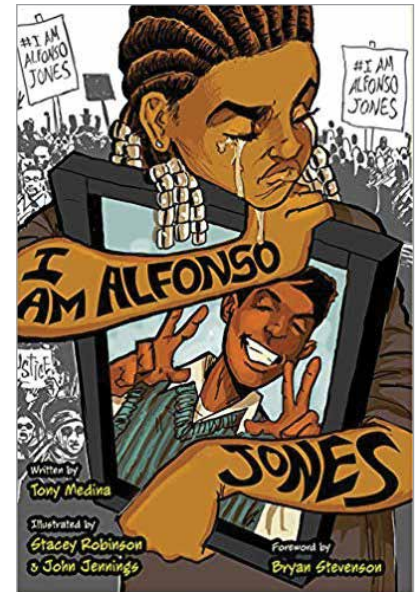


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BOOK 3

I Am Alfonso Jones by Tony Medina

1. Medina includes real-life victims of police brutality (such as Eleanor Bumpurs and Amadou Diallo) as the ancestors that help guide Alfonso in the afterlife. What do you know about these ancestors? How do their stories echo Alfonso's experiences?
2. *I Am Alfonso Jones* highlights the aftermath of Alfonso's death for his loved ones. How does Alfonso try to help the ones he has left behind? How do they help him on his journey on the Ark of Souls?
3. Take a close look at the graphic novel's illustrations. How do the illustrators Robinson and Jennings use black and white to convey the novel's actions? Besides color, how are other ways that illustrations are important to understanding Alfonso's journey?
4. Before his death, Alfonso and his classmates are rehearsing a hip-hop version of the classic Shakespeare play, *Hamlet*. What are the similarities between Hamlet's plot and the events of Alfonso's life and death? Are there other classic works that you're familiar with that resonate with the novel?
5. Although *I Am Alfonso Jones* is fiction, the story reflects a reality for far too many young people. African American youth like Kimani Gray, Rekia Boyd, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, and Tamir Rice also died at the hands of law enforcement. How does the graphic novel humanize Alfonso? How might we retell the stories of victims of violence to emphasize their full humanity? Would you draw a picture, write a poem or story, make a song, or something else? What would you include in your creation?



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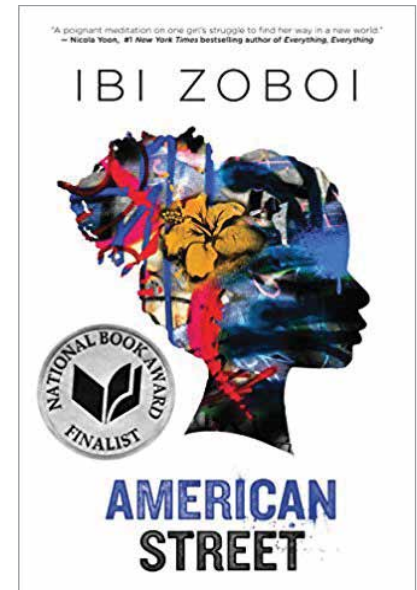


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BOOK 4

American Street by Ibi Zoboi

1. Fabiola and her family live on the intersection of American Street and Joy Road. What do these words represent to her when she first arrives in Detroit? What do they mean by the end of the novel? What do the words mean to you?
2. Fabiola's mother is detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) upon their entrance to the United States. Fabiola gets to continue on to Detroit because of her American citizenship. How is Fabiola's story similar to the stories in the news or in our own lives? How is it different?
3. Zoboi includes italicized sections narrated by various characters — even the house! What do these sections reveal about each characters' experiences of race, class, and gender? How do they differ from the other parts of the novel where we don't get their first-person perspective?
4. Fabiola writes her mother letters while they are apart. Sometimes the letters are hopeful and omit the anxieties Fabiola feels or the new friends and experiences she has. Other letters try to buoy her mother's strength while she's in the detention center. How do the letters chart Fabiola's experience in America? What sorts of responses do you think her mother would write?
5. Compare Fabiola to her cousins, Pri, Donna, and Chantal. What is each young woman's connection to their racial and ethnic heritage? What do their perspectives invite us to consider about immigration and assimilation?



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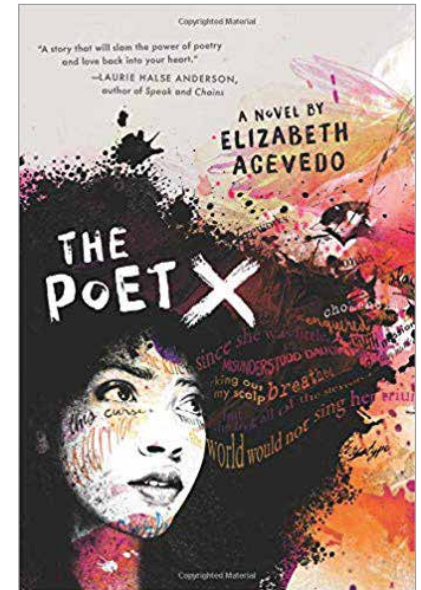


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BOOK 5

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo

1. *The Poet X* is a novel in verse and Xiomara is an aspiring poet. How does the novel's format inform your understanding of Xiomara's growth throughout the novel? What are some representative pieces that clue us in to who Xiomara is and who she is becoming?
2. Xiomara is a working-class Afro-Latina living in Harlem. How does her race, ethnicity, class, and gender affect her life as a young person coming of age? How does she combat the assumptions those around her make based on these identities?
3. Xiomara's family members all communicate in different ways. While both her parents are strict but loving, her father is quiet, while her mother makes it loud and clear how she feels. Meanwhile, Xiomara's twin Xavier is introverted and shy. How would you imagine the events of the novel from their respective perspectives? What would their poems look like?
4. Xiomara's name means "one who is ready for war." How does she live up to her name? How does she struggle against it? What does your name mean? How do you feel about your name? How if at all has it influenced your life?
5. Catholicism is central to Xiomara's mother life, while Xiomara is not so sure about religion. How does Xiomara question religion? Is it more curiosity or skepticism? How is this questioning reflected in other aspects of her life?



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BOOK 6

Anger is a Gift by Mark Oshiro

1. Moss's mother Wanda says the following about anger: "Anger is a gift. Remember that . . . You gotta grasp on to it, hold it tight and use it as ammunition." What does the phrase "anger is a gift" mean in this instance? Do we usually think of anger as a gift? How would you define anger, both as you see it in the world and in the novel?
2. Moss's high school includes school resource officers and metal detectors, while Esperanza's school across town boasts college prep resources. How are these schools in the same city, yet so different? What social or public policies do these differences reflect? Have you seen these differences in your own communities?
3. There are a variety of adults in Moss's life, from his mother to Shamika, to Dawit, to Ms. Torrance and many others. Some are supportive and listen, while others lord their authority over him and other young people. What makes some adults supportive of Moss and his friends and others not? Why do you think there can be a disconnect between teenagers and adults? What can bridge this gap?
4. Moss has endured anxiety and panic attacks since his father's murder. He often feels ashamed at being emotional and wonders how best to navigate when and where he can express himself. The novel gives readers unrestricted access to Moss's hopes and anxieties, as well as his coping strategies. Why do you think there is a stigma in talking about issues like depression and anxiety? How do you think that stigma can be erased?
5. A whole community comes together to push back against the policies at West Oakland High. Students from across Oakland and concerned community members stand up to unjust policy. How do they organize to make this change? Does their activism remind you of other protest movements? Do you or could you see this sort of community organizing where you live? What might it look like?

