

TEACHING GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

READING LEVEL: GRADES 4-5 • INTEREST LEVEL: GRADES 4-8 • 32 PAGES

# READ WOKE™ BOOKS

Developed in partnership with **Cicely Lewis** the Read Woke Librarian

## FIVE PILLARS OF READ WOKE BOOKS

Inspired by the belief that knowledge is power, Read Woke Books are grounded by five pillars. Read Woke Books seek to:

1. Amplify the voices of people of the global majority\*
2. Provide information about groups that have been disenfranchised
3. Share perspectives of people who have been underrepresented or oppressed
4. Challenge social norms and disrupt the status quo
5. Encourage readers to take action in their community

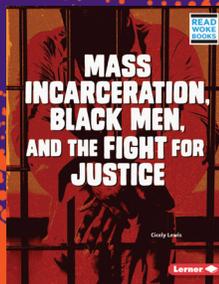
\*People of the global majority is an affirming and empowering term that has been embraced by many people to describe the majority of the world who are people of African, Arab, Asian, and Latin American descent and identify as not white. Read more: I'm Embracing the Term "People of the Global Majority" (<https://regenerative.medium.com/im-embracing-the-term-people-of-the-global-majority-abd1c1251241>)

I created **Read Woke Books** because I want our students to be knowledgeable, compassionate citizens. They need to be equipped with knowledge so they can treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve. And in return, they will be treated with respect.

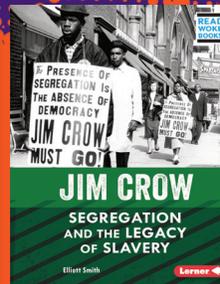
When students learn how history impacts our lives today, they can take part in changes to make our world a better place for all.

*Cicely Lewis*

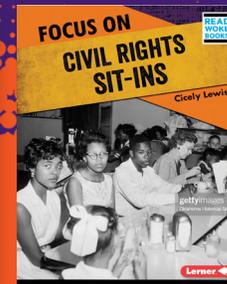
—Cicely Lewis, Executive Editor



**Issues in Action**  
(6 Book Series)  
Released August 2021



**American Slavery and the Fight for Freedom**  
(6 Book Series)  
Released January 2022



**History in Pictures**  
(6 Book Series)  
Coming August 2022

This guide was created by **Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul**, educator, author, founder of Red Clay Educators, host of the Black Creators Series, and cofounder of the Institute for Racial Equity in Literacy.

Visit [lernerbooks.com/readwoke](https://lernerbooks.com/readwoke) for book lists and resources

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# PREPARATION

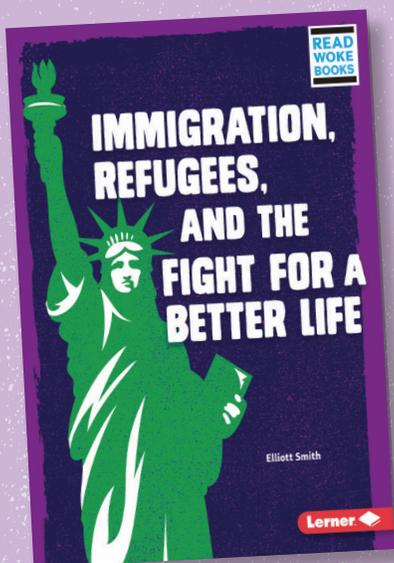
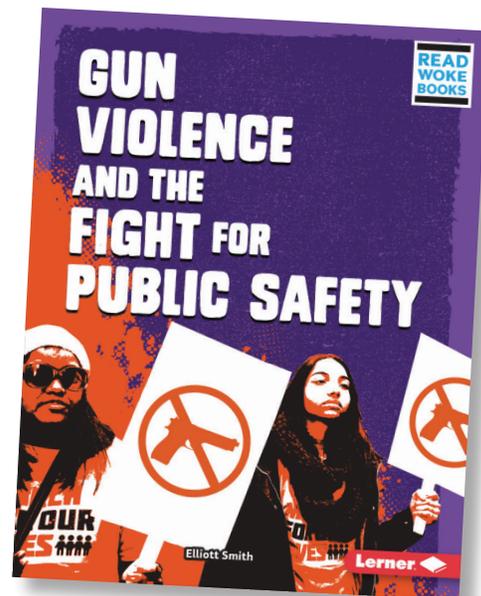
## NOTES TO EDUCATORS

Read Woke Books inform students about some of the most challenging topics and issues in United States history and society. When these texts are read and discussed in classrooms, a powerful learning experience is created for students to develop their sociopolitical consciousness. Students will be able to identify larger sociocultural factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and their complex intersections operating within systems that create and uphold these issues and that impact their lives. As students read books from any of the Read Woke™ Books series, they will learn to analyze the world around them. Classroom instruction and discussions will further help students to recognize systems that perpetuate inequities and to become well-positioned to confront and disrupt them.

**AN IMPORTANT WAY to begin is through careful reflection of instructional practices. CONSIDER:**

- What knowledge and tools do I need in order to further my own racial consciousness?
- What opportunities have I created for conversations about challenging topics?
- How have I helped students to develop skills for analyzing and interrogating systems of oppression?

It is essential for educators to interrogate their own biases and to continually develop their own sociopolitical consciousness. And it is critical that this intentional, parallel work occurs while providing students with language and lenses to discuss pressing societal issues in America.



## LEAN INTO THE FIVE PILLARS OF READ WOKE

As educators read and discuss Read Woke Books with students, they might create a chart that is displayed and/or made accessible to all students. The following essential questions can be added to the chart to support further inquiry of each pillar as students read about and discuss the topics in each text. A sample chart is included on page 3 of this guide.

- Who is centered in this text?
- What has been the impact of this issue on groups of people who have been historically oppressed?
- In what ways does it matter to learn about and from those who are underrepresented and/or most impacted by an issue?
- Who (or what) benefits from maintaining social norms and the status quo?
- What actions have been and can be taken by individuals and communities to create change? How might you take action in your community?

# FIVE PILLARS OF READ WOKE

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Read Woke Books Seek to:	Ask Yourself:	Responses:
Amplify the voices of people of the global majority*	Who is centered in this text?	
Provide information about groups that have been disenfranchised	What has been the impact of this issue on groups of people who have been historically oppressed?	
Share perspectives of people who have been underrepresented or oppressed	Why is it important to learn <i>about</i> and to learn <i>from</i> people who are most affected by an issue?	
Challenge social norms and disrupt the status quo	Who (or what) benefits from maintaining social norms and the status quo?	
Encourage readers to take action in their community	What actions have been and can be taken by individuals and communities to create change? How might you take action in your community?	

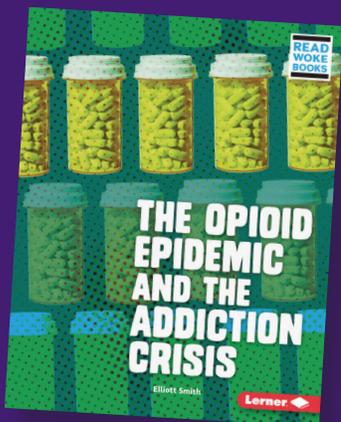
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# PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Silences around challenging topics and issues can occur not only in schools, but at home as well. It is important to know that children want opportunities to ask questions about pressing issues and to learn more about them. It's also important to realize that children are perceptive. They are aware and have knowledge about the world around them.

**REFUSING TO HELP them develop deeper understandings can cause them to INSTEAD DEVELOP MISUNDERSTANDINGS.**

Parents and caregivers can read the Issues in Action series themselves to recognize strategies for discussing hard topics with children. Then, read these books together with children and use the resources in this guide to support further conversations and learning.



## ESTABLISH COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Too often certain topics, like race and racism, have been silenced in classrooms when in fact, students *want* spaces to learn and discuss issues that impact their daily lives. If we truly believe in our students as changemakers who will transform our society, providing opportunities for such work is critical.

Work with students to create conditions for brave and safe discussions about tough topics. Establishing community agreements can help nurture classroom environments where powerful and productive discussions can thrive.

**There are several free resources that can support educators in this work.**

- **Learning for Justice** (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>) offers support for facilitating critical conversations with students.
- **Facing History Facing Ourselves** (<https://www.facinghistory.org/back-to-school-2019/teaching-toolkit/classroom-contracts/>) provides guidance for creating a classroom contract that supports students as they grapple with challenging ideas during discussions.
- **Mindful Schools** (<https://www.mindfulschools.org/inspiration/creating-a-safe-container-student-community-agreements/>) provides prompts and guidance for co-constructing agreements with students with the goal of maintaining caring connections within a class community.

Establishing community agreements can contribute to *all students* feeling supported in conversations about challenging issues.

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## ACKNOWLEDGE AND ADDRESS TRAUMA

Consider how conversations about issues and inequities can affect students and work to mitigate harm. Work with school counselors to learn about students in your classroom that may particularly be impacted by the topics addressed in Read Woke Books series. You may want to speak with some students in advance to let them know when a specific topic will be discussed in your classroom. Discuss ways a student may prefer to participate, including the choice not to engage in discussions. Giving advance notice and respecting students' wishes is vital to building trust and creating an environment where all students can thrive.

When using additional resources with Read Woke Books, avoid images and videos that are trauma-inducing. Additionally, learn the signs of trauma, its impact on students, and teaching practices that support students.

- **Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative** (<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>) provides resources, and best practices for cultivating trauma-sensitive classrooms and schools.
- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network** ([https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing\\_race\\_and\\_trauma\\_in\\_the\\_classroom\\_educators.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing_race_and_trauma_in_the_classroom_educators.pdf)) helps educators address the intersection of race and trauma in the classroom.

# AFFIRMING STUDENTS' IDENTITIES

Conversations about identities are powerful. They help educators to truly know their students and encourage classroom communities to develop strong bonds. Solidifying these relationships will create ideal conditions for having challenging and courageous conversations. Prior to reading any of the Read Woke™ Books series, reflect on whether your classroom has been an identity-inspiring or identity-silencing space.

**CONSIDER:** *Are students able to bring their full selves to the classroom? How are identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender discussed? In what ways are the dynamic lives of students centered and affirmed?*

To create an entry point to discussions about race and to help make conversations about identities commonplace, invite students to create identity maps or webs.

*In Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension*, educator and author Sara K. Ahmed describes identity webs as “personal graphic tools that help us consider the many factors that shape who we are.”

Modeling this is key. Sharing your own identity map can be an invitation for students to include both their personal identifiers (such as favorite music, food, sports, etc.) as well as social identities (race, ethnicity, religion, etc.).

For example, you might show your identity map and say, “Some of my identities are that I am . . .” and intentionally name race, gender, occupation, familial relationships, and more. Then explain, “We bring each of our identities to every text we read, and our identities influence our understandings of a text.”

“They can help us to perceive more in a text, particularly when we share identities and experiences with the characters and people being written about. And our identities can help us to recognize our limited understandings about the lived experiences of others. We’ll want to remain alert to this as we read all texts.”

It is important to note that inviting students to share and discuss their identities is truly an invitation, not a requirement. When students feel safe and comfortable to do so, they will. Also, this work is fluid. Returning to identity maps regularly can inspire students to make additions and revisions as they see fit, and students can be guided to think about which of their identities they are more alert to as they read a text and to consider why that is.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PREPARING TO TEACH READ WOKE™ BOOKS

**Talking about Race: Whiteness | National Museum of African American History & Culture**  
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>

**Racial Equity and Literacy with Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul and Tricia Ebarvia**  
<https://blog.heinemann.com/podcast-racial-equity-literacy-with-dr-sonja-cherry-paul-and-tricia-ebarvia>

**Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul: Using ‘Stamped (For Kids)’ to Have Age-Appropriate Discussions About Race**  
<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/57757/dr-sonja-cherry-paul-using-stamped-for-kids-to-have-age-appropriate-discussions-about-race>

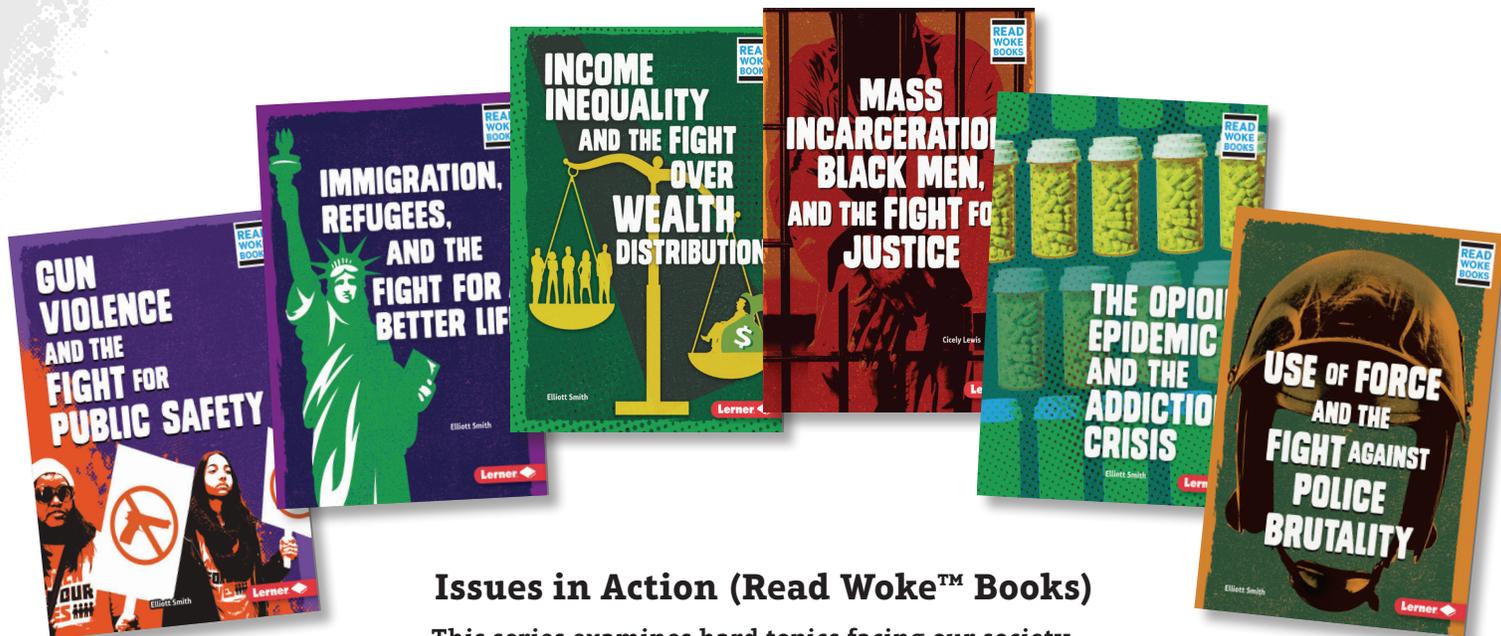
**Dismantling Racism in Education Podcast**  
<https://blog.heinemann.com/the-heinemann-podcast-dismantling-racism-in-education>

**Beyond Quick Fixes to Racial Injustice in Education Podcast**  
<https://blog.heinemann.com/podcast-dismantling-racism-in-education-preview-social-justice-saturday-2018>

**What Is Read Woke™?**  
<http://www.readwoke.com>

**Read Woke NONFICTION Webinar: A Panel Discussion with Carole Boston Weatherford, Cicely Lewis, Elliott Smith, and Dr. Artika Tyner**  
<https://www.slj.com/?event=read-woke-nonfiction-a-panel-discussion-with-carole-boston-weatherford-cicely-lewis-elliott-smith-and-dr-artika-tyner>

# ABOUT THE ISSUES IN ACTION SERIES



## Issues in Action (Read Woke™ Books)

This series examines hard topics facing our society—from gun violence to immigration. Readers will learn how problems developed and hear from underrepresented persons involved in these struggles. Reflection questions help readers challenge their perspectives, while an activism toolkit and a Read Woke reading list empower readers to make a difference.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### CICELY LEWIS

is the librarian at Meadowcreek High School in Norcross, GA; the founder of the Read Woke movement; and the author and executive editor for the Read Woke™ Books program from Lerner Publishing Group. Her first book, *Mass Incarceration, Black Men, and the Fight for Justice*, from the Issues in Action series, received a starred review from *Booklist*. She's also written two titles in future sets of Read Woke Books.



### ELLIOTT SMITH

is a freelance writer and author of children's books, adult books, and numerous articles on sports, entertainment, travel, and history topics. He wrote five titles in the inaugural Issues in Action series in the Read Woke Books brand. He's also written five titles in the *American Slavery and the Fight for Freedom* series, which will be released in January 2022, and additional titles in the *History in Pictures* series coming in August 2022.

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## ISSUES IN ACTION SERIES

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### USING THIS GUIDE IN CLASSROOMS

This guide provides pathways for teaching the Issues in Action series in ways that help students to learn more about hard topics and examine challenging issues in United States society. Educators can decide to teach these books in any order that best fits the needs of their students and curriculum.

There are several instructional approaches educators may take and there are compelling reasons why educators may decide one approach over another as they consider the needs of their students as well as factors such as access to materials and time.

- **Read Aloud:** Educators might read aloud all of the text to students, projecting images, passages, and specific sections—such as the timeline—using a document camera or using an eBook format of the book.
- **Shared Reading:** Educators might read part of the text to energize students about the topic, setting the tone for the reading and learning that will ensue, and then turn over some of the reading to students individually or in partnerships or small groups, repeating this process until the book is completed.
- **Read Excerpts:** Educators may determine to read or assign excerpts of the text as part of a specific nonfiction lesson or unit.
- **Reading Partners/Groups/Clubs:** Educators may organize students into reading partnerships, small groups, or clubs to read and discuss the text.

Each book is concise, making it possible for students to read them in one class period. However, educators can invite students to continue discussions and to engage in further exploration about the topic across several days.

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### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The discussion prompts are designed to support and deepen students' understandings. Educators may invite students to respond to these prompts in writing first, as a way of processing their learning and developing their ideas, and then share their thinking with peers. Discussion prompts may spark thinking and conversations that branch into multiple directions. Be sure to encourage this as the topics and issues they will be learning about are not simple, but instead, complex and multilayered.

### LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

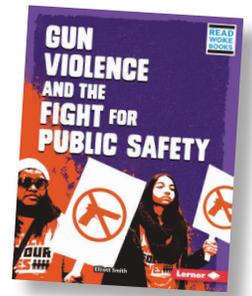
Learning explorations invite students to explore a topic and issue further, extend their learning, and make additional connections to events past as well as those that are present in their lives today. Educators might provide time for students to engage in this work in the classroom or invite students to do so at home.

Providing students with a choice in which learning exploration to try can increase their engagement. This work can be done individually, in partnerships, as a small group, or even as part of a whole-class community experience.

It is important to review digital resources in advance of assigning them to students to make sure they work for the particular students in the classroom in terms of level and content.

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

ISSUES IN ACTION: GUN VIOLENCE AND THE FIGHT FOR PUBLIC SAFETY BY ELLIOTT SMITH



Among similar countries, the United States has a unique problem with gun violence. Gun-related deaths and injuries happen at high rates every year. Debates over how to reduce gun violence center around defining Second Amendment rights, different ideas of freedom, and which reforms to enact. Learn how organizations and governments are working to stop gun violence; which laws, regulations, and technology could effect change; and how young activists are fighting for public safety.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Letter from Cicely Lewis

Read and discuss the Letter from Cicely Lewis at the beginning of this text. Lewis writes: "As you turn these pages, learn about how history has impacted the things we do today. Hopefully you can be the change that helps to make our world a better place for all."

- In what ways can learning about the past help you today and also in the future?
- What does being a changemaker mean to you?

### Voices for Change

- Why do you think so many young activists are advocating for gun reform?

### Chapter 1: National Plague

- There are more guns than people in the United States. What does this say about what the country values?
- Statistics show that the more guns in a state, the more gun-related violence and death occurs. Fewer guns in a state result in lower gun death rates. What then are the implications about solutions for gun violence?
- In the Finding Solutions section, Smith writes, "While the US deals with a serious gun violence issue, other countries have taken steps to reduce guns' impact" (p. 9). Why do you think the United States is so resistant to gun control as compared to other countries?

### Chapter 2: Political Battle

- Reflect: "Do you believe everyone has the right to own a gun? Why or why not?" (p. 13)
- Discuss the conflict and consequences of politicians benefiting financially from campaign supporters. What influence does this have on lawmakers and laws?
- What are some of the additional factors to be considered in creating comprehensive gun laws?

### Chapter 3: Society and Violence

- In what ways are systemic racism, domestic violence, and white supremacy made worse by guns?

## Chapter 4: A Safer America

- What are the goals of commonsense gun law reforms? Discuss some of the approaches individuals and organizations have taken to achieve this.
- In the Smart Gun Tech section Smith writes, “Researchers are developing ways to make guns safer” (p. 21). What possible technologies would help reduce gun violence?
- Reflect: “What laws do you think should be passed to help end gun violence?” (p. 22)
- Smith writes, “About 60 percent of Americans say they want stricter gun laws” (p. 23). What actions can these Americans take to ensure that the laws of the US represent the changes they want to see in the country?

### Take Action

- Review and discuss the various ways you can take action to stop gun violence on pages 24 and 25. Which actions are those you have taken or plan to take? What actions might you add to this list?

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# LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

## Young Activists for Gun Control

The tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018 changed the lives of students forever. Learn more about X. González, formerly known as Emma González, and how survivors of this shooting—along with other young people around the nation—have channeled fear and pain into activism in these two articles: **Emma González on Why This Generation Needs Gun Control** (<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/emma-gonzalez-parkland-gun-control-cover>) **Gun Violence Will Be Stopped By These 9 Young Activists** (<https://www.teenvogue.com/gallery/meet-gun-control-cover-stars>)

- As expressed in the articles, what are the various ways young people are working to end gun violence?

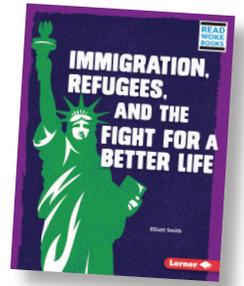
## #NeverAgain—Social Media and Activism

Learn about the #NeverAgain Movement started in 2018 and the role of technology—specifically social media—in the fight for social justice: **What Makes #NeverAgain Different?** (<https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000005761059/student-protests-neveragain-parkland.html>)

- How important do you believe social media is to young people who are interested in activism?
- In what ways is social media an effective tool in advocacy and activism?
- Even as technology plays an important role in activism, what is critical to understand about the role of people in movements?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

ISSUES IN ACTION: IMMIGRATION REFUGEES AND THE FIGHT FOR A BETTER LIFE BY ELLIOTT SMITH



Throughout history and into the modern day, people have moved from place to place to flee danger and seek out better lives. But immigrants and refugees often meet harsh realities on their journeys. Learn about immigration and refugee resettlement within the United States and throughout the world. Follow both historical and recent large migrations, understand the challenges of life in a new country, and see how activists fight for immigrants' and refugees' rights.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Letter from Cicely Lewis

Read and discuss the Letter from Cicely Lewis at the beginning of this text. Lewis writes: "As you turn these pages, learn about how history has impacted the things we do today. Hopefully you can be the change that helps to make our world a better place for all."

- In what ways can learning about the past help you today and also in the future?
- What does being a changemaker mean to you?

### No Place to Go

- Discuss what you know about immigration in the United States, past and present.
- What are you noticing about how US laws and policies can disregard the humanity and basic needs of people?

### Chapter 1: A Land of Dreams

- Smith writes, "The US has a long history of immigrations. Many come in search of the American Dream, the idea that anyone can succeed with enough hard work" (p. 9). In what ways is the American Dream narrative a myth? What are some of the barriers to achieving the American Dream that many immigrants have faced and continue to face today?

### Chapter 2: A National Issue

- Smith writes, "Both legal and illegal immigration are difficult processes. Racism often influences who gains citizenship or asylum" (p. 11). How fair or just can US immigration policies be when racism influences who can and who cannot immigrate to the United States?
- Words matter. Immigration activists have called for the use of the term "undocumented" rather than "illegal." Why is it important to be intentional about language? How does such intentionality help us keep humanity at the center of issues like immigration?
- Reflect: "How do you think the media reinforces stereotypes of immigrants, and how might those stereotypes lead to prejudice?" (p. 12)

### Chapter 3: A Global Crisis

- Discuss some of the complex reasons people flee their homes in search of safety. Smith writes, "[Some] refugees are met with hostility" (p. 15). What are some of the complex reasons why refugees and immigrants aren't always welcomed?
- The section "At Greater Risk" spotlights the particular challenge that women in shelters and refugee camps face. In what ways do social identities such as race, gender, and class result in people experiencing different levels of oppression and discrimination as they seek safety in another country?

## Chapter 4: A Better Tomorrow

- Discuss your understanding of the difference between inhumane and humane actions and behaviors.
- In what ways is separating children from their parents in detention centers an example of an inhumane action?
- Reflect: “How could countries work together to create a network of safe places for refugees?” (p. 22)

### Take Action

- Review and discuss the various ways you can take action to support immigrants and refugees on pages 26 and 27. Which actions are those you have taken or plan to take? What actions might you add to this list?

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# LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

## Listening to the Voices of Immigrants

Engage with these two videos and learn about the lived experiences of two people who immigrated to the United States:

**Standing with Immigrants: The Original Dreamers** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pp4dufuwAmc>)

**Define American: Jose’s Story** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJH1IKqF8PA>)

- In what ways do these videos challenge the dominant narrative about immigrants and immigration in the United States?
- In what ways can the dominant narrative cause students who are immigrants to develop a deficit mindset about themselves and their identities?
- In what ways can people become allies and advocates of undocumented immigrants?

## Creating Counternarratives about Immigrants

Watch Lin Manuel Miranda’s impressionistic, stylized music video of the song, “Immigrants (We Get The Job Done),” from the Broadway smash *Hamilton*: **The *Hamilton* Mixtape: Immigrants (We Get the Job Done)** ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_35a7sn6ds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_35a7sn6ds))

- In what ways does this counternarrative challenge the dominant narrative about immigrants?
- Why is it important to create counternarratives about immigrants?
- How does this text speak to the resilience of immigrants and affirm their importance in the world?

## The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

Working collaboratively and in solidarity with groups of people was a cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement.

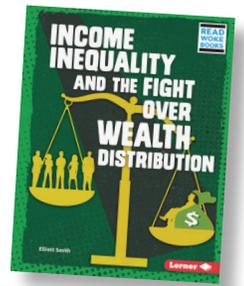
Noted legislative achievements included the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965. Learn more about this

important legislation from these two resources: **Civil Rights and Immigration History Connected** (<https://apnews.com/article/5b3a2295a46c4a408f04f7adf50b315f>) **1965 Immigration and Nationality Act** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivnWXxiKERs>)

- In what ways did Black activists of the Civil Rights Movement work to remove racial barriers not only for Black people?
- How did this legislation open the door to the United States for immigrants other than white, European immigrants?
- What are the advantages of working collaboratively and in solidarity with groups of people?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

INCOME INEQUALITY AND THE FIGHT OVER WEALTH DISTRIBUTION BY ELLIOTT SMITH



In America, the amount of money people earn for doing the same job isn't always equal. The United States only recently made it illegal to pay men more than women for the same job, and the country's history of racism has created big wealth gaps between white and Black people that persist in the twenty-first century. Learn how income inequality originated, why it is a problem, and the ways people are fighting for an equal playing field.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Letter from Cicely Lewis

Read and discuss the Letter from Cicely Lewis at the beginning of this text. Lewis writes: "As you turn these pages, learn about how history has impacted the things we do today. Hopefully you can be the change that helps to make our world a better place for all."

- In what ways can learning about the past help you today and also in the future?
- What does being a changemaker mean to you?

### Equal Playing Field

The gender pay gap spans almost every industry, but in sports in particular, there are vast discrepancies.

- What message does it send to women when they are paid significantly less than men in professional sports, even in circumstances when they perform better?

### Chapter 1: Few vs. Many

The graph on page 8 shows the income gap between the richest people in the United States and those earning significantly less income from 1978 to 2018.

- What are the consequences of 1% of people having the majority of wealth in US society?
- What are the benefits of everyone being able to participate in the larger economy?
- Reflect: Why do you think the gap between rich and poor people in the US has grown in the past forty years?

### Chapter 2: Gender Gap

- How does the lack of transparency about salaries in the workplace further the pay gap between women and men?
- In what ways does the intersection of race and gender result in people experiencing different levels of inequities when it comes to pay and income?

### Chapter 3: Color of Money

- In what ways have policies and laws prevented Black people from accumulating generational wealth? What impact does this have on Black people today?
- In the "ABCs of Money" section, Smith writes, "Money often plays a role in education. In the US, school funding is linked to local property taxes. As a result, schools in more affluent areas often receive more funding than those in poor or rural areas" (p. 17). How can unlinking school funding to local property taxes bring greater economic opportunities to all children, particularly those who have been historically disenfranchised?
- What responsibility does the nation have to repair harms of the past that continue to impact people's lives today?

## Chapter 4: Closing the Gap

- How can the interest of all in a society be met if only those who have the most wealth have the power to determine the laws? What might be part of the solution to income inequality?
- Reflect: “What would you do to help reduce income inequality?” (p. 23)

### Take Action

- Review and discuss the various ways you can take action to support immigrants and refugees on pages 26 and 27. Which actions are those you have taken or plan to take? What actions might you add to this list?

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# LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

## Equal Pay Day

Learn about the Equal Pay Day Campaign and the strategies used to close the gender wage gap for all women:

**Equal Pay Today!** (<http://www.equalpaytoday.org>)

- What is the Equal Pay Day Campaign?
- How does this campaign spotlight income inequality for various groups of women?
- What work does this campaign do to close the gender pay gap?

## Generational Wealth

Wealth is significantly unequally distributed in the United States. Black households have a fraction of the wealth of white households. Learn about the factors that contribute to such disproportionality of wealth: **How Property Law Is Used to Appropriately Black Land** ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Is3P\\_Fic07I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Is3P_Fic07I)) **Racial Wealth Gap May Be a Key to Other Inequities** (<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/06/racial-wealth-gap-may-be-a-key-to-other-inequities/>)

- In what ways has systemic racism hindered Black people from achieving generational wealth?
- How have white people benefited from the racial wealth gap?
- What are the consequences for Black families?
- What actions can be taken to dismantle conditions that create the racial wealth gap?

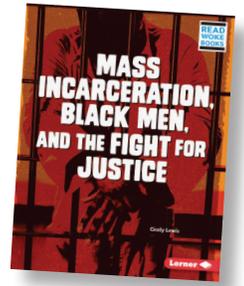
## Occupy Wall Street

Consider what the Occupy Wall Street Movement accomplished and the work that continues in the United States and globally to disrupt the economic status quo. Watch these two videos: **99% v 1%: The Data Behind the Occupy Movement | Guardian Animations** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxvVZe2fnvI>) **“Another World Is Possible”: How Occupy Wall Street Reshaped Politics, Kicked Off New Era of Protest** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9X6HDU4Nii>)

- What are some of the conditions that led people to start the Occupy Wall Street Movement?
- What were the goals of Occupy Wall Street protestors?
- What did the Occupy Wall Street Movement accomplish?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## MASS INCARCERATION, BLACK MEN, AND THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE BY CICELY LEWIS



In the United States, Black men are almost six times more likely to be imprisoned than white men. This disproportionate impact can be traced back to slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the criminalization of Black people into the modern day. With growing awareness about unfair treatment in the justice system, more and more people are calling for change. Read more about the history and causes of mass incarceration and how activists are reforming and rethinking justice.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Letter from Cicely Lewis

Read and discuss the Letter from Cicely Lewis at the beginning of this text. Lewis writes: “I hope this book can help bring reform to our justice system and save a family from the pain my family has suffered. I hope it helps you as a reader to better understand the effects of mass incarceration.”

- What does it mean to reform?
- What do you know about the mass incarceration system and calls for it to be reformed?

### Freed for Life

- Review the graph: Rate of Imprisonment per 100,000 by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity (p. 5). What problematic assumptions about groups of people can be made based on this data? What important questions should be asked about the US justice system and imprisonment?

### Chapter 1: From Slavery to Prison

- Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative says: “The United States has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation on Earth...central to understanding this practice of mass incarceration and excessive punishment is the legacy of slavery” (p. 8). Discuss the ways enslavement of the past has evolved into imprisonment of the present in the United States. In what ways have “practices and laws continued the legacy of slavery”? (p. 10)

### Chapter 2: Unfair Sentences

- Policies such as the War on Drugs were a way to “criminalize and control Black people” (p. 12). Discuss the different approaches toward Black people and white people that the US government, the justice system, and media have taken over drug usage. Compare the War on Drugs to the opioid crisis. In what ways is race a factor in how people are treated? How has this impacted incarceration rates?
- Discuss the connection between mass incarceration and voting. Consider how injustices create systems of oppression.

### Chapter 3: The School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Discuss the factors and conditions that create the school-to-prison pipeline. In what ways is the school-to-prison pipeline strengthened?
- What can you notice in your own life and schooling experiences that are examples of the factors and conditions that contribute to the school-to-prison-pipeline?
- Reflect: “What could schools do to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline?” (p. 19)

## Chapter 4: The Call to Abolish Prisons

- Today, laws have been written to remove penalties for marijuana possession and to legalize marijuana. What actions should the legal system take regarding the mostly Black people who are still imprisoned for marijuana possession and usage? What action should the legal system take on behalf of those who still suffer the consequences of being imprisoned?
- In what ways can prison reform benefit all members of society? What might be some of the pros and cons of prison abolishment?
- What does it mean to make reparations? What are some of the compelling reasons why people advocate for reparations for Black Americans?
- Reflect: “When someone hurts you, how do you want them to fix it?” (p. 23)

### Take Action

- Review and discuss the various ways you can take action to fight mass incarceration on pages 26 and 27. Which actions are those you have taken or plan to take? What actions might you add to this list?

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# LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

## Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass escaped enslavement and was a leader in the abolitionist movement. Although the United States is capable of change, the legacies of slavery continue to be a tremendous struggle. Listen to the descendants of Frederick Douglass deliver his speech: **‘What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July?’: Descendants Read Frederick Douglass’ Speech | NPR** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBe5qbnkqoM>)

- What lessons can be learned from this speech given by Douglass on July 5, 1852, that can still be applied today?
- Why might some Americans hesitate to celebrate on July 4 while others celebrate proudly?

## Juneteenth

In 2021, President Biden signed a bill making June 19, Juneteenth, a federal holiday. Learn more about Juneteenth and its importance in American history: **Juneteenth | National Museum of African American History and Culture** (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/events/juneteenth>)

- What is Juneteenth and why is it important?
- In what ways is it an example of the resilience of Black Americans?

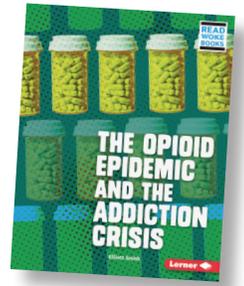
## Bryan Stevenson

In this TED talk, Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice initiative, says: “[We] have in this country this dynamic where we really don’t like to talk about our problems. We don’t like to talk about our history. And because of that, we really haven’t understood what it’s meant to do the things we’ve done historically. We’re constantly running into each other. We’re constantly creating tensions and conflicts. We have a hard time talking about race, and I believe it’s because we are unwilling to commit ourselves to a process of truth and reconciliation.” Learn more about Stevenson and his work on criminal justice reform: **Bryan Stevenson: We Need to Talk about and Injustice** ([https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan\\_stevenson\\_we\\_need\\_to\\_talk\\_about\\_an\\_injustice](https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice))

- What is the connection between identity, humanity, and justice?
- What actions would demonstrate that the nation is willing to commit to “a process of truth and reconciliation”?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC AND THE ADDICTION CRISIS BY ELLIOTT SMITH



The US has seen an alarming rise in the numbers of people addicted to and overdosing on opioid drugs, including oxycodone, codeine, fentanyl, and heroin. Learn about the history of the opioid crisis, the science behind addiction, and how people help those in danger.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Letter from Cicely Lewis

Read and discuss the Letter from Cicely Lewis at the beginning of this text. Lewis writes: “As you turn these pages, learn about how history has impacted the things we do today. Hopefully you can be the change that helps to make our world a better place for all.”

- In what ways can learning about the past help you today and also in the future?
- What does being a changemaker mean to you?

### Back on Track

- Discuss the experiences of Cortney and Eminem. What are you learning about how challenging it is to overcome an opioid addiction?

### Chapter 1: What Are Opioids?

- How do opioids work? Why are they so addictive?
- Discuss the cycle of addiction. What happens to the body on and off opioids that makes it difficult to break the cycle of use?

### Chapter 2: Nationwide Worry

- Smith writes, “The daily opioid use rate in the US is one daily dose for every twenty people, much higher than in other countries” (p. 12). Why do you think more opioids are prescribed in the US?
- In what ways does systemic racism, poverty, and feeling of hopelessness contribute to the opioid crisis?
- Reflect: “Why do you think doctors and pharmacists gave out so many opioid pills? How might medical professionals help with the current crisis?” (p. 16)

### Chapter 3: The Toll on Kids

- In addition to trying to overcome addiction themselves, what are other ways children are affected by the opioid crisis?
- What can schools do to educate children about opioid addiction and support children navigating this crisis in their lives?

### Chapter 4: Helping Hands

- In what ways are activists working to solve the opioid crisis?
- Reflect: “What are some steps our government can take to help those with opioid addictions?” (p. 23)

## Take Action

- Review and discuss the various ways you can take action to help with the opioid crisis on pages 24 and 25. Which actions are those you have taken or plan to take? What actions might you add to this list?
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# LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

## Substance Abuse

Learn more about substance abuse and its impact on a person's brain and actions: **Substance Abuse BrainPOP**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRfvPKiyV7M>)

- Discuss the question posed at the start of the video. What's the difference between using a drug and abusing it?
- What are some things you can do if you think a peer has a drug abuse problem?

## Understanding Addiction and the Impact on Young People

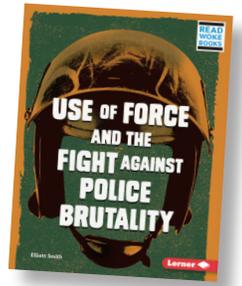
Meet some of the scientists who study addiction and the impact of opioids on the body, and learn about their work:

**Addiction & the Brain—For Kids!** ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0bqT\\_hxMwl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0bqT_hxMwl))

- Discuss the ways the brain is affected by drug usage. Why is it important for young people to know about this?
- One powerful way to fight drug addiction is prevention. What are some ways young people can prevent and be protected from addiction?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

USE OF FORCE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY BY ELLIOTT SMITH



In the spring and summer of 2020, several high-profile cases put a renewed spotlight on law enforcement's use of force in the United States, especially against Black people. Activist groups such as Black Lives Matter demanded accountability for police and justice for victims of police violence. Read about the history of police brutality in the US, the role of technology in police accountability, and community movements calling for changes to police training, equipment, and funding.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Letter from Cicely Lewis

Read and discuss the Letter from Cicely Lewis at the beginning of this text. Lewis writes: "As you turn these pages, learn about how history has impacted the things we do today. Hopefully you can be the change that helps to make our world a better place for all."

- In what ways can learning about the past help you today and also in the future?
- What does being a changemaker mean to you?

### Tragic Summer

- Smith writes, "The spring and summer of 2020 put a spotlight on police brutality in the United States. Several high-profile cases of police brutality led to serious injury and death" (p. 4). What are you aware of regarding police brutality? Why do you think it has been so challenging to talk about this issue?

### Chapter 1: Abuse of Power

- Discuss mantras and mottos such as "To Serve and Protect" and "Justice is Blind." What do they mean? In what ways do systems such as policing and the legal system live up to this promise and/or break it?
- In what ways might police officers be unprepared and ill-prepared to respond to the various situations they encounter in their jobs?
- In the Police or Military? section, Smith writes, "In many places officers don't wear blue but look like soldiers in military-style outfits. They use powerful weapons and armored vehicles. Critics point out that a wartime mindset doesn't help with policing the community" (p. 10). In what ways do you think a police officer's uniform/outfit sets a tone for how they interact with citizens and how the public responds to them?

### Chapter 2: History of Violence

- Discuss what you're learning about the history of policing in the United States.
- Can a system that was never created to serve all members of society, and in fact, was developed specifically to oppress some, ever be fair?
- Reflect: "Have you ever felt scared of the police? If you haven't, can you understand why someone else might?" (p. 14)

### Chapter 3: In Plain Sight

- Body cameras were implemented under the pretense of providing greater transparency about police altercations with the public. Smith writes that body cam footage is "made public only 40 percent of the time" (p. 17). Why do you think that is? How effective is body cam footage in rooting out poor policing, particularly if it isn't made transparent to the public 100 percent of the time?

## Chapter 4: Demanding Change

- Many activists have called for defunding the police. In the Defunding the Police section Smith explains, “Many intend the phrase to mean shifting money away from police departments and into other government agencies and services instead” (p. 21). How might shifting resources away from police departments and toward organizations and services help people in communities?
- Smith writes, “Other reforms focus on job standards. There are no universal requirements to become a police officer. In some states, becoming a barber requires more training than becoming a police officer” (p. 22). What might increasing job standards include? How might this affect relationships between the police and the communities they serve?

### Take Action

- Review and discuss the various ways you can take action to help against police brutality on pages 24 and 25. Which actions are those you have taken or plan to take? What actions might you add to this list?

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# LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

## Athletes and Activism

Basketball player LeBron James says, “We are scared as Black people in America. Black men, Black women, Black kids, we are terrified” (p. 15). Black athletes, past and present, have used their platform to speak out about police brutality. As a result, they have faced consequences that have impacted their careers and their lives. Learn more about the reasons why athletes feel compelled to do so in these videos: \***Colin Kaepernick Timeline: From Protests to a Nike Campaign** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwlopXMTzS4>) **Kwame Alexander: Take a Knee** ([https://www.espn.com/video/clip/\\_/id/18597971](https://www.espn.com/video/clip/_/id/18597971))

- What does it mean to protest? What rights do people have to peacefully protest in the United States? Who gets to decide?
- What reasons does Kaepernick offer for taking a knee during the National Anthem?
- What consequences did he experience for peacefully protesting? How are these consequences examples of institutional racism?
- How does multiple award-winning, *New York Times* best-selling children’s author and poet Kwame Alexander challenge us to understand the Take a Knee protests with empathy and humanity?

\*The term “son-of-a-bitch” is used in this video, in a quote from former President Donald Trump. Educators should determine if this language is right for their learners and/or whether to skip this section. The following article from *Time* magazine could be used as an additional or alternative text: **All Across the Country, Athletes Are Fueling a Debate About How America Defines Patriotism** | *TIME* (<https://time.com/magazine/us/4503993/october-3rd-2016-vol-188-no-13-u-s/>)

## Defund the Police

Activists have various ideas about what it means to defund the police. Ideas range from police-free communities that implement transformative models for cultivating safety, to reducing police budgets and increasing budgets to support community issues such as mental health care, poverty, and unemployment, to improving standards for becoming police officers. Access this resource to learn more: **What “Defund the Police” Really Means** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9w841nrIBg>)

- Why is it problematic to have such significant budget disparities between police departments and other services in communities? How does this create the issue of both overpolicing and underpolicing in predominantly Black and poor communities?
- One of the rally cries of protestors at marches and uprisings against police brutality includes the following call and response: One person chants: “Tell me what democracy looks like.” And all of the protestors respond: “This is what democracy looks like.” What does democracy look like to you? Who should have a say in how communities, including schools like yours, are protected?
- If you were to reimagine what safety and protection looks like for you and your community, what is included in your vision?
- How are co-founders and activists of the Black Lives Matter movement leading the efforts to defund the police as part of transforming society into one that is more humane for all?

# PRAISE FOR READ WOKE™ BOOKS

★ “Lerner’s new Read Woke Books brand, created with librarian Lewis, ‘seek[s] to challenge social norms, give voice to the voiceless, provide information about [disenfranchised] groups . . . , disrupt the status quo, and share perspectives from underrepresented or oppressed groups.’ Its Issues in Action series (6 titles) certainly does this. Here, readers get a frank accounting of mass incarceration in the U.S. today and how it disproportionately affects Black people as Lewis traces its roots to slavery, Jim Crow laws and convict leasing programs, Nixon’s War on Drugs and unjust sentencing practices, and the school-to-prison pipeline. The short chapters pack a punch with sentences that make unflinching statements, such as ‘Though slavery ended, white people continued to torture, abuse, and disenfranchise Black people by creating unfair systems.’ Each page features an illustration or quote by a respected expert, and readers wishing to get involved or learn more will appreciate the ‘Take Action’ suggestions and the ‘Read Woke Reading List.’ Though source notes for the many compelling statistics are sadly absent, this remains a strong addition to social-justice collections.”

—starred,

*Booklist for Mass Incarceration, Black Men, and the Fight for Justice*

## Articles

**PW Online:** <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/85855-lerner-publishing-partners-with-read-woke-to-launch-book-series.html>

**School Library Journal Online:** <https://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/story/2020-school-librarian-of-the-year-cicely-lewis-signs-book-deal-with-lerner-books-read-woke>



### ABOUT THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

**CICELY LEWIS** is the executive editor of the new Read Woke™ Books publishing program from

Lerner. A school librarian with a passion for creating lovers of reading, she was named the 2020 National Librarian of the Year by *School Library Journal* and Scholastic, a 2019 *Library Journal* Mover and Shaker and the 2019 National Teacher Award for Lifelong Readers by the National Council of Teachers of English and Penguin Random House. In 2017, she started the Read Woke challenge in response to the shootings of young unarmed black people, the repeal of DACA, and the lack of diversity in young adult literature. She also writes a bi-monthly column in *School Library Journal* where she shares her book recommendations. Connect with her on Twitter @cicelythegreat, Instagram @cicelythegreat, and at [www.readwoke.com](http://www.readwoke.com).



### ABOUT THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPER

**DR. SONJA CHERRY-PAUL** is an educator, author, founder of Red Clay Educators, host of the Black Creators Series,

and cofounder of the Institute for Racial Equity in Literacy. She consults with schools and organizations to advance the work of equity. Sonja writes curriculum that centers the work of antiracism, culturally relevant and sustaining teaching, and racial literacy in K-12 schools. She is a national speaker and leads institutes working with educators around the world providing professional development.

Connect with her on Twitter and Instagram @SonjaCherryPaul and at [SonjaCherryPaul.com](http://SonjaCherryPaul.com).

