

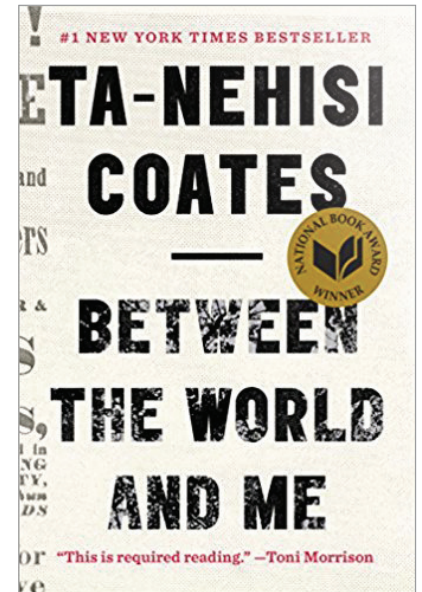


BOOK 1

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

General Questions (for all series books)

1. Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms (positive, negative, or ambiguous) that reminds you of a similar racial reality today? What is it? Does this happen to the same racial/ethnic group as in the book, or different ones (if others, which)? How does seeing history repeat itself affect how you think about America? **Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?**
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3. In every time and situation, there are many diverse roles for people to play in the struggle for racial justice and/or healing. Identify three or more different approaches to working towards positive change in this book. Who does what kind of work? How do gender, age, economic situation, physical ability, personality, and other considerations influence the roles that people take on? What considerations would influence how or whether you would want to take part in social action?





BOOK 1 Additional Questions

4. Coates writes *Between the World and Me* as a letter to his 15-year-old son, following widespread media attention around the police killings of innocent black Americans. These deaths, and the system's routine failure to indict the officers, capture how precarious life still is for black people in the United States. **Why do you think this book about the huge, historically complicated, and highly political question of black/white race relations in America is written as an intimate letter from a parent to his child?** How does it color the story that Coates is trying to tell? Did this approach make you think differently about your own parent(s)/caregiver(s)/child(ren)? If so, how?
5. Early in the book, Coates says that race — including, especially, whiteness — is a “modern invention” (7). What does he mean by this? He goes on to argue that in America, whiteness came into existence and reached a place of special importance through acts of violence against people of color, especially black people (8, 103). **What role does this history of white violence play in the “fear” that Coates says he and so many people in the black community carry with them today (14)?** If this assessment is correct, how is it possible that mainstream images of American whiteness are what Coates calls a “dream” of “perfect houses with nice lawns” and “treehouses and Cub Scouts” (8) instead of oppression and cruelty?
6. While at Howard University, Coates meets many kinds of black people that help him expand his understanding of race and 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 heroism? Do the stories and beliefs associated with your racial/ethnic identity oppress or exclude anybody?** What would it look like to reimagine your community's identity in a more inclusive way?
7. Coates travels outside of America for the first time when he is in his 30s and calls the flight he takes to Europe “a starship” (121). What makes visiting a foreign country like a wonderful 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? If so, how? If not, why not?**



BOOK 2

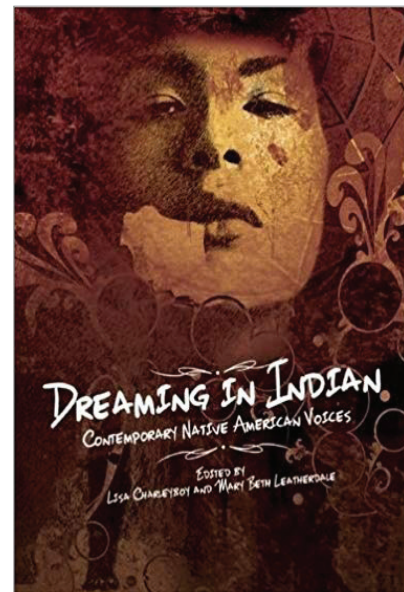
Dreaming in Indian

Contemporary Native American Voices

Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale (eds.)

General Questions (for all series books)

1. Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms (positive, negative, or ambiguous) that reminds you of a similar racial reality today? What is it? Does this happen to the same racial/ethnic group as in the book, or different ones (if others, which)? How does seeing history repeat itself affect how you think about America? **Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?**
2. Find a moment when a character in this book looks to the past in order to find a way to move forward. How does understanding the history of one's family, community, or racial/ethnic group help this character make powerful choices about how to shape the future? Are there ever times when knowledge about the past can hold people back? What is the effect of learning about the histories of racial/ethnic groups other than your own?
3. In every time and situation, there are many diverse roles for people to play in the struggle for racial justice and/or healing. Identify three or more different approaches to working towards positive change in this book. Who does what kind of work? How do gender, age, economic situation, physical ability, personality, and other considerations influence the roles that people take on? What considerations would influence how or whether you would want to take part in social action?





BOOK 2 Additional Questions

4. This collection is called *Dreaming in Indian*, but it includes contributors from a wide range of first nations and indigenous traditions from 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?** How does it affect how you think of our continent to imagine North America as made up of these nations just as much as it is made up of Canada, the United States, and Mexico?
5. Isabelle Knockwood’s piece 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 heritage. In the process, 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 reveal different kinds of information?** For example, compare the essay about Indian residential schools (30-1) with the photos of graffiti on the ruins of a one religious residential school (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? Who do you most wish could see such a piece by and/or about you?**



BOOK 3

Mother of the Sea by Zetta Elliott

General Questions (for all series books)

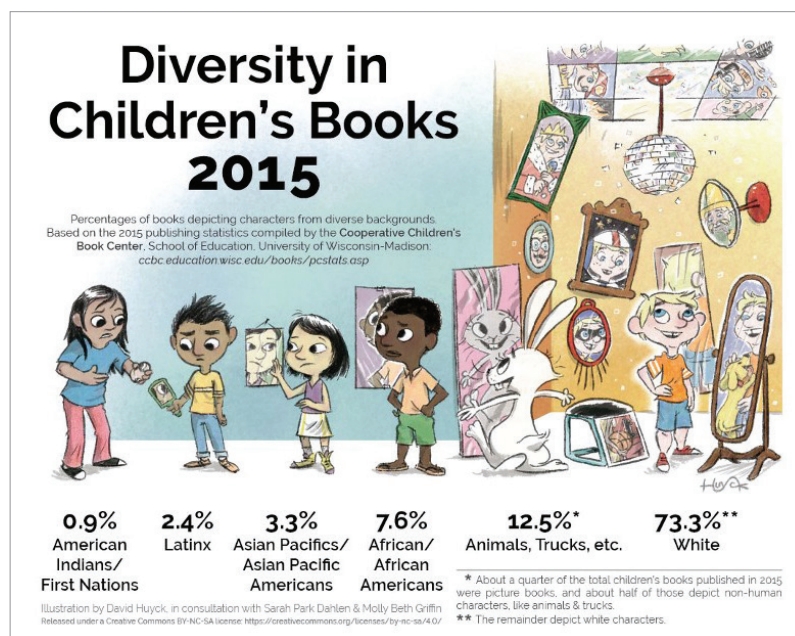
1. Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms (positive, negative, or ambiguous) that reminds you of a similar racial reality today? What is it? Does this happen to the same racial/ethnic group as in the book, or different ones (if others, which)? How does seeing history repeat itself affect how you think about America? **Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?**
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BOOK 3 Additional Questions

4. Zetta Elliott calls *Mother of the Sea* a “mermaid story.” Who do you think are the “mermaids” in this story? (Yemoja, 45-6, and her daughter Eja-keke, “little fish”, perhaps Aduke at the end.) How are they different from the mainstream images of mermaids that you have seen before? What do you think of their interventions on the slave ship? **Do you see this reimagining of history as powerful or disappointing? Why?**
5. Children’s literature critic Philip Nel suggests that the overwhelming racial whiteness of fantasy participates in what he argues is a form of apartheid, in which only white youth get to see people who look like them having magical, heroic adventures while young people of color are bound to the “real” world. **Why do you think fantasy is usually so white, and stories about youth of color are often realist fiction? What are the effects of this kind of separation?**
6. Elliott’s novel reimagines the white-dominated fantasy genre to depict black people in magical situations, but does so by drawing upon West African (Yoruba) religion and placing the action of the story on a historically plausible slave ship. **Do you see *Mother of the Sea* as more realistic or fantastical? What, if anything, do the magical elements add to the story?**
7. In her afterword, Zetta Elliott mentions that she decided to self-publish *Mother of the Sea*. This is a faster and more reliable way to get an unusual book (only 45 pages long, and a fantasy about black characters set amidst the brutalities of the Atlantic



Huyck, David, Sarah Park Dahlen, Molly Beth Griffin. (2016 September 14). Diversity in Children's Books 2015 infographic. sarahpark.com/blog. Retrieved from <https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2016/09/14/picture-this-reflecting-diversity-in-childrens-book-publishing/>. Statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp> Released for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 license



BOOK 3 Additional Questions, cont.

slave trade) into print than going through traditional young adult book publishers. Elliott has chosen to self-publish the majority of her books, citing the lack of receptiveness to her work from a publishing industry dominated by white editors, agents, and other gatekeepers. **Do you think it matters that the “big five” children’s and youth publishers are mostly run by white women? What do you think are the benefits and drawbacks of self-publishing for writers like Elliott?**

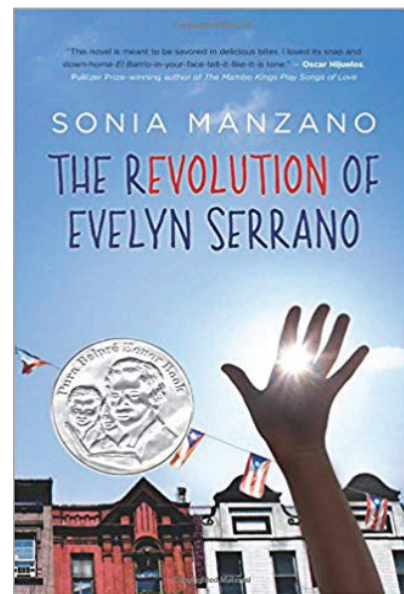


BOOK 4

The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano by Sonia Manzano

General Questions (for all series books)

1. Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms (positive, negative, or ambiguous) that reminds you of a similar racial reality today? What is it? Does this happen to the same racial/ethnic group as in the book, or different ones (if others, which)? How does seeing history repeat itself affect how you think about America? **Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?**
2. Find a moment when a character in this book looks to the past in order to find a way to move forward. How does understanding the history of one's family, community, or racial/ethnic group help this character make powerful choices about how to shape the future? Are there ever times when knowledge about the past can hold people back? What is the effect of learning about the histories of racial/ethnic groups other than your own?
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BOOK 4 Additional Questions

4. At the start of the novel, Evelyn decides she doesn't want to go by her first name, Rosa, because "*El Barrio*, Spanish Harlem, U.S.A. did not need another Rosa, María, or Carmen." Instead, she asks to be called Evelyn, "the least Puerto Rican-sounding" part of her name (7-8). **Why do you think she initially wants to seem less Puerto Rican and less common in her neighborhood?** 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 monitoring 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 grows to understand why her own mother is suspicious of such dedication to larger causes: because Abuela often neglected Mami as a child when she left to take part in social movements (129-30). We see these mothers' priorities in action during the police arrests of the Young Lords, when a bottle hits Evelyn in the eye and Mami rushes her to the hospital while Abuela remains at the protest (193-5). Do you think 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

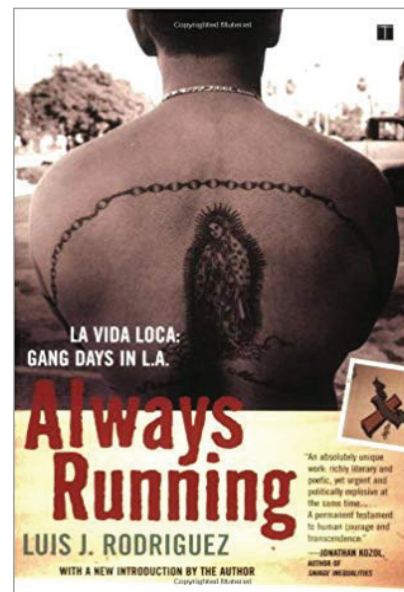
Always Running

La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.

by Luis J. Rodriguez

General Questions (for all series books)

1. Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms (positive, negative, or ambiguous) that reminds you of a similar racial reality today? What is it? Does this happen to the same racial/ethnic group as in the book, or different ones (if others, which)? How does seeing history repeat itself affect how you think about America? **Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?**
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BOOK 5 Additional Questions

1. This book features violence between Latinx and white youth (“the Tradition”), between the Hispanic community and the police force, and within poor Latinx communities. **While the first two kinds of clashes are more obviously inspired by race and inequality, do you think the inter-Latinx violence is, as well? Why or why not?** Why do kids as young as elementary and middle schoolers start their own proto-gangs (“clubs” or “*clicas*”) in Luis’s neighborhood (40-41 and 250)? What do you think inspires the various forms of gender-based violence we see in this book (rape, domestic violence)?
2. In the later chapters of *Always Running*, we learn that Luis is not only a gang member with a history of drugs, violence, and crime, 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 the book only reveals 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?**
3. 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 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?**



BOOK 6

The Shadow Hero

by Gene Luen Yang, illustrated by Sonny Liew

General Questions (for all series books)

1. **Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms (positive, negative, or ambiguous) that reminds you of a similar racial reality today?**
What is it? Does this happen to the same racial/ethnic group as in the book, or different ones (if others, which)? How does seeing history repeat itself affect how you think about America? **Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?**
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BOOK 6 Additional Questions

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 out in the war effort on behalf of the country, Hank immediately agrees (150-1). **Why would Hank be willing to fight for America, even when white Americans exclude and belittle his people?** Why do you think the Anchor of Justice has committed himself to good in America, even though his "parents aren't from around here, either" (152)? **Do you think such devotion to our country and its ideals is still worthwhile, in spite of its 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 written by cartoonist Chu Hing but whose face (and race) is never revealed (154-8). **Why do you think Chu was not able to write about an obviously 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 been released in recent years? (For example: Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical *Hamilton*, the *Spiderman* comics featuring Afro-Latino youth Miles Morales, *Ms. Marvel* comics featuring the South Asian-American Muslim teen Kamala Khan, and the casting of a black actor as Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.)