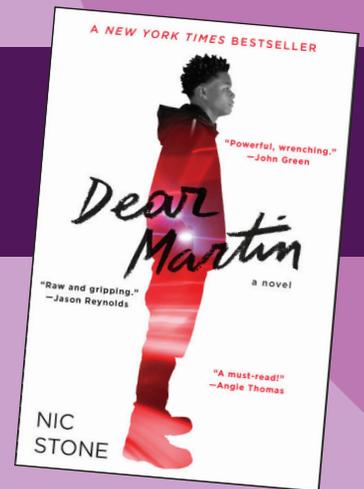


# READING BANNED & CHALLENGED BOOKS

## DEAR MARTIN BY NIC STONE

After a traffic stop turns violent at the hands of the police, a young Black teen grapples with racism—and what it means for his future.



- Discuss Justyce's encounter with Officer Castillo in the first chapter. The officer asks Justyce if he knows his rights. Debate why the officer doesn't allow Justyce to answer. What is racial profiling? Find evidence that Officer Castillo is guilty of racial profiling.
- Dr. Jarius Dray, aka Doc, the debate teacher, uses the phrase "all men are created equal" as a discussion prompt. Discuss the historical significance of these words. Doc then asks the class to discuss how the meaning of the phrase is antiquated by twenty-first-century standards and whether one can discuss these words without addressing race. Why is the class initially reluctant to talk about race? What happens when the conversations get started? Why does Justyce remain quiet?
- Justyce is struggling with his feelings about the incident with Officer Castillo. He tries to manage his emotions by writing letters to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Explain how these letters are a kind of therapy for Justyce. After reading the entire novel, return to the letters and read them sequentially. Debate whether Justyce has learned to confront his feelings by the end of the novel.
- Describe Justyce and Manny's friendship. How does Justyce try to keep Manny out of toxic relationships? Many of the debate students go to the senior lounge and engage in a conversation about Doc's class discussion. How does Justyce react when he hears Manny laugh and join the toast? Discuss Manny's moral and personal dilemmas. Debate whether he feels caught between two worlds. Manny quits the basketball team and says, "I woke up." What opened his eyes? How does he see the world differently?
- When and why is the Equality Brigade formed? Who is the ringleader? At what point is it obvious that the brigade is a bad idea? Discuss dressing as different stereotypes for Halloween. What happens at the Halloween party when the group comes face to face with the member of Black Jihad? Explain how the verbal exchange at the party affects Justyce and Manny.

- Describe the incident at the stop light. How does Justyce encourage Manny to calm down? What mistake does Manny make? Debate whether there would have been a problem if Manny was white. How does the power dynamic set up by our policing system allow officers to feel they have extrajudicial authority? Why is this worse in cases involving people of color? The officer is found guilty. Describe the reaction from the community. Discuss the problem of racism in America. What institutions seek to dismantle racism? Which uphold it?
- People of color, particularly Black people, are forced to confront racism and police violence in ways white people are not. This often means that families must talk with children, especially teenage boys, about how to deal with difficult situations that are all too likely to arise. What do you think is discussed during these talks? How is it a talk about survival? Explain how this novel could be used to engage black and white students in a discussion about racism.
- The novel has been challenged and in some cases banned in schools across the nation. Some call the book "inappropriate" for teens. Define *inappropriate*. How is the meaning of the word subjective? Make the argument that *Dear Martin* is appropriate for teenagers.
- In some school districts, the novel has been challenged because of "vulgar language." Discuss how the language helps to establish the setting. How might the novel be less powerful if milder language had been used?
- A superintendent in Georgia called the content of the book "extreme." Debate whether he wants to control the narrative about racial profiling and bigotry. Discuss why conversations about race and Blackness make many white people uncomfortable.
- In Monett, Missouri, *Dear Martin* was replaced in the curriculum with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is set in Alabama in the 1930s. What is ironic about this substitution? The school officials felt that *Dear Martin* might cause too much "discomfort." How should Harper Lee's work create the same type of "discomfort?" Explain how discomfort cause readers to think.
- Nic Stone wrote in *Mississippi Today*, "My goal was to dismantle the myth that if you are doing everything right, nothing bad will happen to you." Discuss how those who wish to censor books are hoping to keep this myth alive. What do censors fear about this book?
- In an interview with Ali Velshi on MSNBC, Nic Stone stated that as a mother, she understands the desire to keep your child safe and innocent. Discuss how there is safety in knowledge. How does innocence have the potential to make teens unsafe?

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