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ERIC GANSWORTH • MALINDA LO
WALTER DEAN MYERS • DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER

FRESH INK

AN
ANTHOLOGY

THIEN PHAM • JASON REYNOLDS
AMINAH MAE SAFI • GENE LUEN YANG
NICOLA YOON

EDITED BY LAMAR GILES
Cofounder of WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS

EDUCATORS' GUIDE
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EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN STORY TO TELL.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Careful—you are holding fresh ink. And not hot-off-the-press, still-drying-in-your-hands ink. Instead, you are holding twelve stories with endings that are still being written—whose next chapters are up to you.

Because these stories are meant to be read. And shared.

Thirteen of the most accomplished YA authors deliver a label-defying anthology that includes ten short stories, a graphic novel, and a one-act play about topics like gentrification, acceptance, untimely death, coming out, and poverty, and ranging in genre from contemporary realistic fiction to adventure and romance. This collection will inspire you to break conventions, bend the rules, and color outside the lines. All you need is fresh ink.

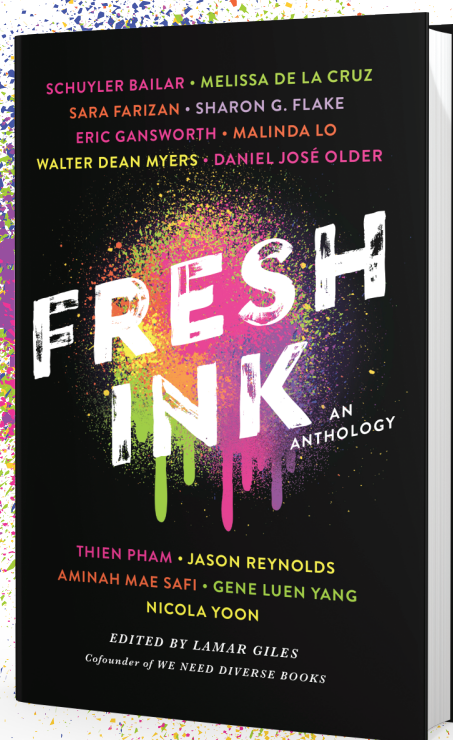
★ “A **POWERFUL** and varied collection.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

★ “The stories are distinct in themes, subjects, genres, and formats, creating an

INCLUSIVE, AUTHENTIC, AND INCREDIBLE COLLECTION.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review



Grade 7 & Up

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Each question invites readers to respond or reflect orally or artistically. The readers may also respond in writing in their journals.

“ERASER TATTOO” by JASON REYNOLDS

- Find three definitions of gentrification. What common elements do you notice? What do some see as the benefits of gentrification? How does gentrification hurt communities? Why does gentrification occur? How do you think the process of gentrification changes and shapes communities? What about government policies?
- What do you notice about the effects of gentrification on different parts of a community? Who seems to have power in the process? Who is not empowered? Reflect on the state of your community. Do you notice any patterns or changes? Who is coming? Who is going? What do the businesses look like? What are the centers of your community?
- The setting is significant to this story. It is a character in itself. Describe the Brooklyn neighborhood that Shay and Dante live in. In what ways are they “witnessing the neighborhood rearrange itself”? (p. 5)
- Describe Shay and Dante’s relationship? How did it evolve?
- Why is Shay’s family moving? Visually represent how you imagine Shay’s new home using mixed media (i.e., collage, diorama, painting).
- A young white couple is moving into Shay’s old house without waiting for her family to finish moving out. What larger meaning could this hold?
- Write a poem to express the feelings of Shay or a member of her family while packing and preparing to move to North Carolina.
- She explains that her future career goal is to be a marine biologist. She says, “Somebody gotta care for all the stuff underwater that nobody can see. It’s a beautiful world down there, full of living things that most folks don’t understand.” (p. 7) Why do you think Shay wants to be a marine biologist? How do you think her career goals relate to what is happening in her community?
- The pairing of *eraser* and *tattoo* is interesting. Unpack the title “Eraser Tattoo” and how it may connect to the theme of this short story. Write a paragraph defending your position.

“MEET CUTE” by MALINDA LO

- Watch an episode each of *The X-Files* and *Star Trek* (the original series). What do you think of the characters?
- Define *cosplay*. Why do you think this practice is popular?
- Some of the characters in this story display sexist attitudes. For example, a male DenCon attendee states, “I hate it when girls think they can cosplay men. . . . It always looks so lame.” (p. 15)

Another says, “Somebody’s on the rag.” (p. 16) Reflect on these comments. Why is such language destructive?

- When discussing the report that Sulu will be gay, Nic highlights, “I think it’s about time, and I’m happy that Sulu got to be the gay character. It’s too bad there can be only one, though, even in the *Star Trek* universe.” (p. 17) Reflect on what she said. Write an argument on the importance of representation in media.
- The lights go out at the convention center and hysteria ensues. Nic’s claustrophobia sets in. She and Tamia escape the main convention floor and go into a hallway. Tamia asks, “What about you? Are you . . . like Sulu?” (p. 29) Why do you think she asks this question?
- Why did Nic suppress a sigh when Wesley joined them?
- Imagine what Nic texted to Tamia. (p. 37) What do you think happens after DenCon? Why? What signs do you get from the story for your answer?

“DON’T PASS ME BY” by ERIC GANSWORTH

- When and where does Gansworth’s story take place?
- In the opening scene, Hayley Simpson’s eyes tell the narrator, “Don’t blow my cover, Doobie, if you know what’s good for you.” (p. 38) Explain what the cover is.
- Doobie notes, “We each made decisions about how Indian we appeared, and we respect each other’s decisions.” Does he respect Hayley’s choices? Cite the story in your answer.
- Hayley had to repeat a year. She returns to school with a new appearance. Why?
- What is “Rez Amnesia”? (p. 42) Why does Hayley have Rez Amnesia?
- Discuss the following moments:
 - when the classmates say that Doobie’s skin is “embedded [with] dirt” (p. 46)
 - when the teacher implores the students to “Please wipe any makeup off *before* your turn. We don’t want it staining on Annie’s skin. You want her to be *normal* colored for the people who come after you.” (p. 51)
 - the discussion on page 52 about the assignment serving as a self-portrait for the majority of the class
- In your journal, reflect on the concept of passing. Why do you think people choose to pass? How does that make you feel?

“BE COOL FOR ONCE”

by AMINAH MAE SAFI

- Who is your favorite band or musician? Write a narrative about the best concert you have been to, or imagine a concert you have not attended and write about that.
- Describe your first crush. Did you approach your crush? What happened? If not, what held you back?
- Jeffrey came to Shirin’s favorite band’s concert. Why was this gesture significant? What does Francesca mean when she says that Shirin should “try overreaching for once”? (p. 58)
- Why is the band, whose members are named after “tragic historical queens” (p. 58), a unique backdrop for this interaction between Shirin and Jeffrey?
- “Oh no. I’ve really *got* to figure out which of the Twelve Imams I pissed off so I can beg forgiveness.” (p. 67) What does this quote say about how Shirin is feeling?
- Reflect upon the last line: “If only her life could be cool, for once.” (p. 71) Is her life not cool? Will Shirin and Jeffrey have a relationship that both of their families and communities embrace? Does this matter?
- Select a song that could symbolize the relationship between Shirin and Jeffrey. Explain your choice.

“TAGS” by WALTER DEAN MYERS

- At the beginning of the play, we watch Big Eddie tagging a wall among other teenagers. What is *tagging*? Is Big Eddie alive? How do you know?
- Reflect on the following statement from Eddie: “When that old dude told me you could still be in the world as long as people kept you in their minds, I knew what I had to do. They see these tags and they remember.” (p. 74)
- Why do you think Walter Dean Myers wrote this story as a play? Does it work? Explain why or why not. How would the story change if it was presented in an alternative format?
- D’Mario enters the hallway and “looks at the others without speaking” (p. 77) Big Eddie shouts to D’Mario, “Yo, this hallway ain’t big enough for everybody! Go someplace else.” Reflect on this statement. Is Big Eddie really talking about space?
- Big Eddie says, “Being alive is walking the damned streets, and making love, and listening to some music. This is just hanging on to what you know is already gone. This ain’t nothing like no life.” (p. 83) Discuss why these words are significant. What is the larger lesson that he is trying to share?
- What is the most important line of this play? Discuss why.
- If the play moved from an urban setting, would the mood change?
- Create a visual representation of tags that Big Eddie, Willie,

J-Boy, and D’Mario create.

- Transform any story of your choice into a play. What was changed or omitted? Explain the decisions you made.

“WHY I LEARNED TO COOK”

by SARA FARIZAN

- “I have my moments of courage,” Yasaman says. (p. 87) In what way does she demonstrate courage throughout the story?
- What have you done to impress someone you care about?
- Describe the moment in the grocery store checkout line. (p. 94) What assumption did the cashier make about Grandma? Do you agree with the grandmother’s reaction to Yasaman’s apology to the woman in line? Explain.
- What life lessons does Yasaman’s grandmother try to teach her throughout the story? How could these lessons relate to your own life? Use your journal to reflect on these questions.
- Compose a journal entry based on one of the following quotes:
 - “Cooking is like love. It should be entered into with abandon or not at all.” —Harriet van Horne
 - “Food is symbolic of love when words are inadequate.” —Alan D. Wolfelt
 - “If you really want to make a friend, go to someone’s house and eat with him. . . . The people who give you their food give you their heart.” —Cesar Chavez
- By inviting Hannah to dinner the following week, what does Yasaman’s grandmother celebrate? Why is this such a big deal?

“A STRANGER AT THE BOCHINCHE”

by DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER

- In an interview with *Nightmare*, Older said: “I think overall there’s a great hunger out there to both see ourselves in speculative literature and for stories that are about more than just ‘getting the girl’ or ‘killing the bad guy.’ Diversity is about equitable representation in characters and authors, yes, but it’s also about a diversity of story craft, of voice, of narrative structure and flow. . . . This kind of thing is fascinating from a narrative and voice perspective and speaks to the need to undo homogeny in all aspects of the industry. Race and culture affect our perspective.” Write a personal response to this statement.
- Who is telling the story? Who is the “you” that the narrator addresses?
- There are four main characters: Ramses Garcia Garcia, Oba Ade Iku, Rosie Gene Selwin, and the stranger. Create a character chart to help describe each of these characters. How are they connected?
- Brooklyn, the setting, is an integral part of the story. Describe Brooklyn before the Four Corners War.

- What did the stranger do to cause the commotion in the Bochinche?
- What does Ramses discover in the tenement the stranger runs into?
- Create a visual representation of the creature that tightened around Ramses's ankles.
- What is the stranger's role in the Scourlings?
- Ramses's abuela's sage advice: "Never leave a place the same way you enter." (p. 109) Reflect on what this means to the story and how it connects to a larger life lesson.

"A BOY'S DUTY" by SHARON G. FLAKE

- Read Langston Hughes's iconic poem "Harlem" (also known as "A Dream Deferred"). What do you think it means to have a dream deferred? Have you had this experience in your own life? When have you seen dreams "dry up" or "explode"? What do you think is the difference?
- Respond to the following quote before you read the story: "A boy's got a duty to hold onto his dreams, I think." (p. 132) After reading the story, return to this quote and reflect again.
- Read the first two paragraphs of the story. (p. 112) What do you know about the narrator? His family? His long-term goals?
- Who is the sailor sitting at the counter who "hangs his head low while he writes, then cuts his blue eyes at [the narrator] and smiles"? (p. 114) Why does he stand out?
- The local newspaper calls the narrator "THE BOY WITH HIS EYES ON THE STARS." He told his father that there's "more to life than living on the farm." (p. 115) Why does this go against what his father believes? Why does his father think the way he does?
- Why did the narrator paint the mural? Is it enough? Why or why not?
- The idea of duty is threaded throughout this story. Zakary, the narrator, is pulled in many directions by his father, by Mr. Jackson, by his peers, and by himself. How would each of these characters define duty?
- Zakary plans to join the army. His father wrote to him that World War II "*is not the Negroes' fight*." What does this mean? Anchor your response in the time period that the story is set in.
- Zakary is an artist. In his honor, create a visual representation of what the theme of this story is.

"ONE VOICE: A SOMETHING IN-BETWEEN STORY"

by MELISSA DE LA CRUZ

- Preview the text. What do you notice about the format of the story? Read the story, and revisit the format. Do you think it works? Explain your answer. Why do you think the author chose this structure?
- Reflect on these quotes from the story prior to reading:
 - "Words matter as much as actions." (p. 135)
 - "It might seem weird but power washing the graffiti so quickly seemed to add to the injustice." (p. 135)
 - "I wanted everyone to see the truth—that even Stanford wasn't free from this kind of hate." (p. 135)
 - "I wanted America to want me because I was already a part of the fabric of the country." (pp. 136–137)
 - "*They're* words? . . . Where do you think violence starts?" (p. 138)
- In the first section "Graffiti," the narrator is struck by how the "white spray-painted message glowed on the sandstone bricks of Jordan Hall." (p. 133) How does this image impact her day?
- Julia Higgins's car was vandalized. "Everyone was so concerned with who committed these crimes, but no one seemed to care much about the targets." (p. 141) Explain what the narrator means by this statement.
- How did the campus react to the targeted, racist vandalism? The students? The administration?
- Jas tries to get Royce to understand her feelings. After some guys make an insensitive remark to her, she says, "Maybe you should consider what it's like to be me when stupid, shallow guys talk about how they only want to date Asian girls. Or how I feel when someone tells me we all look the same, or how frustrating it is because we're all born to lose. Try playing second banana to the pretty-white-girl standard." (p. 143) Discuss the role empathy must play in listening to and understanding the experiences of others.
- The narrator felt herself "growing angrier by the day." (p. 144) Does this anger subside or does it transform? Justify your stance.
- What is the most important sentence or group of sentences in this story? Why? Explain your choice.

“PALADIN/SAMURAI”

by GENE LUEN YANG and THIEN PHAM

- Read the opening panel. What is happening?
- What does *positive representation* mean? Positive representation is just as important in a fantasy game as in other forms of media. Owen, who says that “the land of the rising sun courses through [his] veins,” wants to identify his sword as a samurai sword. How does Wujae respond? Describe how his view evolves throughout the story?
- Owen says to Cameron, “You know the only reason I’m friends with that numb nut is because he’s friends with you.” (p. 150) Explain the significance of this conversation and Owen punching Dusty.
- Why did Owen punch Dusty?
- The final panel shows the characters back in the game, proclaiming, “We’re gonna show ’em who we are!” How has this declaration become realized in the real world?
- Who called the cops? Why do you think this?
- Create a comic strip to tell what happens the next day.

“CATCH, PULL, DRIVE”

by SCHUYLER BAILAR

- Watch the TED Talk “[How to talk \(and listen\) to transgender people.](#)” In a journal, respond to what Jackson Bird shares.
- Read the first two pages of the story. What was the purpose of the Facebook post? How does the narrator, Tommy, feel after writing it?
- These two pages inform the reader that Tommy’s “body never quite matched [his] gender.” (p. 157) How does the narrator want to be addressed? Why is this important?
- Tommy uses the men’s locker room to get ready for swim practice. Describe how his teammates and coach react to his presence there.
- The pool and swimming provide solace for Tommy. He says, “I am a singular action, proof that I am alive and powerful.” (p. 160) How does Tommy use swimming as a shelter from the outside world?
- Pretend that you are a sportscaster. Write the commentary for the race between Parker and Tommy.
- Bailar, the author, uses flashback as a storytelling technique. Do you think this is an effective choice?

“SUPER HUMAN” by NICOLA YOON

- What is an allegory? After you’ve read the story, explain why it could be considered an *allegory*.
- Create a visual representation of what X may look like, both in and out of uniform. Explain the choices you made.
- Three days before the opening of the story, X broadcasts a message: “I no longer believe in humanity. I would see it destroyed. Send someone to convince me otherwise.” (p. 173)
- Why was Syrita selected to meet with X?
- Syrita tells her mother, “It’s not a crime to be poor.” (p. 178) What assumption is she making with this statement?
- X explains to Syrita, “Once you figure out the neighborhood, you can figure out most of the people. I swear to you. Even the air is different.” (p. 183) Discuss the impact of income inequality, segregation, and environmental injustice. Connect your discussion to evidence from the text.
- Respond to X’s exclamation to Syrita: “They all thought I wasn’t human. . . . But I am.” (p. 187). How does this connect to Syrita’s realization that X was “shot by the cops for being black on a street”? (p. 181) What other connections can you make?
- Syrita realizes that the country did not value X’s life when he was not in the X uniform. Can you think of any similar situations in your world?

What is the story saying about unjustified police shootings of unarmed black men and boys?

- How does the story end? Does Syrita survive the fall? Is humanity destroyed? Explain your thoughts.

“THIS BEAUTIFUL,
MOVING, AND
INSIGHTFUL COLLECTION
is quintessentially American and a
valuable addition to all middle and
high school classrooms.”

—Kirkus Reviews

LOOKING AT THE ENTIRE COLLECTION

Even though these stories stand on their own, this collection can also be read in its entirety. The stories support the notion that adolescents want to be seen and validated; they recognize the relief of feeling understood. The yearning for this understanding from peers, parents, librarians, and other adults is quite real. The contributing authors continue to advance the We Need Diverse Books vision of a “world in which all children can see themselves in the pages of a book.” The following section gives examples of discussion questions and activities that encourage young people to make their thinking and experiences public.

- Consider the collection as a whole. What theme do you think binds the stories together?
- Select your favorite short story. Discuss why this story is your favorite. What about this particular story stood out to you?
- These stories were written by popular young adult writers who have penned a vast array of books. Select one of the contributors and conduct an author study. For this formal project, you will research the author and read their works. You are responsible for three components:
 - an oral presentation about the author, their inspiration(s), and their work
 - an exhibition of eight to ten objects relating to your chosen writer, with short explanations about why each was included
 - a brochure highlighting works by the author, key quotes, and other pertinent information
- Each of these stories has a character that is constrained by societal or familial limitations. Revisit each story. What does the character do to confront and disrupt their situation? In what ways does the character’s imagination push them beyond society’s or their family’s boundaries?
- Create a multimedia trailer for each story. Explain your choices in making the trailer.

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