

BURY THE TRUTH, OR KILL THE MESSENGER



JUMATA EMILL

Author of The Black Queen

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

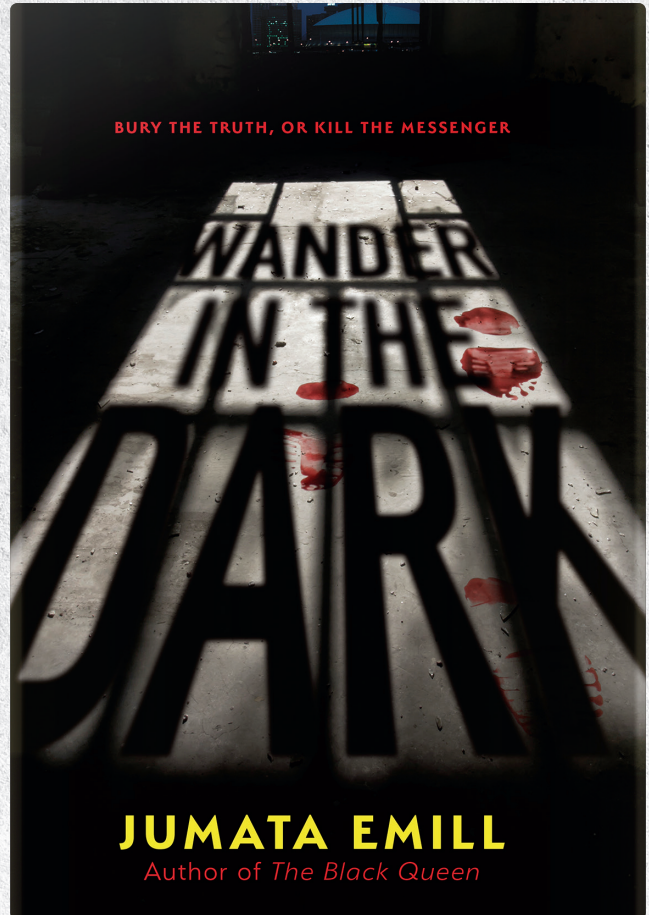
Amir Trudeau only goes to his half brother Marcel's birthday party because of Chloe Danvers. Chloe is rich, and hot, and fits right into the perfect life Marcel inherited when their father left Amir's mother to start a new family with Marcel's mom. But Chloe is hot enough for Amir to forget that for one night.

Does she want to hook up? Or is she trying to meddle in the estranged brothers' messy family drama? Amir can't tell. He doesn't know what Chloe wants from him when, in the final hours of Mardi Gras, she asks him to take her home and stay—her parents are away and she doesn't want to be alone.

Amir never finds out, because when he wakes up, Chloe is dead—stabbed while he was passed out on the couch. And in no time, Amir becomes the only suspect. A Black teenager caught fleeing the scene of a rich white girl's murder? All of New Orleans agrees: the case is open-and-shut.

Amir is innocent. He has a lawyer, but unless someone can figure out who really killed Chloe, things don't look good for him. His number one ally? Marcel. Their relationship is messy, but Marcel knows that Amir isn't a murderer—and maybe proving his innocence will repair the rift between them.

To find Chloe's killer, Amir and Marcel need to dig into her secrets. And what they find is darker than either could have guessed. Parents will go to any lengths to protect their children, and in a city as old as New Orleans, the right family connections can bury even the ugliest truths.



Themes:
Mystery & Suspense,
Racism & Prejudice,
African American
Interest, Boy Interest,
LGBTQ

★ "A propulsive
and engaging
thriller."

—*Publishers Weekly*,
starred review

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jumata Emill is a journalist who has covered crime and local politics in Mississippi and parts of Louisiana. He earned his BA in mass communications from Southern University and A&M College. He's a Pitch Wars alum and a member of the Crime Writers of Color. When he's not writing about murderous teens, he's watching and obsessively tweeting about every franchise of the Real Housewives. Jumata lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and is the author of *The Black Queen* and *Wander in the Dark*.

photo credit: Lance Young

PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define *liberation*. Explain what it means to you personally. Is liberation available to individual people in the United States?
2. How important is family to you?
3. How do you build trust when you meet new people?

POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Amir and Marcel were able to forgive each other but not their classmates or the principal of Truman Academy?
2. In chapter 8, Marcel tells Amir, "Brothers don't let each other wander in the dark alone." What does this quote mean to you? How does it deepen the meaning of the story?
3. Early in the story, Amir is arrested and accused of a crime. Much of the story is revealed through Marcel. In telling his story this way, author Jumata Emill has positioned Amir as a victim and taken away his agency.
 - Can you find examples to support this in the story?
 - Does Amir remain a victim throughout the book? Support your answer.
 - How can we support people who have been affected by trauma or abuse?
4. How does Amir express his emotions during each of these events?
 - When he connected with Chloe in the church (chapter 3)
 - When he was released on bail (chapter 8)
 - When he found out his mom had been lying to him (chapter 14)

Working in small groups, discuss how Amir behaves and how he could express his emotions in a healthy way. If you were Amir's friends, how would you support him? Have a class discussion about how you could help Amir.

5. Was Chloe working for Black liberation? What do you think will be her legacy?
6. Many people worked to hide the racist game the students were playing because of their parents political and economic ties. Walk through the power dynamics of the coverup to reveal how systemic oppression works. What does it take to disrupt this type of power?
7. Marcel asks: "Why does everything about the Black experience in this country have to be about struggling?" How would you answer him? (chapter 14)

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Divide students into pairs. One person in each pair will tell a five-minute story. The other person will not interrupt. Once the storyteller is finished, the listener can ask clarifying questions. The listener should then tell the story back to the original storyteller. Discuss how the story changed. Did the original storyteller think the second storyteller focused on the correct elements?
 - How can we be active listeners?
 - Why is listening to others difficult sometimes?
 - Why is listening to others empowering?
 - Why is being listened to empowering?
 - What are some different things we can do to make others feel like we're really listening to them?
2. What sentence could a seventeen-year-old face in your state if found guilty for first-degree murder? Could they be tried as an adult? Discuss criminal justice in your state.
3. Restorative justice focuses on healing and accountability. Research restorative justice. Use the information you find to create an action plan for a kid who is guilty of stealing candy from another students at school so they can be held accountable for their actions rather than being suspended.

Edith Campbell is an associate librarian in the Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University. Edith has served on selection committees for the Printz Award, Sibert Informational Text Award, and the Walter Award. Edith blogs to promote literacy and social justice in young adult literature at [CrazyQuiltsEdi](#), and she blogs to promote African American literature at [Cotton Quilts Reviews](#). Edith is part of the [We Are Kidlit Collective](#) that provides summer reading lists that recognize the humanity of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) in youth literature.

PRAISE FOR *THE BLACK QUEEN*



"A murder mystery with much to say about modern-day segregation, policing, and personal biases."

—Kirkus Reviews

"This chilling narrative adeptly portrays the struggle with balancing competing loyalties, personal safety, and pursuit of justice while operating within oppressive systems."

—Publishers Weekly

"Masterfully plotted and impossible to put down, *The Black Queen* is a searingly brilliant and bold exposé of the relationship between privilege, perspective, and justice."

—J. Elle, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Wings of Ebony*

"At once incisive and chilling, *The Black Queen* folds hard-hitting truths into a propulsive murder mystery, delivering a story that both entertains and examines.

This is *Pretty Little Liars* for a new generation."

—Tahereh Mafi, *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Shatter Me* series

"A bold, fresh, small-town-secrets thriller with sharp teeth. Grabs you by the throat and doesn't let go."

—Alexa Donne, author of *The Ivies* and *Pretty Dead Queens*

"An addicting mystery and a razor-sharp social commentary that is as wickedly funny as it is twisty and surprising. Jumata Emill is one of the most exciting new voices I've encountered in a while. I couldn't put *The Black Queen* down."

—Kara Thomas, author of *That Weekend* and *The Cheerleaders*



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