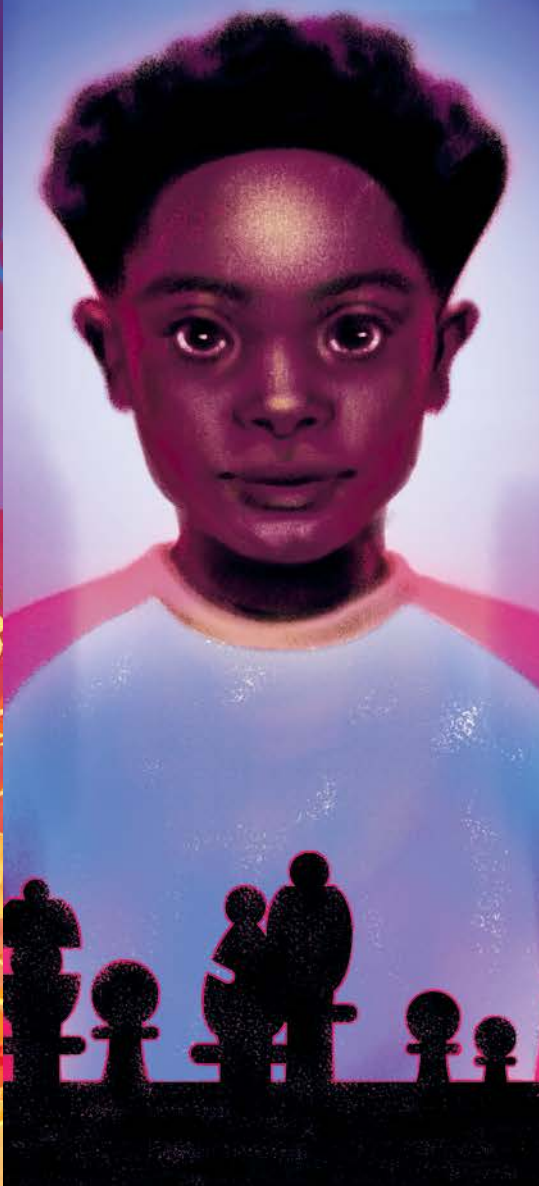


LISTEN TO THE GIRLS



NOT AN EASY WIN



TAKE BACK THE BLOCK



EDUCATORS' GUIDE

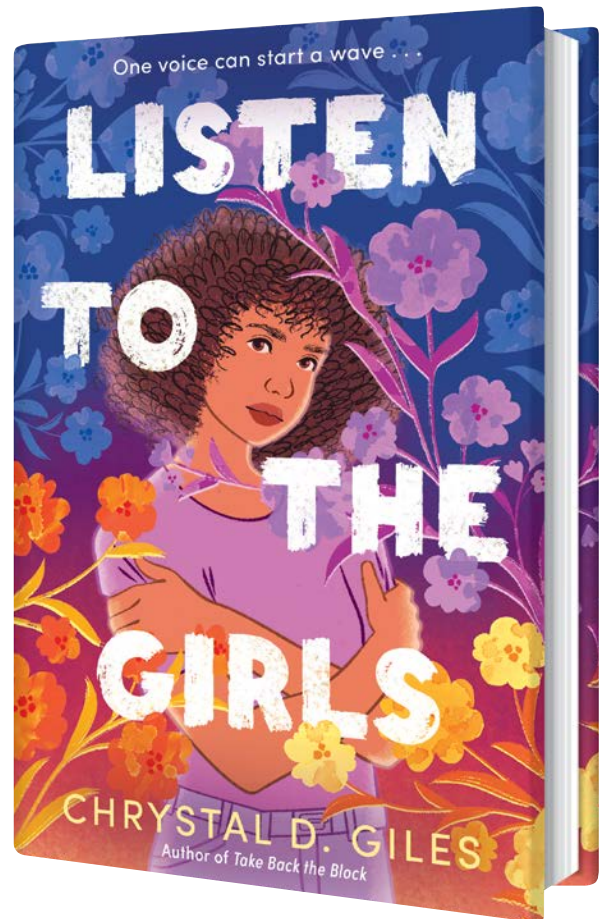
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Calla has always had smart-girl energy. She's Josiah the track star's practical younger sister. Charlee and Jacoby's problem-solving best friend. Attorney Dionne Howard's model daughter. So it's nice when someone seems to see her for her, outside of all that. But what if that person is a grown-up who maybe isn't as trustworthy as Calla thought? Calla's mom likes to say: "Always do what you know is right." But what if you don't know what the right thing is?

These are the questions Calla faces on the last day of seventh grade, when she finds out that her favorite teacher has been accused of inappropriate conduct at his old school. Calla doesn't know what really happened. She does know that people are saying mean things about the girls who have spoken out—and that can't be right . . . can it? Inspired by her favorite newsblogger, EboniNews (whose motto is Amplify. Connect. Truth. ACT.), Calla has an idea. Can she find a way to ACT?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After reading chapter 1, consider what you know and what you want to know about Calla.
 - What is her personality like? What do you notice about her relationships with others? What do you think is important to Calla, based on the limited information you have?
 - Consider the title, *Listen to the Girls*. What does this title mean to you? Finally, taking a leap into the imagination: Guess what might happen in this story, and create some questions that you have after reading chapter 1 that you hope *Listen to the Girls* will answer.
2. Throughout the story, Calla describes how her emotions physically feel in her body. For example, she says, "balled up in the middle of my gut is the ickiest feeling" (p. 6). Calla describes how "the prickly skin feeling has turned into chills" (p. 11). At the pool, "a flood of laughs pours out of me" (p. 114). Later, "my whole body drips into a sour, salty puddle, and I know" (p. 174). Some of her descriptions include sensory details (sight, sound, touch/feel, smell, taste) and others include metaphors (a "flood" of laughs, her body a "puddle"). Where else in the book do you notice descriptions of feelings that have sensory details or that use metaphors? Why do you think the author, Chrystal D. Giles, made a choice to describe Calla's emotions this way? If you were to describe some of your emotions—joy, fear or worry, anticipation, confusion, or others—what sensory details or metaphors would you use?
3. Calla says she is "a straight line. With straight A's and straight legs and straight thoughts about everything" (p. 12). How do you interpret this statement, and why? Calla describes herself as a "straight" (adjective) "line" (noun). How do you, in this moment, describe yourself in an adjective and a noun. Why? Also, how does your experience of being a student in school compare to Calla's experience of being a student; how is it similar and different?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

4. After distracting her prying mom, Calla says, about Listen to the Girls, “It’s up to us to make sure our space stays safe” (p. 73). How do you think Calla, Jacoby, and Charlee can keep Listen to the Girls a safe space? What, in your experience, are important qualities of safe spaces? In your school or in your life outside of school, either online or in person, are there spaces that you have access to that are only for young people? If you were to imagine and design a place (either in person or online) that was only for young people, what would it be like, and why?
5. Characters often gather together over meals and snacks. For example, Calla’s family hosts a crab boil for dinner one night, Emery and Calla try Double Scoop’s red velvet cream cheese swirl and banana pudding ice cream, and Calla tries low country cooking in Charleston on a family trip. All of these culinary examples are of Black American origin and speak to Calla’s history and culture.
- What do you believe is important to the characters about gathering together over food? Why do you think the story includes details about specific foods?
 - Choose and research the history of low country cooking or Cajun cooking. How does food connect to place, community, and history?
 - What foods are important to your family and your culture or the culture(s) within your community? What parts of culture and history are expressed through the foods you and your family eat? If you’ve tried foods from cultures different from your own, what did you learn about those cultures?
6. Flowers—and the mural Calla has in her bedroom—are motifs that recur throughout the story. About flowers, Calla says, “Of all the things I love about flowers—their beauty, their scent, the happy feelings they bring—their best trait is their predictability” (p. 86). Deeper into the story, when reflecting on her mural, Calla felt a “deep nagging feeling crawling all over me that it needs more room to grow” (p. 142).
- Choose and interpret one of these two quotes: Why is it significant, and how does it help us understand Calla and her journey through the book?
 - What do you imagine is the importance of Calla’s name, which was also her maternal grandmother’s, and refers to a flower called the calla lily?
 - What other motifs can you identify in the story? What other objects or things appear repeatedly, and what do you think they mean?
7. Aphorisms are, as Calla’s dad explains, “a quote that conveys a truth” (p. 7). For example, Calla’s mom said, “Always do what you know is right to do” (p. 7). Calla, quoting the musician and entrepreneur Jay-Z, said, “No one wins when the family feuds” (p. 39). Emery said, “Look for the helpers” (p. 141). Si said, “You don’t ever have to get comfortable with someone else’s disrespect” (p. 221). Eboni said, “Trust yourself. Trust your memory, your feelings, your gut. You may misstep, but at least you’ll be moving toward truth” (p. 162). Calla’s mom modifies a quote by educator and orator Booker T. Washington when she says, “Wrong doesn’t become right, and evil doesn’t become good” (p. 185). (Booker T. Washington said, “A lie doesn’t become truth, wrong doesn’t become right, and evil doesn’t become good, just because it’s accepted by a majority.”) Some of these aphorisms feel good to Calla, and others feel “annoying,” but she thinks about all of them as she figures out her feelings and her ideas.
- Pick one of the above aphorisms (or choose another from the book), and describe what you believe it taught Calla or what you believe it was supposed to teach Calla.
 - In your own life, what aphorisms have helped you process your feelings or taught you something useful, and why?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

8. Eboni told Calla that “One of the hardest things about talking to real people—victims, survivors, or just people in general—is convincing them that their point of view, their story, their account matters. Too many of us don’t believe our perspective is important enough to change things. It is” (p. 161). Calla agrees with Eboni.

- As the reader, how do you think Eboni’s insight applies to Calla?
- What connections can you make between Eboni’s insight and experiences that you’ve had in your own life?

9. Chrystal D. Giles describes the emotions of a person experiencing sexual harassment, including grooming, as “complex and sometimes conflicting.” Calla describes conflicting emotions when reflecting on her time with Mr. Chavis. For example, when she says, “A sour taste fills my mouth. He’d said that to me too . . . When he said it, it didn’t make me feel gross at all, though . . . it made me feel good” (p. 31). Calla also describes memories

that appear suddenly, like that of Mr. Chavis touching Takia James’s locs (p. 92) and of the notebook Mr. Chavis gave Calla (p. 189). Reflect on Calla’s journey from silence to speaking out about her experience with Mr. Chavis. What and who along the way helped her speak up, and what and who along the way caused her to doubt her own experiences?

10. Many of the major characters in this book—Calla, Jacoby, Charlee, and Calla’s mom—have grown throughout the book.

- Pick one and describe how their choices and actions reflect growth, using specific examples from the book. What challenged them? How did they take on that challenge?
- What challenges in your life have helped you grow, and what has that growth felt like or looked like? How and why have you chosen to become the person you are today?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Create an aphorism that is helpful to you. It does not need to be helpful to others. Be brave and share it with others! Why this aphorism? Why is it helpful to you?

2. Calla develops her concept of what is right and what is wrong throughout the story. She decides to take action by doing what she feels is right. What issues are affecting you, your family, or your community that are important to you? Research ways to become safely involved in making change. What change do you want to make, and why?

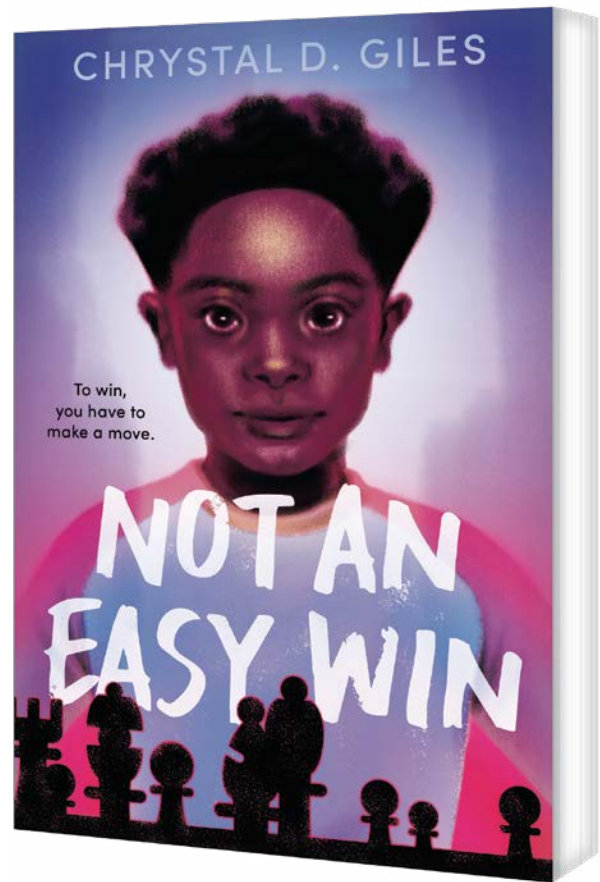
3. Create your own artwork that expresses (a) who you are right now and who you want to become or (b) brings you peace, joy, and inspiration. Like Calla, your mural can be composed of an object or natural element (for her, flowers) or it can be more literal. Instead of visual art, you can also put together a playlist; invent a dance that represents you and your goals, dreams, and/or your peace; or express yourself in a piece of creative writing.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nothing's gone right for Lawrence since he had to move from Charlotte to Larencville, North Carolina, to live with his granny. When Lawrence ends up in one too many fights at his new school, he gets expelled. The fight wasn't his fault, but since his pop's been gone, it feels like no one listens to what Lawrence has to say.

Instead of going to school, Lawrence starts spending his days at the rec center, helping out a neighbor who runs a chess program. Some of the kids in the program will be picked to compete in the Charlotte Classic chess tournament. Could this be Lawrence's chance to go home?

Lawrence doesn't know anything about chess, but something about the center—and the kids there—feels right. Lawrence thought the game was over . . . but does he have more moves left than he thought?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the first chapter of the book, we learn a lot about Lawrence's recent experiences in school. *Expelled* is the first word in his story.

- Based on the information you have available to you in the first chapter, how do you think Lawrence feels about himself because of these school experiences? What do you imagine Lawrence wants, and why?
- Lawrence says: "Everyone just looked at me like I was the problem." What do you think he means by this? Have you seen others treated as if they were "the problem" by teachers or administrators or by their family? How does "looking" at someone like they are a "problem" affect that person?

2. Mr. Dennis tells Lawrence, "Chess is a game for thinkers" (p. 63). As he plays, Lawrence incorporates his pop's music into his chess playing. When playing Lin, Lawrence "imagined that the choir was singing for me, cheering me on" (p. 147). When playing Jada, Lawrence describes "every move was in sync with the

beat" (p. 176). Ultimately, Lawrence learns how it feels to be "controlling the beat" (p. 228).

- What do you think Mr. Dennis meant by his statement about thinkers?
 - For Lawrence, what do thinking and music have to do with his chess game? If "the beat" is a metaphor, what is it a metaphor for?
 - In your life, what experiences have you had, if any, that remind you of how Lawrence describes playing chess? What would you like to get better at, the way Lawrence works at getting better at chess?
3. Lawrence shares many emotions related to his father's incarceration, including pain, longing, and fear. Search for these feelings and the situations where they arise as you read.
- What are some of the feelings Lawrence has, and what situations prompt these feelings?
 - Using examples from throughout the book, including the end, discuss

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

the similarities and differences between Deuce's and Lawrence's experiences and emotions, and the choices related to these experiences and emotions. How do they react to the issue of contact with their incarcerated parents? Using examples from the story, what do you imagine the impact of their shared family experience is on both young men?

- The two schools in Lawrence's community are Andrew Jackson, which is mostly attended by white students, and Booker T. Washington, which is mostly attended by Black students.
 - Look up the people after whom the schools were named. What were their accomplishments, and what do you believe their values were and why? If your school is named after someone, who are they, what did they do, and what do you believe their values to be and why? Who would you like your school to be named after, and why?
 - Granny says, "We fought for Black kids to go to school with white kids. Why in the world would we give that chance up?" Later, Lawrence says, "I didn't have an answer for that—maybe I needed to do some reading—but I did know I'd rather be at school with Twyla, Kendra, Lin, and even Deuce than getting into fights for the rest of my life at Andrew Jackson." Discuss how Lawrence's and Granny's perspectives are different and what they have in common.
- Anti-Black racism is very present in Lawrence's new town in North Carolina. At the start of Lawrence's story, he's been "beat down" by white students at Andrew Jackson. At the close of the book, he is again senselessly aggressed and challenged by young white people. His granny calls the Confederate flag "pure evil," a warning that comes to mind when a truck bearing one passed Lawrence on the street and he kept his "hoodie low and looked straight ahead" (p. 20).
 - What do you imagine is the impact of anti-Black racism on Lawrence and on other Black characters in the story?

- Why does Granny say that the Confederate flag is "pure evil." What led her to this? Use examples from the story to make educated guesses.

- Granny, Ma, and Aunt Carmen work hard, each in different ways, to provide for the family. Granny prepares meals, offers emotional support, and watches Lawrence, Nik, and Aunt Carmen's twins. Ma and Aunt Carmen have jobs that bring in income.
 - At what points in the story do you notice that financial struggles have an impact on Lawrence's life or on the lives of his family members? Choose one of these moments and discuss the impact it has on the characters involved.
 - Reflect on your and your family's experiences with money as it compares to Lawrence and his family's experiences with money: What's similar, and what's different? How does your and your family's relationship with money affect your sense of security and the access you have to housing and food?
- Lawrence asks Twyla to be his girlfriend.
 - How does she respond, and how does Lawrence feel after she responds? What does he immediately tell himself? And how do he and Twyla reestablish their relationship?
 - How did you imagine this situation would go? Did it surprise you? What clues along the way led you to believe it would go one way or another? Would you have written this part of the story differently?
- Throughout the story, Lawrence's relationships with others strengthen. Reflect on Lawrence's relationship with either Ma, Mr. Dennis, Deuce, or Granny.
 - What are the choices that Lawrence made that helped improve their relationship? What are the choices the other person made to improve the relationship? Using examples from the story, how do you believe each character grew?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- Reflect on a relationship you have with a friend or member of your family that has improved over time. What choices did you make to help improve the relationship? What choices did the other person make to improve the relationship? If you can't think of one, imagine what it would be like to have an improved relationship with a particular friend or family member. How might you grow to have better communication in that relationship?
9. Lawrence learns how to trust and believe in his value, gifts, and talents throughout the story. He is surprised when Mr. Dennis says he has “talent” for chess (p. 123). He “wasn't used to people thinking [he] could do good things” (p. 129) and was touched when he realized his Granny was pleased with him: “the words she didn't say and the proud shine in her eyes were all I needed” (p. 190).
10. Lawrence's father is a storyteller, and throughout the book, Lawrence is “learning to tell his own story.”
- What are some big moments in the story that help Lawrence believe in himself? Compare examples of how he feels about himself from the beginning of the story to examples from the middle and end of the story. What do you notice?
 - What moments in your life have helped you see yourself positively, and why? What important moments with others have helped you understand your own talents? Why have these moments been important to you?
- What does it mean to tell your own story? What are the most important parts of Lawrence's story, and why?
 - Tell your own story. Which are the most important parts, and why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

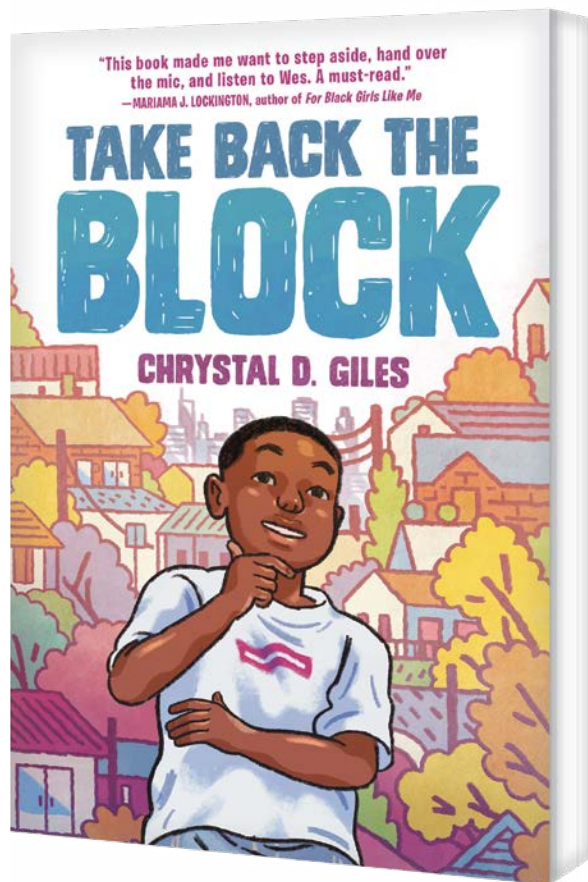
1. Using the clues that Lawrence drops about his pop's playlist, recreate it. Alternatively, create a playlist that represents Lawrence's journey or write a song or a poem that represents Lawrence's growth throughout the story.
2. Incarceration has many effects on family members, especially on the children of incarcerated parents. Over 5 million young people (under 18) have had a parent incarcerated during their lives. Deuce and Lawrence have different experiences of parental incarceration, but they are both deeply affected by it. Research more stories of incarceration to learn how it affects people and their communities; speak to others about their experiences, if they are able and willing to share. What have you learned? What would you like to learn? (Sources: vera.org, sentencingproject.org)
3. Using some of the chess tips you picked up in *Not an Easy Win*, go ahead and learn to play! Check out resources in your community for free programs, ask your school to start a program if you don't have one already, or ask a fellow student or teacher or family member to teach you.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Wes Henderson has the best style in sixth grade. That—and hanging out with the crew (his best friends since little-kid days) and playing video games—is what Wes wants to be thinking about at the start of the school year, not the protests his parents are always dragging him to.

But when a powerful real estate developer makes an offer to buy Kensington Oaks, the neighborhood Wes has lived in his whole life, everything changes. The grown-ups are supposed to have all the answers, but all they're doing is arguing. Even Wes's best friends are fighting. And some of them may be moving. Wes isn't about to give up the only home he's ever known without a fight. He's always been good at puzzles, and he knows there must be a missing piece that will solve this puzzle and save the Oaks. But can he find it before it's too late?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Wes's story starts at a march for tenants' rights. He describes this march as part of a monthlong protest. A tenant rents the home they live in, and often are not well-protected when the companies or people who own their homes raise the rent or evict them.
 - Given what you've read and learned in the first chapter, infer Wes's housing situation. Do you think he's been evicted or pushed out of his home? Why or why not?
 - What is your experience with housing? Your community's? Have you seen a situation where tenants could have, did, or needed to protest for their rights?
2. Throughout the story, Wes likes to put together puzzles. A metaphor is "a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract" (Oxford Languages). If Wes's puzzles are a metaphor—the puzzle being the "thing," what abstract idea do you believe that his puzzles represent? As you read, gather clues. If you're at the beginning of the story, take a guess. If you're at the end, use your clues to . . . puzzle it out! (There isn't one right answer.)
3. Wes says, "Entering Kensington Oaks is like being hugged by a grove of oak trees and sunshine. I've lived in the Oaks my whole life, and I've known all my neighbors since the days of tricycle races" (p. 6).
 - Using examples from throughout the story, in what ways is the Oaks a home for Wes? Who makes up Wes's community in the Oaks, and what does each person bring to that community?
 - What does home mean to you? What does community mean to you? Where, with whom, or when have you felt a sense of home and community?
4. At the first community board meeting about the Simmons Development Corporation notice, many community members share different opinions about what to do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- What are some of the opinions community members share? What opinions do you think Wes's mom agrees with? What opinions does Wes form after the meeting?
 - Imagine you are a community member at Kensington Oaks. What is your perspective on the notice? What information would you want before forming your opinion? How strongly do you feel about your opinion, and why?
- 5.** When the police officer becomes aggressive toward Kari and Wes, screaming at them to get on the ground, Kari and Wes both obey the officer. As he's on the ground, Wes reflects on "The Talk" that his father has had with him. "The Talk" is a conversation in Black households between parents and children or teenagers about the history and possibility of racist aggression and violence from authority figures, including police officers.
- Using examples from this scene in the story, please describe Wes's dad's instructions to Wes. What was the intent of Wes's dad's instructions? What were the instructions meant to do for Wes?
 - What is the longer-term impact of this encounter on Wes, and what is the impact on Kari? Reflect on your own experiences—or those you've read or heard about from others in your family or community—with police and other authority figures. Reflect upon these real-life experiences alongside Kari's and Wes's. What do you notice about people's perspectives and experiences?
- 6.** Wes learns about gentrification as he brainstorms ways to save the Oaks from redevelopment. His teacher, Mr. Baker, poses this question in his article: "Is gentrification the new segregation?"
- How do you interpret this question?
 - What conclusions does Wes come to?
 - Reflecting on the place or places you've grown up and using your own experiences and what you've learned from others in your community as a guide, answer Mr. Baker's question for yourself. Are your ideas similar to or different from Wes's, and why?
- 7.** Wes shares, "Mr. Pippin was a legend in this city, or at least he should be, a legend stripped of his legacy. I'd cracked a mysterious code" (p. 151).
- What was the code Wes cracked? And why does he describe Mr. Pippin as a legend? And how do Mr. Hank and Mr. Baker respond?
 - Reflect on Mr. Baker's saying that Black people's achievements are "often buried or stolen." What does this mean? What examples can you think of, either personal or historical, where this has been true? What actions can a person take to keep Black history alive?
- 8.** Throughout the story, conflicts between friends occur—for example, between Mia and Kari, Brent and Wes, Kari and Wes, Mia and Wes. Pick one pair and answer these questions.
- Describe the conflict from each character's perspective. Why did each character believe they were right? How did they fix their conflict?
 - How have you reacted in a similar situation? What steps have you tried to handle the conflicts you've had with your friends or family members close in age to you?
- 9.** One theme in the story is coming into voice. At the start of the story, Wes describes how it feels when he tries to speak up in public, saying, "my mind gets all blurry, and I forget how to talk" (p. 3). Wes and his parents reflect on how the police officer's actions took his and Kari's voices away. For his history class project, Wes gives a great presentation, even though he was nervous when he started. By the end of the story, Wes has learned how to confidently speak up for what matters to him and express his thoughts and feelings to others. He says, "I am a leader" (p. 223).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- Where do you notice this theme in other places in the story? What do you imagine it feels like for Wes to come into his voice?
- In what moments have you felt like you have come into your own voice? What has been important to you about those moments?

10. Values are a person’s judgment of what is important in life. The story takes place over a year in Wes’s life, and the book starts and ends with two scenes that look pretty much the same: Wes holding a sign up.

- Using quotes from the first two chapters and the last two chapters, describe how Wes’s values have changed or strengthened during the story. What people or situations helped Wes develop his values?
- What are two or three of your values? How have they developed over your life? Who has helped you develop your values?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. During his sleepover, Wes describes himself as feeling full of “Black pride.” Research the history of Black pride in the United States. What do you learn? Why is Black pride important for Black people to feel and express? Find examples in the text of characters expressing pride in being Black.

2. If you don’t have one already, go to your local library and get a library card. Ask a trusted and trustworthy adult for help. Just as Wes did, either in the library or online, look for a buried or forgotten history that is meaningful or interesting to you in the community or communities that you live in or go to school in or one nearby. What do you learn about the history of this place? Why is it meaningful or interesting to you?

3. Create a poem, a short story, a creative essay, or other nonfiction piece or a piece of art like a drawing, collage, or painting to express the theme in this story that is most important to you. You are encouraged to be creative in your approach. Consider using quotes, characters, and situations from the book in your art or writing. Have fun with it.

4. Housing instability occurs because of challenges that prevent individuals or families from having safe, stable, and affordable housing. Those challenges can include “having difficulty paying rent, spending more than 50 percent of household income on housing, having frequent moves, living in overcrowded conditions or doubling up with friends and relatives” (NIH, odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/housing-instability). Many people, including many young people, in the United States experience housing instability, which can lead to homelessness. Learn about housing instability and homelessness in the area where you live. What are the causes? What actions are people in the community taking to prevent it? What is the ideal, dream, or vision of the people who are working to prevent or reduce housing instability and homelessness?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES ACROSS BOOKS

1. Across these books, Lawrence, Wes, and Calla are sustained by strong family relationships and friendships. Even when conflicts arise, Lawrence, Wes, and Calla work hard to grow and solve their conflicts.
 - Across all three books, what relationships stand out to you as very supportive and loving, and why? How do these relationships help our main characters achieve their goals?
 - What are the qualities of the relationships that provide you love and support? To whom do you provide love and support? How and why?
2. Joy in Black families and Black communities are important parts of each of these books as well as Chrystal's debut picture book *We Are Joy*. How do you notice joy arising in each of the books? How does joy arise in your own life? Write a poem, or draw a picture, or create a playlist that expresses the joy that you find in your own family or community.
3. Each of the books is centered on growth, specifically growth into belief in self, and growth into investment in community. Lawrence learns to value his worth and believe in his talents, finding a home in a community of others who also value and believe in him; Calla reckons with a past harm and comes into her voice by bravely supporting and advocating for others who are also coming into their voice; Wes becomes a leader in his home community, overcoming a fear of speaking up after finding something worth speaking up about.
 - What helps you believe in yourself? What experiences and people have taught you about your immense value?
 - What communities, large or small, do you belong to? Choose one that you feel particularly connected to. How does this community sustain you, and how do you sustain it? Write your own story that describes your growth or your relationship to your community!

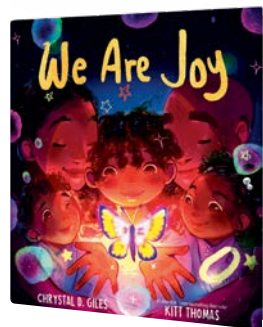
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chrystal D. Giles is a champion for diversity and representation in children's literature.

Chrystal often says she's a lover of both words and numbers; she spent fifteen years as an accountant before transitioning to writing full-time. Chrystal made her debut with *Take Back the Block*, which received multiple starred reviews; was a *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and NPR Best Book; and won the IRA Social Justice Literature Award. Her latest middle grade novel, *Not An Easy Win*, received four starred reviews and was named an ALA Notable Children's Book. She is continuing to expand her catalog with new releases in 2026: a novel, *Listen to the Girls*; and her debut picture book, *We Are Joy*, illustrated by Kitt Thomas. Both have received starred reviews. Chrystal lives outside Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband and son.

ALSO BY CHRystal D. GILES



Shining with lyrical prose and gorgeously vibrant art, this delightful picture book read-together is an inspiring celebration of the beauty and strength of Black culture, Black community, and Black family.

Illustrated by #1 New York

Times bestselling illustrator Kitt Thomas, t's an empowering affirmation that joy—especially Black joy—is all around us—in the people we love, in our communities, and in our hearts.

This guide was created by Christina Olivares, a longtime educator and author of the poetry books *No Map of the Earth Includes Stars* (2015) and *Future Botanic* (2023).



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