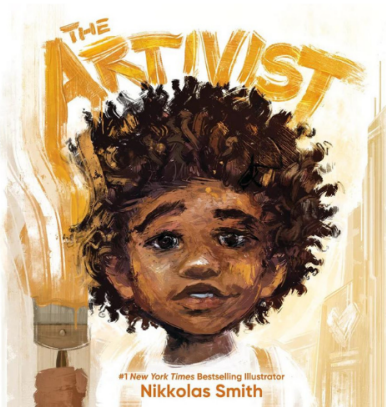


STORYSEED DISCUSSION GUIDE

BY ZAPOURA NEWTON-CALVERT



THE ARTIST BY NIKKOLAS SMITH

grow your learning about:

JUSTICE, ACTION, ART, ACTIVISM, SOLIDARITY,
COMMUNITY, CREATIVITY





WELCOME

Hi, I'm Zapoura Newton-Calvert, co-founder of Reading Is Resistance and a Teaching Associate Professor at Portland State University. Reading Is Resistance focuses on justice-focused book reviews, lists, creative projects, and curriculum creation. Storyseed Curriculum supports ongoing anti-racist and anti-bias capacity building for all ages through the simple, yet profound, practice of reading and discussing justice-focused stories together.¹



The [Social Justice Standards](#) from [Learning for Justice](#) (LFJ), founded by the Southern Poverty Law Center, serve as guides for our work. Discussion questions correlate either to one of the LFJ standards (identity, diversity, justice, and action) or our own learning standards (reflection, imagination). We also draw from abolitionist, decolonizing, heart/body-centered, and white anti-racist practices. Here is a short list of folk and communities who we have and continue to learn from and with:

- ☐ Emergent Strategy: [adriene maree brown](#), [Jezz Chung](#), [Octavia Butler](#)
- ☐ Abolitionist Practice: [Dr. Bettina Love](#), [Woke Kindergarten](#)
- ☐ Decolonization: [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#), [Eve Tuck](#), [Monique Gray Smith](#)
- ☐ Heart/Body Practices: [the Bhodi Project](#), [Dr. Angel Kyodo Williams](#)
- ☐ White Anti-Racist Practice: [JORE Project](#), [Chris Crass](#)

Remember that it's always the right time and you are always the right age to start or deepen your liberation practices. We hope you enjoy this curriculum.

With love and in solidarity,

Zapoura Newton-Calvert

¹ For tips on how to use our curriculum with readers of all ages, go to the Appendix B: Curriculum Tips.



**READING *is*
RESISTANCE**

**STORYSEED
CURRICULUM**

INTRODUCTION

This reading guide was written by Zapoura Newton-Calvert and was designed to accompany author and illustrator Nikkolas Smith's picture book *The Artist*. Reading Is Resistance sees reading as an opportunity to seed deeper learning, conversation, and possibilities for action around racial justice and liberation in our communities.

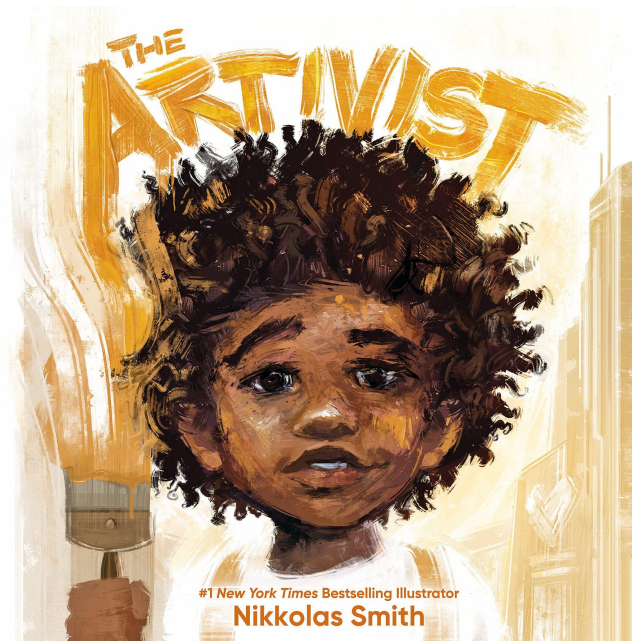
BOOK THEMES

JUSTICE, ACTION, ART, ACTIVISM, SOLIDARITY, COMMUNITY, CREATIVITY

BOOK SUMMARY

A young Black protagonist walks through the city noticing the problems and injustice around them. With a paintbrush in hand, a love of art, and an interest in contributing to social change, they begin to see themselves as an artist-activist – *an activist*.

This story asks us to look at what injustice is happening around us and inspires us to take a talent or hobby that we have and to use it for the good of our community and world.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS² FOR *THE ARTIVIST*

Note: Because this book does not have page numbers, we have indicated pagination with a brief quote from the page or a brief image description.

THEY SAY I'M AN ARTIST.

- ☐ Do people who know you ever notice some of your skills, talents, or hobbies? If so, what do they say about them? What is a skill, talent, or hobby that you have that you are proud of? [REFLECTION, IDENTITY](#)
- ☐ What does it mean to be an artist? What are the qualities and qualifications that you think an artist has to have? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ Can anyone be an artist? Why or why not? [REFLECTION](#)

I LOVE TO HELP MY COMMUNITY

- ☐ What does it mean to be helpful? Is being helpful important to you? Why or why not? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ Is helping around the house or helping in the classroom the same or different than helping the community? Why? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

THEY SAY I'M AN ACTIVIST.

- ☐ How would you define an "activist"? What qualities do activists have, and what actions do they take? Is there just one way to be an activist? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)
- ☐ Can anyone be an activist? Why or why not? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

² The Learning for Justice [Social Justice Standards](#) (IDENTITY, DIVERSITY, JUSTICE, and ACTION) used to design the discussion questions for this book are for Grades K-2. This book, however, can be modified and used with a wide range of ages. Each discussion question is labeled with one of the four standards or one of the Reading for Resistance categories of REFLECTION and IMAGINATION. These indicate the primary learning objective that is being met with the question.



BUT SOMETIMES THE WORLD – I WANT TO SCREAM

- ☐ Look at the illustration. What kinds of problems does the main character see?
[REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ A problem is often something unfair or unjust. Do you see or know about problems in your community or the world that seem larger than life? Do you see or know about problems in your community or in the world that seem small but important?
[REFLECTION, JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ When you see a big problem, what emotions do you feel? What actions do you want to take? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

I WANT TO HOLD UP A MIRROR TO THE WORLD

- ☐ Why do you think the main character wants to hold up a mirror to reflect the problems they see? Who will see the problems in the mirror? Why is it important that they see the problems? [JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ Look at the illustration. What words do you see? Which of these words are familiar? Which are unfamiliar? Learn more about the unfamiliar words. [REFLECTION](#)

THIS NEEDS TO BE FIXED

- ☐ What needs to be fixed on this page? Are these things that need to be fixed in your community, too? How are the problems in your neighborhood similar to and/or different from the ones on these pages? Why? [JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ What are the root causes of the problems shown on this page? What do you understand about why people have to move out of their homes from this book or from other experiences/knowledge? [JUSTICE](#)



THIS NEEDS TO BE FIXED, TOO

- ☐ What is voting, and why is it important in our communities? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ Who should be able to vote? Who has the right to vote in the United States? [JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ What is happening to the voting box in this picture? What do you notice about the person trying to add their ballot to the box? What do you notice about the person trying to close the ballot box? What questions come up for you? Can you do research based on the questions that come up? What do you find out? [JUSTICE, REFLECTION](#)

ABOVE THE SURFACE SEEMS RIGHT

- ☐ What does the main character see above the water? How is this different from what he sees under the water? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ List what you see under the water. What belongs there? What doesn't? How do you know? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ What do you think happens to the plants, animals, and water when there are items that don't belong in their ecosystem? [REFLECTION, JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ Do you know about any actions people have taken to reduce water pollution? How might you get involved? [JUSTICE, ACTION](#)

ALL I CAN THINK TO DO IS PAINT – I THINK IT'S TIME TO COMBINE BOTH PARTS

- ☐ The main character sees problems they want to help change AND has a talent as an artist. They combine an issue they care about/a problem they want to help change AND something they love to do.
 - What is a problem you would like to help change and/or an issue you care about?
 - What is something you love to do? It might be a talent you have, something you like doing, etc.
 - How might you combine these two things to help make change happen? Use your imagination! [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)



I WILL SKETCH AND DRAW

- ☐ How is the main character using their art to make change? What do you see in these illustrations? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

UNTIL HOPEFULLY – OR MANY EYES

- ☐ What do you think might happen when more people see the artist's work?
[REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ How does the power of one activist compare to the power of many activists?
[REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

ARTIVISM HAS THE POWER – AND THE ARTIVIST CAN LIGHT

- ☐ What does it look like is happening in this picture? What is the feeling in the picture?
[REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ Have you ever been inspired by someone else's art, words, dance, or other actions?
Describe why you were inspired. What were you inspired to think, imagine, and/or do?
[REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

THE ARTIVIST CAN INSPIRE

- ☐ What does it mean "to deserve" something? [REFLECTION, JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ Make a list of everything you think all living things deserve. [REFLECTION, JUSTICE](#)
- ☐ Now, think about how you can get involved in making sure that all living things have what they deserve (you can see some ideas in the illustrations on these pages)?
[REFLECTION, JUSTICE, ACTION](#)



NOTE FOR FACILITATORS: On the upcoming pages, the author/illustrator shows us important community movements for justice, including the movement for Black Lives (Black Lives Matter), the movement for Trans Lives, the anti-gun violence movement, police abolition, and more. These movements are important to take time with. Spend some time with your reader finding out what they know about these movements and what they are curious about. Share what you know and look for other voices to share with your reader...voices of people in the heart of these movements. Talk to your reader about what it means to get involved. Think about which movements you are already part of, which you'd like to get more involved with, etc. It's important to talk in depth and spend time with each section.

THE ARTIVIST MUST BE BRAVE

- ☐ What does bravery feel like? Why do activists and other activists need to be brave?

[REFLECTION, JUSTICE, ACTION](#)

AND HUMBLE ENOUGH TO LISTEN

- ☐ Why is it important to listen before speaking? What can happen if you take action without listening to people at the heart of a community issue and most impacted?

[JUSTICE, ACTION](#)

- ☐ What is an ally? Have you ever been an ally? Who were you an ally to? [JUSTICE](#)

THE ARTIVIST IS A PROTECTOR

- ☐ What is happening in the picture on this page? Why do you think the Artist stands in front of the bulldozer? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

- ☐ Have you ever been a protector? What or who did you protect? Why? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

THE ARTIVIST IS A MEMORY KEEPER

- ☐ What is a memory keeper? Why are memory keepers important? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ Whose memory is the Artist keeping on these pages? Why is it important to keep this person's memory? [REFLECTION, JUSTICE](#)

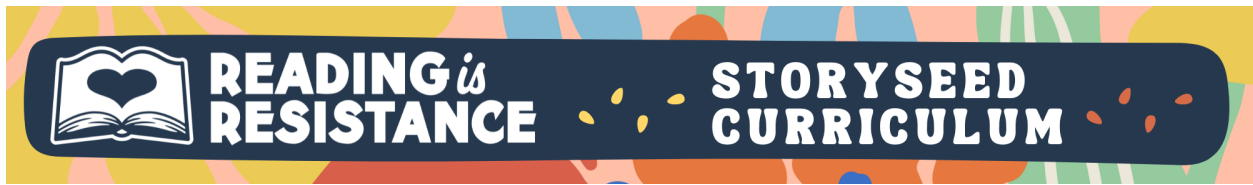


THE ARTIVIST DOESN'T ONLY PAINT – WE BRING AWARENESS

- ☐ All of these activists are working together. Think of a friend or family member that you'd like to talk to about an issue or problem in your community that worries you. Could you get involved together? What's a first step you could take? [REFLECTION, ACTION](#)

THE ARTIVIST IS YOU

- ☐ How do you feel when the author/illustrator reveals that the activist is you? What does this mean to you? [REFLECTION](#)
- ☐ The author/illustrator poses a final question...what change will you create? How will you answer this question? [REFLECTION](#)



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A RESOURCE & ACTION GUIDE

These are optional resources that can extend your learning started in the focus book. Take some time to peruse, enjoy, imagine, and learn.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

- ☐ [Nikkolas Smith's Website](#)
- ☐ [A Kid-Led Interview with Nikkolas Smith](#)
- ☐ [Watch Nikkolas Smith Create](#)

ON THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

- ☐ [60 Second Texts \(Black Lives Matter\)](#) from Woke Kindergarten
- ☐ [60 Second Texts \(Good Trouble\)](#) from Woke Kindergarten
- ☐ [60 Second Texts \(And Martin\)](#) from Woke Kindergarten
- ☐ [Black Lives Matter" Campaigning for Racial Justice](#) from Oregon Public Broadcasting
- ☐ [Why Teaching Black Lives Matter Matters](#) from Learning for Justice

MAKING SOCIAL JUSTICE SIGNS

- ☐ [How to Make a Social Justice Poster](#) (with Favianna Rodriguez)
- ☐ [How to Make a Protest Poster](#) (from the Tate Museum of Art)



APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION TIPS

Our curriculum is rooted in emergent strategy: “the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.”³ The interactions we have with books, among reading partners, inside classrooms, and within reading communities are relatively simple. What is cultivated from those interactions is something much more complex – ongoing anti-oppression capacity building for all ages of readers.

We urge you not to shy away from vocabulary and topics that may be challenging or uncomfortable because they relate to race, racism, oppression, difference, etc. We are all capable, deserving of, and responsible for these conversations. Our liberation and flourishing depend upon them.

FACILITATING THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE READING WITH A READING BUDDY OR COMMUNITY

- Read or listen to the core story at least once.
- Go through the entire reading guide. Mindfully, answer the discussion questions yourself (through reflective writing or another kind of reflective process that is meaningful to you).
- Check out some of the resources. Be aware of which pieces you feel most and least comfortable with, where you have room to grow, and where you have deep roots.
- Think about which questions you might want to highlight with your reading buddy or community. Have some in mind that you’d like to offer. And also, be ready to pivot and to move organically into different questions than you had in mind.

AS PART OF THE READING & LEARNING PROCESS

- Move in the direction of the natural flow of the conversation. Guide lightly and also create space for the natural curiosity of the reader/readers.
- When working with younger readers, scale the questions based on attention span and

³ As defined by Nick Obolensky in adrienne maree brown’s book *Emergent Strategy* (2018).



other factors. It is unnecessary to ask and answer every question for this process to be meaningful. However, we once again implore you not to shy away from challenging questions due to the age of your readers. Young children deserve, need, and have capacity for diving into difficult topics

- If you are working with older readers (middle school and up), you may offer all of the questions over time. You may also use these questions as written reflection prompts or reading buddy discussion prompts to be followed as-is from start to finish.

POST-READING THE CORE TEXT

- Grow into the spaces that your reading experience opens up. This might mean taking a deep dive into some of the suggested resources OR continuing to read on a particular topic using the “READ NEXT” suggestions.
- Return to the core story. Reading a story multiple times gives us more angles and opportunities for learning.
- Consider how to move into alignment with what you’re learning. What daily practices can you shift, release, add, or imagine?
- Share the stories. Share the story and reading guide with other people in your community. Then, talk about it and consider collective actions you can take to align with what you’re learning.
- Take action. Consider sharing your learning more publicly or taking other kinds of action to act in solidarity and in community around justice and liberation.

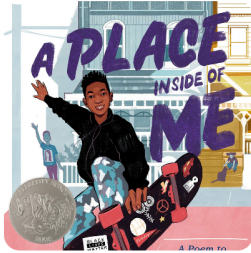


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APPENDIX C: READ NEXT

PICTURE BOOKS



**A PLACE INSIDE
OF ME BY ZETTA
ELLIOTT**



**DORTHEA LANGE
BY CAROLE
BOSTON
WEATHERFORD**

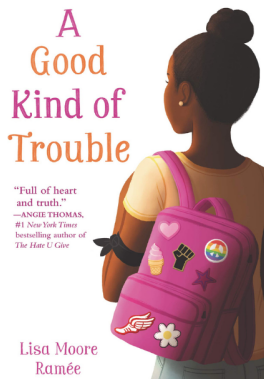


**YOU ARE THE COLOR
BY RIFK EBEID**



**PLACE HAND HERE
BY KATIE
YAMASAKI**

MIDDLE READER BOOKS



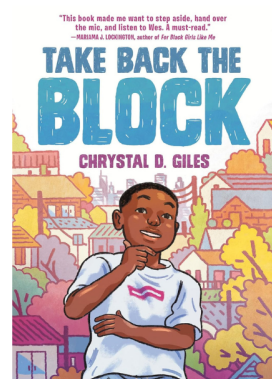
**A GOOD KIND OF
TROUBLE BY LISA
MOORE RAMÉE**



**RISE UP: THE ART OF
PROTEST BY JO
RIPPON**



**STRANGE BIRDS BY CELIA
C. PÉREZ**



**TAKE BACK THE BLOCK BY
CHRYSTAL D. GILES**



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WANT MORE READY-TO-USE TOOLS LIKE THIS?

Our discussion guide bundles go deeper into themes like empathy, anti-racism, decolonization, environmental justice, and more! Explore the full collection at www.readingisresistance.com.

And check us out on Instagram @reading_is_resistance. Join our community. Together we move from reading to action!

