

A READING GROUP GUIDE TO

JASON
REYNOLDS

BRENDAN
KIELY

ALL AMERICAN BOYS

A
NOVEL

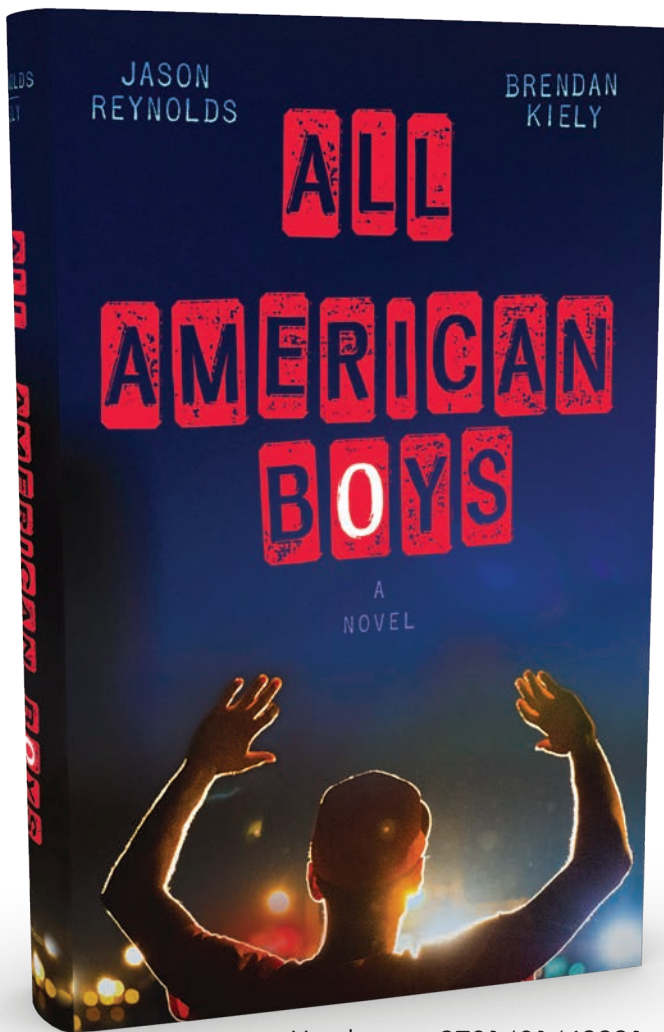


A 2016 CORETTA
SCOTT KING AUTHOR
HONOR BOOK



THE 2016 WALTER
DEAN MYERS
AWARD WINNER

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ABOUT THE BOOK

In an unforgettable novel from award-winning authors **JASON REYNOLDS** and **BRENDAN KIELY**, two teens—one black, one white—grapple with the repercussions of a single violent act that leaves their school, their community, and, ultimately, the country, bitterly divided by racial tension.

A bag of chips. That's all sixteen-year-old Rashad is looking for at the corner bodega. What he finds instead is a fist-happy cop, Paul Galluzzo, who mistakes Rashad for a shoplifter; mistakes Rashad's pleadings that he's stolen nothing for belligerence; mistakes Rashad's resistance to leave the bodega as resisting arrest; mistakes Rashad's flinching at every punch the cop throws as further resistance and refusal to stay still as ordered. But how can you stay still when someone is pounding your face into the concrete pavement?

But there were witnesses: Quinn Collins—a varsity basketball player and Rashad's classmate, who regards Paul as an older brother since his own father died in Afghanistan—and cell phone video cameras. Soon the beating is all over the news and Paul is threatened with accusations of prejudice and racial brutality. Quinn refuses to believe that Paul could potentially be guilty. But then Rashad is absent. And absent again. And again. And the basketball team—half of whom are Rashad's best friends—start to take sides. As does the school. And the town. Simmering tensions threaten to explode as Rashad and Quinn are forced to face decisions and consequences they had never considered before.

Written in tandem by two award-winning authors, this tour de force shares the alternating perspectives of Rashad and Quinn as the complications from that single violent moment, the type taken from the headlines, unfold and reverberate to highlight an unwelcome truth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *All American Boys* as targeted questions for discussion and reflection, or alternatively, they can be used as reflective writing prompts.

- 1 As the novel opens, Rashad states, "Let me make something clear: I didn't need ROTC. I didn't want to be part of no military family." Despite his lack of desire to be involved in ROTC, he remains a member in good standing to make his father happy. What can be inferred about Rashad from this knowledge? Have you ever been in a similar situation where you remained committed to something to please the people you love? If so, share your experience.
- 2 Rashad's father tells him, "There's no better opportunity for a black boy in this country than to join the army." Based on what you learned about his father's experiences, do you think he has a valid point?
- 3 Consider the cover of *All American Boys*. In what ways is the image symbolic for the events that transpire throughout the course of the book?
- 4 Describe Rashad and Quinn. What makes them dynamic characters? Are they the type of people you would want to befriend?
- 5 What is your earliest impression of Spoony, Rashad's brother? Do you find him to be a good brother to Rashad? In what ways are these two brothers similar? How are they different?
- 6 Quinn states, "On Friday nights, there were only two things on my mind: getting the hell out of the house and finding the party." Why do his responsibilities at home make him feel such a need to escape? How would you describe Quinn's family? In what ways has the absence/loss of his father impacted how the family functions? Are they in any way similar to your own? If so, in what ways?
- 7 For what reasons do you think Quinn begins to feel connected to Jill? How would you characterize their relationship, and how does it change over the course of the novel?
- 8 Guzzo states, "People have it all backward. They do...I'm sorry, but my brother did the right thing. He has to make tough calls." When his brother attacks Rashad, Guzzo is around the corner from the store, so he doesn't bear witness to the assault. Why is Guzzo unable to come to terms with the truth about his brother's actions?
- 9 Consider the variety of settings for *All American Boys*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
- 10 Jill tells Quinn, "I don't think most people think they're racist. But every time something like this happens, you could, like you said, say, 'not my problem.' You could say, 'it's a one-time thing.' Every time it happened." Do you agree with her assessment?
- 11 Quinn states, "And if I don't do something. If I just stay silent, it's just like saying it's not my problem." How does this moment show that Quinn is actively choosing not to be a bystander? Though difficult, do you agree it's the right decision?

- 12** How does the discovery of the spray-painted tag “Rashad Is Absent Again Today” change the dynamics about how students at the high school are able to deal with the event? In what ways does this initially non-spoken symbol become an avenue for reflection and conversation among both the student body and the faculty?
- 13** *All American Boys* is told in a dual first-person narrative. How would the story be different if someone besides Rashad and Quinn were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? If you could, would you want another character’s perspective to be included in the novel? If so, whose?
- 14** Dwyer tells Quinn, “Listen, man. You’ve got to fix this. We got to get the team straight...This is too big. This is our life, man. Our futures.” Consider English’s, Shannon’s, Guzzo’s, Dwyer’s, and Quinn’s shared passion for basketball. What role does the game play in the lives of these characters, and in what ways does this sport allow these young men to come together as a team? How is the team changed after the attack on Rashad? From your perspective, what will they have to do as a team to overcome this divisive experience?
- 15** Explain the title, *All American Boys*. What does it mean? In your opinion, does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel?
- 16** What is the significance of the march? Why did it mean so much to Quinn, Rashad, and Spoony? How about the rest of the characters? Why do people protest? Do you think protests are effective in voicing a cause? Can they institute change?
- 17** How does finding his father on the Police Plaza steps, waiting to join them on the march, affect Rashad? What makes this act such a powerful statement?
- 18** As the novel closes, Spoony and Berry read a roll call of real names of black people killed by police. What was your emotional response to the novel’s closing?
- 19** How is *All American Boys* a statement, or a response, to some of the racial injustice featured in the media today? What is the message that you think the authors are trying to convey through this novel? Do you think this book is an accurate reflection on society today?

EXPLORING **ALL AMERICAN BOYS** THROUGH WRITING

In *All American Boys*, the complexities of the characters, their relationships, and the situations in which they find themselves provide students with an opportunity to dig deep in the text as they examine and answer one of the following prompts:

JOURNAL RESPONSE

Throughout *All American Boys*, many characters exhibit acts of bravery. Consider the individual actions of these characters. Who do you believe to be the most courageous? Write a letter to that character explaining why you believe his/her actions are so brave?

DIARY ENTRY

Throughout the course of the novel, readers are offered great insight about the experiences of Rashad and Quinn from the events of *All American Boys*. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters in *All American Boys* and draft a diary entry detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five W's (who, what, when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.)

EXPLORING **ALL AMERICAN BOYS** THROUGH RESEARCH

- 1** As he tries to convince his mother why it's essential for them to protest the crime against Rashad, Spoony tells her, "But Ma, all we want is to feel like we can be who we are without being accused of being something else. That's all." In your opinion, why should this be a fundamental right for everyone? Using digital resources through your library, examine the history of protests for human rights, being sure to look closely at the Civil Rights Movement and at the variety of ways people have sacrificed to bring about change. In what ways is it evident that there is still much work to be done and that racism is still ongoing? Learn more about the Black Lives Matter movement to discover its goals and its importance, and consider what you can personally do to support change.
- 2** While Rashad recovers from his injuries, the hashtag #RashadIsAbsentAgain is introduced via graffiti at his high school, and quickly students begin to use it to speak up about the crime. How do social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook allow for a collective voice to speak up about injustice? How does this vehicle of information potentially differ from traditional news sources? Select a current newsworthy event and investigate the similarities and differences between the traditional news sources (CNN, network news, etc.) and social media programs. Be sure to share your findings.
- 3** Through Rashad's appreciation of the art of Aaron Douglas to the examination of the writing of Ralph Ellison in their high school coursework, readers get a brief introduction to these important black artists. Using information from library resources and the Internet, research Douglas or Ellison and prepare a digital presentation of your choice that synthesizes your findings. Be sure to consider the following:
 - ✘ Biographical information about the artist
 - ✘ Specific information regarding the inspiration for his work and what work he is most known for
 - ✘ Select your favorite example of the artist's work to share with the class
 - ✘ Why you believe his work has withstood the test of time

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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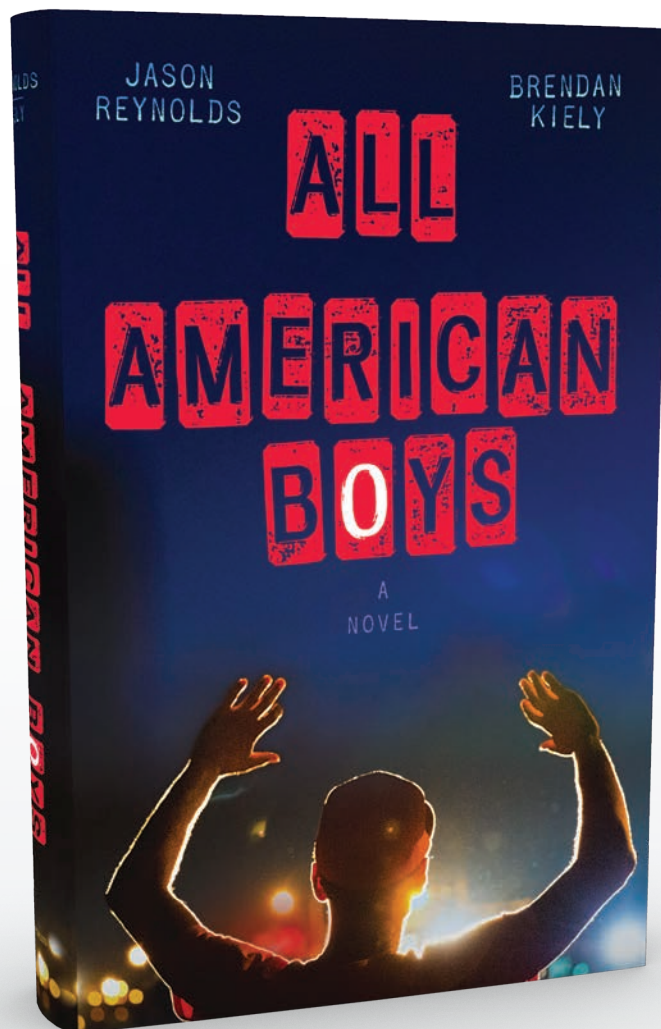
JASON REYNOLDS is crazy. About stories. After earning a BA in English from The University of Maryland, College Park, he moved to Brooklyn, New York, where you can often find him walking the four blocks from the train to his apartment talking to himself. Well, not really talking to himself, but just repeating character names and plot lines he thought of on the train, over and over again, because he's afraid he'll forget it all before he gets home. Jason is the author of critically acclaimed *When I Was the Greatest*, for which he was the recipient of the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent; the Coretta Scott King Honor books *The Boy in the Black Suit* and *All American Boys* (cowritten with Brendan Kiely); and *As Brave as You*, his middle grade debut. You can find his ramblings at JasonWritesBooks.com.



PHOTO © GARY JOSEPH COHEN

BRENDAN KIELY received his MFA from the City College of New York. He is the author, with Jason Reynolds, of the Coretta Scott King Author Honor book *All American Boys*. His debut novel, *The Gospel of Winter*, has been published in eight languages, was selected as one of the American Library Association's Top Ten Best Fiction for Young Adults 2015, and was a *Kirkus Reviews* selection for the Best of 2014. He is also the author of *The Last True Love Story*. Originally from the Boston area, he now lives with his wife in Greenwich Village. Find out more at BrendanKiely.com.

Watch a video series
with the authors and more at
AllAmericanBoysNovel.com



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