

# EDUCATOR GUIDE

Ages 12  
to Adult

DEVELOPED BY LIZ MADANS, REBEKAH SHOAF, BOOGIE DOWN BOOKS & MICHAEL BIRZER

*The* REAL EDUCATION *of*

TJ

CROWLEY

GRANT OVERSTAKE

**Educator Guide for  
The Real Education  
of TJ Crowley**

# EDUCATOR GUIDE

Ages 12  
to Adult

DEVELOPED BY LIZ MADANS, REBEKAH SHOAF, BOOGIE DOWN BOOKS & MICHAEL BIRZER

*The* REAL EDUCATION *of*

TJ

CROWLEY

GRANT OVERSTAKE

# **GVP**

Grain Valley Publishing  
2020 W. 21st Street, #34  
Wichita, KS 67203

Copyright © 2018 by Grant Overstake

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases, contact  
Grain Valley Publishing.

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-7323047-1-0

# OVERVIEW

This Educator Guide opens up a range of approaches and resources for teachers to use in engaging students with the novel *The Real Education of TJ Crowley* by Grant Overstake. Rather than providing a prescribed curriculum or a pacing calendar, this guide is intended to inspire and challenge educators to design instructional experiences that are best suited to their particular students. Materials and activities are organized thematically and need not be implemented in the order in which they appear here. A suggested timeframe is offered for each activity, but these are flexible depending on a teacher's overall vision and plan, as well as the grade level and organization of the class period.

# CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>Introducing <i>The Real Education of TJ Crowley</i> to Students</b>	<b>7</b>
	A Walking Into the Novel	7
	B Building the Background	10
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>Literary Experience and Analysis</b>	<b>12</b>
	A Close Reading Practice	12
	B Levels of Reading/Annotation	14
	C Analysis	14
	• Characterization	14
	• Point of View	14
	• Themes	15
	• Structure	16
	• Setting	17
	D Writer’s Craft and Language	17
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>A Place To Stand/Historical Context</b>	<b>20</b>
	A America in 1968	20
	B Vietnam	23
	C Name-Calling/Storytelling: Then and Now	23
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>The Psychological and Societal Impact of Biases</b>	<b>25</b>
	A Paying Attention to Bias	25
	B Police, Criminal Justice, Race and TJ	27
	C Mediators	28
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>Extending Outward and Inward: Inspired Action</b>	<b>30</b>
	A Choices	30
	B Challenging the Story/Flipping the Script	31

# 1

## Introducing *The Real Education of TJ Crowley* to Students

### A. WALKING INTO THE NOVEL

#### *First Words*

1. Title: Have students quick-write (3-5 minutes independent writing in journals) about the title of the novel. What is “real” and what does “education” mean to them?
2. Whiparound: Going around the room, students share out as concisely and as quickly as possible their definitions and ideas as the teacher graphically organizes on the board. Once the class has been heard, use the completed list to make predictions. What will this book be about, as we think about “real education”?
  - A possible follow-up: What, if anything, would be “fake” education? What does Overstake’s use of “real” underline/emphasize?
3. Opening Epigraph: Consider the opening epigraph by Maya Angelou: “When you know better, do better.” In a 10-15 minute opening set, have students put this idea in their words, and discuss whether they agree or disagree, and why? (This level of quotation analysis is a strong opening set for the Silent Discussion below.)
  - What does this epigraph lead you to expect from the novel? How/in what ways does it engage with the notion of “real education”?

#### *Silent Discussion (45 minutes)*

Students silently gather around quotations centered around the themes of the novel, not only activating their thinking in preparation for reading, but also to make visible

their current standpoint. A Silent Discussion is also a great way to open up respectful conversation and to practice creating strong clarifying questions and responses.

### Procedure

---

1. Introduce the activity by reviewing what it means to address a quotation: putting its words into your own words, and then deciding whether you disagree or agree with its ideas, and why.
2. As a class, walk through the process once, and then discuss/debrief. Does everyone agree/disagree? Why or why not? What did you need to know in order to come to an opinion?
3. Set the room: Depending on the size of the class/grade level, choose 10-12 quotations so that 3-4 students can be writing silently together. All quotations should be posted around the room on big paper, and students respond to each, walking over to each, analyzing the quotations and building on each other's comments/interpretation with a marker. (Students should put their names on all comments.) All discussion, questions, disagreements must happen on the page, and the room should stay as silent as possible.
4. Afterwards students can gallery-walk these conversations: How do we think together? What do you see/notice in these conversations?
5. Some quotes to inspire (silent) conversation:
  - "At this point, I think if you're being silent, you're making a choice and taking a side." — Michael Bennett
  - "Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man—this race and that race and the other race being inferior... Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal." — Abraham Lincoln
  - "Men build too many walls and not enough bridges." — Joseph Fort Newton
  - "All division is created in and by the mind." — Joseph Rain
  - "Growing up is losing some illusions, in order to acquire others." — Virginia Woolf
  - "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." — W.B. Yeats
  - "Tolerance of intolerance is cowardice." — Ayaan Hirsi Ali
  - "I came to discover that 'safe' was an illusion, a pretense that adults wrapped around their children—and sometimes themselves—to make the world seem comfortable." — Holly Lisle
  - "Names have power." — Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*



- “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” — Aristotle
- “Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right path, but the final forming of a person’s character lies in their own hands.” — Anne Frank
- “I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.” — Mark Twain
- “It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to.” — W.C. Fields
- “The highest result of education is tolerance.” — Helen Keller
- “He who opens a school door, closes a prison.” — Victor Hugo
- “When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.” — Ralph Ellison
- “The deeper I go into myself the more I realize that I am my own enemy.”  
— Floriano Martins

#### *Finding the Heart (10-15 minutes)*

Students find “the heart” of the opening section of the novel. This can also be explained as the key word, phrase, and/or sentence that best captures the essence of the novel’s opening.

#### *Character Mapping*

Students create collages of words and images to imagine each character as they read deeper and deeper into the novel (particular characters can be assigned to a group or an individual).

- Students should use at least 50% words on their map, and may draw/find images that explain/explore the character.
- Students may build on these character maps as they read on through the novel. What is revealed about this character and how can we build empathy/understanding?
- Especially with characters that students may struggle to empathize with, this exercise gives students a chance to find the humanity in the character.
- This exercise can be an ongoing check-in to start discussions of the novel as students read through the novel (10-15 minutes a class) or a class period at the end of the novel.

#### *Thinking on Our Feet (30-25 minutes)*

Like a [value line](#), this exercise uses movement and student choice to open up a topic or text, or to get a sense of student understanding.

#### Procedure

1. Define four areas of the classroom: Agree/Disagree/Has A Question/On the Fence.
2. Read aloud the first statement, and invite students to take a side, walking to the area

of the classroom that best fits their response.

3. Check for questions, and then ask students to share why they are on their chosen side. Students on the fence should be encouraged to choose a side.
4. The prompts can open up a reading and be revisited during or at the end of the novel to gauge how minds/opinions have been pushed while reading.
5. Some prompts to start a discussion before/during *The Real Education Of TJ Crowley*:
  - People can't change their beliefs/opinions.
  - Family is more important than friends.
  - School is where you learn the most important lessons about life.
  - Parents know what is best for you.
  - You are a product of where you come from.

#### *Question Gallery (15-20 minutes)*

This practice opens up the range of students' queries about the action and meanings of the novel, allowing students at all points of understanding to advance their thinking collaboratively.

#### Procedure

---

1. After reading the first chapter/chosen opening section, students gather as many questions as they can on post-its, and organize them on the wall.
2. Students then choose a post-it question that pushes their thinking, take it off the wall, and do a quick-write. Responses, and why the student chose this question, can be shared with a partner/group.

## **B. BUILDING THE BACKGROUND**

#### *Rapid Research Project (20-25 minutes)*

This activity gives students a chance to learn about the background references that are most interesting and meaningful to them. Students conduct research in small chunks using whatever resources (technological or otherwise) are easily accessible. This practice also opens up opportunities for students to teach and learn from each other. Finally, this activity may be expanded into research projects where students present their findings through writing, presentation, and/or digital publication.

Students conduct online research using any available resources (including their cell

phones!). Students choose from a hat, or a list of topics, or images off the wall.

- Some suggested topics: Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Vietnam War in 1968, Jim Crow laws, Civil Rights movement in 1968, Lunch counter protests, Redlining, Brown v. Board of Education, Plessy v. Ferguson, Ku Klux Klan in 1968.

### Procedure

---

1. Students select or are assigned research topics. Students engage in online research for 5-15 minutes (smartphones, class computers, whatever is available) to begin contextualizing the novel.
2. Research prompts for *The Real Education of TJ Crowley* might include:
  - Find basic information about your topic: Who or what is it? What are the “need-to-knows”?
  - What are the obvious and less than obvious connections to the novel? Participants join others who researched the same topic to share, compare, and enhance findings.
3. Participants jigsaw with others who researched different topics to teach, discuss, and synthesize.
4. Participants reconvene as a whole group to discuss trends, conclusions, and other takeaways. A discussion prompt for *The Real Education of TJ Crowley* might be: How has your understanding of the novel been enhanced by learning more about these references?

# 2

## Literary Experience and Analysis

### A. CLOSE READING PRACTICE

#### *Quotation Pulling*

This practice opens up moments into which students may deep-dive in terms of reaction, understanding and analysis. Teachers may choose to have students pull their own moments, or to use set quotations to drive the conversation. Discussion may be in pairs, small groups, or as a class.

This practice can be an opener to discussion (5-10 minutes) or a collaborative discussion, in which students evaluate and choose multiple quotations throughout the text. (35-40 minutes)

#### Procedure

---

1. In each quotation, students should discuss how it might demonstrate:
  - A clear indication of a character's mindset
  - A change or realization in a character
  - A reflection of the bigger questions/issues/themes of the novel

Here are some quotations to start—all of these reflect not only the themes of the novel, but also moments of transformation/realization: What is the story we tell ourselves, and how/ in what ways does it change?

- “Something big was burning down there where the lights were flashing and the orange flames were leaping and the black smoke was bending crooked again the strong Kansas wind. Hot town, summer in the city. It’s July 1968. Wichita was burning, again.” (3)
- ““Wait a minute, I remember you. You were at my lunch counter in Oklahoma City! How did you find me here?” “Begging your pardon, ma’am, but I’ve never been to Oklahoma City,” he said. “I’m afraid you’ve mistaken me for someone else. My name is Robert, Robert Washington.”” (4)
- ““You’re awfully young to have such a strong opinion about people you don’t know, don’t you think?” I didn’t answer, so he kept talking. “You know, I’ve come to believe we’re all alike,” he said. “The only real difference is the color of our skin. Leon’s a good kid, just like you. He loves sports just like you. If you do your part to get along, I think you could be friends.” Yeah, right, I thought.” (10)
- “It was weird, everything about her was so right and so wrong at the same time. My stomach twisted into a knot thinking about her living so close to me. What was she doing here messing up my life.” (24)
- “As we sat I took a good look at Uncle Ray. His arms were pale and white like the belly of a catfish. There was a faded blue tattoo on the inside of his forearm that I hadn’t noticed until now. It was a pin-up girl in a swimming suit looking over her shoulder. The word beneath her high heel shoes was blurry. But I could read it: HATE.” (33)
- ““You’re an angry young man, too angry for someone your age. It’s like everything going wrong in this country is boiling up inside of you. You don’t deserve this. You’re just a kid. But right now you can choose what kind of man you want to be.”” (249)
- ““Wichita’s a hard nut to crack, one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Ninety-nine percent of Negroes in this town live in the same zip code, 67214.” “I’ve been down there once, to Mathewson.” She gave a sharp sigh. “That is a sad excuse for a school. Unequal in every way. Equal education is the answer. Negro and white children learning together from teachers of all races. We’ve fought a hard fight to get this far but we can do better. We’ve got to do better.”” (284)
- “He was dressed in street clothes but still wore his gold medal on the ribbon, around his neck. I hadn’t thought to wear mine but it was in my pocket. The championship medal looked great on him. Like Ali, he’s the greatest.” (334)
- “Leon and I were together in the kitchen. I gave him an orange pop from the cooler because I remembered it was his favorite. I thought about the last time I had seen him drinking pop at the gas station. I had been wrong about Leon.” (334)
- “The last time he went under, I caught a glimpse of his old tattoo and the word still looked like HATE to me. I looked and looked and looked and looked downstream, but

he was gone.” (344)

- “We stood on the porch to watch Mom and Doctor Washington speed away in the back of the screaming ambulance. Then I laughed out loud. How was I ever going to tell her who’d saved her life?” (350)

## B. LEVELS OF READING/ANNOTATION

1. Matthew D. Brown’s article ["I'll Have Mine Annotated, Please: Helping Students Make Connections with Text"](#) gives a solid overview of ways to encourage students to annotate/interact with text.
2. [This](#) is a great overview for grades 6-8 to introduce/concretize methods of annotation.
3. [This video](#) (8 minutes) gives a great intro for students in grades 6-10 about methods of annotation.

## C. ANALYSIS

### *Characterization:*

How do we get to know these characters? What choices throughout the novel define and change each character?

- *Minding the Gaps (in character, in story):* What do we learn about each character that “explains” them? What do we still want to know? For instance, Leon’s anger at Ivy, or TJ’s mother’s relationship with Ray, or why the Washingtons moved?
- Older students may want to discuss how Overstake writes to/against stereotypes in the novel. How and in what ways do we see stereotypes in this novel? How/are these stereotypes/characters challenged and/or changed as the novel goes on?

### *Point of View*

The story is told entirely through the perspective of one character (TJ). Whose voice would you have liked to hear? What additional info might we learn from a different narrator? How might their recounting of a particular incident differ from TJ’s? How might the reader’s experience with the novel be impacted if they were reading it through another character’s eyes? Why would the author choose TJ as his narrator instead of another character?

### Procedure

---

1. *Stepping Into Someone Else’s Shoes:* Students choose a scene from the novel and

rewrite it from a different character's perspective.

2. As a classwide quick-write (3-5 minutes) to react/consider the impact of a scene: What aspects/elements did individual students notice in the characterization? Did everyone see this character's perspective leading to the same realizations/conclusion?
3. As a choice of scenes pulled from a hat to push understanding of more characters and to deepen understanding of the novel. What scenes would students have liked to see? This exercise can be solo or small-group based, and opens up opportunities for deeper inquiry and writing. This exercise can be a collaborative practice and share (30-45 minutes) or a final project for the unit.
4. From the point of view of a character who ISN'T there. This character could possibly be dead (Ivy's brother) or not directly present in the scene. How would they have heard about these events, and what would this moment mean to them? How does their voice add to the experience/understanding of the novel and the characters? Similar to the preceding exercise, teachers may choose to use this exercise as an in-class practice (30-45 minutes) with a share-out the end, or a final project for the unit.
5. As a monologue project: there are so many stories at work around TJ's narrative, and finding the truth that propels each character is a powerful exercise of analysis, research and empathy. Students may choose or be assigned a large or small character, and then use the text and research to build an understanding/empathy. Erick Gordan in "[Occupying Spaces: The Mockingbird Monologues](#)" discusses this work with a middle school class as they engaged with *To Kill A Mockingbird* over the course of a long-running unit of study.

*Themes:*

How and in what ways does the novel revolve around:

1. Separation: How/in what ways does family separation (TJ's dad leaving the family, TJ's brother leaving, the death of Ivy's brother) shape each character?
2. Safety: Throughout the novel, the idea of safety recurs with the repeated mentions of Kansas being "safe" as opposed to other places in America, TJ's sense of Ivy and her family in his neighborhood, his security at his own house when Ray comes on the scene. Additionally, his sense of his brother in Vietnam is complicated by his brother's assurances that he is safe and the reality playing out on the television screen. What do these factors tell a reader about this place and time? When and how is one ever "safe"?
3. Family: There are three families that revolve around each other in the novel: the Crowleys, the Armstrongs, and the Washingtons. How do each of these families function, and what values, beliefs, and connections unite them/pull them apart?

4. **Growing Up:** While the novel centers on the adolescence/transformation of TJ, each of his friends also changes and grows up over the course of the story. How and in what ways do they change and mature? What does each character understand and know by the ending?
5. **Identity/Names:** Students will note the proliferation of racist terms TJ uses, especially at the beginning of the novel, and what that name-calling does for him, both in terms of his worldview and also in the eyes of others. Looking deeper, students may want to discuss the use of TJ's initials and the change of Andy to "Birmingham." How do the names that TJ gives objects and experiences shift throughout the novel, and how does this reflect how he is changing?
6. **Intolerance/Tolerance:** In what ways do the characters' world views change over the novel, and how does this relate to the actions and realities they are willing to accept or even embrace?
7. **Racism/Belief:** As one of the most dominant aspects of the novel, consider the myriad ways racism is enacted throughout by different characters. How do these beliefs work to unite and divide characters? How do they and their beliefs change throughout the novel? What main ideas and understandings about racism come from these experiences?
8. **Education:** As students read the novel, refer back to the opening activity in *Walking Into the Novel*: What is the "real" education of TJ, and what is his learning? Where/in what ways is he learning?
9. **Sports/Athletics:** The idea of sports resonates throughout the novel, beginning with TJ's dreams of joining the football team (a dream he is forced to give up), his experience meeting Leon, a character who is not only gifted at sports but also mirrors TJ's frustration at his situation and his desire to be part of a team, and finally as they both find a place on the track team. What role does sports play in creating a sense of belonging for the characters throughout the text? Why and in what ways do sports provide a place for these characters? What does their participation in sports reveal about their characters and how they are changing?

### *Structure*

The entire novel takes place over the course of a year, as TJ begins school with one kind of expectation/understanding about the world, and ends with this character's entirely changed perception. Ask students to pay attention to the ending, as TJ ends with a question: How will his mother react when she finds out who saved her life? Will this knowledge change her in some way?



- What is the significance of ending the novel with a question? What does it show about TJ and how he has changed?
- What will happen next? How do students imagine she will react, and what will change?
- Is this a happy ending?

### *Setting*

Through TJ, students will gain a sense of place as he navigates the people and neighborhoods of Wichita, Kansas. Many times throughout the novel, characters offer comments and warnings regarding the safety of the place, and also what kinds of actions/people are allowed in this place. How do students compare/contrast this place and time to their present day neighborhood?

- What makes a neighborhood safe or “good”? Students may choose to compare/connect such words or ideas to looking at their own neighborhoods. What actions/words/behaviors are acceptable there, and how do they know?

## **D. WRITER’S CRAFT AND LANGUAGE**

The novel unblinkingly engages with racist language that may be challenging for students. Why does Overstake use these terms? What does their use reveal about the characters who use/don’t use them and their time period? What do students notice about their use as the novel progresses? How does their own reaction to this use change?

### *Reader’s Encounter with Racist Language*

What have been students’ experiences with racist language before this novel? A gathering/writing opportunity for students can include a quick-write about their first time hearing/being exposed to racist or otherwise discriminatory language. Below are some prompts, adapted from this [New York Times](#) lesson:

- What is your earliest experience dealing with discriminatory language?
- How did you feel while this was happening?
- What was your response and what was the response of others around you?
- What impact did it have on you? What did you learn from the experience?
- Did the encounter change you in some way, and if so, how?

In class, students can group up and share out these 3-5 minute quickwrites. While listening, students can jot down words and phrases that most pushed their thinking and create a word cloud, using a generator like Word It Out. To develop further: students may

develop these stories into final, standalone projects:

- Record these experiences on video
- Create an illustration of the experience
- Create comic or storyboards that narrate the experience
- Perform part of the story with spoken word, song, or performance art

### *The Words:*

Why are some racial slurs printed fully in the text, while others are not, the prime example being Overstake’s use of asterisks? What do students notice about the reactions of the other characters to this language, and also of their own reactions?

- As students discuss the use of language, teachers of upper grades in particular may choose to deep-dive into this topic:
- [“Straight Talk About the N-Word”](#): This interview with Arizona State University Professor Neal A. Lester discusses the complexity of the word in history and today, and how teachers particularly can navigate its use.
- [“The ‘N’ Word–It Just Slips Out”](#): Written over twenty years ago when he was eighteen, Allen Francis engages with the mixed feelings and often uneasy acceptance of the word throughout mainstream media.
- [“New Edition of ‘Huck Finn’ Censors ‘N Word’”](#): With the publication of a “clean” version of the Twain novel, this Atlantic essay reflects a variety of responses to the choice.
- [“An Essay On A Wickedly Pointed Word”](#): The use of racial language, and particularly the n-word is never acceptable, according to Keith Woods. It cannot ever be used separately from its violent and tortured past.
- [“That Word”](#): In this interview, Randall Jackson discusses the varied use of the n-word in our society today, and establishes that using such a term from a place of ignorance is the problem, not the word itself.
- [“Nigga, Please”](#): Talib Kweli Greene, a hip-hop artist, argues that the use of the word, and especially his choice to use the word in his lyrics, connects listeners to the painful history of African-Americans, and reflects their ongoing struggle.
- [“In Defense of a Loaded Word”](#): Ta-Nehisi Coates gives an alternate approach towards usage of culturally provocative terms; students may engage with the two sides of this conversation as they assess Overstake’s usage throughout.

### Procedure

1. Compare Overstake’s language use to Countee Cullen’s poem [“Incident”](#): What is

the effect of the racist language in this poem? Cullen, a famous poet of the Harlem Renaissance, created many complex and formal poetical works in his career—this poem is breathtaking in its seeming simplicity. What is the power of the word here, and how does it work within the context of the poem? How does it speak to the world outside the poem?

- What would the text be like without this language? Would it have the same power/effect? Students may wish to check out excerpts from other texts that are used to convey a historic sense of racism, and also the defense of these novels. (Several organizations formed a [coalition](#) to defend Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* after a private school in Pennsylvania dropped it from the curriculum.)

# 3

## A Place to Stand/Historical Context

### A. AMERICA IN 1968

As students dive deeper into the narrative, they can support their experience by building a context for the pressures and forces shaping the world of the novel.

#### Procedure

1. *Getting The Newspaper* (10-15 minutes): Each group of students receives a headline from a newspaper from 1968 and makes guided inferences/ideas/connections to the present.
  - How do these moments compare/fill out/address the investigations from *Walking Into the Novel*?
  - How do these headlines compare to those from the same/similar publication today? What has changed? What hasn't?

#### Integration

1. [This](#) series of articles via ProPublica gives a solid overview of the history of school segregation in the US.
2. The Norman Rockwell painting "[The Problem We All Live With](#)" in the Washingtons' living room captures the atmosphere of division in America as schools began the work of integration and also speaks to the power of the individual. Like Ruby Bridges, TJ

has to choose, and chooses again and again to walk into a new way of thinking and being in the world. This painting was hung in the Obama White House, and [here](#) is an interview (1:30 minutes) with the now-grown Bridges on seeing it again.

3. Much of the Civil Rights Movement is refracted throughout the novel by the specific experiences of the characters: Ivy chooses to attend a predominantly white school, while TJ's mother cites her experiences as a waitress in Oklahoma during a sit-in as a genesis for her antipathy towards African-Americans.
  - [This article](#) shows a celebration/re-enacting of the first Katz Drug store sit-ins that happened on August 19, 1958. Inspired by their teacher Clara Luper, high-school students initiated the first of several sit-ins at the Katz Drugstore chain, which ultimately succeeded in desegregating the drugstore. A [video](#) (5 minutes) through the Library of Congress gives an overview of Luper's work and the sit-in. [The Zinn Education Project](#) gives more information about this early sit-in, and an interview with Luper's daughter about her mother's work may be found [here](#) (3 minutes).
  - For younger readers, this [picture book](#) by Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich gives a moving overview of Luper and her legacy.
  - Some readers may have questions about how writers of historical fiction reference, adapt, and recast historical events to serve their authorial purposes. Invite students to consider the relationships between these historical accounts of the sit-ins and the memory that TJ's mother shares.
4. Students may want to explore [this exhibit](#) at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History to see the original lunch counter at some of the first sit-ins at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960.
5. Invite students to consider the implications of [this image](#) from a sit-in training: What does the photograph tell us about what sit-in activists endured and how they approached their acts of resistance?
6. This video about [The Little Rock Nine](#) (3 minutes) gives a sense of participants' points of view and experiences. The Library of Congress, as part of their collection about the Civil Rights Act of 1964, [offers a wide range of short videos](#) about the era that teachers may want to use to deepen students' understanding: [the footage from the CBS reporting on Birmingham, Alabama in 1963](#) (5 minutes) presents students with stark first-hand experience of the struggle.
7. Students often consider the American South to be the historic center for racially motivated activity and civil rights struggle. It may be useful to have them consider sites of racism and discrimination throughout the country. [This entry](#) on Digital History

gives a solid overview of segregation, systemic discrimination, and the struggle for human rights throughout the country.

8. Educators may choose to use the novel's setting of Wichita, Kansas, as a place to start this conversation. Finding it on the map, students can make guesses regarding its place/position in the civil rights era.
  - The sit-ins at Dockum Drugstores in Wichita in 1958 took place a full year and a half before the NAACP sanctioned sit-ins as a form of civil disobedience. Students can listen to an NPR account [here](#) (4 minutes) or watch excerpts of a documentary [here](#) (the documentary is 1 hour long, but is easily broken up into small segments if desired). Both speak to the courage of individuals to recognize/work against an established injustice, a theme that resonates throughout the novel. This example also may be a way to push students' perceptions of where/when the struggle for civil rights unfolded.
9. Students may continue to use/challenge the idea of a "good" or "safe" place (as characters throughout the book continue to call Wichita) by doing a research dive into their own city/state. What happened there? What kinds of laws promoting segregation existed there, and when did these laws finally disappear? What kind of separation/tensions exist today?
  - Students can use [this map](#) to research what laws existed in each state in 1949, right before the modern civil rights era gained momentum.
  - In [this excerpt](#) (6 minutes) from the documentary *Confronted*, residents of a suburban town near Philadelphia react with violence when a black family moves into the neighborhood, which may give students a sense of the opposition encountered by the Washington family in the novel.
10. [Why Are US Cities Still So Segregated?](#) (7 minutes): This NPR short goes far to give the history of segregation and redlining throughout the country, and its long-reaching historical effects into today's cities throughout the country.
11. [This article](#) in Vox discusses how even well-intentioned discussions of race and segregation across the country today are complex and often bring up traumatic and complex issues.

#### *Accompanying/Connective Texts*

1. *A Raisin In The Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry: This play depicts the struggle of an African-American family as they face the choice to move to a white neighborhood and away from their redlined zip code.
2. *Fences*, August Wilson: Students can identify the fences and barriers in their lives,

explore who erected them, and reflect on the extent to which they've explored the other side.

3. "I, Too," Langston Hughes: This short poem reflects on the sense of not being included: in a social setting, in America, in the story of history. As the poem moves down the page, the speaker finds the strength to look ahead into a historical moment wherein s/he will not only be included, but will be valued and known.

## B. VIETNAM

Throughout the novel, the actions and events of the Vietnam war seep into the narrative, such as TJ and Eric witnessing a military funeral, television footage, and the Bronze star Ronnie sends to TJ. Ronnie has escaped the difficulties of his home life by enlisting to fight in the Vietnam War. Over the course of the novel, he wins a Bronze star, appears on television, and becomes a character through his infrequent letters to TJ.

- [Photos](#) capturing multiple layers and perspectives of the war begin to give a sense of the war's complexity, and Tim O'Brien's epic book, [The Things They Carried](#), conveys a soldier's experience of Vietnam (and the grisly aspects of war Ronnie does not directly share with TJ). How do these photographs challenge/open up multiple perspectives of the war?
- What values/ideas is America fighting for in this war, and how does that relate to the "war" at home?

## C. NAME-CALLING/STORY-TELLING: THEN AND NOW

Throughout the novel, TJ compares the stories he knows to the information and different versions of events he learns from his experiences at school with his friends. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks to this engagement in her TED Talk, ["The Danger of a Single Story"](#) (18 minutes), relating the need to push against one version of the truth.

### Procedure

1. Students may consider naming as an act of power exchange/identity shift in nicknames, full names, etc. Characters in the novel change their name (Andy becomes Birmingham, TJ is called various aspects of his "real" name by different characters). What does this naming mean? What does it mean to be named by others?
2. The practice of name-calling as a tool and weapon penetrates through multiple layers of America then and now. As an extension, students may explore the evolution of

name-calling, from TJ's world to today: how/in what ways does name-calling seek to define/control a story or sense of a person/group of people?



# 4

## The Psychological and Societal Impact of Biases

### A. PAYING ATTENTION TO BIAS

#### *Identifying Bias*

What is bias? Throughout the novel, TJ’s judgments and understandings are motivated by his explicit and implicit biases.

1. [“Peanut Butter, Jelly and Racism”](#) (2:30 minutes). This *New York Times* short defines the term “implicit bias” and how it may affect and shape a person’s experiences and understandings.
2. Students may be interested in taking a [quiz](#) to track their own implicit bias: What ideas/impressions are they bringing into a conversation/encounter?
3. Facing History offers [lesson plans](#) and resources to open up a conversation about bias and identifying it, starting within the classroom.
4. “How Good Are You At Detecting Bias?”: This [lesson](#), along with the quiz, allows students to observe their own implicit bias, as well as [an overview/identification of “fake news”](#).
5. [Speak Up At School](#): This resource, along with others listed here from Teaching Tolerance, offers concrete methods students can use to advocate for change in their school community.

#### *The Impact of Prejudice and Racism*

Prejudice and racism impacts people at different levels including:

1. *The Cognitive Level:* Stereotypes and implicit biases often maintained by a supporting environment such as family and friends.
2. *The Emotional Level:* The feelings aroused when a person comes into contact with, for example, a person of a different race.
3. *The Behavioral Level:* When a person acts on their stereotypes and implicit biases, and engages in a hate crime or hateful act purposefully discriminating against another person.

#### Procedure

1. Considering the three levels listed above, students should list (10-15 minutes), on their own, one or two examples from each level based on TJ Crowley's life.
2. Have students share their lists with the larger class. (20-30 minute discussion)
  - Instructors, one textbook example at the cognitive level is stereotyping on page 132: Uncle Ray says to TJ "He sure loves that car, don't he. All them uppity n\*\*\*\*\* drive shiny new Cadillacs. Thing is, most of them make payments with welfare checks."
  - Another example, page 133 "Ray cracked open the last beer in the cooler and slurred, Stupid, stupid n\*\*\*\*\*. They don't deserve a thing they've been handed to them by the government." In this statement, Ray engages in the stereotype, albeit incorrect, that African Americans are somehow in great numbers receiving government handouts or the implied welfare check.
  - One of the many examples of the emotional level is on page 4: TJ's mother is shocked when Dr. Washington knocks on the Crowley's door to introduce himself and TJ's mother says, "Wait a minute, I remember you. You were at my lunch counter in Oklahoma City . . ." After Dr. Washington says "Begging your pardon ma'am but I've never been to Oklahoma City . . ." and then introduces himself as the Crowley's next door neighbor, TJ's mother acts on her emotions and says "N\*\*\*\*\* get off my porch."
  - One example at the behavioral level is when Uncle Ray and TJ poured sugar into Dr. Washington's Lincoln automobile. They acted on their stereotypes and implicit biases and committed a hate crime.

#### *Learned Behavior*

People are not born with prejudiced views of others. They learn them. Prejudiced views of others may develop in part based on a number of factors including:

1. Our interactions with others

2. What we were raised to believe; and
3. Our life experiences.

#### Procedure

---

1. Using the three factors above as a guide, students should, on their own, take a few minutes to compile a list of how TJ Crowley's prejudice was shaped. (10-15 minutes)
2. The students' compiled lists should be shared with the class. (20-30 minutes)
  - A response to look for in students lists might be: Uncle Ray and his mother nurturing TJ's prejudice. This is also an opportunity to bring back into the discussion the mediators in TJ's life that had a counter effect on the prejudice that TJ was being exposed to.

## B. POLICE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, RACE AND TJ

### *Reflection of Race and the Criminal Justice System*

This activity engages students in thought and critical reflection about race, police, and the larger criminal justice system.

#### Procedure

---

1. Have students individually (5-10 minutes) develop a list of how African Americans were depicted as symbolic criminal offenders in TJ's story. Questions to consider include:
  - What role do you think the police had in the story?
  - Was Detective Harris relationship with TJ authentic in your mind?
  - How did he help shape TJ's worldview?
  - Should he have "closed the book" absolving TJ after the incident at the spillway that led to Uncle Ray's death? Why or why not? What was wrong or right about it?
  - *Additional suggested question:* Do historical injustices such as in TJ's era play a role on race relations today? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Have students share their list with the class and discuss as a group (15-20 minutes)
  - One example in the book is on page 133. TJ and Ray were watching news accounts of an MLK march. Students should be able to identify how African Americans were presented as "symbolic offenders." For example, page 34 "The newscaster said, *Dr. King's ambition to have a peaceful non-violent protest was disrupted by police, who were given the go-ahead to disperse the marchers by whatever means necessary.*"

This is an opportunity for instructors to discuss with students the state of police – minority relations today. How were protests handled during TJ’s era compared to protests as part of the Black Lives Matter movement we witnessed in recent years in Ferguson, Baltimore, Minneapolis, New York, etc. Instructors might consider allowing students to Google search terms on their hand held devices like Black Lives Matter and police protests. Then engage students in a discussion of how recent protests and police–racial minority encounters are different or similar when compared to TJ’s time (late 1960s).

- In addition, on page 133 TJ says, “I watched images of burning buildings and colored people coming out of smashed store windows carrying TV sets. Many nights, I’ve smelled smoke blowing over from the riots in N\*\*\*\*\* town here in Wichita.” Students should be able to recognize the coded, *symbolic offender* that is being constructed through TJ’s worldview. The symbolic offender presented in TJs era represents, albeit false, the notion of African Americans, rioting, looting, all embedded in a sense of chaos, disorder and lawlessness. Students should be able to recognize and discuss the level of fear this may create and nurture of other racial groups outside of their own.

Instructors might also assign a brief homework assignment to students. Have students over the course of a few days or a week or two, collect and record stories about crime and justice, and/or Hollywood depictions of criminal offenders. Then, in class, engage the students in a discussion in regards to their findings.

1. Which racial group did they find depicted as criminal offenders the most in the news stories and Hollywood movies and TV?
2. How do these depictions shape our views of race?

## C. MEDIATORS

### *The Importance of Mediators*

With a lack of mediators, a person raised in a prejudicial and/or racist environment may hold those beliefs over time. Mediators are people or events that offset or counter a person’s prejudice or racist beliefs.

#### Procedure

1. Students should, on their own, compile a list of what they believe were mediating

factors in TJ Crowley's life. (10-15 minutes)

2. The students' compiled lists should be shared with the larger class. (20-30 minutes discussion)
3. Ask students to discuss what they believe the consequences would have been if TJ would not had the mediating factors present in his life, or the exposure to African Americans while attending Brooks Junior High. (20 minutes)

# 5

## Extending Outward and Inward: Inspired Action

### A. CHOICES

*Where Do We Go? Where Are We Going?*

What TJ chooses ultimately leads him to grow up and to take action. Students can activate their thinking regarding choice through reflective writing assignments/memoir.

#### Procedure

1. *Reflective Essay*: Students may select one of TJ's choices and connect it to their own choices as they've grown up. Is there a choice they have made in their lives that has profoundly changed/affected not only the situation but also themselves? How and in what ways? These questions may be explored through a variety of frames:
  - Rumination Paper
  - College Application Essay draft
2. *Spoken Word*: Playing with choral/paired reading, students may engage and complicate their "single" story such as in [Lost Voices](#) (3 minutes), in which two speakers share their own struggles as they jump in and out of each other's voices.
  - This practice of development and drafting may be a standalone lesson for a class period, or can be shaped and practiced over the study of the novel into a final project/performance at the end of the unit.

## B. CHALLENGING THE STORY/FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

### *Social Justice Movements*

As they read the novel, students have the opportunity to see TJ change his mind, open up to new experiences, and challenge what he has been taught. Social justice programs and initiatives in a school are opportunities for students, and school communities on the whole, to pay this kind of attention to equity and experience. This [blog post](#) on Edutopia.com gives a great overview of the ways social justice programming and thinking is developed in a school setting, and opens up a place to start.

### *Restorative Justice: taking a role in the school community*

Building and being part of restorative justice practices in a school community is a compelling move towards building conversation, empathy, and equity. This [guide](#), created by students and teachers in Oakland, California, gives a strong overview of the approach, its implementation, and ways to begin.

### *Taking A Stand*

This [site](#) gives a running list of the many ways we can step up within our own communities to affect change.

### [“Agree To Respectfully Disagree”](#)

How do we talk with/communicate with those we disagree with? How do these conversations change the community/our own outlook/perspective?

# MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

## **LIZ MADANS**, Curriculum Developer

Liz Madans is a writer and educator based in New York City. She holds degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, and Columbia University's Teachers College. For the last 15 years, she has taught English at Robert F. Wagner Jr. Secondary School for Arts and Technology in Queens. In the classroom, she builds critical and creative fluency with her students, leading to all-night Homeric performances, Shakespearean flash mobs, personal essay podcasts, and poetry slams. A contributing writer at Huffington Post from 2013 to 2017, she has received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the New York Public Library's The Cullman Center Institute for Teachers for her research into pedagogy and the humanities. She continues to develop her practice as a professional development facilitator, a coordinator for the College Now program at CUNY, and a curriculum designer for both adolescent and adult learning.

## **REBEKAH SHOAF**, Curriculum Designer, Owner & Founder of Boogie Down Books

[www.boogiedownbooks.com](http://www.boogiedownbooks.com) | @boogiedownbooks

Rebekah Shoaf is a New York City-based educational consultant and the founder and owner of Boogie Down Books, a bookstore-without-walls for kids, teens, families, and educators in the Bronx and beyond. After teaching high school English for ten years, she served as a Teacher Development Coach with the NYC Department of Education, where she supported educators at middle and high schools in promoting rigorous, student-centered instruction. She continues to work with a variety of clients to promote educational equity through transformative professional learning experiences as an instructional and teacher leadership coach, professional development facilitator, and curriculum designer for both adolescent and adult learning. A Miami native, Rebekah is a lifelong bookworm, a university instructor, a graduate of the Chef's Training Program at the Natural Gourmet Institute, and an aunt to six budding bibliophiles. She believes that teaching young people to read well and eat well can change the world.

## **DR. MICHAEL BIRZER**, Contributor, Professor of Criminal Justice, Wichita State University | [Wichita Profile](#)

Professor Birzer has authored or co-authored 14 books for law enforcement and criminal justice courses, about crime, the police, and racial profiling. His recent book, *Racial Profiling: They Stopped me because I'm \_\_\_\_!* captures how racial minority citizens experience what they believe to be racial profiling. Other publications include: *Police Field Operations: Theory Meets Practice*, 2nd Edition (2015) Pearson/Prentice-Hall; and, *In Their Own Words: Criminals on Crime*, 7th ed. (2017) Oxford Publishing, (with Paul Cromwell). Prior to his entry into academia, Dr. Birzer retired after 18 years of service in law enforcement.

## **GRANT OVERSTAKE**, Journalist & Author | [www.GrantOverstake.com](http://www.GrantOverstake.com)

Award-winning journalist and author Grant Overstake is a former Miami Herald Staff Writer and newspaper editor. A teaching artist with Arts Partners, he presents writing workshops in Wichita public schools. His premier novel, *Maggie Vaults Over the Moon*, was hailed as a "Fine YA novel about perseverance in sports and in life," by *KIRKUS REVIEWS*.

**Grain Valley Publishing**

GRAINVALLEYPUBLISHING.COM

Cover design by Tiani Kennedy

Cover image © Pexels.com