

That FLAG



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

TAMEKA FRYER BROWN AND #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING ILLUSTRATOR NIKKOLAS SMITH

We hope the words and images in this story foster transformative conversations that lead to change.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Two best friends are alike in every way and spend every moment together. Except at home. Bianca's family flies a Confederate flag, and Kiera's family is clear that the presence of "that flag" means Kiera can't spend time in Bianca's home. As Kiera and Bianca learn more about the flag and its history, they face not only the truth but a big divide in their friendship as well. When the flag and its violence strike close to home, the pair slowly reconnect through their grief and a new understanding.

ABOUT THE CREATORS



Tameka Fryer Brown writes books for children. Her picture books include *Twelve Dinging Doorbells*, *Brown Baby Lullaby*, *Around Our Way on Neighbors' Day*, *My Cold Plum Lemon Pie Bluesy Mood*, and *Not Done Yet: Shirley Chisholm's Fight for Change*. Her work also appears in the anthology, *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices*. Tameka is an active member of The Brown Bookshelf, Black Creators HQ and KidLit in Color. She currently resides in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can visit her at www.tamekafryerbrown.com.



Nikkolas Smith is a Houston, Texas-born Artist, picture book author, and Hollywood film illustrator. He is the illustrator of the groundbreaking #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The 1619 Project: Born on the Water* written by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson. Nikkolas is also the illustrator of *The Golden Girls of Rio*, nominated for an NAACP Image Award; *Black Panther Wakanda Forever: The Courage To Dream*; *I Am Ruby Bridges*; *My Hair Is Poofy & That's Okay*; and *World Cup Women*. As a Black illustrator, Nikkolas is focused on creating captivating art that can spark important conversations around social justice in today's world and inspire meaningful change. He lives in Los Angeles, California. You can visit him at www.NIKKOLAS.art.

NOTES FROM THE CREATORS TO YOUNG READERS

I wrote this story to tell you the truth about the Confederate flag, about where it came from and how it has been used throughout our country's history. I want to help readers understand why it is not merely a symbol of "Southern heritage," but an emblem that makes many people feel anger and fear—and for good reason. I believe in telling kids the truth, even about things that are sad or a little bit scary.

I'm not sure when I was first told to stay away from people who flew or wore the Confederate flag . . . but I'm sure it was by someone who loved me and cared about my safety. What they didn't tell me was why those people could be a danger to me, and that left me confused. It wasn't until I was an adult that I learned just how often the Confederate flag has been used by white supremacists in our country. White supremacists believe white people are better than Black people and other groups, and they believe white people should control our society. I wrote this book because I believe white supremacy is wrong, and that celebrating the symbols associated with it (like Confederate flags and statues) is wrong too.

If human beings can learn to be racist, we can also learn not to be. In fact, your generation could grow up to be the fairest, most inclusive generation our nation has ever seen . . . especially if we adults do our part and tell you more truths about more things.

I wrote *That Flag* to do my part to make humanity better, because I believe in your power to change the world.

—TAMEKA

I truly believe that America is a country that can soar to the highest heights if we are open and honest about our past.

In *That Flag*, I wanted to illustrate the feelings of hurt and sadness that come with the past and present of the confederate flag, and toward the end of the book, paint visual representations of what society could look like if we are truly serious about addressing and confronting the monster that is racism. It is a monster that I have seen firsthand as a young Black boy growing up in the South, but I also grew up seeing many people who believe in a free and equitable society. This has led me to creating activism for a living, with the primary objective of illustrating both the hurt and the hope in this world.

I love to portray the innocence and wisdom of youth because it is often a roadmap of where we should go as a human race, and Keira and Bianca display this so well. To all of you youngsters out there who stand up and speak out for human rights and justice for all, thank you for leading the way to a brighter future. Never let anyone silence your voice.

—NIKKOLAS



TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS & EDUCATORS

- **Reflect and stretch yourself.** One of the most important things to consider when approaching complicated and emotionally charged topics with young readers is yourself. Explore your own feelings on the topic first and be open to new information. Make use of resources, consult reputable organizations, and read, read, read. A caring adult willing to model vulnerability and continuous learning bolsters young readers' sense of safety as they grapple with a challenging topic themselves.
- **Encourage open expression.** When reading *That Flag* or introducing a difficult topic, find out what young readers already know or think about it. Correct misconceptions or misinformation while engaging in dialogue and encouraging young readers to share their feelings and questions in whatever mode of expression works best for them.
- **Lean on the books.** Research shows that children process difficult topics more easily "thirdhand," such as through a book. Discussion about not only what's going on in a book but about the book itself can provide a release valve for the pressure of heavy subjects and allow young readers to consider the conflict in *That Flag* and other books without becoming overwhelmed.
- **Balance is key.** The many thoughtful books that discuss and illustrate the "hurt and hope" of young readers' world are important tools. That said, heavy topics should be balanced with joy and celebration as well as with validation of young readers' feelings. For example, consider discussing the hopeful ending of *That Flag* as well as pairing it with books celebrating Black heroes or books about mindfulness and handling big feelings.
- **Help kids check in on their feelings.** Taking time to recognize how we're feeling is the first step to coping with big or negative emotions. Provide breaks when reading or engaging with complicated or emotional topics, and ask young readers to check in with their feelings and their bodies without judgment. Help them make a connection between their feelings and something that happened in the story or during the discussion, and model good coping skills like taking deep breaths or taking body breaks.
- **Share the activism!** Show young readers the ways that injustice has historically and to this very day been met with resistance. You can use biographical, nonfiction, or other books or have readers explore news and activist resources. Help young readers learn about youth activism and the ways that resistance of young people just like them has been key to every social justice movement.
- **Primary sources too!** Exploring museums and special collections is a wonderful way to connect young readers with living history. If possible, speaking with or hearing from people who have participated in civil rights direct action, in the past or in the present. The Library of Congress digital collections and documentaries about activists like Bree Newsome are great places to start.
- **Support self-reflection.** Kiera and Bianca are both faced with new perspectives on their families' beliefs, and the time they take apart allows them both time to reflect. Self-reflection is a skill like any other that requires patient, supportive modeling and practice. Help young readers make connections between some of the details and information in the story and their own experiences and their own beliefs. You can use this guide's discussion questions and activities or try something different like drawing or journaling or pretend play to meet young readers where they are.

This guide was prepared by Anastasia Collins, MA, MLIS, librarian, youth literature scholar, anti-oppression educator. Follow her at @DarkLiterata.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students look at the front and back covers and the endpapers of the picture book. What do they notice? What are they wondering? What does the title and the outer art make them think about the story inside?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the flag in Bianca's yard mean Kiera can't spend time at her house? What do you think Kiera's parents are worried about?
2. Kiera loves how much she and Bianca have in common and is very upset to realize that they have some big differences too. Have you ever learned something you didn't like about a friend or someone you care about? How did you handle it?
3. Discuss how a symbol (like a flag, a statue, a work of art, etc.) can make some people feel proud and others feel pain or fear. Why is it important not to forget or dismiss a symbol's connection to hate or harm?
4. Why do you think Bianca isn't troubled by the museum exhibit and the flag's violent history the same way Kiera is?
5. The story is told from Kiera's perspective. Where do the illustrations give us more or different information than the text? When this happens, what do readers know that Kiera doesn't?
6. When Ms. Greyson explains the flag's historical and present-day use by white supremacists, Bianca argues and gets upset, asking "Why would my family fly a flag like that? [p. 27]" What do you think the answer to Bianca's question might be?
7. This story has a lot of big emotions from several different characters. Choose three scenes in the book and name all the feelings you see described in the text and shown in the illustrations. Are the feelings in the text the same as those in the illustrations? Are they different?
8. What are your feelings as you read the story? At the beginning? At the end? If you could turn your feelings into actions right now, what would you do?
9. When Bianca and her family attend the candlelight vigil and take down their flag afterward, Kiera is surprised and wonders why. Why do you think they did? What in the text and illustrations supports your thinking?
10. How do the characters change during the story? Why do you think they change and how do you know?
11. What do you think Kiera and Bianca learned about themselves, their families, and the world? What did you learn about Kiera and Bianca as you read the story? Use the text and illustrations to support your answers.
12. Read Nikkolas Smith's illustrator's note at the end of the book [p. 39]. Describe "activism" in your own words. How are books like *That Flag* and their illustrations examples of activism?
13. What do you think the author and illustrator want readers to remember or think about most after reading Kiera's story?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Get Your Art On

Flags can be powerful symbols, but, as Nikkolas Smith says in his illustrator's note, so can artwork that uplifts a community or movement. Introduce students to examples of community and activist art like murals, installations, etc. and discuss it: *What do students see in the piece of art? How does the art make them feel? Why do they think the artist(s) made it, and why is the art important?* Give students a list of words from the discussion (e.g., community, hope, and justice) and have students, individually or in groups, choose one. Students will draw, paint, collage, use digital or fiber art tools, etc. to create an art piece that represents their chosen word.

History in Action

Divide students into research groups. Each group will choose one of the past or present civil rights events and figures that Kiera's family tells her about: Freedom Fighters, Selma, Charleston 9 (Emanuel AME). Students can each take on specific tasks or work together to write and present a brief report about their event or person and why they are important.

Fly Your Flag

Have students choose something about themselves that makes them proud and design a flag to represent it. Encourage them to think about how real flags use symbolism (shapes, colors, patterns, etc.) to represent important aspects of a country, group, or movement. If a student is particularly proud of their homemade ramen, how might they represent their cooking skills beyond drawing a bowl of ramen?

Museum Magic

Take students on a trip (in-person or virtual) to a civil rights museum. Ask students to write down three things they learn that they didn't know before, including something about the history of the Confederate flag that wasn't mentioned in the book? Along with what they learned, have students think about what they'd like to know more about or what they're wondering and make a plan for finding more information (your school or public librarian is a great resource to help them get started).

