

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

LIGHT IT UP

FOR USE
WITH COMMON
CORE STATE
STANDARDS

ABOUT THE BOOK

A girl walks home from school. She's tall for her age. She's wearing her winter coat. Her headphones are in. She's hurrying.

She never makes it home.

In the aftermath, while law enforcement tries to justify the response, one fact remains: a police officer has shot and killed an unarmed thirteen-year-old girl. The community is thrown into upheaval, leading to unrest, a growing movement to protest the senseless taking of black lives, and the arrival of white-supremacist demonstrators.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KEKLA MAGOON is the author of several books for young adults, including *37 Things I Love*, the Coretta Scott King Honor/John Steptoe Award-winning *The Rock and the River*, and the Coretta Scott King Honor book *How It Went Down*. She has also contributed to the anthology *Dear Heartbreak: YA Authors and Teens on the Dark Side of Love*. She lives in Vermont.



This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. The standards listed throughout are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for grade eight, but the activities and questions can be applied to multiple grade levels. Please adapt the activities and questions to meet the needs of your students. You know your students better than anyone else!

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever taken part in a protest? What was its focus? What other protests have you heard or read about? Who organized the protests, and how? What were the goals? If peaceful protests are ineffective, do you believe violence is a justifiable option? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, focusing on freedom of speech. What do you think is protected under the amendment? Does it affect your life in any way? Should speech that's considered hate speech be protected if it threatens individuals or groups?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the role of the person identified only as "Witness." What did he see during the shooting? What does he do with that information? Why does he join the crowds in the street after the grand jury announcement, and what happens to him? Why do you think the author didn't give Witness a name or other identifiable details?
2. Why does the police department impose a curfew? How do people in the community and specific characters in the novel react to the curfew? Review the discussion of the topic in the news broadcast on pages 87-88. Here and elsewhere characters refer to *militaristic policing*. What do they mean? What are the problems with that type of policing?
3. Compare the lives and feelings of Tina and Eva, whose entries are sometimes juxtaposed. Describe each of the girls and what she cares about. What problems does each of them cope with? What are they feeling near the end of the novel?
4. Find references throughout the novel to how parents of color worry about their children and why they do. Who are some of the parents? What do they say to their children? What about our society makes this necessary?
5. Even though the narrative shifts repeatedly from character to character, complicated relationships develop during the story. Talk about the romances between Kimberly and Zeke, and Brick and Melody. What is the role of the shooting in bringing them together? Describe Jennica and how she fits into their lives.
6. Talk about connections among various characters—whether from their pasts or displayed in the course of the novel. For example, Brick thinks about Will's graffiti about rules for dogcatchers and rules for cops. Talk about specific connections and their consequences, such as Tyrell promising Tina he will visit.
7. Discuss reactions of white outsiders to the shooting including the "war on cops" movement and the hate-filled signs at Shae's funeral. What motivates such reactions? How do the people in the community feel about them? What is your view of them? Discuss the racist comments, signs, and protests in relation to the First Amendment and hate speech.

8. Why does Tyrell try to avoid discussions with Robb about race? What is his general view of Robb? Why does Tyrell initially reject the offer to go back to Underhill? Why does he change his mind? Tyrell says about college, “I win if I graduate” (p. 94). What does he mean? What do you think will happen to him in the future?
9. Discuss Robb’s character and his interest in issues about race. What does DeVante think of Robb? Find incidents and comments where Robb reveals his ignorance about racism. In what ways does he embody white privilege? Do you think he learns anything in the course of the novel? Contrast Robb’s situation at the end of the book to Tyrell’s.
10. Reread the arguments that DeVante and Robb have about racism on pages 49-50 and 144-145. What are their disagreements? Discuss the arguments about the use of the words in these scenes and in the news transcript on pages 22-23. For example, DeVante says *rioting* is “a white man’s word” (p. 50).
11. Near the end of the novel, several of the male characters feel they have failed. Find those passages and discuss why the characters feel this way. Do you agree with their judgment about themselves? Why is this a particular problem for black men?
12. Talk about the importance of setting in terms of time and place. How integral is the neighborhood to the story? Could it have been set in a suburb or small town? Why do you think the author doesn’t name the city? What would have been different if the story had been set decades earlier? How do broadcast media and social media extend the impact of the shooting to a broader range of people?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to write a paper that adds a character to the novel. The paper should consist of four or five entries at different times in the novel, with an explanation of where they fit in the time frame. The entries should include details about the new character such as age and family situation. The character should know at least two of the other characters in the novel and interact with them.

CCSS.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

2. Assign each student a character in the novel to study more closely. The student should re-read that character’s entries and write a paragraph describing the character. Then the student should pick one of the entries to practice reading aloud. Have students read their descriptions and the chosen entry aloud in small groups.

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.SL.8.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grade 8 Language standards 1 and 3 here for specific expectations.)

3. Throughout the novel, characters refer to black children and adults who have been killed by police. As a class, make a list of the names and have students add other names they may know. Then have pairs of students research one of the people shot and create a poster with their photograph, information about their life, and facts about the shooting. Dedicate a wall or bulletin board for sharing the posters.

CCSS.W.8.1 D Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence

CCSS.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

4. The novel also refers to events in history when communities reacted to injustice, such as the Birmingham campaign and the upheaval in 1965 Watts. Have students choose such an event to learn more about. Students should research their topic using print and digital resources and create a multimedia presentation to share with the class that includes facts, quotes, and images, and possibly video and music.

CCSS.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

CCSS.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

5. In a conversation with other students about the Underhill protests, DeVante objects to the word *riot*, saying, “Everyone wants to say violence isn’t the answer. You have to remember that violence is also the question. That’s what we don’t talk about” (p. 50). Have a discussion about his statement in general and specifically in relation to the novel.

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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