

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO

HANDS

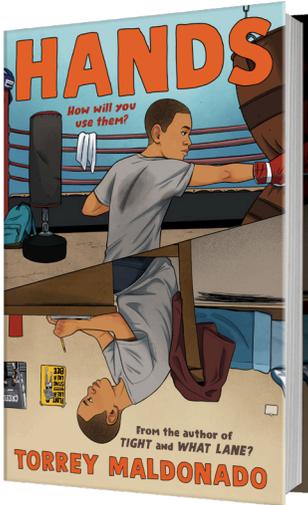


**“FANS OF JASON
REYNOLDS’S ‘TRACK’ SERIES
WILL LOVE THIS ONE.”**

★ —*School Library Journal*, starred review



ABOUT THE BOOK



The author of *What Lane?* and *Tight* delivers a fast-paced read that packs a punch about a boy figuring out how to best use his hands—to build or to knock down. Trev would do anything to protect his mom and sisters, especially from his stepdad. But his stepdad's return stresses Trev—because when he left, he threatened Trev's mom. Rather than live scared, Trev takes matters into his own hands, literally. He starts learning to box to handle his stepdad. But everyone isn't a fan of his plan, because Trev's a talented artist, and his hands could actually help him build a better future. And they're letting him know. But their advice for some distant future feels useless in his reality right now. Ultimately, Trev knows his future is in his hands, and his hands are his own, and *he* has to choose how to use them.

“GORGEOUS AND GRIPPING. *HANDS* IS A POETIC PAGE-TURNER. YOU MIGHT JUST FINISH IT IN ONE SITTING. TORREY MALDONADO UNDERSTANDS THE KIDS HE WRITES FOR AT THE DEEPEST LEVEL.”

—Adam Gidwitz, Newbery Honor-winning author of *The Inquisitor's Tale*



ABOUT TORREY MALDONADO

Torrey Maldonado (torreymaldonado.com), the author of the critically acclaimed *What Lane?*, *Tight*, and *Hands*, is a teacher in Brooklyn, New York, where he was born and raised. His books reflect his students' and his experiences.

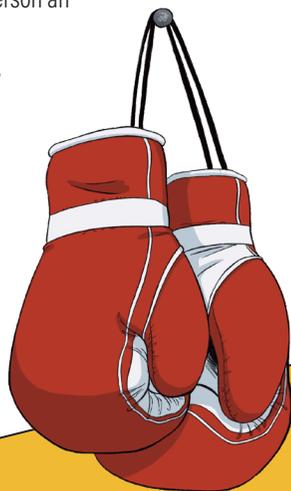
This guide was written by Shanetia P. Clark, PhD. Shanetia is an associate professor of literacy at Salisbury University in Maryland. She teaches courses in literacy methods and children's literature.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Take a moment to examine the cover of *Hands*. What inferences can you make about the story based on the cover? What wonderings do you have about the story? What from the cover sparks these wonderings and inferences? Return to them as you read.
2. Reread chapters 1–2. What frictions or tensions exist in Trev's (the narrator's) family? What feelings do these frictions and tensions bring up in Trev?
3. Describe Trev's stepfather. How does he feel when the neighbors comment that Trev reminds them of his biological father? Why do you think his stepdad is intimidated by Trev's biological father?
4. Who is Little Cole? What talent does he and Trev share? Why does Trev feel protective over him? How important is Little Cole to the whole story?
5. Think about how *Hands* incorporates comic books.
 - Which comic book characters are mentioned in *Hands*?
 - Some comic characters matter more to the whole story than other comic characters, such as Miles Morales, the teen Spider-Man. Which comic characters matter most to the whole story? Why?
 - Which comic characters do you feel really mirror Trevor's struggles, strengths, and life?
6. The word "promise" is brought up frequently. Reflect on the weight that the word (and premise of) "promise" places on Trev's mind. Here are some examples:
 - A. Ms. Clark tells Trev, "Another thing—your promise shouldn't hurt your promise: your potential" (p. 106).
 - B. Trev's stepdad promised to his mother, "I'll get you back! YOU did this to me! YOU got me locked up!" (p. 11).
 - C. "And that night as Ma iced her puffy eye, I made a promise through my salty tears, deep in my heart:
On my life
On my mom's
On my sisters
He won't *ever* hit Ma again.
Never.
Watch" (p. 12).
 - D. "Don't let no one mess with your sisters. Stand up for them. Protect them, no matter what! My stepdad made me promise that once when we were out and saw a teenage guy grip his girlfriend's wrists and shake her.
'How do I protect my sisters?'
He lifted his fists. His knuckles were cracked red. 'With these. *Promise*'" (p. 5).
 - E. What does Trev promise himself once his stepdad returns? How does this self-promise influence his thinking when he walks into the boxing gym at the rec center? (p. 31)

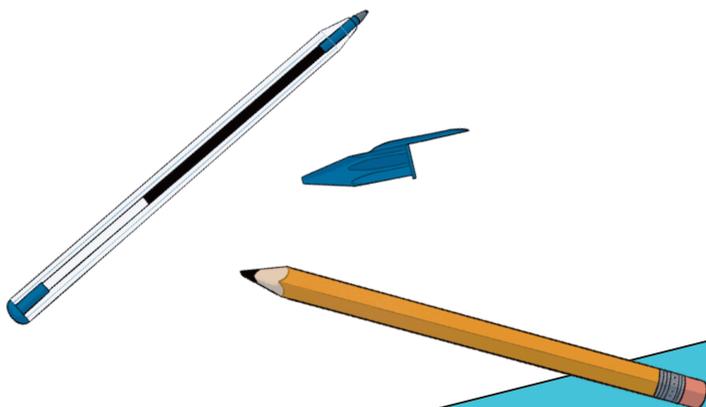
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

7. Who is P? Describe his friendship with Trev.
8. The “cowboy trainer,” Quick, impresses P and Trev. Why? What is his training style compared to the other trainers? What do you think Trev means by saying that he trains “like a good dad would” (p. 34)? What is behind Quick’s choice to not train Trev (pp. 28–30)? Why is Uncle Frankie glad that Quick is not training Trev? Who is influencing both Quick’s and Uncle Frankie’s choices about Trev fighting (pp. 58–61)?
9. Describe the sibling relationship between Nicki, Jess, and Trev.
10. Trev asks himself tough questions. When thinking about his mother and stepdad, Trev wonders, “Does her loving him mean maybe I’m supposed to love him too?” Why does Trev feel “so confused, so east and west. Torn in two” (p. 22)?
11. Read the following passages then answer the questions:
 - A. “Blood-related men in my family are sun before night. They here, shining for a bit. Then gone. Leaving things dark and my head be in the clouds. Searching for sun. Wish I had sun but get none. Sometimes feels like I never had sun” (p. 52). What does Trev mean by this?
 - B. “Be a rainbow in someone’s cloud” (p. 57). Why is this quote so important?
 - C. “I think back to when P spoke, like stating an equation: *Sometimes you gotta throw hands. Some cats don’t get it, till they get hit*” (p. 105). Does Trev agree with that? Does he change his mind?
12. Reread Chapter 57. Discuss the conversation between Trev and Uncle Larry. What advice does Uncle Larry give? Why? What is its significance?
13. Read page 8. This is where we first hear the term “gentle giant.” It is brought up throughout *Hands*. Reflect on why it keeps repeating.
 - Why do you think Trev’s mom calls him a “gentle giant?”
 - How is Trevor a gentle giant?
 - Does Trev like being called that? Explain.
 - Who are other examples in *Hands* of gentle giants. How is that person an example of a gentle giant?
 - What does being a gentle giant mean about how to use strength, might, or force?
 - At the end of *Hands*, do you think Trev has changed his opinion of gentle giants? Explain.

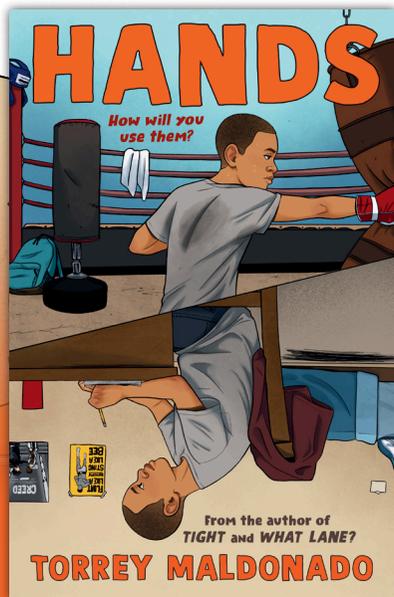


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

14. What are themes in *Hands*? Explain your thinking.
15. Who do you think needs to read *Hands*? Why?
16. *Hands* is musical and has rhythm to its writing. A review from *BookPage* says, "*Hands* is a compact, fast-paced novel narrated in a poetic, stream-of-consciousness style. Maldonado uses short, staccato sentences like feinted boxing jabs to draw readers in."
 - Why do you think Torrey Maldonado wrote *Hands* in a musical, rhythmic style?
 - Find parts of *Hands* where music is in the book.
 - Find parts of *Hands* where rhythm is mentioned or where rhythm is important.
 - What parts of this book sound like poetry? Or rap?
 - Create a soundtrack with songs or other music that matches important moments in *Hands*.
17. Describe how you can be a supportive friend to someone who is in a similar situation to Trev.
18. The chapters in *Hands* are quite short. In what ways does the chapter length help the pace of the narrative?
19. *Hands* is written in the first person. Would the narrative be different if Maldonado wrote the story in a different point of view? If yes, how?
20. Each uncle represents a different part of Trev. Match up each uncle by name to an aspect of Trev's personality and wants/needs. What is the significance of Trev's uncles?
21. Among the many references in the book, *Star Wars* is brought up several times in *Hands*.
 - How is the struggle that Jedis have in *Star Wars* similar to Trev's struggle?
 - Which *Star Wars* character does Trev compare his mom to? Why?
 - Which *Star Wars* character does Trev feel like? Why?
 - Which *Star Wars* character does Uncle Larry compare Trev's stepdad to? Why?



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