

“Raw and gripping.”
—Jason Reynolds



Dear Martin

a novel

“A must-read!”
—Angie Thomas

NIC
STONE

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Raw, captivating, and undeniably real, Nic Stone joins industry giants Jason Reynolds and Walter Dean Myers as she boldly tackles American race relations in this stunning debut.

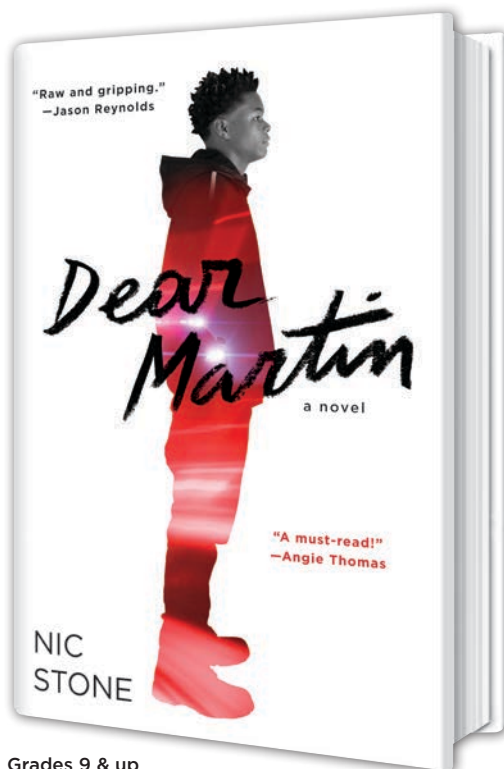
Justyce McAllister is top of his class, captain of the debate team, and set for the Ivy League next year—but none of that matters to the police officer who just put him in handcuffs. He is eventually released without charges (or an apology), but the incident has Justyce spooked. Despite leaving his rough neighborhood, he can't seem to escape the scorn of his former peers or the attitude of his prep-school classmates. The only exception: Sarah Jane, Justyce's gorgeous—and white—debate partner he wishes he didn't have a thing for.

Struggling to cope with it all, Justyce starts a journal to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But do Dr. King's teachings hold up in the modern world? Justyce isn't so sure.

Then comes the day Justyce goes driving with his best friend, Manny, windows rolled down, music turned up. *Way up*. Much to the fury of the white off-duty cop beside them. Words fly. Shots are fired. And Justyce and Manny get caught in the crosshairs. In the media fallout, it's Justyce who is under attack. Some would kill to know the truth of what happened—Justyce is dying to forget.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Do you have a journal? If you do, why do you write in it? If you don't, why do you suppose people write in journals? What is their purpose?
- Watch the video and read the transcript of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech at nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance_en.html. Create a visual representation that summarizes or embodies the spirit of this speech.
- The following quote from Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech opens the book: "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality." Reflect on this quote. Hypothesize how this quote may fit into the story.



Grades 9 & up

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

PART ONE

- The opening scene shows Justyce trying to get his ex-girlfriend, Melo, home safely. She is biracial and, as readers find out, she is perceived as white based on her complexion. Justyce is confronted and attacked by Officer Castillo. Do you think that he would have attacked Justyce if he thought that Melo was not white? Why or why not?
- Justyce writes letters to Martin (Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) to make sense of his feelings about The Incident. He recalls what happened to Shemar Carson in Nevada. He realizes that his good character does not make him “exempt from the stuff THOSE black guys deal with.” (p. 12) How has The Incident changed Justyce? Why is writing to Martin cathartic for him? Why are letters an effective medium for Justyce?
- Bruises remain a week after The Incident. “Sometimes [Justyce] thinks they’ll never fade.” (p. 16) Do you think this is meant literally? If not, what does it mean?
- In chapter two, Manny, Justyce’s best friend, tries to make Justyce aware of how toxic his relationship with Melo is. Describe Manny. What kind of friend is he?
- How does Justyce handle the news that the officer who killed Shemar Carson was not indicted? How are those feelings made more complicated when Manny’s cousin is accused of killing Officer Castillo? (pp. 19–20)
- Dr. “Doc” Dray, Justyce and Manny’s debate teacher, puts the words “all men are created equal” on the board. (p. 21) Discuss the meaning of these words within their historical context and now. How and why has their meaning changed?
- It is discovered that Shemar Carson had a criminal record. Does his past justify what happened to him? Will Manny’s cousin have the same burden if his past comes up? (pp. 27–29)
- A group of Justyce’s male classmates go to the lounge to talk about Doc’s class. One of the classmates is Jared. Describe him. What do you know about him? How might this conversation have been changed had they known that Justyce was also in the lounge? Would Manny have laughed and joined the toast? (pp. 30–33)
- By chapter 4, what do you know about Manny? Describe his moral and personal dilemmas. Do you feel that Manny is caught between two worlds? Why?
- In one letter to Martin, Justyce recalls a conversation he had with his mother. She asks, “You ever consider that maybe you are not supposed to ‘fit’? People who make history rarely do.” (p. 36) Discuss this statement. What other realizations does Justyce have as he processes his mother’s words?
- Reflect on Justyce’s and the “Equality Brigade[’s]” choice to wear costumes representing different stereotypes to the Halloween party. How were these costumes received at the party? On social media? What did Justyce and Manny realize as they left the party? (pp. 39–51)
- Describe the love triangle that Justyce thinks he is in. Why is SJ giving Justyce the cold shoulder at school? (pp. 82–86)
- Justyce and Manny go to Blake’s house for his birthday party. What was the impetus for Justyce’s arguments with Blake, Jared, and Manny? Have these fights been brewing for a while? Support your argument with evidence from the text.

- Manny visits Justyce after quitting the basketball team. He says, “I woke up.” (p. 108) What caused Manny to “wake up”?
- Describe the conversation between Manny, his dad, and Justyce. (pp. 111-114) What is the preparation that Manny’s dad describes? Refer back to what Justyce’s mother said: “Hard being a black man, ain’t it?” (p. 35)
- Why do you think the author used only three words for chapter 14? (p. 120) What effect does this have?

PART TWO

- Justyce is invited to dinner at the Rivers’s house to “memorialize the indictment” of Manny’s murderer. (p. 135) Why is the indictment something to commemorate? How does Justyce feel about being back in Manny’s house? Why is the gift of the watch significant?
- Respond to Quan’s question: “Why try to do right if people will always look at me and assume wrong?” (p. 144) Why did Quan ask this? How does Justyce respond? What would Martin say?
- Reflect on this comment from Doc as he, Justyce, and SJ respond to the news that characterizes Manny and Justyce as thugs: “They *need* to believe you’re a bad guy who got what he deserved in order for their world to keep spinning the way it always has.” (p. 151) How does this statement fit into the story so far? How does it fit into our society?
- Why has Manny’s father “stepped down from his position” as executive vice president of Davidson Wells Financial Corporation? Is this “mutually agreed” decision to part ways right? Why or why not? (p. 155)
- Justyce goes to visit Martel, the leader of the Black Jihad. What was the purpose of his visit? What caused him to leave quickly and go to immediately to SJ’s house? (pp. 160-165)
- Who do you think set Officer Garrett Tison’s house on fire? (p. 174) Explain your thinking.
- What happens at graduation? Why did the officers question Justyce? What revelations were made to Justyce’s mother? How does she feel? In your opinion, is her reasoning for not approving of his relationship with SJ justified? Explain your thinking. (pp. 175-183)
- The courtroom scene shows Justyce getting cross-examined by the defense attorney. (pp. 184-192) Did the attorney create doubt? Did she seem to justify Manny’s murder? Reflect and respond.
- React to the jury’s decision. (p. 193) Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Officer Tison dies in prison. What do you think is going on in Justyce’s mind once he hears the news? (pp. 197-198)
- During the Christmas break after starting Yale, Justyce returns home to visit Manny’s gravesite. He sees Jared there. What do they talk about at the cemetery? Do you think that the two will “chill” in the future? (p. 208)

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

- Part Two opens with a transcript of the evening news. (p. 123) Find news articles related to the death of Jordan Davis of Jacksonville, Florida, in November 2012. What similarities do you notice?
- The quote on the book’s cover—“Raw and gripping. An undeniably real feast of fury and forgiveness”—is from award-winning author Jason Reynolds. Read Reynolds’s *All American Boys*, coauthored with Brendan Kiely, and detail connections between that book and *Dear Martin*.
- Read Langston Hughes’s poem “I, Too.” What similarities do you see between the poem and *Dear Martin*? Write a reflection on how these texts work together.
- Who was an ally in *Dear Martin*? Who was not? Explain the importance of solidarity in the face of all forms of bigotry.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THIS GUIDE

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR LANGUAGE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4

★ “Stone’s debut confronts the reality of police brutality, misconduct, and fatal shootings in the U.S, using an authentic voice to accurately portray the struggle of self-exploration teens like Justyce experience every day. Teens, librarians, and teachers alike will find this book **A GODSEND IN ASSISTING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT DEALING WITH POLICE** as well as the philosophical underpinnings of King’s work. **VIVID AND POWERFUL.** —*Booklist*, Starred



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NIC STONE is a native of Atlanta and a Spelman College graduate. After working extensively in teen mentoring and living in Israel for a few years, she returned to the United States to write full-time.

Dear Martin, her first novel, is loosely based on a series of true events involving the shooting deaths of unarmed African American teenagers. Shaken by the various responses to these incidents—and to the pro-justice movement that sprang up as a result—Stone began the project in an attempt to examine current affairs through the lens of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s teachings. You can find her fangirling over her husband and sons on Twitter and Instagram at @getnicced or on her website at nicstone.info.

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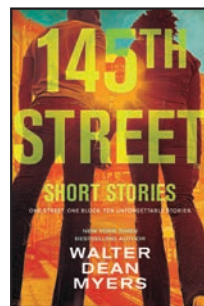


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