

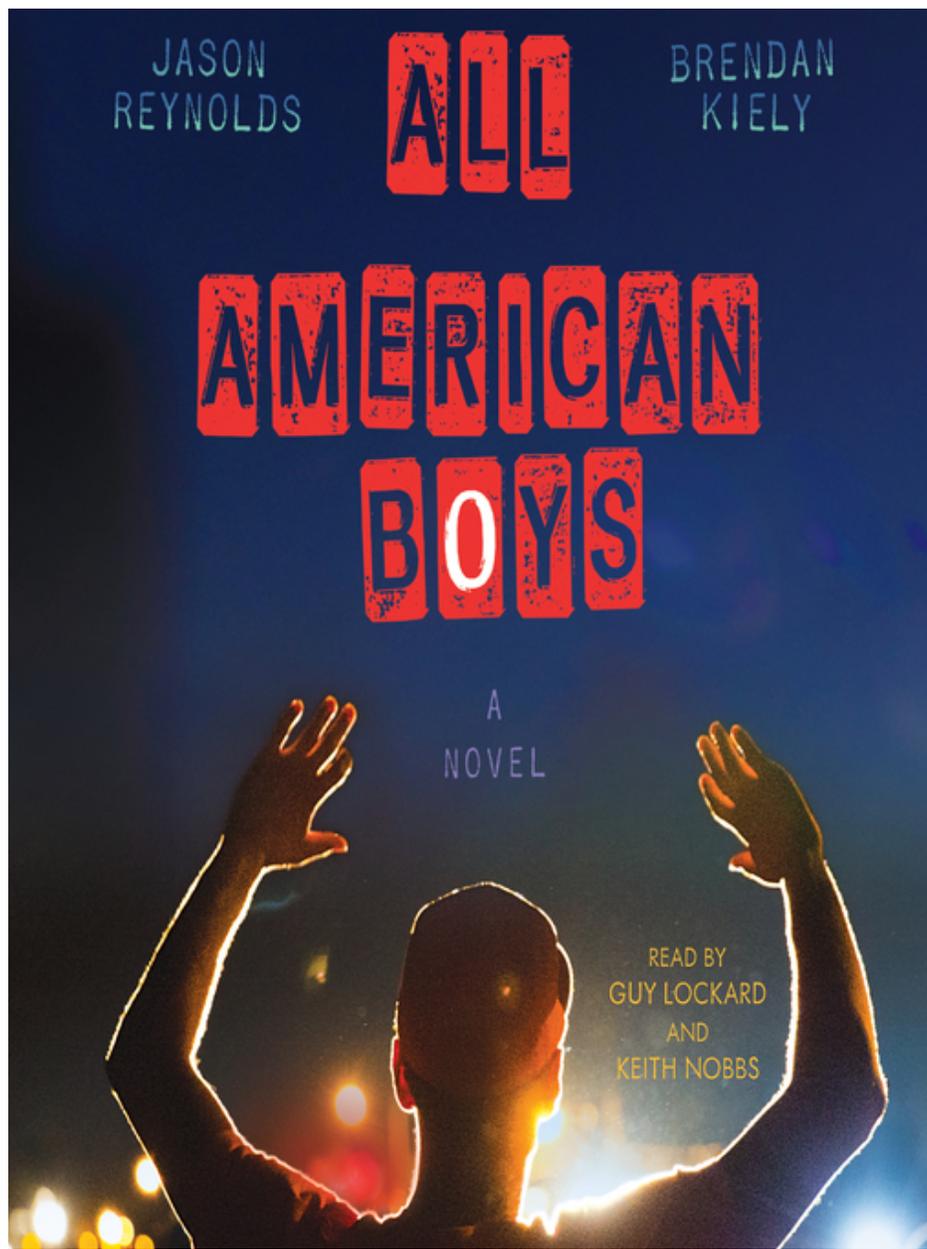
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English 112B

Book Talk

All American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely





Jason Reynolds (left) and Brendan Kiely (right)

Jason Reynolds considers himself a writer in the same way a professional basketball player considers himself a professional athlete. He practices everyday, trying to come up with cool stories to share with the world. Reynolds graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in English. He then moved to Brooklyn because someone told him “they were giving dream-come-true vouchers”; they weren’t. Reynolds struggled, but his stories are what kept him going. Today, he is the New York Times Best Selling author of not just *All American Boys*, *Ghost*, *Patina*, *Long Way Down*, and *Mile Morales: Spider-Man*.

Brendan Kiely is from Massachusetts. His first book, *The Gospel of Winter*, has been published in ten languages and won the 2015 Top Ten Best Fiction for Young Adults. Kiely received an MFA in creative writing from The City College of New York. Currently, he lives in Greenwich Village in New York.

Synopsis

Rashad, black, is a member of the JROTC minus the J and a student at Springfield Central High School. It's Friday night, and Rashad is going to meet his friends English, Shannon, and Carlos at a party. Before the party, Rashad visits Jerry's Corner Mart, an everything store because they sell it all. Rashad's plan was to buy a bag of chips and some gum to beat the stank-breath. However, his plan falls apart when a woman trips over him while he tries to text his brother Spoony. Jerry and a cop believe Rashad is trying to steal the chips and the woman who tripped over caught him in the act. The cop beats Rashad, resulting in Rashad not only getting arrested, but also having to go to the hospital.

Quinn, white, has two things on his mind: getting the hell out of his house and finding a party to get his buzz on. Quinn's dad passed away, and his mother has put him in charge of caring for his younger brother Willy. After Quinn drops Willy off at his neighbor's house, he and his friends Guzzo and Dwyer head to Jerry's for liquor. When they get there, Quinn witnesses Rashad getting beat by the cop, and realizes the cop is his friend Guzzo's older brother, Paul. Quinn witnessing this event causes a rift between him and his friends, and, as news of the event spreads through school, resulting in everyone debating whether Paul's actions were just or racist, Quinn is forced to figure out where he stands on the event.

Quotes

Quote: "Whaaaaa? What was going on? He was accusing me of things that hadn't happened even happened! Like, he couldn't have been talking to *me*. I wanted to turn around to check and make sure there wasn't some other kid standing behind me, stuffing chips in his backpack or something, but I knew there wasn't" (21).

Context: Rashad is reacting to Jerry and the cop, Paul, accusing him of stealing. Before the woman who tripped over Rashad and Rashad can state there has been a misunderstanding, the cop decides Rashad is shoplifting, resulting in Rashad getting beaten and arrested. This is an important part of the book because Reynolds and Kiely introduce readers to the issue of police brutality against blacks. Rashad is a good student, he is in the ROTC, and he comes from a good family. So why is Paul treating him like a criminal?

Quote: "But he *could* be. You have no idea. You have no idea, Quinn. The point is, he could be. Then what? Is that what it would take to look at this thing differently? You need him to be dead? Shame on you, man. I had no idea you were such a dick. You want to forget all this. Maybe you can. But I won't" (175).

Context: Quinn and English are on the basketball team. When Quinn talks to English about Rashad, Quinn, because he does not understand the severity of what happened

to Rashad, both physically and politically, suggests Rashad was on drugs, and that is why Paul did what he did. English, since he knows Rashad, not only defends Rashad, but also asserts his opinion on what Paul did. This is also an important part of the book because it introduces readers to the idea of politics and friendship. English is going to stand up for his friend, but he is also going to call things as he sees them. In this case, English is stating Paul's actions were unjust; Rashad could have died, and Rashad would have become another victim of police brutality because of the color of his skin.

Quote: "Those people. I hadn't known any of them, and he [Quinn] probably hadn't either. But I was connected to those names now, because of what happened to me. We all were. I was sad. I was angry. But I was also proud. Proud that I was there. Proud that I could represent Darnell Shackelford. Proud that I could represent Mrs. Fitzgerald —her brother who was beaten in Selma" (310).

Context: Throughout most of this book, Rashad is recovering from what happened at Jerry's. Rashad's voice was silenced when Paul beat him, and, considering Paul's actions may have been based on the color of Rashad's skin, Rashad has trouble coming to terms with how to react. In order to find his voice, he bonds with a nurse and woman working in the gift shop at the hospital who encourage him to stand up for himself. Unlike Quinn, whose struggle is external, Rashad's struggle is internal because all he can do is think about how the event has affected his life and the community. This is a big moment in the book because Rashad stands up for himself and has a greater understanding of his place in the world.

How I Would Teach the Book

Reynolds and Kiely address racism and white privilege. Rashad's character, although he is a good student and comes from a caring family, is accused of a crime he did not commit and is beaten for it. Guzzo's older brother Paul thinks he can get away with how he treated Rashad. How does what happened to Rashad relate to current events? Why is it important Rashad take a stand and defend himself by going public with what happened? Quinn's character, although he did not want to get involved, is forced to put himself in an uncomfortable situation by deciding whether Paul's actions were just. Why is it important for his character to get involved? I would ask my class to share their thoughts on these questions in small groups. I would then have my class write a journal about a time where they felt they were misjudged or a time where they got involved in a matter they did not expect to but were glad they did. Beside addressing racism and white privilege, Reynolds and Kiely address identity. Both Rashad and Quinn are forced to think about who they are and who they want to be. I would have my class write an essay about identity using three quotes from Reynolds and Kiely's book and relating them to an event that has shaped their lives.

Why Should Teens Read This Book

- It examines topics such as police brutality, racism, and white privilege
- It introduces teens to the idea of politics.

- It forces teens to think about their place in the world.
- It questions the meaning of friendship.

Text Complexity

This book is intended for high schoolers, but I believe middle schoolers and college students could benefit from reading this book as well. The book, although it is an easy read, is about social issues all of us face whether we are in high school or not. Also, the style in which the book is written is very creative, and I believe there is something important writers can take from that.

Works Cited: Reynolds, Jason, and Brendan Kiely. *All American Boys*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers: New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, and New Delhi. 2015. Print.