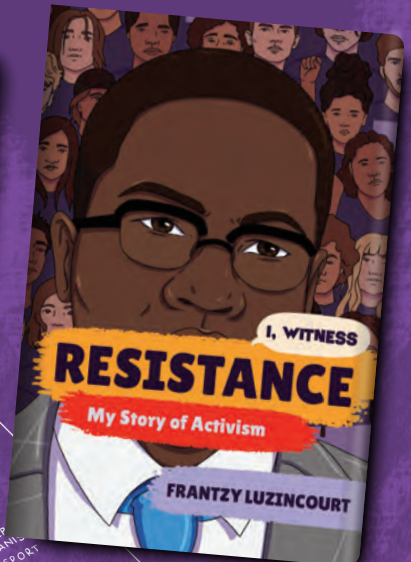




I, WITNESS

# A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Prepared by Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul



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**“One of the best ways to understand a complicated moment in history is through the story of a person who lived at the center of it.”**

—*Accused*, p. 1

The I, Witness book series offers a unique opportunity for young readers to listen to and learn from the voices of young people impacted by injustices. Further, each book provides opportunities for young readers to deepen their understanding of what equity means by considering questions such as: Who should be centered in the work of justice? What does it mean to advocate on behalf of others? Who are the changemakers of society?

This educators' guide includes recommendations for *table setting*—the work that is necessary before reading and discussing the I, Witness nonfiction book series with students, as well as *teaching* suggestions for work that can support students during and after they read.

# Table Setting

Before we dive into the work of equity, Levon Williams, a race, equity, and inclusion advocate, recommends that we do “table setting” to mitigate the harm that can result by rushing forward without enough preparation and care. To learn more about table setting, access Levon Williams, “Table Setting: The Work Before the Work,” American Alliance of Museums, <https://www.aam-us.org/2019/12/06/table-setting-the-work-before-the-work/>.

This guide recommends three table setting suggestions to support challenging conversations with students, particularly ones that involve injustices such as racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, genocide, environmental racism, and more. Prior to reading and discussing these books, consider taking the following approaches.

## ESTABLISH COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Because discussions about injustice can be challenging, community agreements can help educators and students have more productive conversations and navigate difficulties. Educators and students can co-construct community agreements by making a list of their ideas about what it means to cultivate a brave and safe space for discussions. A long list of ideas will be difficult for anyone to remember. So together, the class can combine and rephrase ideas that feel similar and work together to identify three to five agreements they will commit to. The following resources can support educators in this work:

- “Let’s Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students,” Learning for Justice, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/TT-Lets-Talk-December-2019.pdf>
- “Creating a Classroom Contract,” Facing History & Ourselves, <https://www.facinghistory.org/back-to-school-2019/teaching-toolkit/classroom-contracts/>
- “Developing Community Agreements,” National Equity Project, <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/developing-community-agreements>

# AVOID CURRICULUM VIOLENCE

Dr. Stephanie P. Jones’s research on educational violence reveals that racial trauma, in particular, occurs at every grade level of education. Among the many implications of her research is that nonphysical violence is normalized. It harms children in various ways and impedes their learning. One way this occurs in classrooms is when educators show and share racist images or videos. Therefore, it is critical to first understand that children do not need to see traumatic images to feel empathy and to review materials prior to sharing them with students. Learn more about the various ways curriculum violence occurs in classrooms and schools and how to avoid it by reading resources such as “Ending Curriculum Violence,” Learning for Justice, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2020/ending-curriculum-violence>.

## IMPLEMENT TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

All of the young authors of the *I, Witness* books have experienced trauma. So have many of the young people educators teach in their classrooms every day. Multicultural education scholar Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop says that books can serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for children. For many students, reading these books may feel like looking into a mirror. They may feel validated and acknowledged in reading about experiences similar to their own. For some students, these books may feel like a window, where they are learning about events and issues for the first time. For other students, reading and imagining the various circumstances, may help them “become part of the world created or recreated by the author” (R. S. Bishop, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” *Collected Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, vol. 6, no. 3. Boston: Christopher-Gordon, 1990). A range of feelings may emerge, from affirmation to discomfort and more. It is critical that all educators implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms and schools to support all students and their varied experiences with and responses to trauma. Putting key steps in place can help to mitigate harm and navigate challenges that come up in classrooms. Learn more about the trauma-informed practices and ways to implement them school-wide using resources such as the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment’s Trauma Sensitive Schools Training Package Implementation Guide, [https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/TSS\\_Training\\_Package\\_Implementation\\_Guidefinal.pdf](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/TSS_Training_Package_Implementation_Guidefinal.pdf).

# Teaching with I, Witness Books

As young readers engage the books from the I, Witness nonfiction book series, they'll discover that young people like themselves are the true changemakers of society. Educators can utilize this guide as readers engage with the books either individually or collectively. The following three sections can support educators and students during and after reading the I, Witness books. These sections include: Nonfiction Framework, Essential Questions, and Learning Resources.

## READING NONFICTION

**"There's no better way for young readers to learn about the world's issues and upheavals than through the eyes of young people who have lived through these times."**

*— Accused, p. 105*

The Nonfiction Framework can deepen readers' comprehension and interpretation of nonfiction works. Educators might create a chart to serve as a reminder of the kind of thinking work and active reading they'd like students to do whenever they read nonfiction. Further, educators might use this framework to coach students as they read and during reading conferences to assess and support students' progress as readers.



## Reading Nonfiction

Add these strategies and questions to your repertoire, and apply them as you read nonfiction.

Strategy	Question
Read	What do you find fascinating, frustrating, frightening?
Reread	Which parts will you reread to capture details you may have missed?
Talk	What would you like to talk about and process with a reading partner?
Ask	What questions are being raised for you that can lead to additional explorations that can deepen your learning?
Consider	How do the identities of the author influence the writing?
Reflect	How do your identities inform your interpretations of this text?

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

**"The I, Witness books will bring you stories of ordinary kids and teens like you who have faced extraordinary challenges in their lives."**

*— Accused, p. 3*

Asking students to consider questions that are open-ended and thought-provoking creates opportunities for them to develop critical thinking skills that are transferable beyond the book they are reading. These kinds of questions spark further discussion, invite analysis, and raise new questions. The Essential Questions in this guide create opportunities for this iterative process. They support readers in recognizing the full humanity of the authors and their dynamic identities including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and more.

Each book in the I, Witness series contains an introduction that challenges readers to "consider your own life and your own story as you read. Is your life very similar to the author's? Or very different? Is there a problem in the world or in your life that you would like to help solve?" (*Accused*, pp. 3–4). The Essential Questions encourage students to do this work as well as to consider what it means to them to be a changemaker.



# **Accused: My Story of Injustice**

by Adama Bah

## Essential Questions

Remind readers to practice using the **Reading Nonfiction** strategies to support their reading of nonfiction. Students might also engage one or more of the following Essential Questions during their reading of the book.

### Introduction

**“One of the best ways to understand a complicated issue is through the story of a person who lived at the center of it.”**

— *Accused*, p. 1

- Why does it matter who tells the story not only in fiction but also in nonfiction?
- In what ways does reading this story from the mind and perspective of Adama matter?
- How might this story be different if it were not told by and through the eyes, mind, and experiences of the person who lived through it?

### Chapter 1: Unsheltered

- Adama writes, “I didn’t know I wasn’t an American until I was sixteen and I was in handcuffs” (p. 7). Being an American is often defined narrowly. Consider the limitations of this fact.
- Who is typically left out from constructions of what it looks like and means to be American?
- Who benefits from narrow constructions of what it looks like and means to be an American, and in what ways?

The Essential Questions and accompanying activities in this guide can help readers understand the sociopolitical conditions influencing each author’s lived experiences. Readers are also invited to consider their own identities and lived experiences. Too often young readers in school learn to perceive texts as neutral. Instead, by accessing these Essential Questions, young readers will have opportunities to self-reflect and discover that who tells the story matters, not only when reading fiction but particularly when reading nonfiction texts.

Educators might set students up to read books from the I, Witness series in partnership or in book clubs. If students are reading independently, provide time for them to speak with a partner. Encourage students to respond to the Essential Questions in discussions with peers and/or in their reader’s notebook. Because some questions invite students to reflect on their identities and lived experiences in ways that can feel deeply personal and private, it is important to honor students’ decisions about whether, what, and how they’d like to share their ideas.

Each title in the I, Witness nonfiction book series provides a set of Essential Questions.

## Learning Resources

**“This is what this series is all about: letting young people—who have seen and lived through recent history—tell their stories.”**

— *Accused*, p. 1

All the authors of the I, Witness nonfiction books are activists. The Learning Resources include ways students might do some additional learning about issues and events related to each book and each author. Young people have always been poised and ready to lead the changes they’d like to see in the world. As they read the books in this series, they will have burning questions and a strong desire to know more and to do more. The Learning Resources can link them digitally and responsibly to the wider world, connecting them to ideas and people they want to know more about, and toward the work of advocacy and activism, like the authors of the books themselves.

It is important for educators to preview the Text Sets provided in the Learning Resources prior to sharing them with students to determine which will be best for your particular learners.

Learning Resources are provided for each title from the I, Witness nonfiction book series and are located after the Essential Questions.

## Chapter 2: Taken

- In what ways does Adama demonstrate resistance in the face of opposition?
- What does it mean to treat others humanely?
- How do the actions and words of the Department of Homeland Security toward Adama and her family align with or differ from your understanding of what it means to treat one another humanely?

## Chapter 3: Questioned

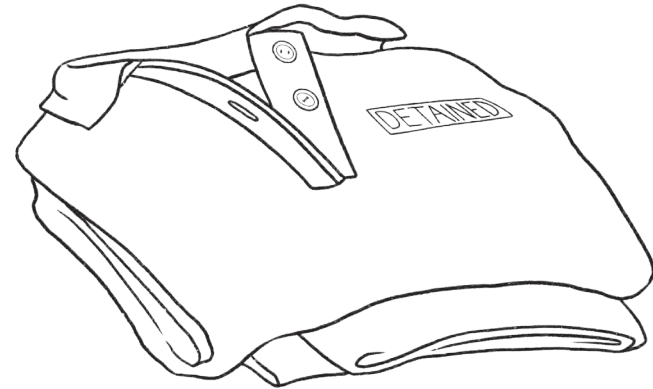
- What is the dominant narrative about immigrants that people are taught by political leaders, the media, school, home?
- What are the barriers that work to prevent people from distinguishing between immigrants and terrorists?
- In what ways can counternarratives like *Accused* disrupt dominant narratives about groups of people?
- People often flee their country because staying can jeopardize their physical safety. Discuss the specific harm that might have come to Adama if she stayed in Guinea: female genital mutilation.
- How does knowledge of the physical dangers that can harm people inform your understanding about the compelling reasons that people take such huge risks to leave their country to live in another country like the United States of America?

## Chapter 4: Framed

- The constant questions from the dominant majority “Where are you from?” and “What are you?” are really statements in disguise. It’s as if they are telling what someone is allowed and not allowed to be. What are the various ways the interrogation agents question Adama’s identity?
- Consider the various ways people are labeled. How does this limit the possibilities of who we each can be?

## Chapter 5: Violated and Chapter 6: Bargained

- To dehumanize a person or group of people is to see them as less than human, deprive them of their dignity, and subject them to degrading conditions and treatment. In what ways is Adama dehumanized during her detainment? You may want to revisit previous chapters as well as Chapters 5 and 6.
- In what ways have you observed people being dehumanized at school, in your community, or beyond?
- In what ways does Adama’s reflection of her discussion with Tashnuba in the cell where they were detained remind you of her and Tashnuba’s humanity?



## Chapter 7: Changed and Chapter 8: Freed

- Trauma can be defined as a person’s response to a deeply distressing or disturbing experience or event. As you consider all that you’ve read as well as Chapters 7 and 8, think of some of the physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral effects of trauma Adama has endured as a result of this experience.

### The Impact of Trauma

Trauma can overwhelm a person’s ability to cope, cause feelings of helplessness, lessen their sense of self, and hinder their ability to feel a full range of emotions and have a full range of experiences. Adama and her family experience trauma as a result of detainment and subsequent events.

Use this chart to note the depth and range of this trauma.

Reactions to Trauma	Examples
Physical	
Mental	
Emotional	
Behavioral	

- Adama writes, “I thought I was going to be able to go back to school, that the government was going to apologize and write me a check and I would be set for life, but it didn’t go that way at all. When I came back to my life in New York, I had to drop out of school to work to support my family” (pp. 70–71). Instead of receiving help, Adama and her family were set up to fail. What does reconciliation mean? What might reconciliation toward Adama and her family involve?

- In what ways does Adama demonstrate resilience throughout her experiences?

## Continue the Discussion

Read and discuss each section to learn more about:

- the uniqueness of Adama’s experience
- physical and verbal harm Muslims endured after 9/11
- the detainment and deportation of Muslims
- changes in American airport travel after 9/11
- what Adama is doing today

Then explore one or more of the Learning Resources to learn more about the issues and topics discussed in *Accused*.



## Get Involved

In this section, three action steps are provided for advancing the work of equity: read up; share what you know; and take care of yourself.

- Read and discuss each action step offered.
- What other ways can you take action?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for knowing and caring about the experiences of others?

## Timeline

Timelines help us to understand the chronology of historical and current events. They can reveal cause and effect relationships between events, and they can help us to situate our own lived experiences in relation to events and people.

- What patterns and themes do you notice?
- Which events would you like to learn more about?
- Consider several of the dates and events on this timeline. Where do you locate yourself and your lived experiences related to or different from the events?
- Create your own timeline that reveals key moments that influenced you, sparked your interest in an issue, and motivated you to take action to support causes you believe in.

## About I, Witness

This section states, “I, Witness is a nonfiction book series that tells important stories of real young people who have faced and conquered extraordinary contemporary challenges” (p. 105).

- Do you believe Adama Bah has conquered the challenges she faced?
- What are the challenges that remain?
- Whose responsibility is it to dismantle and eliminate those challenges?

## Learning Resources

Engage one or more of the following Learning Resources to further explore a topic or issue from *Accused*.

**1) Islamophobia:** The dominant narrative in the United States about hate groups can make it seem as if these kinds of groups have existed only in recent history. Also, some hate groups are spotlighted more than others, resulting in

stereotyping and harmful misrepresentations of groups of people. This happens frequently with Arabs and Muslims. Xenophobia is fear, distrust, and hatred of people from other cultures or countries. Islamophobia is prejudice, irrational, unjustified fear, hostility, or hatred toward Muslims.

After the militant Islamic extremist network Al-Qaeda committed acts of terrorism against the United States on September 11, 2001, many Muslim and Arab Americans were subjected to negative treatment, such as detainment, violence, and harassment.

The truth is that hate groups existed in the United States long before 2001. The Ku Klux Klan, white nationalists, the neo-Nazi movement, and antigovernment factions are a few examples of groups led predominantly by white men that have committed heinous acts of domestic terrorism in the United States. Yet the response to these actions have been different when the perpetrators are white. Learn more about September 11, 2001, including the Islamophobia it fueled.

### TEXT SET

- “9/11 FAQs,” 9/11 Memorial & Museum <https://www.911memorial.org/911-faqs>
- “Young Muslim Americans React to Islamophobia,” Fusion, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pPStKJ30eQ&ab\\_channel=FUSION](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pPStKJ30eQ&ab_channel=FUSION)
- “Muslim NYPD Chaplain: Saluted in Uniform, Harassed as a Civilian,” *Vox*, November 15, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaYhcgwsfgg&ab\\_channel=Vox](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaYhcgwsfgg&ab_channel=Vox)

- What do you notice about how certain individuals and groups of people are stereotyped as terrorists while others aren't?
- What can we do to recognize the difference between people and their religious and cultural beliefs and practices and extremist groups that commit terrorist acts and acts of hate?

**2) Illegal versus Undocumented:** The immigrant-youth-led Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic movement has reclaimed and reframed the term *undocumented* from something negative that reduces a person to a deficiency to a term of empowerment. Learn more about the Drop the I-Word campaign that has



led to major changes in how many news organizations and media discuss people and issues related to immigration.

### TEXT SET

- “Drop the I-Word,” Race Forward, <https://www.raceforward.org/practice/tools/drop-i-word>
- “Unsettling the Continent, 1492–1776,” National Museum of American History, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/many-voices-exhibition/unsettling-continent-1492-1776>
- “Pushed and Pulled: European Immigration,” National Museum of American History, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/many-voices-exhibition/peopling-expanding-nation-1776%E2%80%931900/european-immigration>

- Words matter. Discuss the differences between calling someone illegal and calling someone undocumented.
- Why is it dehumanizing to call people illegal? Use the chart below to include ideas.
- How does using the term *illegal* rather than *undocumented* encourage a lack of empathy and prevent recognition of the full humanity of people?

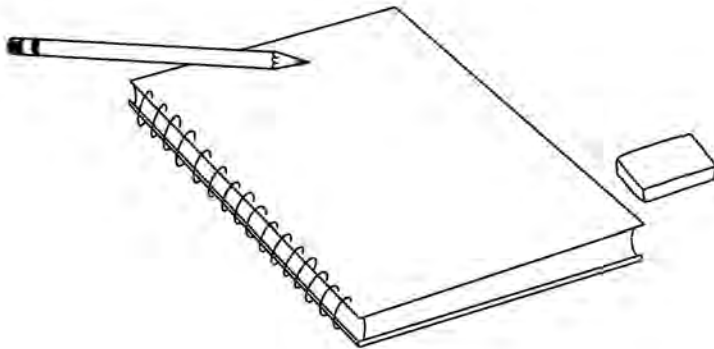


<b>Words Matter!</b> Discuss moral and historical reasons why the terms <i>illegal immigrants</i> and <i>illegals</i> are dehumanizing.	
<b>Moral</b> How are people and their humanity jeopardized as a result of using these terms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes racist discrimination against people of color</li> <li>• Impacts ways young people feel about themselves and their importance in the world</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Historical</b> In what ways can evaluating these terms through the lens of history create a shift in discussions about immigrants of color in the United States?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colonization by European immigrants</li> <li>• Enslavement of Africans as forced immigration for the purpose of economic success</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

**3) Adama Bah:** In addition to authoring *Accused: My Story of Injustice*, Adama is an immigrant rights advocate. In 2021, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of September 11, she wrote: “On August 4, 2021, I was sworn in as an American citizen in the same building I was interrogated as a sixteen-year-old. I’ve spent the majority of my life in court. Honestly, I’m drained. I’m focusing on healing years of trauma and evaluating my experience to better help others around me who are in the same situation.” Learn more about Adama and her family’s experiences and Adama’s life today.

## TEXT SET

- Adama Bah, “9/11 Narratives Like My Own Are Usually Silenced,” *McSweeney’s Internet Tendency*, September 10, 2021, <https://www.mcsweeney.net/articles/9-11-narratives-like-my-own-are-usually-silenced>
  - “Adama,” *David Felix Sutcliffe*, <https://vimeo.com/47204289>
  - “Being the Subject of a Documentary: Authors Adama Bah, Salvador Gómez-Colón, and Freshta Tori Jan,” Rob Kent, January 12, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jugljHWSuuc&ab\\_channel=RobKent](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jugljHWSuuc&ab_channel=RobKent)
- What does justice mean to you?
  - What do you think justice means to Adama? What changes are needed for her to receive justice?
  - What can we learn from Adama about advocacy and activism?
  - What can we learn from Adama about the process of change?



# Hurricane: My Story of Resilience

by Salvador Gómez-Colón

## Essential Questions

Remind readers to practice using the **Reading Nonfiction** strategies to support their reading of nonfiction. Students might also engage one or more of the following Essential Questions during their reading of the book.

### Introduction

**“One of the best ways to understand complicated issues is through the story of a person who lived at the center of it.”**

— *Hurricane*, p. 1

- Why does it matter who tells the story not only fiction but also in nonfiction?
- In what ways does reading this story from the mind and perspective of Salvador matter?
- How might this story be different if it were not told by and through the eyes, mind, and experiences of the person who lived through it?

### Chapter 1: Calm

- We are all dynamic human beings, and we are more than the challenges we face. Discuss what you are learning about Salvador in Puerto Rico before Hurricane Maria struck the island.
- What do you notice about what life was like for Salvador?
- What seemed to matter most? What did he value? How did he spend his time?

- For people who live in areas where hurricanes are typical, what’s important to know about this? How do you imagine this impacts their daily lives?

## Chapter 2: Storm

- Salvador writes, “Now, when I try to remember what happened during and immediately after the hurricane, it is a blur” (p. 17). While certain details and their order may feel like a blur to Salvador, discuss the sense of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness that are permanently etched into his memory.

## Chapter 3: Aftermath

- “I saw the sunset that night and thought about hope. *I asked myself, How can I take a bigger role in all this?*” (p. 35). What does hope mean to you? In what ways is hope not only a feeling but also an action?
- Salvador’s mother has played a pivotal role in his life and how he thinks about others. He writes, “My mom made sure we only turned on one light at a time in our apartment, so that we could understand how life was for others at the time” (p. 35). Discuss ways children learn to be compassionate and empathetic. How is this different from being sympathetic?
- What does it mean to be in solidarity with others? What does this look like in your own life?

## Chapter 4: Plan

- “When I asked myself, *What do people need? What is missing?* the first thing that came to mind was light, both in the physical and emotional senses” (p. 39). Asking questions can lead us to recognizing ways to help. Think about a particular issue you’ve noticed and have been concerned about. How might asking yourself the same questions that Salvador asked help guide you in the work of advocating for others? Use the chart on the next page to help you think more about this.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Advocating for Others</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Think about issues you’ve observed and have been concerned about in your neighborhood, within your community, and in the world.</p>		
Issue	<p>What do people need?</p> <p>What is missing?</p>	How can I help?

- Salvador writes, “*Having clean clothes is not just a commodity, it is a public health issue*” (p. 42). Discuss the physical, emotional, and social implications of having clean clothes.
- Sometimes when people think about advocacy and activism, they consider global issues. What is the purpose and power of Salvador’s Light and Hope project?

- What is the importance of thinking about the kinds of changes needed in one's own neighborhood and community? What are the benefits?
- In what ways can supporting our neighborhoods and communities change the world?

## Chapter 5: Momentum

- When he is reflecting on the resilience of his mother, Salvador writes, "Talking with her helped me realize that it was not just about me and my idea. It was about the people I could help. If I wanted to give them hope, I realized I had to be held accountable to them" (pp. 46–47). What does accountability mean and look like in the work of activism?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for the advocacy and activism you plan to do?
- Salvador reflects on both the abundance and the lack of media attention about Hurricane Maria and its impact on Puerto Rico. Discuss the ways media can be both helpful and problematic in the work of activism.

## Chapter 6: Commitment

- Why did Salvador decide to distribute solar lamps in Loíza? How can we think about these reasons broadly to determine who must be centered in the work of activism no matter the cause or issue?

## Chapter 7: Action

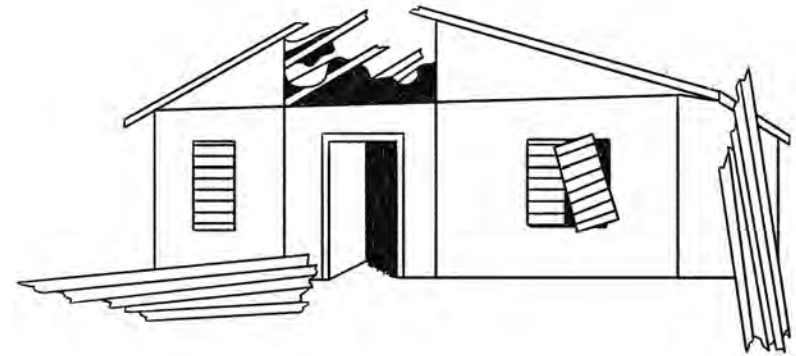
- Think about the infrastructure and electricity system of Puerto Rico. How did it contribute to the impact of Hurricane Maria?
- Salvador writes, "In Loíza, I distributed solar lamps by going house-to-house, visiting each home. I wanted the experience to feel personal. I did not want it to feel fake. I wanted to make sure that it was grassroots, and that people felt connected to one another. I held on to the idea that the lamps were conduits of hope" (p. 66). *Performative activism* and *slacktivism* are terms used to describe the surface-level activism of those looking to gain attention rather than truly caring about and being devoted to a cause and putting in the necessary work

to make change. Consider when you've observed performative activism or slacktivism.

- In what ways are Salvador's thoughts and actions in direct contrast with performative activism or slacktivism?
- How does performative activism do more harm than good?

## Chapter 8: Recovery

- Discuss the various ways residents of Morovis demonstrated resilience in the face of obstacles.



## Chapter 9: Light

- Salvador writes, "One of the things that I learned from this experience was that while the impact of a storm is not always in our hands, our response is. While I could not control what happened, I *could* control my response, so I chose to respond by helping those around me" (p. 81). What else do you think Salvador learned as a result of this experience?
- How might you apply some of what Salvador has learned to your own life and to the causes you care about and plan to advocate for?

- Salvador concludes his account with the following words: “Don’t let anyone dim your light” (p. 83). What advice might you share with other activists working to support their communities?

## Continue the Discussion

Read and discuss each section to learn more about:

- Hurricane Maria
- the damage Hurricane Maria caused
- the impact of Salvador’s actions
- what Salvador is doing today.

Then explore one or more of the Learning Resources to learn more about the issues and topics discussed in *Hurricane*.

## Get Involved

In this section, three action steps are provided for advancing the work of equity: talk about it; read up and speak out; and volunteer.

- Read and discuss each action step offered.
- What other ways can you take action?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for knowing and caring about the experiences of others?

## Timeline

Timelines help us to understand the chronology of historical and current events. They can reveal cause and effect relationships between events, and they can help us to situate our own lived experiences in relation to events and people.

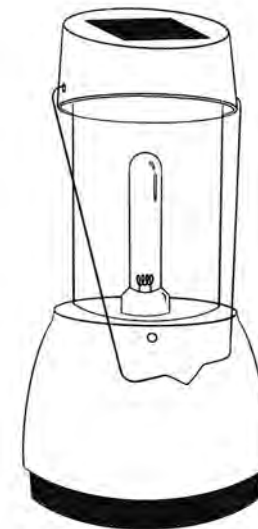
- What patterns and themes do you notice?

- Which events would you like to learn more about?
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## About I, Witness

This section states, “I, Witness is a nonfiction book series that tells important stories of real young people who have faced and conquered extraordinary contemporary challenges” (p. 105).

- Do you believe Salvador Gómez-Colón has conquered the challenges he faced?
- What challenges still remain?
- Whose responsibility is it to dismantle and eliminate these challenges?





# Learning Resources

Engage with one or more of the following Learning Resources to further explore a topic from *Hurricane*.

**1) Environmental Racism:** Learn about the conditions that contribute to environmental racism. Explore events that on the surface may seem like isolated events. Then take a closer look to consider ways these events can in fact be part of a larger conversation about environmental racism in the United States.

## TEXT SET

- Ivana Ramirez, "10 Examples of Environmental Racism and How It Works" *YES! Solutions Journalism*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2021/04/22/environmental-racism-examples>
- Natalie Colarossi, "10 Egregious Examples of Environmental Racism in the United States," *Insider*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.insider.com/environmental-racism-examples-united-states-2020-8>
- "Hurricane Katrina," History.com, August 9, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/natural-disasters-and-environment/hurricane-katrina>
- German Lopez, "Hurricane Katrina, in 7 Essential Facts," *Vox*, August 23, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/8/23/9191907/hurricane-katrina>
- Joe Posner, "Flint's Water Crisis, Explained in 3 Minutes," *Vox*, January 21, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUSiLOWkrlw&ab\\_channel=Vox](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUSiLOWkrlw&ab_channel=Vox)
- Steve Almasy and Laura Ly, "Flint Water Crisis: Report Says 'Systemic Racism' Played Role," *CNN Politics*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/18/politics/flint-water-report-systemic-racism/index.htm>
- "Treaties Still Matter: The Dakota Access Pipeline," *Native Knowledge*, 2018, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dapl>

- Lily Herman, "Standing Rock Protesters Are Asking for Urgent Help to Fight the DAPL," *Teen Vogue*, February 21, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/standing-rock-protesters-are-asking-for-urgent-help-to-fight-the-dapl>
- Scott Clement, Katie Zezima, and Emily Guskin, "Puerto Rico After Maria: Residents See a Failure at All Levels of Government," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/09/12/feature/residents-see-a-failure-at-all-levels-of-government/>
- "The Reasons Behind Puerto Rico's Blackout," *Frontline* and NPR, May 1, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baagXcDijKs&ab\\_channel=FRONTLINEPBS%7COfficial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baagXcDijKs&ab_channel=FRONTLINEPBS%7COfficial)
- "What is Environmental Justice?," *Grist*, January 26, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6\\_c&ab\\_channel=Grist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6_c&ab_channel=Grist)

- What do you notice about the communities most impacted by landfills and hazardous waste sites, the children most affected by lead poisoning, and governmental response to natural disasters?
- What are some of the racist policies and practices that contribute to the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on Indigenous and Black and Brown communities?
- What will it take for the most marginalized to experience environmental justice?

**2) Salvador Gómez-Colón:** Learn more about Salvador's work in response to Hurricane Maria, his Light and Hope campaign, and his continued advocacy for sustainability and climate resilience today.

## TEXT SET

- "ABC Tiempo features Light and Hope for Puerto Rico Campaign—Part 1 of 2," *Light and Hope Puerto Rico*, <https://vimeo.com/250868954>

° Phineas Rueckert, "This 15-Year-Old Is Bringing Light to One of Puerto Rico's Poorest Communities," *Global Citizen*, October 24, 2017, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/fr/content/puerto-rico-teen-solar-lamps-washing-machines/>

° Keenan Miller and Alessia DeGraeve, "Student Author Shares New Book on Hurricane Maria experience," *Yale Daily News*, October 18, 2021, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2021/10/18/student-author-shares-new-book-on-hurricane-maria-experience/>

° "Salvador Gómez-Colón: Biography," <https://salvadorgomezcolon.com/about>

- Many people take light for granted. What is the importance of light beyond visibility?
- What does resilience mean to you?
- What is climate resilience, and why is it important?
- What can we learn from Salvador about advocacy and activism?
- What can we learn from Salvador about the process of change?



# ***Courage: My Story of Persecution*** by Freshta Tori Jan

## Essential Questions

Remind readers to practice using the **Reading Nonfiction** strategies to support their reading of nonfiction. Students might also engage one or more of the following Essential Questions during their reading of the book.

### Introduction

**"One of the best ways to understand a complicated moment in history is by reading the story of a person who lived through it."**

— *Courage*, p. 1

- Why does it matter who tells the story not only in fiction but also in nonfiction?
- In what ways will reading this story from the mind and perspective of Freshta matter?
- How might this story be different if it was not told by and through the eyes, mind, and experiences of the person who lived through it?

### Chapter 1: Change

- We are each dynamic human beings, and we are more than the challenges we face. Discuss what you are learning about Freshta and her life in Afghanistan before the Taliban attacked Herat. What seemed to matter most to her? What did she value? How did she spend her time?
- Many of us will never know the fear, shock, and panic that results from bullets and bombs lighting up the sky where we live. Why do you think Freshta's sister didn't tell Freshta at first that what she was seeing in the night sky wasn't stars but bullets?

- What were some of the sacrifices Freshta and her family had to make in order to survive this attack?

## Chapter 2: Torment

- Discuss the distinct, yet interconnected challenges Freshta faced in Kabul.

## Chapter 3: Hope

- For many children, school is a sanctuary. Discuss the power and purpose of education and the ways school meant much more to Freshta than just a place to learn.
- How did attending the International School of Kabul (ISK) benefit Freshta? What challenges did she continue to face?

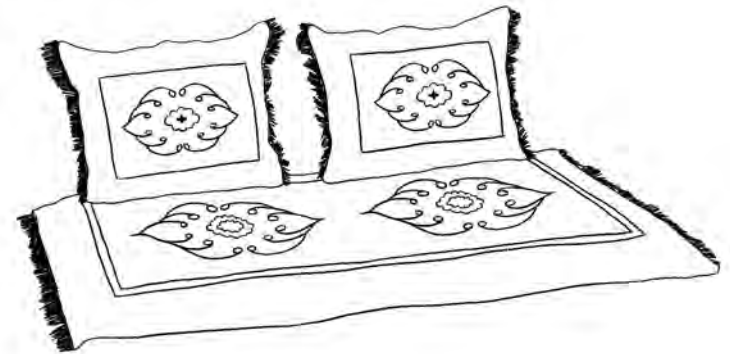
## Chapter 4: Destruction

- Power isn't always good or bad, but certainly it can be used in these ways in societies and in our lives. Discuss this chapter, and name the power systems you're noticing and their ideologies (racism, sexism, classism, etc.). In what ways is power exerted by forces in Freshta's life? How does Freshta exert power in response to and in defiance of these forces?
- Why is it dangerous when people are denied access to libraries and schools?



## Chapter 5: Legacy

- Freshta describes her father's many stories as those of "courage, resilience, independence, and taking risks" (p. 56). She shares that her father "was always the one standing out, pushing back against what was 'normal' and deemed appropriate by society" (p. 57). In what ways do the stories told by Freshta's father disrupt one-sided narratives and stereotypes about Afghani men? How do they provide an important counternarrative?
- Continuing to reflect on her father, Freshta writes, "His experiences gave me wings of courage" (p. 59). What has Freshta learned from her father, and how does she demonstrate this in her life?



- Ethnic bigotry and persecution are distinct from but also similar to racism. Understandings about bigotry and racism can be limited to isolated, individual acts of hate. Use the chart below to help you consider effects of bigotry and racism on individuals and groups of people.

## Broadened Understandings of Bigotry and Racism

As you read *Courage: My Story of Persecution* by Freshta Tori Jan, consider her experiences as well as your own that help to expand ideas about harmful effects of bigotry and racism.

Effects	Examples in Freshta's life	Examples in your life (experienced and/or observed)
<p><b>Interpersonal</b> (between individuals) Negative, harmful ideas; bigotry or racial bias expressed during interactions with others</p>		
<p><b>Internalized</b> (within ourselves) Negative, harmful ideas and lies that nondominant groups start to believe about themselves and others from nondominant groups; beliefs about superiority and entitlement by dominant group</p>		
<p><b>Institutional</b> (within institutions and systems) Discriminatory policies and practices by institutions such as schools, healthcare, housing, employment, government, etc. that benefit dominant groups and result in inequitable outcomes for nondominant groups.</p>		

- Freshta writes, "In school, throughout every grade, history books never mentioned anything positive about the Hazaras. Every single history book talked about Tajik and Pashtun achievements, but there was hardly any information about Hazaras, and the small amount of information there was focused on how we had always been slaves, plantation workers, and the lowest of the low in Afghan society" (p. 60). Discuss the dangers of misrepresentation and erasure of people.

- Who and what is missing from the textbooks and curricula in your school?

- In what ways is Fresta's reflection a parallel to misrepresentations and silences in textbooks and curricula in the United States?

- How do silences and erasures in textbooks and curricula in the United States help you think about the purpose and dangers of banning books?

- Freshta shares, "I turned to people who were elderly and held more knowledge about our history. They ended up being my greatest resource" (pp. 60–61). Consider again why who tells the story matters, as well as the importance of oral history.

## Chapter 6: Bloodshed

- Freshta writes, "At school, the kids, who were mostly Pashtuns and Tajiks, would make fun of me. Then they would say, 'It's surprising that we haven't gotten you yet'" (p. 67). In what ways are kids socialized into bigotry and hateful ideas?

- How can children resist ideas born from bigotry and hate, even when these harmful messages come from those who may be closest to them?

- Consider what Freshta reveals about the government in Afghanistan. "Government leaders focused on what benefited them and their own ethnic groups. They were okay with policies that discriminated against others, and that could even eliminate a whole group of people. They didn't believe that all groups were as deserving of life and happiness as their own" (p. 68). What do you believe should be the purpose of government and the responsibilities of government leaders?

- In what ways can you observe the actions of governmental leaders aligning with their words? Where do you see examples of misalignment? Share examples of this in your own life.
- In what ways does Freshta help make clear the emotional, mental, and physical consequences of bigotry?

## Chapter 7: Fear

- Freshta describes the ways fear, violence, and terror change people. Discuss the meaning of compliance.
- What were the various ways Freshta’s mother complied to keep her family safe? What was the cost of this compliance to them?
- Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw created the term *intersectionality* to describe how classifications such as race, gender identity, and class can “intersect” and result in overlapping systems of discrimination and oppression. Consider how intersectionality impacts social, economic, and political conditions for Freshta and her family.

## Chapter 8: Escape

- Too often, those who have the least sacrifice the most. Discuss the sacrifices Freshta and her family have made. What were they willing to lose in order to gain? In what ways did they demonstrate this all along?



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Environmental Factors</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">As you read <i>Courage: My Story of Persecution</i> by Freshta Tori Jan, identify the ways ethnicity, class, religion, and gender influence social, economic, and political conditions for groups of people. Where do you see evidence of this in your life?</p>		
Conditions	Examples in Freshta’s life	Examples in your life
<p><i>Social</i></p> <p>Interactions between individuals and groups of people</p>		
<p><i>Economic</i></p> <p>Money, jobs, and resources</p>		
<p><i>Political</i></p> <p>Government, laws, policies, policing, and practices enforced</p> <p>Money, jobs, and resources</p>		



## Epilogue

- Freshta writes, “But every group that faces persecution or oppression is valuable and deserves people’s care and attention. One person’s life is not more important than another’s, no matter their ethnicity or color or class. A life is a life” (p. 94). What can we learn from Freshta about what it means to fight for justice?
- Why isn’t it enough to just know about injustice but to take action against it? Whose responsibility is it to take action?

## Continue the Discussion

Read and discuss each section to learn more about:

- the Taliban
- the Taliban’s continued acts of terrorism
- past and present persecution and violence against Hazaras
- what Freshta is doing today

Then explore one or more of the Learning Resources to learn more about the issues and topics discussed in *Courage*.

## Get Involved

In this section, three action steps are provided for advancing the work of equity: stay informed; speak out; and support.

- Read and discuss each action step offered.
- What other ways can you take action?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for knowing about and caring about the experiences of others?

## Timeline

Timelines help us to understand the chronology of historical and current events. They can reveal cause and effect relationships between events, and they can help us to situate our own lived experiences in relation to events and people.

- What patterns and themes do you notice?
- Which events would you like to learn more about?
- Consider several of the dates and events on this timeline. Where do you locate yourself and your lived experiences related to or different from the events?
- Create your own timeline that reveals key moments that influenced you, sparked your interest in an issue, and motivated you to take action to support causes you believe in.

## About I, Witness

This section states, “I, Witness is a nonfiction book series that tells important stories of real young people who have faced and conquered extraordinary contemporary challenges” (p. 121).

- Do you believe Freshta Tori Jan has conquered the challenges she faced?
- What are the challenges that remain?
- Whose responsibility is it to dismantle and eliminate those challenges?

## Learning Resources

Engage one or more of the following Learning Resources to further explore a topic or issue from *Courage*.

**1) The Hazaras of Afghanistan:** Freshta writes, “In school, throughout every grade, history books never mentioned anything positive about Hazaras” (p. 60).

People are much more than their oppression. Author and educator M. Colleen Cruz says that the most dangerous thing that can happen to a people is erasure. Learn about the rich history of the Hazaras, and continue to learn about their persecution and fight for survival.

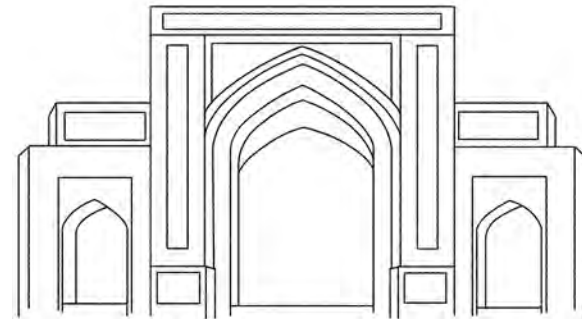
## TEXT SET

- “Who Are the Hazara of Afghanistan? An Expert on Islam Explains,” *Conversation*, September 13, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/who-are-the-hazara-of-afghanistan-an-expert-on-islam-explains-166776>
  - “Homira Rezai interview,” *Insider NJ*, August 23, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1cd4S5a-TU&ab\\_channel=InsiderNJ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1cd4S5a-TU&ab_channel=InsiderNJ)  
(Educators, you may decide to show just part of this interview, such as from 0.00 to 4:12)
  - “Who Are the Hazaras, One of Afghanistan’s Threatened Minorities,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/video/226352/who-are-the-hazara-people>
  - “Khadim Ali Discusses the Shahnameh’s Significance,” Guggenheim, November 18, 2013, <https://www.guggenheim.org/video/khadim-ali-discusses-the-shahnamehs-significance>
- What are you learning about the diversity of the Hazaras?
  - How did the persecution of Hazaras in Afghanistan begin?
  - How did the geographic location of Hazaras in Afghanistan isolate them and hinder their connection to the broader community?
  - *Courage* demonstrates the important power of one’s own story. What do we learn when we listen to artist Khadim Ali discuss his Hazara identity, his background, and his experiences, and how they influence his art?
  - How does the geographic location and climate of Afghanistan contribute to the ways Afghani families value storytelling?

**2) Freshta Tori Jan:** Today Freshta is a global human rights activist and public speaker. Learn more about her advocacy and activism on behalf of numerous communities around the world.

## TEXT SET

- Freshta Tori Jan, speech to National Character and Leadership Symposium, 2021, U.S. Air Force Academy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ap8-nYKfDNM>
  - Freshta Tori Jan “Courage: My Story of Persecution,” *Nicola’s Books*, January 20, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIvEJTzL1oQ&feature=youtu.be>
- Why do you think the term “Middle East” is used for the approximately twenty countries designated to this geographic region, rather than referencing the continents in which they are located?
  - What misconceptions have you been taught about Afghanistan?
  - What has Freshta helped you to unlearn? What has Freshta helped you to learn?
  - How can you help disrupt harmful dominant narratives about Afghanistan and Afghani people?
  - What can we learn from Freshta about advocacy and activism?
  - What can we learn from Freshta about the process of change?



# Resistance: My Story of Activism by Frantzy Luzincourt

## Essential Questions

Remind readers to practice using the **Reading Nonfiction** strategies to support their reading of nonfiction. Students might also engage one or more of the following Essential Questions during their reading of the book.

### INTRODUCTION

**“One of the best ways to understand a complicated moment in history is to read the story of someone who lived through it.”**

— *Resistance*, p. 1



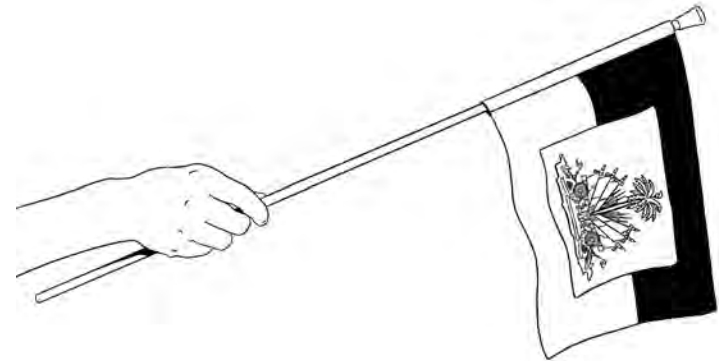
- Why does it matter who tells the story not only in fiction but also in nonfiction?
- In what ways will reading this story from the mind and perspective of Frantzy matter?
- How might this story be different if it was not told by and through the eyes, mind, and experiences of the person who lived through it?

### Chapter 1: Icon

- What are you learning about Frantzy and how he sees the world?
- Discuss the differences between the words *celebrity* and *icon*.
- What are some of the characteristics of an *icon*? Who do you consider an icon and why?

## Chapter 2: Voice

- In what ways do Frantzy's neighborhood and community affirm his racial and cultural identity?
- Who and what in Frantzy's life influence and empower him, and in what ways?
- Who and what in your life influence and empower you, and in what ways?



### Chapter 3: Profiled

- Have you ever felt singled out? Discuss with a peer or reflect in writing what it feels like to be labeled in a negative way.
- We form stereotypes based on assumptions we make about the categories in which we place people. When our assumptions impact the way we act toward others and what we believe to be true about them, they become bias and discrimination. In what ways can we monitor our assumptions so they don't become harmful or limit our understandings about people and the world?

### Chapter 4: President

- Gifted and talented programs have historically been a way to segregate students in schools. What racial patterns do you notice in your school regarding honors or advanced placement classes? How do these patterns reinforce

false and harmful ideas about groups of people? In what ways can gifted and talented programs, honors, and advanced placement classes create false and harmful feelings of superiority?

- Frantzy writes, “As Black students and students of color, we did everything together. It was a survival mechanism in such a white environment” (p. 34). Why are affinity group spaces for those who share a similar or the same racial/cultural identity essential for people who have been marginalized and oppressed in society?

## Chapter 5: Gala

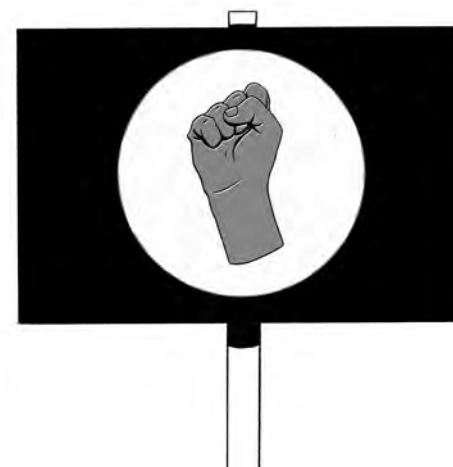
- Frantzy writes, “I took the lessons of starting the first-ever Black Student Union in my high school and employed them on a grander scale in college” (p. 46). What do you notice about the lessons Frantzy learns and how he applies them in aspects of his life?
- In what ways do Frantzy’s words align with his actions?

## Chapter 6: Strategy

- Discuss the word strategy. What does it mean? How does this inform your understanding of the purpose and work of Strategy for Black Lives?
- Frantzy writes, “Why weren’t we seeing structural or policy change? We knew we had to do something about this. We might not be able to solve the entire problem, but we were positive we could be part of the solution” (p. 54). Discuss Frantzy’s seven-point document of demands and his vision of structural and policy change to end police brutality.

## Chapter 7: Protest

- Have you ever been to a large protest? Discuss your experience.
- Discuss Strategy for Black Lives’s protest formula. In what ways is this formula essential in supporting large protests?
- Can you suggest additional strategies to support large protests? How might they help achieve the goals of the protest?



## Chapter 8: Repeal

- Frantzy writes, “Strategy for Black Lives approaches the work of liberation from multiple angles” (p. 68). What does liberation mean to you?
- What patterns do you notice in history and even today that demonstrate what happens whenever people who are most oppressed fight for liberation?
- The title of this book is *Resistance*. Discuss the ways resistance shows up both in the work of activism and in response to it.

## Chapter 9: Batman

- When reflecting on the words of John Lewis, Frantzy writes, “Good trouble means that if you really do want to make change, you have to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. You have to be willing to step up” (p. 79). What does it mean to you to be comfortable with the uncomfortable? How might this make a difference in the world?
- What issues are you willing to “step up” for?

## Continue the Discussion

Read and discuss each section to learn more about:

- the importance of the library in Frantzy's life
- the impact of George Floyd's murder
- what Frantzy is doing today
- Strategy for Black Lives

Then explore one or more of the Learning Resources to learn more about the issues and topics discussed in *Resistance*.

## Get Involved

In this section, three action steps are provided for advancing the work of equity: empower; educate; and enact.

- Read and discuss each action step offered.
- What other ways can you take action?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for knowing about and caring about the experiences of others?

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- Do you believe Frantzy Luzincourt has conquered the challenges he faced?
- What are the challenges that remain?
- Whose responsibility is it to dismantle and eliminate these challenges?

## Learning Resources

Engage one or more of the following Learning Resources to further explore a topic or issue from *Resistance*.

**1) John Lewis:** In his final message to America before he died, John Lewis wrote, “Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble.” Learn more about John Lewis—his activism, his work, and his message, all of which inspire Frantzy Luzincourt and countless others.

### TEXT SET

° “Congressman John Lewis’s Legacy,” CBS News with the National Museum of African American History and Culture, July 23, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/congressman-john-lewis-legacy-with-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/#x>

° John Lewis, “Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.engr.uconn.edu/wp-content/>



uploads/2020/08/NYT-John-Lewis\_Together-You-Can-Redeem-the-Soul-of-Our-Nation.pdf

◦ “Remembering the Life and Legacy of John Lewis,” *PBS News Weekend*, July 18, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/remembering-the-life-and-legacy-of-john-lewis>

- What do you notice about the kind of “good and necessary trouble” Lewis cared about?
- In what ways do the life and legacy of John Lewis clarify the meaning and purpose of activism?
- What kinds of “good and necessary trouble” might you get in to that would honor the legacy of John Lewis?

**2) Black Student Unions:** Frantzy writes that his teacher, Mr. Blackmon, played a pivotal role in helping him start his predominantly white, affluent high school’s first Black Student Union. Black Student Unions have played an important role in colleges and universities across the United States since the 1960s. Learn about the origins of Black Student Unions.

### TEXT SET

◦ Ciera Graham, “The History of the Black Student Union,” *Best Colleges*, January 24, 2022, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/history-of-black-student-union/>

- Consider what you’re learning about Black Student Unions. In what ways are Black Student Unions safe, affirming spaces that help Black students thrive?
- How has the purpose of Black Student Unions remained the same over the decades? How has it changed?
- What do you notice about the role of activism in Black Student Unions?
- As you read about Frantzy’s K-12 schooling, consider what you’ve learned about contemporary school segregation. Although Black Student Unions began on college campuses, why and how can they support K-12 students?

**3) Frantzy Luzincourt and Strategy for Black Lives:** Frantzy is a national activist, public speaker, founder and CEO of Strategy for Black Lives, and a case manager at a law firm. Learn more about his advocacy and activism for racial justice.

### TEXT SET

◦ “Frantzy Luzincourt Organized a National Movement of Leaders Dedicated to Empowering Black People,” *In the Know*, November 1, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqh4dCMbyd0&ab\\_channel=InTheKnow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqh4dCMbyd0&ab_channel=InTheKnow)

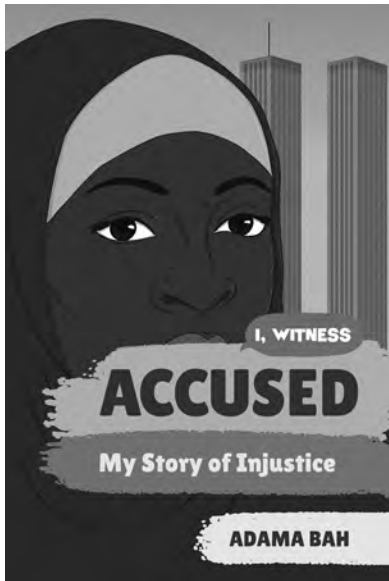
◦ “About Us,” Strategy for Black Lives, <https://www.strategyforblacklives.org/>

- What strategies does Frantzy believe are necessary? What changes does he believe can lead to racial justice?
- What examples of institutional and systemic racism and injustice across the nation does Frantzy spotlight?
- What is Frantzy’s vision for Strategies for Black Lives?
- What can we learn from Frantzy about advocacy and activism?
- What can we learn from Frantzy about the process of change?



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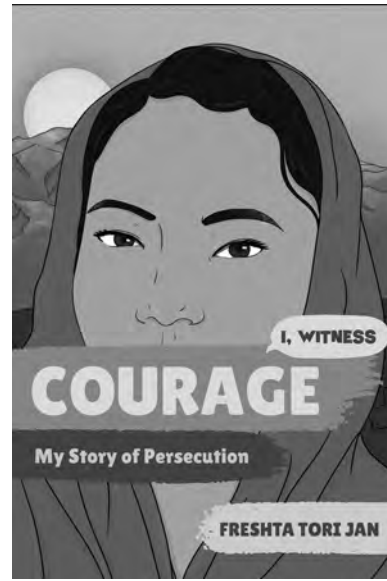


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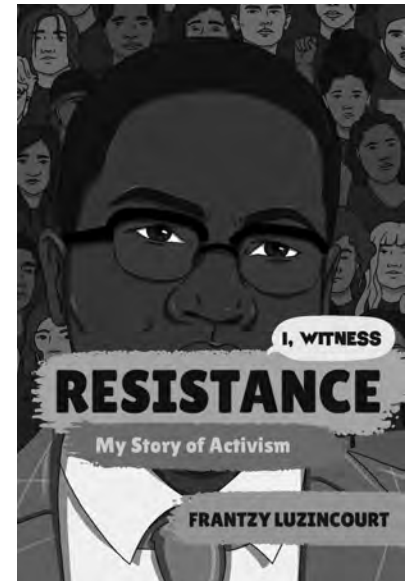
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## **About I, Witness**

**I, Witness is a nonfiction book series that tells important stories of real young people who have faced and conquered extraordinary contemporary challenges. There's no better way for young readers to learn about the world's issues and upheavals than through the eyes of young people who have lived through these times.**



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