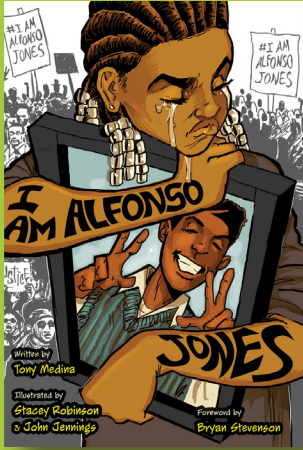


TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

I Am Alfonso Jones

written by Tony Medina

illustrated by Stacey Robinson and John Jennings

About the Book

Genre: Magical Realism

*Reading Level: Grades 7-12

Interest Level: Grades 7-12

Guided Reading Level: Z+

Accelerated Reader® Level/
Points: N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the Spache
Readability Formula

Themes: Police Brutality, Teenage Experience, First Love, Protest, Death and Dying, Magical Realism, Realistic Fiction, Poetry, Discrimination, Family, New York, African/African American Interest, Latinx/Hispanic Interest, Civil Rights Movement, Empathy and Compassion, United States History

SYNOPSIS

Alfonso Jones can't wait to play the role of Hamlet in his school's hip-hop rendition of the classic Shakespearean play. He also wants to let his best friend, Danetta, know how he really feels about her. But as he is buying his first suit, an off-duty police officer mistakes a clothes hanger for a gun, and he shoots Alfonso.

When Alfonso wakes up in the afterlife, he's on a ghost train guided by well-known victims of police shootings, who teach him what he needs to know about this subterranean spiritual world. Meanwhile, Alfonso's family and friends struggle with their grief and seek justice for Alfonso in the streets. As they confront their new realities, both Alfonso and those he loves realize the work that lies ahead in the fight for justice.

In the first graphic novel for young readers to focus on police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, as in *Hamlet*, the dead shall speak—and the living yield even more surprises.



BACKGROUND

From the Foreword:

“The narrative of racial difference in the United States has created a smog that pollutes many communities and marginalizes people of color. It began when white settlers came to this continent and killed millions of Native people, forced them off their land, and declared them to be ‘savages.’ That same narrative of racial difference sustained two centuries of human enslavement where African people were abducted, kidnapped, beaten, abused, sexually exploited, and denied human dignity. The Thirteenth Amendment prohibited involuntary servitude and forced labor, but said nothing about the ideology of white supremacy and the narrative of racial difference that was slavery’s true evil. Slavery didn’t end in 1865; it evolved. For another hundred years our nation witnessed racial terror lynchings, widespread mistreatment and economic exploitation of people of color, segregation, Jim Crow laws, bans on interracial romance, and unaddressed racial bigotry. A heroic civil rights struggle helped move things forward, but the narrative of racial difference endured.

“Today, we have mass incarceration and a criminal justice system that treats you better if you’re rich and guilty than if you’re poor and innocent. The Bureau of Justice predicts that one in three black male babies born in this country will spend time in jail or prison; this was not true throughout most of the twentieth century. An epidemic of police violence claims the lives of people of color, who are frequently menaced, targeted, and harassed. In schools, on streets, and frequently in media and popular culture, black children are presumed criminal and must do exceptional things to enjoy the opportunities other people are freely given. We are Alfonso Jones.”—Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy* (<https://eji.org/bryan-stevenson>)

From the Author’s Note:

“As a literary artist, I realized I’ve been documenting—in poetry—police brutality cases since the late 1980s. From Eleanor Bumpurs (who reminded me of my own grandmother) to Charleena Lyles, a thirty-year-old pregnant African American woman shot to death by police in the doorway of her apartment, in front of her children, after calling the police for a possible burglary (possibly her estranged abusive boyfriend), I have amassed a full-length collection of poetry on such

horrifying cases.

“When Amadou Diallo was killed in 1999, I took to the streets in a major protest that began in mid-Manhattan and culminated in front of the courthouses in lower Manhattan. It was jam-packed, and when the protest ended and the massive crowd began to disperse, I recall being purposefully pummeled by a white cop who disguised his brutality against me with the excuse of moving the crowd along. The sneaky smirk on his face when he realized a friend and fellow poet, Suheir Hammad, witnessed the assault, yanking me away and saying, “Come on, Medina, we need you alive!” showed me all I needed know about how some people, hiding behind badges, abuse their authority and positions of power to get out their own anger and frustration. This is one of the reasons we need better policing and screening of those who serve in public positions where society entrusts them to carry a weapon and a badge.

“Ever since the Trayvon Martin killing and the subsequent trial of George Zimmerman, who was found not guilty in a jury decision that was confounding, to say the least, I have been posting incessantly on social media (and writing poems) about cases of police brutality and injustices against people of color as part of the Black Lives Matter resistance. As a professor, I also hold intense discussions among my students at Howard University in Washington, DC, and even have my students respond in writing and video, in which they speak out as poets and concerned citizens about their fear, confusion, and anger regarding the onslaught of cases of police brutality and the killing of innocent, unarmed people of color. I also published an anthology, *Resisting Arrest: Poems to Stretch the Sky* (Jacar Press, 2016) on police brutality and violence, featuring some of the most prominent poets in the country

“I Am Alfonso Jones is a culmination of my great concern for the inequality that rears its head in the justice system, the prison industry, and in the dangerous elements found in policing in America.”—Tony Medina

Black Lives Matter:

Black Lives Matter writes about their creation, “Black Lives Matter is a chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life. We are working to (re)build the Black liberation movement. #BlackLivesMatter was created in 2012 after Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman, was



acquitted for his crime, and dead seventeen-year-old Trayvon was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder. Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society. Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes.” (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>)

Here are additional resources for how to teach Black Lives Matter in the classroom:

- The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has a downloadable lesson plan for high school students called, “Black Lives Matter: From Hashtag to Movement.” (https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/black-lives-matter-from-hashtag-to-movement?referrer=https%3A//www.google.com/#.WI_rNrYrLBJ)
- Black Lives Matter Syllabus contains a variety of resources for teachers, including relevant lesson plans, texts, and films. (<http://www.blacklivesmattersyllabus.com/fall2016/>)

Here is a list of websites for further information and lesson plans:

- Black Lives Matter Lesson Series (Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility) (<http://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/black-lives-matter-lesson-series-part-1>)
- Teaching #BlackLivesMatter (Teaching for Change) (<http://www.teachingforchange.org/teaching-blacklivesmatter>)
- Why Teaching Black Lives Matter Matters: Part I (Teaching Tolerance) (<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/why-teaching-black-lives-matter-matters-part-i>)
- Bringing Black Lives Matter into the Classroom: Part II (Teaching Tolerance) (<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/bringing-black-lives-matter-into-the-classroom-part-ii>)
- Teaching About Race, Racism and Police Violence (Teaching Tolerance) (<https://www.tolerance.org/moment/racism-and-police-violence>)

YA Titles about Police Violence

The Hate You Give written by Angie Thomas

<https://www.harpercollins.com/9780062498533/the-hate-u-give>

All American Boys written by Jason Alexander and Brendan Kiely

<http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/All-American-Boys/Jason-Reynolds/9781481463348>

How it Went Down written by Kekla Magoon

<https://us.macmillan.com/howitwentdown/keklamagoon/9781250068231/>

Tyler Johnson Was Here written by Jay Coles

<https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/jay-coles/tyler-johnson-was-here/9781549167980/>

Dear Martin written by Nic Stone

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/534050/dear-martin-by-nic-stone/9781101939499/>

Teaching Social Issues with Graphic Novels

Yummy written by G. Neri, illustrated by Randy DuBurke

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/yummy>

Chess Rumble written by G. Neri, illustrated by Jesse Joshua Watson

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/chess-rumble>

March: Book One, Book Two and ***Book Three*** written by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin, illustrated by Nate Powell

<https://www.amazon.com/March-Trilogy-Slipcase-John-Lewis/dp/1603093958>

Hiroshima written and illustrated by Nakazawa Keiji

<http://amzn.to/2zYFiH1>

Persepolis and ***Persepolis 2*** written and illustrated by Mariane Satrapi

<http://amzn.to/2z3cEFv>

Maus written and illustrated by Art Spiegelman

<http://amzn.to/2z4Horl>

The Silence of Our Friends written by Mark Long and Jim Demonakos, illustrated by Nate Powell

<http://amzn.to/2ikSPSd>

Wandering Son written and illustrated by Shimura Takako

<http://amzn.to/2zYnH>



VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Content Specific

Boer War, borough, *Do the Right Thing*, due process, genocide, gestapo, The Gulf War, haiku, hogtie, The Holocaust, hypothermia, *Invisible Man*, Japanese internment camps, Jim Crow, liberation theology, lynching, mofongo, overseer, pho, police brutality, prison industrial complex, racial profiling, tax evasion, Tuskegee Airmen, Zoot Suit Riots

Academic

Activist, ambush, annihilation, atrocious, astronomical, bureaucracy, bystander, cliché, contingent, cower, diabolical, deity, eulogy, exonerate, hallowed, impunity, inclement, injurious, languish, loathe, millennial, mobilize, motto, obtuse, ominous, pamper, progressive, rampage, rhetorical, ricochet, silhouette, solidarity, stalk, strife, terrestrial, trauma, treacherous, vigil

Historical Figures and Cultural References

Louis Armstrong, Chuck D, Frederick Douglass, Henry Dumas, Duke Ellington, Ralph Ellison, Rudy Giuliani, Benny Goodman, Adam Clayton Powell, Radio Raheem, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. How do you define justice? Discuss some examples of the injustices in your community. What do you think racial justice means?
2. What is the job of the police? Describe the relationship the police have with the people in your community.
3. What do you know about the Black Lives Matter movement? What are some other examples of political activism or social justice movements?
4. What do you know about Harlem? The Bronx? Have you been to either of those places? If not, how did you learn about them?
5. What is your perception of the American criminal justice system? What experiences have formed your view? What do you know about racial profiling? Police violence?
6. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

1. Ask students what they think the title, *I Am Alfonso Jones*, means. What do they think this book will most likely be about? What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
2. Have students look at the front and back cover art. Spend a few minutes flipping through the pages, noticing the illustrations. What predictions can they make? Do they think this book is fiction or nonfiction? What makes them think that? Ask why an author and illustrator may want to tell a story in a graphic novel format.
3. Introduce students to Tony Medina (the author) and Stacey Robinson and John Jennings (the illustrators). You can find information in the “about the author” and “about the illustrators” section of this guide.
 - Ask if anyone has read other books by the same author/illustrators.



- Have students read the book’s dedications, acknowledgments, and author’s note and discuss what impressions they have.
 - Point out that the author and two illustrators are Black, and that the author and Alfonso Jones both identify as Black Puerto Rican. Ask students what impact the identity of an author or illustrator has on their experience of reading. Does that change depending on the identity of the characters? Or what the story is about? Or on the identity of the reader?
4. Provide students with relevant historical and sociopolitical context for understanding the themes in *I Am Alfonso Jones*. This will vary depending on your students’ lived experiences and prior knowledge, as well as current events and the learning goals particular to your class.
 5. Discuss the genre. *I Am Alfonso Jones* is a graphic novel and can be classified as magical realism. Point out that the book is organized into chapters. Draw attention to the following parts of *I Am Alfonso Jones*:
 - Foreword
 - Dedications
 - The Cast
 - Author’s Note
 - The Real-Life Ancestors of This Book
 - Acknowledgments
 6. Introduce students to the main elements of a graphic novel. Spend time defining these elements and pointing to each in the book until students are able to identify them:
 - *Panel*: A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text.
 - *Frame*: The lines and borders that contain the panels.
 - *Gutter*: The space between framed panels.
 - *Speech balloon*: These enclosed words come from a specific speaker’s mouth to show dialogue between characters.
 - *Thought balloon*: These enclosed words show private thoughts with a series of dots or bubbles going up to it from a specific character.
- *Caption*: These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc.
 - *Special-effects lettering*: This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights drama or exaggeration and reinforces the impact of words such as “bang” or “wow.”
 - *Foreground*: The art can be perceived as closest to the viewer within the panel.
 - *Background*: Provides additional, subtextual information for the reader.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how African American history and culture are woven into the characters and plot of *I Am Alfonso Jones*
- how *I Am Alfonso Jones* connects to real-world current events and community issues, nationally or locally
- how the dynamics of race and racism intersect with policing to create problems in the criminal justice system
- the importance of advocacy and activism in solving community problems
- how and why Tony Medina plays with elements of time and space in order to introduce the voices of the “ancestors” into Alfonso’s story

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**



“In the aftermath of his senseless murder at the hands of a policeman, Alfonso’s story powerfully illustrates the value inherent in every human life and the tragedy of loss by all who are impacted...”

– **LeVar Burton, Actor, Director, Author, and Reading Activist**

★“**VERDICT:** A brutally honest and bleak but necessary selection for all graphic novel collections.”

–**School Library Journal**

“Medina...guides readers through the world that contemporary African Americans live in, a world where justice does not seem to exist... Yet, he preserves a thoughtful perspective and a sense of balanced humanity...”

–**Booklist**

Right There Questions (*The answer is stated in the text.*)

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What was Alfonso’s job?
2. Where do Alfonso and his mother live? Who else lives with them?
3. What are Alfonso and his peers reading in English class?
4. What do Alfonso and Danetta go shopping for after school?
5. What three objects does Alfonso have with him in his afterlife on the
6. Where was Alfonso’s funeral? Who gave the eulogy?
7. Where was Alfonso born?
8. What movie character does the killing of Anthony Baez remind Alfonso of?
9. What does Danetta go to the emergency room for?
10. Was anyone charged with Alfonso’s death?

Think and Search Questions (*The answer is stated in the text but you must combine pieces of information to fully answer the question.*)

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3, and Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Why was Alfonso’s father put in jail, and how is Alfonso’s life trajectory altered as a result? What about his mother’s life?
2. Who is Alfonso’s school named after, and what kind of school is it? How is he able to attend school there?
3. According to the police captain, what were the supposed circumstances that led to Alfonso being shot and killed? What kinds of questions does the reporter ask? What is your interpretation of what happened?
4. Who are Eleanor and Mr. Scobie? Summarize the circumstances of both of their deaths. What do they have in common with Alfonso?
5. What are some examples of how the media sought to smear Alfonso’s character?
6. After Alfonso dies, Danetta starts organizing protests. What impact does this have on Danetta? How does Alfonso’s letter change her?
7. What historical connections do Alfonso and his peers make to the crisis of mass incarceration? What class are they in when they have this conversation?
8. Why is Chapter 22 titled “Bronx Beruit”?
9. Who is the president after Alfonso’s death, and what are the main points in the president’s remarks



about his case? Does it make you think about our country's history differently?

10. What does Alfonso learn when he finally meets Henry Dumas? How have their two lives overlapped and intersected?

Author and Me Questions (Combine your own knowledge with what the author has written to answer the question.)

Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3, Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7-8
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Alfonso's story is told in a nonlinear fashion. What insights does this offer into his life and character? Why might the author have chosen to tell Alfonso's story in this way?
2. What kind of relationship does Mr. Oh have with his students? How would you describe his educational philosophy? Have you had teachers like Mr. Oh?
3. Describe the conversations Alfonso and his classmates have with their teachers about race and racism. Do you have similar discussions with your peers? In your classes?
4. What message does this story send about the way the media sensationalizes information? How are Alfonso's family and friends impacted by the media coverage of his death?
5. In Chapter 29, Danetta yells, "*I'm sick of this! I'm sick of this! I watched Alfonso get shot like a deer! How did we become the enemy? Weren't we minding our own business? How did we become the enemy? Aren't we part of America? Don't we matter? Don't our lives matter?*" Who do you think "we" refers to? To whom do you think her questions are directed? How does this sentiment connect to the larger Black Lives Matter movement?
6. How is the police officer who killed Alfonso portrayed in the book? Do you think he feels remorse? What makes you say that? What does Alfonso see when he looks into Officer Whitson's eyes? What does he begin to question about his death?

7. What happens when Reverends Jones and Roundtree interact with the younger Black Lives Matter activists? What tensions and differences arise? What is the importance of intergenerational participation in social justice movements?
8. Why is Chapter 44 titled "The Talk"? What does Alfonso think he and Granddad will discuss, and what does he actually talk to him about? Have you had this or a similar conversation with your parents or an adult? Do parents of white children have "the talk"? Why is that? How does it make you feel that "the talk" is such a common thing?
9. Why do you think author Tony Medina included the school shooting at Mary Mount Elementary in the story? What comparisons can you draw between Scott Drudge and Alfonso Jones, particularly in terms of how they are treated by law enforcement? How do the illustrations help to show this?
10. How does Tony Medina draw from recent events and history to build Alfonso's story? Do you think this story is a realistic portrayal of current events? Why or why not?

On My Own Questions (Knowledge of the text or topic is needed but the answer comes from your head.)

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7-8)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Why do you think the author, Tony Medina, begins with the Alfonso's death? What impact does this have on the story?
2. In Chapter 3, "The thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion." What do you think this quote from Frederick Douglass means? Why do you think Medina included it in the story?
3. In Chapter 35, Alfonso's heartbroken mother Cynthia pleads, "*Why do you think I fought so hard to get my son into Henry Dumas? Because it was a school that was created from grassroots organizing and did not depend on a curriculum that excluded his reality. Had that damn security guard cop, Officer Whitson, went to a school whose books reflected a*



broader reality than his narrow lily-white mind—had movies, TV, whatever, reflected that—maybe he would have seen my son as a teenager, as a person, as citizen, as a human . . . and not something to be so easily . . . so rapidly . . . so wistfully disposed of.” What is the importance of including experiences of people of all different races in education? What role does schooling play in forming or combatting our prejudices?

4. Why do you think the graphic novel format was used to tell this story? What do readers gain by experiencing the story visually as well as through words?
5. What is the significance of the title, *I Am Alfonso Jones*? How does the Black Lives Matter movement give Alfonso a voice before his death? What about after his death?
6. Alfonso explains his understanding of Ralph Ellison’s notion of invisibility, saying “you could be invisible in society, yet stick out.” Or, “you could be visible yet be totally ignored.” How does the feeling of invisibility relate to racism? How can this idea help us think more deeply about the role of implicit bias in policing?
7. When discussing concerns about police violence, some people will object, “But there are so many good cops.” What do you think is the intention of such a statement? What is the impact of that statement on efforts to defend racial justice?
8. During a press conference, President Holder said, “Our officers need better training.” What sort of training do you think would help improve police and community relations?
9. What does the phrase “no justice, no peace” mean to you? Why do you think it is a refrain heard so often in the wake of deaths like Alfonso’s?
10. Nearly seventy Americans are honored on the “Ancestors Wall” at the end of *I Am Alfonso Jones*. Unlike the story of Alfonso Jones, which is fiction, these are real people who died at the hands of law enforcement. Do you know of any instances of police violence in your community? What cases have you heard about, perhaps in the news, that

involve unarmed men or women being killed by police?

Discussing a Graphic Novel

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3, Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 & 8)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Because *I Am Alfonso Jones* is a graphic novel, there are some unique elements of the genre medium that students need to understand in order to comprehend the story. Incorporate these questions into discussions:

1. Point to where you see these elements of a graphic novel on the page: panels, frame, gutter, speech balloon, thought balloon, caption, special-effects lettering, foreground, background. How would the story change if you took out any one of these elements?
2. Graphic novels use both words and illustrations. What do you learn from just the words on this page? What do you learn from just the illustrations? Are they telling you the same or different information? How do they work together?
3. Expressions and gestures are important to how we understand characters. Have students select a character. Then encourage students to look for an example of a particular expression or movement that you think shows a significant character trait.
4. In graphic novels action happens “in the gutters,” or in the spaces between each panel. Sometimes big things happen in the time it takes to turn the page. Find a specific sequence of panels or a page turn and explain what actions or events happened in those in-between spaces or gutters. How do we know those actions took place if we don’t see them?
5. In graphic novels, panels are used to show the passage of time. Time, and how fast or slowly it seems to pass, is important in how panels change. Can you find a sequence where the pacing is slow, observing a character or scene? How about a sequence in which everything speeds up?



Strategies for Linguistically Diverse Students

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. **Shared Reading:** ELLs should both observe and participate in shared reading. Social interaction enhances comprehension; as English language learners hear phrasing, intonation and expression, they will better understand the process and the text. To reduce ELLs' anxiety reading to the whole group, consider forming smaller reading circles of four to six students.
2. **Partner Reading:** Pair English language learners with a partner who is at least one level of proficiency higher. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
3. **Chunking:** Excerpting the text will help English language learners isolate a smaller portion of the text and increase their comprehension. Highlight the excerpted section of the text ahead of time for ELL students. Chunking the text in this way can aid their understanding and increase their participation.
4. **Sentence Starters:** Provide English language learners with sentence starters to form effective questions using five w's (who, what, where, when, and why).
5. **Word Wall:** Organize vocabulary into categories or word families to build context and associations among words. Post phrases, including idioms and transition words, and include accompanying visuals whenever possible. English language learners should practice speaking the words on the wall.
6. **Vocabulary Instruction:** Many content-specific and academic words may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a

dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

Writing/English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

1. Encourage students to watch the book trailer (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rmLR_CJM8E&feature=youtu.be) for *I Am Alfonso Jones* and examples of student-made book trailers. If the necessary equipment is available at school or in students' homes, encourage students to record and edit their own book trailers for *I Am Alfonso Jones*. For ideas, check out this Creating Reading Excitement with Book Trailers lesson plan (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-creating-c-30914.html>) by ReadWriteThink.org.
2. Assign students to read The New York Times articles, "Where Fiction and Reality Collide: Books and Black Lives Matter" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/20/books/where-fiction-and-reality-collide-books-and-black-lives-matter.html>) and "New Crop of Young Adult Novels Explores Race



and Police Brutality” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/books/review/black-lives-matter-teenage-books.html>) and learn about other YA titles that address the theme of racial justice. Have students choose and read one of these titles and then develop an essay comparing it to *I Am Alfonso Jones*. Their essays should compare and contrast the central ideas of each book and discuss the author’s views on race and police brutality.

3. Draw students’ attention to the page in the front matter where the cast of *I Am Alfonso Jones* is featured. Challenge students to explore the characters more deeply with writing tasks that require perspective-taking:
 - Write a dialogue between two of the characters in which they discuss their feelings about what happened to Alfonso.
 - Write a sympathy card to Alfonso’s mother from the perspective of one of the other characters.
 - Write diary entries from Alfonso’s perspective during one of the days leading up to his death and during one of the days after his death. Have students discuss in small groups about how the diary entries are different and reflect on how Alfonso’s character changes over the course of the book.
4. The rich and varied language used by Tony Medina in *I Am Alfonso Jones* provides an opportunity for students to develop their vocabulary skills in authentic contexts. Challenge students to learn and practice using the academic and content-specific words listed in this teacher’s guide:
 - Before reading: Provide students with a list of the vocabulary words to sort into categories (e.g. very familiar, somewhat familiar, unfamiliar).
 - During reading: Have students make note of the vocabulary words as they encounter them in *I Am Alfonso Jones*. They can underline, highlight, or keep a log. Have students predict what the words mean based on context clues.
 - After reading: Have students work in pairs to look up the definitions of the “unfamiliar” words on their combined lists. Were their predictions correct? Post the new vocabulary words on your word wall.

5. Tell students to imagine they will be interviewing the author of *I Am Alfonso Jones*, Tony Medina, for a local newspaper or talk show. Assign students to read the “Author’s Note” at the back of the book and then develop a list of five interview questions they want to ask. What do they want to learn about in terms of the writing process, the inspiration or research for the story, the issue of police brutality, and so on? Lead a class discussion, creating a combined list of questions and then narrowing that list down to ten questions. Share your students’ questions with Tony Medina (http://coas.howard.edu/english/faculty&staff_medina.html) by contacting him through his website. (<http://tonymedina.org/index.html>)

Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

1. Photocopy pages of a chapter (or chapters) in the book, selecting one with multiple panels in a plot sequence. Cut the panels apart and shuffle them so they are out of order. Place the mixed up panels into an envelope. Prepare whatever number envelopes you need to distribute them to pairs of students. After collecting their books, have students work in pairs to organize the panels in proper sequence. Prompt students to use cues and context provided by the illustrations and text, as well as their recall of the story. Walk around asking questions and giving feedback. Have students use their books to check their work. Have students create and write their own comics or graphic novels based on their own lives with the Comic Creator from ReadWriteThink.org.
2. Have students create and write their own comics or graphic novels based on their own lives with the Comic Creator from [ReadWriteThink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/index.html). (<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/index.html>)



3. With a small group of students, make a Reader's Theater script of *I Am Alfonso Jones*. (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/readers-theatre-172.html>) Choose students to say the speaking parts of Alfonso, Danetta, Mr. Oh, Ms. Carmona, Amadou Diallo and other characters. Choose two or three narrators to set each scene. Have students perform the story for the rest of the class.
4. Collective action and political protest play an important part in the story of Alfonso Jones. Illustrations throughout the book feature people taking to the street peacefully to have their voices heard. Draw students' attention to the protest posters and signs in Chapters 16, 54, and 61. Discuss the messages and their impact. Spend time showing students examples of protest signs (https://www.tes.com/lessons/RkJLkpdN-WN_g/protest-art) and art from various social movements. Provide students with time and materials to create their own sign/poster representing a cause they care about. Display the signs in your classroom or hallway.
5. Assign students to read about John Jennings (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sheena-c-howard/post_10765_b_8892290.html) and Stacey Robinson (<http://www.timesunion.com/tuplus-features/article/Artist-brings-Branding-the-Afrofuturo-to-Union-11023750.php>) and discuss their work and careers. What do they learn about the artists' perspectives on art and politics? Find evidence in the book's illustrations to support and elaborate on the discussion. How is the role of illustrator different in a graphic novel than in picture books? Why was it so effective for Tony Medina's story about race and police brutality to be illustrated by these artists?

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

1. Design a lesson or unit on Black Lives Matter. Use the resources at the end of this guide to help

your planning. Learning goals should highlight key aspects of the movement, such as the founders, origins, organizers, core beliefs, platform and agenda, tactics and strategies, media coverage, opposition, or challenges, as well as connections to other social justice movements today and in history.

2. Divide students into groups of five. Assign each student to read about one of the five "real-life ancestors" at the back of the book and then report to their group about what they learned. After hearing from one another, have groups create lists comparing similarities and differences between the ancestors (e.g., they were all killed in New York City; Eleanor is the only woman; they were all different ages when they died; they were all killed by police officers; they were all people of color). Then, have each student choose a name from the "Ancestors Wall." Provide time for students to do online research about their "ancestor." In some cases, students may have to choose another person if they're unable to find enough information online. Have students use their research to write a memorial in the form of an obituary or eulogy. Stage a ceremony to honor the ancestors during which students read their writing.
3. Provide students with a list of the historical and cultural figures referenced in *I Am Alfonso Jones*: Louis Armstrong, Chuck D, Frederick Douglass, Henry Dumas, Duke Ellington, Ralph Ellison, Adam Clayton Powell, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X. Have students locate where each figure was referenced in the story and then choose one about whom they would like to learn more. Assign each student to write five research questions about their figure. Allow online and/or library time for students to research the answers to their questions. End by having students introduce their historical/cultural figure to the class.
4. Have students research police brutality and other topics related to criminal justice such as racial profiling, implicit bias, mass incarceration, and zero-tolerance school discipline policies. Develop a research focus and related inquires with your students. Consider having different students and groups focus on different aspects of a larger topic. As a class, engage in a research project that includes diverse outcomes, such as: local, state, and



natioanal data related to the topic; analyses of the intersections of gender, race, and class with the topic; current policy debates on the topic; personal narratives about the topic.

5. The setting of New York City's Harlem places *I Am Alfonso Jones* within a cultural milieu of African American art, politics, and history. Extend students' learning by designing a unit on the Harlem Renaissance. Draw on these online resources in your planning: Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/harlem-renaissance/>), PBS (http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons_plans/the-harlem-renaissance/), The National Museum of African American History and Culture (<http://nmaahc.tumblr.com/post/89382360830/lgbtq-african-americans-of-the-harlem-renaissance>), and ReadWriteThink (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/harlem-renaissance-retrospective-connecting-252.html>).

Home-School Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

1. Assign students to watch the news for one week and take notes on the way crime is reported. Have students survey a variety of news sources: local, national, cable, and network. What do they notice about the language and tone of the reports? What about the imagery, photographs, and film footage? How are the victims and the suspects talked about? What about law enforcement? Explain in advance that students should pay particular focus to the way race and identity figures into the coverage. After a week of home research, have students discuss their findings.
2. Assign students to talk with someone who works within or has experience around the criminal justice system. This could be a law enforcement official, probation officer, judge, public defender, prosecutor, mediator, youth court worker, school resource officer, community organizer, public

advocate, or a formerly incarcerated person. Encourage students to learn what this person's views are on race and the criminal justice system. Support students in advance by brainstorming and modeling the types of questions appropriate in such a conversation.

3. Invite students to bring a copy of *I Am Alfonso Jones* home with them. Encourage them to have a family member (or members) read the book. They might read it aloud to a younger sibling, share it with an older sibling, or ask a parent or guardian to read it on their morning commute to work. Have students talk about the book with other people in their family who have read it to. What did they take away from the story?
4. Challenge students to talk about the story *I Am Alfonso Jones* at home. Explain that they can integrate what they learn at school into informal discussions with friends, family, and neighbors. Discuss ways to do this without shutting people out or engaging in unhealthy conflict, even when a topic is uncomfortable or controversial.
5. As a class, develop a short poll or quiz about race and the criminal justice system. For instance, a quiz might include true/false questions based on statistics about the disproportionate impact of mass incarceration on communities of color, or a poll could be opinion-based and survey peoples' perceptions of law enforcement in the community. Have students collect a certain number of responses (anonymously) and then compile and discuss their findings as a class. Additionally, investigate the implicit bias in newspapers and statistics in these articles. Who is writing these newspaper articles? Where do the statistics come from? Do they come from reliable resources?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Medina is the author of eight beloved books for young readers, including *I and I*, *Bob Marley and Love to Langston*, as well as multiple volumes of poetry. A Pushcart Prize-nominated poet and a professor of creative writing at Howard University, Dr. Medina is a two-time winner of the Paterson Prize for Books for Young People.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Stacey Robinson is an assistant professor of graphic design at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an Arthur A. Schomburg Fellow with an MFA from the University at Buffalo. As part of the collaborative team “Black Kirby” with John Jennings, he creates graphic novels, gallery exhibitions, and lectures that deconstruct the work of artist Jack Kirby to re-imagine Black resistance spaces inspired by hip-hop, religion, the arts, and sciences.

John Jennings co-edited the Eisner-nominated anthology *The Blacker the Ink* and illustrated the graphic novel adaptation of Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. He is a professor of media and cultural studies at the University of California, Riverside, and a 2017 Nasir Jones HipHop Fellow at Harvard’s Hutchins Center for African & African American Research.

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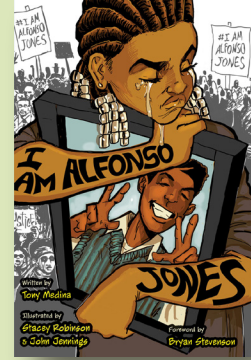
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Book Information for *I Am Alfonso Jones*



\$18.95, PAPERBACK

978-1-62014-263-9

176 pages, 6 X 9

*Reading Level: Grades 7-12

Interest Level: Grades 7–12

Guided Reading Level: z+

Accelerated Reader® Level/
Points: N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

THEMES: Police Brutality, Teenage Experience, First Love, Protest, Death and Dying, Magical Realism, Realistic Fiction, Poetry, Discrimination, Family, New York, African/African American Interest, Latinx/Hispanic Interest, Civil Rights Movement, Empathy and Compassion, United States History

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/i-am-alfonso-jones>

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.