



Discussion Guide

Snitchers

Written by Stephane Dunn

About the Book

Genre: Fiction

Interest Level: Young Adult

Ordering Information

⊕ General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

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SYNOPSIS

Nia Barnes is preparing to enter high school and trying to stay on her mama's good side. Life in their small Midwestern city hasn't been the same since her father was shot down in the middle of the night with no witnesses. The unsolved murder has haunted Nia ever since, driving her love of detective novels and true crime stories. And the violence isn't just where she lives--it's everywhere. Nia can't stand that nothing can stop it.

When the little boy she babysits is caught in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting, it devastates Nia, her friends, and the community. She and her best friends Dontay and Miracle Ruth want to do more than be sad and afraid. The trio secretly sets out to find who murdered Little Petey and get him justice. They look up police reports and listen to the conversations of their elders; they try to follow suspects the way Nia's favorite teen detectives might. But the search for truth isn't straightforward, especially when you're somewhere between being kids and adults, and people want peace but are afraid to talk. If Nia and her friends solve the crime, more people might end up dead. Is that justice? Should they still try?

Writer and filmmaker Stephane Dunn makes her YA debut with this endearing, heart-wrenching novel about loss, truth, and the reality of violence in communities everywhere.

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

BACKGROUND

Author's Note from Stephane Dunn

Many years have passed since one of my sister's best friends, Kimberly Renee Saxton, was murdered. Just twenty-four at the time, she was not the shooter's intended target, but the bullets didn't know that. Since then, many have perished similarly, including people I knew, like a childhood schoolmate who was a teacher innocently mind- ing her own business, and a student gunned down mere weeks post-college graduation, and so many more as of this writing in schools, homes, stores, front porches, high- ways and streets, parks, post offices, movie theaters, night clubs, freedom protests, and seem- ingly everywhere on the planet, including my hometown. The people and events in this book are fictional, but our condition as human beings living within the constant threat of violence was very much the inspiration. However, neither pessimism nor acceptance is the way. -Nia

Resources for Educators on Gun Violence

Nia and her community suffer a senseless tragedy when Little Petey is caught in the crossfire of a drive by shooting. This event can be triggering for students, and it is important as educators to talk and listen to students' feelings about traumatic events that occur in the community and around the world. See the following resources below for additional information on how gun violence is affecting young people and how to support students and the school community:

- Learning For Justice, *Gun Violence in Schools* (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/gun-violence-in-schools>)
- Chalkbeat, *Gun violence, grief and trauma: A resource guide for students, teachers, and parents* (<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/5/26/23142087/school-shooting-gun-violence-grief-trauma-mental-health-resources-guide>) and *'Stop the Shooting': Inside the effort to protect students from neighborhood gun violence* (<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/9/13/23349462/stu-dents-shootings-community-gun-violence-school-security>)
- Center for American Progress, *Gun Violence Is Having a Devastating Impact on Young People* (<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/gun-violence-is-having-a-devastating-impact-on-young-people/>) and *Community-Based Violence Interruption Programs Can Reduce Gun Violence* (<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-pro-grams-can-reduce-gun-violence/>)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Nia lost her father at a young age, and she deals with the trauma of his death in various ways throughout the novel. How does her father's death change the way she looks at life? Who was she before he died? What did she like to do? How is she after his death? What did she stop doing?
2. How does Nia process Little Petey's death? How does Nia describe her pain when she thinks about Little Petey? Why does she feel guilty? What does she keep asking herself?
3. What is Nia's relationship with her mother like? What important lessons does her mom teach her? How do we see the relationship with her mother change over time?
4. How do the Nancy Drew novels inspire Nia? When and how did she get introduced to Nancy Drew books? How does the inspiration play out through the story?

5. What stands out to you about the resistance Dontay is giving Nia about investigating Little Petey's death? Why do you think he is so worried about being labeled as a "snitch"? Why is it important for Nia to breakdown what it means to be a snitch?
6. What role does religion play in Nia's life? How do her observations about God and religion guide the way she thinks? What other religious culture do we see in the novel?
7. What connection(s) does Nia share with her pen pal Alima? How does this relationship help Nia as well as Alima deal with the trauma of losing loved ones?
8. How has violence and gun violence affected Nia's family and community? What does gun violence look like across the United States? What does violence look like across the world?
9. What do you notice about how Nia describes the death of her grandfather, her dad and Little Petey? How does she describe the physical effects of dealing with grief and death?
10. What message does Reverend Don King deliver at Little Petey's funeral? Why is this message so powerful? What does he say about living in violence?
11. What is special about the relationship between Nia and Nana Mae? How does Nana Mae make Nia feel? Why did you think Nia asks Nana Mae to tell her the story of Nzinga?
12. Why do you think it was important for Nia, her mother and Nana Mae to seek counseling? What is powerful about the author talking about going to therapy?
13. Why do Nia and her friends decide to do a film on "Stop the violence"?
14. What role does the community play in Snitchers? How does Little Petey's death bring the community together?
15. Ahmad and his father are having a conversation about Big Pete when he says, "Son, we talked about this how many times? What he was and what he is now is two different things." What does his father mean when he says this? How does this apply to those in the community like Big Pete and Lightning?
16. What relationship does the police have with the community? Why do you think that? Do people trust that the police will help stop crime and bring justice to the victims of gun violence?
17. What was Nia's relationship like with her father and what is something important that she learn from her father?
18. When Dontay's father tells his brother Ahmad, "A bullet don't got nobody's name on it," what does he mean?
19. What does the title Snitchers mean to you after reading? Why do you think the author chose this title?
20. In the author's note, Stephane Dunn writes, "However, neither pessimism nor acceptance is the way." How did you see this represented in the novel through Nia and her friends' journey for justice?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephane Dunn is a writer, filmmaker, and professor. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Vogue*, *Ms. magazine*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *CNN.com*, *The Root*, and *Best African American Essays 2009*, among others. She is the author of *Baad Bitches & Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films*, and the Tirota/Finish Line Social Impact Script Competition award-winning screenplay, *Chicago '66*. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her family. Find her on Twitter at @DrStephaneDunn.

REVIEWS

"A thrilling story grounded in a thoughtful exploration of social themes." – *Kirkus Reviews*

ADDITIONAL BOOKS FOR TEENS

Black Was the Ink

By Michelle Coles and illustrated by Justin Johnson
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/black-was-the-ink>

Ahimsa

By Supriya Kelkar
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/ahimsa>

I am Alfonso Jones

By Tony Medina and Illustrated by Stacey Robinson, John Jennings
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/i-am-alfonso-jones>

Boy, Everywhere

By A. M. Dassu
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/boy-everywhere>

Indian No More

by Charlene Willing McManis, Traci Sorell
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/indian-no-more>

Juliete and the Diamond Enigma

By Luisana Duarte Armendáriz
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/juliete-and-the-diamond-enigma>

Thirty Talks Weird Love

By Alessandra Narváz Varella
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/thirty-talks-weird-love>