

Pitch Black

written by Anthony Horton and Youme
illustrated by Youme

About the Book

Genre: Memoir/Biography

Format: Paperback
72 pages, 11 x 6

ISBN: 9781643796567

Reading Level: Grade 8

Interest Level: Grades 8–12

Guided Reading Level: Z+

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Art, Artist, Biography/
Memoir, Discrimination, Empathy
and Compassion, Home, Friendship,
Collaboration, Homelessness, Found
Family, Transportation (subway), City
Life, New York, Nonfiction, Overcoming
Obstacles, Hope, Inspiration, Graphic
Novel, YA interest

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/pitch-black

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

SYNOPSIS

In this short graphic novel, acclaimed author Youme joins with Anthony Horton to tell the true story of how Anthony lived—and created art—underneath the NYC subway system.

“On the subway, do you ever notice that people are always looking, but they only see what they want to?” Anthony Horton asks. A guide, an observer of the many, and resident of the spaces below New York City streets, he’s happy to show you how he lives in the tunnels underneath the subway system—that is, if you’ll let him show you.

This is exactly what happened when Youme and Anthony began a conversation about art in the subway. It turned out that both Youme and Anthony were artists. While part of Youme’s artistic process was listening long and hard to the stories of the people she met, part of Anthony’s artistic process was making art out of what most people wouldn’t even look at. Thus began a unique collaboration and conversation between the two artists over a year, which culminated into the creation of this graphic novel *Pitch Black*.

With art and words, they mapped out Anthony’s life and world, seen by many as a tough life, a startling and undoing life. But from Anthony’s point of view, it was a life lived as art.

Awards and honors include:

- Best Children’s Books of the Year by Bank Street College of Education
- Great Graphic Novels for Teens, Top Ten by Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)
- Skipping Stones Book Awards Honor by *Skipping Stones Magazine*
- Starred review from *School Library Journal*

BACKGROUND

Note About Teaching with *Pitch Black*

There are references to hypodermic needles, explicit language, homelessness, theft, and prostitution in the book. Be cognizant of the students in your classroom or relevant setting and aware of students' living and personal circumstances prior to reading *Pitch Black*. Would this text be triggering for any students? Several organizations below offer guidance on navigating difficult conversations with children about abuse and suggestions on how to support young survivors. Consider providing context and a framework for the reading of *Pitch Black* with the Background section of the book.

Author's Note "My Friend. . ." from Youme

Tony and I wrote *Remember Me* for the ending of the book because we both want to be remembered. We both knew that sharing stories—wild and true, imagined, real, lived, realer than real and truer than facts—lasts longer than people do. We wanted children to know that they are strong and they are loved. We are all children. We both had people living only in memory who we talked to and listened with, for answers we were not receiving in the "real" world.

So yes, some years after this book was written, Tony followed the path that took him out of the physical world into the spirit world, and yes, I am angry and lost and ripped in half again to lose a collaborator and friend who challenged and championed me. And yes, I continue to challenge and champion Anthony Horton, Tony, Tone-e, Tone of the World. For the possible movie and the re-release of the book, I kept telling everyone, "I don't want this book/movie/story to end with Tony's death." Elise, my editor, said, "Trust your readers to know that death is not an end."

People often asked us, "But how did you really connect?" I think we really connected as artists, open to the possibility that the world we see is connected to the worlds we cannot see, and that guidance and connection comes through being open to the call-and-response of life itself.

I heed his messages as they reach me. Official reports say that Tony died in a fire in the tunnels that no one set. A spark. Tony, what do you want me to say here? That you did the phoenix thing? That you went further underground? You were working on your next book, *The Other Side*, and *The Darker Sun*. You shared with me that *Pitch Black* didn't address the harder parts of your life, but it made a good jump-off. *Pitch Black* has traveled. Come through, young ancestor! Keep representing for the toughness and the tenderness that are under attack yet keep making art and speaking truth to power; cracking jokes that cut through racism, sexism, and homophobia; telling stories that help us see our flawed selves coexisting with our reality creating power. There is work to be done here, dear reader. You called us both to you by reading this book. This story is yours as much as it is ours. What do you hear from worlds you cannot see? How do we remember together?

With Love, which is Respect,
Youme

Author and illustrator Anthony Horton passed away in 2012. Read a profile by *The New York Times* here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/nyregion/the-fiery-end-of-a-life-lived-beneath-the-city.html>.

Additional Information and Resources about Homelessness

The New York Times offered a roundup of ideas and links for talking with children about homelessness: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/us/california-homelessness-kids.html>. "Unsheltered Lives: Teaching About Homelessness in Grades K-12" offers a wide range of resources, lesson ideas, and portrayals of homeless individuals in different circumstances (<https://www.scribd.com/document/459747468/unsheltered-lives-2010>). See <https://cotsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Unsheltered-Lives-2010.pdf>. The National Coalition for the Homeless has a Teaching Resources page that lists guides, manuals for educators and families, videos, and more, all in efforts to dispel the negative stereotypes surrounding homelessness and people experiencing homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless has additional articles about advocacy and ways to that you can help others in your community (<https://nationalhomeless.org/who-we-are/>).

Discussing Homelessness with Students

The purpose of talking about homelessness with students is to enable them to care for others, build compassion, strengthen character, and validate lived experiences. Explain that being homeless means that a person or family does not have a place to live. They might be homeless for a day or two or for many weeks or months. A homeless person or family might live in a shelter with a lot of other people, or in a car, or have no structure surrounding them. Help students understand that being homeless does not mean that a person is bad or that the person did something wrong. Homelessness is not an illness, and it isn't anything someone wants. It is something that happens to some people who are having a very difficult time and is sometimes caused by bad luck paired with larger economic factors. Also point out that homelessness is not necessarily permanent and often people just need some help to get settled again.

Note about Sexual Violence

At its core, *Pitch Black* is a story of love, hope, loss, and self-empowerment. Sexual assault is a topic that may affect students deeply. Teachers are encouraged to plan for how they will address this topic in class. Your school's social worker or interventionist may have specific protocols regarding themes of harm. Be sure to seek their advice prior to introducing the novel. RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. Consult RAINN's resources and hotline for additional information and resources on how to teach about sexual violence and assault (<https://www.rainn.org/about-rainn>).

Note about Drug Addiction

The story mentions that drug use and hypodermic needles. You will want to treat this part of the story with sensitivity as drug addiction is a painful issue for some families and the disease may have personally touched the lives of some of your students. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Ser-

vices Administration (SAMHSA) has more information on drug addiction, how to get help, and more (<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>).

Additional Note

Be cognizant of the students in your classroom and aware of students' living circumstances prior to reading *Pitch Black*. Would this text be triggering for any students who have been homeless or are currently experiencing homelessness? *Pitch Black* and the questions and activities in this guide help expose children to the realities of homelessness in the United States.

However, you may have children in your classroom who are experiencing homelessness or who have experienced homelessness in the past. In either situation, be sure to lead these activities in a manner that is sensitive to the needs and emotions of your students and that demonstrates respect, rather than pity, for people who are unhoused.

For information about the use of unhoused vs. homeless please see: <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/news-events/ubssw-in-media.host.html/content/shared/socialwork/home/news/in-the-news/2023/why-homeless-giving-way-unhoused.detail.html>.

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:

- What is a shelter? Why do people need shelter? Whose responsibility is it to provide homes for people? If someone doesn't have a home, how might they find shelter?
- What does "homeless" mean? What does "unhoused" mean? What differences do you notice between the two terms?
- What are the most important feelings or characteristics of "home" to you?
- Why is art important? What is the significance of art for an artist?
- As a hook for readers, consider showing students this book trailer posted on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Cp5NrvMXyG8?si=N3qlvBcJIOkz0Zcj>

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)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *Pitch Black*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they

think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

- **Front Cover:** Have students look at the front cover. Spend a few minutes flipping through the pages, noticing the illustrations. What predictions can students make? Ask why an author and illustrator may want to tell a memoir in a graphic novel format.
- **Read the back of *Pitch Black*:** Point out that Anthony Horton, the author, is Black, and Youme, author and illustrator, is white. 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?
- **Author/Illustrator:** Introduce students to Anthony Horton (author) and Youme (author and illustrator). You can find information in the "about the author" and "about the illustrator" section of this guide. Additional profile of Anthony Horton is available here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/nyregion/the-fierce-end-of-a-life-lived-beneath-the-city.html>. More background on Youme is available at <https://www.youmeland.org/>.
- Encourage students to stop and jot in their notebooks when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.
- Have students read the epigraph, which states "just cause you can't see don't mean ain't nothing there," and quickly write feeling(s)/ reaction(s) in their notebook. Why do students think this quote was chosen? Do students agree with it? Why or why not?
- **Graphic Novel:** 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:

- about the life of Anthony Horton
- about the conditions of people who are unhoused in the United States
- the importance of art in storytelling
- the importance of friendship
- the importance of hope
- how dynamics of race, gender, and class intersect to create unhoused populations

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

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

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

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.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: 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, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Many words can be found in the glossary at the end of the book, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.

Content Specific

social services, turnstile, platform, squatting

Academic

reunification, prehistoric, unconditional, converse, kinetic, scavengers, resistance, oppression, despair

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 textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

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

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

1. How do the two main characters meet? What do they have in common?
2. What do you learn about Anthony's childhood?
3. Where does the Department of Social Services send Anthony?
4. What is Anthony's experience of living in the shelter?
5. How does Anthony discover the tunnels below New York City's subway stations?
6. Why does Youme go with Anthony into the tunnels?
7. What are the things that should and should not be done when living underground?
8. Who are the people who are a part of Anthony's community when living underground? What do they teach him?
9. How does Youme describe being out of the tunnels?
10. What does Anthony ask Youme to do at the end of the story?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

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

1. How does *Pitch Black* depict the challenges faced by unhoused individuals, particularly in large cities?
2. What is Youme's role in this story? How does art bond Anthony and Youme? What is the relationship between art and survival as depicted in the story?
3. What do lightness and darkness represent in the story? How are they connected to Anthony's life?
4. How does *Pitch Black* use interactions with the environment to explore themes of community, invisibility, belonging, and resilience?
5. Analyze the impact of the subway tunnels as a physical and metaphorical space that shapes Anthony and Youme's sense of self, purpose, and connection.

6. How does race play a role in Anthony's life experiences? How does race play a role within Youme and Anthony's friendship?
7. Why does Anthony consider himself uneducated? What does he have a lot of knowledge about, despite not having any access to formal education?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. Why do you think the illustrator, Youme, creates the images in black and white, without any other color? What effect does this palette have on the tone of the story? How might the story be different if the images were in color?
11. Revisit the title of the book. What does "*Pitch Black*" mean to you after reading?
12. *Pitch Black* ends with a quote by Sonia Sanchez where she states, "Black is the beginning of everything." Interpret this quote. What is the relationship to the quote and the story of *Pitch Black*?
13. Read the author's note at the end of *Pitch Black*. What happened to Anthony? How does Youme's author's note impact your reading of *Pitch Black*? What is the importance of remembering people and places that impact us?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What do you think the message to the reader is? Think about possible motivations behind the authors' intentions to write the book. What do you think they wanted to tell her young readers?
2. Reflect on what this story shares about people who experience homelessness. Make a list of questions you have about the problem of homelessness in our world. Then make a list of ideas showing how others can help those in this situation.
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Pitch Black*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *Pitch Black* make you think of that?
5. How has reading *Pitch Black* impacted your understanding of art? What are some other ways people use art? How do you use art?

Multilingual (ML) Teaching Activities

(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. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading: 1) Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing. 2) Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they think the message of *Pitch Black* is.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose ML 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.

Social and Emotional Learning

(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)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Flip through the pages of the book and focus on the characters' faces on each page. Describe how their faces look and name the emotions they convey. (You might also notice their body language.) Use sticky notes to label various emotions. Ask students to act out specific sections of the story, using their faces and bodies to help convey feelings.
2. Discuss how this story might change students' perspectives on homelessness. How might they change their reactions to someone experiencing homelessness or feel encouraged by Anthony's life?
3. How do people in Anthony's life support him when he lives underground? What did you learn about dealing with economic hardship and the importance of community from Anthony's experience?

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.

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)

- **Encourage students to read two reviews for *Pitch Black* and write their own review of the novel.** What would students want to include in their review? What do they want to tell other readers about this book? How did it affect them? Example reviews of *Pitch Black* include:
 - *School Library Journal*: <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/pitch-black/reviews/3554>
 - *Kirkus Reviews*: <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/youme-landowne/pitch-black/>
 - *The New York Times*: <https://archive.nytimes.com/cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/07/rules-for-living-in-subway-tunnels/#more-4151>
 - *Publishers Weekly*: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/new-titles/adult-announcements/article/14931-living-and-drawing-in-the-subway.html>
 - For ideas, check out this Book Review Template (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/book-review-template-30200.html>) by ReadWriteThink.org.
- **In the Author's Note, Youme asks, "What do you hear from worlds you cannot see? How do we remember together?"** Have students write an essay answering these questions. How did students react to these questions? Why are these important questions to contemplate?
- **Tell students to imagine they will be interviewing the Anthony for a local newspaper or talk show.** Ask students to develop a list of five interview questions they want to ask. What do they want to learn about in terms of Anthony's life, his art, and the process of writing this graphic novel? Lead a class discussion, creating a combined list of questions and then narrowing that list down to ten questions.
- **Have students read Youme's signature from the Author's Note, which reads "with love, which is respect."** Prepare an essay that explains why or why not you believe love is respect. Defend your views by citing specific examples.
- **Read other books that portray people experiencing homelessness, for instance pairing *Pitch Black* with *A Shelter in Our Car*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/a-shelter-in-our-car>). Talk about how each book presents different details and circumstances about

homelessness, and the importance of considering different perspectives and situations when learning about a social issue.

- **Read the article, “The Fiery End of a Life Lived Beneath the City” from *The New York Times*** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/nyregion/the-fiery-end-of-a-life-lived-beneath-the-city.html>). Discuss what you learned from the article versus engaging with a graphic novel about it. How was the article about Anthony different from *Pitch Black*?
- **Discussing a Graphic Novel:** Because *Pitch Black* is a graphic novel, there are some unique elements of the genre medium that students need to understand to comprehend the story. Incorporate these questions into discussions:
 - 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?
 - 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?
 - 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.
 - 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?
 - 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?

Social Studies

(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)

- **Design a lesson or unit on homelessness in the United States.** Learning goals should highlight key aspects of the history such as time periods, critiques, race, gender, and class demographics, media coverage, political positions over time, as well as connections to other global narratives of homelessness. Consult the resources below for more information to get started:
 - History of Homelessness by Invisible People: (https://invisiblepeople.tv/history-of-homelessness/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAloavBhBOEiwAbtAJ0o01oMo9PikmPb-

s56u2Foyc75T12RndNXJAY2hBqmlyHR9OIJZLBoC09oQAvD_BwE) and Places Journal: (https://placesjournal.org/article/tent-city-america/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAop-uvBhBCEiwAm8jaMdDt-LWw4qMHw8B_SVtug3iXqEmnLDAvWfZWU6GBTcrMOtAZTI_YF-hoC4jwQAvD_BwE&cn-reloaded=1&cn-reloaded=1).

- Homelessness Through the Early 20th century from the National Library of Medicine: (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519584/>)
- A Brief Timeline of Race and Homelessness in America from Community Solutions: (<https://community.solutions/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A-Brief-Timeline-of-Race-and-Homelessness-in-America-March-2019.pdf>)
- Homeless and Racial Disparities from the National Alliance to End Homelessness (<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/inequality/>)
- Cornell University's "'Staggering disparities': Homelessness risk varies across race" in Cornell Chronicle: (<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2023/02/staggering-disparities-homelessness-risk-varies-across-race>)
- Housing Matters' "Homelessness is a Housing and Racism Problem" from Housing Matters, an Urban Institute Initiative: (<https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/homelessness-housing-and-racism-problem>)
- Demography's "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Lifetime Prevalence of Homelessness in the United States" from National Library of Medicine: (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7665902/>)

Art/Media

(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)

- **Spend time showing students examples of subway signs and posters.** 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. Students can use *The New York Times*' "Underground Art: A Show Celebrates Subway Posters" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/29/nyregion/subway-posters-visual-arts.html>) to view more underground art. The School of Visual Arts also has subway posters archives for students to look through (<https://archives.sva.edu/about-collection/sva-subway-posters-1947-present?autoscroll=0>).
- **Ask students to write their own free verse or narrative free verse poem about a cause they care about.** Encourage students to have their poems reflect their personal experiences and/or their feelings and opinions toward the topics. Have students perform their work.
- **Study with students how the illustrator portrayed feelings via facial expressions and body language in this book.** Have students create a self-portrait, or a portrait of someone they care about, in a similar style, with the goal of conveying an emotion through the artwork.

- **Put students in small groups and have them discuss reactions to the images throughout *Pitch Black*.** What images stood out? What images were confusing? What story do the images tell?
- **Tony's drawings and writings are archived at the New York Public Library, Schomburg Center** (<https://archives.nypl.org/scm/24666>). Consider contacting the Schomburg Center about accessing Tony's archives. Have students go through his artwork and writings. What do students notice about his works? How does Tony's work make them feel?

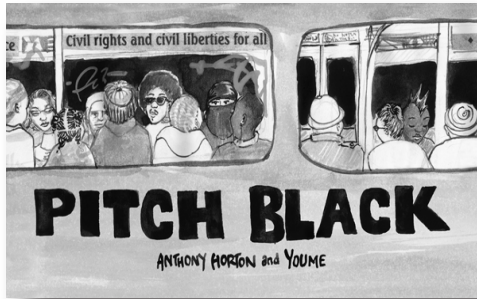
School-Home Connection

(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)

- **Ask students to create portraits of people who are their personal role models through drawing, collage, or photograph.** In writing, students should describe what actions and qualities they admire about this person. Students can write in prose or submit a poem or song.
- **If possible, arrange visits (in-person or virtual) with local individuals working to combat homelessness (e.g., someone from a local aid organization).** Prepare questions with students to help them build more context for understanding the experiences of Anthony, and for understanding the specific concerns about homelessness in your area.
- **If accessible, have students and families research other titles featuring unhoused people and homelessness.**



Ordering Information

General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

leeandlow.com/books/pitch-black

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 381 Park Ave S Rm 401,
New York, NY 10016-8829

ABOUT THE CREATORS

Anthony Horton-Author

Anthony Horton (1968-2012) was an unhoused artist living underneath New York City. His work can be seen along the tunnel walls in the darkest parts of the transit system. Anthony met Youme some years ago and together they embarked on a journey to bring *Pitch Black* to light.

Youme-Author, Illustrator

Youme grew up loving stories. She has lived and worked as a community artist in New York, New Haven, Miami, Woods Hole, San Francisco, Kenya, Japan, Lao P.D.R., Vietnam, St. John, U.S.V.I., Haiti, and Cuba. Youme's books include *Selavi (That Is Life)-A Haitian Story of Hope*, *Mali Under the Night Sky-A Lao Story of Home*, and *Pitch Black* with Anthony Horton. She is drawn to stories of survival and champions for social justice. Youme lives in an ever-changing location with her partner and their two children. Learn more at <https://www.youmeland.org/>.

REVIEWS

"After meeting on a subway platform in New York City, Landowne and Horton share a conversation about art and life while riding uptown and downtown. Youme listens carefully as Anthony tells his story of living on the streets after being abandoned by his adoptive family. At first he stayed at a homeless shelter where he witnessed, "things no kid should ever see." He discovered a city below the city when one day the police chased him into a subway tunnel. In these dark passageways, Anthony built a makeshift home and found a canvas for his artwork. After showing Youme his life six stories below the city, the two artists begin a collaboration that ends in this beautiful, gritty biography. Both Youme and Anthony contributed text and art to the book-their black and gray watercolors are tender and raw, their words spare and poetic. This book's unflinching look at homelessness and the ability to find hope and inspiration in the dark will appeal greatly to teens" –*School Library Journal*, **starred review**

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.