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UCF Alumni Book Club

All Boy's Aren't Blue by George M. Johnson

Book Discussion Guide

Book Description

In a series of personal essays, prominent journalist and LGBTQIA+ activist George M. Johnson explores his childhood, adolescence, and college years in New Jersey and Virginia. From the memories of getting his teeth kicked out by bullies at age five, to flea marketing with his loving grandmother, to his first sexual relationships, this young-adult memoir weaves together the trials and triumphs faced by Black queer boys.

Both a primer for teens eager to be allies as well as a reassuring testimony for young queer men of color, *All Boys Aren't Blue* covers topics such as gender identity, toxic masculinity, brotherhood, family, structural marginalization, consent, and Black joy. Johnson's emotionally frank style of writing will appeal directly to young adults.

About the Author

George M Johnson is an Award-Winning Black Non-Binary Writer, Author, and Activist located in the LA area. George has written for major outlets including *Teen Vogue*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *NBC*, *The Root*, *Buzzfeed*, *Essence*, and *The Grio*. They have also served as Guest Editor for *BET.com*'s Pride month.

In 2019 They were awarded the Salute to Excellence Award by the National Association of Black Journalists for their article "When Racism Anchors your Health in *Vice Magazine*. They were also listed on *The Root* 100 Most Influential African Americans in 2020, and the *Out* 100 Most Influential LGBTQ People in 2021.

They are the author of the *New York Times* Bestselling Young Adult memoir *All Boys Aren't Blue* discussing their adolescence growing up as a young Black Queer boy in New Jersey through a series of powerful essays. The book was optioned for Television by *Gabrielle Union* and *Sony TV*.

Their second memoir *WE ARE NOT BROKEN* was released in September of 2021.

In 2022 they received a Special Recognition Award from GLAAD for the Dramatic Reading of *All Boys Aren't Blue* starring Jenifer Lewis and Dyllon Burnside.

George is also a proud HBCU alum twice over, and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated.

Bio from: <https://iamgmjohnson.com/>

Discussion Questions

General Questions

- Share your overall thoughts on the book.
- What aspect of the story did you most relate to?
- What did you learn from hearing the author's story?
- Are there any areas you wished the author had elaborated upon further?
- Are there any people in the book whose perspective you wanted?
- Why do you think it's important that the author's story is told and is available to everyone?
- What are the benefits of this story being told as a memoir instead of a different form of narrative?
- What was one of your favorite sections/stories from the memoir?

Questions

From: <https://bookclubs.com/discussion-guides/all-boys-arent-blue-a-memoir-manifesto>

- For Johnson's whole life, he's been able to depend on his family, even if they don't understand or necessarily agree with his choices. Talk about a time you've relied on your family or friends and they've fully supported you. Are there things you're going through now that you could use support with? Even things you're afraid won't be fully understood?
- When he was in college, Johnson was initially torn about joining a fraternity. On the one hand, he was afraid of the backlash he would get for his effeminate nature. On the other hand, it was incredibly important to him to determine masculinity on his own terms. He ended up loving being in a fraternity—so much that he was eventually its president—and formed lifelong bonds with his brothers. What's a club, activity, or hobby you've been interested in engaging with but have been afraid you won't be accepted? What are pros and cons to trying it out?

- One of the most powerful moments in the book comes when Johnson recognizes the "firsts"—the first Black people who have accomplished various things and the way they've been celebrated for doing so. But he also recognizes that the fact these firsts came in such recent history is in itself an indignity. He says, "But I've come to learn that symbolism is a threat to actual change—it's a chance for those in power to say 'Look how far you have come' rather than admitting, 'Look how long we've stopped you from getting here.'" Think about your school, neighborhood, community, friend group, family, and government. Where do you recognize a symbolic gesture that's taking the place of real change? What can you do to lobby for change to occur?
- Johnson wrote this book as 1) a celebration of queer Black boys and opportunity for them to see a successful person who was once in their shoes and 2) a guide for teenagers who are looking to better understand and advocate for their peers. If you could write a memoir-manifesto, what would your purpose be? Who would you be writing it for? What hope would you be giving them?
- There are three main points in this book that speak openly about death: that of Johnson's cousin, line brother, and grandmother. In these moments, Johnson's pain is palpable, but he also takes time to rejoice in their lives and recognize the support he's gotten from loved ones. What's a difficult loss or moment you've gone through? Who or what helped you move past it? How can you see yourself helping a loved one who is going through something similar?

Resources

Author In the Press

<https://iamgmjohnson.com/in-the-press-draft/>

Tamron Hall Show Sept 2022

The author speaks out as his book becomes one of the most banned in the US.

<https://twitter.com/TamronHallShow/status/1573058998596665355>