

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO



ART © 2018 BY JAELE BENDT

TORREY MALDONADO



ABOUT THE BOOK



TIGHT: Lately Bryan's been feeling it in all kinds of ways. He knows what's tight for him in a good way—reading comics, drawing superheroes, and hanging out with no drama. But drama's hard to escape where he's from, and that gets him wound up tight.

And now Bryan's new friend Mike is challenging him to have fun in ways that are crazy risky. At first, it's a rush following Mike, hopping turnstiles, subway surfing, and getting into all kinds of trouble. But Bryan never feels right acting wrong. So which way will he go when he understands that drama is so not his style? Fortunately his favorite comic heroes shed light on his dilemma, reminding him that he has power—the power to choose his friends and to stand up for what he believes is right . . .

This guide was written by Shanetia P. Clark, PhD. Shanetia is an associate professor of literacy at Salisbury University (MD). She teaches courses in literacy methods and children's literature.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is Bryan's favorite comic book hero? Why is Mike so adamant that Luke Cage is the best? What does Bryan and Mike's discussion illustrate about their dynamic?
2. Throughout *Tight*, there are moments when characters share advice. Reflect on and discuss their words.
 - a. "Focus on school," Ma always tells me. "There will be friends later. The wrong friends bring drama, and I don't want them rubbing off on you." (p. 7)
 - b. That makes me think of when I was little and Pa asked me, "Would you rather have people like you or be afraid of you?" Back then, I said I didn't know and Pa told me, "You want them afraid of you. If they're afraid, they'll respect you. Being respected is better than being liked." (p. 26)
 - c. "You should talk to him," Big Will tells me . . . "Stop his mood from growing. Keep things cool with him." (p. 109)
 - d. He was getting hyped," Big Will says. "Which is why I tried to cool him down. Bryan, if someone wants to think they're tougher than me, I let them. I just say 'My bad' and that usually makes them feel boss. 'My bad' usually relaxes someone who is tight and starting to hype themselves up." (pp. 144-145)
 - e. Ma explains, "So, you see that you made choices, right? You chose *not* to talk first with him. You chose to follow him when he was making the wrong choices, and then you chose to explode on him" (p. 170).
 - f. Ma says, "Bryan, I'm not saying you have to go back to being best friends with him. I'm not even saying you should be friends with him. But you need to make this right with him. You and him have history. And you can't walk around with a neighbor who wants to fight you, especially when you know some of his friends are troublemakers. And who knows? Someday, you might need his help" (p. 173).
3. Who is in Bryan's family? Describe the relationship that Bryan has with his sister, his half siblings, his mother, and his father. How do their relationships evolve (or not) throughout the story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED . . .

4. Pa invites Mike and Bryan to play dominoes. He watches over them playing and offers guidance to Bryan when needed. Bryan reflects, *"I just played dominoes. Pa sorta played with me. Pa just coached me. Pa rubbed my head"* (p. 15). Explain why this was a momentous moment for Bryan.
5. Bryan does things with Mike that he knows are out of character and contradict his inner voice. Give examples of what Bryan does when he goes along with Mike. How does he convince himself to follow Mike? Why do these moments contrast with his usual behavior? (Some examples are forging his mother's handwriting, lying about Mike's mom being home, and jumping the turnstile at the subway train station.)
6. Bryan begins to have doubts about Mike. He shares his initial impression and how it changed: *"I feel different about Mike. I feel like I don't know the whole him. When he showed up at Ma's desk, I felt this way, then got to know him and the feeling went away. But it's back. I don't know if I should trust my original bad vibe about him, or just move ahead and trust him?"* (p. 33). Do you or should you trust and follow your initial instincts about someone? Has your opinion about someone changed only to reaffirm your initial thought? Or did it remain changed?
7. Bryan hates being described as "soft." Ava and Mike tease him for being, looking, and acting "soft." It is a constant refrain (pp. 7, 31, 59, 62, 162-163). According to Ava and Mike, what does it mean when one is "soft"? Why is it viewed as a negative? When is it appropriate to be soft? Give an example of when not being soft had unintended negative consequences.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED . . .

8. Who is Little Kevin? Why is Bryan wary about Little Kevin trainsurfing? What happens to him at the train station? Discuss Bryan's reaction after this day's events (pp. 120-125). Are they justified? What is Mike's reaction?

9. Have you had a feeling similar to Bryan as described on p. 125? He explains:

I feel like I can't talk to anyone about this stuff. I feel like I can't go anywhere to be safe and I hate it. I have so many feelings I don't know what to do. I stare at him disappearing into Starbucks. He's the only one who knows everything. He's the only one I have to trust. I hate it.

Reflect on his and your feelings. What did you do to work through them? How does Bryan overcome his confusion?

10. Would you describe Mike as a good friend? Big Will?

11. What is the theme, the larger message, of this story? How can you take this lesson into your own life?

C

A

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Mike introduces Bryan to the comic book character Luke Cage. Create a chart of the superheroes that outlines the traits, strengths, and weaknesses of the following characters: Batman, Spider-Man, Luke Cage, and Black Panther.
2. There are particular ways in which masculinity expresses itself in this book. Start with Bryan hiding and quieting his tears after Pa gets arrested (p. 65); rejecting the label of “soft”; Pa warning Mike that “he better realize I’m good to him as long as he’s good to you” (p. 140); and Ma talking with Bryan about his and his father’s explosive tempers (p. 170). Discuss the different impressions of how masculinity is described. (p. 6)
3. Reread the scene of Bryan’s first train-surf ride (pp. 87-89). Create a storyboard or comic version of this scene.
4. Create a comic strip that extends the story, one in which, as Bryan voiced, “Tomorrow, I will dead this drama. Tomorrow. And forever. I definitely will use my head” (p. 177).
5. Listen to your favorite scene with the audiobook version of *Tight*. How does Maldonado’s narrator influence your reading and visualizing of the scene?
6. Watch Torrey Maldonado’s [Classroom Activity Starter video](#). What do you think *Tight* means? What does it mean to the characters?

PRAISE FOR **TIGHT**

A 2019 ALA Notable

A 2019 YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant YA Readers

“I was riveted by Bryan’s journey, breaking down stereotypes and becoming his own kind of superhero.”

—JACQUELINE WOODSON, NATIONAL BOOK AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR
OF *BROWN GIRL DREAMING*

★ “An excellent addition to libraries with fans of David Barclay Moore’s *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*, Jason Reynolds’s *Ghost*, and character-driven realistic fiction.”

—*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*, STARRED REVIEW

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TORREY MALDONADO (torreymaldonado.com), the author of the critically acclaimed *What Lane?*, *Tight*, and *Secret Saturdays*, is a teacher in Brooklyn, New York, where he was born and raised. His books reflect his students’ and his experiences.



PENGUINCLASSROOM.COM



@PENGUINCLASS



@PENGUINCLASSROOM



@PENGUINCLASSROOM