

The Black Panther Party

A Graphic Novel History

by David F. Walker and Marcus Kwame Anderson

Guide written by Ronell Whitaker, ELA Curriculum Director

Ten Speed Press

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Founded in Oakland, California, in 1966, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was a radical political organization that stood in defiant contrast to the mainstream Civil Rights Movement. This gripping illustrated history explores the impact and significance of the Panthers from their social, educational, and healthcare programs designed to uplift the Black community to their battle against police brutality through citizen patrols and frequent clashes with the FBI, which targeted the party from its outset.

Using dramatic comic book–style retellings and illustrated profiles of key figures, *The Black Panther Party* captures the party's the major events, people, and actions, as well as their cultural and political influence and enduring legacy.

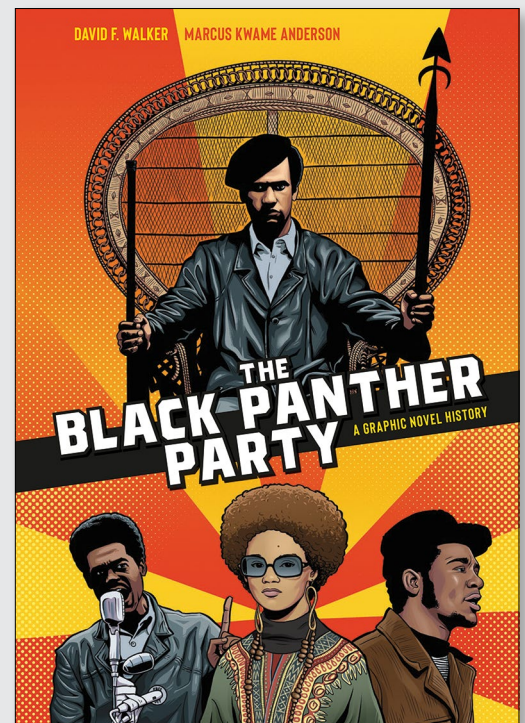
ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

David F. Walker is an award-winning comic book writer, author, filmmaker, journalist, and educator. His work in comic books includes *Shaft*, winner of the Glyph Award for Story of the Year, *Power Man and Iron Fist*, *Nighthawk*, *Fury*, *Secret Wars: Battleworld*, *Cyborg*, *The Army of Dr. Moreau*, and *Number 13*. He is also the creator of the critically-acclaimed YA series *The Adventures of Darius Logan* and the author of the graphic novel biography *The Life of Frederick Douglass*. Recognized as a leading scholar expert of African American cinema, Walker produced one of the definitive documentaries on the topic of Blaxploitation films, *Macked, Hammered, Slaughtered, and Shafted*.

Teacher's Guide

INCLUDES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS,
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES,
AND RESOURCES



ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR (CONTINUED)

Marcus Kwame Anderson is an illustrator and fine artist. Much of his work explores the beauty and diversity of the African diaspora and often incorporates social commentary. He graduated from SUNY Fredonia with a degree in illustration. Anderson is the co-creator of the comic book series *Snow Daze* and has illustrated stories in Action Lab's *Cash and Carrie* and *F.O.R.C.E.*

NOTE TO THE TEACHER

The Black Panther Party is a complex group that can be approached from many different angles. One thing to keep in mind when grappling with this material is that students will be asked to examine topics that may be difficult for them to navigate without proper preparation and support. If you already have your own community norms and discussion protocols in place, you may be in a good place. However, teachers looking for more support may want to consider resources like Matthew R. Kay's book *Not Light, but Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom* and Facing History's "Preparing to Discuss Race in the Classroom" (tinyurl.com/yckuva5x). Also, the visual nature of comics often makes for a faster reading experience, but it would be a good idea to encourage students to slow down and focus on the visual language of the book as well as the text. Visual literacy is a powerful skill, and having students strengthen their abilities in this area will only add to their understanding and enjoyment of this text.

IMPORTANT GRAPHIC NOVEL / COMIC TERMS

Bleed — Images that run outside the border of the panel.

Captions — Contain information about a scene or character.

Speech Bubble — Contain character dialogue; communication between/among characters. The pointer/tail signifies who is speaking.

Emanata — Text or icons that represent what is going on in a character's head.

Frame — Lines or boxes around a panel(s).

Graphic Weight — A term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others, creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways.

Gutters — Space between panels where the reader infers movement/action between panels.

Panels — Squares or rectangles that contain a single scene/image.

Sound Effect — Words that show sound is happening.

Splash Page — One image or panel that takes up an entire comic page.

Thought Balloons — Contain a character's thoughts.

Writer — The writer writes the story and has the overall vision of how the story will go. They write the dialogue and how the story will progress.

Penciler — Primary artist. This person takes the script and draws the comic. They draw the comic in pencil, which then gets inked and colored later on.

Creator(s) — The entire creative team on a book (writer, penciler, inker, colorist, letterer, etc.) who came together to collectively tell and present the story. All of their decisions work together to influence the end product of a comic/graphic novel.

READING A GRAPHIC NOVEL / COMIC

The comic medium is normally read from front to back, left to right, and top to bottom. As you read through the panels, the dialogue bubbles are read in the same manner, highest to lowest, left to right. This is always subject to change, due mainly to the imagination and creativity of the comic creators.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1966, SEALE STARTED RUNNING A YOUTH WORK PROGRAM AT THE NORTH OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD ANTI-POVERTY CENTER.

FOLLOWING THE BLACK POWER CONFERENCE IN BERKELEY, SEALE AND NEWTON BEGAN MEETING MORE REGULARLY, TRYING TO COME UP WITH A PLAN OF ACTION.

North Oakland Neighborhood Anti-Poverty Center

WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THIS ORGANIZATION FOR A WHILE NOW...

...BUT THAT'S ALL WE'VE BEEN DOING. IT'S TIME TO STOP TALKING AND START ORGANIZING.

OKAY. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT IN MIND?

I GOT THIS IN THE MAIL THE OTHER DAY. THEY STARTED THIS ORGANIZATION IN ALABAMA, AND THEY USE A BLACK PANTHER AS THEIR SYMBOL.

THE PANTHER IS A FIERCE ANIMAL, BUT IT WON'T ATTACK UNTIL IT'S BACKED INTO A CORNER.

A BLACK PANTHER?

I LIKE IT.

YEAH, I FIGURE WE CAN CALL OURSELVES THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY.

WORKS FOR ME. BUT WE NEED MORE THAN JUST A NAME.

Captions - contain information (exposition) about a scene or character

Gutters - space between panels where the reader infers movement/action between panels

Panels - squares or rectangles that contain a single scene/image

Speech Bubble - contain character dialogue; communication between/among characters

READING A GRAPHIC NOVEL
/ COMIC (CONTINUED)

1 WE NEED A PROGRAM--SOMETHING THAT RELATES TO THE PEOPLE. SOMETHING THEY CAN UNDERSTAND.

THIS HAS TO BE FOR THE PEOPLE ON THE STREETS. THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS STRUGGLING TO GET BY.

2 THIS PROGRAM... IT HAS TO BE SOMETHING PEOPLE CAN READ AND KNOW THAT IT IS FOR THEM.

IT HAS TO BE ABOUT BOTH THEIR NEEDS AND THEIR DESIRES. AND IT'S GOTTA BE HONEST.

Highest left

I'M READY.

Lowest right

3 WRITE THIS DOWN: "WHAT WE WANT."

WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK COMMUNITY.

4 GOT IT.

WHAT ELSE, BROTHER?

5 WHAT WE BELIEVE...

WE BELIEVE THAT BLACK PEOPLE WILL NOT BE FREE UNTIL WE ARE ABLE TO DETERMINE OUR OWN DESTINY.

OVER THE COURSE OF SEVERAL DAYS IN OCTOBER 1966, WHILE WORKING OUT OF THE NORTH OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD ANTI-POVERTY CENTER, NEWTON AND SEALE DRAFTED THE TEN-POINT PROGRAM--THE GUIDING DOCUMENT FOR THE ORGANIZATION THEY WERE FORMING.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Book Preview

Have students examine the front and back cover of the book and reflect on what questions about the book immediately come to mind and any first impressions they have of what they may be about to experience in the text. What do they expect from this book? What do they think they already know about the Black Panther Party? What is the artist trying to communicate with this cover?

Reading Comics and Graphic Novels

Have students reflect on their experience with graphic novels. Have they ever read a graphic novel, comic, or manga? If yes, what did they like and/or dislike about the experience? If no, what do they anticipate they will like and/or dislike about reading a graphic novel? How is the reading experience different between graphic novels and prose books? How might the reader have to think differently to read a graphic novel than when they read a prose book?

Background on the Black Panthers

In the short clip from *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (tinyurl.com/f53jz56e), the speaker in the beginning points out the complex nature of the Black Panther Party and uses the parable of the blind men and the elephant to illustrate her point. Have your class discuss how this uncertainty about the Panthers might have impacted their mission.

Power of Protest and Resistance

Ask students to list examples of protesting or protests they know about. What is their attitude toward protest? What are some reasons people protest? Do they think protests are an effective way to enact change? Why or why not? Have students brainstorm something in their school or community life and what are some ways they would try to advocate for change.

GUIDED READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1: The Myth of the Panthers

1. The title of this chapter refers to the “myth” of the Panthers. What is a myth and why is that an appropriate word to describe this part of the Panthers’ story?
2. A running theme of *The Black Panther Party* is the multi-faceted identity of the party. How does the final panel of page 2 exemplify this theme?



Chapter 2: Before the Panthers

1. How does knowing the history of Black oppression in the United States help one to understand how the Black Panthers came to be?
2. What was life like for Black Americans during this time? How are things different now? How are they the same?
3. This chapter outlines the birth of the Civil Rights Movement in its many phases. What are some of the ways the Civil Rights Movement changed throughout history, and what was the response by white America?
4. Pages 13 and 14 list the names and pictures of those slain in the pursuit of civil rights. Why do you think the creators chose to present them this way rather than as a list? What impact does it have on the reader?
5. What were some of the factors that led people to question the effectiveness of non-violent protest?

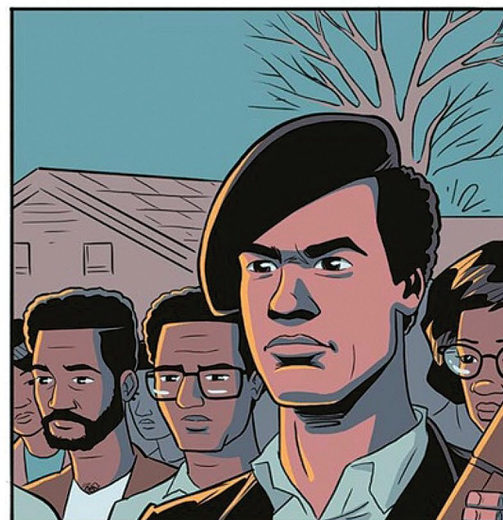
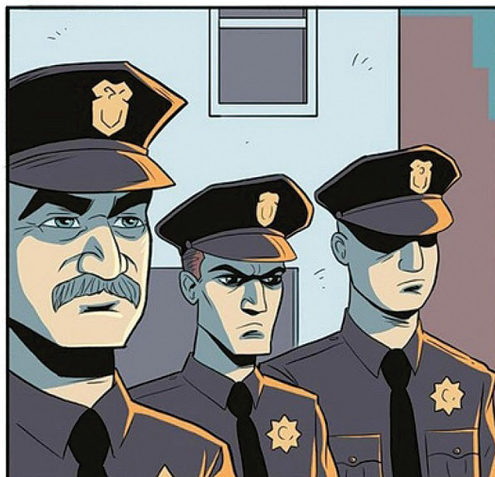
Chapter 3: 1966: Birth of the Panthers

1. Why did Newton and Seale choose the black panther as a symbol for their organization? Why did they think this was a fitting symbol and name for their group?
2. Why was it important to Newton and Seale to have a program for their organization to follow?
3. Which two points of the Ten Point Program resonate with you the most? Why?
4. Why is it important to note that all six of the founding members were born in the South?

GUIDED READING AND
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
(CONTINUED)

Chapter 4: 1967: Panthers Unleashed

1. At the beginning of this chapter, the Panthers are about to be approached by police. Huey says that's what they want. Why did he want to have an interaction with the police?
2. Look at the art on page 54. How is Huey characterized? What about the police? How does the art help you draw conclusions about characterization?



**GUIDED READING AND
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
(CONTINUED)**

3. What role did *The Black Panther* newspaper play for the organization? Why was it important?
4. What is "The Sacramento Incident?" How did it impact the Panthers? The rest of America?
5. What effect did Huey's arrest have on the Black Panthers? Was this a positive or negative impact? Explain.

Chapter 5: 1968: Public Enemies

1. Why were women integral to the mission of the Black Panther Party?
2. How did the Black Panther Party inspire others? Why did some people deem them dangerous because of this?
3. Why were the Free Breakfast program and other initiatives centered on children so important for the Black Panther Party?

Chapter 6: 1969: Casualties of War

1. What were some of the methods used to take down the Black Panther Party?
2. What toll did the war with the FBI have on the Panthers? How did this hurt the organization?
3. Much of this chapter is delivered in very factual terms, except for the murder of Fred Hampton. Why do you think the creators chose to depict this part the way they did? What impact are they trying to have on the reader?

Chapter 7: 1970: The Beginning of the End

1. With the release of Newton, the Black Panther Party changed its focus to "Survival Programs." Why did Newton choose to change the direction of the organization?
2. What are some examples of Survival Programs the Panthers instituted?

GUIDED READING AND
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
(CONTINUED)

Chapter 8: 1971–1988: Death of the Panthers

1. What were some of the major factors that lead to the downfall of the Panthers organization?
2. How did the Black Panther Party seek to reinvent itself? Why do you think it wasn't successful?
3. What is your reaction to the final splash page (page 170)? To the ending of the book?



POST-READING / EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Write a brief essay comparing the reality of the Black Panther Party to the “mythology” around them. Did how they were perceived help them or harm them?
2. Pick one of the chapters or sections of a chapter to research and present more in-depth information to the class. Ask students to:
 - Summarize the chapter
 - Identify the key people/figures in this section
 - Explain what makes this chapter/section significant
 - Choose one question or something/someone they want to know more about and present the topic to the class

Suggested sources to begin research:

- National Archives (tinyurl.com/3f8a8xx9)
 - The Black Panther Party Newspapers (tinyurl.com/4cecus9c)
 - Seattle Black Panther Party History and Memory Project (tinyurl.com/2p9ytd4y)
 - National Museum of African American History and Culture (nmaahc.si.edu)
3. Pick one of the points from the Ten Point Program and investigate if there has been any progress made between the time of the Black Panthers and the present day. What still needs to be done? What makes this point a worthy goal? What impact would it have on Black Americans?
 4. Pick one of the points from the Ten Point Program and make a short comic/ write a comic script illustrating what this would look like in action. How would society look different if this point was enacted?
 5. Create your own short comic biography of an activist you'd like your class to know more about. What are some myths about this person/group? How are/ were they trying to improve life for marginalized people? How does telling their story help others learn more about the injustices in the world?
 6. The Panthers used a newsletter to communicate with one another and the world about the plight of Black people and marginalized communities around the world. What are some issues you feel strongly about? Create your own newsletter detailing the issue and developments that impact your community.
 7. Where are they now? Research living Panthers in the National Archives (tinyurl.com/3f8a8xx9) and create a visual presentation or splash page detailing who they are and what they are currently doing.

- *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, available from PBS
- *Judas and the Black Messiah*, available on HBO Max
- *Run* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and L. Fury with Nate Powell
- *Save It for Later: Promises, Parenthood, and the Urgency of Protest* by Nate Powell
- *Kent State: Four Dead in Ohio* by Derf Backderf

Ronell Whitaker is a high school English Curriculum Director for Community High School District 218 in Oak Lawn, Illinois. He has over 15 years of education experience and is a champion for comics in the classroom. He has presented across the country at conferences and conventions on the virtues of comics in the classroom. He is a founding member of the Lit-X Teacher Cohort and sits on the Board of Directors for Reading With Pictures. Ronell believes in comics, and he likes to think that comics believe in him.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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