

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF CLEAN GETAWAY

NIC STONE

Sometimes to win,
you have to strike out.



EDUCATORS' GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Nic Stone comes a challenging and heartwarming coming-of-age story about a softball player looking to prove herself on and off the field.

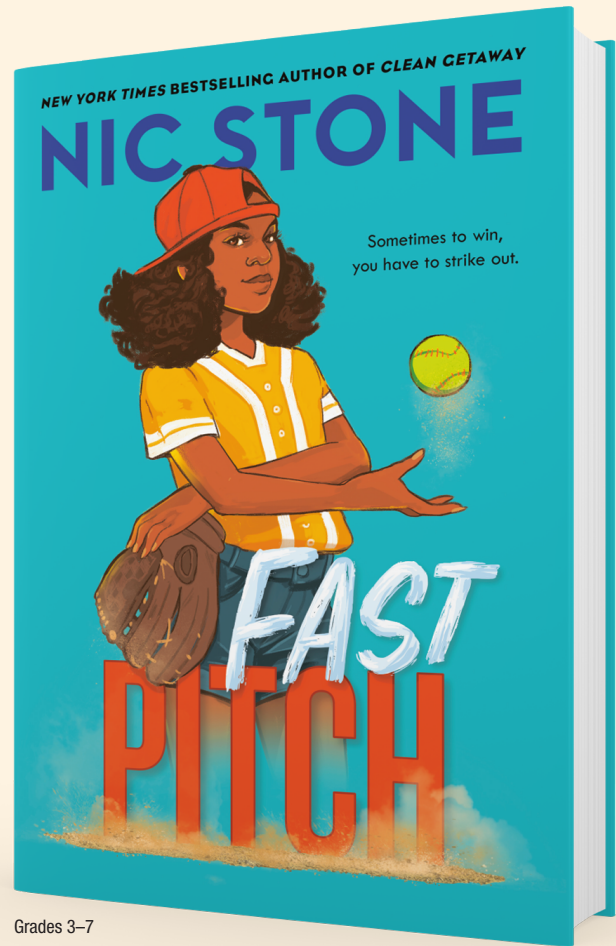
Shenice Lockwood, captain of the Fulton Firebirds, is hyper-focused when she steps up to the plate. Nothing can stop her from leading her team to the 12U fast-pitch softball regional championship. But life has thrown some curveballs her way.

Strike one: As the sole team of all-brown faces, Shenice and the Firebirds have to work twice as hard to prove that Black girls belong at bat.

Strike two: Shenice's focus gets shaken when her great-uncle Jack reveals that a career-ending—and family-name-ruining—crime may have been a setup.

Strike three: Broken focus means mistakes on the field. And Shenice's teammates are beginning to wonder if she's qualified to be captain at all.

It's up to Shenice to discover the truth about her family's past—and fast—before secrets take the Firebirds out of the game forever.



Grades 3–7
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Nigel Livingstone

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nic Stone is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Clean Getaway*, which received starred reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*, which called it “an absolute firecracker of a book.” She is also the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling and William C. Morris Award finalist *Dear Martin*, its *New York Times* bestselling sequel *Dear Justyce*, and the acclaimed novels *Odd One Out* and *Jackpot* for teens. Nic spent several years on the softball field as a kid, and *Fast Pitch* grew out of her love of the sport and the movie *The Sandlot* and her desire to see more Black female athletes represented on the field and on the page. Nic lives in Atlanta with her adorable little family. You can find her online at nicstone.info.



BEFORE READING

1. To learn more about the Negro Leagues of baseball, visit the following resources:
 - a. Read Kadir Nelson's *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League* for an accessible history and awe-inspiring illustrations.
 - b. Review the "[Negro League Baseball](https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/negro-league-baseball/additional-resources)" resource from the Digital Public Library of America (dp.la/primary-source-sets/negro-league-baseball/additional-resources).
2. Have you ever played on a team? What did you learn about yourself and your teammates?
3. Have you ever been accused of something that you did not do? If anything, what did you do to right the wrong?

DURING READING

1. Shenice plays on an all-Black softball team, the Fulton Firebirds, which has the potential to win the Dixie Youth Softball Association championship. Why does every win feel "historical"? (p. 2)
2. What is Shenice's role and position on the team? What is her nickname? How did she get that nickname?
3. Shenice's family is a "batball" family. Detail the history of her family's connection to the sport. (pp. 14, 27–28)
4. Describe the relationship between Shenice and each member of her immediate family.
5. What ailment does Drake have?
6. In the locked room on the second floor (PopPop's room), Shenice's dad shows her "Great-Grampy JonJon's infamous trunk." (p. 25) He gives her the key to the trunk. Why is the key special?

7. In the trunk, two things grab Shenice's attention: a fancy brown leather journal and a framed black-and-white photograph of Great-Grampy JonJon with another man. Who is the man in the photograph?
8. Shenice's language arts class is reading *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers. The story is about a Black teenager who is accused of a crime and is on trial. What connections can you make between *Monster* and the story Uncle Jack started to tell about Great-Grampy JonJon? (pp. 58–61) What crime was Great-Grampy JonJon accused of? What did the accusation do to his baseball career?
9. Shenice's dad gives her his high school baseball state championship ring. (p. 38) Why is this gesture surprising to her?
11. Who is Scoob? What is his relationship with Shenice and her family? (Learn more about Scoob in Nic Stone's debut middle-grade novel, *Clean Getaway*.)
12. Who is Jacob Carlyle? What was his connection to JonJon? Discuss the rest of the story about the stolen DiMaggio glove that Uncle John told to Shenice. (pp. 78–84)
13. Where is DiMaggio's glove and Carlyle's cap?
14. The Fulton Firebirds play against the Midville Mighty Ducks. Their game is in an area where people openly display the Confederate flag. How does the symbol make the Fulton Firebirds feel? How do they channel their fear and anxiety? Discuss Shenice's thoughts about Ms. Erica's statement: "The world ain't always a nice or fair place for bright and bold young royals like you." (pp. 88–95)



15. The only Black player on the Castleberry Crabs is the pitcher, whose name is Tanisha. Shenice was the only Black player on a team before joining the Fulton Firebirds. She wonders, “Do people mispronounce *her* name? Or say things like ‘Wow, you’re great at softball for a girl like you’? Do they touch her hair without permission or make comments about her edges when she sweats and they get frizzy?” (p. 106) Discuss microaggressions. Why would the Crabs say these things to Tanisha? Why is Shenice noticing? Have you ever experienced or witnessed something similar? What happened? How did you handle it?
16. What does Shenice learn about Great-Grampy JonJon by reading his journal?
17. Uncle Jack’s doctor gives Shenice a piece of paper with the address of where she can find the DiMaggio glove. What is special about this house? Describe the house and the home next door. What happens to Shenice as she looks around the perimeter of the house?
18. Describe the details of #OperationDiMaggio. (p. 139–146) Draw a comic retelling the events of the visit to Uncle Jack’s old house.
19. Create a storyboard or a movie that captures the events of chapter 17. What happens when Shenice sneaks back to Uncle Jack’s house? What does she discover?

AFTER READING

1. Sit down with elders in your family and community. Ask them to tell you stories about their childhoods and other significant moments of their lives. Record these conversations so that you have an account of your community’s history.
2. Read the article “[How a Majority Black School in Detroit Shook Up the World of Lacrosse](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/may/07/how-a-majority-black-school-in-detroit-shook-up-the-world-of-lacrosse)” (theguardian.com/sport/2021/may/07/how-a-majority-black-school-in-detroit-shook-up-the-world-of-lacrosse). What are some of the similar pressures that this team and the Firebirds had to deal with?
3. What is a major theme of this book?

KEY QUOTES

Reflect on the following quotes from *Fast Pitch*. What lessons can you take from each, and how might they apply to your life? Why are they significant to the story?

“When it’s time, it’ll be time, kiddo.” (p. 25)

“Now, I obviously don’t know the details regarding this assignment you mention, but I’m a firm believer that if it really is *yours* to complete, the tools and resources you need are already at your disposal or right within reach. You just gotta open your eyes and your mind a little wider.” (pp. 104–105)

From Great-Grampy’s journal: “Seems white folks can’t believe I had the audacity to hope the laying of my life on the line would actually mean something.” (p. 114)

From Scoob: “In *my* experience, sometimes grown-ups don’t tell kids certain things because they know it’s gonna change how we see them.” (p. 149)



PRAISE FOR *FAST PITCH*

“Sports, suspense, mystery, history . . . what more could you want?”

A funny, charming page-turner.”

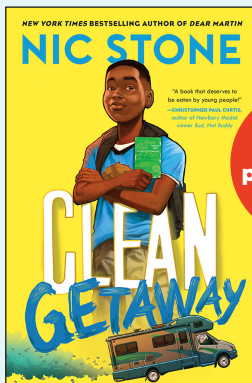
—Adam Gidwitz, *New York Times* bestselling author

★ “A grand slam of an adventure.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

★ “Black girl magic hits a home run in Stone’s latest novel.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

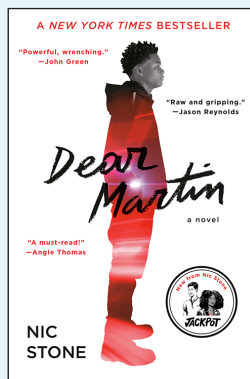
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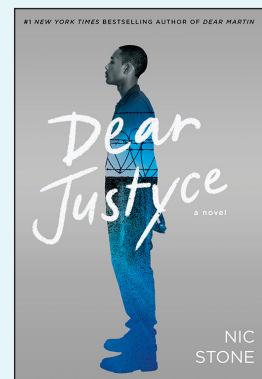
★ “An absolute firecracker
of a book and a must-have for
children’s collections.”

—*Booklist*, Starred Review



“Raw and gripping”

—Jason Reynolds, #1 *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Long Way Down*



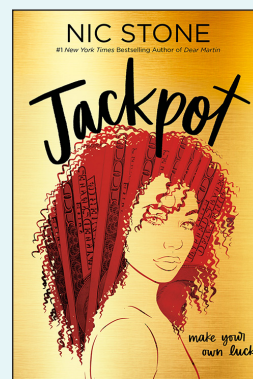
★ “A powerful, raw
must-read told through the lens
of a Black boy ensnared by our
broken criminal justice system.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review



★ “Essential reading.”

—*Booklist*, Starred Review



“Stone delivers a thoughtful and
polished novel about class, privilege,
and relative poverty.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

