GUTTER CHILD
a novel
Jael Richardson

TEACHER'S GUIDE
Prepared by Melissa Fleming and Alexiis Stephen
Notes to Teachers When Using This Guide

“We may be uncomfortable talking about race, but we can no longer afford to be silent. We have chosen a profession that—like parenting—requires us to put our comforts second to those of children.”

—Jamilah Pitts

This guide was specifically designed with an anti-racist education approach to the novel for students in Grades 10 to 12. Teachers should use their professional judgment to select what will work best for students depending on their grade level and strengths. Extension questions are included in the chapter questions to further challenge students to critically think about connections between the novel and their lives. Chapter tips occur for select chapters to provide teachers with specific resources and insights to direct the learning within an anti-racist education framework.

Know and Support Your Learners

As with any novel study, it is important to first develop relationships by getting to know the students in the classroom. Discover what history your students might have with and around the following topics that surface in the novel: race, racism, anti-Black racism, teen pregnancy, poverty, complications at birth, intercourse, suicide, violence, human trafficking, torture and adoption. Consider how best to use this knowledge to frame the conversations around each topic area. Because the novel explores both identity and belonging, recognize that your students might be in different stages of development and that there will be diversity in their lived experience, culture, ethnicity and so on. As students make connections between the novel and their experiences, emphasize that it is important to approach their thinking as how they see themselves at this moment in recognizing that identity, belonging and sense of self can be fluid and changing. The author asks readers to “take care with your heart and your mind as you read.” Brainstorm strategies of self-care to maintain student well-being throughout.

Anti-Racist Education Approaches

Gutter Child is a timely novel that addresses long-standing issues within the Black community in Canada, in the United States and internationally. Anti-Black racism stems from the very foundation and creation of North America and its historical events, which permeate the Black experience as a present-day reality. In approaching the teaching of this novel, it is important that teachers become familiar with and are able to speak to anti-Black racism and its impacts—especially how it plays out in the education system.
When approaching this novel, it is important to recognize the diversity and intersectionality that exist within the Black diaspora all over the world. For example, within the Caribbean, there are many nations that have their own history, language and culture. Similarly, Africa (as a continent) is vast and diverse in its makeup of countries in regard to language and culture. Consider that both the Caribbean nations and African countries have been impacted in different ways by colonization.

While colonialism in North America is very much the experience of members of the Indigenous community, the experiences in the novel *Gutter Child* are reflective of Black individuals and families from the Caribbean, the Americas and Africa. Although there are colonialistic parallels with North American Indigenous communities, to discuss those histories thoroughly and thoughtfully, the author encourages teachers to seek novels and resources by Indigenous authors.

In conjunction with this novel, seek out ways to affirm the lived identity of Black students in the classroom and school. Recognize the ways in which Black individuals can be seen from a deficit perspective and how a colonized perspective of what should be valued in the individual and in interpersonal and institutional relations is dominant in society. Specific ways to challenge our colonial constructs and affirm Black identity within the context of this novel include (and are not limited to) a focus on:

a) Community
   - What is a community? Why is community important?
   - How is Black identity, culture and community represented in your classroom and school?

b) Family
   - What makes a family? What are the varying definitions of family?
   - How are members of the Black community faced with the decision to leave family for a “better” opportunity?
   - What is the role of extended family in the Black community?

c) Resilience
   - What skills are deemed as resilient?
   - What kind of resilience is required of or demonstrated by Black students entering traditionally white spaces?
   - How do we reframe resilience to affirm Black identity?
d) Identity

- How often do Black students see themselves represented in the curriculum?
- What parts of the Black community are appropriated? Valued? Devalued?
- In what ways are spaces created to invite student voices?

When teaching this novel, it is important to refer to tools, skills and strategies to support the creation of inclusive spaces and **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**. Addressing disenfranchisement and cultivating a sense of belonging must be addressed in the classroom so that all learners are included in the education. It is equally important to recognize the impacts of systemic racism on Black students, which include (but are not limited to):

- streaming of students
- white supremacy in the curriculum
- lack of representation in teachers and administrators
- low academic expectations
- high disciplinary rates

When making connections to anti-Black racism in schools while studying the novel, it is also important to recognize that the experiences above are not a reflection of the student themselves but a result of the systems of oppression that exist in our society.

Some suggested resources to help deepen your understanding of anti-Black racism and anti-racist education include:

- Dr. Carl James (York University): Talking to Children about Anti-Black Racism
- What Systemic Racism in Canada Looks Like

**A LIST OF KEY TERMS**

It is important that teachers familiarize themselves with these terms and understand their connections to the novel as they regularly surface throughout the teacher’s guide.
• accomplice
• activism
• ally
• anti-Black racism
• anti-racist
• bystander
• capitalism
• colonialism
• dehumanization
• disenfranchisement
• equality
• equity
• gender
• generational poverty
• genocide
• inclusion
• intergenerational trauma
• intersectionality
• microaggressions
• non-racist
• oral tradition

• paternalism
• positionality
• prejudice
• privilege
• race
• racism
• racist
• reconciliation
• reparation
• resistance
• restitution
• segregation
• social justice
• systemic barriers
• systemic oppression
• systemic racism
• systems of oppression
• trauma
• upstander
• white privilege
• white supremacy

Student Pre-Learning Activity

Before assigning the novel to the class, consider providing students with some context to Black history in Canada, America, African countries and Caribbean nations as well as the present-day impacts of systemic racism and colonization. Taking some time to unpack the terms listed in “A List of Key Terms” as students progress through the novel is also recommended.

Suggested resources include:

• What Systemic Racism in Canada Looks Like
• Systemic Racism Explained (US Context)
• Colonialism in Africa: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
• The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes
• The Difference between Being Not Racist and Being Anti-Racist
Student Research Project: Before, During and After

Arrange students in groups to address one of the topics below. Students research and present their findings to the class BEFORE reading the book, so that they have the necessary information to make connections. DURING reading, these same groups are responsible for making connections between the book and their topic. AFTER reading the book, the students will present the insights they gained as they made connections between the book and their research.

Topics may include:

- African diaspora
- Caribbean diaspora
- Colonialism in North America and its impact on Black peoples
- Jim Crow laws in America (1865–1968)
- Share-cropping in 1870s America
- Common Schools Act, 1850–1983; legalized segregation within schools in Canada
- Black Loyalists in Canada
- Africville Apology (Canada, 2010)
- Apartheid in South Africa (1948–1991)
- Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa (1960)
- Homelands of South Africa
- W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963)
- Langston Hughes (1902–1967)
- Jael Richardson
- Social justice movements in Canada and the United States (Black Lives Matter, addressing police brutality in the Black community, demonstrations, etc.)
- Activism and activists
  - Letter writing
  - Speech
  - Banning of services/products
  - Demonstrations
- Identity
  - How one sees oneself versus how others see oneself
  - Diversity in groups
  - Markers of identity (e.g., hair)
  - Affirmation of identity
The Power of Words

a) Cover Activity

- In bookselling, the packaging is everything!
- Define what the word gutter means. Unpack the various connotations of the word. Why do you think that the author chose this word?
- Discuss the messages and meaning of the use of colour, pattern and images on the cover of this novel.
- Examine how the title juxtaposes the imagery of the cover.
- Based on this artwork and title, what would you predict the novel to be about?
- After the book has been read, how does the cover art reinforce the messages of the novel?

b) Who is W.E.B. Du Bois?

“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.”

- Biography
- Author starts with the above quotation, which is known as an epigraph. What does this quote mean? Why did the author select Du Bois?
- Connections through the centuries: Why is Du Bois still relevant today?
- Prediction activity: Based on this quotation, what might the novel be about?
- What role did Du Bois play in addressing anti-Black racism?
- How did he contribute towards anti-slavery advocacy?

c) Who is Langston Hughes?

- Biography
- What is the Harlem Renaissance?
- Locate and read his poems cited in the novel to deepen the connections.
  - Pages 65–66: “As I Grew Older”
  - Pages 72–73: “To Artina”
  - Page 97: “Harlem”
  - Page 247: “Wide River”
  - Page 330: “Troubled Woman”
d) Poetry Connections

- Students create their own poetry based on the novel
- Students find other poems by Black poets to connect to the novel

e) Words to Unpack

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Extension Activities

a. What is the difference between being not racist and anti-racist? Where do you place yourself? Consider reviewing your response to this question as you move throughout this novel. Intentionally return to this question to critically think of how you have changed your understanding of yourself. Here are two resources to help deepen your understanding:

• TED Talk: The Difference between Being “Not Racist” and Anti-Racist, by Ibram X Kendi
• The Difference between Being Not Racist and Being Anti-Racist, by Christina Capatides

AND/OR

Being an anti-racist means that you are armed with knowledge and awareness when you act to create change in society. What have you done or could you do to be anti-racist? What actions can you take to address racism in your classroom, school and community? How could you take an anti-racist stance in your classroom, school and community? Discuss your knowledge and connect your experiences in your life that have shaped you along the way as you read the book.

b. Pitch a sequel to this book. Include ten plot points and five main characters (either new or recurring).

c. Online reviews are an important tool to help support authors and draw attention to their work. Consider developing an online review for a book you liked.

d. What questions do you have for the author? Consider searching for past interviews of the author discussing this novel to learn more.

e. Social justice can be defined as actions based on the concerns of the distribution of wealth, opportunities and privilege within a society. How could you use social media and other platforms of influence both personally and as a school to raise awareness and promote activism? What leaders and experts could you invite to strengthen this messaging?
f. This novel surfaces a long-standing relationship between the global Black community and colonization, systemic racism, slavery and the erasure of identity. When the roots of these issues are harder to see, it can be easy for society to minimize the Black experience with the expectation that it is an issue of the past and with an eye on the future. Define the terms restitution, reparations and reconciliation. Choose to research one of the following topics:

- the Africville Apology
- the restitution given to some American slaves—“40 acres and a mule”
- the South Africa apartheid apology and South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

What constitutes an appropriate apology? Do you think that the apology researched was sufficient? Why or why not? Justify your answer.

Essay Writing/Discussion

1. The world in this novel is designed in a way that creates success for some (Mainlanders) and barriers for others (Gutter people). While “Redemption Freedom” has all of the positive connotations in its words, it is a control measure put in place to further benefit those who have the power and privilege in society. Those who are oppressed face a lifetime of impossible circumstances in the Gutter, where the odds of success are greatly diminished. Discuss the ways in which the people in these situations endure and/or rise up against this oppression.

2. The United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected. Learn more about the UDHR and evaluate what it would take for the Mainland to measure up to the rights and protocols defined in the declaration.

3. The messages in poetry have the power to inspire a person into action. Explore the life and poems of Langston Hughes—especially the ones that are alluded to in this novel (see the “Who is Langston Hughes?” activity for a list)—and trace how their messages are extended in Gutter Child.
4. On page 232, Elimina says, “What if greatness only happens when we’re together, when we don’t let [Mainlanders] pull us apart?” Alternatively, Miss Charlotte believes that “Relationships and bad influences can lead you astray” (pg. 236). Consider the difference in how relationships and community are viewed by Elimina and Miss Charlotte. What might be the reasons that each character feels this way? What is your opinion on relationships and community?

5. “Gutter life requires us to make impossible decisions” (pg. 237). What are some examples of impossible decisions that Gutter people have to make? How are these decisions a reflection of systems of oppression versus individual choices?

6. “Since this whole Gutter System nonsense began, there have been nine factory workers to get Redemption Freedom. Nine. It’s like they just pick one every so often so folks still believe it’s possible’ . . . But all I can think about is the Hall of Heroes at Livingstone Academy—how difficult it must be to get Redemption Freedom if only eight men ever did it, and how impossible it seems for a woman to get it at all” (pg. 267). How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact outcomes in society? What actions can we take to create more equitable outcomes for all?

7. According to Jensen (2009), “Generational poverty occurs in families where at least two generations have been born into poverty. Families living in this type of poverty are not equipped with the tools to move out of their situations.” In what ways does generational poverty exist in the novel? How is generational poverty tied to systems of oppression? Is it possible for people in the novel to break this cycle? How?

8. “To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships” (W.E.B. Du Bois). Consider the ways in which the Atlantic slave trade, Jim Crow, segregation, etc., have contributed to this reality. Explain how these historical events are connected to situations and concepts in the novel.

9. *Gutter Child* is a timely novel that addresses long-standing anti-Black racism in North America and internationally. Learn about social justice and resistance movements (e.g., Nat Turner, sit-ins, *Green Book*, Colin Kaepernick, etc.). What has changed? What has stayed the same?
10. In the novel, Gutter people have a debt that will take their entire life to pay off. This debt is specific to Gutter people and is determined and managed by Mainlanders. What might this debt signify in real life? How does this connect to systemic oppression?

11. As the characters in the novel grow up and leave their school, they begin to see different ways in which members of the Gutter community resist the existing systems of oppression. Identify two different ways and compare/contrast the impact that each has made.

12. “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990). Discuss how this book has been a window, mirror and sliding glass door for you. Examine the new insights you have gained from this experience as a reader.

13. How does Elimina create her own opportunities of resistance to push back against systemic oppression and create her own destiny? Consider the roles she is cast in, the spaces she exists in, the places she is sent to, the places she escapes to, the choices she makes, and the people she interacts with along the way.

14. On page 23, Mr. Gregors says, “Let me ask you, Elimina: Do you consider yourself a Gutter child?” When we meet Elimina at the beginning of the novel, she doesn’t see herself as a Gutter child. However, as we move through the novel, Elimina’s lived experience and identity shift. This coming-of-age story traces the psychological growth and identity of a character who transitions from youth to adulthood. Trace the external factors that Elimina faces in the novel that lead to her growing sense of self.
15. Various characters in the novel face different paths toward debt reduction. For example, Elimina was promised a “debt-free” life as part of the “Gutter Enhancement Project” once she turned eighteen, but she had to live a life where she never felt like she belonged. Even though Duncan and Lulabelle are debt-free, they only enjoy a “kind of freedom” because they are haunted by their past decisions. Rowan ascends to the level of champion only to learn that he was “raised to lose” (pg. 338). Discuss how, in the novel, it is clear that it doesn’t matter whether characters are debt-free or not—they will always face a system of oppression.

16. *Gutter Child* brings to light that “A system can’t be broken in a moment” (pg. 366) and that the action of people is what will create systemic change. Catherine Hernandez emphasized in the TED Talk “A Guide to Lifelong Allyship” that “Allyship is not an identity you can claim via a Costco membership . . . It is a lifelong journey and it must begin in the body.” Using Hernandez’s definition of *allyship*, identify the characters who had the ability to change the system and the extent to which they used their positionality to act against the system. For example, Miss Charlotte, through positive intentions, provides care for youth such as Elimina and Violet, but she does nothing to impact the system that isolates these characters in her home. Elimina’s mother loves and nurtures her but does not use her privilege to eliminate the barriers that are in place. Even though Elimina cannot reunite with David, she is able to craft her letters to fuel a movement toward change.

17. Franklin Leonard has said that, “When you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.” What systems must be dismantled by the Mainland in order to begin a path toward reconciliation with the Sossi people? Is equality achievable? Discuss.

18. “The Hill” is a unique community in the novel that both models and rejects the systems of the Mainland. While they oppose the Gutter System and pressure the Mainland government to change, they also accumulate wealth and live lavish lifestyles. Given the opportunities that “the Hill” chooses to act on, do you think that capitalism and social justice/activism can co-exist?
19. According to the United Nations, \textit{genocide} means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethni-cal, racial or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Based on the criteria above, prove that the Mainland government com-mitted acts of genocide on the Sossi people.

\textbf{Topic to Theme Seminars}

There are many topics and themes that recur throughout the novel. Put students into groups and assign/select one of the topics below that the group is responsible for during the entire novel study. Their research could involve (a) tracing the ways in which the topic is prevalent, or even transformative, as they continue to read, and (b) selecting important quotations to support their discoveries. At the end of the novel study, students can present their findings to one another, develop questions for discussion, create thematic or thesis statements and make connections to the other topics in the novel.

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| Symbolism          | 3, 24, 32, 250 | “The scar means something”  
• The mark of the X on Gutter people  
• Marking a person for the purpose of identification  
• X as a symbol of erasure or cancelling—dehumanizing effect  
• Malcolm X—the X represented the true African name of his family that he would never know |
|             | 35, 135     | Red jacket/coat (colour; colonialism; power; law)  
“It’s the most incredible thing I’ve ever worn”  
• The colour red symbolizes power, death, blood, sacrifice  
• The red coat has connections to colonialism and law and order of the British army (the Red Coats)  
• The representation of red in the African flag—blood shed by Africans in their pursuit of liberation and the blood that unites us as a people |
|             | 18          | Collar/Leashes  
• Torture device  
• Dehumanizing  
• Used in slavery during slave auctions |
|             | 65          | Blue book of poetry  
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• Bird never leaves the Gutter even though it could  
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Chapter Questions

What follows are comprehension and critical-thinking questions that have students better connect to the messages in the text. Select chapters include tips to provide teachers with specific resources and insights to direct the learning within an anti-racist education framework. There are also selected chapter extension questions where further contextual and historical connections can be explored. Teachers should use their professional judgment to determine which questions to assign to their students.

Additionally, students can be assigned the following chapter exercises:

a) Chapter Summary Exercises
   • Assign students to the chapters and have them come up with an effective word or phrase to title each chapter.
   • As part of note-taking skill development, have students write a chapter summary, where they determine the most important moments.

b) Quotation Exercises
   • Students collate a number of powerful quotations and explain why they were selected.

c) KWHLAQ Chart
Having students approach this text from an anti-racist stance will help them to better understand the ways in which systems can be dismantled and changed. Students can be prompted to return to this chart as they continue through the novel study to add their thoughts in relation to anti-racism.

   • What do I know?
   • What do I want to know?
   • How do I find out?
   • What did I learn?
   • What action do I take?
   • What questions do I have?

PREFACE
1. In the preface, there is a quotation that says, “It takes a particular kind of strength to exist in a world where you are not wanted that doesn’t feel like
strength at all.” Foreshadowing exists to give readers a glimpse into a future event in a story. Using your prediction skills, what might the author be alluding to in this opening paragraph? 

**Extension:** Students can reflect on their initial prediction and compare it to their final understanding of what this quotation may mean.

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**PART 1: LIVINGSTONE**

**CHAPTER 1**

1. Describe the mood and atmosphere of the opening paragraph of this chapter. Given that an “academy” is an education institution, what predictions can you make about the learning environment of Livingstone Academy?

2. Divide the class into groups and assign students one or more of the five senses (see, feel, smell, hear, taste) to record evidence from this chapter. How does the author use imagery to place the audience directly in the shoes of Elimina? How might these senses help to amplify the emotions being experienced in this opening scene?

3. On page 6, Mr. Gregors states, “It’s a basic tenet of the work we do here to always be on time. I consider tardiness a sign of disrespect. Let’s not get off to a bad start.” From this statement by the headmaster, we learn that Livingstone Academy values both hard work and punctuality. Where have you encountered situations in your life where these values were instilled in you? Were you able to conform to these expectations? Why or why not? What happens when the values of one group do not line up with the values of another group?

4. When taking in the academy, Elimina notes to herself, “At least it’s not the Gutter” (pg. 4), and then proclaims, “I don’t belong here. You’re all . . . I’m not . . . I’m not a Gutter child” (pg. 8). What perceptions does Elimina have about the Gutter and Gutter children? What information does she have to support her thinking and reaction? Is it fair for her to have this opinion of the Gutter?
CHAPTER 2

Historically, in an effort to justify the transatlantic slave trade, Europeans tied the capture, transport and enslavement of Black people to the belief that those of African descent were less than human and should be held to the same standard as animals. This chapter identifies the use of leashes as a way to intimidate and discipline academy students. Unpacking and learning about the historic connection between the dehumanization of members of the Black community and the long-term impact of this mental framework on present-day systems of oppression and systemic racism will help to frame classroom discussions.

1. In this chapter, the reader learns more about Elimina’s past and how she ended up as a student at Livingstone Academy. Using your inferencing skills, try to provide as much detail as possible to describe and explain the following:

   - The Gutter
   - The Mainland
   - Mainlanders
   - Gutter people
   - The X scars
   - Project children
   - Capedown
   - Livingstone Academy

2. Reflect on the quotation that Elimina recalls from her history book: “Every Gutter man, woman and child will toil and struggle, and when they succeed, when they rise above their circumstances and redeem their place on this land, we will celebrate their toil and their labour. ‘For the greatness of the country,’ we will shout” (pgs. 10–11). Consider who might have made this statement and the perspective/viewpoint they had when writing this. How do you think the author of this statement views Gutter people? What is considered success for Gutter people? Whose narrative is missing in this statement? Extension: Why would it be important to gain an understanding of the perspective of Gutter people before drawing any conclusions?
3. In this chapter, we learn more about some central characters. Referring back to Chapter 1 and using your insights gathered from reading Chapter 2, develop a character sketch of the people below (or one that is assigned to you). Consider their physical and personality traits in your descriptions.

- Elimina
- Miss Femia
- Headmaster Samuel J. Gregors
- Josephine
- Elimina’s Mainland mother
- David
- Rowan
- Louis

4. Elimina is introduced to some harsh cruelty in this chapter when she learns about the purpose of the “leash” at the academy. Record your reactions when you learned what the leashes are used for. How would you respond to Josephine when she states, “We’re here to work. This is how it is for people like us” (pg. 19)? Why do you think Josephine believes this? Extension: Review the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Would the actions at the academy be upholding this document?

5. On page 11, the different roles assigned to Gutter children are described. Do you think that the roles uphold or challenge gender roles? How might the traditionally assigned gender roles affect each student’s ability to gain Redemption Freedom?

CHAPTER 3
This chapter includes a narrative around the colonization of the Sossi territory and Sossi people by the Mainlanders. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, colonization is “the process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.” Discuss how colonization involves the dispossession of a group of people and the stripping of culture and language in order to gain access to resources and land. Explore the impacts of colonization on the land and its inhabitants by making connections to the colonization of Caribbean nations and African countries.
1. In this chapter, Elimina Madeleine Dubois learns for the first time about the “Gutter System” and “Gutter debt.” In your own words, explain what Gutter debt means, how it is accumulated and how it can be reduced. What events are related to the establishment of the debt system? Elimina learns that her debt is “negligible” or less than her peers. Why is this?

2. Mr. Gregors says that, from a legal standpoint, Elimina is both a “ward of the nation” and a Gutter child with rules and laws that dictate how she is to live her life (pgs. 23–24). What is a “ward of the nation” in the context of this book? What decisions have been removed from Elimina’s life as a result of this law? How might this impact her life?

3. Mr. Gregors recounts the formation of the Gutter System with pride, calling it an impressive “model of revolutionary forward-thinking” (pg. 26), but we quickly learn that it is an oppressive system with roots in the colonization of the Sossi territory. What are the short- and long-term impacts of colonization on the Sossi people?

4. How do you react to Mr. Gregors’s statement when he muses, “that story-and-drum-and-sit-around-the fire country life is quaint? But it’s just not ideal for really prospering” (pgs. 27–28). What does Mr. Gregors value? What are the benefits to oral teaching and learning? How does this statement connect to colonialism?

5. Elimina remembers her mother saying, “Struggle makes you stronger” (pg. 31). Consider the lived experience of Elimina’s mother as a Mainlander and compare this to the lived experiences of Gutter people. Why might this statement not be entirely true? Why might this be an easier statement for Elimina’s mother to make? What is she missing in making this statement?

6. What meanings does the word redemption have? Is “Redemption Freedom” (pg. 31) really about freedom or something else? Using a Venn diagram, compare Redemption Freedom to anti-Black racism.

7. Mr. Gregors reassures Elimina that she has the best “chance” in life (pg. 35), yet her exit from Livingstone Academy will come with a mountain of debt and
a lifetime of work. What systemic barriers will Elimina now face? *Extension:* Create a T-chart and compare the life of a Gutter child to the life of a Mainland child. Connect your findings to the impact of systemic oppression.

8. Elimina recalls the only time she attended a school, at Capedown Elementary. What was her experience? How safe and inclusive was this school for her? Do you think that present-day schools are inclusive for every student? Why or why not? What information are you using to inform your perspective? What perspective might you be missing? *Extension:* What are some actions you can take to gain a more fulsome perspective?

9. Mr. Gregors tells Elimina that her “scar still means something . . . Even if you have just the one” (pg. 24). Consider Mr. Gregors’s statement in relation to what Elimina was told her scar meant growing up. What does Elimina’s scar symbolize? What impact will Elimina’s scar have on her life? *Extension:* Compare Elimina’s scar to stereotypes. Like stereotypes, what assumptions are made about Elimina because of her scar? Are these assumptions valid? Justify your answer.

**CHAPTER 4**

In this chapter, systemic oppression, systemic racism and education are strongly intertwined and interconnected. There is available data and research to indicate that Black students are more often streamed into pathways that limit their post-secondary opportunities.

For more information and background, please see the following links:

- **Ontario’s Anti-Black Racism Strategy**
- **Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area**

1. During her orientation, Elimina is warned to never enter Miss Darling’s office, and Elimina recalls a neighbour who said to keep “away from her house and everything she owned, including her garbage” (pg. 39). Based on that warning, what kind of relationships likely exist between the Decos and the students? Why is this problematic given that the role of the Deco includes the
supervision and training of the students? What are the differences between a Deco and a Gutter Deco? Why would Miss Templeton refer to the job of Gutter Deco as “one of the best kinds of jobs you can get” (pg. 41)?

2. Miss Templeton informs Elimina that the departments for employment “define all the types of work students can do to prepare for their future” (pg. 38). What types of employment does this academy train its students for? What choice do students have in their occupation? What positions in the workforce will those who graduate from this academy be permitted to hold? What positions will they be excluded from? What is revealed about the systems of oppression in place through what occupations are missing from the training at the academy?

3. Miss Templeton assures Elimina that there are opportunities available if “you work hard” (pg. 41). How is this statement ironic when you think back to the messages that are given to the youth of the Mainland? For what purpose are youth being given two opposing messages? How would you feel if you were in a similar situation?

CHAPTER 5

1. Louis believes that the role of Red Coat is assigned to someone who is “special” (pg. 47). However, being a Red Coat polarizes the students at the academy. Why might the administration of the school choose to do such a thing?

2. From a young age, children at the academies are conditioned to work hard in a variety of employment roles that will prepare a future designed to reduce their debt over many decades. They are also taught that “if Gutter folks really want to get Redemption Freedom, knowing Mainland rules and following them is key” (pg. 49). How did Louis’s upbringing reinforce this indoctrination? Explain who stands to benefit the most from these academies and their “work hard” and “follow the rules” programming.

3. Elimina has an opportunity at the end of this chapter to get on the “good side” with Louis by reporting that she saw Josephine run to the Fieldhouse after curfew. Why do you think that she chooses not to inform him of this transgression? What might Elimina realize about the power that comes with the role of Red Coat that has been imposed on her?
4. Consider Elimina’s perception that she is unique and different from the other students. What perception of Gutter people might she have that makes her want to believe this? What misinformation has she had that has framed her thinking? Why is it important to build context and understanding before drawing conclusions?

CHAPTER 6

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Elimina meets Ida, who helps her with her hair. Why do you think Elimina has never done her hair before? Why is she self-conscious about her hair? What examples of Black hair do you think that Elimina had in her life before the academy? How did this frame her thinking about her hair? Extension: Watch the short film titled *Hair Love*. What impact does representation of all types of hair have? Consider what actions you can take to increase representation in your social media.

2. Elimina is welcomed into Ida Mason’s quarters with the words “You’re okay. You’re safe here” (pg. 53). Why is this reassurance exactly what Elimina needs? What makes Elimina feel safe in that space? What actions can schools and other public places take to make spaces truly safe? How would they know that they are successful in doing so?

3. Despite all of the systemic barriers that Ida faces with her debt toward Redemption Freedom, what keeps her motivated and focused? What does resilience mean? What criteria defines a resilient person? Use evidence from the novel to show Ida’s resilience.

4. Considering that Elimina herself is a Gutter child, why do you think that Ida is the first Gutter woman that Elimina has ever met and spoken to? How do you think her upbringing has impacted Elimina’s perception of Gutter people? Of herself? Extension: What might Elimina need to do to change this narrative?

5. Why would the Capedown museum charge Elimina and her mother “twice the price” (pg. 56) to visit during the day while other kids were at school? How is this an example of systemic racism?
6. Elimina muses that “Mainlanders get up-in-arms angry when things don’t go their way. And when they complain loud enough, the Mainland government usually does something about it” (pg. 57). Discuss how this description lines up with the definitions of privilege and power. In what ways are Mainland privilege and power revealed in this chapter? Extension: As an activist, how could a Mainlander use their privilege and power to affect change?

7. The narrative of the colonizer only provides a narrow perspective of history, and the voices of the colonized are reduced or erased. Ida warns Elimina not to “believe what you read in those books” when it comes to history, because the information in the books only tells one side of the story (pg. 58). What is the definition of bias? Based on what you already know about the Mainland and the Gutter, what biases might exist that Ida is warning Elimina about? Extension: Review a non-fiction resource that you have in your home or at school. Whose narrative is missing? Fill in the gaps through your own research.

CHAPTER 7

1. What does Rowan mean when he says, “Being a Red Coat has advantages, Elimina . . . But the real advantage is knowing when and how to use it” (pg. 63)? In what ways can this power be used for good?

2. Why is Violet so opposed to Elimina staying at their meeting in the Fieldhouse? What might she fear? What consequences could come from authorities discovering these meetings? What benefits come from their meetings that might explain why they take such a risk?

3. On page 65, the group reads from a poetry book. What impact does its words have on them? Why would they risk getting caught reading from this book? Does poetry impact you in the same way? Extension: Remember that song lyrics are poetry put to music! Explore how music by Black artists has been used throughout the 1980s and 90s to address social justice issues, including anti-Black racism.

4. Frederick Douglass said, “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.” Research who Frederick Douglass was. What do you think he meant by this
statement? How might reading from the poetry book help the group from the academy navigate their lives?

5. In this chapter, we learn more about how each student in the Fieldhouse came to be at Livingstone Academy. Record the circumstances for each of the following characters:

• Rowan
• Violet
• Josephine
• David

6. On page 69, Josephine reveals a truth about the relationship between herself and David. Why would it be so important to keep it a secret? Why would the school forbid those relationships? Would you say that community is important to this group? How might the concept of family shift within this group? Use specific examples to justify your answer. Extension: How does Ida’s words “we don’t have to be family to be family . . . Wherever we are, we find family” (pg. 61) support or contradict your answer.

7. In this chapter, Elimina covers up her unmarked hand when she is with the other Gutter children. Reflect on her feelings about her marked hand in Chapter 3. What about her changing perception of Gutter people might change her actions? What more does she now know? How has this context changed her thinking?

CHAPTER 8

1. Elimina recalls going to the beach outside of Capedown with her mother (pg. 74). There, she sees a Gutter man and experiences both curiosity and fear. How do the actions and words of her mother, the man and Elimina reveal the extent to which the Mainland reinforces racism? Do you think that Elimina’s mother took action to protect her? If so, what might the lived experience of Elimina’s mother make her miss in her actions? How was this event traumatic for Elimina? How would it contribute to her self-worth and her perception of Gutter people?
2. There is discussion in this chapter about Ida and what she has endured and continues to endure to help get her family out of debt. Summarize the difficult choices Ida has had to make in order to prioritize the well-being of her family over “living forward” (pg. 76). Even though Ida says, “I got it real good here” when she recounts her life (pg. 55), how have the Mainlander systems “trapped” (pg. 77) Ida at the academy into valuing purpose over happiness (pg. 61)?

3. Rowan recalls the day when he left the Gutter at age seven, a few weeks after his father disappeared. Rowan and his family are counting on his success as a fighter to help pay down their collective debt. While Rowan and Elimina may be on similar tracks toward Redemption Freedom, how will the debt system imposed by the Mainlanders be a greater challenge for Rowan?

CHAPTER 9

1. Murray Smith recalls that “his five years in the Gutter with the meanest father on the planet made him brave and untouchable, and that it’s his purpose in life to create that same kind of inner strength in others” (pg. 82). While Murray might be protecting himself from physical and mental pain, his actions cause harm to others. How could he preserve the well-being of both himself and others more effectively? What supports are unavailable to Murray? What impact has this had on his current thinking?

2. In this chapter, Elimina finds herself barking along with the rest of the academy students even though she didn’t want to. How did Elimina give in to peer pressure? What other choices could she have made? Define bystander, upstander, ally and accomplice. What are the differences between each? Which stance leads to real change?

CHAPTER 10

1. At age sixty, Albert Cootes will earn his “honour” as the ninth Livingstone graduate to gain Redemption Freedom—after forty years of work to pay off his debt. David believes that the merits of being a Livingstone graduate along with loving the work you do will ease the suffering of a lifetime of servitude.
Consider the last poem they read together about “all the things that can happen when you wait too long for a dream—a stench, a heaviness, an explosion” (pg. 97). What mindset is required in order to endure the hardships that come with the imposed debt? What might happen to a person over time if their debt is not paid off as fast as possible?

2. What does Violet mean when she says, “Whether Josephine wants to admit it or not, it’s different for us” (pg. 94)? Who is Violet referring to when she says “us”? What additional barriers exist for anyone who is in Violet’s position?

3. What is “the Hill”? What does the Hill represent to the students? Why might Elimina think it is “too impossible to be real” (pg. 97)? Explain.

4. Fear and uncertainty of the unknown dominate this chapter. What would you argue are the students most afraid of? Justify your response with references to the text.

CHAPTER 11

In this chapter, there is the introduction of the Hill, which is viewed by many of the Gutter children as idyllic and desirable. Mr. and Mrs. Freeman are also introduced to the reader. Consider discussing the symbolism of their name. Connections can be made in regards to what they represent in society, colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade.

1. What is the “employer fair”? As a student, you may have attended a career fair before, or you might know someone who has attended a “job fair.” How is this “employer fair” in the novel completely unlike your experiences? What is its true purpose? How does the promise of a “good position” further set up the students to accept a lifetime of oppression that is imposed upon them?

2. When arriving at the employer fair, there is a billboard that says “Welcome to the Site of the Battle of Haven where Mainland Believers defeated Gutter Betrayers” (pg. 101). Is it a coincidence that the fair occurs here? What underlying message would this send to Mainlanders? To Gutter people?
3. In this chapter, Mr. Gregors proclaims that “everyone wins” at the employer fair. Based on your growing understanding of what the employer fair means to Gutter people, would you agree with this statement? Share your thoughts on another character’s perspective on Mr. Gregors’s statement.

4. The employer fair involves many levels of money exchanges and agreements in the process, including the role of the debt manager, headmaster and the hiring deposit. Explain this system that revolves around the employer fair in as much detail as possible. How is this system set up to make Redemption Freedom more unattainable for Gutter people?

5. What are the qualities/attributes that are used to identify Gutter people? How might these differ from the qualities that you perceive of yourself? What is the difference? How are the qualities valued by the Mainlanders associated with capitalism? With slavery? OR How can racist and/or stereotypical perspectives impact the value placed on people?

6. Mabel and Harold Freeman are from “the Hill” and are able to acquire David for a significant amount of money. While they agree to pay the commission to Mr. Gregors, they state that “it’s [David’s] debt that is of utmost importance” (pg. 112). What do you think the Freemans meant by this? How was the acquisition for David different from that of the other students?

7. Mr. Gregors tries to create a package deal for both Violet and David with the Freemans. However, they decline, saying it would not be in Violet’s best interest. Why would that be the case? Why was Violet’s contract with the Jung brothers and the travel company also not in her best interest?

CHAPTER 12
In this chapter, dogs are used to track and hunt down Josephine. Consider discussing how dogs have historically been used to intimidate, track and hunt down Black people. Further discussion could include the author’s choice to use dogs and their symbolism throughout the novel.
1. While Mr. Gregors wants to find Josephine as soon as possible, he directs the guards to use the dogs to deter any student who may think of running away. Why would Mr. Gregors be more interested in setting an example than being concerned for the health and welfare of his students? What does he stand to lose? What would motivate a student to run away? Where could they go?

2. What is the escape plan that was developed for Josephine? Do you think it will be successful? Why or why not? Predict what you think will happen to Josephine.

3. Once Elimina realizes the scope of the entire plot for Josephine’s escape, she concludes that her friends betrayed her. However, Rowan points out an even bigger betrayal when he reminds her of Mr. Gregors’s true intentions (pg. 127). What does Elimina realize about Mr. Gregors as a result of this exchange with Rowan?

CHAPTER 13

1. Rather than being concerned for Josephine’s safety, what two things are Mr. Gregors concerned about? What does his physical appearance along with his words and actions reveal about his character and position as headmaster of the academy? Elimina tries to calm Mr. Gregors by pointing out the “good money” that was made at the employer fair the day before (pg. 133). How does Mr. Gregors use money to punish Elimina for what happened?

2. Elimina’s role as a Red Coat is taken away from her by Mr. Gregors. Why? Why isn’t Elimina relieved to be rid of it? What does Elimina also lose besides the status of a Red Coat? In Chapter 12, Rowan said that the red coat was given to Elimina by Mr. Gregors to keep Elimina apart from the other students (pg. 127). What might Elimina gain from this loss?

3. Earlier in the novel, Elimina saw herself as different from the other Gutter children. However, in this chapter, Elimina is no longer sure that she can say this (pg. 132). What has changed in Elimina’s perception of self? What stereotypes of Gutter people does she no longer have? What new information does she have about Gutter people? What has caused her to gain this new mental framework?
CHAPTER 14
In this chapter, Ida shares an oral story with Elimina that centres on colonization. This story is engaging and also tells Elimina history and facts that will shape her perspective. Oral traditions are strong within African and Caribbean cultures and are used to inform, educate and even warn listeners. Consider engaging in discussion around the beauty and history of oral traditions with students.

For more information, research publications on the topic:

- South African History Online: Oral tradition and Indigenous Knowledge
- From Africa to Reggae: The Anansi Collection

1. Elimina shares her experience of the Freemans and her perspective of the Hill with Ida when she returns to the academy. Elimina notices that Ida does not share her enthusiasm about the Hill. What new perspective do we gain about the Hill from Ida? What might inform Ida’s perspective?

2. In this chapter, Ida shares an oral story that has been passed down to her and encourages Elimina to pass it down to her children (pgs. 138–141). What are some oral stories and traditions that have been carried through your family? Why are stories important? What history do they tell?

3. Ida shares with Elimina the narrative of the Olo and the Sossi people. Who might the Olo people represent? Who might the Sossi people represent? Connect this story to the real history of colonization of African countries and/or Caribbean nations. What new perspective do you have?

4. What connections can you make between Langston Hughes’s poem “Harlem” and the following statement by Ida: “Truth is, I don’t ache for a child the way some do. And I don’t ache for a man. I suppose I’ve got enough to worry about that those things don’t seem so interesting to me” (pg. 137).

5. Colonization is when land is invaded, those indigenous to the land are dispossessed, enslaved and/or controlled and the resources of the land are taken over by the colonizer. Research the history of colonization in African countries and/or Caribbean nations and identify the short- and long-term impacts of colonization. Extension: The Sossi word *joda* means “one who devours like fire” (pg. 140). Make connections to the word *joda* and the act of colonization.
6. What do you think Ida meant when she said, “Olo know how to devour not just the land, but who we are [...] that’s the slow death you don’t see coming, the hardest one to fight. The one that comes for your mind” (pg. 141). Make connections to systemic racism and how it plays out in society.

7. Ida is able to show Elimina that even though she was told that her birth mother volunteered her for the project, she had no choice but to give her up. How does this realization change Elimina’s perspective? How does it change or challenge your perspective of systemic oppression?

8. The chapter ends with both Ida and Elimina saying, “For the greatness of the country” to each other (pg. 143). Who is the country really becoming “great” for? Who benefits? Who has to make a sacrifice? Extension: How does this connect to the difference between equity and equality?

CHAPTER 15

This chapter discusses the impact of racism and the feelings experienced by the victim. Some pre-learning around anti-Black racism, systemic oppression, systemic racism and white supremacy would be helpful in ensuring strong connections when answering and unpacking the questions below. It is equally important to recognize that unpacking this chapter will resonate with and potentially generate emotional responses from Black and racialized students who have experienced racism. Demonstrate support for any student who shares a personal account of racism, to ensure that they feel valued, validated and affirmed.

1. Elimina recounts a time when she won the spelling bee. Elimina recalls that the audience didn’t cheer for her and that she understood that everyone was really hoping that she would lose (pg. 150). Franklin Leonard said, “When you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.” How does this quotation relate to Elimina’s experience?

2. After Elimina’s victory, the focus of attention was centred on the Mainlander who lost. The local news reported, “Local Boy Chokes in Face-off with Gutter Child” (pg. 150). What was the bias of the news reporter? What role does bias play in the media? How can this inform opinions and perspectives in society?
3. Elimina says to Rowan, “They want to win. But what do they lose if they don't—their pride, their confidence? That's nothing. You're strong because you have to be. You've got no choice. Everything rides on you winning each match. Use that” (pg. 151). How can you connect this statement to the demonstrated systemic oppression and white supremacy in Capedown?

4. Do you agree when Elimina tells Rowan to use his anger to combat the odds being against him at the fights? Why might Elimina and Rowan feel that they have no power in their lives? Why might they feel justified in using anger and fighting to address issues?

**CHAPTER 16**

1. When Elimina looks at the eight portraits in the “Hall of Heroes” of those who achieved Redemption Freedom, she hopes to add her name to the list one day (pg. 153). What do you notice about this list? What is the significance of the list? *Extension:* In knowing that very few people achieve Redemption Freedom, how does Elimina still show perseverance and resilience?

2. How is mail delivered and received at Livingstone Academy? Examine the various laws in place regarding the mail system on page 155. Why is there such a level of control? How have people found a way around the control measures? When has the mail been monitored, controlled and even censored in our past and current society. Who might these measures benefit? Oppress?

3. Rowan is feeling the “weight” of the role he has been cast in by society in this chapter. Connect Rowan’s oppression to the messages in Langston Hughes’s poem “Harlem.”

4. Rowan shares a story of a Gutter boxer who gained his Redemption Freedom in five years only to die at age twenty-three (pg. 156). Elimina shakes her head at “the cruelty of working so hard to get free only to die before you can really enjoy it” (pg. 156). What is the cost and risk of Rowan’s Redemption Freedom? Research the life of an individual who self-identifies as Black (African, Caribbean, North American, etc.). Make connections to the risks and sacrifices they, or someone in their family, have made to attain a degree of freedom in their life.
5. When Elimina and Rowan dream of life on the Hill, they picture “fancy shops and restaurants,” “colourful dresses,” “a coat or a car or a house,” parties, customers and “all the money” to spend (pgs. 156–157). In many ways, “the Hill” pursues a lifestyle similar to that of the Mainland. Compare their vision of the Hill to Bob Marley’s idea that “[t]he greatness of a man is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively.”

6. Experiences of racism have short- and long-term impacts on victims of its acts. Identify and reflect on the many feelings the author describes and/or infers when Rowan and Elimina experience racism. Consider how you may have been complicit in racism and what actions you will take going forward to directly interrupt racist acts.

7. Elimina sings a song her mother sang to her: “*Come cool waters of paradise. Come find me in the waters of paradise.*” What do you think is the meaning of this song? What emotions does it evoke? Research African American spirituals and consider how the lyrics were used to bring hope, provide direction to freedom and convey messages among slaves. How does hope, in spite of circumstances, reflect the resilience of Gutter people?

**CHAPTER 17**

1. In response to Elimina’s pregnancy, Mr. Gregors reinforces to Elimina that her ability to return to work as soon as possible is what will keep the Freemans interested in her. Mr. Gregors talks of a delay he can try with legal paperwork to strengthen the “deal” with the Freemans and says he will “encourage the Freemans to wait” (pg. 164). He also reassures Elimina that he can reduce her debt “if the child is healthy” (pg. 164). Even though Mr. Gregors has a duty to enforce the “rules and laws for these situations,” he clearly has the power to negotiate Elimina’s debt and the transaction with the Freemans. How do you think the Freemans would react if they knew about Elimina’s pregnancy and Mr. Gregors’s attitude toward their planned transaction?

2. What is the likely fate of Elimina’s child? Provide evidence from the text to support your position.
3. Consider what you know of how debt is incurred in this novel. How will Elimina's pregnancy impact her attainment of Redemption Freedom? What decisions might she have to make in the name of achieving Redemption Freedom? *Extension:* How does this connect to systems of oppression and their impact on those without power?

**PART 2: RIVERSIDE**

**CHAPTER 18**

Throughout this chapter, Miss Charlotte makes a number of comments that would be considered *microaggressions.* When unpacking this chapter, defining the term and identifying its impact will help students to understand the significance of microaggressions and the power of words.

1. Deconstruct the connotation of the words used in “Miss Charlotte’s Home for Troubled Girls.” What message does it send to the community? To those who are housed within Miss Charlotte’s?

2. On page 168, Elimina and the reader are introduced to Tilly and Isobel. When introducing themselves, Tilly and Isobel are very clear about their names. Why are names so important? Why do you think it is important to Tilly and Isobel especially?

3. Elimina recalls how the newspaper portrayed the Gutter when she lived in Capedown (pgs. 170–171). How is the media used to reinforce racist perceptions of Gutter people? *Extension:* Make present-day connections. Consider what actions you can take going forward to directly interrupt racist characterizations in the media.

4. Miss Charlotte sees herself as a nice and good person and someone who is kind to Gutter people, but she still upholds racist ideas and is racist in her behaviours. What is the difference between not racist and anti-racist?
5. Lulabelle reacts very strongly when she sees Elimina, and calls her “Lima Jenkins Sinclair” and says, “[Y]ou are home” (pg. 177). What are your predictions regarding what Lulabelle means and who Elimina really is?

6. This chapter describes the hyper-surveillance of Gutter people in the city that is closest to the Gutter. What does this infer about Gutter people in general? What evidence do you know that would say that this is not true?

7. Miss Charlotte proclaims that Riverside “is one of the safest cities on the Mainland” (in spite of its proximity to the Gutter) and that she’s “taken great comfort in the fact that the Mainland Guards outnumber the civilians” (pg. 171). Who does Miss Charlotte need to feel safe from? Is this perception of safety warranted? Do you think everyone in Riverside feels equally as safe? Give evidence to support your answer. Extension: Research data and statistics on discipline, suspension and/or incarceration rates by race. How does hyper-surveillance of Black individuals play a role in outcomes?

8. Elimina reflects on her new proximity to the Gutter and how she now feels that the “Gutter is a magnet, a powerful force, that can pull people away from their dreams” (pg. 171). Do you think that this is really the case? Do you think that it is the Gutter or systemic racism/oppression that Elimina is referring to? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

CHAPTER 19
The topics in this chapter give the opportunity for the reader to unpack the concept of *post-colonial paternalism* and the many policies and procedures that were ostensibly established for “the greatness of the country” but were really to benefit the Mainlanders at the expense of Gutter people. Connections to real-life systems of oppression can also be made.

1. Tilly states, “I don’t trust Mainlanders with loaded guns. Especially when it’s dark” (pg. 179). Thinking back to Miss Charlotte’s feeling of safety in the previous chapter, what about Tilly’s lived experience would inform her difference of opinion? How does Tilly’s statement speak to the uncontested power of the Mainland Guards when it comes to Gutter people? Extension: Research a
historical or present-day human rights issue related to police brutality. What connections can you make? What actions can you take to address this issue in your community?

2. “They think they can get somewhere better if they can just get past the wall. Truth is, they’re dead as soon as they try” (pg. 179). What names do various groups of people give the river that runs alongside the Gutter? How do the different names reflect the lived experiences and perspectives of each group?

3. What is the story about how Isobel came to the Mainland? How was her family received as immigrants/refugees to a new land? What is revealed about how Mainlanders position themselves in the world when Tilly and Elimina don’t even know about Isobel’s homeland?

4. What arrangement has been made for Isobel and her baby? Why is Tilly angry about this arrangement?

5. Tilly recalls a bird that lives in the Gutter, the gavanje bird, which is red like blood, perches on the walls and never leaves. What could this bird be symbolizing for the girls and for the people of the Gutter?

6. Why would Tilly warn Elimina not to get “too attached” to her baby (pg. 186)? What might she be alluding to?

CHAPTER 20

1. What is misleading about the words “Our Home, Our Land” written on the map of the Mainland? Are there similar claims upheld in colonist societies today? Why might this message be disenfranchising to some and inspiring to others? Extension: Consider the national anthem of colonized nations (e.g., Canada). What kind of words are used to create and/or reinforce a sense of “nation”?

2. Why might Miss Charlotte have reason to be concerned with Elimina’s well-being aside from potential complications with her pregnancy? What could she stand to gain from both Elimina and the baby remaining in optimal health?
3. Why would Miss Charlotte say, “[T]hat’s enough for now,” when Elimina is listening to her baby’s heartbeat (pg. 191)? How do Miss Charlotte’s actions reinforce Tilly’s warning to not get “too attached” in the previous chapter?

4. Duncan states, “Can’t remove these kinds of scars, Elimina. They can only change how they look” (pg. 192). What does he mean by this? What might Elimina have to accept about herself? Why is this hard for Elimina to accept?

5. Duncan dances with Elimina to a song that will “heal your soul if you let it” (pg. 193). What is the significance of the song to Elimina’s current state? How has music played a role in addressing human and civil rights throughout history?

CHAPTER 21
Due to systemic racism and as a result of intergenerational oppression, there is an overrepresentation of Black youth in the Ontario child welfare system. It is not uncommon for Black children to be placed with white families. Additionally, within the Black community, families continue to make challenging decisions to better the outcomes of future generations. In education, it is not uncommon for families to send children to live with extended family members with the goal of providing a better educational opportunity that will lead to greater choice and future opportunities (i.e., post-secondary education, career choice, etc.). The different ways in which Black youth are displaced from their homes, whether intentionally or unintentionally, can be likened to the experiences and outcomes of the Gutter Enhancement Project (pgs. 198–202).

For more information:

- **Toronto Star article:** “Why Are So Many Black Children in Foster and Group Homes?” (2014)

1. When Lulabelle recognizes Elimina as “Lima,” she says, “I’m sorry for what I’ve done. I’m sorry every day . . . Took my own kind and gave them away” (pg. 197). Duncan adds, “That’s how me and Momma ended up on this
side of the bridge with these scars” (pg. 198). What is haunting them? What were the circumstances surrounding Duncan and Lulabelle’s involvement in Elimina’s birth? What role did they both play?

2. What was Rosalind trying to do on the day that Elimina was born? What was offered to the women for participating in the project? Why did Rosalind change her mind?

3. What happened to the other project children while they were in the care of Mainlanders? Why would there have been no action to protect the children more by the Mainland government?

4. The Hill Coalition called the project “unjust and inhumane” (pg. 201). The government’s response to the pressures from the Hill was to pull all remaining children from their homes on their tenth birthday and return them to the Gutter. How could a return to the Gutter further impact the well-being of the project children? What have they lost as far as connections to their community are concerned? Why would the Network have “had thoughts” about the children being released to the Hill (pg. 202)? What was the outcome of this “dilemma”? Comment on the roles and responsibilities that those in power had on the well-being of the children.

5. Why do you think Elimina was spared? Why is she the only living project case left? Reflect on the different ways in which her mother protected her.

**CHAPTER 22**

1. What is prejudice or prejudgment? Recall in Chapter 8 when Elimina remembers she and her mother encountered a Gutter man at the beach (pgs. 74–75). Consider also the Gutter man in this chapter who drops off Violet at “Miss Charlotte’s Home for Troubled Girls” and drives away quickly. Discuss how their reactions to the situations they are in align with the experiences of those who are prejudged because of their race? What is the impact of prejudgment on Gutter people? Extension: Draw a mind map and make connections to the many ways prejudgments can impact a person’s life. What can you do as an activist to combat prejudgments?
2. In this chapter, Elimina is reunited with Violet. With her, Elimina finally processes how Duncan and Lulabelle achieved their Redemption Freedom by participating in the Gutter Enhancement Project. On page 203, Elimina says to Duncan, “How can you live with yourselves?” What has Elimina come to terms with regarding her past? How might this information help to form both her present and future relationships with those around her?

3. Violet says to Elimina, “My stories are not worth telling” (pg. 207). Why would Violet feel that her story is not worth telling? Who/what has told her this?

4. “I want a story where a Gutter girl wins, where things turn out well, like they do for Mainlanders” is a narrative that Violet wants told (pg. 207). What is the impact of the media on the stories that we learn about and hear in regard to the Black community? Extension: Research and/or view online a story of a member of the Black community that is not widely known.

CHAPTER 23

1. The lifestyle of the Mainland Guards on weekends demonstrates that their actions go unchallenged no matter how deplorable their behaviour is. Why are they allowed to act in this way? Why does a double standard exist where Gutter people would be punished if they acted the way Mainland Guards do? Extension: Explore the “double standard” that exists in the way the police and security personnel responded to the Black Lives Matter activists in the spring and summer of 2020 versus the riot on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021, in the United States.

2. Even after Violet acted with cruelty at times to Elimina at Livingstone, Elimina provides Violet with kindness by throwing her a birthday party. How does Violet react? What does her reactions reveal about her past experiences? What power does kindness have on people?

3. Reading literature provides its audience with perspective. Consider the game shows that are described in this chapter. After reading the reactions to shows where entire houses are given to contestants, what further perspectives have you gained from how wealth is spread on the Mainland? Is wealth distributed in a similar way in our society? Explain.
4. How does this evening impact the four girls involved? What new talents were shown by each girl? What new kinds of relationships have been formed? How could these relationships help strengthen the characters in the novel? Compare and contrast the talents shown in each girl to the way in which she would be described by a Mainlander? Extension: In what ways has capitalism played a role in how Gutter people are valued in society? How does this provide a single story or narrative for Gutter people? What diversity are Mainlanders missing as a result of this?

CHAPTER 24

1. The girls at Miss Charlotte’s are troubled in this chapter with what lies ahead for both themselves and their babies. What happened to Sarah, the girl who was there before Elimina arrived, when she asked to keep her baby?

2. What did Tilly learn about what not to say to Mainlanders? What plan does Tilly have to keep her baby? What is dangerous about this plan and what Tilly reveals when she says Mainlanders will “add a fine to my debt if I don’t deliver a baby for them” (pg. 218). Why would Mainlanders add more debt in this scenario?

3. Tilly tells Elimina, “It’s the baby that I’m thinking about” (pg. 217). What does Tilly mean by this statement? Define the word paternalism. In what ways have Mainlanders created a paternalistic society for Gutter people?

4. We learn that Isobel has been entrapped in the role of surrogate mother for a Healer couple. What does Tilly predict will happen to fourteen-year-old Isobel and the baby? Evaluate how privilege and power play out in the relationship between Isobel and the Healers. How did the Healers take advantage of Tilly’s innocence and status? How have they and how will they betray her trust? Why would people who call themselves “healers” act in this way?

CHAPTER 25

1. Why would the doctor want the other girls to wait outside while Tilly gives birth even though Tilly wants them there with her? Why would Miss Charlotte emphasize that the Mainland Guards will be watching them?
2. On page 223, a Mainland woman arrives in a grey car and a guard asks her, “You delivering?” What is the woman there to do? Comment on the way in which the guards handle the situation in relation to the words and actions of Doc Luca and Miss Charlotte.

3. When Tilly delivers, she asks to hold her baby and is denied by Miss Charlotte and Doc Luca. Why won’t they let Tilly hold the baby? Is it fair for them to prevent Tilly from holding her baby? What long-term impact could these actions have on the baby and on Tilly? Extension: How does the abduction of the baby echo the practices of slave owners in America? How will this abduction fuel the cycle of intergenerational trauma?

4. Where do you think the Mainland Guards take the baby? Where might they be taking Tilly? Given the way in which Mainland law works, what consequences might Tilly face for her actions?

CHAPTER 26

1. Duncan shares with Elimina the potential fallout for Tilly due to her actions (pg. 229). He then says that Tilly is a “tough girl.” What characteristics make her tough? Do you think that Tilly is tough inherently or due to the life and choices she’s given? Is it fair that Tilly has to be tough?

2. What is Elimina’s plan in order to keep her baby and have a family? What risk is she taking in sending a letter to the Freemans? Do you think they will help? Why doesn’t Duncan think her plan will work? What barriers are in place to prevent her from achieving this goal? What alternative does Duncan propose so that she can keep her baby? How are both plans dangerous for Elimina, the baby, Lulabelle and Duncan?

3. Compare and contrast the following two statements from this chapter, and consider what community, family and belonging might mean in the context of the novel:

   - Elimina: “What if greatness only happens when we’re together, when we don’t let them pull us apart?” (pg. 232)
• Duncan: “Where we are is where we belong.” (pg. 231)

4. Duncan tells Elimina, “You got to be sure on that. Because debt, it can hurt just like a wound” (pg. 231). What do you think debt represents? In what ways can this hurt just like or more than a wound?

5. Duncan advises Elimina that “one choice can eat away at everything that comes after. It can swallow you whole” (pg. 232). When people are faced with impossible choices day after day because of systemic barriers, it will impact a person's life. What decision did Duncan make that he now has to live with every day? What barriers were in place to limit his choices for a better outcome?

CHAPTER 27

1. Besides what she tells the girls, why might Miss Charlotte choose not to have any more girls arrive while Violet and Elimina are there? From Miss Charlotte’s perspective, why is it important to keep them isolated? When Miss Charlotte tells the girls to trust her, should they believe her?

2. Elimina says, “Gutter folks are always saying goodbye, Miss Charlotte. You just get used to it eventually,” even though it’s not true for her (pg. 235). Why are Gutter people always saying goodbye? Why is this only the experience for Gutter people? How do you think that this contributes to the concepts of family and community among Gutter people? Give an example from the novel to support your answer.

3. “Gutter life requires us to make impossible decisions,” Elimina says (pg. 237). How is this statement true for Tilly, Isobel, Duncan and Elimina? Is Miss Charlotte required to make any impossible decisions?

4. In this chapter, Miss Charlotte shares her belief that the situation the girls (and other Gutter people) are in is because of bad decisions, distractions, stubbornness and individual failings. Is this the case? What perspective/reality is Miss Charlotte missing?
CHAPTER 28

In this chapter, we learn that Violet was exploited by human traffickers when she left Livingstone Academy. According to Public Safety Canada, “Human trafficking, which includes sexual exploitation and forced labour, is a heinous crime, with serious impacts on victims and survivors, their families, communities and society as a whole.” In 2018, Statistics Canada reported that 28 percent of all trafficking victims in Canada are under the age of eighteen. Often, young people are lured into human trafficking when they are seeking better lives, and traffickers take advantage of their vulnerability. Sadly, many people who are survivors of human trafficking are treated as participants rather than as victims. Victims, like Violet, are left with scars, trauma and shame, and often do not get access to support to help them heal.

Although arming students with education and awareness is one of the best tools to combat human trafficking, be aware that this chapter may evoke emotional responses from students if Violet’s story resonates with them. Be prepared to provide additional support and resources to students accordingly. Teachers should research this topic to learn more about human trafficking as it applies both to race and their geographic location.

1. Violet finally reveals what happened to her after she left Livingstone Academy. How was she deceived by both the Jungs and Jameson Wells? Why does Violet feel ashamed?

2. What becomes of Violet’s employment status? What will become of her baby?

3. What difficult decisions did Violet make in the name of attaining Redemption Freedom? How was she taken advantage of? Violet says to Elimina that “There are no shortcuts for Gutter girls. Only dead ends.” Is it fair that Violet can’t take actions to reduce her Redemption Freedom? Extension: Research the cycle of oppression. In what ways did Violet try to break the cycle of oppression for herself? In what ways was she pushed back into the cycle of oppression?
CHAPTER 29

1. What can you piece together from this chapter to determine the plan that Elimina and Violet have for when Elimina goes into labour? Include the details that will throw off Miss Charlotte when she tries to determine where Elimina escaped to.

2. Why are Duncan and Lulabelle not concerned about Elimina being followed after she re-enters the Gutter? Why might someone come looking for Elimina and the baby down the line?

3. Why is it necessary for Duncan to brand the X onto both hands of the baby and create a scar for Elimina on her left hand?

4. Despite the history between Elimina and Duncan and Lulabelle, Elimina chooses to name her son after Duncan. Why do you think Elimina made this choice? What might be the significance of this choice?

PART 3: THE GUTTER

CHAPTER 30

1. In this chapter, Duncan advises Elimina to “[p]retend like your body is broken, like no employer on the Mainland would want you” when she crosses the bridge (pg. 253). Why would she need to act this way to gain access? What does this say about the lack of care and value for those with disabilities? Extension: Define the word intersectionality. Discuss the impact of the intersectionality of race and ability in your society.

2. Consider the simile “the red gates swing open like a hungry mouth” (pg. 254). Consider your growing understanding of systemic oppression. How might this quote connect to systemic oppression?

3. Upon passing through the gates and providing the documentation, Elimina Madeleine Dubois uses her birth name, Lima Jenkins Sinclair. With a change in name comes a change in identity. What does Elimina leave behind as she changes from her colonial name? What does she move forward with as Lima?
4. Who is Geneva? How does she convince the guards to have Lima come with her and bypass processing? Why might she be angry that Lima and DJ are now in the Gutter?

CHAPTER 31

1. Why would Shirley tell Lima that she’s “ruined everything” (pg. 264)? What impact does the arrival of DJ and Lima have on the family?

2. In this chapter, Geneva and Shirley argue over Roger’s job at the factory. Geneva wants Roger to continue working at the factory, and Shirley would like Roger to quit. What is the reason for each of their perspectives? On page 267, Shirley states, “Since this whole Gutter System nonsense began, there have been nine factory workers to get Redemption Freedom. Nine.” Why is it so difficult for Gutter people to get out of this debt? Do you think that the organizers of this system truly want Gutter people to achieve Redemption Freedom? Justify your answer.

3. The men who work in the factory face many dangers to their health, and yet they still report for work every day. Are there jobs in our world where people sacrifice their health and safety? Do all jobs have laws to protect the workers from these risks? Do some research to connect back to this novel. What do these sacrifices reveal about society and employment standards?

4. What are “Subsidy Cases” (pg. 269)? Why would this “support” be a last resort for people to access? Why is it stigmatized by Geneva and others? Should it be stigmatized? Explain.

5. Up to this point in the novel, Lima continually feels as though she doesn’t belong. On page 261, Lima acknowledges that she finally looks like she belongs. Why do you think that Lima has such a strong desire to belong? What are the different ways in which she didn’t feel like she belonged? What are the different ways in which she felt as though she belonged? Give examples from the book. Extension: How can we create welcoming spaces for everyone?
CHAPTER 32

The topics in this chapter provide an opportunity for students to unpack the concepts of generational wealth, systemic oppression and systemic racism. This chapter can help the reader to see the short- and long-term impacts of systems of oppression and identify its true role on individual outcomes. The reader has the opportunity to better understand that systems of oppression and systemic racism put the onus, responsibility and failure on the individual and not the system that sets them up to fail. It is also helpful at this point to affirm identity by identifying the resilience, perseverance and work ethic of the Gutter people.

1. Lima learns from Elsa May, Marley, Marnie and Cecily what impact her arrival in the Gutter has had on Geneva and the Jackson family. Summarize the “plan” that Geneva had for her family and how Lima and DJ have forced it to change.

2. Mainland law makes it so that a man cannot get Redemption Freedom until all of his biological children along with their mothers are taken care of first. How does this law further the cycle of oppression?

3. In this chapter, Elsa May describes Geneva’s thinking and says, “She believed she could get out of here if she worked hard enough.” Elsa May then goes on to say that she “knew all along that her plan was doomed to fail.” Is Elsa May right in what she says? Give evidence from the novel to support your answer. Extension: Research and learn about systemic oppression and systemic racism. Does the information you have gained change the perspective of your original answer?

CHAPTER 33

Systemic oppression, systemic racism and mental health are strongly intertwined and interconnected. For more information and background, please see the following links:

- Promoting Health Equity: Mental Health of Black Canadians Fund
- Racial Discrimination and Mental Health in Racialized and Aboriginal Communities
1. How does Geneva use her clearance as a medic to help Violet? What does she risk in doing so?

2. In this chapter, Violet’s mental health is in crisis and ultimately leads to her death by suicide. What evidence in the previous chapters indicates that Violet is in distress (e.g., pg. 244)? Does it make sense to send guards to “move on her” when she is in distress (pg. 285)? How should the guards have responded to Violet’s actions? Extension: Research and discuss how wellness checks for mental health and well-being have led to similar tragic outcomes for Black people.

CHAPTER 34

1. Lima ponders the meaning of the word rest on page 289. What do you think rest means to Lima? Why can’t she feel or be rested? How does this society build in systems to prevent her from resting? Discuss the intentionality of a system that forces Gutter people into labour as a means to achieve Redemption Freedom.

2. In this chapter, Lima starts to work in the Lower End of the Gutter. How might this work be different than attaining a job on the Mainland?

CHAPTER 35

1. What is the role of a “Runner”? How will this role benefit both Lima and others in the Gutter community? Why is this work different from what she would have been tasked to do at the academy?

2. During the colonization of Sossi territory, people were displaced. While some of the Sossi people formed the Hill community, the rest of the Sossi people were moved to the Gutter and were further split into Upper/Legacy and Lower End. What is similar between each of these groups of people? What is different?
3. “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.” — Assata Shakur (social activist). Discuss how this quotation connects to the words “Sossi” and “Resist” that Lima sees spray-painted on the wall on page 292.

4. In this chapter, the reader learns about the ways in which the government creates a dependency amongst Subs by encouraging them to spend their entire allowance each month. What might be the purpose of this messaging? *Extension:* Why might it be intentional to keep a group of Gutter people reliant on the government for money?

**CHAPTER 36**

This chapter highlights the experience of many Black youth who are sent to Canada to gain a better education and better opportunities for their families “back home.” In the 2016 census, the percentage of Black people fifteen and older living with others (relatives or non-relatives) was 17.3 percent compared to the national average of 10.7 percent. In unpacking this chapter, it is important to consider the lived experiences of the students in your classroom. It is also worth highlighting this reality and framing it with demonstrated resilience needed to venture out independently and to find success for oneself and one’s family. Connections to the theme of family and community throughout the novel can also be made.

1. In this chapter, Lima finds Josephine and meets William, who calls Josephine “Auntie” even though they are not related. This practice is very common in many cultures, including in the Caribbean and parts of Africa. What does this practice tell you about how the Caribbean and African cultures view the construct of family? How does this contribute toward the greater sense of community?

2. Josephine comments on Rowan’s job as a boxer. She says, “[H]ow hard could it be to punch Mainlanders for money, you know? If they gave me that job, I’d be rich” (pg. 299). Why do you think that Josephine feels this way? Provide evidence from the text. Consider who has all the power on the Mainland. In reflecting on Josephine’s lived experience and the power she has, why might she be willing to “fight”?
3. Josephine speaks of her experience on the Hill and, in her explanation, shares that Mainlanders visit the Hill and even do business with the people on the Hill. Josephine comments, “Those people on the Hill surrendered to the Mainland and then left our families here with nothing” (pg. 302). There is an African proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Consider the choices that the Sossi people on the Hill have made. How have the choices of the Hill people impacted the Gutter people? What sacrifices have the Hill people made to live the way they do?

4. Josephine shares her family’s story with Lima, including the house fire and how she eventually ended up at Livingstone. What did losing everything mean for this family? What impossible choice did Josephine and David’s parents have to make? Describe the path each child took toward freedom. Do you think they achieved this? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 37
Systemic oppression, systemic racism and the health care system are strongly intertwined and interconnected.

For more information and background, please see the following links:

- Black Health Alliance
- “Racial Inequality in Access to Health Care Services”
- “The Life-and-Death Stakes of Anti-Black Racism in Health Care”


2. Who are the “Mainland Healers”? Why would the Healers impose what they think the community needs rather than asking what the community needs? Why would Gutter folks demonstrate to block the work of the Healers?

3. The Healers repeat that they are here to “help.” Based on their actions, what does “help” look like from the perspective of the Healers? Do their actions
“help”? Explain. Extension: In what ways has charity and colonialism been used to further dehumanize and/or degrade those it was meant to “help”?

4. Lima’s question, “Can you take away my debt?” is not addressed by the Healers, but she is given a pickle for DJ as a way to placate the situation. What do you think is the real goal of the Healers? Who is their work truly benefiting? Research and define the difference between being non-racist and anti-racist. How does this connect to the actions of the Healers?

5. On page 311, Lima asks for “a freedom I’ve always wanted but never had.” Think about how anti-Black racism plays out in today’s society. Even though members of the Black community are physically free, what are some ways that systemic racism and systemic oppression still have an impact? How can you address this as a student? An educator? An activist?

CHAPTER 38
1. Why is Geneva so angry on page 315? What is the significance of Rowan’s return? What new and difficult choices might the family now have to make?

2. How do you think Rowan feels in his present situation? Do you think that Rowan is happy to be back in the Gutter? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 39
1. Tattoos can convey messages, bring significance to a memory or moment, and be decoration for cultural reasons or as a personal choice. Tattoos can also signify a rite of passage or an important event in a person’s life. What is the significance of Rowan’s “Sossi” tattoo? Why did he select this word for his tattoo? What impact would this tattoo have on Rowan’s mindset? On his opponents in the boxing ring?

2. A man gifts Rowan with a gold chain and an X-shaped pendant that he wears around his neck. What might the X symbolize?

3. Why is it law for Rowan to put his shirt on in public? What do the guards want him to cover up? Why would such a law exist? Extension: Research the Tulsa
race massacre, the tearing down of Africville, Nova Scotia, or the theft of Black inventions. In what ways are elements of pride erased from mainstream knowledge? What impact does this have on society? What story ends up being told?

4. Lima chooses to ignore that Rowan still calls her Elimina even though she is now going by “Lima.” Why might Rowan still call her “Elimina”? Why doesn’t she correct him?

CHAPTER 40

1. After all of the hard work that Rowan put into his training to achieve success, he is forced to throw the fights to appease the Mainlanders’ dominance. Even though Rowan earned his achievements and was a champion in his sport, he is thrust into the position of failure. How does the weight of the unarguable power of the Mainlanders impact both Rowan and his family?

2. As Rowan breaks down, Lima is reminded of what Ida once said: “the hardest battles to fight are the ones that come for our minds” (pg. 328). What do you think that Ida meant when she said this? Consider all the pressures weighing Rowan and Lima down. How does this statement connect to Rowan’s and Lima’s unending sense of hope and willingness to push on in spite of the barriers they face? Extension: Consider the initiative of the Hockey Diversity Alliance in spite of the lack of support from the NHL, or research the background of another social justice group or leader. How might the statement by Ida prove true for your chosen social justice leader or organization?

CHAPTER 41

1. Lima sends David a poem from the blue book. Find a copy of Langston Hughes’s poem “Troubled Woman.” In what ways is Lima’s experience similar to that of the troubled woman?

2. What are the reactions of Geneva, Rowan and Lima when they learn of her second pregnancy? What does this pregnancy mean for each person? What past experiences are they protecting themselves from in their reactions?
3. Rowan had plans to put his medals and trophies on display once he and Lima had their own place, but Geneva drags them outside and sets them on fire. What do these medals and trophies symbolize to Rowan? What do the medals and trophies symbolize for Geneva?

CHAPTER 42

1. Lima comes full circle when she arrives to live in the same block where she was born and where her mother died. Why do you think the author chose this for Lima? What is its significance?

2. Even though Josephine and Lima are not related by blood, they become like family. Why is their relationship so important? What does their relationship say about the concept of family? Of the importance of community?

3. On page 337, Josephine says, “They tell us all the time that the way the Mainland does things is somehow best.” Josephine identifies that Lima believes she might actually be a Mainlander (or like one) because of the way she was raised and the red coat she was given at the academy. What does Josephine now see that Lima might not? *Extension:* How does this connect to colonialism?

4. Reflect on Josephine’s statement that no one is “really free if the Gutter System still exists” (pg. 338). Why might this statement be true? Who can make the necessary changes to the Gutter System? Who can put pressure to make these changes? Is change really realistic?

5. What does the Network represent to the Gutter people? To the Mainlanders? What motivated Josephine to join the Network? What does she reject from the Mainlanders by doing so? While this rejection might make survival more difficult, why would it bring strength to both herself and the Network’s cause? Use evidence from the novel to support your ideas.

6. Lima learns that a photo of her along with the letters she sent to David played a part in fuelling the movement to raise sympathy to end the Gutter System. What is Lima’s reaction to this? Would you consider the letters activism? On
page 339, Josephine tells Lima that “we all have a part.” What does she mean by this? What other examples of activism do you see unfolding in this movement?

CHAPTER 43

1. What roles do Miss Femia and Richard Rhodes play in the Mainland government? Compare and contrast the way in which Miss Femia’s actions and words are purposeful in trying to ensure Lima’s co-operation with the questioning, while Mr. Rhodes’s are deceitful in trying to find cause to entrap Lima. In what ways do both of these Mainland government employees lie to Lima and treat her with disrespect and hostility in her own home? How does Lima respond? Are they there because they truly want to find out how she’s doing, or could they fear Lima’s potential in strengthening the Network’s cause? Explain your position.

2. Lima inquires about her debt now that she has turned eighteen. She learns, “If [the Gutter Enhancement Project cases] met the criteria—if they stayed out of trouble and did well in school—the plan was, theoretically, to let project cases live and work like Mainlanders,” and debt-free (pg. 354). Considering what has transpired, what recommendations do you think Mr. Rhodes will write in his report? If Mr. Rhodes was truly there to collect evidence for this report, why would he tell Lima that he intends to tell the judge what was said and not said, as well as what was heard and not heard. Discuss the irony when he says, “It’s not my job to be emotional or take sides . . . But I will share the facts” (pg. 355).

Extension: Describe the difference between intent and impact. How does Mr. Rhodes’s intention of remaining neutral negatively impact Lima?

3. In the exchange between Lima and the Mainlander employees, Lima pushes back against all the oppression that has been weighing her down by challenging Mr. Rhodes, Miss Femia and the entire system. What are some events that may have contributed to Lima’s resolve to fight back?

4. On page 352, Lima tells Miss Femia and Mr. Rhodes, “You built this whole system to ruin us,” and that they want Gutter people to “forget about the past” but still pay debts. Why can’t the Gutter people move forward without
addressing the past? *Extension:* Research the Africville Apology or the reparations made following the transatlantic slave trade or South African apartheid. Were the responses to each event enough to “forget the past”? What constitutes a full reconciliation?

5. Rowan is labelled as having “violent tendencies” and being “armed and dangerous” by Miss Femia and Mr. Rhodes. What knowledge are Miss Femia and Mr. Rhodes using to make this determination? Is this fair and accurate? What impact might this label have on Rowan? *Extension:* Consider how labels have contributed toward anti-Black racism in education, police brutality, child welfare, etc.

6. At the end of this chapter, we see Lima continue the tradition of the Sossi people by telling stories to DJ. Why is keeping this tradition alive important? Why is culture important? How might this eventually connect to DJ’s sense of belonging in the world? *Extension:* What traditions do you and/or your family hold near?

**CHAPTER 44**

This chapter includes a scene that readers may connect with and need to unpack. Anti-Black racism has been connected to police brutality for generations with limited repercussions in the legal system. This has generated a response by the Black community along with allies and accomplices in an effort to demand change. Consider researching and discussing police brutality and its connection to human rights as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. Ensure that the discussion includes actions the reader can take to address this human rights issue in their community.

1. Lima attends a Network event and is amazed at what they do “every weekend” (pg. 358). Describe both the celebratory atmosphere as well as the ways in which this event provides important community connections for the people who live there. Given the purpose of this event, comment on the presence and actions of the Mainland Guards.

2. What happened to cause the Corridor Killings in the marketplace? Who will be held accountable? Why? *Extension:* Have similar events occurred in our society? Explain.
3. What are some examples of social justice in action that you see in this chapter?

4. In Cat Cole’s speech, she says, “The Mainlanders who support us are few, but they are passionate . . . And they will be critical to whatever happens next. But the hardest work, the most important work, starts here. Living every day and fighting for what is ours. We need to get our land back and govern better with our own set of rules” (pg. 357).

- Discuss how this quotation lines up with the definition of independence.
- Connect this quotation with one earlier from Josephine: “[T]he Gutter System is how we become great . . . This is home” (pg. 337).
- What will Mainlanders have to acknowledge and change for independence to occur? Is this realistic?
- Why might Mainlanders be opposed to change?
- What do and could Lima and Josephine do to help support this important work? Why will this work be hard for them? Why will this work be hard for all?

CHAPTER 45

This chapter addresses the Corridor Killings, and the author chose to name each of the people who were murdered at the hands of the Mainland Guards. The process and purpose of colonization was and is to dehumanize Black people to the point where a life is no longer valued by the greater society. In response to the 2020 murders of Black people, the #SayTheirNames movement was started. Correspondingly, #SayHerName was activated due to the outcry for justice for Breonna Taylor and other female lives lost to police brutality. It is important to note that although the hashtag movement started in 2020, the deaths of Black people at the hands of police dates back to slavery. To humanize lives lost, it is encouraged that students learn about and share the humanity of those lives lost to police brutality.

1. While the Network and Gutter folk call what happened the “Corridor Killings,” the Mainland Guards call it a riot. Why might each group view this event differently? What is the definition of a riot? Do the events that occurred
in Chapter 44 line up with the definition of a *riot*? Why would the Mainland newspapers and Mainland Guards choose to describe the event in that way? In what ways do the Mainlanders benefit by telling the story in this way? Evaluate in the same manner the other headlines highlighted in this chapter.

2. Upon seeing the headlines and articles in the Mainland papers, Lima wonders about “all the lies I believed about who I am, where I’m from” (pg. 364). Use the internet to scan through some current newspapers and find a story told by different media outlets. What do you notice? Consider whose voices are elevated and whose voices are ignored or erased.

3. What emerges from Mainland headlines is that the Network is pushing back against the Mainland Guards and the Gutter System in protests. What do the news outlets report in response to these events? How should the Mainland Guards be held accountable for their actions?

4. What changes are proposed in the negotiations that follow? Why is the Sossi Independence Act not pursued? What do the people settle for instead? Why? Why is this solution only short-term? What does Josephine mean when she concludes that “[a] system can’t be broken in a moment” (pg. 366)?

5. What does Lima mean when she says she feels trapped “in a cage of injustice” (pg. 366)? What measures are put into place by the Mainland Guards and government officials to both mentally and physically trap the people in the Gutter as a result of their actions to achieve justice? How do these impositions intentionally weaken the support of the Network and the Sossi Independence Act?

6. For what purpose does Lima begin to send David “stories of people working hard in a system that was meant to punish and destroy” (pg. 368)? What is the power that these stories hold for all those who read them? How does this narrative contradict the way in which Gutter people are perceived by Mainlanders? How might truth erode the existing systemic racism and systemic oppression?

7. The novel concludes with Lima telling DJ stories of “how we were meant to live” (pg. 368). What does Lima mean by this? How has colonization affected
the Sossi (Gutter) people? *Extension:* Watch the movie *Black Panther* (a movie that imagines a world where colonization has not happened for a small nation in Northeast Africa). Consider the impacts of colonization of Caribbean nations and African countries. Imagine how these geographic areas would be today if colonization had not occurred. What would be the same? What would be different?

8. At the end of the novel, Lima says, “I climb into bed every night surrounded by a handful of my most prized possessions” (pg. 368). When leaving home to go to Livingstone, then Riverside and then the Gutter, what possessions did she take with her? What does this reveal about Lima’s growth and identity?

9. Were you satisfied with the way the novel ended? What additional questions or wonderings do you have? Discuss.

**Author Bios**

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**Alexiis Stephen** is an educator and instructional program leader for Equity and Inclusive Education and engages in community advocacy. Using critical race theory and an anti-oppression framework, she works with individuals and groups in public
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