

# I'M NOT DYING WITH YOU TONIGHT

by KIMBERLY JONES and GILLY SEGAL

## EDUCATOR & READING GROUP GUIDE



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Over the course of one night, two girls with two very different backgrounds must rely on each other to get through the violent race riot that has enveloped their city.

Lena has her killer style, her awesome boyfriend, and a plan. She knows she's going to make it big. Campbell, on the other hand, is just trying to keep her head down and get through the year at her new school.

When both girls attend the Friday-night football game, what neither expects is for everything to descend into sudden mass chaos. Chaos born from violence and hate. Chaos that unexpectedly throws them together.

They aren't friends. They hardly understand the other's point of view. But none of that matters when the city is up in flames, and they only have each other to rely on if they're going to survive the night.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**KIMBERLY JONES** is the former manager of the bookstore Little Shop of Stories and currently works in the entertainment industry.

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Both authors live in Atlanta, Georgia.



### PRAISE FOR I'M NOT DYING WITH YOU TONIGHT:

**"Compelling and powerful."**—Angie Thomas, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Hate U Give*

**"A vital addition to the YA race relations canon."**—Nic Stone, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dear Martin*

**"An astounding achievement... This is a book meant to be devoured in a single sitting and discussed for years to come."**—Mark Oshiro, author of *Anger Is a Gift*

**"A powerful examination of privilege... as timely as it is addictive."**—David Arnold, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Mosquitoland* and *Kids of Appetite*

This guide was created by Pat R. Scales.

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## BEFORE READING

Discuss the difference between prejudice and racism. How does prejudice promote racism? Explain how racism is about power. What is the difference between overt and covert racism? How does racism lead to violence? Locate articles in local, state, or national newspapers that expose acts of racism. Brainstorm ways to alleviate such behavior. *Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 8-12.1, SL. 8-12.2, SL. 8-12.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 8-12.4, SL. 8-12.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 8-12.1; Knowledge of Language L. 8-12.3.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss the structure of the novel. The entire novel takes place in one night. How do the five parts of the book advance the plot and create tension as the events of the night escalate? Explain how the two alternating voices contribute to the powerful message of the book.
- The heart of racial or ethnic prejudice is ignorance and fear. How do Lena and Campbell have false views of each other? Why does Lena assume that Campbell is rich? Campbell came from a school in Pennsylvania that had very few black students. How does this contribute to her ignorance about people of color? Cite moments in the novel when her naivete causes tension with Lena. How does Lena make Campbell begin to think about race? What do the girls learn about each other and from each other as the night of violence progresses?
- Campbell is new to McPherson High School. Compare her school in Haverford with McPherson. Why is her father so eager for her to work the concession stand at the football game? Campbell wonders, “Where does he think this one night is going to lead?” (p. 9). What does this reveal about their relationship and about Campbell’s resentment about leaving her old school? Explain how working the concession stand causes Campbell to miss her old friends in Haverford. Throughout the novel, she experiences loneliness, feeling like she has been left behind. How is there hope for a different life at the end of the novel?
- Describe Lena. Compare and contrast Lena’s home life with Campbell’s. How is Pops, Lena’s grandfather, a strong father figure? Why is he so strict with Lena? Discuss the phrase “it takes a village.” Explain how Marcus and others in the neighborhood work with Pops to keep Lena safe. How does she rebel? What or who is the root of her rebellion? At the end of the novel, Lena tells Pops the truth. How was this the right thing for her to do? Debate whether the night’s events help Lena understand why Pops is so strict.
- LaShunda, Lena’s best friend, displays a stronger sense of responsibility and better judgment than Lena. How does Lena need LaShunda when things get scary and tough?
- Discuss Lena’s relationship with Black. Explain what she means when she says, “Black usually leaves me in the most amazing mood, except for when he plays like he Hansel, leaving me crumbs” (p. 7). What are the “crumbs” he leaves? Black is older than Lena, a fact that she doesn’t reveal to Pops. How could Black be out of Lena’s league? Explain how this is evident on the night of the riots. Why is Marcus so upset that Lena is trying to find Black? Discuss what Marcus means when he says, “He can be an eagle, but if he chose to flock with pigeons, he gon’ have pigeon ways.” (p. 117) Explain Black’s “pigeon ways.” Discuss how the riots and violence make Lena finally see through Black.

# I'M NOT DYING WITH YOU TONIGHT

- Jonesville is McPherson's biggest football rival, but the problem between the two schools runs deeper than a simple football rivalry. The point is made that there is extra security that night. Why is that not enough? Discuss what the school officials could have done to prepare for possible violence at the game. How might the administrations of McPherson and Jonesville high schools address the student body on the following Monday morning?
- Campbell has never seen a fight up close. What is her first reaction when the fight breaks out at the concession stand? What precipitates the fight in the first place? Contrast Lena and Campbell's view of the cops. Explain what Lena means when she says, "They ain't gonna bother you, maybe! They look at you and see a poodle. They look at me and all they see is a pit bull" (p. 91). How does this sum up the reality of police brutality and racial profiling in some cities across the nation? What should law enforcement officers do to change the way they deal with black youth?
- Campbell and Lena don't really know each other when they wind up huddled together in the concession stand. Explain what Campbell means when she says, "With only me and Lena left, this shelter feels less like a fortress and more like a cage" (p. 57). What is the difference between a fortress and a cage? How do both girls begin to panic?
- Discuss what Lena means when she says, "When you push people to their breaking point, and they ain't got no power, they'll find a way to take it. What's so wrong with that?" (p. 230–231). What is the root of the breaking point on the night of the riot? Debate whether Campbell understands the breaking point by the end of the evening. Discuss how the night makes Campbell question how she would react if the roles were reversed.
- Campbell's dad says they have a lot to talk about. What do you think he says to her? How about Pops? What conversation might he have with Lena the next morning?
- Explain what you think the title of the book means.

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 8-12.1, RL. 8-12.2, RL. 8-12.3; Craft & Structure RL. 8-12.4, RL. 8-12.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 8-12.1, SL. 8-12.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 8-12.4, SL. 8-12.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 8-12.1; Knowledge of Language L. 8-12.3.*

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Discuss the difference between a protest and a riot. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "A riot is the language of the unheard." Write an essay that explains King's words.

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 8-12.1; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 8-12.1, L. 8-12.2; Knowledge of Language 8-12.3.*

Write a letter that Campbell might send to her mother in Venezuela that provides a summary of the events on the night of the riot. Include a concluding paragraph that explains what she learned from Lena.

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 8-12.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 8-12.1, L. 8-12.2; Knowledge of Language 8-12.3.*

# I'M NOT DYING WITH YOU TONIGHT

Research civil rights and social justice organizations in the United States. Design and write a pamphlet that lists at least ten organizations with brief explanations of their missions. Include the website of each organization.

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing W. 8-12.4, W. 8-12.6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 8-12.7, W. 8-12.6; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 8-12.1, L. 8-12.2; Knowledge of Language 8-12.3.*

Write a front-page story for the local newspaper about the riot that occurred after the McPherson and Jonesville football game. Include interviews with Campbell, Lena, Marcus, the chief of police, the mayor of the city, and several bystanders. Remember to include who, what, when, where, and how.

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 8-12.2; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 8-12.1, L. 8-12.2; Knowledge of Language 8-12.3.*

The novel is divided into five parts. Write a summary paragraph for each part. Include a concluding sentence in each paragraph that explains the title of each part.

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 8-12.2; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 8-12.1, L. 8-12.2; Knowledge of Language 8-12.3.*

Stage a talk show where Campbell and Lena engage in a dialogue with Starr Carter, the protagonist of *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas about the violence that erupted in streets of their communities. What might they say is the solution to such violence? What advice might they give to teens and young adults who are caught up in such violence?

*Correlates to English Language Arts CCSS in Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 8-12.1, SL. 8-12.2, SL. 8-12.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 8-12.4, SL. 8-12.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 8-12.1; Knowledge of Language L. 8-12.3.*

## COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

The Jonesville students posted pictures of themselves in black face on the internet. Why is this an act of racism? Explain why the post was inappropriate. Sponsor a community panel that addresses the role of the internet in promoting racism and violence. The panel should include at least two students, a school administrator, a teacher, two community members, and two parents. Ask them to suggest solutions for this systemic issue.

Read about the Black Lives Matter movement (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/what-we-believe/>). Then find out if there is a local chapter. If there is, ask someone to come and speak to the group about why the organization is important for promoting equal justice within the community. Ask about the different ways you can get involved to support the movement. Start a conversation about the tactics police use during protests and discuss tips on how to stay safe while participating in community demonstrations.

How can reading books like *I'm Not Dying with You Tonight* help communities come together to create a healthy dialogue about race and racial tensions? Explain how getting to know one another, as Lena and Campbell did, can improve race relations. How might this apply to any and all cultural groups? Brainstorm opportunities within your community to bridge racial and cultural divides. Such activities may include: a community picnic, joint worship services, programs at the public library, joint service projects on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, and marching in unity for social justice.