

Reading List



Reconstruction



POD SAVE
THE PEOPLE
WITH DERAY



CAMPAIGN
ZERO

recon.today/blackest-book-club

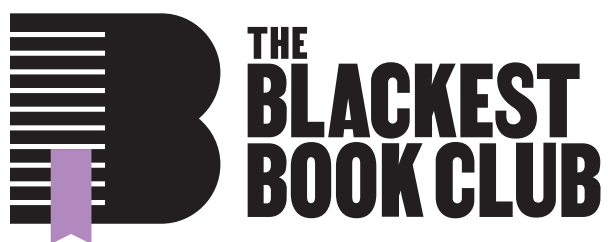
This is a collection of stories, poems, and essays from classic and contemporary leaders of Black thought and literature. We share this list so that their genius will continue to create understanding and connection among us. We share with the hope that these titles provide mirrors into the political, social, and personal realities of the intersection of Black lives with the notions of power, gender, race, faith, and love.

Reconstruction, **Pod Save the People** and **Campaign Zero** came together to answer these questions and we think they are a great way for you to talk with your kids, families, and friends.

- **Which book do you wish you had read as a child?**
- **Which book do you think every Black person should read?**
- **What's the book you pick up and read when you need to restore your passion, strength or belief?**
- **Which book has most shaped your identity as a Black person?**



Reconstruction is a Black owned and Black operated curriculum company that provides live, K-12 supplemental and enrichment courses through an online platform that situates Black people, Black culture and Black heritage and contributions to America and the world in an authentic, identity-affirming manner. These interactive courses are designed to bring joy to students with a blend of academic intensives and cultural exploration curriculum. Students of all backgrounds benefit from a more complete understanding of our shared history and society.



Reading List

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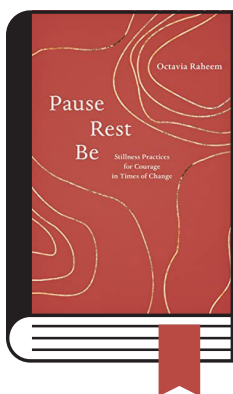
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De'Ara Balenger

Co-founder, Maestra
Social Impact Agency

Which book do you wish you had read as a child or teen?



Pause, Rest, Be: Stillness Practices for Courage in Times of Change

OCTAVIA F. RAHEEM

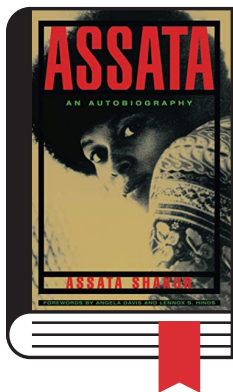
Yoga teacher and activist Octavia Raheem offers us the motivation and guidance we need to restore ourselves in the midst of all sorts of change. Change in our lives—whether it be welcome, joyful, challenging, or more subtle—presents us with the opportunity to pause and gather our energy to work with whatever lies ahead.

“

I read tons as a teen but never anything that taught me how to be still, present or to find inner peace (until this book).

”

Which book pushed your thinking the most?



Assata An Autobiography

ASSATA SHAKUR

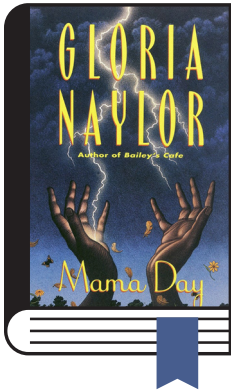
With wit and candor, Assata Shakur recounts the experiences that led her to a life of activism and portrays the strengths, weaknesses, and eventual demise of Black and white revolutionary groups at the hand of government officials. The result is a signal contribution to the literature about growing up Black in America that has already taken its place alongside *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and the works of Maya Angelou.

“

I read this book in college when I had gotten into my studies on Black thought, expression and contributions to American society. This is one of the texts that, in an intellectual way, helped me understand the depths and power of Black womanhood.

”

Which book do you think every Black person should read?



Mama Day

GLORIA NAYLOR

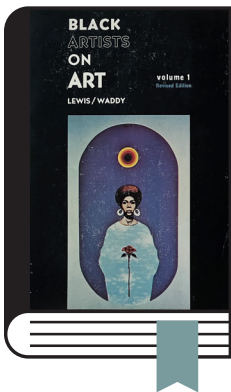
A fascinating novel that reworks elements of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. On the island of Willow Springs, off the Georgia coast, the powers of healer Mama Day are tested by her great niece, Cocoa, a stubbornly emancipated woman endangered by the island's darker forces.

“

I read this book every year.

”

What's the book you pick up when you need to restore your passion, strength or belief?



Black Artists on Art (Volume 1)

SAMELLA LEWIS AND RUTH WADDY

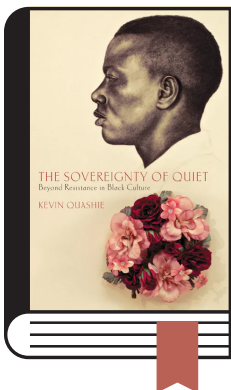
Drawing from historical and private collections around the country, Samella Lewis has gathered an impressive representation of the work of African American artists, from the 18th century to the present.

“

These [restorative books] are typically art books for me.

”

Which book has most shaped your identity as a Black person?



The Sovereignty of Quiet

KEVIN QUASHIE

African American culture is often considered expressive, dramatic, and even defiant. In *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, Kevin Quashie explores quiet as a different kind of expressiveness, one which characterizes a person's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, and fears.

“

I don't think I could choose one book - each book I have read over my lifetime and certainly still true of today, has shaped me. I think [...] as I get older, it's actually books about healing, processing and growing that I lean towards to ensure that I feel and see myself yes in my Blackness, not Blackness in opposition to whiteness.

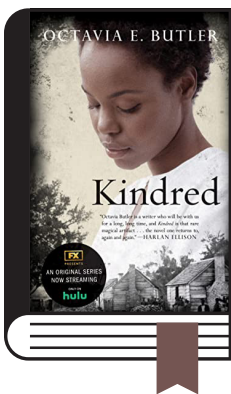
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DeRay Mckesson

Organizer, Activist
Campaign Zero

Which book do you wish you had read as a child or teen?



Kindred

OCTAVIA BUTLER

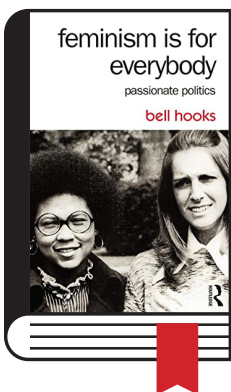
The visionary time-travel classic whose Black female hero is pulled through time to face the horrors of American slavery and explores the impacts of racism, sexism, and white supremacy then and now.

“

I'd never seen black people travel through time as a teenager and Octavia Butler so expertly executes this while also pushing us to think more deeply re: race, slavery, family, and love. I would've loved to read this in a classroom, too.

”

Which book pushed your thinking the most?



Feminism is for Everybody

bell hooks

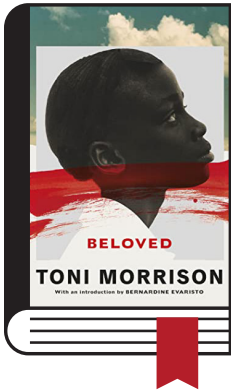
What is feminism? In this short, accessible primer, bell hooks explores the nature of feminism and its positive promise to eliminate sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. With her characteristic clarity and directness, hooks encourages readers to see how feminism can touch and change their lives to see that feminism is for everybody.

“

Until this book, I'd never actually understood feminism, the power that it holds to reshape the way that we love and build community, and the promise of blackness in a world where black feminism is embraced. In no uncertain terms, this book changed my life.

”

Which book do you think every Black person should read?



Beloved

TONI MORRISON

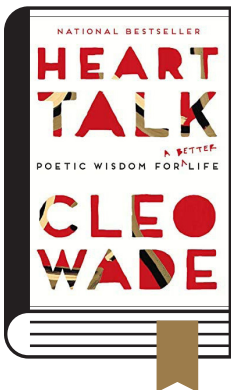
After Paul D. finds his old slave friend Sethe in Ohio and moves in with her and her daughter Denver, a strange girl comes along by the name of “Beloved.” Sethe and Denver take her in and then strange things begin to happen. Set in rural Ohio several years after the Civil War, this profoundly affecting chronicle of slavery and its aftermath is Toni Morrison’s greatest novel, a dazzling achievement, and the most spellbinding reading experience of the decade.

“

This is perhaps the most lyrical book I’ve ever read. I didn’t know books could actually be lyrical until I read this, the way in which Morrison engages the written word is truly magical. And it was such a beautifully complicated story about love in/and blackness that I think we should all have to wrestle with.

”

What’s the book you pick up when you need to restore your passion, strength or belief?



Heart Talk

CLEO WADE

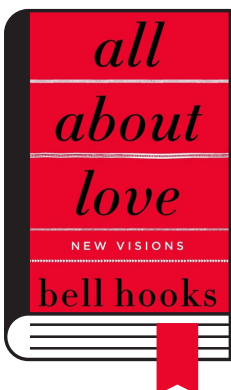
True to her hugely popular Instagram account, Cleo Wade brings her moving life lessons to *Heart Talk*, an inspiring, accessible, and spiritual book of wisdom for the new generation. Featuring over one hundred and twenty of Cleo’s original poems, mantras, and affirmations, including fan favorites and never before seen ones, this book is a daily pep talk to keep you feeling empowered and motivated.

“

This book is a reminder that we can make it through the hard moments, that we can love fully at our core, and that the work we do on ourselves is our best and true work.

”

Which book has most shaped your identity as a Black person?



All About Love

bell hooks

The word ‘love’ is most often defined as a noun, yet we would all love better if we used it as a verb,” writes bell hooks as she comes out fighting and on fire in *All About Love*. Here, at her most provocative and intensely personal, renowned scholar, cultural critic and feminist bell hooks offers a proactive new ethic for a society bereft with lovelessness—not the lack of romance, but the lack of care, compassion, and unity. People are divided, she declares, by society’s failure to provide a model for learning to love.

“

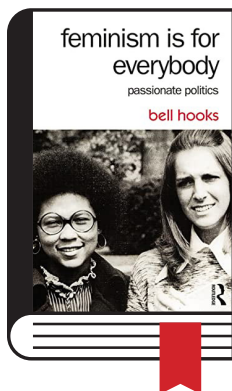
I had never read someone write so honestly about love in blackness until this book. And I have to believe that the power of blackness, at its core, is rooted in a love so deep that it can change worlds.

”



Myles E. Johnson

Which book do you wish you had read as a child or teen?



Feminism is for Everybody

bell hooks

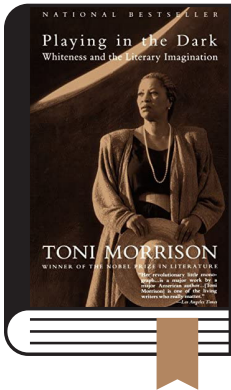
What is feminism? In this short, accessible primer, bell hooks explores the nature of feminism and its positive promise to eliminate sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. With her characteristic clarity and directness, hooks encourages readers to see how feminism can touch and change their lives—to see that feminism is for everybody.

“

*Because the earlier,
the better.*

”

Which book pushed your thinking the most?



Playing in the Dark

TONI MORRISON

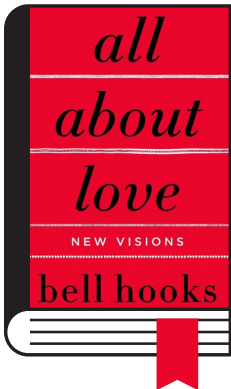
An immensely persuasive work of literary criticism that opens a new chapter in the American dialogue on race—and promises to change the way we read American literature—from the acclaimed Nobel Prize winner

“

[This book] pushed me to think critically about “The Literary Canon” and pushed me to think critically even with works that are considered literary standards.

”

What’s the book you pick up when you need to restore your passion, strength or belief?



All About Love

bell hooks

The word ‘love’ is most often defined as a noun, yet we would all love better if we used it as a verb,” writes bell hooks as she comes out fighting and on fire in *All About Love*. Here, at her most provocative and intensely personal, renowned scholar, cultural critic and feminist bell hooks offers a proactive new ethic for a society bereft with lovelessness—not the lack of romance, but the lack of care, compassion, and unity. People are divided, she declares, by society’s failure to provide a model for learning to love.

“

Bell Hooks’ All About Love is a constant work I return to that grounds me back into my passion and strength because it reminds me “what it’s all about” and how to navigate this world and the people in it.

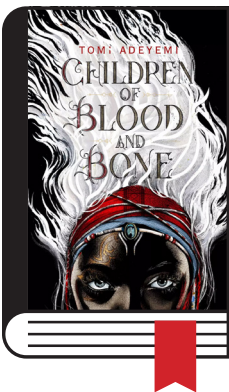
”



Kaya Henderson

Educator, CEO
Reconstruction

Which book do you wish you had read as a child or teen?



Children of Blood and Bone

TOMI ADEYEMI

*They killed my mother.
They took our magic.
They tried to bury us.
Now we rise.*

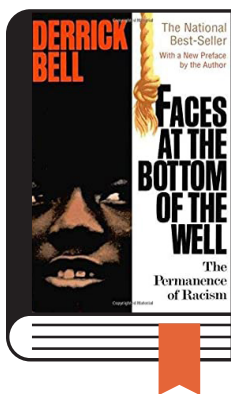
Tomi Adeyemi conjures a stunning world of dark magic and danger in her West African-inspired fantasy debut. Zélie Adebola remembers when the soil of Orisha hummed with magic. Burners ignited flames, Tiders beckoned waves, and Zélie's Reaper mother summoned forth souls. But everything changed the night magic disappeared. Under the orders of a ruthless king, maji were killed, leaving Zélie without a mother and her people without hope.

“

It's an epic fantasy book along the lines of Harry Potter or The Hunger Games, whose protagonist is a young African girl who is trying to restore magic to an unjust world. I would have LOVED to have seen a powerful Black girl protagonist using history, ingenuity, and agency to solve her society's problems. There wasn't anything like this when I was coming up. It would have had a profound impact on how I viewed myself in the world.

”

Which book pushed your thinking the most?



Faces at the Bottom of the Well

DERRICK BELL

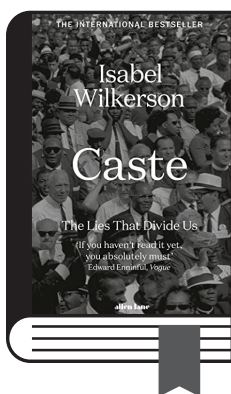
Civil rights activist and legal scholar Derrick Bell uses allegory and historical example to argue that racism is an integral and permanent part of American society. African American struggles for equality are doomed to fail so long as the majority of whites do not see their own well-being threatened by the status quo. Bell calls on African Americans to face up to this unhappy truth and abandon a misplaced faith in inevitable progress. Only then will Blacks, and those whites who join with them, be in a position to create viable strategies to alleviate the burdens of racism.

“

This book totally changed my worldview. As a child of the post-Civil Rights era, I grew up believing that at some point, we would overcome racism. This is the first book that challenged me to think of what I would do differently if I knew that racism was permanent. Through a series of engaging vignettes, it forced me to rethink everything!!

”

Which book do you think every Black person should read?



Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

ISABEL WILKERSON

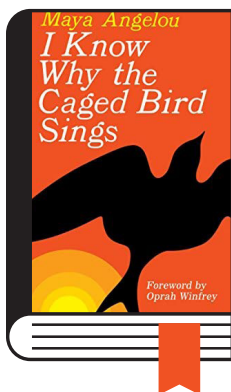
The Pulitzer Prize-winning, bestselling author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human divisions. In this brilliant book, Isabel Wilkerson gives us a masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America as she explores, through an immersive, deeply researched, and beautifully written narrative and stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings.

“

This book tries to help us understand the hows and whys of racism in America. It's brilliantly written and compels us to think differently about our history (and future) as a country.

”

What's the book you pick up when you need to restore your passion, strength or belief?



I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

MAYA ANGELOU

Here is a book as joyous and painful, as mysterious and memorable, as childhood itself. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* captures the longing of lonely children, the brute insult of bigotry, and the wonder of words that can make the world right. Maya Angelou's debut memoir is a modern American classic beloved worldwide.

“

It's the autobiography of one of my favorite authors whose life reminds us that no matter what might happen to you, you can overcome your circumstances and create a life you could never have imagined.

”



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**POD SAVE
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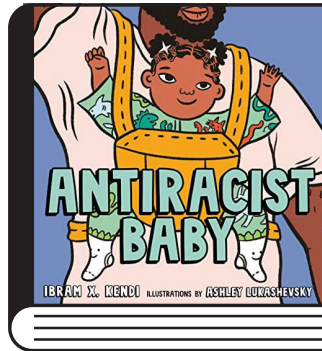


**CAMPAIGN
ZERO**

Reconstruction's Top 5 Children's and YA Picks

Grade Level:

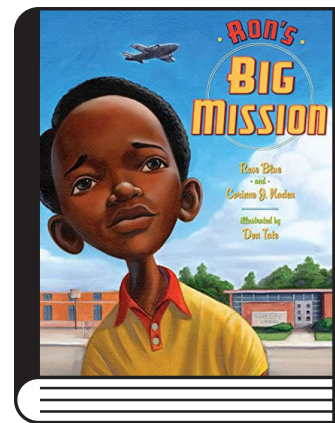
K-2nd



The Antiracist Baby

IBRAM X. KENDI

Inspired by the author's 4-year-old daughter, this book was conceived as a tool for discussing racism with young children.



Ron's Big Mission

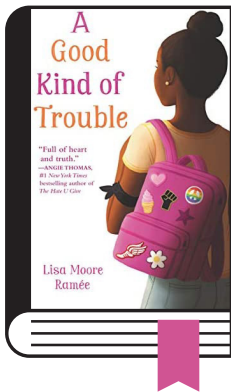
ROSE BLUE

Nine-year-old Ron loves going to the Lake City Public Library to look through all the books on airplanes and flight. Today, Ron is ready to take out books by himself. But in the segregated world of South Carolina in the 1950s, Ron obtaining his own library card is not just a small rite of passage, it is a young man's first courageous mission.

3rd–5th

6th–8th

9th–12th



A Good Kind of Trouble

LISA MOORE RAMÉE

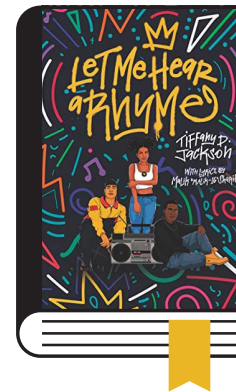
This funny and big-hearted middle grade text about friendship, family, and standing up for what's right, perfect for fans of Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* and the novels of Renée Watson and Jason Reynolds.



It All Comes Down to This

KAREN ENGLISH

When riots erupt in nearby Watts and a friend is unfairly arrested, Sophie learns that life—and her own place in it—is even more complicated than she'd once thought.



Let Me Hear a Rhyme

TIFFANY D. JACKSON

In this striking novel by the critically acclaimed author of *Allegedly* and *Monday's Not Coming*, Tiffany D. Jackson tells the story of three Brooklyn teens who plot to turn their murdered friend into a major rap star by pretending he's still alive.

Index

Full list of podcaster selected titles, listed by question:

Which book do you wish you had read as a child or teen?

- DB *Pause, Rest, Be: Stillness Practices for Courage in Times of Change* OCTAVIA F. RAHEEM
- DM *Kindred* OCTAVIA BUTLER
- MJ *Feminism is for Everybody* bell hooks
- KH *Children of Blood and Bone* TOMI ADEYEMI

Which book pushed your thinking the most?

- DB *Assata An Autobiography* ASSATA SHAKUR
- DM *Feminism is for Everybody* bell hooks
- MJ *Playing in the Dark* TONI MORRISON
- KH *Face at the Bottom of the Well* DERRICK BELL

Which book do you think every Black person should read?

- DB *Mama Day* GLORIA NAYLOR
- DM *Beloved* TONI MORRISON
- KH *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* ISABEL WILKERSON

What's the book you pick up when you need to restore your passion, strength or belief?

DB *Black Artists on Art (Volume1)*
SAMELLA LEWIS AND RUTH WADDY

DM *Heart Talk* CLEO WADE

MJ *All About Love* bell hooks

KH *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* MAYA ANGELOU

Which book has most shaped your identity as a Black person?

DB *The Sovereignty of Quiet* KEVIN QUASHIE

DM *All About Love* bell hooks

