

# PATRON SAINTS OF NOTHING

by Randy Ribay

## ABOUT THE BOOK

When he finds out that his cousin Jun has been killed as part of Philippine president Duterte's campaign of extrajudicial killings, seventeen-year-old Jay Reguero is devastated. However, neither his own family nor Jun's will talk about his cousin's death or answer Jay's questions. But when Jay gets a mysterious message from someone that his cousin was innocent, Jay decides to travel to the Philippines to find out what happened. *Patron Saints of Nothing* will appeal to students as the novel inspires them to consider questions around family, loyalty, identity, truth, and ultimately, that our responsibility is to ourselves and to each other.

## Considerations for Teachers and Students

Consider using *Patron Saints of Nothing* to pair with or replace any coming-of-age text you might have in your curriculum. We believe that Ribay's novel offers students deep possibilities for exploring similar terrain and issues as traditionally canonical texts. For example, consider pairing Ribay's novel with or replacing texts such as *Catcher in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and *The Outsiders*, among others. Likewise, *Patron Saints of Nothing* can be paired with Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* or *On the Come Up* to help students unpack issues of justice and social responsibility, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* to explore issues related to grief and familial obligation, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* to examine themes around government corruption and finding one's voice.

Before starting *Patron Saints of Nothing*, we recommend working with students to consider how their identities and experiences may inform their reading experience. For some students, this book may be the first time that they have read about a Filipinx American experience or that takes place in the Philippines.

## Considerations for Teachers and Students (cont.)

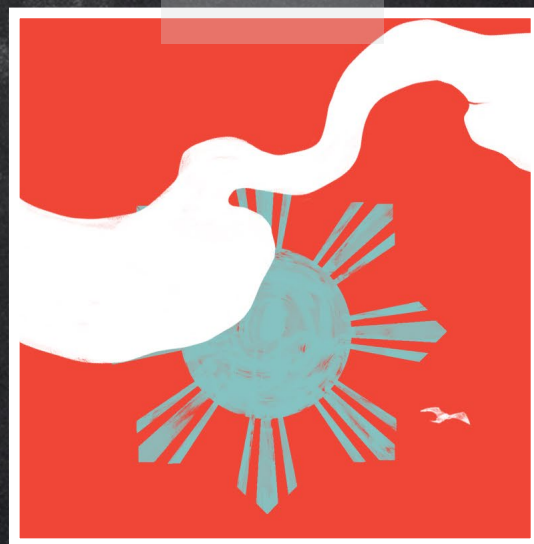
### CONSIDERATIONS AROUND RACIAL IDENTITY

Early in the text, Jay and his friend Seth stumble into a conversation about race. When Seth tells Jay that he forgot that Jay was Filipino, Jay immediately becomes defensive. When Jay asks Seth, who is white, what he means by that, Seth tells him, “You’re basically white” and adds, “I don’t see color” and “We’re all one race: the human race. That’s all I meant.”

Although this is a passing moment in the text, this presents a key opportunity to invite students into a conversation around identity, particularly around racial identity. For students of color, especially those who navigate predominantly white institutions, this moment may be an all-too-familiar one—one that represents a common *microaggression* that people of color may face. Teachers College professor of psychology and education Derald Wing Sue defines microaggression as “the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned white people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated” (Sue, 2010).

Seth’s explanation that he doesn’t “see color” fits a larger pattern in which the racial, cultural, or ethnic identities of others are rendered invisible. While they seem well-intentioned, comments like Seth’s can have a negative impact on people of color. When white people tell people of color that they don’t see color, what they’re trying to say is that race doesn’t matter. Yet research consistently shows that even though race is a social construct, race does matter—race impacts the opportunities and outcomes that people of color have available to them. Furthermore, to say that “race doesn’t matter” implies that race is inherently negative. While it is true that people of color have been discriminated against because of their race, race—and culture—can also be a source of pride and community. Thus, when a white person says they don’t see race, a person of color might experience this as a microaggression that invalidates the experiences they’ve had—both positive and negative—related to their race and culture. At a systems level, ignoring race does nothing to address the impact of racial discrimination and allows the current status quo of racial inequity to continue.

In *Patron Saints of Nothing*, when Seth tells Jay that he “acts like everyone else at school,” Jay points out that everyone else at their school is white. Except,



## Considerations for Teachers and Students (cont.)

as Jay thinks, they are not: “The majority are, for sure, but [Seth’s] generalization—spoken with such confidence, such ease—makes me feel like he’s erasing the rest of us.” Here, in this moment, Jay experiences a microaggression that sends the “hidden message” that Jay’s identity as a person of color isn’t seen or doesn’t matter, and that the only parts of him that are seen or matter are the ways that Jay “acts like everyone else at school.” In other words, the parts of him that seem “white.”

Students of color reading *Patron Saints of Nothing* may have had similar experiences. White students, too, may have been perpetrators of such microaggressions without realizing it. Provide space for students to journal and discuss this scene in the text, how it may or may not connect to the experiences they’ve had. Validating the invisibility that students of color may have felt in moments like this is critical, especially as such moments are often dismissed as being insignificant or unintentional. Students might also discuss the assumptions underneath microaggressions and the implicit and explicit messages society sends around race and culture that fuel these assumptions. For more guidance on how to deal with microaggressions in the classroom, Dr. Tasha Souza’s “Responding to Microaggressions in the Classroom: Taking ACTION” (2018) provides one useful framework.

### CONSIDERATIONS AROUND STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE PHILIPPINES

Filipinx people have been in the United States since the 1500s and Filipinx Americans make up the third-largest immigrant population in the country. Yet depending on which area of the United States you and your student live, their experiences with Filipinx people and culture may be limited (nearly half of all Filipinx Americans live in California, for example). Furthermore, although there is a rich literary history of Filipinx American literature, this literature is rarely taught in schools. However, in recent years, more Filipinx writers are being published and recognized for their talent, especially in middle grade and young adult fiction. (See Barbara Jane Reyes’ recommended list of Filipinx American authors in resources.)

Many students may know little to nothing about the Philippines. Even the protagonist Jay admits that he knows little about his own Filipinx culture and history and expresses guilt around this throughout the novel. What little students know about the Philippines may be based on stereotypes they have about many developing countries—that they are poor, uneducated, or even backwards when compared to life in the United States. Such stereotypes are harmful as they paint a “single story” (Adichie) of a country that is diverse and rich in many ways. For some students of color who have roots in countries like the Philippines, hearing that others may not know anything about a country they may have roots in or feel connected to may feel like a form of invisibility.

## Considerations for Teachers and Students (cont.)



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Teachers should consider the background and identities of the students in their classroom and take this potential impact into account.

Ribay addresses some of these stereotypes through Jay's experiences. For example, when Jay and Mia follow Mia's professor through the slums, Jay reflects on the difference between his expectations (which are based on stereotypes) and reality:

*I'm ashamed to admit I expected more misery. Expected it to feel like one of those commercials where they play mournful music and some white actor's compassionate voice-over urges you to sponsor a child because it's the only way they will be saved from their hellish third-world country.*

*But, basically, those here are living their lives. Doing the best they can with what they have, I suppose. Doing the same any of us do—only in smaller spaces with much less privacy. They're finding ways to survive.*

This passage provides a powerful opportunity for students to discuss not just stereotypes, but more importantly, the impact that these stereotypes have on systems of power, including imperialism and colonialism. Likewise, this moment can invite students to reflect on the impact of white saviorism and

how this mindset can lead to harmful outcomes, particularly for communities of color, both abroad and at home in the United States. Ask students to analyze Jay's comment about a "white actor's compassionate voice-over" and how the media might shape their perceptions (and patterns) of which groups of people are often positioned as "saviors" versus those who need "saving."

Furthermore, because the novel deals with the extrajudicial killings of Philippine citizens, students may incorrectly assume government corruption and drug abuse as the single story of the country. To disrupt the potential stereotypes that students may have before and even during reading the novel, teachers can provide students with

## Considerations for Teachers and Students (cont.)

additional texts that reflect the Philippine's rich diversity, such as photographs that represent the varied settings in the novel. Students can also be asked to consider the ways in which issues of poverty, government corruption, and drug addiction are not unique to the Philippines and how these issues impact the United States, nationally, and their own communities, locally. Expanding students' perspective in this way can lessen the chance that students dismiss these issues as problems of others and see them as systemic problems that are embedded in many different countries, including their own.

### CONSIDERATIONS AROUND DRUG ADDICTION

Drug addiction is a disease that affects millions worldwide. Because of its pervasiveness, it is likely that many students themselves or someone they know has been affected by drug addiction. Thus, teachers should consider the potential impact that discussions around drug addiction may have on students. Specifically, teachers should avoid describing drug addiction as a moral failing or character flaw (Hardee, 2017).

Instead, teachers and students can discuss policies and practices on a systemic level that can lead to drug addiction. For example, in the Philippines, because of the country's issues around poverty, drug use may provide one method for some to deal with hunger and pain. This is what happens to Jun, as the drug shabu was an effective hunger suppressant, especially for those who live in poverty. Students can be invited to consider what policies can address poverty and how the use of extrajudicial killings to address drug addiction, as has been the policy in Philippine President Duterte's administration, does little to address the root of systemic issues involved. Teachers can also discuss how the stigma around drug addiction is counterproductive; such a stigma is not only what leads to the fracture in Jun's relationship with his family, but also what allows illegal extrajudicial killings to continue.

## Themes and Essential Questions

Teaching Tolerance's Social Justice Standards provides useful framework to read and analyze texts, especially a text like *Patron Saints of Nothing*. The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards focus on four domains: identity, diversity, justice, and action. Themes and essential questions can be developed around these domains to encourage students to respond to the text as individuals but then make connections to larger historical and contemporary systems through a social justice lens. Learn more about the standards and domains at [tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards](https://tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards).

## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

Some examples of themes and essential questions that teachers can use to frame students' study of *Patron Saints of Nothing* are listed below.

### *Theme: Identity*

- Who am I? What experiences and identities make up who I am? What are my values and beliefs, and how are those reflected in my thoughts and actions? (identity)
- What are the experiences and identities of others? What are the values and beliefs of others, and how are these reflected in group practices? (diversity)
- In what ways can individuals and groups be discriminated against based on their identities? What systems and structures support this discrimination? (justice)
- What can we do to ensure that all people, whatever identities they possess, are treated with dignity and respect? (action)

### *Theme: Family*

- How do I define my family? What makes up my family? How does my family define who I am? (identity)
- What are the different ways that families can be defined? How do families differ and why? How do family dynamics impact interpersonal relationships? (diversity)
- How do systems and structures, policies and practices, affect families in fair and unfair ways? What should be the relationship between government and families? (diversity)
- What can we do to ensure that all individuals and groups, whatever their family background, can be guaranteed equal access, opportunities, and treatment? (justice)

### *Theme: Truth*

- How do I define truth and why? How do my own identities and experiences inform the way I understand or misunderstand truth? (identity)
- How do others define the truth and why? How do the identities and experiences of others inform the way they understand or misunderstand truth? (diversity)
- In what ways can truth be revealed or hidden? What systems and structures, policies and practices, lead to or hide the truth? (justice)
- How can we ensure that truth is protected and told in socially responsible ways? (justice)

## Key Concepts and Vocabulary

Because *Patron Saints of Nothing* explores issues related to identity, race, culture, and history, some understanding of key concepts related to these issues is essential for teachers and students. The following list contains some definitions and their application to the novel.

### HYPHENATED IDENTITY

In a 2006 *Newsweek* piece, Indian American author Jhumpa Lahiri wrote about the duality of having multiple identities: “The traditions on either side of the hyphen dwell in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, one outshining the other depending on the day.” For Black, Indigenous, and people of color navigating predominantly white spaces, experiencing conflicting dual (or multiple) identities can be challenging. The concept of hyphenated identities complements W. E. B. DuBois’s concept of dual consciousness, of having to see and understand oneself through their own eyes and through the gaze of dominant culture.

Understanding this challenge, Ribay dedicates *Patron Saints of Nothing* “for the hyphenated” and Jay’s struggles to understand his own Filipinx and American identities throughout the novel reflects this duality.

### MICROAGGRESSION

Derald Wing Sue defines microaggression as “the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned white people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated” (2010). Sue also identifies several types of racial microaggressions: microassaults (the use of racial epithets), microinsults (verbal and nonverbal communication that demeans a person’s racial identity or heritage), and microinvalidations (communication that dismisses or nullifies the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of people of color).

In the novel, Jay experiences a microaggression when his friend Seth dismisses Jay’s experiences as a Filipinx American.

### STIGMA

Stigma is a mark of disgrace that renders a topic, idea, or issue socially unacceptable or taboo to acknowledge or discuss. Stigmas are socially constructed and based on the norms, beliefs, and attitudes of a dominant group.

Because they can prevent open discussion about serious issues, stigmas can be harmful. In the novel, stigma around drug addiction results in victim-blaming, preventing those affected, like Jun, from getting the support they need.

## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

### PATRIARCHY AND TOXIC MASCULINITY

Patriarchy is a system in which men and the characteristics associated with traditional manhood dominate power structures. Patriarchal power can be seen in the overrepresentation of men in positions of power in society but also in the acceptance and sometimes glorification of competition, physical power, violence, and other masculine-associated traits and behaviors. When such traits become the only way to define manhood, this leads to toxic masculinity. The Good Men Project defines toxic masculinity as a “narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression” (O’Malley, 2016). Accordingly, character traits outside these—especially those associated with emotional vulnerability and sensitivity—are excluded and dismissed.

In the novel, toxic masculinity can be seen in Tito Maning’s disappointment when Jun doesn’t fit his idea of what it means to be a strong man, his dismissiveness of Jun’s emotional sensitivity when it comes to the less fortunate, and his ultimatum in rejecting Jun when he refuses to abide by his standards.

### COLONIALISM

Colonialism occurs when one political state takes over another’s land, people, and resources, creating structure and systems that put themselves in power over others. While students will already be familiar with examples of colonialism in U.S. history, they may be less familiar with the history and implications of U.S. colonization of other countries, like the Philippines. Colonialism may be in the form of physical and political power, but also result in the form of ideas and attitudes. Thus, even after a colonizing power leaves or is ejected, the effects of colonialism on the formerly colonized may remain long after.

Such long-term effects of colonialism can be seen in the Philippines and in *Patron Saints of Nothing*. When Jun tries to defend journalists who seek to find the truth about the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, his uncle responds, “Our country’s history is full of invading foreigners who thought they knew us better than we knew ourselves.” Tito Maning’s distrust of journalists, especially foreign journalists who try to illuminate the truth about Duterte’s actions, stems from a larger distrust of outsiders due to Philippines and U.S. colonial history. As Ribay pointed out in a November 2019 conference keynote address, the effects of colonialism can be seen in Jay’s character: “The confusion of self he experiences on a daily basis, the loss of language and culture he’s suffered through the pressure immigrants feel to assimilate. The contradictory nature of Tito Maning’s pride in Filipino culture juxtaposed with his colorism.”



## Journal Prompts

Students will find many entry points throughout the story to connect with. Writing in response to critical moments of tension in the text can help students reflect and process their own emotions and questions as they read.

Ask students to revisit these passages from the novel: What stands out? What connections can you make to your own experiences or the experiences of others?

- “We can only handle so much truth at any given moment, I suppose” (xv).
- “Everyone acts like seventeen-year-olds who don’t have their career path mapped out are wasting their lives” (5).
- “How do you mourn someone you already let slip away? Are you even allowed to?” (10).
- “I’m seventeen years old, but I want someone to hold me like how my mom held me when I was a little kid” (17).
- “Truth is a hungry thing” (29).
- “It’s a sad thing when you map the borders of a friendship and find it’s a narrower country than expected” (38).
- “It’s like I only know half of myself” (48).
- “...there are many bad things, things not so easy to see from far away. When you are close, though, they are sometimes all you see” (54).
- “None of his children knows their mother tongue. And if you do not know your mother tongue, you cannot know your mother. And if you do not know your mother, you do not understand who you are” (96).
- “There was a time when I thought getting older meant you’d understand more about the world, but it turns out the exact opposite is true” (296).

## Discussion and Lesson Ideas

### COMING-OF-AGE

Senior year can be an important rite of passage for many young people as they begin taking steps toward greater independence after high school. When Jay learns of Jun's death, the things that seemed so important to him at one point—a new laptop, video games, college admissions—suddenly lose their significance. Indeed, Jun's death and the circumstances around it become a catalyst for Jay to reflect more deeply on himself and how his actions may or may not make a difference in the world.

Ask students to trace Jay's journey throughout the novel and identify the key moments in the text that help Jay develop a deeper understanding of himself. Aside from the larger event of Jun's death, what are the specific catalysts to growth that Jay experiences? Students can create a simple two-column chart, one side summarizing the event or moment, and the other side describing the impact of this event or moment. Some sentence starters—such as “Before this moment, Jay...” or “After this moment, Jay...”—can be helpful for students. Students can then be asked to rank the moments in order of most (causes greatest change in growth) to least significant (causes less change in growth).

As an extension of this activity, have students read Chen Chen's poem “When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities.” Students can study this text for its structure and then can do one or both of the following: 1) write a poem in Chen Chen's style from the perspective of one of the characters in the book, or 2) write a poem that represents their own hopes about growing up.

### HYPHENATED IDENTITY

Many students can identify with the push and pull of multiple identities. For many students, adolescence is a period of development that challenges them to “try on” different identities in the journey to find their authentic self. And while this is a challenge for many adolescents, for students of color, the experience of navigating the dualities of a cultural identity in a predominantly white society presents its own unique difficulties.

Invite students to listen to Randy Ribay talk about the epigraph to his book, “for the hyphenated,” by listening to his 2019 interview on NPR. Students can journal in response, noting what stands out to them: what confirms, challenges, or changes their perspectives.

In addition, students can also consider the following texts around hyphenated identities. What similarities and differences do they see between these texts, Jay's experiences in the novel, and their own lives?

## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

- Essays on [MashedupAmericans.com](http://MashedupAmericans.com)
- *The New York Times* video documentary series “Conversations About Race”
- Jhumpa Lahiri’s essay “My Two Lives” in *Newsweek*
- Code Switch podcast episode “What About Our Friends?”
- Independent Lens documentary *The Seed Savers*

### INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

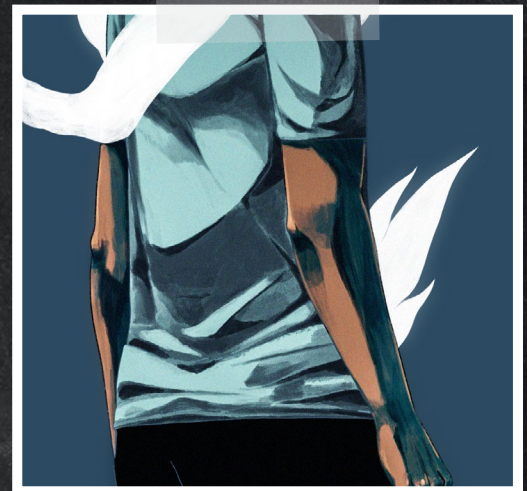
When Jay finds out that Jun is killed, he is warned by his parents not to interfere, that it is a private family matter and not to get involved. Yet Jay’s guilt over not responding to Jun’s letters and his questions around his cousin’s death compel him to find out more.

Ask students to consider what their individual and our collective responsibility is when it comes to issues of injustice: What is our obligation to find out the truth? How far should we go to seek justice? What are we willing to sacrifice to make things right? Such questions can spark a discussion before students begin reading *Patron Saints of Nothing* and can be revisited as students continue reading.

One approach might be to have students reread the following passage from the novel, an excerpt from a letter Jun writes to Jay:

*“I thought of the story of the Good Samaritan. You know the one? I think everyone does. Or, at least everyone has heard it. Every time I do, I think, surely, if I were in that situation I would be like the Samaritan and help the man in need. But how many times have I instead walked past?” (63).*

Ask students to journal about what thoughts, questions, and connections this passage brings up for them. After some discussion, introduce students to



## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

the concept of a *universe of obligation*. According to sociologist Helen Fein, our universe of obligation includes those individuals and groups “toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.” In other words, our universe of obligation includes those we feel a responsibility or even a moral imperative to care for.

Invite students to read more about a universe of obligation by sharing the information provided on the Facing History, Facing Ourselves website. Teachers can then guide students in reflecting on what individuals and groups they would include in their own universe of obligation, by drawing at least three concentric circles and placing individuals and groups in the circle, with those closest to the center being those whom they feel most obligated and responsible for. This exercise can be expanded to ask students to reflect on what individuals and groups they believe their family, schools, and society as a whole feel most responsible for. Ask students to support their ideas: for example, what policies, practices, or traditions say about who is valued and who is not. And most importantly, what is the impact?

Teachers might also ask students to revisit another key scene from the novel to deepen their understanding of the individual and collective responsibility. After arriving in Manila, a beggar approaches the car and Jay rolls down his window to hand money to the girl. His aunt, Tita Ami, however, interjects, “They are like ants. You will never get rid of them all . . . You cannot give money to everyone who asks for it while you are here. There are so many poor in this country . . .” (77). Ask students to what extent they agree or disagree with Tita Ami’s opinion here and why. Students might also make connections to their own experiences by researching attitudes and policies regarding poverty in the U. S.

### PARENT AND CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

*“But adults lie, I guess. That’s what they do. Sure, there are a bunch of reasons they do it, and people would probably say most of them are pretty good. When you’re a kid, they lie and say you did a great job in a game even if you sucked. Then you grow a bit and your mom and dad lie to you about how strong their relationship is and how much they love each other after they have a big fight. Then you grow up a bit more and they tell you the lie that life is as simple as studying hard, getting into a good college, and finding a decent job.” (65)*

Students can deepen their understanding of the novel by analyzing the familial relationships present in the text. Invite students to think about Jay’s relationship with his parents and siblings: Are they close? How open and honest are their relationships, and how do they know? To expand on this, ask students to compare Jay’s

## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

relationships with his own family to the family dynamics he observes among his family in the Philippines, specifically with Tito Maning's family and Tita Chato's family.

Teachers can specifically ask students to focus on what they infer about how each family communicates with one another, what values are prioritized, and how they show their love for each other. For example, although students might be tempted to believe that Tito Maning does not care for Jun, a deeper reading of the text might invite students to see that how Tito Maning's values conflicted with his son's, how their understanding of family and parent-child relationships in particular led to their separation.

To deepen their analysis, students could use Thomas Foster's chapter on acts of communion in *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* and apply his framework to *Patron Saints*. Foster, for example, asserts that anytime characters eat a meal together, it's an act of communion. In this act of communion, readers can infer much about how characters relate to one another: How do the characters gather for meals? What is the conversation like at the table? What can readers infer about what the characters' relationships are with one another? Considering the central role that food often plays in culture, analyzing meal scenes to better understand characters and character relationships can be a unique and insightful experience for students to consider in the book (and even in their own lives).

### MEDIA LITERACY AND JUSTICE

Another approach teachers and students can take is to examine the role of the free press in a democratic society, particularly in holding governments accountable to following the law and to being transparent with the public. Ask students to consider Jay's reaction as he researches the drug war in the Philippines and reread that section in the chapter "A Narrower Country Than Expected." Here, Jun is taken aback, in particular, by the photographs he sees, like that of a "woman cradling her husband's dead body." Although Jay wants to turn away, he reminds himself: "I need to know. I need to see it. These photographers didn't want to water it down. They wanted the audience to confront reality, to feel the pain that's been numbed by a headline culture." After searching, Jay realizes how unaware he had been, concluding, "It's crazy and shameful that all of this has been going on for the last three years, and I basically knew nothing about it."

Ask students to consider Jay's position here. In what ways have they, too, been unaware of social issues and injustices that are happening both in the world and in the U.S.? Teachers can ask students to begin by writing down a list of issues they feel like they should know more about but do not—or put another way, a list of issues they feel it is important to know more about. Students can journal and then identify and discuss

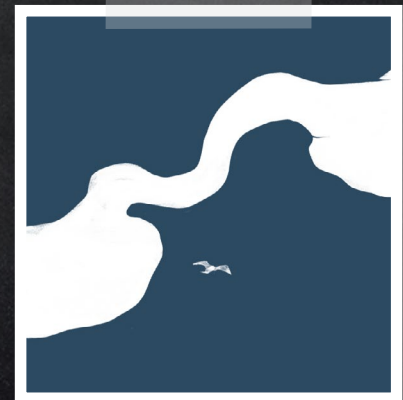
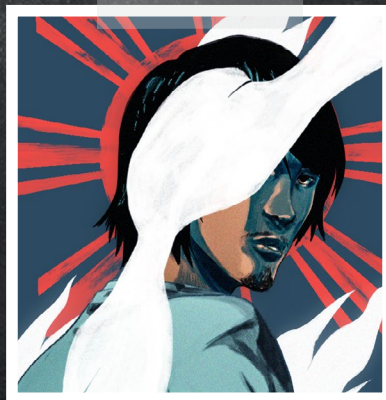
## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

what barriers to social awareness might exist—and what they can do about it. Although most students will not be able to travel to the other side of the world as Jay does to investigate an injustice, there are steps that students can take in the context of their own lives. Invite students to brainstorm not only what these steps might be but how they may actually do them.

Furthermore, the role of the free press can be analyzed more closely, both in the book and in students' lives. How does the media report (or not report) news of the drug war? How does this affect Jay's ability to seek justice for his cousin? What is the role of the press in presenting the truth about the drug war?

The last question, in particular, can be explored by asking students to note, like Jay does, the differences between how the press in the Philippines reports on the drug war versus press outside the country. In March 2019, the British public service television network Channel 4 interviewed Filipino journalist Raffy Lerma, who took the photograph that Jay describes in the novel of a woman cradling her dead husband (Miller, 2019). Depending on the age and maturity of students, teachers can share this five-minute news report and interview and ask them to consider what Lerma believes to be the power and role of the photographs he takes in telling the narrative of the drug war and in the pursuit of justice.

Likewise, ask students to consider U.S. media and analyze the bias in major media outlets and publications they might be exposed to. Students can go to [AllSides.com](http://AllSides.com) to learn more about media bias. By comparing and contrasting the language used in news reports and headlines in left-leaning, right-leaning, and centrist media outlets, students can discuss the importance of seeking and finding multiple perspectives. As an extension, have students choose a social issue they would like to know more about, journal about their initial understanding about this issue, and then compare this initial understanding with how this issue is presented in news outlets from across the political spectrum on [AllSides.com](http://AllSides.com). Emphasize to students that just as there was



## Themes and Essential Questions (cont.)

more to Jun's death than Jay initially thought, there are often deeper layers and hidden counternarratives that are left out or marginalized. The key here will be to also ask students how their identities and experiences inform their understanding of issues. After all, Jay's anger at Jun's death stems from his belief in due process, but this belief is rooted in his identity as an American:

"The right to due process is so ingrained in me as an American that I've taken it for granted. Up until now, I've never fully understood that such a right is nothing but ink on paper, paper that can be shredded and tossed in the garbage, paper that can be ignored if people don't demand its application. And it doesn't take some great evil to do that. The promise of safety is enough."

Invite students to reflect on this passage and what implications that it might have in the U.S., especially in the context of Black Lives Matter civil rights protests in recent years: In what ways can protest help to guarantee due process to Black Americans regarding police shootings? And what is the media's role in establishing or disrupting narratives around both police shootings and Black Lives Matter protests?

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## Extension Activities

### THE POWER OF LETTERS

In 2020, Teaching Tolerance produced a short film, *Bibi*, which explores issues of identity and intersectionality. Students can watch the film, focusing on the ways in which identity impacts the relationships between the characters in the film, and then applying this same analysis to the characters and events in *Patron Saints of Nothing*. In particular, students can consider the power of letter writing in both *Bibi* and *Patron Saints of Nothing*. Students can consider the ways that letters between a father and son in *Bibi* compare and contrast with the letters exchanged between Jay and Jun.

One of Jay's deepest regrets in the novel is not writing back to Jun. Thus, a potentially powerful writing assignment for students could be to write a letter in the voice of Jay at the end of the novel. Or, students could also choose any letter that Jun writes and respond in Jay's voice.

## Extension Activities (cont.)

### A MEANINGFUL PLACE

Have students reread and annotate the chapter “To Flood,” in which Jay experiences an epiphany about his identity and the connection he feels to the Philippines. Walk students through Ribay’s craft throughout the chapter, particularly noting his use of diction, imagery, and voice. Then ask students to write about a meaningful place in their own experiences, describing it with some of the same techniques Ribay uses and making them their own.

### READING THROUGH CRITICAL LITERARY THEORIES

In a 2019 conference keynote address, Randy Ribay argues for teaching students to use critical literary theory as preparation for the world. Specifically, Ribay recommends using three critical lenses—feminist, Marxist, and post-colonial—to deepen students’ understanding of both the text and the world.

Have students read Ribay’s entire essay. Then, working in groups, students can choose one of the lenses Ribay recommends and find evidence in the text to support reading the text through that lens. Ultimately, students can ask themselves how using this lens helps to complicate and clarify their understanding of the text.

### Bibliography

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["Patron Saints of Nothing" Is a Book for "the Hyphenated" \(podcast\)](#)

#DisruptTexts is not simply about replacing older texts for new ones; rather, it is a more nuanced and holistic approach aimed at offering a restorative and antiracist curriculum. #DisruptTexts requires that we as educators interrogate our own biases, center the voices of BIPOC in literature, help students develop a critical lens, and work in community with other antiracist and BIPOC educators. Together we will bring about change in society.

**JULIA E. TORRES** is a veteran language arts teacher librarian in Denver, Colorado. Julia facilitates teacher development workshops rooted in the areas of antiracist education, equity and access in literacy and librarianship, and education as a practice of liberation. Julia works with students and teachers locally and around the country with the goal of empowering them to use literacy to fuel resistance and positive social transformation. Julia also serves on several local and national boards and committees promoting educational equity and progressivism. She is the current NCTE Secondary Representative-at-large, a Book Love Foundation board member and Educator Collaborative Book Ambassador.

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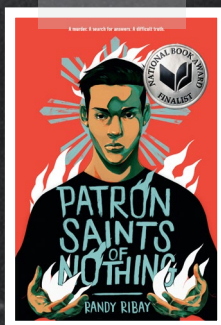
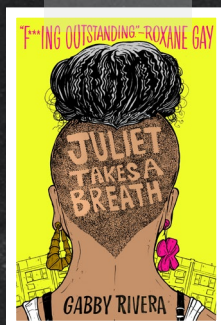
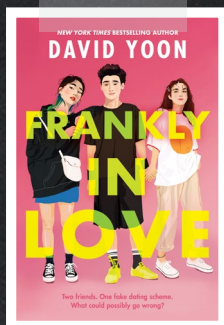
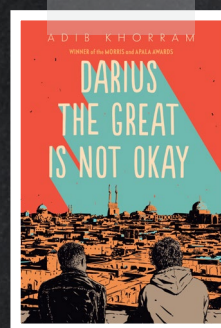
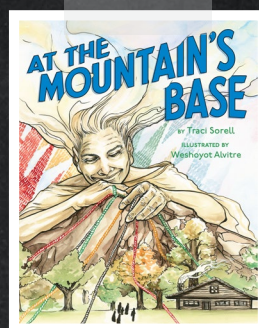
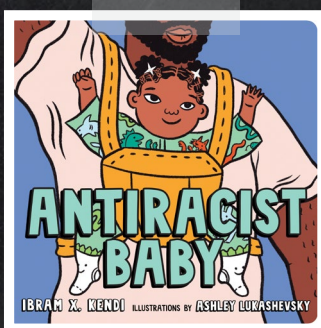
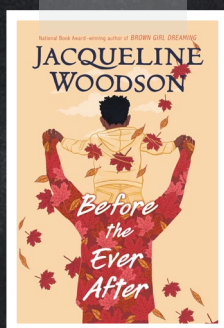
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