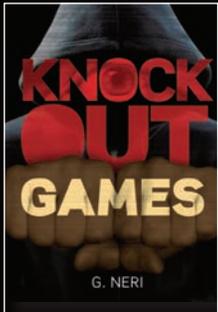


★ "Harsh and relentless, a tough but worthy read."
—starred, *Kirkus Reviews*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

G. NERI is an author and filmmaker. His books for young readers of all ages have earned him accolades and awards, including a Coretta Scott King Honor for *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty*. Visit him online at gregneri.com.



Knockout Games

G. Neri

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KNOCK OUT GAMES

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

For Calvin Barnes, the only thing that comes close to the rush of playing the knockout game is watching videos of the knockout game.

Kalvin's crew always takes videos of their KOs, but Calvin wants more—something better. He thinks if someone could really see the game for what it was, could appreciate it, could capture the essence of it—that would be a video for all time. The world would have to notice.

That's where Erica comes in. She's new in town. Awkward. Shy. White. But she's got a good camera and a filmmaker's eye. She could learn. Calvin could open her eyes to the power he sees in the knockout game; he could make her see things his way. But first she'll have to close her eyes to everything else.

For a while, Calvin's knockouts are strangers. For a while, Erica can ignore their suffering in the rush of creativity and Calvin's attention. Then comes the KO that forces her eyes open, that makes her see what's really happening.

NO ONE WINS THE KNOCKOUT GAME.

Coretta Scott King Award honoree G. Neri captures the notorious and terrifying knockout game and its players in an unflinching novel that's hard to read and impossible to put down.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. *Knockout Games* begins with a familiar scene: a character is uprooted by her parents' divorce. Was this important to the rest of the story? What does it add to or take away from Erica's character and the overall plot?
2. How did you feel about the way race is described and addressed in this book, either by Erica as a narrator or by another character? Discuss a specific example.
3. Why do you think Erica is drawn to making videos? What qualities does she possess that make her a good artist?
4. How do you think Mrs. Lee knew Erica would be interested in the video art book? What qualities did Mrs. Lee have that made her a good teacher? Why are those qualities important?
5. Compare and contrast Destiny and Erica's personalities. What do they have in common? Why do you think they become—and remain—friends?
6. How would you describe Calvin? What are his attractive qualities? What qualities are unattractive?
7. Why do you think Destiny stayed involved with TKO after her brother left? What did the group represent for her?
8. Though it's clear that Erica's decisions are getting her into dangerous situations, what would you have done in her place? Do you understand the motivations or desires that inspired her actions?
9. What do you think of Mr. Lee? Do you agree with Calvin that he was being racist at his rally? Why or why not? Is it possible to sympathize with both Calvin's and Mr. Lee's arguments?
10. If you were Mr. Lee and were worried about safety in your community, how would you have addressed the situation of the knockout game?
11. Right before the climactic confrontation between Erica and Calvin, there is a chapter in third-person perspective. What are some reasons the author might have chosen this brief moment to switch perspectives?
12. *Knockout Games* clearly demonstrates that the internet can be as dangerous and violent as the knockout game itself. Have you ever been a part of cyberbullying or invasion of privacy on the internet (from either side)?
13. Do you think Calvin took advantage of Erica when he filmed their most intimate moments? Point to some examples of Calvin's language that could be considered manipulative. How can you tell if you are being manipulated?
14. In the book's climax, Erica confronts Calvin one last time. Would you have done the same? Why or why not? What was your reaction to what happened to the members of TKO?
15. How do you define "justice"? Using your definition, do you think justice was served in the end?
16. Erica wonders sometimes if she's strong or weak. Which is she? Point to some specific moments to back up your answer.
17. What is empathy? Why do you think some adults in the novel claim that teenagers don't have it? How would you respond if an adult made that claim about you?
18. How would you react if you found out the knockout game was being played in your neighborhood? Would you respond differently than Erica?