

WNC BOOK LISTS

TOPIC CURATED TITLE SUGGESTIONS



SPORTS

Hey there Teacher friend,

I'm so glad you're here! If you've landed on this resource, you've probably already heard of First Chapter Friday—but just in case, let me give you a quick rundown.

First Chapter Friday is a simple (but powerful!) routine where you share the opening chapter of a book with your students each Friday. It's a chance for them to “test drive” new titles, hear engaging read-alouds, and discover books they might never have picked up on their own. Think of it as a weekly spark to ignite curiosity and build a classroom full of independent readers.

This particular bundle is designed for the sports lovers, underdogs, teammates, competitors, and dreamers in your classroom. Whether your students are athletes themselves or simply love stories packed with determination, teamwork, perseverance, rivalry, and heart, these titles are filled with the kinds of characters and challenges that keep readers hooked. From the pressure of the big game to personal struggles off the field, court, track, or gym floor, sports stories have a unique way of connecting with middle school readers and reminding them that growth often happens through grit, failure, and resilience.

Inside this bundle, you'll find everything you need to bring high-interest sports books into your classroom reading routine with minimal prep and maximum engagement, including:

- First Chapter Friday video read-alouds featuring sports-themed middle grade and YA titles
- Student response worksheets to encourage reflection, prediction, and meaningful connections
- Teacher tips, implementation ideas, and quick-access resources to make everything easy to use

My hope is that these stories help students discover books they genuinely want to read—books that make them cheer, gasp, laugh, reflect, and maybe even see themselves a little more clearly. Sports stories often open the door for reluctant readers because they combine action, emotion, competition, and character growth in such an engaging way.

Thank you for bringing reading excitement into your classroom and for creating spaces where students can connect with stories, characters, and ideas that matter.

Happy reading,
Amanda (aka: The Word Nerd)



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

In this resource you will find a curated list of books that feature sports as well as a variety of accompanying materials.

How to Use This Resource

1. Choose a title from the sports list.
2. Scan the QR code to play the read-aloud video.
3. Students complete the response sheet while listening.
4. Students vote: Would you keep reading?
5. Display the book cover poster to build classroom book buzz.

Classroom Use Ideas Quick List:

- First Chapter Friday
- Sub plans
- Book tasting stations
- Library preview lessons
- Early finisher reading activities



To check the reading level, video length or to find a book purchasing link, look at this [Google Doc](#) that organizes ALL of my First Chapter Friday read aloud videos alphabetically.

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Page 5: What is First Chapter Friday?

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Page 10: Book List

Page 11: Full List Book Cover Poster

Pages 13-32 Individual Book First Chapter Friday Sheets

Pages 33-53: Individual Book Posters

** More resources may be added in the future, so check back occasionally. As always, please email me with any title requests or questions. (wordnerd@amandazieba.com)

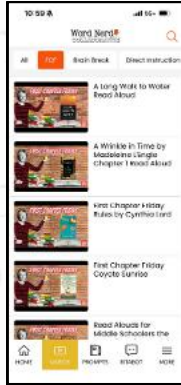
HAPPY READING SPORTS FANS!



Word Nerd Daily

an app from Amanda Zieba

MUST TRY!



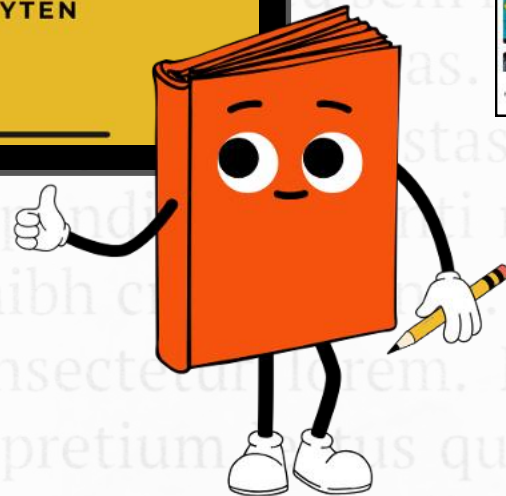
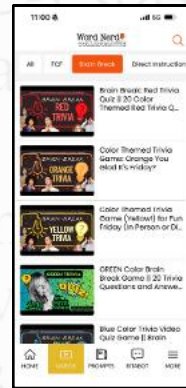
First Chapter Friday Videos

ChatBot for Reading Recs and Lesson Planning



Writing Prompt Library

Brain Break Videos



AVAILABLE FOR APPLE AND ANDROID DEVICES



FIRST CHAPTER *Friday Videos*

Not sure how First Chapter Friday works?

Check out this [video](#) for a full explanation and 4 implementation ideas.



If you prefer a written description in lieu of a video, click [here](#).

[Click here](#) for a live, continually updated, Google Doc of the First Chapter Friday videos on my channel. Additionally you will find links to purchase the books and watch the read aloud videos, as well as book reading levels, genre/format, video length and more!

All my best,
Amanda Zieba



SPORTS books

Want to quickly preview these books directly in class?
Check out this [video](#) for a quick overview of each title.



Preview Video



Use the sheet on the next page to help students determine which of the 20 books in this curated collection they might want to try out!

For each title, students can circle yes, maybe or no and then at the end, share the title (or titles!) they are most interested in checking out.

TITLE, AUTHOR	LIKE IT?	NOTES
Becoming Muhammad Ali	Y / M / N	
Change the Game	Y / M / N	
Chirp	Y / M / N	
Chunky	Y / M / N	
The Crossover	Y / M / N	
Dragon Hoops	Y / M / N	
Duel	Y / M / N	
Friendship and Other Things We Fouled Up	Y / M / N	
Hoop Kings / Hoop Queens	Y / M / N	
Kareem Between	Y / M / N	
Last Shot	Y / M / N	
Legacy and the Queen	Y / M / N	
Life in the Passenger Seat	Y / M / N	
Nikki on the Line	Y / M / N	
The Running Dream	Y / M / N	
Stealing Home	Y / M / N	
Swim Team	Y / M / N	
The Tryout	Y / M / N	
Vanishing Act	Y / M / N	
War Game	Y / M / N	

Which book are you most excited to give a try and why?



SPORTS

books



Preview Video

Name: _____

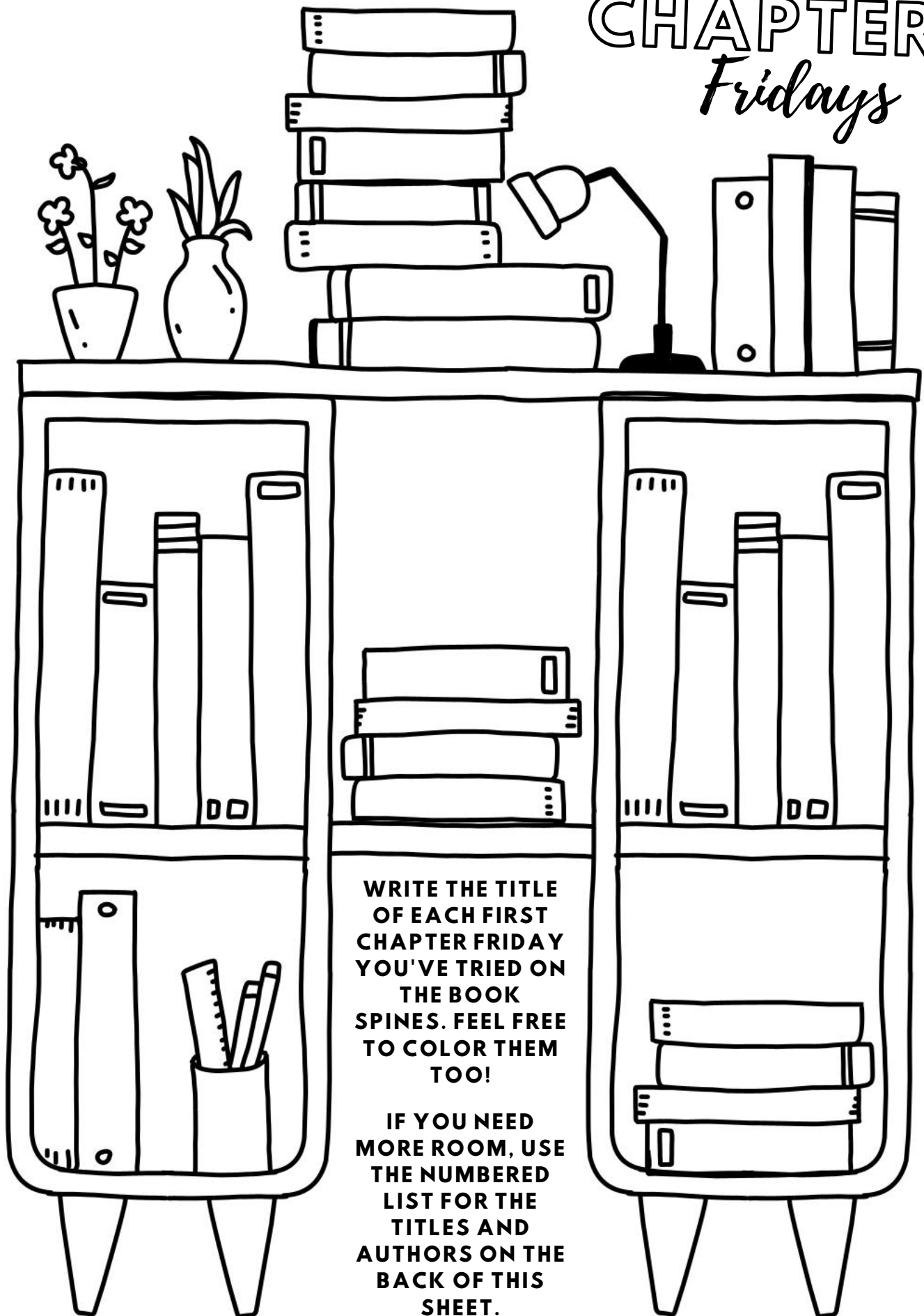
TITLE	LIKE IT?	NOTES
Becoming Muhammad Ali	Y / M / N	
Change the Game	Y / M / N	
Chirp	Y / M / N	
Chunky	Y / M / N	
The Crossover	Y / M / N	
Dragon Hoops	Y / M / N	
Duel	Y / M / N	
Freethrows, Friendship and Other Things We Fouled Up	Y / M / N	
Hoop Kings / Hoop Queens	Y / M / N	
Kareem Between	Y / M / N	
Last Shot	Y / M / N	
Legacy and the Queen	Y / M / N	
Life in the Passenger Seat	Y / M / N	
Nikki on the Line	Y / M / N	
The Running Dream	Y / M / N	
Stealing Home	Y / M / N	
Swim Team	Y / M / N	
The Tryout	Y / M / N	
Vanishing Act	Y / M / N	
War Game	Y / M / N	

Which book are you most excited to give a try and why?

[illegible]

NAME: _____

First CHAPTER *Fridays*



WNC BOOK LIST

SPORTS

While each of these books is about sports, they aren't all fun and games! You'll find some serious topics and mysteries, some facts and histories mixed in with the athletic competition.



Becoming Muhammad Ali

by James Patterson and Kwame Alexander (Boxing)

Change the Game by Colin Kaepernick (Football)

Chirp by Kate Messner (Gymnastics)

Chunky by Yehudi Mercado (Many sports)

The Crossover by Kwame Alexander (Basketball)

Dragon Hoops by Gene Luen Yang (Basketball)

Duel by Jessixa Bagley (Fencing)

Free Throws, Friendship and Other Things We Fouled Up

by Jenn Bishop (Basketball)

Hoop Kings/Queens by Charles Ray Smith, Jr. (Basketball)

Kareem Between by Shifa Safadi (Football)

The Last Shot by John Feinstein (Basketball)

Legacy and the Queen by Kobe Bryant and Annie Matthew (Tennis)

Life in the Passenger Seat by Amanda Zieba (Gymnastics)

Nikki on the Line by Barabara Carol Roberts (Basketball)

The Running Dream by Wendelin Van Draanen (Track and Field)

Stealing Home by J. Torres (Baseball)

Swim Team by Jonnie Christmas (Swimming)

The Tryout by Christina Soontornvat (Cheerleading)

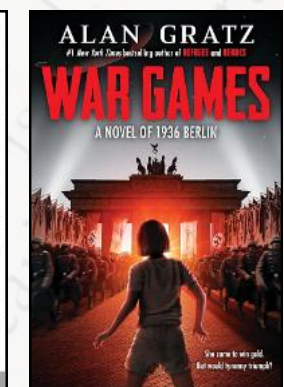
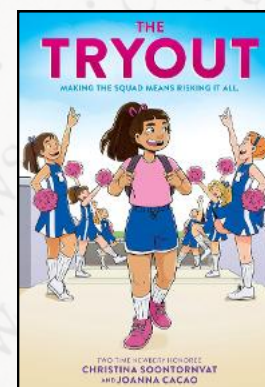
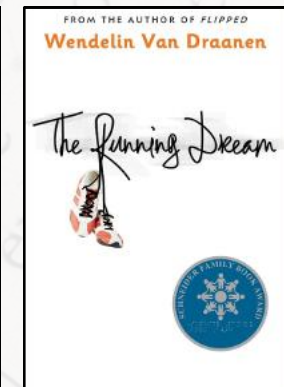
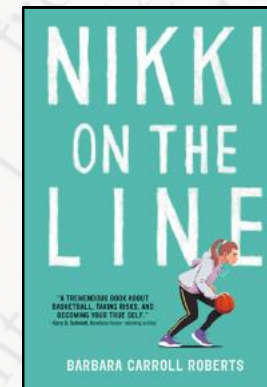
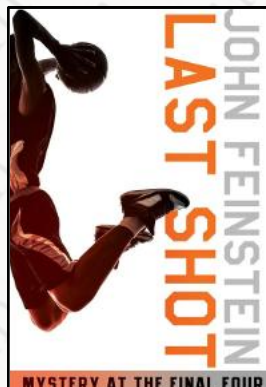
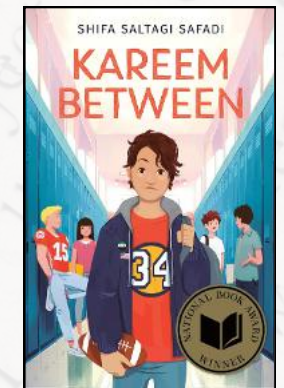
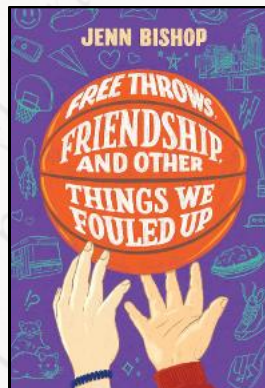
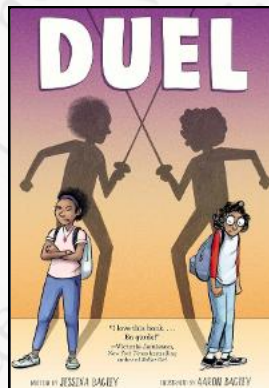
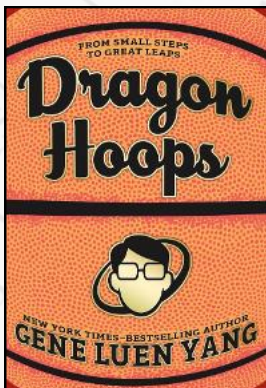
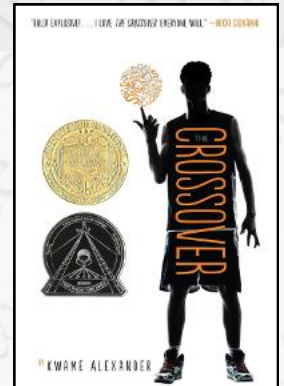
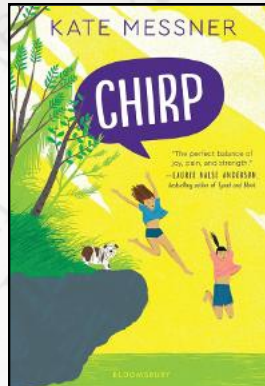
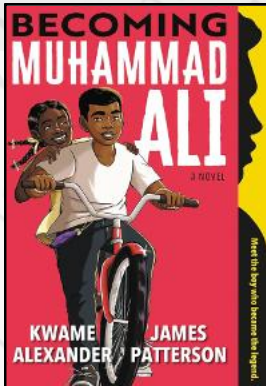
Vanishing Act by John Feinstein (Tennis)

War Games by Alan Gratz (Gymnastics)



WNC BOOK LISTS * TOPIC CURATED TITLE SUGGESTIONS

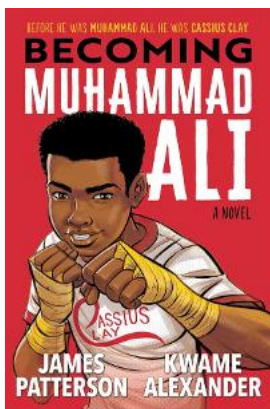
SPORTS



WNC BOOK LISTS * TOPIC CURATED TITLE SUGGESTIONS

[illegible]

FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY



Name _____

Date _____

Becoming Muhammad Ali

by Kwame Alexander and James Patterson



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

Before he was a household name, Cassius Clay was a kid with struggles like any other. James Patterson and Kwame Alexander join forces to vividly depict his life up to age seventeen in both prose and verse, including his childhood friendships, struggles in school, the racism he faced, and his discovery of boxing. Readers will learn about Cassius's family and neighbors in Louisville, Kentucky, and how Cassius began training as an amateur boxer at age twelve. Before long, he won his first Golden Gloves bout and began his transformation into the unrivaled Muhammad Ali. Fully authorized by and written in cooperation with the Muhammad Ali estate, *Becoming Muhammad Ali* dynamically captures the budding charisma and youthful personality of one of the greatest sports heroes of all time.

AR Reading Level: 5.4

Who Wrote It?

Things Kwame and James have in common...

- Award Winning Authors
- Both have written more than 40 books!
- Advocates for Children's Literature
- Some of their books have been turned into movies and TV shows!
- They are philanthropists, which means they donate money to charitable causes.

Some differences...

- James lives in Florida.
- Kwame lives in London.
- James has a son.
- Kwame has a daughter.
- James writes prose.
- Kwame writes poetry.



Lexile Level: 1010L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆ ☆ WHAT I THINK ☆ ☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Change the Game

by Colin Kaepernick

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



Read Aloud Video

What's It About?

High school star athlete Colin Kaepernick is at a crossroads in life. Heavily scouted by colleges and MLB as a baseball pitcher, he has a bright future ahead of him as a highly touted prospect. Everyone from his parents to his teachers and coaches are in agreement on his future. Colin feels differently.

Colin isn't excited about baseball. In the words of five-time all-star MLB player Adam Jones, 'Baseball is a white man's game.' Colin looks up to athletes like Allen Iverson: talented, hyper-competitive, unapologetically Black, and dominating their sports while staying true to themselves. College football looks a lot more fun than sleeping on hotel room floors in the minor leagues of baseball. But Colin doesn't have a single offer to play football. Yet.

This touching graphic novel explores the story of how a young change-maker learned to find himself and never compromise. How the right decision is very rarely the easy one, but taking the road less traveled can make all the difference in the world.

Who Wrote It?

Colin Kaepernick is a professional Super Bowl quarterback who fights oppression globally. He founded the Know Your Rights Camps to advance the liberation and well-being of Black and Brown people through education, self-empowerment, mass-mobilization, and the creation of new systems that elevate the next generation of change leaders. In 2019, he founded Kaepernick Publishing to elevate a new generation of writers and creators through the development and publication of meaningful works of all genres with the focus of amplifying diverse



views and voices. I Color Myself Different, a New York Times bestseller, was his first book for children. Change the Game is his third book. Abolition for the People was his second.

AR Reading Level: 3.9

Lexile Level: 670

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.



Name _____

Date _____

Chirp

by Kate Messner



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

When Mia moves to Vermont the summer after seventh grade, she's recovering from the broken arm she got falling off a balance beam. And packed away in the moving boxes under her clothes and gymnastics trophies is a secret she'd rather forget. Mia's change in scenery brings day camp, new friends, and time with her beloved grandmother. But Gram is convinced someone is trying to destroy her cricket farm. Is it sabotage or is Gram's thinking impaired from the stroke she suffered months ago? Mia and her friends set out to investigate, but can they uncover the truth in time to save Gram's farm? And will that discovery empower Mia to confront the secret she's been hiding--and find the courage she never knew she had?

In a compelling story rich with friendship, science, and summer fun, a girl finds her voice while navigating the joys and challenges of growing up.

Who Wrote It?

Kate Messner is passionately curious and writes books that encourage kids to wonder. She writes picture books, chapter books and books for middle schoolers. Before becoming a full-time writer, Kate was a TV news reporter as well as an educator who spent fifteen years teaching middle school English. She lives on Lake Champlain with her family and is trying to summit all 46 Adirondack High Peaks in between book deadlines. Kate's writing advice? "I think one of the most important things to do if you want to be a writer is to lead an interesting life. Go outside. Try new things. Talk to people, especially people whose lives are different



from yours. And don't pass up opportunities." You can learn more about Kate and her many books at her website: www.katemessner.com or in this videos' interview!

AR Reading Level: 4.6

Lexile Level: currently unavailable

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆ ☆ WHAT I THINK ☆ ☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Chunky

by Yehudi Mercado



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

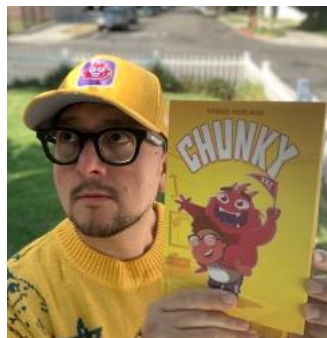
Hudi needs to lose weight, according to his doctors. Concerned about the serious medical issue Hudi had when he was younger, his parents push him to try out for sports. Hudi would rather do anything else, but then he meets Chunky, his imaginary friend and mascot. Together, they decide to give baseball a shot.

As the only Mexican and Jewish kid in his neighborhood, Hudi has found the cheerleader he never had. Baseball doesn't go well (unless getting hit by the ball counts), but the two friends have a great time drawing and making jokes. While Hudi's parents keep trying to find the right sport for Hudi, Chunky encourages him to pursue his true love—comedy.

But when Hudi's dad loses his job, it gets harder for Hudi to chart his own course, even with Chunky's guidance. Can Chunky help Hudi stay true to himself or will this friendship strike out?

Who Wrote It?

Yehudi Mercado is a former pizza delivery driver and art director for Disney Interactive. He is currently a writer-artist-director. "During his time at Disney he co-wrote and was the Art Director for Guardians of the Galaxy: The Universal Weapon (Mobile Game). His original graphic novels as include Buffalo Speedway, Pantalones, TX, Rocket Salvage and Sci-Fu: Kick it Off (which was featured on the Scholastic Book Fair and was one of the top 10 most checked out books for kids in the New York Public Library System)" (www.bricfoundation.org). Yehudi was born in Mexico City, grew up in Texas, and now lives in Los Angeles.



You can learn more about Yehudi and his work on his website: <https://www.supermercado.pizza/about>

AR Reading Level: currently unavailable Lexile Level: currently unavailable

I want to read this book: YES / NO

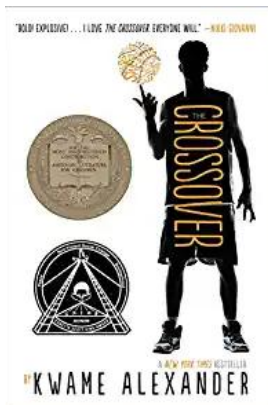
☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



The Crossover

by Kwame Alexander



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

12-year old Josh Bell. He and his twin brother Jordan are awesome on the court. But Josh has more than basketball in his blood, he's got mad beats, too, that tell his family's story in verse, in this fast and furious middle grade novel of family and brotherhood from Kwame Alexander. Josh and Jordan must come to grips with growing up on and off the court to realize breaking the rules comes at a terrible price, as their story's heart-stopping climax proves a game-changer for the entire family.

This book is a novel in verse, which means it is told in poems. Many are styled like raps.

- ** Soon to be a show on Disney+
- ** Won the Newbery Award
- ** New York Times Bestseller!

Who Wrote It?

Kwame Alexander has written 35 books, three of them in a chair next to a fireplace at his neighborhood Panera Bread. He now writes in a penthouse in London, where he lives. When he's not writing, Kwame's playing Softball with his soon-to-be six feet tall middle school daughter, walking around London listening to audio books, and travelling to schools and libraries across the globe...on Zoom. Kwame has eaten snails, chocolate covered bugs, and grasscutter, which is like a big rat, which he had no idea he was eating



because it was in a really tasty stew he ate in Ghana while building a library and a health clinic in a village called Konko. Kwame loves jazz. Kwame loves his family. Kwame loves his job.

AR Reading Level: 4.3

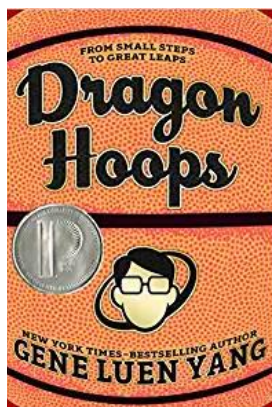
Lexile Level: 750L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.



Name _____

Date _____

Dragon Hoops by Gene Luen Yang



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



What's It About?

Gene understands stories—comic book stories, in particular. Big action. Bigger thrills. And the hero always wins.

But Gene doesn't get sports. As a kid, his friends called him 'Stick' and every basketball game he played ended in pain. He lost interest in basketball long ago, but at the high school where he now teaches, it's all anyone can talk about. The men's varsity team, the Dragons, is having a phenomenal season that's been decades in the making. Each victory brings them closer to their ultimate goal: the California State Championships.

Once Gene gets to know these young all-stars, he realizes that their story is just as thrilling as anything he's seen on a comic book page. He knows he has to follow this epic to its end. What he doesn't know yet is that this season is not only going to change the Dragons's lives, but his own life as well.

Who Wrote It?

Hi! I'm Gene Luen Yang. I began making comics and graphic novels in the fifth grade. In 2006, my book *American Born Chinese* was published by First Second Books. It became the first graphic novel to be nominated for a National Book Award and the first to win the American Library Association's Printz Award. I've done a number of other comics, including Dark Horse Comics' continuation of the popular Nickelodeon cartoon *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and DC Comics' *Superman!* In addition cartooning, I teach creative writing at Hamlin



University. In January 2016, the Library of Congress appointed me the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature.

AR Reading Level: 3.9

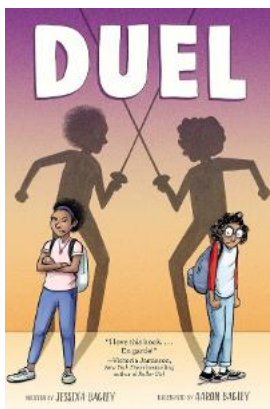
Lexile Level: 550L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.



Name _____

Date _____

Duel

by Jessixa Bagley

P.S. The 'x' is pronounced like a 'c'



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

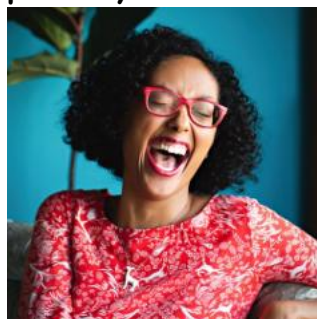
What's It About?

Sixth grader Lucy loves fantasy novels and is brand-new to middle school. GiGi is the undisputed queen bee of eighth grade (as well as everything else she does). They've only got one thing in common: fencing. Oh, and they're sisters. They never got along super well, but ever since their dad died, it seems like they're always at each other's throats. When GiGi humiliates Lucy in the cafeteria on the first day of school, Lucy snaps and challenges GiGi to a duel with high sisterly stakes. If GiGi wins, Lucy promises to stay out of GiGi's way; if Lucy wins, GiGi will stop teasing Lucy for good. But after their scene in the cafeteria, both girls are on thin ice with the principal and their mom. Lucy stopped practicing fencing after their fencer dad died and will have to get back to fighting form in secret or she'll be in big trouble. And GiGi must behave perfectly or risk getting kicked off the fencing team.

As the clock ticks down to the girls' fencing bout, the anticipation grows. Their school is divided into GiGi and Lucy factions, complete with t-shirts declaring kids' allegiances. Both sisters are determined to triumph. But will winning the duel mean fracturing their family even further?

Who Wrote It?

I grew up in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon where I developed a love of hamburgers, drawing, and anthropomorphic food. Upon becoming an adult, I decided to follow my childhood dreams of being a cartoonist and picture book maker. I attended the University of Washington and then Cornish College of the Arts where I graduated in 2004 with a BFA in painting and printmaking. I live in Seattle, Washington in a castle in the sky with my wonderful husband, painfully adorable son, and a slew of



houseplants that all have names. You can learn more about Jessixa on her website at: www.jessixa.com

Photo Credit: Jenny Jimenez

AR Reading Level: N/A

Lexile Level: N/A

I want to read this book: YES / NO

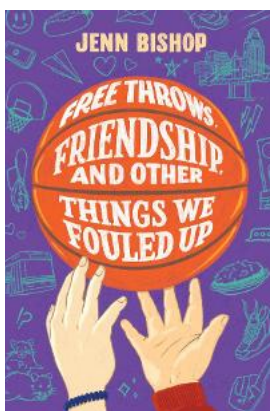
☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Free Throws, Friendship, and Other Things We Fouled Up

by Jenn Bishop



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

Cincinnati, Ohio, lives and dies by college basketball, with two elite Division I rivals separated by a mere three miles. Rory's dad just secured a new coaching gig at the University of Cincinnati, so it means yet another school and move for her, only this time to her dad's hometown. Rory's life revolves around basketball; she's never had a close friend outside of it. Could this be a chance for a fresh start? Abby has always lived in Cincinnati, where her dad grew up playing ball and now coaches at Xavier University. But Abby has recently retreated from basketball after a frustrating season that left her confidence in shambles. This year, she finds herself on the outside looking in when it comes to her former teammates, and she could seriously use a new friend. The coaches' daughters connect over their shared love of the game when Abby chaperones Rory on her first day of school. But when Abby's dad practically forbids their friendship because of something that happened between him and Rory's dad when they were younger, Abby and Rory have no choice but to move their budding friendship underground.

Can the two of them get to the bottom of what went down between their dads in the 1990s before history repeats itself?

Who Wrote It?

Jenn grew up in a small Massachusetts town and loved playing sports and being outdoors. She also enjoyed reading and writing. The first book she wrote as a child was about her pet rock, named Christy! She loved writing so much, that she went to college (in Chicago) to learn all about books and became a librarian. Her love of books led her to wanting to write them, so she went back to school to earn an MFA (Master in Fine Arts) at a famous school called The Vermont College of Fine Arts. Shortly after graduating her published her first book, *The Distance to Home* (2016) and hasn't stopped. *Free Throws, Friendship and Other Things we*



Photo credit: Kate L Photography

Fouled Up is her 5th book. Jenn currently lives in Cincinnati. When she isn't writing, she likes running, gardening, hanging out with her husband (and cat!) and cheering for her fav basketball team!

AR Reading Level: Unavailable

Lexile Level: Unavailable

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Hoop Kings & Hoop Queens by Charles R. Smith, Jr.

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



Read Aloud Video and Author Interview

What's It About?

If you're looking for a poetry collection that will fire up basketball fans of all ages, Charles R. Smith Jr.'s high-energy series is a slam dunk. With his signature blend of rap-inspired rhythm, bold wordplay, and dynamic photography, Smith brings the court to life, profiling some of the biggest legends and rising stars in both the NBA and WNBA. From the power and grace of Candace Parker and A'ja Wilson to the explosive moves of LeBron James and Steph Curry, each poem spotlights the unique skills, styles, and swagger of the players who dominate the game. Readers will meet the towering presence of Shaquille O'Neal, the lightning speed of Russell Westbrook, and the versatile finesse of Elena Delle Donne—all celebrated through rhythmic, lyrical storytelling that matches their on-court magic. Perfect for classrooms, poetry units, or any young athlete who reads with a ball in their hand, this collection goes beyond stats and scores to capture the heart of the game.

AR Reading Level: 5.0

Who Wrote It?

Charles R. Smith Jr. is an award-winning children's book author, photographer and poet with over thirty books to his credit. His awards include a Coretta Scott King Award. Charles combines his passions of writing and photography with a variety of subjects that spark his interest. Charles says, "I want to show students, particularly boys, that there are many ways to pursue their interests, no matter what they may be."



Check out Charles' [YouTube channel](#) to learn more about him and hear him read his poems so you can listen to them truly come to life!

Lexile Level: 710L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Name _____

Date _____



Kareem Between

by Shifa Saltagi Safadi



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

Seventh grade begins, and Kareem's already fumbled it. His best friend moved away, he messed up his tryout for the football team, and because of his heritage, he was voluntold to show the new kid—a Syrian refugee with a thick and embarrassing accent—around school. Just when Kareem thinks his middle school life has imploded, the hotshot QB promises to get Kareem another tryout for the squad. There's a catch: to secure that chance, Kareem must do something he knows is wrong.

Then, like a surprise blitz, Kareem's mom returns to Syria to help her family but can't make it back home. If Kareem could throw a penalty flag on the fouls of his school and home life, it would be for unnecessary roughness. Kareem is stuck between. Between countries. Between friends, between football, between parents—and between right and wrong. It's up to him to step up, find his confidence, and navigate the beauty and hope found somewhere in the middle.

AR Reading Level: 4.7

Who Wrote It?

Shifa Saltagi Safadi is the National Book Award Winning author of *Kareem Between*, the *Amina Banana* series, and several picture books, including *The Gift of Eid*. She was born in Syria and immigrated to the US with her parents when she was a young girl. When she got married, she moved to the Chicagoland area and says she is a Midwest gal, through and through! She is a bilingual Arabic/English speaker, and is very familiar with the challenges of learning English and navigating two languages. Shifa also used to be a teacher and a book reviewer. Shifa loves to cook and says her favorite foods are Shakriyeh, a lamb yogurt stew served with rice, as well as cheeseburgers with extra



onions (yummy) and of course, CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES! You can learn more about Shifa (and get free printables and activities for her books) here: <https://shifasafadi.com/>

Lexile Level: Unavailable

I want to read this book: YES / NO

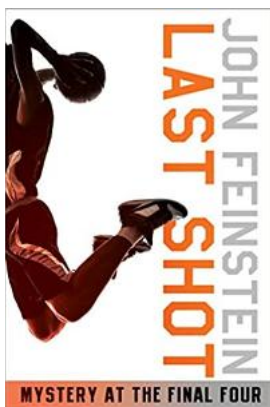
☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Last Shot

by John Feinstein



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

When Stevie wins a writing contest for aspiring sports journalists, his prize is a press pass to the Final Four in New Orleans. While exploring the Superdome, he overhears a plot to throw the championship game. With the help of fellow contest winner Susan Carol, Stevie has just 48 hours to figure out who is blackmailing one of the star players . . . and why.

John Feinstein has been praised as 'the best writer of sports books in America today' (The Boston Globe), and he proves it again in this fast-paced novel.

'A page-turning thriller and a basketball junkie's bonanza.' —USA Today

Who Wrote It?

John Feinstein was born in New York City. His dad was heavily involved in the arts, so he grew up surrounded by creative people. John has written 44 books, many of which have been on the New York Times bestsellers list. He currently writes for The Washington Post and Golf Digest and is a regular contributor to the Golf Channel, Comcast Sports Regional Networks, and he hosts a college basketball show and a golf show on SiriusXM Radio. Honestly, John is a little hard to track down. He doesn't have a website or social media. Most of this



information came from his publishing company's biography page and wikipedia. Maybe if you do some digging, you'll have better luck than I did!

AR Reading Level: 4.8

Lexile Level: 760L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

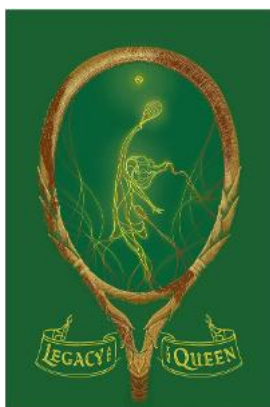
☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Legacy and the Queen

by Kobe Bryant and Annie Matthew



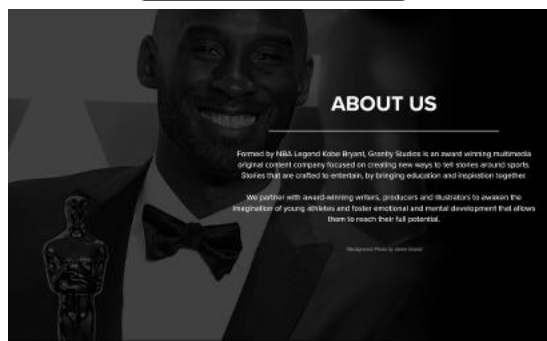
Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

GAME. SET. MAGIC. Game – Tennis means life and death for the residents of the magical kingdom of Nova, and for twelve-year-old Legacy, it's the only thing getting her through the long days taking care of the other kids at the orphanage. That's all about to change when she hears about Silla's tournament. Set – Silla, the ruler of Nova, hosts an annual tournament for the less fortunate of her citizens to come and prove themselves and win entrance to the Academy, where they can train to compete at nationals. The prize is Silla's favor and enough cash to keep open the orphanage, and Legacy has her heart set on both. Magic – What Legacy has yet to know is that the other players have something besides better skills and more money than she does. In Nova, tennis can unlock magic. Magic that Silla used to save the kingdom long ago and magic that her competitors have been training in for months already. Now, with the world turned against her and the orphanage at stake, Legacy has to learn to use her passion for the game to rise above those around her and shine.

Who Wrote It?



Kobe Bryant is an Academy Award-winning author, New York Times best-selling author, and former NBA star. Bryant was also the CEO of Gracify Studios, a multimedia content creation company. He was driven to teach the next generation how to reach their full potential.

Annie Matthew is a novelist and poet who was previously a professional athlete. She now lives in Iowa with her dog, Gus.

Kobe and Annie co-wrote this book, meaning they created it together!

AR Reading Level: N/A

Lexile Level: N/A

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

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Life in the Passenger Seat by Amanda Zieba



Read Aloud Video and
Author Interview

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

For readers who love emotional coming-of-age stories, underdog sports drama, and fierce teen girls fighting for their future.

Shelby has spent her life moving from place to place in her mom's classic Mustang, always one eviction away from starting over. But when they run out of gas in Michigan, Shelby finally gets a taste of something she's never had: stability. She joins a gymnastics team, starts making friends, and falls in love with a routine of regularity. Then her mom disappears—again—and Shelby is placed in foster care with her coach and his wife. These days, her biggest trouble is fighting for her spot in the line-up. But when her mom suddenly reappears, Shelby must confront the fact that she's just a passenger in her own life, and that perhaps it's time to take the wheel.

Perfect for fans of realistic YA fiction, foster care stories, sports novels for teens, and books for teen girls 14-18. Includes expert back matter from NFL player Alec Ingold and a collegiate sports psychologist.

Who Wrote It?

Amanda has likely always been a word nerd. Ever since she was born in Wisconsin, she's loved reading and writing. But just like anyone else, there's more than one side of her. Amanda was also a gymnast, a camp counselor, coach, teacher, and will forever be a sweet tooth. Amanda is also a mom, wife, daughter, sister, YouTuber, caffeine lover, and avid sports spectator. She loves her laptop, but prefers to brainstorm and draft with paper and pen. Amanda does not love bacon, nor animals (but hopes you will still like her anyway.) When she isn't creating content or writing, she might be getting a gel manicure,



watching HGTV or hanging out with her awesome family. To learn more, check out Amanda's other books, or just say hi, visit her word-nerdy website: www.amandazieba.com. She is so happy you have found her First Chapter Fridays!

AR Reading Level: 4.7

Lexile Level: Unavailable

I want to read this book: YES / NO

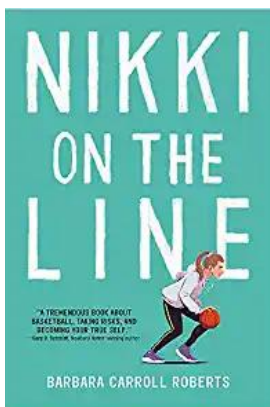
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Name _____

Date _____



Nikki on the Line

by Barbara Carroll Roberts



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

Thirteen-year-old Nikki Doyle's dreams of becoming a basketball great feel within reach when she's selected to play on an elite-level club team. But in a league with taller, stronger, and faster girls, Nikki suddenly isn't the best point guard. In fact, she's no longer a point guard at all, which leaves her struggling to figure out who she is and how she fits in. The stress piles on as Nikki's best friend spends more and more time with another girl on the team, and when her science teacher assigns a family tree project that will be impossible to complete unless Nikki reveals her most embarrassing secret. As if that's not enough to deal with, to cover the costs of her new team, Nikki has agreed to take care of her annoying younger brother after school to save money on childcare. As the stakes rise on the basketball court, at school, and at home, Nikki's confidence plummets. Can she learn to compete at this new, higher level? And how hard is she willing to work to find out?

Who Wrote It?

As a kid, I was a SLOW reader. But when I was in high school, I had a wonderful English teacher who not only introduced our class to some truly great books, he taught us to see the craft techniques the authors used, showed us how to 'explore beyond the plot' to figure out what a book was 'about.' Suddenly, the world of literature opened up for me. And even though I hadn't yet gotten over my embarrassment at reading so slowly, I now realized that because of this 'weakness,' I discovered details in books, sparkling images, musical language, hidden themes



that my fast-reading classmates skimmed past without noticing. My weakness had become a strength. You can learn more about Barbara on her website: www.barbaracarrollroberts.com.

AR Reading Level: 5.0

Lexile Level: 840L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

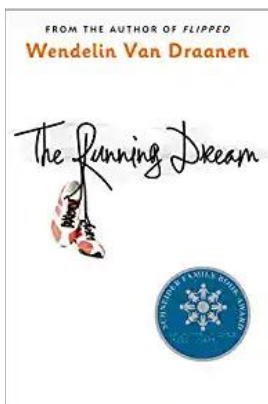
☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

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Date _____



The Running Dream by Wendelin VanDraanen



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

Jessica thinks her life is over when she loses a leg in a car accident. She's not comforted by the news that she'll be able to walk with the help of a prosthetic leg. Who cares about walking when you live to run?

As she struggles to cope, Jessica feels that she's both in the spotlight and invisible. People who don't know what to say act like she's not there. Jessica's embarrassed to realize that she's done the same to a girl with CP named Rosa. A girl who is going to tutor her through all the math she's missed. A girl who sees right into the heart of her.

With the support of family, friends, a coach, and her track teammates, Jessica may actually be able to run again. But that's not enough for her now. She doesn't just want to cross finish lines herself—she wants to take Rosa with her.

Who Wrote It?

I was born on January 6th to Dutch immigrants (Peter & Mieske Van Draanen) in Chicago, IL. When I was very young, my family moved to California, where I still reside. I grew up with two brothers and a sister. We did a lot of camping and backpacking as a family, and also as Scouts, where we learned useful survival skills and also to appreciate nature. I taught computer science and math at the high school level for 15 years. I began writing because I went through some awful times and learned



that writing can help you sort out your troubles and find focus. To learn more about Wendelin, read her memoir: Hope in the Mail or in the interview at the end of this video.

AR Reading Level: 4.1

Lexile Level: 650L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆ ☆ WHAT I THINK ☆ ☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Stealing Home

by J. Torres

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



Read Aloud Video

What's It About?

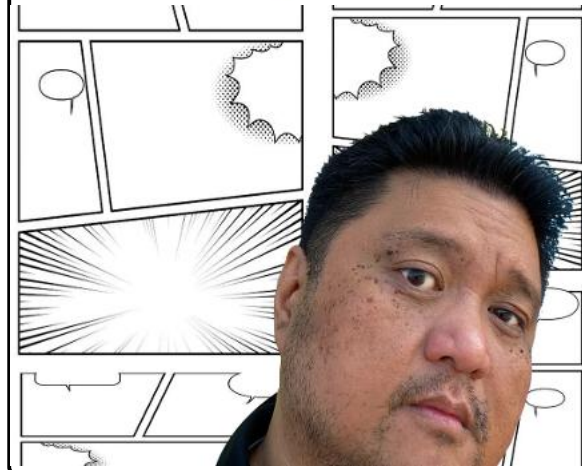
Sandy Saito is a happy boy who reads comic books and is obsessed with baseball --- especially the Asahi team, the pride of his Japanese Canadian community. But when the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, his life, like that of every other North American of Japanese descent, changes forever. His family is forced to move to a remote internment camp, and his father must spend months away from them. Sandy, his mother and his brother cope as best they can with the difficulties at the camp. Over time, Sandy comes to realize that life is a lot like baseball. It's about dealing with whatever is thrown at you, however you can. And it's about finding your way home. In this emotionally gripping graphic novel, J. Torres has artfully woven a fictional story into a historically accurate, thoroughly researched account of the events surrounding the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Using the approachable graphic novel format, the story of this grave chapter in North American history is gently told with sensitivity and insight, and the theme of baseball runs through the story as a message of hope and renewal.

AR Reading Level: 3.3

Who Wrote It?

Bio

Readers may know me as the writer of DC's *Batman: Knightwatch*, the original *Teen Titans Go* comic book series, the Forest of Reading Honour Books *Planet Hockey* and *Stealing Home*, or *Lola: A Ghost Story*, recipient of an Aesop Accolade from the American Folklore Society. I was born in Manila and raised in Montreal where he was educated at McGill University. I'm married, have two sons, and love going to the movies, traveling, and cheering for the Toronto Raptors.



Lexile Level: 430L

I want to read this book: YES / NO



WHAT I THINK ☆☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

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Date _____



Swim Team

by Johnnie Christmas

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



Read Aloud Video

What's It About?

A splashy, contemporary middle grade graphic novel from bestselling comics creator Johnnie Christmas! Bree can't wait for her first day at her new middle school, Enith Brighitha, home to the Mighty Manatees—until she's stuck with the only elective that fits her schedule, the dreaded Swim 101. The thought of swimming makes Bree more than a little queasy, yet she's forced to dive headfirst into one of her greatest fears. Lucky for her, Etta, an elderly occupant of her apartment building and former swim team captain, is willing to help. With Etta's training and a lot of hard work, Bree suddenly finds her swim-crazed community counting on her to turn the school's failing team around. But that's easier said than done, especially when their rival, the prestigious Holyoke Prep, has everything they need to leave the Mighty Manatees in their wake. Can Bree defy the odds and guide her team to a state championship, or have the Manatees swum their last lap—for good?

Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor, National Book Award Longlist, Kirkus Best Book of the Year, Harvey Award Best Children's or Young Adult Book Nominee

Who Wrote It?

Johnnie Christmas is a #1 New York Times Best Selling graphic novelist. SWIM TEAM is his middle grade graphic novel debut. When Johnnie was a child he fell into a pool and almost drown. It was that experience that inspired this story. As a kid Johnnie loved reading Calvin and Hobbes and Peanuts comics. Johnnie used to write things for adults, but now focuses on work for kids. He is currently hard at work on two new middle-grade graphic novels, one of them about video games! He also co-created the series ANGEL CATBIRD with celebrated writer Margaret Atwood and adapted William Gibson's lost screenplay for ALIEN 3



into a critically acclaimed graphic novel of the same name. Johnnie lives in Vancouver, British Columbia. You can learn more about him and his work at www.johnniechristmas.com.

AR Reading Level: 2.6

Lexile Level: Unavailable

I want to read this book: YES / NO

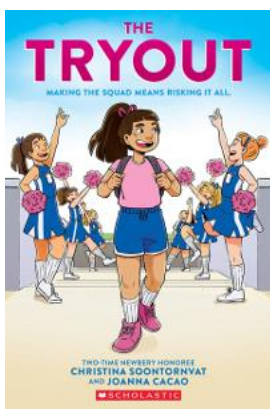
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The Tryout

Written by Christina Soontornvat
Illustrated by Joanna Cacao

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



Read Aloud Video

What's It About?

Trying out for middle school cheerleader means: performing in the giant school gym, with the whole school watching, and risking total humiliation. If Christina can make it through this, she can make it through anything.

As one of the only Asian American kids in her small Texas town, Christina just wants to fit in. Luckily, her best friend, Megan, who is Iranian American, can totally relate. The two girls have always been inseparable and relish creating elaborate fantasy worlds together. But middle school is a reality-check, and suddenly popularity is way more important than playing pretend. When cheerleading tryouts are announced, Christina and Megan literally jump at the chance to join the squad. But does fitting in actually equal belonging? Will they survive the terrifying tryouts? And most importantly, will their friendship withstand the pressures of heated competition and rivalry? Hilarious and heartfelt, *The Tryout* is Christina Soontornvat's personal story, sure to make you laugh, cry, and cheer!

Who Wrote It?



Author Christina Soontornvat



AR Reading Level: unavailable

Lexile Level: 380L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

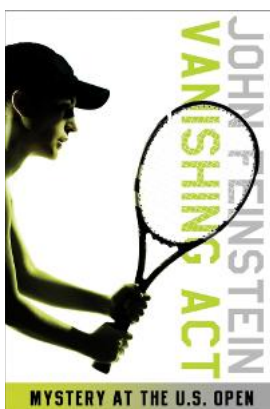
☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



Vanishing Act

by John Feinstein

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.



Read Aloud Video

What's It About?

New York Times bestselling author John Feinstein goes behind closed doors at the US Open . . . When teen sportswriters Stevie Thomas and Susan Carol Anderson score press passes to the U.S. Open they expect drama. They expect blistering serves, smashed returns and fierce competition. What they don't expect is kidnapping. Russian tennis phenom Nadia Symanova was supposed to win it all, but she never even made it onto the court. Now the whole stadium is in an uproar trying to find her. Can Stevie and Susan Carol get to Nadia before it's too late?

Book 2 of 6 in the Sports Beat Series



Who Wrote It?

John Feinstein was born in New York City. His dad was heavily involved in the arts, so he grew up surrounded by creative people. John has written 44 books, many of which have been on the New York Times bestsellers list. He currently writes for The Washington Post and Golf Digest and is a regular contributor to the Golf Channel, Comcast Sports Regional Networks, and he hosts a college basketball show and a golf show on SiriusXM Radio. Honestly, John is a little hard to track down. He doesn't have a website or social media. Most of this



information came from his publishing company's biography page and wikipedia. Maybe if you do some digging, you'll have better luck than I did!

AR Reading Level: 4.8

Lexile Level: 760L

I want to read this book: YES / NO

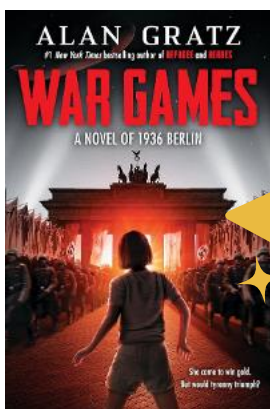
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Use this graphic organizer with the First Chapter Friday videos on YouTube from the Word Nerd.

Name _____

Date _____



War Games

by Alan Gratz



Read Aloud Video

Here is a little background information about our First Chapter Friday title and its creator. Feel free to add your own notes and thoughts in the bottom box.

What's It About?

In 1936 Berlin, nothing is what it seems... Evie Harris can't believe her luck: She's competing in the Olympics, along with fellow American athletes like Jesse Owens. True, there's something creepy about Germany's leader, Adolf Hitler, who watches over the games with his Nazi henchmen. But Evie's just here to win a gold medal in gymnastics. Until she discovers a horrible secret. Behind all the Olympic fanfare, the Nazis have Berlin in an iron grip of terror and violence--and war is brewing. When Evie becomes embroiled in a mysterious plot to help steal Nazi gold, she must navigate the city's darkest corners and hidden passageways, never knowing who she can trust. With lives on the line and her family's future at stake, Evie has to choose between following her Olympic dreams and standing up to evil... before it's too late. #1 New York Times bestselling author Alan Gratz is back and better than ever with this heart-racing, plot-twisting story about the roots of World War II and the sacrifices we make for what matters most.

Who Wrote It?

Alan was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, home of the 1982 World's Fair. After a carefree but humid childhood, Alan attended the University of Tennessee, where he earned a College Scholars degree with a specialization in creative writing, and, later, a Master's degree in English education. A member of the East Tennessee Writers Hall of Fame, Alan now lives with his family in Portland, Oregon, where he enjoys playing games, eating pizza, and, perhaps not too surprisingly,



reading books. You can learn more about Alan and his work (20 and counting!) at www.alangratz.com

AR Reading Level: 4.9

Lexile Level: N/A

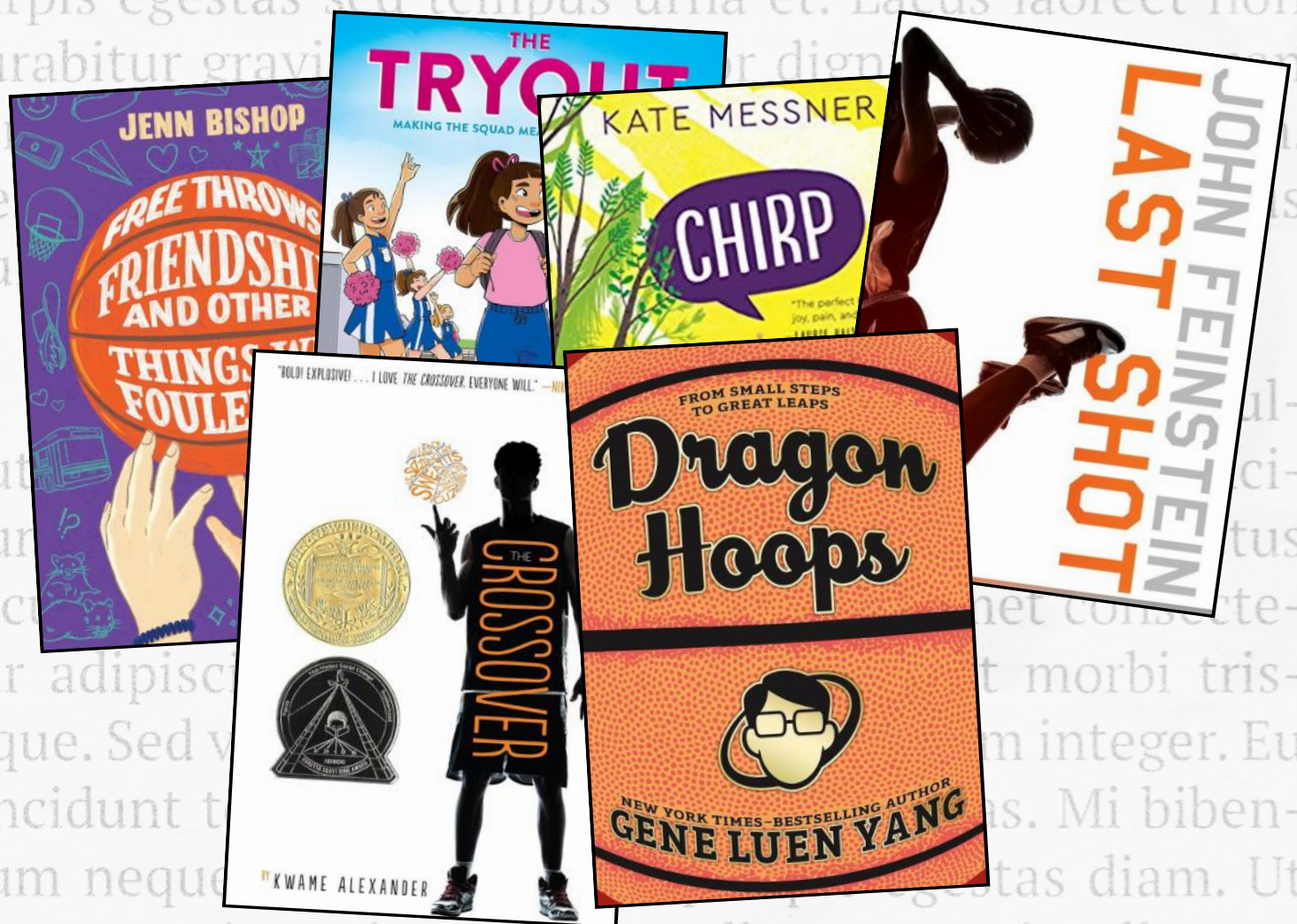
I want to read this book: YES / NO

☆☆ WHAT I THINK ☆☆



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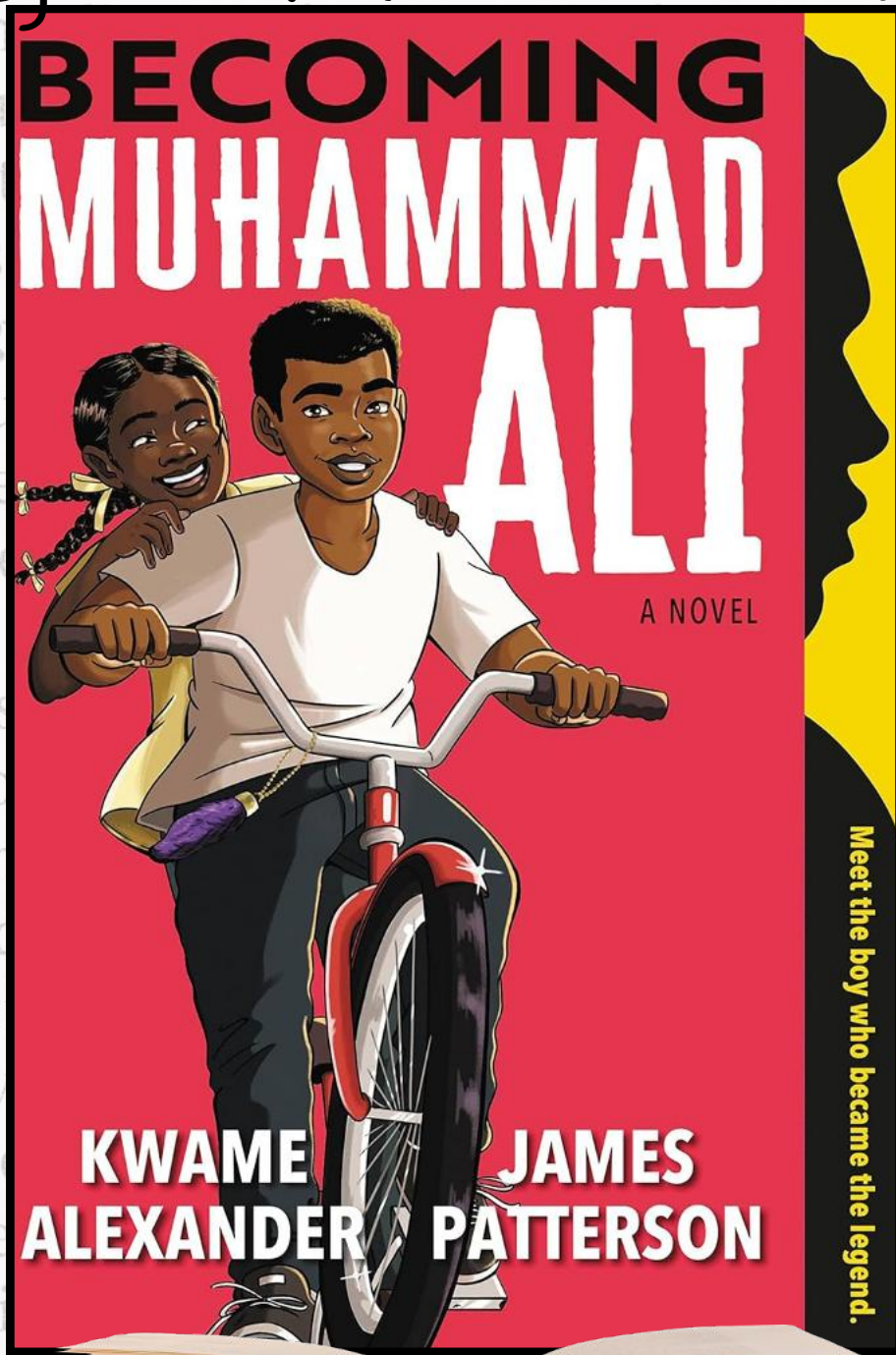
INDIVIDUAL BOOK POSTERS



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

BECOMING MUHAMMAD ALI

By Kwame Alexander & James Patterson



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

CHANGE THE GAME

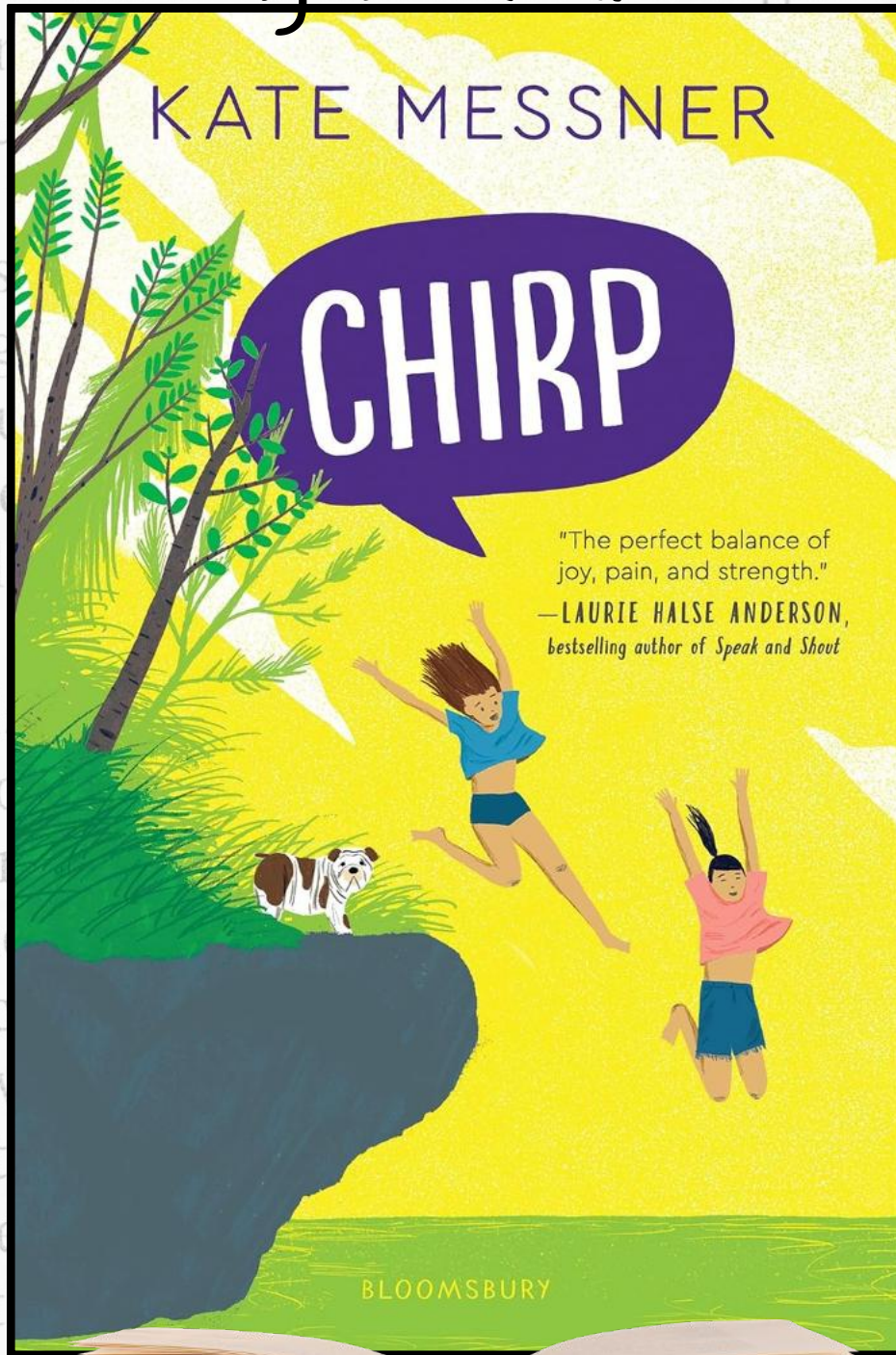
by Colin Kaepernick



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

CHIRP

by Kate Messner



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

CHUNKY

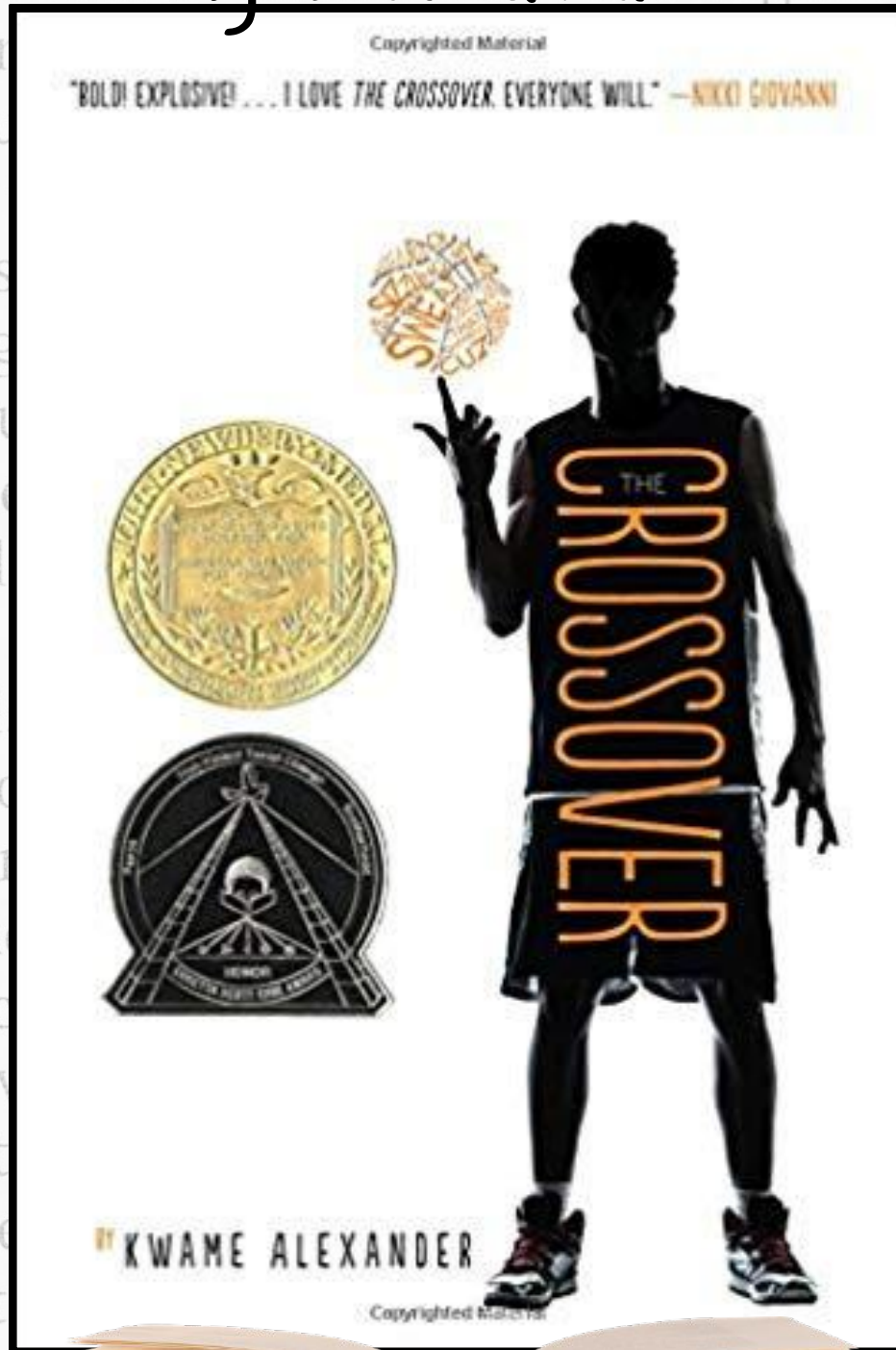
by Yehudi Mercado



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

THE CROSSOVER

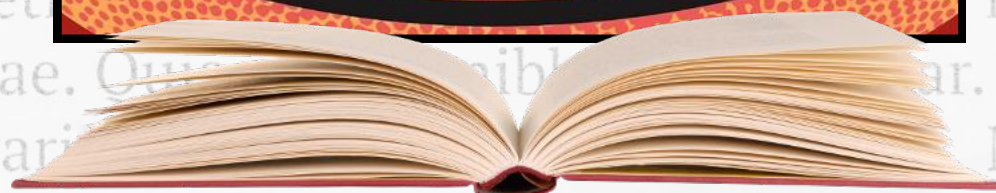
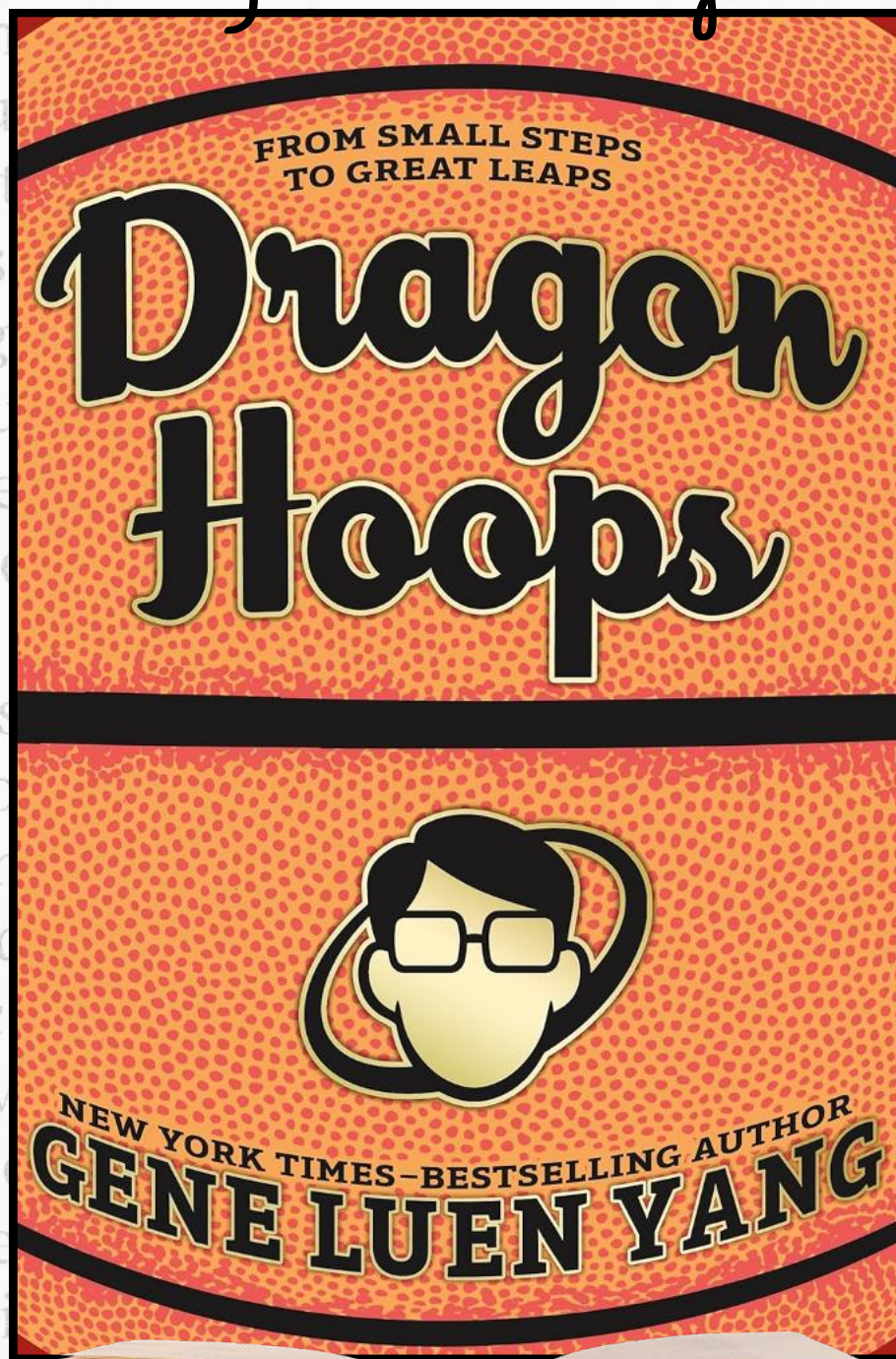
by Kwame Alexander



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

DRAGON HOOPS

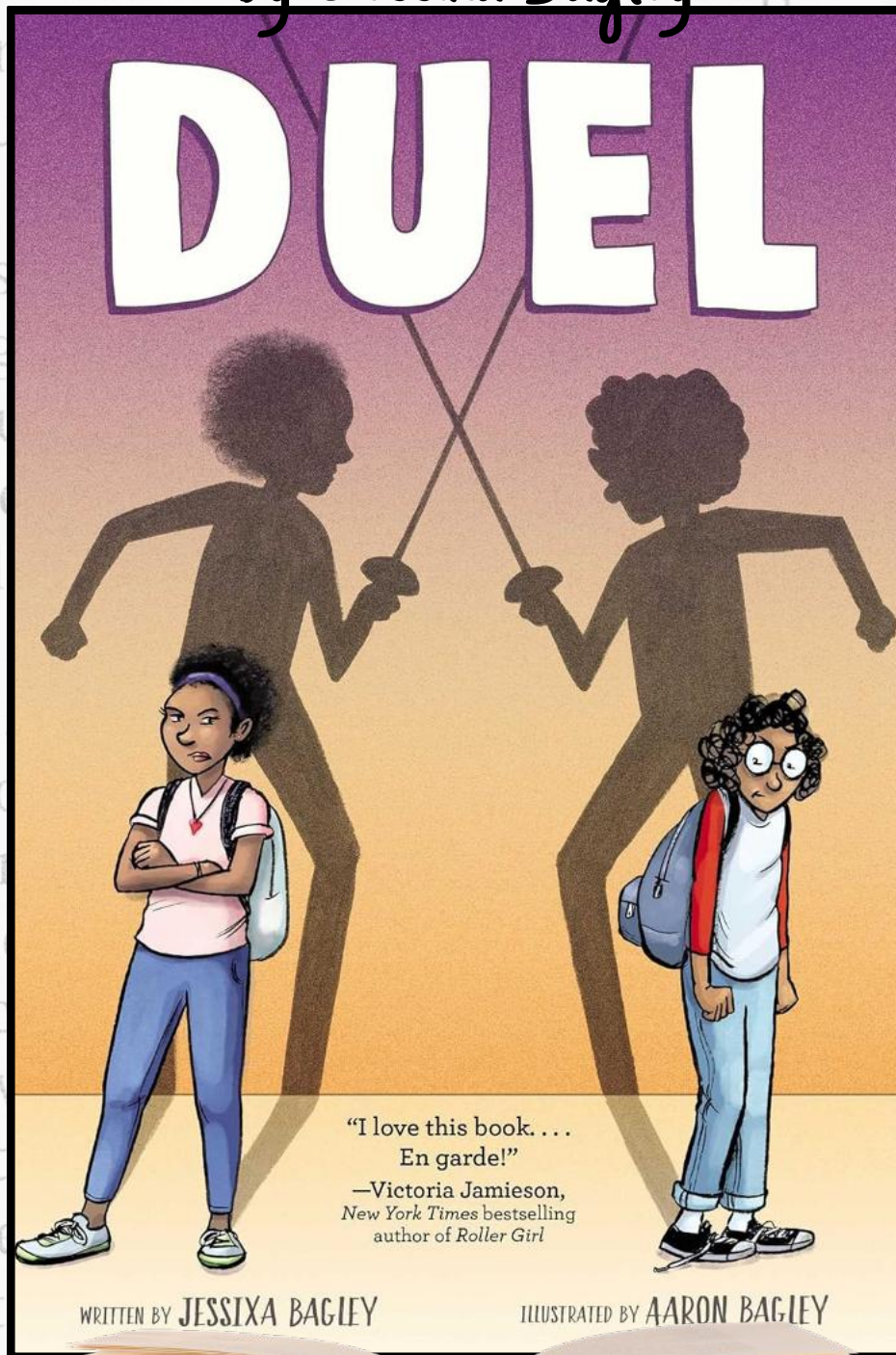
by Gene Luen Yang



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

DUEL

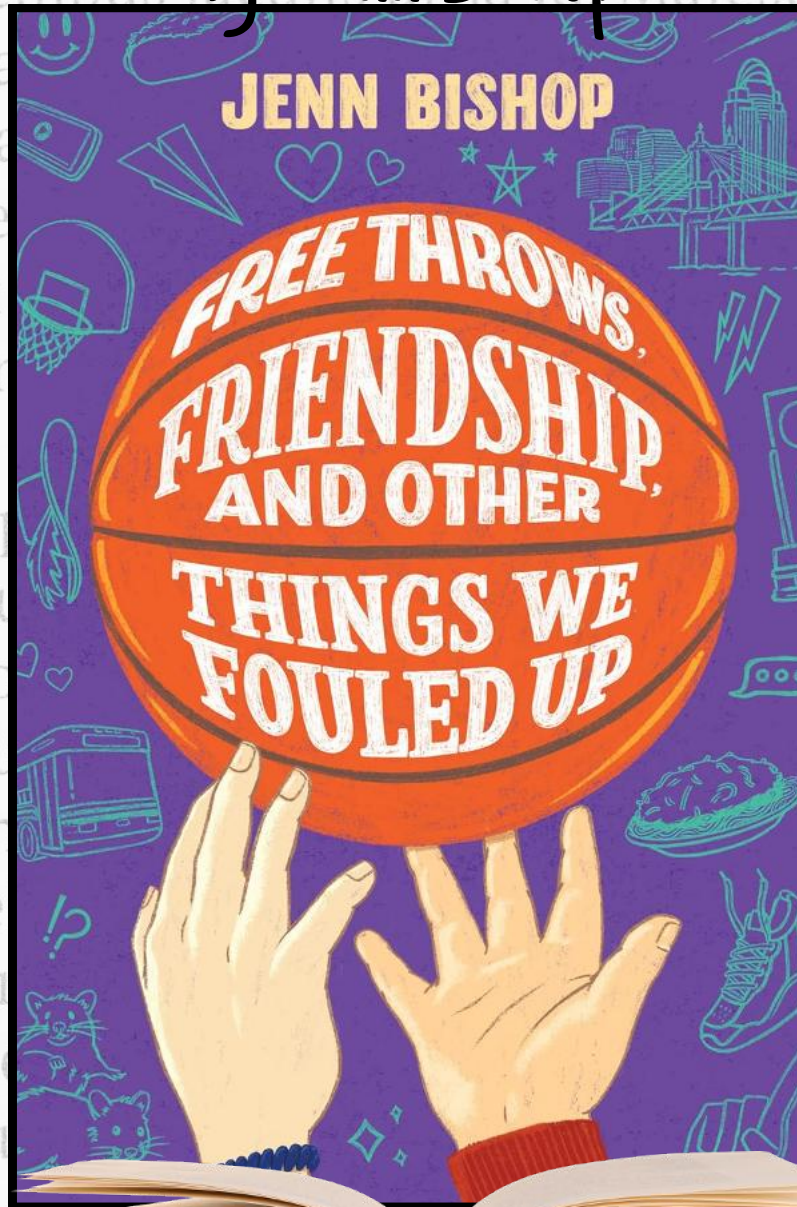
by Jessixa Bagley



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

FREE THROWS, FRIENDSHIP, AND OTHER THINGS WE FOULED UP

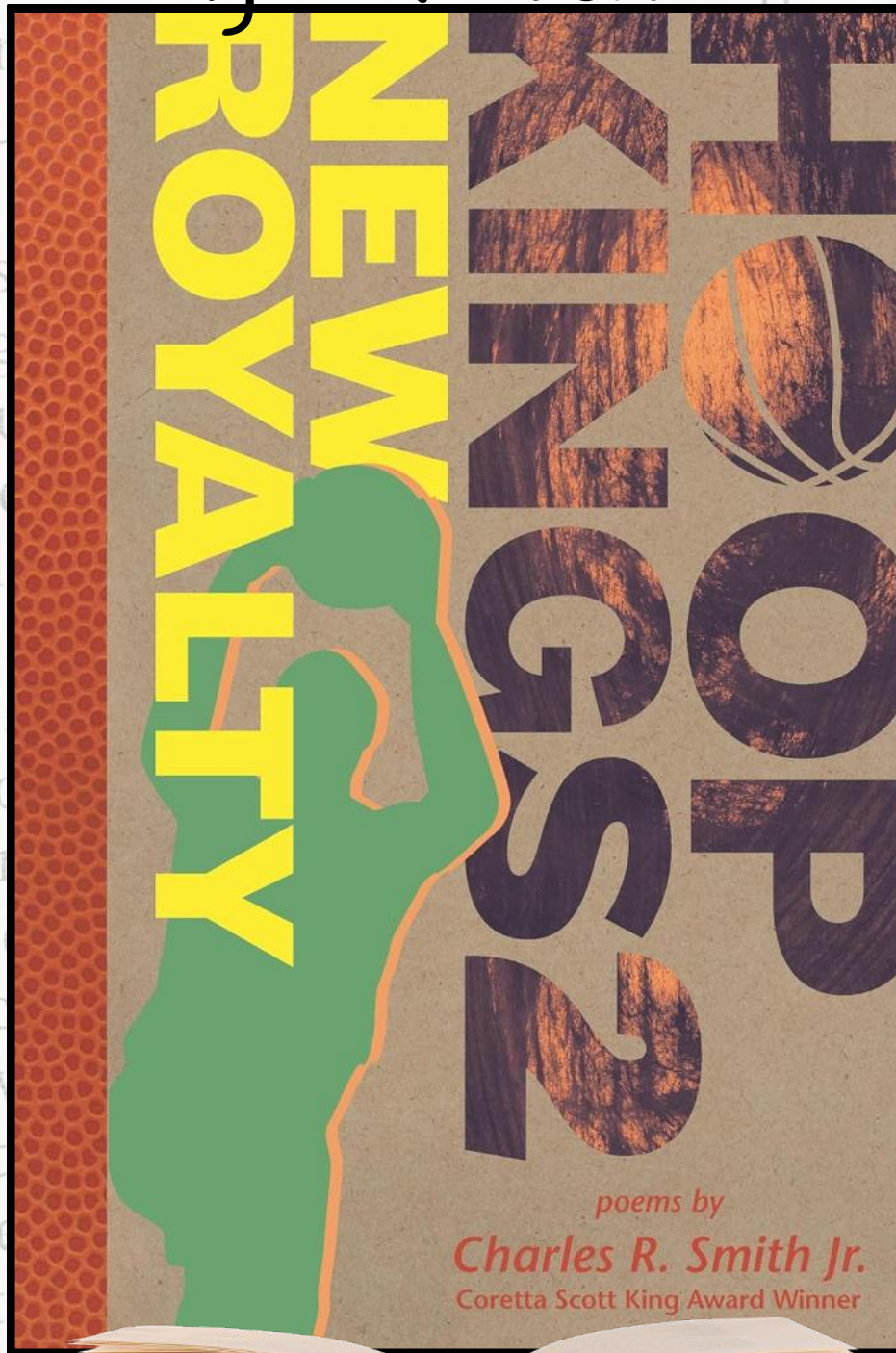
by Jenn Bishop



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

HOOP KINGS

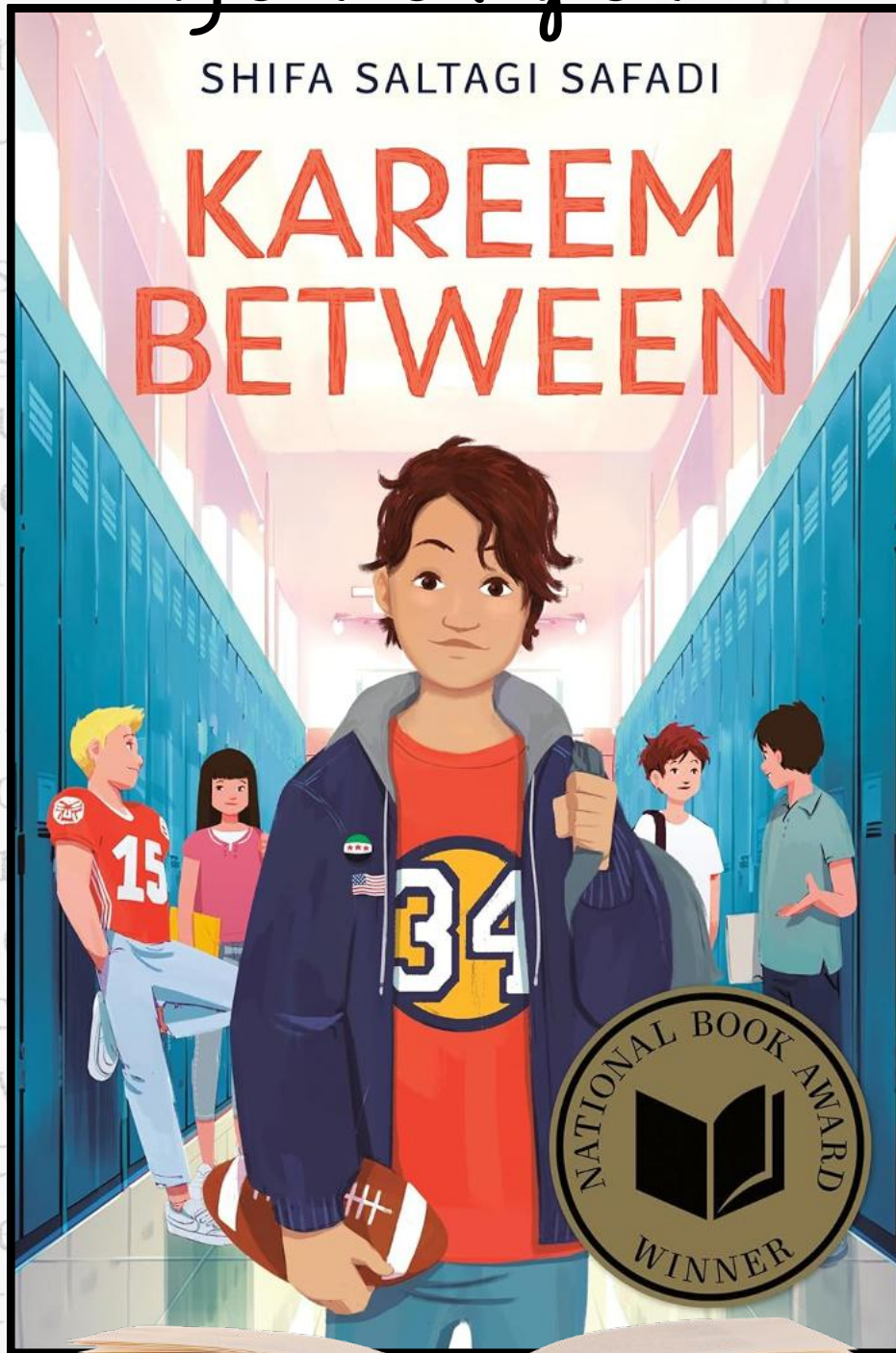
by Charles R. Smith



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

KAREEM BETWEEN

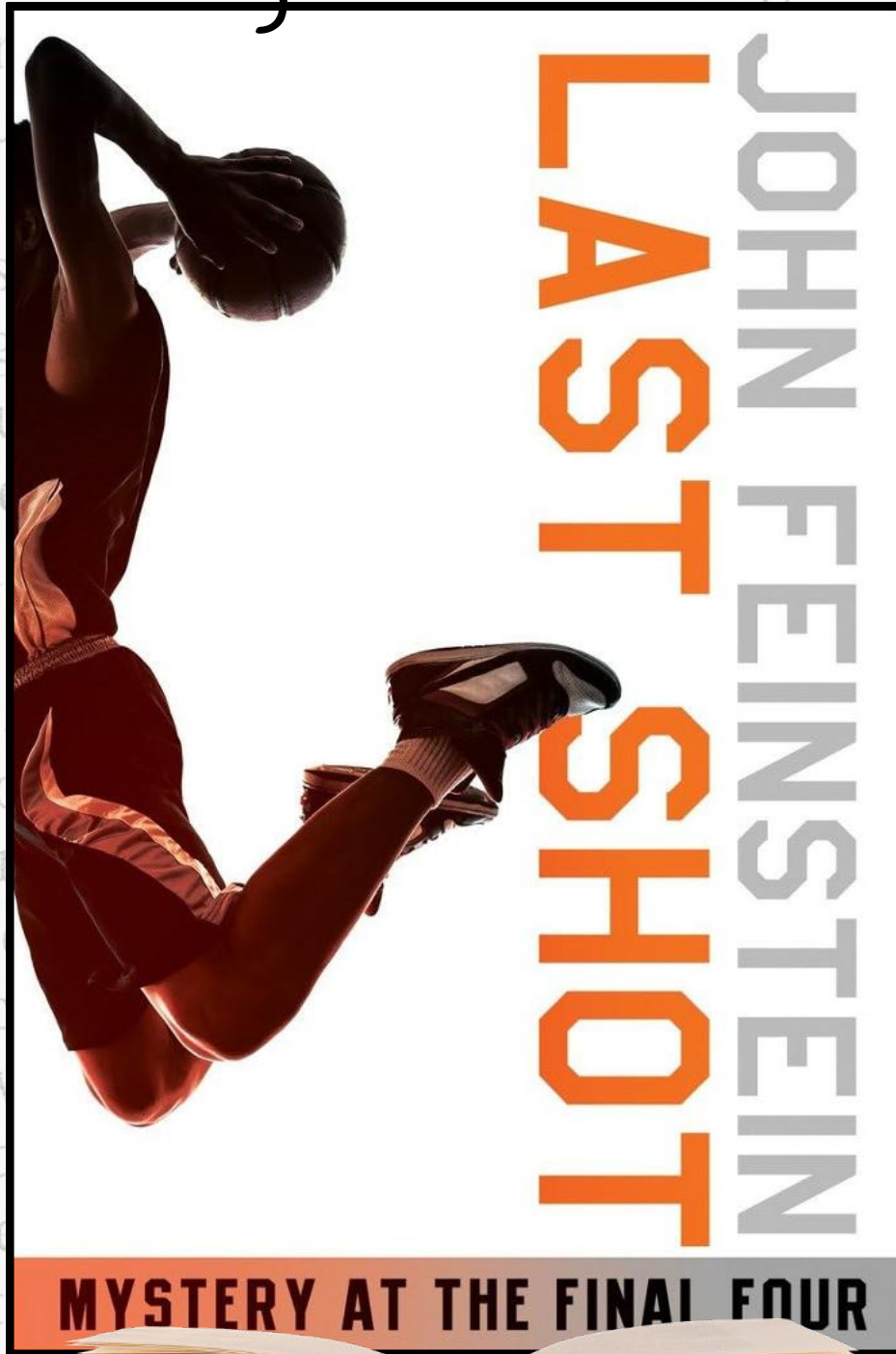
by Shifa Saltagi Safadi



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

LAST SHOT

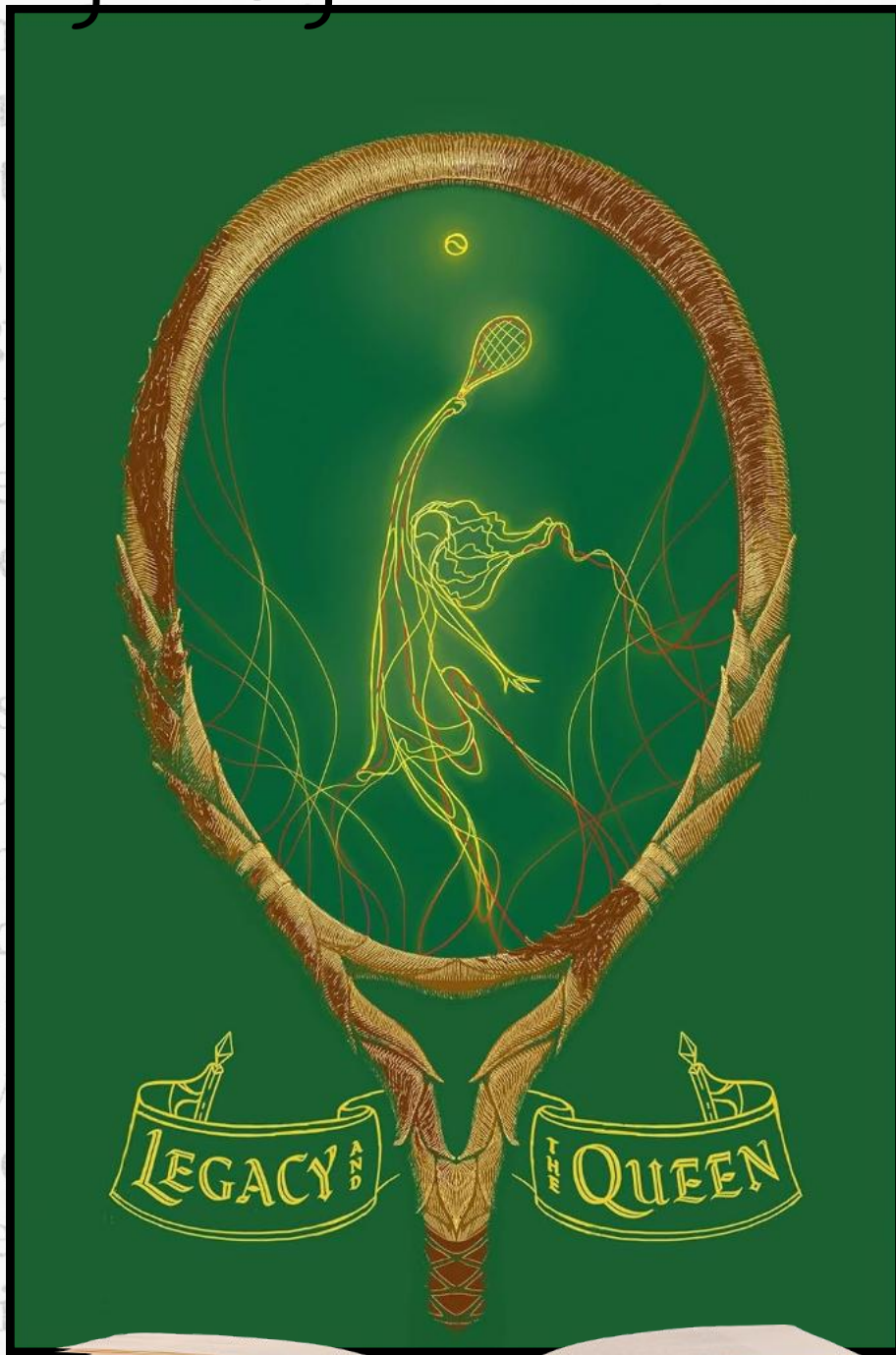
by John Feinstein



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

LEGACY AND THE QUEEN

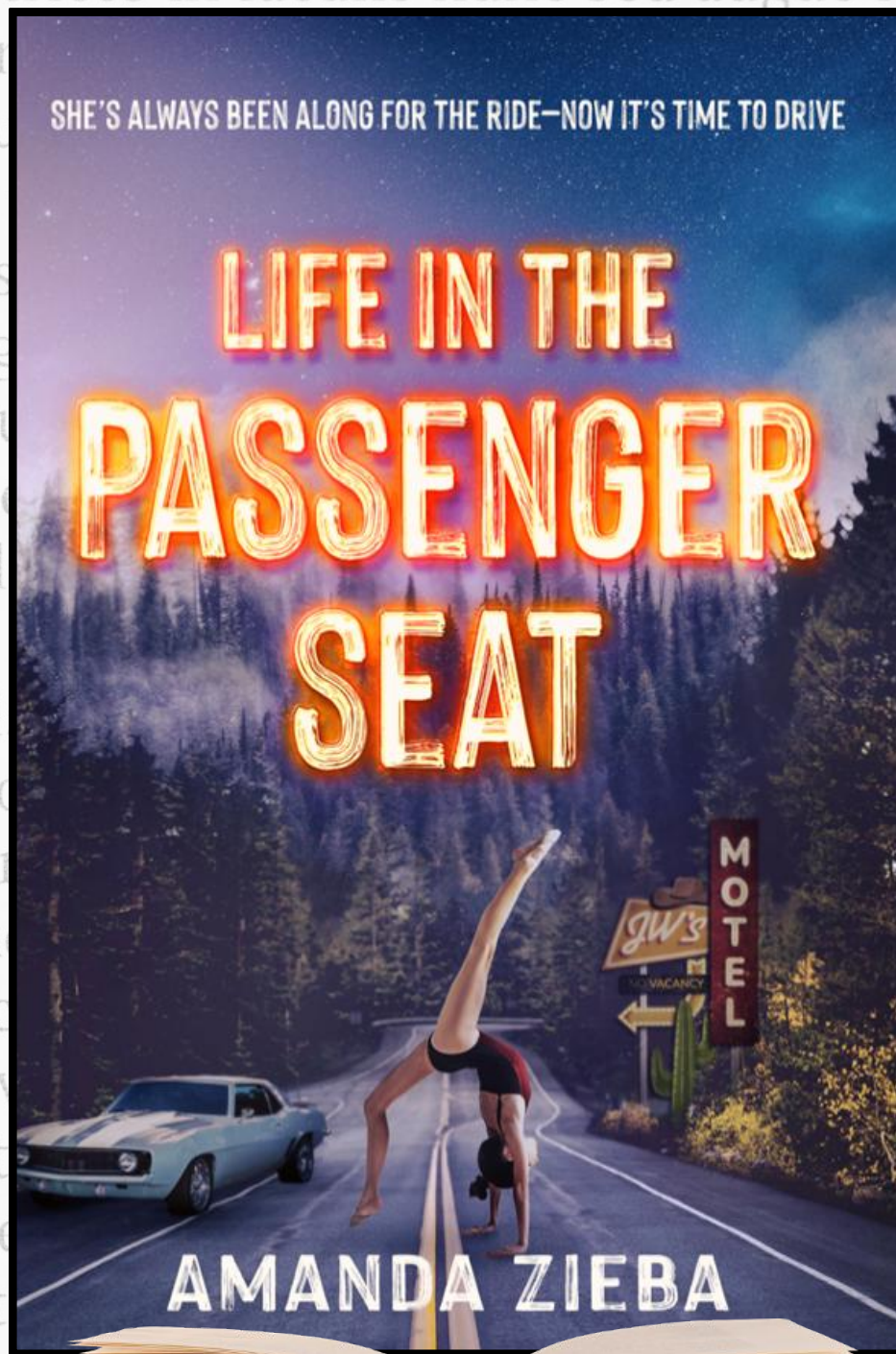
by Kobe Bryant and Annie Matthew



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

LIFE IN THE PASSENGER SEAT

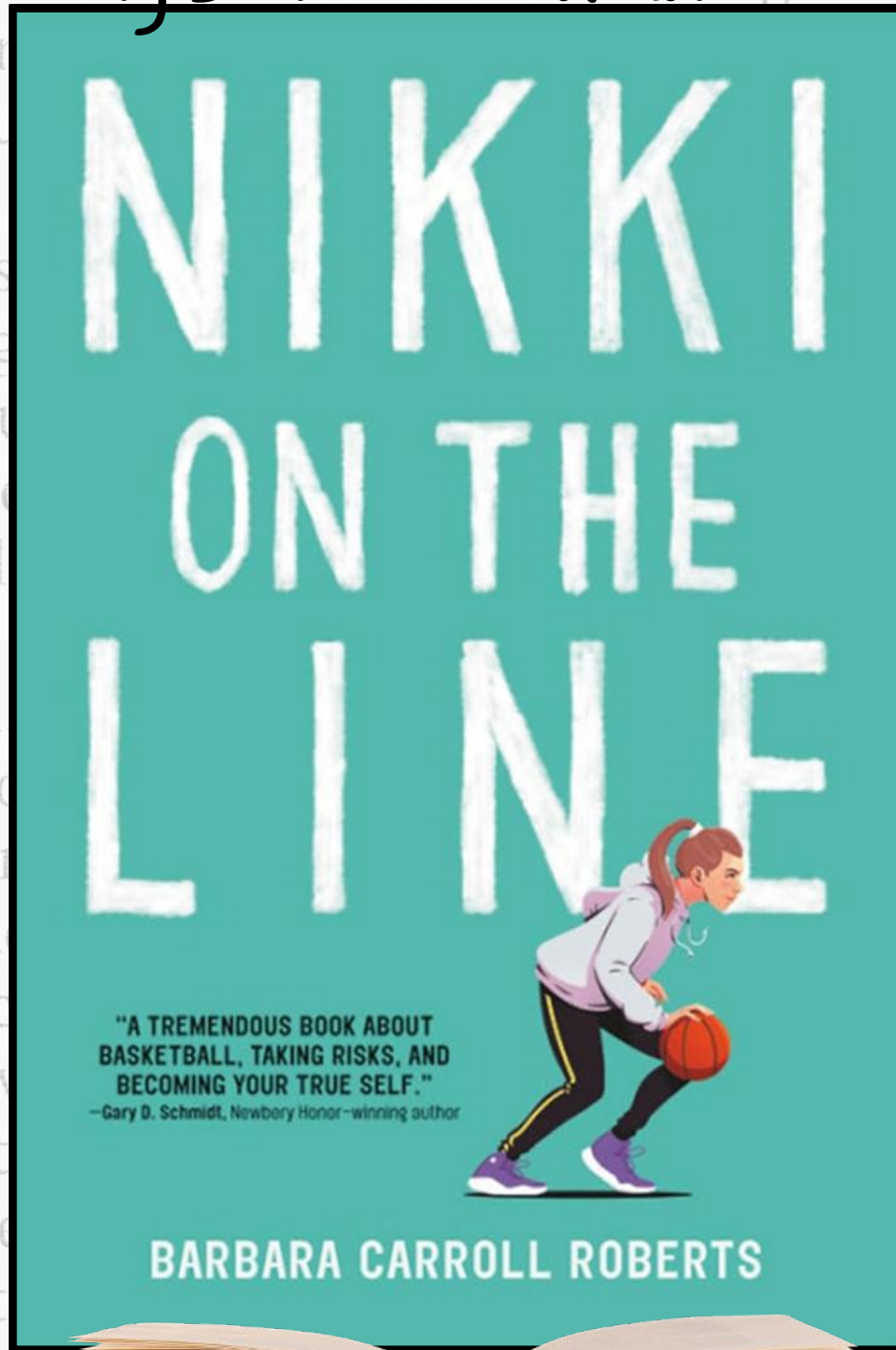
by Amanda Zieba



FIRST CHAPTER FRIDAY

NIKKI ON THE LINE

by Barbara Carroll Roberts



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THE RUNNING DREAM

by Wendelin Van Draanen

FROM THE AUTHOR OF *FLIPPED*

Wendelin Van Draanen

The Running Dream



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STEALING HOME

by J. Torres & David Namisato



J. Torres
David Namisato

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SWIM TEAM

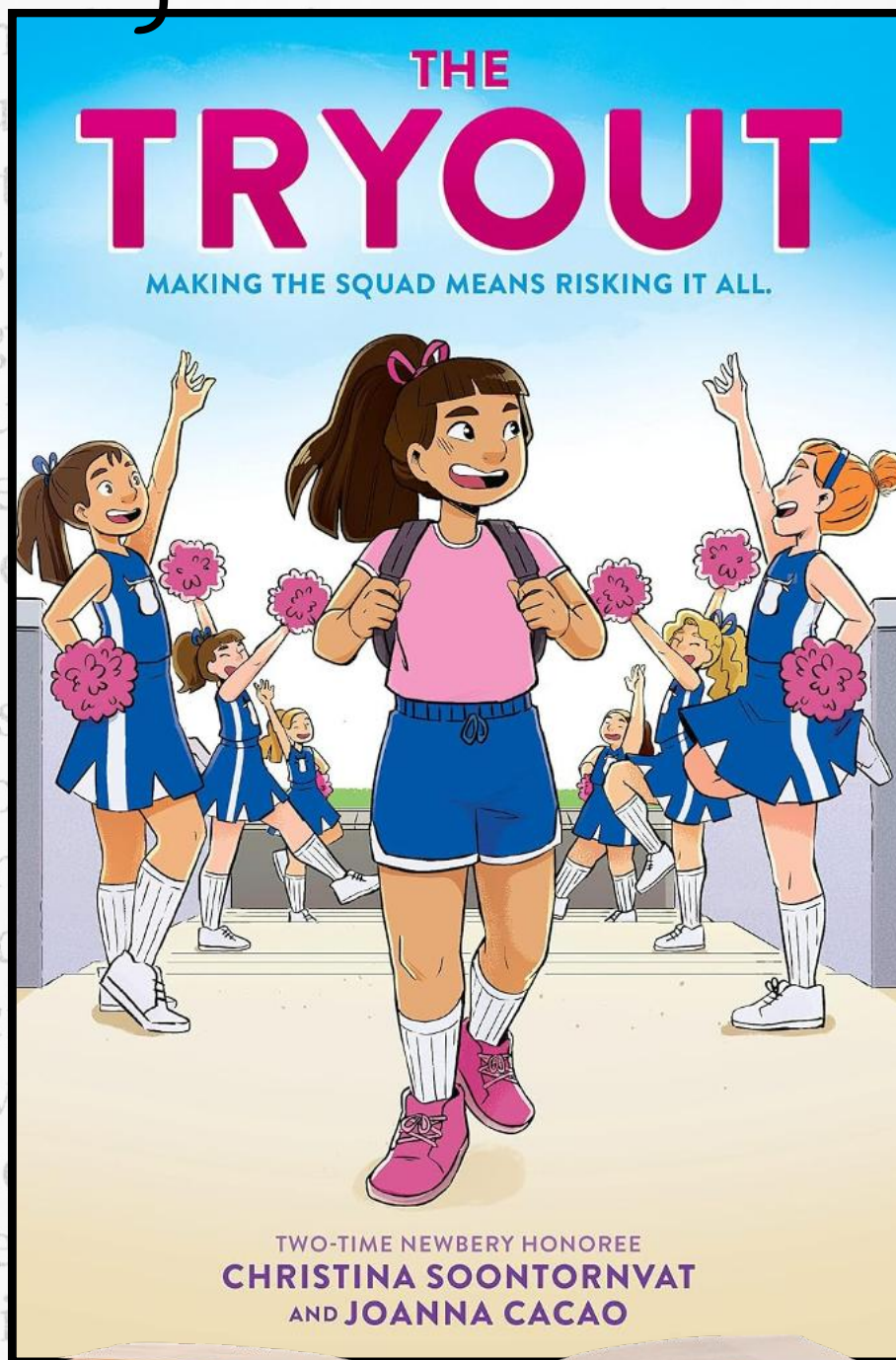
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THE TRYOUT

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VANISHING ACT

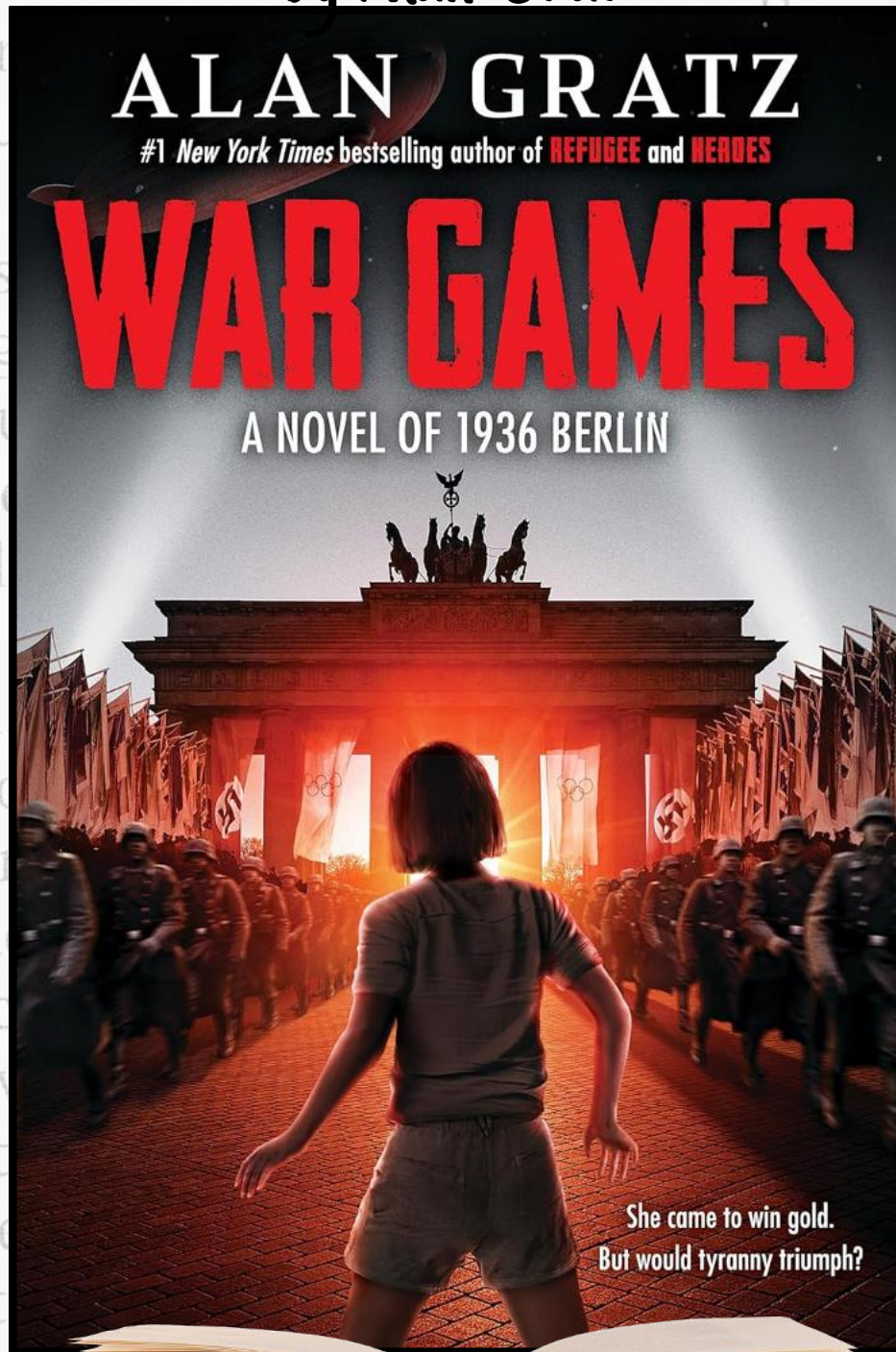
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