



DISCUSSION GUIDE

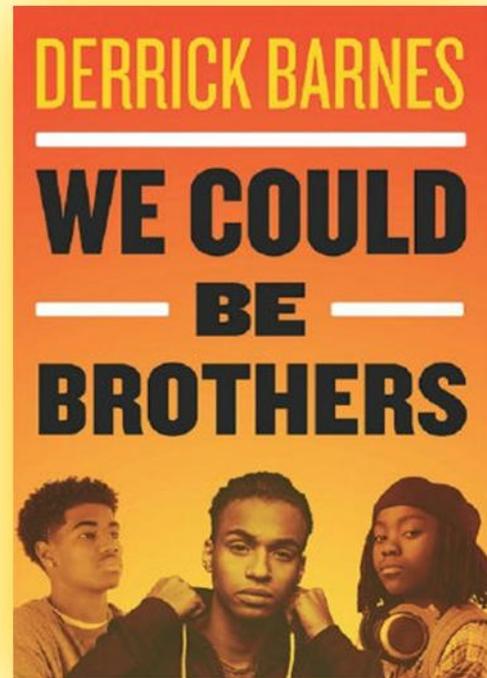
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BOOK SYNOPSIS

In **We Could Be Brothers** (Just Us Books) by Derrick Barnes (Ruby & the Booker Boys), two thirteen-year-old African-American boys become friends during a three-day stint in an after-school suspension. They were both involved in two unrelated incidents with the same person, the resident menace at Alain Locke Middle, **Tariq Molten Robeson Battlefield** is from a two-parent household, where both parents are highly successful and educated. Academic achievement, social consciousness and responsibility are reinforced daily in the Battlefield household.

Pacino Clapton comes from a single parent household; his mom works two fulltime jobs. Pacino has a ton of responsibilities, including cutting hair to help pay bills, and taking care of his twin five-year-old sisters.

During this three-day span, the young men visit each other's home, and chop it up on a multitude of subjects including respect of self and Black women, the dire state of hip-hop music, the use of the dreaded 'N' word, and masculinity. Before long, the three boys are on a collision course. And when they do intersect, their lives are changed forever. **We Could Brothers** addresses the presence and lack of positive male leadership in the home, and how it dictates the way young African American men view themselves, each other, and the world around them.



QUESTIONS

- 1) Why was Robeson so embarrassed about having to spend the entire week in PSS? What does his reaction, in regards to his father knowing, tell you about his parents' academic expectations? What does the Frederick Douglas quote that hung outside of the PSS door mean to you?

“People might not get all they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get.”



Look up quotes from prominent African-American men that you would like to post/frame at your bedroom door, at your locker, on the home screen of your phone/computer/tablet. The quote should be motivational, inspirational and speaks to you personally.

2) Cut out pictures from a magazine or go to a stock photography website (Gettyimages.com, Shutterstock.com, iStockphoto.com, etc) and look for images of people that look like Pacino, Robeson and Rosilyn. Print and/or cut out the images and tape or glue them to a sheet of paper. Next to the image type a short profile of the character: age, grade, personality, interests, future plans, etc.

3) With Pacino being raised by a hard working single mother, and having so much responsibility for his twin five year old sisters, why do you think he had no problem disrespecting Rosilyn the way that he did? Would you have stood up for Rosilyn the way that Robeson did? Why or why not?

Read the article *"Respect and Protect the Black Woman"* from the May 28, 2008 issue of FinalCall.com. Discuss as a group. Write down a statement in the article that stuck with you the most.

4) Pacino and Robeson discovered that Tariq Molten was the common thread for them both landing in PSS. What was different about their separate incidents involving Tariq, and in what ways did their personalities dictate the situation? Why do you think it was so easy for Pacino to quickly forget about Robeson stepping up to him, and then agreeing to have his back? Write down and discuss a time where you stood up for someone in the face of a potential backlash.

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5) Robeson discovered so much about Pacino that really changed the way he saw him initially (the responsibility of caring for his twin sisters, his high IQ and GPA, his side barber hustle to help his mom pay the bills, etc.) Compare and contrast the influence Robeson and Pacino's parents have on them, as well as how their home lives/responsibilities have shaped them into the people that they have become. List the experiences or responsibilities do you have that you think will prepare you for your future?

6) Robeson and Pacino discuss the state of hip-hop music and compare between MCs of yesterday and those of today. Look up the term 'socially conscious'. Do you think that artists have a responsibility to have socially conscious messages in their songs? Does the intelligence of a rapper play a role in what music/songs you enjoy? Research 10-15 albums during Hip-Hops 'Golden Era'. Write the names of the artists and the albums down. Find a socially conscious song from one of those albums, write down the lyrics and then discuss the possible motivation and intent of that song.

7) Pacino is stopped short before he is about to call Robeson a vile, negative racial slur that's been used for hundreds of years to demean Black people in America. Robeson proposes that they refer to each other as 'brother'. Why would a person or any group of people refer to each other as a word that was born out of negativity, hatred and prejudice, and turn it into a term of endearment? What does 'term of endearment' mean? Go around the room and make up positive nicknames for at least ten people.



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Choose names that make them feel good about themselves. Share with the class. How can being spoken to and referred to, repeatedly, with inspiring words affect someone positively?

8) Do you think that Mr. Battlefield came down too hard on Pacino about his sagging pants? Do you agree with him when he told Pacino, *“No real man walks out of the house looking like a clown. You gotta know that. If for nobody else, wear the belt for you, Clapton.”* ? How does where you come from and the daily influences that you see in your home or in your neighborhood dictate how you dress yourself or what you deem presentable? What role does self respect play in determining how you present yourself (personal hygiene, appropriate clothes for the occasion, grooming etc.)? If there is no one at home to teach a young man how he should present himself the right way, where else could he learn it from? Is there a ‘right way’? Discuss.

9) Why do you think that Robeson kept his martial arts background a secret for so long? He was more than capable of defending himself, so why did he want Pacino to help him? Compare and contrast Robeson and Pacino’s views on violence between Black boys and men. Why do you think that Tariq was so determined to intimidate or harm Robeson and Pacino?

Google/research the article *“5 Reasons Young Black Men Resort To Violence”* from the November 26, 2013 issue of Atlanta BlackStar.com. Write down five solutions for each reason mentioned.

10) The Brand New Vision meeting at the Battlefield household was filled with prominent Black men from all walks of life; rich, working class, business owners, students, fathers, grandfathers, athletes, etc. Why was it so hard for Pacino to understand that the men wanted to voluntarily take responsibility for what happens in their neighborhoods/communities? How powerful would this be if every city in America had a real life BNV chapter? What kind of change could they enact if they pooled their resources and addressed major issues in the Black community? Make a list the powerful, influential men in your life or in your community (father, teacher, pastor, coach, neighbor, uncle, friend, etc.) What would be the first issue you’d like them to take action on if they formed a group like the BNV?

11) What do you think was going through Robeson’s mind when he saw Tariq pressing a gun against Pacino’s chest at the fountain? Pacino was hollering at Robeson to leave. Why do you think he was still protecting Robeson aka Crease? Why would Tariq threaten the boys with an unloaded gun? What was his motive? Robeson retaliated in a fit of rage. Why do you think he was so angry and went completely against his ideals of violence amongst Black boys? Get in groups of threes and reenact the scene at the fountain. Create an alternative to what happened in the story.

12) Why did Robeson think his dad would be disappointed in what he had done to Tariq? Officer Watts viewed Tariq as a menace that was incapable of being rehabilitated; *“Typical, dumb street behavior. These boys will never learn. Jail seems like the only solution.”* Do you agree? There were a few

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times in the story where Robeson showed empathy for Tariq's situation (being in constant trouble, abused by step fathers, being without both parents, etc.). Why was he so forgiving to someone that clearly had resentment and contempt for him? Why was he coming up with alternatives to prison and solutions for Tariq? Would you have been as forgiving? Define the words a) empathy b) compassion and c) benevolent. Write about a time where you were forgiving towards someone that did something to harm you.

13) The Battlefields had accepted Pacino as one of their own. He was an unofficial Battlefield member. How important is mentoring for young men who don't have positive daily influences in their lives? Who is the mentor in your life that you look up to? Are you a mentor to someone younger than yourself? Write down the nature of those relationships and share with the group.



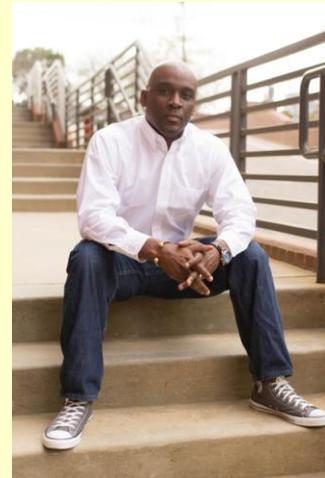
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14) There are three very important prayers in the story; one by Pacino, one from Mr. Battlefield, and a pivotal conversation with God by Robeson. Write down, compare and contrast all three; the occasion, the importance of each, and a line from each one that stuck with you the most.



DERRICK BARNES is a native of Kansas City, MO. He is a graduate of Jackson State University with a degree in Marketing. He is the author of the ultra popular series entitled RUBY AND THE BOOKER BOYS, published by Scholastic. The highly acclaimed novel WE COULD BE BROTHERS (Just Us Books) was his first middle grade release. He has two forthcoming picture books--CROWN: AN ODE TO THE FRESH CUT published by Denene Millner Books/Agate Bolden, and THE KING OF KINDERGARTEN published by Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin. He is also known for writing best selling copy for various Hallmark Card lines. He's the founder of his own creative copy writing company, [Say Word Creative Communications](#). He resides in Charlotte, NC with his enchanting wife, Tinka and their sons, Ezra, Solomon, Silas, and Nnamdi.