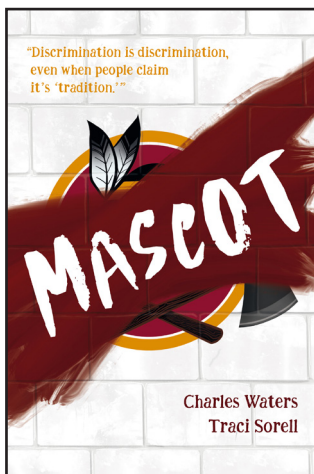


MASCOT

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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About the Book

Welcome to Rye, Virginia. In this suburb outside of Washington, DC, people work hard, kids go to school, and football is big on Friday nights. When an eighth-grade English teacher assigns her class a debate project—Should the school mascot stay or change?—six middle schoolers, all with different backgrounds and beliefs, get involved in an issue that already has the town turned upside down with everyone choosing sides and arguments getting ugly.

This novel in verse by two award-winning authors brings a contemporary, ripped-from-the-headlines topic onto the page and asks, “What happens when a mascot is seen as racist, but not by everyone?”

About the Authors



Charles Waters is a children’s poet, actor, educator, and coauthor (with Irene Latham) of *African Town*, winner of the 2023 Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction; *Dictionary for a Better World: Poems, Quotes, and Anecdotes from A to Z*; and the award-winning *Can I Touch Your Hair? Poems of Race, Mistakes and Friendship*. He lives near Atlanta. www.charleswaterspoetry.com



Traci Sorell writes fiction and nonfiction for children featuring contemporary characters and compelling biographies, including the award-winning *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*, *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know*, and *Powwow Day*. She is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation and lives in northeastern Oklahoma, where her tribe is located. www.tracisorell.com

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Use these questions to kick off classroom discussion, guide pre-thinking and post-reading responses, or inspire a writing assignment!

- What does your school mascot mean to you? Do you feel a strong attachment to it? Would you want to change your school mascot? Why or why not?
- What do you learn about Callie from her self-introduction in the first poem in this book? Compare and contrast this poem to the later poem “Theme for 7th Period Honors English by Callie Crossland” (pg. 26). Why do you think Callie introduces herself differently in this poem than aloud to her classmates? How do these poems handle the subject of the school mascot differently?
- One of the chapters is a collection of poems Ms. Williams’s students have written as a response to Langston Hughes’s “Theme for English B.” Read Hughes’s poem and compare it to these response poems. What would you include if you wrote your own version of “Theme for English B”?
- Why do you think Tessa gets no traction when talking to Luis about the negative impacts of the mascot? Read Luis’s poem in the chapter “Facts Versus Opinions” (pg. 60) and discuss: Has someone ever talked to you the way Tessa talks to Luis? What insight does Sean have about this interaction?
- Discuss the end of Ms. Williams’s poem in the chapter “Facts Versus Opinions”: “Sometimes it’s hard to gauge what’s right/and what’s wrong/in a classroom” (pg. 63). Do you agree? What was behind Ms. Williams’s decision-making when she assigned this project? What makes the classroom a hard place to gauge right and wrong? Are there other places where gauging right and wrong can be difficult?
- Callie and her classmates do research and learn information about how Native-based mascots cause damage to students’ self-esteem. When have you needed to provide evidence for a change you’ve wanted to make, or when do you think you might need to?
- Read the two poems in the chapter “Keepin’ It Real” (pg. 78). Why do you think this conversation is the tipping point for Franklin’s support of the mascot? What were some early signs of Franklin’s changing opinion? Why do you think it took him time to change?
- What is cognitive dissonance? Have you ever experienced cognitive dissonance? Discuss the end of Franklin’s poem in “Columbus Day Versus Indigenous Peoples’ Day”: “Once it’s in plain sight, I can’t hide from it./Once it’s visible, I can’t make it invisible/ever again” (pg. 91).
- Compare the poems in the chapter “Fall Break” (pg. 94). What do you notice about these characters when they’re out of school?
- Why do you think Sean and Luis feel so betrayed by what Franklin says at his presentation? How does their support of the mascot affect their friendship? Do you have friendships that are built on shared values and beliefs? How would you react if your friend decided an important shared belief was actually wrong?
- How do Callie, Priya, and Tessa contribute to the petition drive for the mascot change? How do you see this petition affecting the larger school and community?

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- Who does Sean ask to testify at the first school board hearing? Discuss Callie's poem about Mr. Allen's testimony in "After the Board Meeting" (pg. 174). Why do you think the authors chose to include the character of Mr. Allen?
- Why are Callie, Priya, and Franklin upset with Tessa after the first school board hearing? What does Tessa later do to earn their trust back? Discuss Tessa's poem at the end of "Fundraising" (pg. 215). How does her perspective change when she adopts a new role in the campaign?
- Why doesn't Luis want to go to Bishop Derry High School? Why do his parents insist anyway? If your parents insisted you switch from a public to a private school or vice versa, how would that impact your life?
- What is the deciding factor for the school board in the vote to change the mascot?
- Discuss Ms. Williams's remarks to each of her honors students in "Eighth Grade Graduation" (pg. 228). What would you say to these students' families if you were their teacher? Has a teacher ever given you end-of-year feedback that stuck with you?
- What role do the adults in this story play in the main characters' lives? (Callie's parents and aunt, Franklin's dad, Sean's grandmother, and others.) What role do the adults in your life play in shaping your beliefs and values?
- How does the McEntire family's poverty affect Sean's worldview? Take a moment to consider your own economic status: How would your life be different if your family had more wealth or less wealth?
- Why do you think the last chapter in the book is titled "New Beginnings" (pg. 235)? What new beginning is each student looking forward to in this chapter?
- Many Cherokee and Spanish words appear in this book. Take a look at the "Words to Know" (pg. 244) section in the back matter and discuss: What are some of your favorite words in these glossaries? What role, if any, do languages other than English play in your life?
- Read the "About Mascots and Taking Action" (pg. 246) section in the back matter and discuss. What have you learned over the course of this book about the impact of Native-based mascots? How is the cause of mascot change relevant to your community?