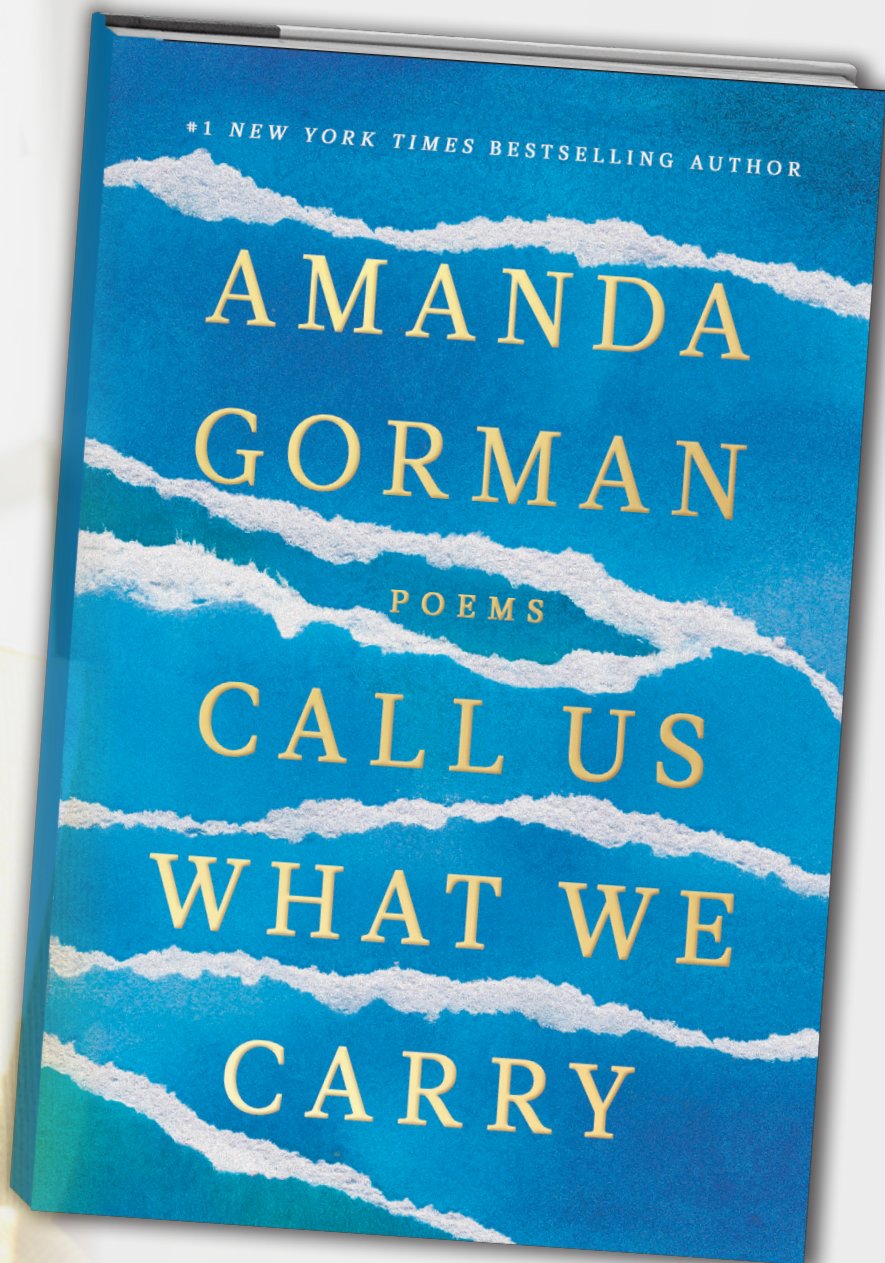


AN EDUCATOR GUIDE TO  
CALL US WHAT  
WE CARRY



## DEAR EDUCATORS,

**W**e're proud to partner with DisruptTexts on the creation of this educator guide for Amanda Gorman's *Call Us What We Carry*. DisruptTexts is a crowdsourced, grassroots effort by teachers for teachers to aid and develop teachers committed to antiracist/anti-bias teaching pedagogy and practices to create change. Amanda Gorman burst onto the world stage with her inaugural poem, "The Hill We Climb," and with it, lifted poetry in classrooms across the country. Since then, Amanda has published books for all ages with *Change Sings* and *Call Us What We Carry*. To help bring Amanda and her work to life in your class, this guide is aligned to the four core principles of DisruptTexts: 1) Continuously interrogate our own biases and how they inform our thinking. 2) Center Black, Indigenous, and other voices of color in literature. 3) Apply a critical literacy lens to our teaching practices. 4) Work in communities with other antiracist educators, especially Black, Indigenous, and other educators of color. Each principle stands for actions that are culturally sustaining and antiracist. Through each principle, teachers aim to offer a curriculum that is restorative and inclusive, and therefore works toward healing identities and communities. As you read this guide, you'll see how each of these principles informs the approach recommended to teach *Call Us What We Carry*. As educators, sharing a book in your classrooms can be a powerful way to inspire and engage students. You can show them that they have the power to make changes—big or small—in the world, in their communities, and most importantly, in them-selves. We thank you for taking the time to share Amanda Gorman's work with your students.

Yours in Solidarity,

The DisruptTexts Team and Penguin Young Readers School and Library Marketing

**#DISRUPTTEXTS**

THIS GUIDE WAS WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED BY #DISRUPTTEXTS TEAM MEMBERS: TRICIA EBARVIA, LORENA GERMÁN, DR. KIMBERLY N. PARKER, AND JULIA TORRES. FIND OUT MORE ABOUT #DISRUPTTEXTS [HERE](#) OR AT [DISRUPTTEXTS.ORG](https://disrupttexts.org).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Photo by Danny Williams

### AMANDA GORMAN

is a poet, activist, and bestselling author. She is a committed advocate for the environment, racial equity, and gender justice. Amanda's activism and poetry have been featured on *The Today Show*, PBS Kids, and *CBS This Morning*, and in *The*

*New York Times*, *Vogue*, and *Essence*. After graduating cum laude from Harvard University, she now lives in her hometown of Los Angeles. In 2017, Amanda Gorman was appointed the first-ever national youth poet laureate by Urban Word—a program that supports youth poet laureates in more than sixty cities, regions, and states nationally. Gorman's performance of her poem "The Hill We Climb" at the 2021 presidential inauguration received critical acclaim and international attention. The special edition of her inaugural poem, "The Hill We Climb," was published in March 2021 and debuted at #1 on the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal* bestsellers list. Amanda appeared on the cover of *TIME* magazine in February 2021 and was the first poet to grace the cover of *Vogue* in their May 2021 issue. She was *Porter Magazine's* July 2021 cover star and received the Artist Impact Award at the 2021 Backstage at the Geffen fundraiser. Her debut picture book, *Change Sings*, was published in September 2021 and debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and her poetry collection *Call Us What We Carry* published in December 2021. Please visit [theamandagorman.com](http://theamandagorman.com).

## ABOUT THE BOOK:

The luminous poetry collection by #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and presidential inaugural poet Amanda Gorman captures a shipwrecked moment in time and transforms it into a lyric of hope and healing. In *Call Us What We Carry*, Gorman explores history, language, identity, and erasure through an imaginative and intimate collage. Harnessing the collective grief of a global pandemic, these poems shine a light on a moment of reckoning and reveal that Gorman has become our messenger from the past, our voice for the future.

## COMMON THEMES:

"Poetry is the lens we use to interrogate the history we stand on and the future we stand for" (Obama 2021). Gorman's poetry helps connect **past to present**. She draws on **history**, especially the 1919 influenza epidemic, Chicago's race riots, and even New England whaling history, helping readers understand how much of our present reflects our past. Since Gorman writes through the current moment, *Call Us What We Carry* is a fitting text for processing the multiple pandemics many have experienced, too. Gorman explores **themes of grief, loss, and trauma, while also providing a powerful throughline of hope and change**. Gorman is also invested in the collective, using "we" regularly, and that insistence on reminding us that we are all responsible for one another invites ways to process past and present trauma.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CORRESPOND TO SECTIONS OF *CALL US WHAT WE CARRY*.

## I. REQUIEM

- ❧ A ship's manifest is a record of what is on the ship. In "Ship's Manifest," the speaker says, "To be accountable we must render an account." Who is the "we" to whom the speaker refers, and what does the speaker list in the manifest? What is the significance of this "capsule" and why must it be preserved?
- ❧ "At First" is formatted as a series of text messages that documents the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic. Discuss how the form of the poem supports the messages throughout, especially as related to loss, unanswered questions, and survival. How might the concluding stanza, which includes the line "By letting love reclaim our tongues," provide hope and remind the reader of their responsibility to others?
- ❧ "Fugue" seems to capture the mundane, seemingly never-ending aspects of the pandemic. Which moments resonate with you and your experiences? A fugue can also be a period of loss and awareness; how does the speaker help us process the importance of those smaller moments that, in retrospect, seem important? What encouragement and advice, specifically, does the speaker provide us for emerging from this fugue?
- ❧ "School's Out" asks the reader to recall events that disrupted "normal": the closing of school, for instance, being the case here, as well as the cancellation of milestone moments like graduation. How does the poem capture the feelings of tension, sorrow, and resolution? What does the speaker suggest about the human condition when they write, "There is power in being robbed / & still choosing to dance"?
- ❧ The speaker encourages us to pay attention to the smaller details of our lives, exemplified well during quarantine. The three poems, "There's No Power Like Home," "What We Did in the Time Being," and "Surviving" are a timeline of sorts. They invite us to think about the many ways we survived, grieved, and hoped for pandemics to end. Which of these poems, lines, and words resonate with your own experiences during this time?
- ❧ The poems that end this section explore the relationship between grief, trauma, and hope. In "The Shallows," the speaker summarizes that "What we have lived / remains indecipherable. / & yet we remain. / & still, we write." What can we understand about the need to document what we have experienced? What is the importance of surviving this moment, while also grieving the many who did not survive it? "& So" reminds us that "despite being drenched with dread, / this dark girl still dreams. / We smile like a sun that is never shunted." Why must we continue to dream? What is our responsibility to those who died and to ourselves, and why and how must we learn to "let this loss, / like us, sing on & on"? Then, in "Cut," the speaker grapples with scars we all carry, especially as we attempt to reconnect with others. While "the old We collapses like a lung," what advice does the speaker give us about the responsibility we have for others? Finally, "Good Grief" takes up the seeming contradiction that by surviving and experiencing grief and trauma, "we are alive & awake." Also, the speaker calls grief an "anchor" that we carry. Do you agree with this comparison?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

## II. WHAT A PIECE OF WRECK IS MAN

- ❧ “*Essex I*” is a concrete poem. [The Poetry Foundation](#) defines concrete poetry as “verse that emphasizes nonlinguistic elements in its meaning, such as a typeface that creates a visual image of the topic.” [The Academy of American Poets](#) adds, “In essence, works of concrete poetry are as much pieces of visual art made with words as they are poems. Were one to hear a piece of concrete poetry read aloud, a substantial amount of its effect would be lost.” Explore the ways the shape of the poem invites the reader to think about the cost of whaling to the whale and to the whalers. What is the connection between form and the lines “We / become what we flee / & what we fear”?
- ❧ “Call Us” depicts the ways Black people’s bodies have been denigrated and dehumanized. Yet, the speaker entreats the reader to remember all the ways that Black people have been integral. What is the responsibility that the speaker puts on the reader when they say, “We are not me— / we are we”? Why must we, then, “call us / what we carry”? What is the importance of acknowledging the harm done to Black people? What happens if we do not?
- ❧ “In the Deep” incorporates the imagery of being in rough waters and the disequilibrium created by that experience. It also explores living through a pandemic, longing for normal, and the challenge of nostalgia obscuring our reality. How might our lives, especially as experienced in recent years, resemble being aboard a ship, and what are the lessons learned about the experience that are important for ourselves and our broader world?
- ❧ How do the poems “Lighthouse” and “Compass” reflect our attempts to navigate unsettling times? What advice does the speaker provide that resonates with you?
- ❧ Consider “Every Day We Are Learning” and “Cordage, or Atonement.” What does this pair of poems suggest about persistence, resilience, and humanity? What might these lines from “Cordage, or Atonement” suggest about the cost of change: “Often we cannot change / without someone in us dying”?

## III. EARTH EYES

- ❧ This section is rich with natural imagery, particularly the poems “Lucent,” “Earth Eyes,” “Captive” and “Arborescent II.” How do these poems encourage us to honor and reconnect with the natural world? What images from these poems compel us to slow down and value the beauty of nature? Given the importance of environmental activism, what lines from these poems might urge the reader to action?

## IV. MEMORIA

- ❧ In the poem “Pre-Memory,” the speaker explains: “Pre-memory defines who we are as a people. Will we / forget, erase, censor, distort the experience as we live it, so / that it cannot be fully remembered? Or will we ask, carry, / keep, share, listen, truth-tell, so it need not be fully relieved?” What might happen if we choose to tell our stories without a full reckoning with or accounting of our pasts?
- ❧ “Vale of the Shadow of Death . . .” challenges readers to think about the many ways history is changed, omitted, or retold to privilege certain versions of the past. Do you agree with the speaker’s claim that “ignorance isn’t bliss. Ignorance / is to miss: to block ourselves / from seeing sky”?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

### V. ATONEMENT

- ☞ The note on p. 90 explains that poems in this section draw on erasure. It's important to also read the references that provide more explanation about the sources of the original poetry. Gorman explains her aim for constructive erasure: "to create an extension instead of an extract." Other ways erasure works is to "enhance, evoke, explore, and expose [. . . as] we erase to find." As you read these poems, ask yourself the following questions: Whose voice(s) and experiences are enhanced in the poem? What experiences, histories, other themes are exposed (for instance, Native American genocide; Washington, DC, race riots, the AIDS epidemic, etc.)? What are these poems encouraging us to explore? How does the idea of atonement figure into this section?
- ☞ Gorman juxtaposes history with her imagination in "The Surveyed: Report on Migration of Roes" in response to the understanding of the 1919 Chicago race riots. On pp. 139–140, she offers, "Through some fictions we find facts; in some fantasies we / discover / ourselves & then some." How does the form of the poem, told through a combination of real and imagined survey answers, help us to think about this moment in history, what actually happened and what we know and don't know? What are the fictions and facts that this poem encourages us to recognize?

### VI. FURY & FAITH

- ☞ Notice the different contrasts throughout this section. What is the impact of the words written within the American flag on p. 155? What are the conflicts—external and internal—that we must contend with if we hope to make significant changes in our lives and world? What emotions do the poems in this section elicit? In the poem "Fury & Faith," to whom does the "you" and "we" refer? How does Gorman summon the need for collective liberation, hope, and persistence, and for what purpose?

### VII. RESOLUTION

- ☞ What have we learned as "we mourn & we mend," especially during these last few years? Note the ways the speaker uses "morning" and "mourning" in "The Miracle of Morning." What is the relationship between these ideas and words in the poem? How do we survive and thrive beyond this moment?
- ☞ Who is responsible for the future? What agency and urgency do we need to summon, especially according to "Augury or the Birds"? What are the qualities that will enable us to keep practicing for the future we want to create, especially those elicited by "Practice Makes People"?
- ☞ How does the comparison of the last two years to the monomyth complicate our understanding of what makes a hero and what qualities determine someone as heroic? What other poems in this section provide advice, direction, and inspiration for the work required to begin thinking about our lives in the later stages of the pandemic and afterward?

## JOURNAL PROMPTS

- ❧ Amanda Gorman has said, “Poetry is the lens we use to interrogate the history we stand on and the future we stand for” (Obama 2021). In what ways does *Call Us What We Carry* support this statement?
- ❧ A requiem is a remembrance. What is the significance of Gorman titling the first section of *Call Us What We Carry* in this way? What is she urging readers to remember, and in what particular ways?
- ❧ Think about the ways we orient ourselves—the objects, people, or experiences that help us to remember who we are. Who have been your lighthouses and your compasses?
- ❧ What do we stand to gain by confronting ignorance, racism, and inaccuracies? Why is taking this active stance one that inspires hope?
- ❧ Gorman explains about her lineage: “I’m the daughter of Black writers who are descended from Freedom Fighters who broke their chains and changed the world. They call me” (Obama, 2021) What is your lineage? Who are your ancestors? Who calls you, and what do they call you to do?

## ACTIVITIES

- ❧ *Call Us What We Carry* details Gorman’s personal experience living through the pandemic. Create a collection of poetry speaking to your individual experience, focusing especially on the last few years. What symbols or outside works will you reference that would be recognizable to others who have lived through this time? What emotions or feelings do you hope to convey? What changes do you want your poetry to be able to impact? What might be an outlet for your poems (i.e., publishing, taking other action, etc.)? See the [Notes on Poetry](#) within this guide for more tips and suggestions to include.
- ❧ Many of the poems in *Call Us What We Carry* are inspired by [Blackout Poetry](#). Choose your favorite speech or essay related to the fight for justice (e.g., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”). Black out all but the words you would like to use to craft a new poem. Keep in mind the notes about poetry found in this guide and the use of poetic forms throughout Gorman’s collections that may help inspire you to play with form in new ways.
- ❧ Consider the differences between your generation and generations that have come before you. ([This BuzzFeed video](#), “Generations Throughout History,” might be helpful.) Then, identify specific lines from “The Hill We Climb” that you would connect to each of the seven generations mentioned. How is your generation different from others that have come before? What unique challenges or gifts do you have that you might use to unify and heal your community and country? Create a short presentation connecting typical traits or characteristics of your generation to lines from “The Hill We Climb,” then share it with members of your community.
- ❧ Consider the endnotes in *Call Us What We Carry*. Review the notes from Amanda about her inspiration for certain poems. Have students select a few poems and examine the influences on each poem and how they may be present in the poem. Consider starting with the annotation of [“WAR: WHAT, IS IT GOOD?”](#).

## NOTES ON POETRY

### SOME COMMONLY USED ELEMENTS OF POETRY YOU WILL FIND THROUGHOUT GORMAN'S WORKS INCLUDE:

- Alliteration
- Simile
- Homonym
- Allusion
- Symbolism
- Metaphor
- Anaphora
- Enjambment

This is not an exhaustive list, but as you read, note some specific examples of these craft tools. When you write your own poetry, try to use a few of these elements throughout, remembering that it is better to use one tool very well than all of them without clear intention.

### THESE RESOURCES MAY BE HELPFUL:

- [“Writing 101: What Is Repetition? 7 Types of Repetition in Writing With Examples” - 2021](#)
- [“Giving voice: Jacqueline Woodson, the new young people’s poet laureate, on why poetry is a party everyone is invited to.”](#)
- [Poetry Writing Tips from Amanda](#)
- [“Amanda Gorman on Poetry” video](#)
- [Poetryfoundation.org/teens](#)
- [Poets.org/poem-a-day](#)

In *Call Us What We Carry*, many of the poems play with form in unconventional ways. When writing your own poetry and reading poems written by others, take note of the way that form can be connected to function. If, for example, one wishes to write about America, what might be the emotional impact of writing that poem in the shape of an American flag?

Some of the most historically recognized poets use deliberate form not only for the measurement of lines and stanzas but also inside those lines, as they craft rhyme and meter. Learn more about the details of poetic rhyme and meter from Mary Oliver in [“Flare Form and Meter.”](#)

## REFERENCES

Obama, Michelle (2021). “‘Unity with Purpose.’ Amanda Gorman and Michelle Obama Discuss Art, Identity, and Optimism.” *TIME*, February 4, 2021. <https://time.com/5933596/amanda-gorman-michelle-obama-interview/>.



## WHAT IS #DISRUPTTEXTS?

DisruptTexts is a crowdsourced, grassroots effort *by* teachers and *for* teachers to challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve. Cofounded by Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena Germán, Dr. Kimberly N. Parker, and Julia Torres, #DisruptTexts's mission is to aid and develop teachers committed to antiracist/anti-bias teaching pedagogy and practices.

There are four core principles to #DisruptTexts:

### 1. Continuously interrogate our own biases and how they inform our thinking.

As teachers, we have been socialized in certain values, attitudes, and beliefs that inform the way we read, interpret, and teach texts, and the way we interact with our students. Ask: How are my own biases affecting the way I'm teaching this text and engaging with my students?

### 2. Center Black, Indigenous, and other voices of color in literature.

Literature study in US classrooms has largely focused on the experiences of White- (and male)-dominated society, as perpetuated through a traditional, Eurocentric canon. Ask: What voices—authors or characters—are marginalized or missing in our study? How are these perspectives authentic to the lived experiences of communities of color?

### 3. Apply a critical-literacy lens to our teaching practices.

While text-dependent analysis and close reading are important skills for students to develop, teachers should also support students in asking questions about the way that such texts are constructed. Ask: How does this text support or challenge issues of representation, fairness, or justice? How does this text perpetuate or subvert dominant power dynamics and ideologies? And how can we ask students to wrestle with these tensions?

### 4. Work in community with other antiracist educators, especially Black, Indigenous, and other educators of color.

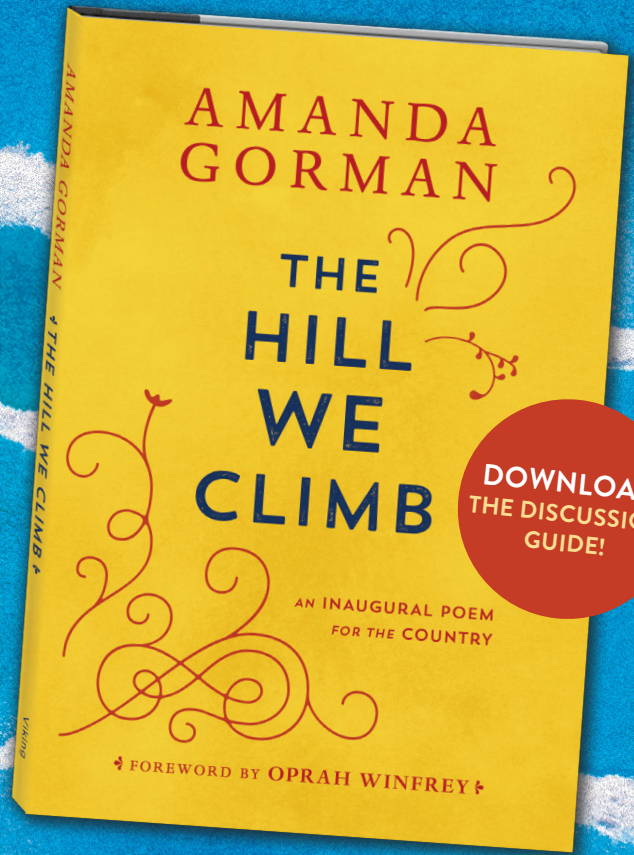
To disrupt and transform curriculum and instruction requires working with other educators who can challenge us as antiracist educators. Ask: How can we collaborate to identify, revise, or create instructional resources (like this guide) that can center and do justice to the experiences of historically marginalized communities?

Each principle stands for actions that are culturally sustaining and antiracist. Through each principle, teachers aim to offer a curriculum that is restorative and inclusive, and which therefore works toward healing identities and communities. As you use this guide, you'll see how each of these principles informs the approach recommended to teaching the collected works of Amanda Gorman.

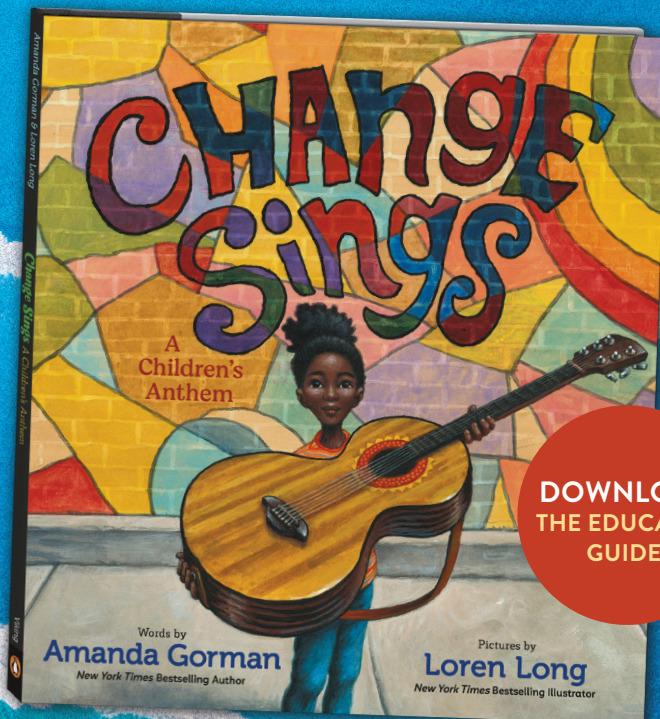
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