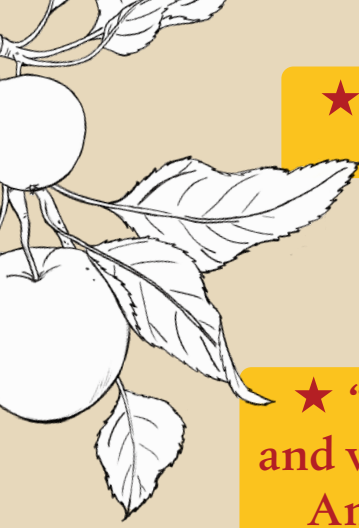


# AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO



★ **“A MUST** for all collections,  
this four-generation saga of Filipino fathers and sons  
**WILL RESONATE WITH TEENAGERS OF ALL CULTURES.”**

—*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*, starred review



★ “A masterclass.”

—BCCB, starred review

★ “Entwined and exquisite.”

—BOOKLIST, starred review

★ “Emotionally resonant.”

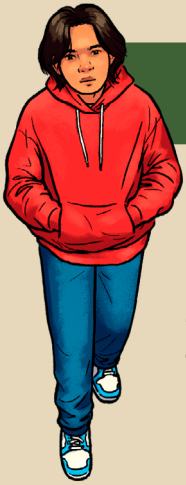
—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review

★ “Ribay juggles skillfully and with great heart a Filipino American family history.”

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, starred review

★ “A powerful and moving family saga.”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS, starred review



A NATIONAL BOOK AWARD LONGLIST SELECTION

## ABOUT THE BOOK

From the author of the National Book Award finalist *Patron Saints of Nothing* comes an emotionally charged, moving novel about four generations of Filipino American boys grappling with identity, masculinity, and their fraught father-son relationships.



**RANDY RIBAY** is a Filipino American author of young adult fiction. His novel *Patron Saints of Nothing* was a finalist for the National Book Award and the *LA Times* Book Prize. Randy was also a contributor to the Printz Award–winning anthology *The Collectors*, edited by A. S. King. His other works include *An Infinite Number of Parallel Universes*, *After the Shot Drops*, and *Chronicles of the Avatar: The Reckoning of Roku*. Born in the Philippines and raised in the Midwest, Randy currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, son, and cat-like dog.



AUTHOR PHOTO BY LEOPALDO MACAYA

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## DEAR TEACHERS,

In 2019, I read Randy’s novel *Patron Saints of Nothing*. As a second-generation Filipina American, I had never seen my identity captured in a book the way it was in those pages. When I taught *Patron Saints of Nothing* the following year, it was the first time in my two-decade career that I would teach a book by any Filipino American author. Reading and teaching *Patron Saints of Nothing* was a deeply personal and moving experience for me as a reader and teacher. Reading *Patron Saints of Nothing* affirmed for me the power of literature as a “mirror,” so beautifully expressed by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop in 1990.

Now, with *Everything We Never Had*, Randy has given readers another tremendous gift. James Joyce once wrote that “in the particular is contained the universal.” Someone reading *Everything We Never Had* doesn’t have to be Filipino, or Asian American, or a person of color to be deeply moved by the novel or connect with it. One friend who read the book could see echoes of his own strained relationship with his father. A colleague connected the novel to her family’s immigrant histories and traumas. Another friend was moved by the lyrical prose and the beauty of the multiracial families throughout. My own seventeen-year-old son could see and better understand his grandparents in the Maghabol family.

*Everything We Never Had* may capture the specific complexities of a Filipino American experience, but in doing so, it also captures the shared experiences of the many—of children longing for their parents’ approval; of parents struggling to understand their children’s different needs; of outsiders struggling

to fit in; and of dreamers who refuse to give up their ideals even when the world says no, over and over again. Through the stories of Francisco, Emil, Chris, and Enzo Maghabol, the novel captures the disappointments and griefs, loneliness and pain of what it means to be sixteen-years-old, at different moments in time, and across generations. But it also captures the hope and deep abiding love that is possible when we reach for and find each other. The novel puts into words the things we too often stay silent about, and in doing so, it can evoke many different reader responses. As I was putting together this teaching guide, I quickly realized just how much there was to teach, unpack, and analyze. In this guide, I’ve tried to provide different ways you might approach the novel, to put your arms around everything it has to offer. I encourage you to let students lead the way. What’s resonating for students? What can their responses to the characters teach us about what they might need next? How can we invite students to engage deeply with the text and with each other?

The more I reflect on the novel, I continue to be struck by what I see as its simple and central call to action. In spending time getting to know each of the Maghabol boys, we are called to be gentler, more patient, and more understanding. In a world that could use infinitely more compassion and care, may this experience of reading *Everything We Never Had* be a way forward for you and your students.



WITH GRATITUDE AND HOPE,  
TRICIA

This guide was written by **TRICIA EBARVIA**. She is a co-founder of #DisruptTexts and the Institute for Racial Equity in Literacy, a lifelong educator, literacy activist, speaker, and facilitator. After teaching high school English for twenty years, she is currently a school leader at a PK-8 independent school. Tricia is the author of *Get Free: Anti-Bias Literacy Instruction for Stronger Readers, Writers, and Thinkers*.

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

*Everything We Never Had* (EWNH) is a rich and multi-layered exploration of identity, culture, family, intergenerational trauma, and, ultimately, of resilience and hope. Its themes, characters, and prose offer teachers and students many opportunities to grapple with complex and timely ideas that are relevant and relatable to the lives of young people.

Consider using *EWNH* to pair with or replace any coming-of-age text you might have in your curriculum, as well as those that center on complicated family relationships, especially those that span multiple generations. For example, *EWNH* would pair well with texts already in many high school classrooms, such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Tommy Orange's *There There*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, or Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Likewise, *EWNH* can be taught through the lens of the "American Dream" alongside some of those already mentioned, as well as *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi, *Huda F Are You?* by Huda Fahmy, *I Was Their American Dream* by Malaka Gharib, *The Best That We Could Do* by Thi Bui, and many others.

Young adult novels that center and explore multigenerational relationships would also be excellent selections to pair with *EWNH* or read as part of literature circles. Consider titles such as Jacqueline Woodson's *Before the Ever After*, Sabaa Tahir's *All My Rage*, Autumn Allen's *All You Have to Do*, Mitali Perkins's *You Bring the Distance Near*, and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*.

Because the novel explores each of the main characters at the age of sixteen, and at four different time periods spanning nearly one hundred years, students reading the book will be invited and challenged to think about how each character's particular set of experiences and identities—as well as their larger social, political, and historical context—informs their growth and development. Students will find the scope and breadth of the novel engaging as they follow one family through multiple generations, while the specificity and diversity of each of the main characters enables students to see some part of their own experiences reflected. For young people trying to make sense of their own identities, their relationships with their family, and their place in the world, *EWNH* offers students many ways "into" the world that Ribay has laid out.

**"It's facing the  
truth—even when  
it's difficult—that  
allows us to change  
for the better."**

**– Randy Ribay from  
*Everything We  
Never Had***



# CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS (CONTINUED)



## CONSIDERATIONS AROUND ETHNIC, CULTURAL, AND RACIAL IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES

Despite being just over 250 pages, *EWNH* covers the same breadth and depth of material as novels that have double the pages, as Ribay explores the challenges that a Filipino American family faces across multiple generations. Each main character grapples with issues of identity—what it means to be an outsider in an unfamiliar, hostile land; what parts of our cultures and histories we hold on to and those we erase; how to navigate the painful effects of assimilation; and how to find ways to put the pieces of one’s identity, family, and history back together.

From the opening pages, readers immediately know that the journey ahead will be difficult in a land where “it turned out there was no gold” and the words “go back to where you came from” sting the ears (4). Conversations about cultural identity and the ugly parts of America’s history cannot be avoided. These conversations can be empowering for students but also challenging. After reading the novel, teachers should consider what they know—and what they might not know—about the identities and backgrounds of their students, paying attention to how some of the issues raised in the text may impact them. Giving students regular space and time to journal, talk in small groups, and explore supplementary texts will be critical (suggestions outlined in this guide).

approaches and internalize different values to navigate these adversities. The discrimination that Francisco experiences causes him to become an activist leader, but that decision creates tension between him and Emil. Because Emil never talked openly with Chris, Chris is unsure of how to break the silences between him and Enzo.

Students will have different responses to the family dynamics as presented in the novel. For some students, the strained relationships between fathers and sons may remind them of their own experiences; reading about these tensions might be validating for some students, but it may cause anxiety for others. Students’ relationships with their families may be complicated, and teachers should use inclusive language that honors the many different ways students’ families may be constructed, without making assumptions about caregiver roles, identities, or family structures. Opportunities to engage with the novel should allow students to preserve both privacy and agency, providing them with space, time, and choice about how to share responses to parts of the novel that may be sensitive for them. Teachers should offer students different ways to engage with the novel that allow students to preserve both privacy and agency, providing students with space, time, and choice in how to share their responses to parts of the novel that may be particularly sensitive for them. For more information about a trauma-informed approach to teaching, see Alex Shevrin Venet’s book *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education*.

## CONSIDERATIONS AROUND FAMILY DYNAMICS AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

*Everything We Never Had* explores the effects of intergenerational trauma. Also known as generational trauma or transgenerational trauma, intergenerational trauma is the passing down of the effects of traumatic or adverse experiences from one generation to the next. In the novel, each of the Maghabol boys experience challenges due to racism, discrimination, and xenophobia. Each boy responds to these adverse experiences in their own way; they adopt different

## CONSIDERATIONS AROUND SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Because the novel takes place across four different generations, teachers and students will need to have some working knowledge of the social, political, and historical context of each time period. As each character is introduced, students can reflect on what they might know about the specific time and place of that character’s story, and with teacher support, consider how these may impact each character’s journey. In particular, some supplementary background knowledge about each particular time period will be helpful. Teachers might consider creating an activity using the resources below as students read.



# CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS (CONTINUED)

TIME PERIOD	RELEVANT SOCIAL CONTEXT	RESOURCES
1929 (Francisco)	<p><i>The History of Filipino Americans and Filipino Immigration to the United States</i></p> <p>The Maghabol family's story in the novel begins in 1929 when Francisco Maghabol, lured by promises of a better life, takes up work as a farm laborer in Watsonville, California. Francisco represents one of the many Filipinos who immigrated to California during this time period and whose labor was integral in making Watsonville one of the nation's leading production centers for crops such as strawberries, apples, grapes, and others.</p> <p>Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that most high school students will know this history, or the larger history of Filipino and Asian migration to the US. In the opening chapter, Ribay writes that Francisco had "stepped into the belly of the boat that carried him from Manila to Japan to Hawai'i to California" (3). While many students may be familiar with the romanticized story of immigration as part of the "American Dream," as students learn in the novel, the plight and exploitation of day laborers from countries like the Philippines was far from romantic. The story of Asian migration to the United States is a story of economics and labor, imperialism and war. Filipinos and their fellow laborers faced not only brutal, physical work for very little pay, but were also subjected to discrimination, violence, and hate crimes, such as the 1930 Watsonville riots, which was the basis for Lorenzo's story (see the author's note).</p>	<p><a href="#">Sowing Seeds Exhibit: Watsonville is in the Heart</a> - virtual tour and additional resources provided by the University of California, Santa Cruz</p> <p><a href="#">Pajaro Valley Filipinos tell their communities' stories in new museum exhibit</a> - podcast from KAZU</p> <p><a href="#">On Jan 19, 1930: White Mobs Attack Filipino Farmworkers in Watsonville, California</a> - article from Equal Justice Initiative</p>

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS (CONTINUED)

TIME PERIOD	RELEVANT SOCIAL CONTEXT	RESOURCES
1965 (Emil)	<p><b>1960s Civil Rights and Labor Movement</b></p> <p>Emil grows up under the shadow of his father Francisco’s activism, which takes him away from Emil and his family for weeks and months at a time. In the novel, Francisco is a manong, one of the Filipino leaders of the labor movement who worked alongside other laborer organizers such as Larry Itliong, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta, all of whom are mentioned in the novel.</p> <p>While students may associate the civil rights era with the work of more well-known activists such as Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, on the West Coast, the labor movement was growing, resulting in the founding of the United Farm Workers union (UFW) in 1962. The UFW gained national prominence when Filipino American leader Larry Itliong organized the Delano Grape Strike in 1965. It is this labor strike that serves as the backdrop for Francisco’s activism during these chapters.</p> <p>Knowing the facts of this history is important, but the novel also offers students an opportunity to imagine what it was like for families of the organizers. Ironically, although the Filipino unity clap of isang bagsak (in English, translated to “one down”) unites the workers, it is Francisco’s commitment to the labor movement that divides his family. Not only does Emil’s relationship with his father suffer, but their family is ostracized by their local community for the outspoken and visible role that Francisco plays in the labor movement, often making enemies of members of the Filipino community who do not agree with him. These moments in the novel can offer students insight into organizing movements and consider how these same tensions and disagreements occur among activist groups today.</p>	<p><a href="#">Why Every Filipino American Should Know about Larry Itliong</a> - article from Smithsonian Institute</p> <p><a href="#">Gintong Kasaysayan Mural</a> - video from the Historical Filipinotown Neighborhood Council YouTube Channel</p> <p><a href="#">Journey for Justice: The Life of Larry Itliong</a> - children’s book by Dawn Bohulano Mabalon and Gayle Romasanta</p> <p><a href="#">How Cesar Chavez Joined Larry Itliong to Demand Farm Workers’ Rights</a> - article from the History Channel</p> <p><a href="#">When Mexicans and Filipinos joined together</a> - article from United Farm Workers</p> <p><a href="#">Sept. 8, 1965: Delano Grape Strike Began</a> - article from the Zinn Education Project</p> <p><a href="#">Little Manila: A look into the rich history of Filipino Americans in Stockton, California</a> - video from ABC10</p> <p><a href="#">Little Manila: Filipinos in California’s Heartland   Season 5   Episode 10</a> - video from PBS</p>





# CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS (CONTINUED)

TIME PERIOD	RELEVANT SOCIAL CONTEXT	RESOURCES
1983 (Chris)	<p><b>Model Minority Myth</b></p> <p>Early in the novel, Emil is described as an “assimilationist” (10) who dismisses and shuns his Filipino identity in favor of being “American” and a “model minority.” Emil’s fraught relationship with his identity impacts his relationship with his son, Chris, which is explored in the novel both when Chris is a boy and an adult.</p> <p>Students may benefit from some additional context regarding the “Model Minority Myth” and how this affected not only how Asian Americans were (and continue to be) perceived, but especially how racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans and Filipino Americans may have impacted individuals like Emil.</p>	<p><a href="#">What Is the Model Minority Myth?</a> - article from Learning for Justice</p> <p><a href="#">‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks</a> - article from NPR’s <i>Code Switch</i></p> <p><a href="#">Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All</a> - article from <i>TIME</i> magazine</p>
2020 (Enzo)	<p><b>COVID-19 Pandemic</b></p> <p>In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, and within days, schools, businesses, and communities shut down in order to slow the spread of the disease. In 2020, an estimated 3.2 million worldwide deaths were attributable to COVID-19. More than 55 million students in 124,000 US public and private schools were affected by the school closures that Enzo’s character experiences in the novel (Education Week, 2021).</p> <p>Depending on when you are reading <i>EWNH</i>, students may have varying personal experiences with school closures due to COVID-19. Students might draw on what they remember or experienced about school closures, but it could also be helpful to have students read about the different ways teenagers, like Enzo, navigated the challenges lockdowns imposed. Teachers should also take care to consider how students in the same class may have had very different experiences during COVID-19, including some students who may have lost family members. Reading about Enzo’s experience may be upsetting for some students, depending on their own experiences. Make space for students to process in their journals and connect students with counselors as needed.</p>	<p><a href="#">Teens on a Year That Changed Everything</a> - article from the <i>New York Times</i></p>

# THEMES AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The Social Justice Standards, developed by Leading for Justice, provide a useful framework to read and analyze texts, especially a text like *Everything We Never Had*. The Social Justice Standards focus on four domains: identity, diversity, justice, and action. Themes and essential questions can be developed around these domains to encourage students to respond to the text as individuals but then make connections to larger historical and contemporary systems through a social justice lens. As a brief summary:

- the identity domain asks us to think about how this theme applies to themselves
- the diversity domain asks us to think about how this theme applies to other people or groups
- the justice domain asks us to examine how this theme shows up in our systems and structures in just and unjust ways
- the action domain asks us to consider what can be done to address injustice that may exist.

Teachers can learn more about the standards and domains at the [Learning For Justice website](#).

Some examples of themes and essential questions that teachers can use to frame students' study of *Everything We Never Had* are listed below. Students can explore the essential questions before reading the book and then apply them to the novel as they read. The essential questions can also help frame the study of a larger text set composed of additional novels, essays, videos, visual art, short stories, poems, etc., focused on that particular theme.

THEME: IDENTITY AND SENSE OF SELF		
DOMAIN	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	APPLICATION TO THE NOVEL
Identity	Who am I? What experiences and identities make up who I am? What are my values and beliefs, and how are those reflected in my thoughts and actions?	
Diversity	How do individuals' different experiences impact the way they see themselves and the identities that are important to them? How do social, political, and historical contexts impact how different people develop their sense of identity?	How do Francisco's, Emil's, Chris's, and Enzo's particular and different experiences impact the way they see themselves and their values and beliefs? How do each of their social, political, and historical contexts shape how they see themselves in the world? How do other characters act as foils to the Maghabol boys, and what can we learn from this comparison?
Justice	In what ways can individuals and groups be discriminated against based on their identities? What systems and structures support this discrimination?	How do each of the Maghabol boys experience bias, discrimination, and oppression based on their identities? What is the source of this oppression? How do race and racism, gender identity, sexism and misogyny, socioeconomics and classism, and xenophobia and imperialism manifest in the novel? How do these oppressive forces show up in the Maghabol boys' personal and social lives, in their relationships with others and in the communities and institutions they navigate?
Action	What can we do to ensure that all people, regardless of identity, are treated with dignity and respect?	How do each of the Maghabol boys make decisions in their lives and take action to develop and grow in their identities with dignity and respect (or not)? How could the systems around them have been better structured to encourage dignity and respect for who they are?

# THEMES AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

## (CONTINUED)

### THEME: FAMILY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

DOMAIN	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	APPLICATION TO THE NOVEL
Identity	How do I define my family? What is my role in my family? What makes up my family? How does my family define who I am?	
Diversity	What are the different ways that families interact with one another? How do family dynamics differ and why? How do family dynamics impact interpersonal relationships between family members?	How do each of the Maghabol boys see themselves in their families? How do the dynamics in their families growing up impact the way they see themselves and others?
Justice	How do systems and structures, policies and practices, affect families in fair and unfair ways? How do societal, cultural, historical, and political contexts impact how family members see themselves and in relationship to each other?	How do the larger historical, societal, and political contexts of the times impact each of the Maghabol boys' family dynamics? What tensions or opportunities arise in their families in response to their differing social contexts?
Action	What can we do to ensure that all individuals and groups, whatever their family background, can be guaranteed equal access, opportunities, and treatment?	How do each of the Maghabol boys and their families define or redefine what family means to them? How does each Maghabol father take action to improve their families' lives? How do their actions affect their relationships with their children and the dynamics within the family?

### THEME: RESILIENCY AND HEALING

DOMAIN	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	APPLICATION TO THE NOVEL
Identity	How do I define resilience? What hurts do I have and how do I heal from them?	
Diversity	How do others define resilience? What are some cultural traditions or ways of healing and finding hope practiced in different communities?	How do each of the Maghabol boys practice and demonstrate resilience in their circumstances? How might cultural beliefs, traditions, and expectations—such as those around their Filipino culture, gender, and nationality—inform the way they practice resilience and healing?
Justice	How do larger social, political, and historical contexts shape the ways in which individuals and communities resist oppression and find healing and support?	How do larger social, political, and historical contexts shape the ways in which each of the Maghabol boys resist oppression and find healing and support? What opportunities for or challenges to resilience, healing, and hope do each of the boys face and how are these impacted by their particular set of circumstances?
Action	What actions can individuals, communities, and systems take to practice resilience in the face of oppressive forces?	How do each of the Maghabol boys resist the oppressive forces they identify in their lives and practice resilience? How do their actions further (or impede) healing within themselves and with others?



# KEY CONCEPTS AND VOCABULARY

## UTANG NA LOOB

In Filipino culture, the concept of utang na loob is loosely translated to “debt of one’s inner self.” Utang na loob is the deep sense of obligation that family members—especially children to parents—feel toward each other. Depending on students’ cultural backgrounds, this concept may be familiar or unfamiliar. In many ways, utang na loob is at the root of what drives each of the Maghabol boys’ sense of self and subsequent actions as adults.

The NPR podcast *Code Switch* produced a special episode that unpacks the concept of utang na loob called [“The Utang Clan.”](#) Teachers might have students listen to this episode when the concept is first mentioned early in the novel, or wait until the end of the book to reflect on the novel’s exploration of family relationships, obligations, and healing.

## HYPHENATED IDENTITY

In a [2006 Newsweek piece](#), Indian American author Jhumpa Lahiri wrote about the duality of having multiple identities: “The traditions on either side of the hyphen dwell in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, one outshining the other depending on the day.” For Black, Indigenous, and people of color navigating predominantly white spaces, experiencing conflicting dual (or multiple) identities can be challenging. The concept of hyphenated identities complements W. E. B. DuBois’s concept of double-consciousness, of having to see and understand oneself through one’s own eyes and through the gaze of dominant culture.

Ribay dedicated his earlier novel, *Patron Saints of Nothing*, to “the hyphenated.” In that novel, Ribay focuses on a single protagonist and his journey in exploring his relationship with his Filipino and Filipino American identity. In *Everything We Never Had*, Ribay builds upon and expands this exploration of identity through four different perspectives. Because the novel spans four generations, each of the Maghabol boys experiences their “hyphenated” identities in different ways as a result of their particular social, political, and historical contexts.

As students read the novel, they can explore how each of the Maghabol boys differ from each other, as well as how their individual journeys may reflect the experiences of those considered “hyphenated” in American society at different moments in time.

## SYSTEMIC RACISM

Each of the Maghabol boys experiences the effects of racism in their lives. Sometimes, the racism they experience is direct and targeted, as it was for Francisco. But sometimes, racism is experienced through unjust societal structures created with the intention to segregate or divide individuals based on their racial or cultural identities. While students will be able to easily identify overt acts of racism, as in the case of Francisco, students can also identify the ways in which systemic racism has impacted the Maghabol family through each generation.

## ASSIMILATION

Put simply, assimilation occurs whenever we take in new information and change our behavior to adapt to our surroundings. In general, assimilation is neither good nor bad. However, in the context of racism, assimilation is negative when Black and brown people feel that they must assimilate in order to either be accepted or to survive. In these situations, the effects of assimilation can include the loss of cultural identity, generational conflict, and internalized racism, among others. Assimilation plays a key role in Emil’s character development, and its impact informs his relationships not only with his own father, but also his son and grandson.

## COLONIALISM & US IMPERIALISM

Students may not be familiar with the history of colonialism and US imperialism in the Philippines, yet colonialism and US imperialism are the driving factors in Francisco’s decision to settle in the United States. Furthermore, the United States’ presence in the Philippines extended beyond its physical occupation of the islands; even after the US withdrew from the Philippines, its cultural impact was and is still felt by many Filipinos and Filipino Americans today.

Students may not be familiar with the history of colonialism and U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, yet colonialism and U.S. imperialism are the driving factors in Francisco’s decision to settle in the United States. Furthermore, the United States’ presence in the Philippines extended beyond its physical occupation of the islands; even after the U.S. withdrew from the Philippines, its cultural impact was and is still felt by many Filipinos and Filipino Americans today. For some background on this history, teachers may consider the following resources as a starting point:

- o [Everything you didn’t know about Filipino American History](#) - short film by One Down series, Breaking The Taboo (available on YouTube)
- o [A Filipino American Story Since 1587](#) - short film by Next Day Films (available on YouTube)
- o Excerpts from [A History of Domestic Work and Worker Organizing: Early U.S. Imperialism and Migration, Cultures of Early U.S. Imperialism, U.S. Imperialism in the Philippines, How Empires Guttured the Philippines, Creating the “Subservient Filipina”](#)

## PATRIARCHY & TOXIC MASCULINITY

Gendered expectations around patriarchy and masculinity permeate throughout the novel. Although students may be familiar with these ideas, the novel offers a rich opportunity for students to examine how their understanding of and expectations around gender identity are influenced by various factors—their individual personality traits, family, friends, ethnic identity, social norms, and dominant culture.

## MENTAL HEALTH & STIGMA

For many, and especially for communities of color, stigmas still exist and persist around mental health as a taboo topic. Even discussing the topic of mental health may be a new experience, and depending on their own cultural backgrounds and experiences, students may feel anxious or uncertain. The novel offers students an opportunity to examine the factors that impact mental health and identify the importance of having a positive relationship with mental health care.

Consider inviting students to learn more about the importance of mental health through resources aimed at youth, such as [ThisIsMyBrave.org](#) and [WellBeings.org](#). Make space in class for students to regularly journal and reflect. For example, the trailer to the film *Our Turn to Talk* can invite students to discuss the importance of mental health and the barriers youth might face in seeking support. While students should never be forced to share personal experiences they are not comfortable sharing, by creating opportunities in class to journal, share, and reflect, teachers can invite students to learn more about their own relationship with mental health. Local resources such as school counselors, student clubs, and related community organizations may also be consulted or brought into the conversation.

# DISCUSSION AND LESSON IDEAS

## INTRODUCING THE NOVEL

There are many ways to welcome students into reading *Everything We Never Had*. Depending on your students, you might directly introduce the novel with information about the author and a brief summary. Teachers might consider the following strategies, with each progressively more inquiry-based.

### POETRY AND JOURNAL PROMPT

Ariana Brown’s award-winning spoken word poem [“Ode to Thrift Stores”](#) explores important lessons she learned from her mother not just about thrift stores, but so much more. Before watching the poem, provide students with the following journal prompt:

*Everything We Never Had* explores multigenerational family relationships and all the complicated ways that these relationships impact our identities—who we are and who we might become. Take a few moments to reflect on your own family or families, or even just one or two people in your family. What are some lessons that you’ve learned through your observations, experiences, or relationships with

them? Feel free to brainstorm a list or reflect more deeply on one or two particular relationships that stand out to you.

Share “Ode to Thrift Stores” with students. Have students watch twice, first with just the video and then a second time with a copy of the poem in front of them. Ask students to annotate the poem with the key lines that stand out to them. Provide students with some time to write and discuss their responses to these lines. Then ask them to go back to their original journal entry about their own family and revisit to add, revise, or continue where they left off.

### THEMATIC TEXT SET

Another way to introduce *Everything We Never Had* is to invite students to

engage with different texts that share themes related to the novel. Teachers can set up a station-rotation activity in the classroom, with each station focused on a different text. Working in small groups, students spend 10–15 minutes per station, followed by whole-class discussion after students have had the opportunity to engage with all the texts. Below are some suggestions, although teachers should curate a text set that best meets the needs of their students.

After engaging with each text, ask students to notice what patterns emerge and make predictions about the novel based on these texts. Teachers may want to record these notes on chart paper, which can be revisited as students read the novel and make thematic connections.

TEXT	GENRE/CATEGORY	CONNECTION TO NOVEL
<i>Drawn Together</i> by Minh Lê, with drawings by Dan Santat	picture book	relationships between different generations; spoken language barriers
<a href="#">“Ode to Thrift Stores”</a> by Ariana Brown	spoken word poem	lessons learned from parents; facing stereotypes
“Thoughts on Resistance” by Rebecca Roanhorse	short personal essay	resistance and resilience through a Native first-person voice; importance of imagination and joy
<a href="#">“The Weight of Sweetness”</a> by Li-Young Lee and “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden	poems	childhood and innocence; responsibility; parent-child relationships
<a href="#">“How Photographer Christina Fernandez Makes Invisible Labor Visible,”</a> artist spotlight by National Gallery of Art	essay and photographs	invisible labor; migrant experiences; capitalism
<a href="#">“The Melting Pot: Assimilation and Americans”</a> from <i>BackStory</i>	podcast	assimilation, American Dream, American identity

### ANTICIPATION GUIDE STATEMENTS

Provide students with the following statements and ask them to rate how much they agree or disagree with each of them. Students can then share their responses through a Four Corners activity.

NOTE: As students read the novel, extend students’ thinking by asking them to revisit their original responses and change their ratings depending on the novel. Students might also consider to what extent each of the Maghabol boys would agree or disagree with these statements.

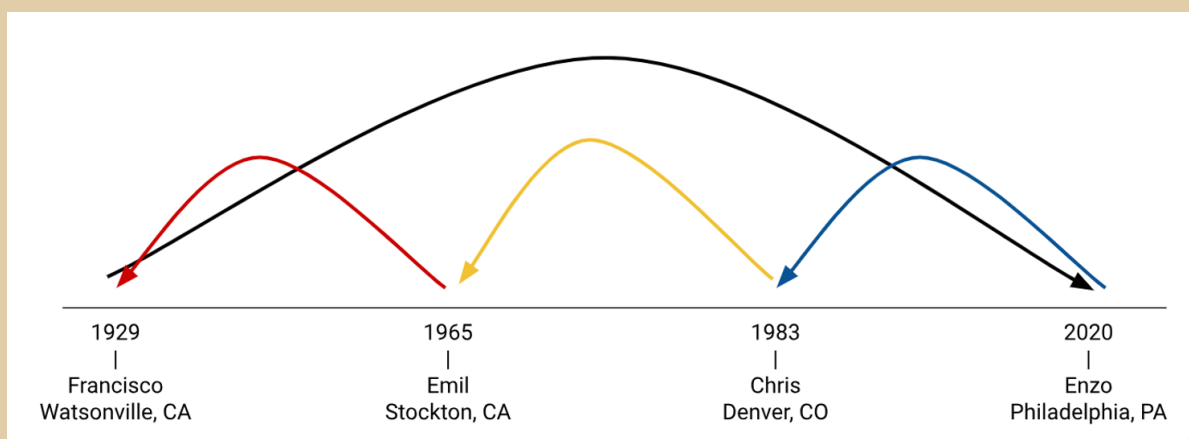
- Our parents are our greatest teachers.
- Children become adults the moment they realize they see their parents as people.
- To be accepted, you have to learn to be part of the crowd.
- You can’t know who you are unless you know where you come from.
- Success can be judged by material wealth.
- Not everything should be said aloud. Some things are better left unspoken.
- Parents can never fully understand their children.
- Even when they don’t agree with them, children should respect their parents.
- We can never be truly happy unless we embrace who we are.
- You can love someone even if you don’t accept who they are.

# DURING READING

Because of the multiple voices and timelines, students will benefit from some concrete tools to help them keep track of characters, conflicts, and key moments.

## TRACKING CHARACTERS AND TIMELINES

The novel is structured like a “nesting doll” that unfolds over multiple generations, starting in the past with Francisco in 1929, jumping forward almost one hundred years later to 2020 with Enzo, then moving backward by each generation with Chris in 1983, then Emil in 1965, before returning to Francisco in 1929 and starting again. Collaborate with students to create a timeline like the one below to help students visualize the novel’s unconventional structure. It may be helpful to keep this timeline on chart paper or on the board where students can add annotations using sticky notes.



Alternatively, students might collaborate as a class or in small groups to create a timeline using a digital tool, like the [Padlet](#) (see below). A digital timeline allows students to include multimedia resources such as images, videos, relevant articles or historical documents, poetry, etc., and can be easily revised and edited as students read and learn more about each character.



Francisco (1929)	Emil (1965)	Chris (1983)	Enzo (2020)
+	+	+	+
IMAGE	QUOTE	SYMBOL	IMAGE
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	QUOTE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
QUOTE	IMAGE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	QUOTE
POEM	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	QUOTE	IMAGE
ARTICLE	ARTICLE	SYMBOL	SYMBOL
ESSAY	VIDEO	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	SYMBOL
VIDEO	SYMBOL	POEM	VIDEO



# DURING READING (CONTINUED)

## TRACKING CHARACTER APPEARANCES

Consider providing or collaborating with students to record where and how characters appear throughout the novel. Each Maghabol boy is the main character of their primary timeline (when they are sixteen-years-old) but are also adults in each other's storylines. The chart below offers a brief summary.

CHARACTER	PRIMARY TIMELINE AT SIXTEEN-YEARS-OLD	YEAR BORN	TOTAL TIMELINE IN BOOK	AGE IN 2020
Francisco	October 1929 to January 1930 (3–4 months)	1913	1929 to 1978	deceased (died in 1978, age 65)
Emil	May to September 1965 (4 months)	1949	1965 to 2020	71
Chris	October to November 1983 (1–2 months)	1967	1983 to 2020	53
Enzo	December 2019 to May 2020 (5 months)	2004	2004 to 2020	16

## FOLLOW A CHARACTER

Divide students into small groups and assign each group one of the Maghabol boys to follow and read more closely throughout the novel. A reader response organizer may be helpful; below is a sample organizer for Enzo's character.

If using an organizer like the one to the right, note that the reader response space allows for students to write about one, some, or all of the chapters in that particular part of the book. In this way, students can take notes about each individual chapter (i.e. bulleted list of events), but then reflect on those chapters as a whole, writing about what most stood out to them and why. By following one character, students become "experts" of that character's journey.

ENZO (2020)		
CHAPTER	WHAT HAPPENS (KEY MOMENTS)	WHAT I THINK, FEEL, WONDER (READER RESPONSE)
"Utang na Loob"		
"Murder Hornets"		
"Aligning Planets"		
"Snowflake Obsidian"		
"Adults"		
"This Is Fine"		
"Some Company"		
"Thor and His Infinite Bladder"		
"A Man for Once"		
"Doomscrolling"		
"Grown-Ass Men"		
"Everything We Never Had"		
"Whole"		
"Clear"		

# DURING READING (CONTINUED)

## JIGSAW CHARACTER GROUPS

The novel can be roughly divided into four parts, each comprising a full cycle of the four main characters. (Note that the last part includes only two characters, Francisco and Enzo.)

- Part 1: Francisco, Enzo, Chris, and Emil - pp. 3 to 62
- Part 2: Francisco, Enzo, Chris, and Emil - pp. 63 to 134
- Part 3: Francisco, Enzo, Chris, and Emil - pp. 135 to 224
- Part 4: Francisco and Enzo - pp. 225 to 264

Although the number of pages read each night will depend on what works best for your students, pausing after each of the four parts allows students some space to reflect on the growth and development of each of the main characters.:

**ROUND 1** Students meet to talk about the same character: After students share their individual insights about their character, ask students to discuss further with the following prompts. Students can record their group's ideas on chart paper or using a digital tool.

- What's the most compelling or urgent external conflict this character is facing right now? How is this conflict challenging to him and why?
- What's the most compelling or urgent internal conflict this character is facing right now? What is this internal conflict motivating him to think, say, or do?
- As readers, what are we learning about how this character responds to the challenges they're facing?
- At this point in the story, what symbol or metaphor could be used to describe this character? Why?

**ROUND 2 (OPTION 1)** Whole class share-out: Ask each group to summarize the key points from their group discussions.

**ROUND 2 (OPTION 2)** Reorganize groups: Divide students into new groups, so that each student in the group has a different character. Each student then summarizes key points about their character.

**ROUND 3** Reflection: Now that students have deepened their understanding of their assigned character and learned more about other characters from their classmates, ask students to reflect by writing, sharing with a partner, or discussing in small groups:

- What is something new they have learned about their assigned character?
- What is something new they learned about another character?
- What similarities or differences between the characters feel important right now and why?
- What might the author be asking us to see or understand better?

Students could also revisit the anticipation guide statements from earlier and consider which statement best represents each character at this moment in the novel.



# DURING READING

## (CONTINUED)

### NOTICING CRAFT AND LANGUAGE

The prose in *Everything We Never Had* is both accessible and sophisticated, straightforward and lyrical. Invite students to notice where and how Ribay's choices in craft might evoke different responses from readers. Encourage students to think about all the different ways a passage might be "worth noticing." Students might notice lines with beautiful word choice or literary elements such as symbolism, imagery, metaphor, foreshadowing, characterization, and so on. Students may write about these lines in their notebooks and journaling.

In addition, teachers can collect these passages through a simple online form. These student-selected passages can then be used in a number of different ways:

**"Night by night, block by block, story by story, grandfather and grandson finally get to know each other in a way that's eluded so many men of their blood."**

– Randy Ribay, *Everything We Never Had* (p. 171)

- **PERSONAL RESPONSE:** Choose a passage and use it as a writing warm-up at the beginning of class. Students might respond by making personal connections or by reflecting on what the passage makes them think about or feel.
- **SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION:** Provide students with several passages by printing each passage on a separate strip of paper (this will make sorting and sifting through the passages easier for students). Ask students to discuss what makes each passage worth noticing or why it might be important in the novel.
- **RATING AND RANKING PASSAGES:** Ask students to rate and/or rank the passages by their significance: Which of these passages is most significant to conveying the novel's themes, character arcs, conflicts, etc.? After determining their ratings or rankings in small groups, invite students to share as a whole class to compare and discuss further.
- **BEST EVIDENCE:** As you progress later in the novel, provide students with possible essay prompts or theme statements. Ask students to determine which passages might provide the best "evidence" in an essay that explores a particular essay prompt or supports a specific theme statement. After working in a group, students can then use their group's feedback to help them choose the best evidence for their individual essays.
- **GALLERY WALK OR SILENT DISCUSSION:** Post some of the passages around the classroom and have students explore through a gallery walk activity. Students might walk around and silently read each passage, adding their thoughts using Post-its. Students might also walk together in pairs or small groups to talk about the passages and how they are meaningful to them or the novel.

**"Could this ever be enough to quiet the regret, to justify an ocean crossing, to anchor him to the earth?"**

– Randy Ribay, *Everything We Never Had* (p. 6)



# DURING READING (CONTINUED)

## READER RESPONSE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Providing space and time to process their reactions to the novel can help students navigate the novel's complexity. Below are some suggested prompts or sentence starters; these could be used at the beginning of class as a warm-up to discussion or at the end of class to capture new thinking.

- I noticed ...
- I'm wondering ...
- I hope ...
- The words I'm carrying away with me for this chapter are ...
- I want to know more about ... because ...
- When ... I felt ...
- When ... I thought ...
- When ... I believed ...
- When ... I wanted to ...
- Something I'm thinking a lot about after reading this section is ... because ...
- I used to think ... and/but now I think ...
- As someone who ... the moment when ... stood out to me because ...



## AFTER READING

After finishing the book, encourage students to step back and look at how each piece of the novel comes together.

Revisit the essential questions provided at the start of this guide and invite students to consider how the novel is grappling with and exploring these questions. Students might work in small groups to choose an essential question and identify key moments that speak to that question, capturing their ideas on chart paper or with a digital tool.

The next page includes some discussion questions and writing invitations that can help students synthesize the complexities of the novel's characters, structure, and major themes.



# AFTER READING (CONTINUED)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **NARRATIVE STRUCTURE.** Consider the narrative structure of the novel. Why do you think the author chose to unfold the Maghabol family's stories in this way? What is the effect of moving forward and backward through time? How would the reader's experience reading the novel have changed if it was organized in a different way? What other ways could it have been organized?
2. **BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS.** The first and last chapters of the novel act as bookends to the Maghabol story. Reread "The Fog," where we meet Francisco. Note the descriptions of the Pajaro Valley and the imagery Ribay uses to set the scene and mood: After reading the novel, what foreshadowing is revealed in this chapter? Then reread the last chapter, "Clear," which focuses on Enzo. How does this last chapter speak back to the first? What similarities and differences, patterns and echoes emerge? Although Francisco and Enzo never meet, what do the opening and closing chapters suggest about how Enzo's journey as a character is a response to Francisco's? Why might Ribay have chosen to begin with Francisco's voice and end with Enzo's? In addition to the connections between "The Fog" and "Clear," what might the chapters titled "Brokenness" and "Whole" suggest?

3. **COMING-OF-AGE.** As readers, we meet each of the Maghabol boys when they are sixteen years old. Why might the author have chosen this particular age? What is significant about being sixteen? What, if any, universal experiences are typical of this age? At the same time, how might being sixteen in 1929, 1965, 1983, and 2020 be a different and unique experience?

Coming of age and growing up can be described as a journey of challenges in discovering your own independent identity, both connected to and separate from your family. How do Francisco, Emil, Chris, and Enzo navigate this journey? What do they learn about who they are in the process?

4. **AMERICAN DREAMS.** In Tagalog, the word *maghabol* means to chase. What are each of the Maghabol boys "chasing"? How do their motives overlap, and how do they diverge? What motivates them and how are their motivations informed by both their historical context (social, cultural, and political events of their time) and personal context (their own identity, family dynamics, and relationships)?

In many ways, *Everything We Never Had* is a novel that explores the idea of the "American Dream." How might each of the Maghabol boys define their own "American Dream"? What do Francisco's, Emil's, Chris's, and Enzo's dreams suggest about the possibility and realities of a larger "American Dream" in the United States, historically and today?

5. **TURNING POINTS.** Each of the Maghabol boys experiences a crisis or turning point in their lives. For example, Lorenzo's murder sets Francisco's life toward a path of activism, while the revelation of his father's secret tears apart Emil's relationship both with his father and to his Filipino culture. Review the character arcs of each boy: what could be considered the key turning points in their lives? For better or worse, how does this turning point mark a clear difference between who they were before and after this moment?

6. **MINOR CHARACTERS, MAJOR IMPACTS.** Although the novel focuses on the four Maghabol boys, consider the many other characters who support, challenge, and play key roles in the narrative. Make a list of the supporting characters in the novel. Some act as important foil characters to Francisco, Emil, Chris, and Enzo. How do they impact each of the main characters? How might the Maghabol boys' stories have turned out differently without the impact of these supporting characters?

7. **KNOW HISTORY, KNOW SELF.** The Filipino revolutionary hero José Rizal once said, “Ang hindi lumungon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makarating sa paroroonan.” In English, Rizal’s words translate to “He who does not return to the source will never reach the destination.” For many Filipinos and Filipino Americans, Rizal’s words are a reminder about the importance of knowing Filipino history in order to better understand Filipino identity. In other words, as the Filipino American National Historical Society says, “No history, no self. Know history, know self.”

Compare and contrast each character’s relationship with history and the past. What do each of the Maghabol boys know about their family and cultural history? For example, Francisco longs for his family in the Philippines, while Emil doesn’t see the value in knowing anything about the Philippines. Chris’s family ancestry school project reveals how much he doesn’t know about the Philippines, past or present, while Enzo finds meaning in Filipino traditions like rolling lumpia with his family. Find passages in the novel that reveal the characters’ attitudes toward their cultural history. What does the novel suggest about the importance of knowing one’s past?

8. **HOPE AND HEALING.** The strained relationships between each of the Maghabol fathers and sons are a common thread throughout the novel. In fact, *Everything We Never Had* reveals the ways in which intergenerational trauma can manifest and persist. Compare and contrast each of the father-son relationships: What are the greatest barriers or sources of tension in each relationship and why? How have each of the Maghabol boys’ experiences with their fathers impacted their own approaches to parenting and their relationships with their sons?

Despite the pain and hurt that persists from one generation to the next, the novel nevertheless also suggests real possibilities for healing. How do each of Maghabol boys find ways to heal? Consider, for example, how Chris’s choice to become a history teacher can be an act of healing, or how Enzo and Emil’s walks with Thor offer opportunities for grandfather and son—and eventually, father and son—to connect. What does the novel suggest about how individuals might interrupt patterns of hurt and work toward healing?

9. **EVERYTHING WE NEVER HAD.** In argument with his son, Emil tells Chris, “We tried to give you and your sisters everything we never had. You’re here because of us” (254). Although the title’s words don’t appear until near the end of the book, the sentiment is felt throughout the entire narrative. Reread Emil and Chris’s conversation in this chapter. How is the motivation to provide “everything we never had” present in each generation of the Maghabol family? How does this sentiment connect as well as divide the family? How do the Maghabol family’s immigrant experiences reflect other immigrant experiences in the United States?



## WRITING INVITATIONS

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS ESSAYS

The novel’s rich craft invites students to practice their critical reading and analysis skills. The essential questions and discussion prompts in this guide can serve as essay choices for students. In addition, the open-ended literature questions given each year on the AP English Literature exam offer a multitude of possibilities. These essay prompts are readily available online on the College Board’s website and also compiled at [mseffie.com/AP/ap.html](https://mseffie.com/AP/ap.html). Teachers might choose or allow students to choose which essay questions seem most relevant to the themes and characters in *EWNH*.



# WRITING INVITATIONS (CONTINUED)

## LITERARY LENSES

Several literary lenses can help bring the novel's major themes and craft into sharper focus. In a 2019 conference keynote address, Randy Ribay argued for teaching students to use critical literary theory as preparation for the world. Specifically, Ribay recommends using three critical lenses—feminist, Marxist, and post-colonial—to deepen students' understanding of both the text and the world. Although Ribay's address focused on his previous novel, these same literary lenses can be applied to *Everything We Never Had*. If students are not already familiar with literary theory, provide some background and questions to help focus their analysis.

## RUMINATION ESSAY

Both the complexity and relatability of *EWNH* make it an ideal text for students to apply their literary analysis skills as well as make personal connections. A rumination essay “marries the literary analysis with the personal narrative” (Huff, 2021), combining elements of literary analysis with personal essay. Students begin by analyzing the significance of a key moment or scene in the novel before pivoting to a personal connection. The rest of the essay then becomes a “rumination,” or exploration, of this personal experience, as inspired by the novel. More information and models for rumination essays can be found at [huffenglish.com/rumination-essays](https://huffenglish.com/rumination-essays). This writing invitation can be especially appealing to students who deeply connect with one or more of the characters' experiences.

## RAFT

To offer students more flexibility and choice, teachers might consider using a RAFT assignment. RAFT is a writing assignment that allows students to choose what role they will take on as a writer, who their audience will be, what form of writing they will use, and the topic they will write about. Two examples of possible RAFT writing assignments for *EWNH* are provided below. Learn more about RAFT writing at [Reading Rockets](https://ReadingRockets.com).

ROLE	Student who has just finished reading <i>EWNH</i>
AUDIENCE	Fellow students who have not yet read the book
FORM	Book review in the school newspaper
TOPIC	The value of reading <i>EWNH</i> and other books like it

ROLE	A son, daughter, or child who has just finished reading <i>EWNH</i>
AUDIENCE	Parents, caregivers, or other family members
FORM	Letter
TOPIC	The value of reading <i>EWNH</i> and other books like it

## TWO-VOICE POEM

Two-voice poems are poems with two speakers who come together in one poem. While the speakers express their own points of view, they also speak in unison at times during the poem. More information and examples of two-voice poems can be easily found online.

Ask students to choose two characters from the novel. Students might use a Venn diagram to brainstorm how the characters are similar and different. Teachers may also encourage students to incorporate lines from the novel into their poems.

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Teachers can follow their students' lead and see what elements of the novel are resonating with them. Depending on time and interest, students may find some of the options below to be welcome extensions of their work with the novel.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY STARTER WITH RANDY RIBAY

In [this video](#), Randy Ribay shares three writing prompts that teachers can use to help students write about intergenerational values and their impact on themselves and relationships with others. These prompts could be used to introduce the novel, or at any point when reading. In addition, these prompts could also support students in writing a Two Voice Poem that features themselves and another person in their lives (see [Writing Invitations](#)).

## ARTISTIC COLLAGE

Invite students to create an artistic collage to represent one or more of the characters or themes in the novel. Students might draw or use digital tools, incorporating multimedia, passages from the book, and images that represent important moments or relationships for the character.

## PLAYLIST / SOUNDTRACK

Have students create a soundtrack for one or more of the main characters. Students might choose songs or artists that they think the characters might like, or they might choose songs that could serve as a soundtrack for key moments a character experiences.



## FAMILY ANCESTRY

Consider providing students with the option of learning more about their own family ancestry and histories, just as Chris does in the novel. Many students may feel curious about their own cultural backgrounds and Chris's journey might inspire them to talk with family members or do research. Note: Students' relationships with their family ancestry and cultural backgrounds will vary, and for some students, it may be a painful topic. Teachers can offer an invitation to learn more about this part of their identity, but should not require students to do so.

## POETRY

Revisit "Ode to Thrift Stores" (above). After reading the novel, ask students the following: If Francisco, Emil, Chris, and Enzo were to write their own spoken word poems about the lessons they'd learned from each of their fathers, what do you imagine those poems would be about? You might ask students to write these poems, and as an added challenge, ask students to include lines from the novel.

## THEMATIC BOOK CLUBS

Following a whole-class reading of *Everything We Never Had*, offer students books with complementary themes. Students might create and share projects that capture the similarities and differences between *EWNH* and their book club selection. See "Considerations for Teachers and Students" (above) for suggested titles.

## AMERICAN CREED DOCUMENTARY

If reading *Everything We Never Had* as part of a study of the American Dream, consider watching the documentary *American Creed* ([AmericanCreed.org](https://www.AmericanCreed.org)). The documentary explores the concept of a national American identity, what it has meant historically for different communities, and what possibilities and challenges still exist. Students will recognize many of the same struggles that the Maghabol boys experience as they meet the individuals portrayed in the documentary.



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