

# TWENTY-FOUR SECONDS FROM NOW BY JASON REYNOLDS



## KS4 DISCUSSION NOTES

The discussion questions and ideas included here are suitable for classroom, library or book group sessions with ages 14+.

Note: This book covers themes around sexuality and sex. Teachers/parents/carers may want to read the book first before sharing with students.



# ABOUT THE BOOK



A brand-new novel about first times from Carnegie Award-winning, global sensation, Jason Reynolds.

Seventeen-year-old Neon is about to have sex with his girlfriend, Aria, for the first time. In 24 seconds to be precise. He's hiding in the bathroom, nervous, wanting to do everything right . . .

Rewind. To 24 minutes earlier where Neon rushes from work, taking the gift of fried chicken to Aria's house.

Rewind again. To 24 hours earlier when Neon's big sister has advice about sex which makes him think he probably shouldn't be listening to his friends.

To 24 days earlier. To 24 weeks earlier. To 24 months earlier, when he and Aria first met.

This tender, sweet, wholesome piece of fiction discusses how to approach first sex, how to respect women, how to be gentle, how to make it about love. It shows us a refreshingly different side to male sexuality.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Reynolds is a multi-award-winning writer and poet. He has been a Number 1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author many times and he was US National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. He has won almost every major award in the US and the UK, including the Indie Book Awards, the Yoto Carnegie Medal, the Kirkus Prize, the Edgar Award, the Walter Dean Myers Award and the NAACP Image Award. He is a Newbery, Printz and 5-time Coretta Scott King Honoree.

He wrote *Long Way Down*, *All American Boys*, *Oxygen Mask* and the *Run* series, amongst others. His books have sold over 9 million copies worldwide.



# A LETTER FROM JASON REYNOLDS

Dear Reader,

I've been trying to figure out how to say that which should be easy to say but oftentimes isn't because everyone says we can't say it.

So I'll just say it.

You deserve love. You deserve to experience it and explore it and allow it to grow you. And to grow in you. You deserve to know its safety and its excitement. You deserve to be curious about it, and to not feel shame for that curiosity. You deserve the freedom to laugh at yourself as you fumble through it knowing that being a human is humorous most of the time. And you're a human. Who desires what humans desire. And ain't nothing wrong with that.

You deserve what so many of us didn't get – a chance to feel without fear of judgment. Even at your age.

Especially at your age.

This book is about that. And is for you.

With gratitude and big, big love,

Jason



# PART 1 – THEMES

Use this 'theme sheet' to record ideas as you read. How is each theme explored in the novel? Which are the most important? Why? Try to add themes of your own.

Theme	Notes
Sex	
Love	
Intimacy	
Respect	
Masculinity	
Empathy	
Family	
Friendship	
Young Adulthood	

# PART 2 – READING QUESTIONS

## RIGHT NOW . . .

- What is happening to Neon 'right now'? Why do you think the author, Jason Reynolds, chose to start the book in this way?
- What do you notice about the structure of the book? What is the effect of telling Neon and Aria's story in this way?
- What is the significance of the dog in the first section of the book?
- 'Tonight is for our first time and will be *our* first time.' What does Neon mean when he says this?
- How does Neon feel about what is about to happen? Why? Pick out key words and phrases that help you to understand his emotions.
- How does Neon feel about Aria? Does he have a respectful attitude towards her? How can you tell?

## JUST TWENTY-FOUR SECONDS AGO . . .

- Neon wants to do 'the right thing'. Can you find examples of this?
- What does Neon mean when he says he doesn't want to 'focus on something for too long' because it 'would turn Aria into a body'?
- What is Aria's relationship with her mother?
- How is Neon and Aria's experience different to what we might see in the movies?

## AND TWENTY-FOUR MINUTES BEFORE THAT . . .

- What are the family dynamics in Neon and Aria's homes?
- Why did Neon and Aria choose Aria's house for their first time?
- How does Neon feel about his work in the bingo hall?
- What is the significance of the chicken tenders?

## **AND JUST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS BEFORE THAT . . .**

- What three words would you use to describe school for your own version of a digital yearbook?
- Consider the importance of different symbols in the story (for example the dog, the chicken tenders, the door knocker). How does the author weave these into the narrative? How do they show Neon's love for Aria?
- How would you describe Neon's relationship with the women in the story, for example with his big sister, Nat?
- It is healthy that Neon can speak openly to his sister about his relationship with Aria. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- How does Dodie speak about girls and sex? How does Neon respond to him?
- Who is 'Little Connie'? Why did she have to 'play herself to safety'? What happened to her?
- How can you tell that Neon has a lot of empathy for others?
- What reasons does Neon give for being nervous about having sex with Aria for the first time?
- What do you think of Nat's advice to 'say the things'? What does she mean by this?

## **AND TWENTY-FOUR DAYS BEFORE THAT . . .**

- What sort of relationship did Gammy and Grandy have? What example does it set for Neon?
- Why is it important to be surrounded by positive relationships?
- What does Ma mean when she mentions 'protection and consent'? What advice do you think she would give about these things?
- Are you surprised by Neon's conversation with his Ma? Why or why not?
- Consider the different women in Neon's life. What is his relationship with each of them? How do they help Neon to form positive attitudes towards women?
- What is Ma's advice to Neon about pornography?
- What does Spank say about 'respect'? How important is the theme of respect in the novel?

## **AND TWENTY-FOUR WEEKS BEFORE THAT . . .**

- What does Neon talk about with his Dad? What sort of relationship do they have? Why are male role models important for young people?
- How does Neon hold Aria's hand, according to his Dad? What do the words 'intimate' and 'tenderness' mean?
- How does Neon feel about approaching the end of the school year? Why?
- What do you think of Aria's statement that 'communication is the key to . . . everything'? Do you agree?

## **AND TWENTY-FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THAT . . .**

- How are doors and doorways important in the novel? What does a doorway symbolise?
- What is the link between Grandy and Denzel Washington? Why is this significant?
- What does Neon learn about 'sowing your oats'? What does the phrase mean? And what do Grandy and Neon's Dad think about it?
- How does Neon meet Aria? What different elements and characters from the novel are brought together in this passage?
- Do you agree with Neon that: 'this ain't no movie. This is a mirror. This me. This her. This us. This real.'? How 'real' do you think Neon and Aria's story is?

## **BACK TO NOW . . .**

- What is the impact of Jason Reynolds' choice of structure for the book? How do you feel coming back to the present moment after everything you have just read about Neon and Aria's story? Can you plot important events on a timeline?
- What 'three words' do you think Neon and Aria say to each other?
- Which of Neon's anxieties are resolved at the end of the story? How does the author, Jason Reynolds, tie everything together?
- How do you feel at the end of the book?
- What do you think the future holds for Neon and Aria? Does it matter?
- What are the important messages of the book? What do you think the author is trying to say to young people about love and sex?

- Jason Reynolds himself has said: 'You deserve to be curious about [love], and to not feel shame for that curiosity.' What does he mean? Why is it important to be curious about love and sex?
- How can adults, teachers and friends help young people feel supported to be curious about love and sex?
- How far does *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* show a refreshingly different side to male sexuality and the experience of having sex?
- If you could ask Jason Reynolds five questions about this book, what would they be?