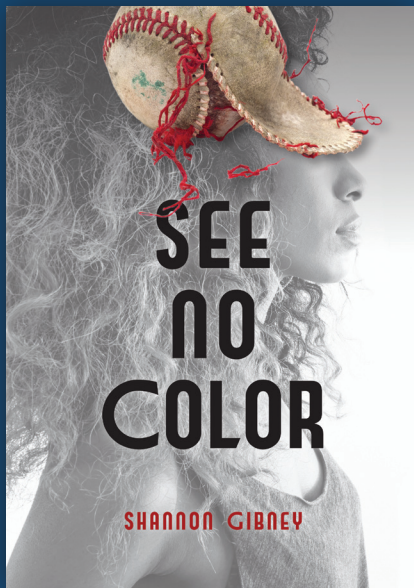




YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERATURE WINNER

Category sponsored by The Creative Writing Programs at Hamline University



See No Color by Shannon Gibney

CAROLRHODA LAB/LERNER PUBLISHING GROUP



The Friends, as the Library of Congress-designated Minnesota center for the book, organizes the year-round, statewide activities of the Minnesota book awards.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Despite some teasing, being a biracial girl adopted by a white family never bothered Alex very much. She was a stellar baseball player, just like her father, and all Alex wanted was to play ball forever. But after she meets Reggie, the first black guy who's wanted to get to know her, and discovers some hidden letters from her biological father, Alex starts questioning who she really is. Does she truly fit in with her white family? What does it mean to be black? To find the answers, Alex needs to come to terms with her adoption, her race, and the dreams she thought would always guide her.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shannon Gibney is a professor of English at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC), where she teaches critical and creative writing, journalism, and African diasporic topics. A former Bush Artist Fellow, her writing has appeared in a variety of venues, including *The Crisis*, *Gawker*, and *Inside Higher Education*. She has been the editor of the *Indiana Review* and managing editor at the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, the state's oldest Black newspaper. Gibney lives with her husband, Ballah D. Corvah, their son Boisey, and daughter Marwein, in the Powderhorn neighborhood of South Minneapolis. This is her first book. Visit

www.shannongibney.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do Alex's adoptive parents dismiss the black part of her identity? What language do they use (or not use) to describe and define Alex?
2. When Alex is looking through her adoption papers, she discovers that the adoption agency referred to her as a "special needs" child. What does Alex later find out that this means? Why does she not discuss this detail with her adoptive parents?
3. How might Alex's upbringing have been different if she had been adopted by a black couple? Would she still have felt estranged from part of her racial background, given that she's half white? Would she be as insecure of her identity?
4. When Alex's brother Jason expresses his desire to quit baseball at the beginning of the novel, Alex doesn't understand. She can't conceive of the person she would be without baseball in her life. How does Alex's concept of her identity evolve throughout the novel?
5. Why does Alex initially lie to Reggie about the race of her mother? What reasons does she have for desiring an adoptive family that is—at least in part, if not entirely—black?
6. How do Alex's adoptive parents and Jason address Alex's racial background differently than Kit?
7. After Alex gets her hair done, everyone in her family (except Kit) considers it a positive transformation. Why does Alex feel unhappy about it? How does this outward transformation make her feel more insecure about her identity?
8. When Alex first visits Reggie's home and has dinner with his mother, what differences does she observe between Reggie's home and family life and her own? What does she admire about Reggie's family life that she feels is lacking in her own family?
9. When Alex meets her biological father in person, what is the first question she asks him? Why is this, and why do you think she waited to ask him in person instead of over the phone?
10. The conclusion of the novel leaves a few aspects of Alex's story unresolved. What do you think will happen to Alex after the novel ends?

Questions courtesy of Carolrhoda Lab™

28TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide, year-round outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul.

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A CONVERSATION WITH SHANNON GIBNEY

What inspired you to write *See No Color*?

Like many first novels, *See No Color* is highly autobiographical, so I think it's true to say that the major themes in the book were inspired by major themes in my life as an adolescent. These themes include race, identity, gender, family, adoption, and belonging. A book can be a wonderful way to ask and explore a series of questions that you have struggled with, and to invite readers to struggle through them with you.

Why does baseball form the framework of the plot?

Baseball was a very intentional choice in the novel. It is such a potent metaphor for American life, insofar as it is known as "the national pastime," and therefore reflects all the contradictions around race/racism, gender/sexism, winning/losing endemic to life here. I also wanted to show the physicality of this young girl, and how serious she was about this game - which is something we don't see enough of in popular media.

How much of this novel draws on your own personal experience growing up in Michigan?

Michigan was and always will be the landscape of my growing up. I was a very intense, reflective, very physical girl growing up, just like Alex, and had a hard time seeing myself in my white family and predominantly white environment. So, yes, I think that that feeling and sensibility - and definitely a Midwestern sensibility - inform the book.

What did you enjoy most about writing the book? Did you encounter any challenges in the process?

Honestly, I really enjoyed the opportunity to examine my own issues through a fictional "Other." Somehow, having that space between "the truth," and "the created," was really enjoyable, and allowed me to inhabit a consciousness that was both familiar and new.

What do you hope your readers will take away from this book?

Wow, good question. I hope readers will come away from the book with the sense that the search for identity is a layered and ongoing process, one that is profoundly isolating for many - but that there are definitely certain people and groups who have a harder time than others. Transracial adoptees would be one of those groups, due to the many factors explored in detail in the book. I also hope that readers understand that this whole "Love conquers all," idea is not true, and can actually be



Shannon Gibney discusses *See No Color* at Meet the Finalists on March 18, 2016 at Open Book in Minneapolis.

extremely toxic when dealing with difference, particularly in families. Race still matters in America, and nothing, not even love, can erase that fact.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

As long as I have been reading, I have been writing. So, that would mean I was what, maybe six, when I decided I wanted to be a writer? And then I went out and did it. I wrote my first "book" in first grade. If I remember correctly, it was an illustrated tale about Strawberry Shortcake and her friends, on lined paper stapled together between two pieces of cardboard. I was incredibly proud of it, and it actually won an award in my elementary school. So then I wrote a bunch more...

Could you share a little about your current work or plans for a future project?

I'm in the middle of another Young Adult novel, about five generations of African and African American young people, whose lives criss-cross the Atlantic as they flee exile, slavery, and even death. It is tentatively titled *Dream Country*, and most of it is set in Liberia, although the first part is about a contemporary Liberian American teenager in Brooklyn Center. I've been working on it on and off for ten years, and it takes place now, in 1980, 1925, 1827, and 1847 in two very different countries...so it is this formidable, exciting project. It is slated to be released sometime in 2018, by Dutton; I am thrilled to be working again with Andrew Karre, my editor for *See No Color*.

I am also almost done with a family memoir, tentatively titled *Love Across the Middle Passage: Making An African/African American Family*.