

One Book, One City For Kids

Read with us!

One Book, One City for Kids is an annual reading program that encourages upper elementary students to read and discuss the same book. The program also helps to develop a lifelong love of reading among school-age readers, to inspire readers to bring story ideas and themes to life through discussion and creative reactions, and to build collaborative ties between public libraries, school libraries, and area schools.

This year's One Book, One City for Kids selection is *Playing the Cards You're Dealt* by Varian Johnson.

About the book

Ten-year-old Anthony Joplin is excited to finally be old enough to play in the spades tournament, a big deal for every Joplin Man. While his friends worry about school and girls, Ant only cares about living up to his dad's expectations at the card table. But when his best friend gets grounded, Ant needs a new partner. Shirley, the new girl in class, isn't who he imagined—she talks a lot of smack and plays tough. Ant's not sure his dad would like him teaming up with a girl, but Shirley is smart and knows her cards. So Ant teams up with her and keeps it a secret. But soon, he finds out his dad has a huge secret too, one that might tear their family apart.

About the author

Varian Johnson is the author of several novels for children and young adults, including *The Parker Inheritance*, which won both Coretta Scott King Author Honor and Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor awards; *The Great Greene Heist*, an ALA Notable Children's Book, a Kirkus Reviews Best Book, and a Texas Library Association Lone Star List selection; and the graphic novel *Twins* co-created with Shannon Wright, an NPR Best Book.

You can find out more about Johnson at varianjohnson.com and follow him on Instagram at [@varianjohnson](https://www.instagram.com/varianjohnson).



RELATED EVENT

Author Talk with Varian Johnson

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

1:00 – 2:00 pm

St. Cecilia Music Center

24 Ransom Ave NE

Varian Johnson will discuss his writing process and answer questions about his book *Playing the Cards You're Dealt*. This event is designed for upper elementary classes, homeschool students, and community members.

In your classroom

Here are some activities your class can do based on the story and its themes. Corresponding Common Core standards for each activity are included when applicable.

Discussion questions and writing prompts

Have students discuss, either in groups or through writing, one of these questions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5

1. Ant's family loves spades. The regulars at the corner store in his neighborhood play dominoes. What games do you and your family or friends like to play?
2. What does it mean to "play the cards you're dealt"? Why do you think the author chose this title?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4
3. Ant and his fellow spades players like to trash talk, but some of them, like Jamal, take it too far (pg. 44). When does trash talking become bullying?
4. Jamal's brother Taj tries to give Ant advice about girls, but Ant thinks Taj is "the last person he wants to get love advice from" (pg. 128). What is Taj wrong about? Who could Ant get advice from instead?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
5. Is Jamal a good friend to Ant? Why or why not?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1
6. What are some examples of gambling that you see in your day-to-day life? When is this okay, and when does it become a problem, like it is for Ant's dad?
7. Many characters in this book have secrets. Ant's dad makes Ant promise not to tell anyone about his gambling (pg. 109), but Ant tells his brother (pg. 168). When is it okay to tell a secret? Are there other times like that in this book?
8. When Shirley's mom meets Ant, she asks his permission before hugging him, something an adult has never asked Ant (pg. 189). Why does she do this? How does it make Ant feel?
9. When talking about their fathers, Shirley tells Ant "I understand how you can love someone but still not trust them" (pg. 265). What does she mean by that?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4
10. Ant has to stand up to his father at the end (pgs. 294-298). Have you ever had to stand up to someone? How did it feel before and after?

Activities



RELATED EVENT

Family Card Game Day

Monday, February 17, 2025

1:00 – 3:00 pm Main Library

111 Library St NE

The library will provide a variety of card games for families to play. Attendees are welcome to bring their own deck of cards, too. This free event is designed for kids and teens.

1. Learn to play spades! The rules are on pgs. 37-40 of the book.
2. Teach others how to play a game you love—or make up your own game! You can also come to our Family Card Game Day at the Main Library on February 17 to try a new game.
3. The book is narrated by Ant’s late grandfather. How would it change if the narrator were different? Rewrite a passage with a different character narrating.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6
4. Design a deck of cards themed around the book.
5. On pgs. 123-125, Mr. Reese gives the class a riddle, and Ant’s group comes up with ten possible answers for it. See how many answers you can come up with.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5
6. Create a “What You Know, What You Want to Know, What You Learned” chart about any of the themes and topics in *Playing the Cards You’re Dealt*.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.7

Themes with research support:

Gambling and alcohol addictions

- Talk2Kids (from the New York Council on Problem Gambling)
talk2kids.org/
- Gam-Anon School Kit
gam-anon.org/public-relations/gam-anon-school-kit
- “Children Pressured to Gamble While Gaming”
childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/blogs/children-pressured-gamble-while-gaming
- What Is Problem Gambling?
ncpgambling.org/help-treatment/faqs-what-is-problem-gambling/
- Compulsive Gambling
mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/compulsive-gambling/
- Al-Anon (for loved ones of alcoholics)
al-anon.org
- SMART Recovery Family and Friends
smartrecovery.org/family

Healthy masculinity

- “#HatchKids Discuss Male Gender Stereotypes”
[youtube.com/watch?v=QxYvhh1hQvk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxYvhh1hQvk)
- “Boys to Men: Teaching and Learning About Masculinity in an Age of Change”
[nytimes.com/2018/04/12/learning/lesson-plans/boys-to-men-teaching-and-learning-about-masculinity-in-an-age-of-change.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/learning/lesson-plans/boys-to-men-teaching-and-learning-about-masculinity-in-an-age-of-change.html)
- *Boys Will Be Human* by Justin Baldoni
- *Stories for Boys Who Dare to Be Different: True Tales of Amazing Boys Who Changed the World Without Killing Dragons* by Ben Brooks

Consent

- “Growing Kids and Boundaries: Teaching Consent by Age and Stage”
childrescuecoalition.org/educations/growing-kids-and-boundaries-teaching-consent-by-age-and-stage/
- “8 Ways to Teach Kids About Consent and Healthy Boundaries”
endsexualviolencect.org/8-ways-to-teach-kids-about-consent-and-healthy-boundaries/
- “Consent at Every Age”
gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/18/12/consent-every-age
- *Consent (For Kids!): Boundaries, Respect, and Being in Charge of You* by Rachel Brian
- *Let’s Talk About Body Boundaries, Consent, and Respect* by Jayneen Sanders
- *Welcome to Consent: How to Say No, When to Say Yes, and How to Be the Boss of Your Body* by Yumi Stynes

Special Thanks!

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