

JASON REYNOLDS INTERVIEW
THE THREAD SEASON ONE

Jason Reynolds, Author
September 18, 2023
Interviewed by Matthew Henderson
Total Running Time: 33 minutes and 25 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

JASON REYNOLDS:

The mere act of reading, the mere act of it teaches discipline, persistence, Consistency broadens the vocabulary. The more words you have, the less violent you need to be. It teaches you how to listen to yourself, and it keeps your imagination stoked. Which is to say that literacy is important because it is the very thing that could that keeps us free.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories
Jason Reynolds
Author

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

I'm curious about where you grew up. I wonder, you know, I grew up in these flowerpots in Brownsville, and there were certain smells and sounds and daily goings on in the neighborhood. And also, I feel like growing up in the



eighties, especially in most neighborhoods, especially in black neighborhoods now, we were out in the street all day. What were some of those sounds as.

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JASON REYNOLDS:

Well outside babies, first and foremost. I mean, we were outside. You open the door. My mom opened the door at 9:00 in the morning and I see it like go outside and it's like and do what? No matter what, you know, and without cell phones, without any of the things that we had to monitor the whereabouts of children, we were just outside on our own and expect to just be home before it was dark gray street like street light rules. Right. But mom has no idea what we're doing or where we are, and apparently didn't really matter that much in that time. It wasn't it wasn't like it is now. Some of the sounds and smells, you know, I had you know, first of all, we start within the house. So I come from this black household with my mom was a Southern woman. So, you know, with Sunday mornings you had gospel music playing, you know, on Saturday mornings, you know, it was it same thing as it is so many of us play. I need a break because we got to clean house, right? On Friday nights, my mom played funk music on the radio. My father was a very different it was different. So when we got in his car, it was all like rock and roll. I listen to the Hendrix and listening to Bruce. He love eighties pop rock, right? So listening to Hall and Oates. Phil Collins. Right. And that was sort of another of the sound that we heard. We also heard my father and my next door neighbors, two houses down, Sidney and Hassan, some of my father's friend's sons. Basically, they were all like gearheads, right? So they're all outside fixing cars. My father was a big mechanic kind of guy, right? So they're fixing cars and



you're hearing the sounds of of of the ratchet clicking. You're hearing them trying to start a car that won't turn over. You're hearing beer bottles, you're hearing lots of cussing and, you know, just this noise. And and then on the other side, the preacher, it was very different, right? Because there wasn't any of that. It was more sort of like the gospel music of him going to church on Sundays and packing up all of his children to get there and things of that nature. And you had to deal with ambulances. People on my block were also, you know, I've had my neighbors die of AIDS during this time. This is the eighties and the early nineties, Right. People are dying of the AIDS and that's happening. And so we're seeing ambulances. We're seeing, you know, you're dealing with all of that stuff, too. You're dealing with cop cars because of break ins and things of that nature as well. Dogs barking in eighties, everybody had a dog and mostly outside dogs. This is a very different time now. Right back then, your dog was on the outside. Your dog was in a doghouse. Right. And like your dog, you know, if you lived in those kind of neighborhoods, it was like a dog coming inside. And so a lot of dog barking all night, all the time. Just because people had outside dogs. Oh, you hear you hear telephone cords. Long telephone call is a straight once from back in the day, we would use those the double Dutch right to jump rope. And so you would hear the skipping of the ropes, right? You'd hear the sound of roller skates. The wheels of roller skates on the asphalt. Right. Like all of those things are the sounds of like the soundscape of my childhood ice cream trucks. Of course.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

You describe what street life was like, an oxen hill. What was home life like?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

My home life was. Honestly, it was so cool. I this is another thing that sort of comes into clearer view as you get older. As I've gotten older. I realize now that I was growing up in a household with. With an uncanny amount of freedom. That my mother, my parents were together for the first ten years and they modeled love in a really specific and in vibrant way. My parents, my father was very affectionate. My. They were they were a very they were a touchy feely couple, which is a kid. It's so gross. As an adult, though, I know what love looks like. I know what it's supposed to feel like. And so and even when my parents broke up and divorced, they still were good friends. And so I also got to see what love looks like when the circumstance changes. They still loved each other. But just the conditions were different. And I got to see what that looked like as well in that house. The other thing was we my mom was all about open channels of communication. So she had rough days where every week there was some days without that that were sticky for us. Of course, because she's a person, she's a human, and she was carrying a lot of weight trying to make sure that everything stay afloat, that me, my older brother, that everybody was safe, that we that the streets hadn't done what it does to so many black boys that but but also that we were that we were testing our boundaries that we were pushing the line a little bit. She understood that that was a part of our maturation and made space for it. She made space for us to say anything we wanted to say. I never had to worry about hiding and lying. I never had to. Like I could just say like, hey, you know,



I'm I'm interested in these things or I want to do this or I want to try this, or what does this mean? Or I'm afraid of these things or, you know, I like this girl. Can you remember this one time? You know, and this is this will give you a good a good a glimpse of who she was. I remember being in 10th grade or 11th grade, and I had this girlfriend. We really were just dating. We weren't like we were dating. And I liked her a lot. And it was Valentine's Day, and I was like, Ma, like, I need like, I need to do this right? I need to impress this girl, right? It's no one like, I never get. It was snow on the ground, and my mom was like, cool, like, and here, I'll tell you what to do, right? She's like, Go to the store. We're gonna go get you a Stouffer's lasagna. I know. Forget this. Because I was like, Man, you got to help me. Like, I got to make, like, a nice dinner. You know what I mean? She can go to the store, get you some stuff. As a designer, we're going to cook the lasagna, and they're going to take it out the tent and we will put it in a pan as if you made this right. And then you will pull it out the oven when she get here and you can cut it and you can serve it. Right. And then on top of all it is my mom was like, I'm going to not I'm going to leave the house to give you this space for your romantic time. I'm going to allow for you to to like, learn how to do this, because you're going to need to know how to do this. Right. How to how to treat someone that you care for and how to be. I think romantic is a cheap word. I think I think it diminishes with I think wishing to try to change things, how to be thoughtful, how to be intentional, and how to put forth effort, even when you may lack resource and talent. Right. It was like you may not know how to cook with my, but we've been to work around that and it's going be good. It's when it tastes good. And she might know the difference. She might not, but she'll appreciate the effort. And it was an amazing night. Right. And that's when she was it was



always like, how do I give my kids the edge? How do I teach them how to move, how to move through the world, how to see the world and view it right? How do I teach them sort of how to change bits of it that they want to change? How do I give them a heightened sense of discernment while also giving them the wings to be unafraid?

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

One of the reasons you can stand ten toes deep nowadays is because you sit on the shoulders of Isabel Reynolds, your mom's.

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JASON REYNOLDS:

You know, Isobel Reynolds is to me, for a woman coming up in her time, a revolutionary, a maverick. She said this about her mother. But when I look at my mom, I look at her. I'm like, Yo, you really did some special things, you know? This is a woman. 15 years. You graduated from high school early. First of all, she's from from the mud rain from rural South Carolina, then moved to D.C. where she's ten years old. And D.C. school system does everything they can to keep her back because of her next of an accent. Right. They looked at her accent as if it was a symbol for ignorance, as if she could not know. She could not keep up with the rigor of a city education. My mom was being taught in one room schoolhouses and like, you know, my mom was going to school with her older sister because they had to go somewhere. So you big sister going to school in a time for you to go to school, but go with it because you got to go. We're going to be in a field. So I'm like, I watch that thing. So go



with your older sister. Right. And so she was able to be in school earlier than usual, gets to D.C., gets challenged. And her mother is like little test it test and then ends up graduating early. Right. And so she gets to D.C. She graduates early. She takes a job 15, 16 years old, working in the mailroom of this insurance, this insurance policy place and works. Ah, we get you know, in season goes to the march on Washington and realizes that like oh she's 16 goes to the march on Washington and realizes, oh, this moment being here has catalyzed me and I now know I will not stay in the mailroom. Before that, she wasn't sure. Women didn't have a lot of opportunity. Black women had even less writing to do going to be a secretary, a teacher, or even to work in a mill. And my mom was like, after witnessing what I've just witnessed and I know I don't know where I'm going, but I know I'm going to stay in this mailroom. Took a 12 years to get a bachelor's degree, got a bachelor's degree in education while working every single day and going to school with class at the time and doing it the hard way. The first person in my family to get a degree, even after taking 12 years to do so, right. She ends up working her way up the ladder to the supervisor position, Right? The first black person, the first black woman to hold that position. Now, while doing all of this as a super professional woman. She would then come home and, like, have a whole separate part of herself. It's like, all right, now in the house, it's going to be meditation. It's going to be, you know, palm reading. It's going to be right. We've got crystals. We got you know, I always laugh because these days, all of this is so, so in vogue. Right? Everybody's got like, you know, every woman I know is like, oh, yeah, I got my crystal. Like, it's going to be a full moon and I got to do it right. All this stuff, right? Know my agent sounds like I might not sound, but I got my Palo Santo. I got my white sage, right? And this



is stuff. I grew up in a house where my mom was an herbalist. You open up the cabinets and it's just like all kind of flowers, tree barks and all that stuff. Because she didn't believe in she believed in like naturalism was like, Look, we can make a stew or I can make a tea that's going to knock that right out, Right? We had all these books like Back to Eden and all of these sort of like books of the occult that we grew up around and that were very normal and real for us. Now I realized just how special that was, how cool it was to live in a house where things were being done differently, how cool it was to be around somebody who really carved their own path when it came to spiritual practices, when it came to parental practices. Right. She really was just on her own wave and in her own bag. And still she's like, you know, I've been thinking about this, that and the third, you know, I got new thoughts on the afterlife. If it's a thing or or you know, the thing about learning this, right. And I am inspired. Because I'd know that as I age, I want to be a person who is constantly unfolding myself. And that's what she's done. She's constantly peel back layer after layer after layer. Every year, every decade, a new layer and something fresh being exposed underneath that, even as she's entering into the winter of her life.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

Yeah, I mean, I know it's not all peaches and cream, but it sounds like the environment that you grew up in was like an incubator for free speech, for learning unconditional love, you know? And that just that's that's the seeds that birthed empathy and compassion and individuals. Would you say that your mom's is your North Star?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

I would say my mom. It's definitely my my, my North Star. And I would also say my father, he's not too far behind. You know, I think I don't talk about him as much because there was a gap in our relationship. Right. But I, I hit the parental jackpot like the coolest parents, you know, God bless the dad. He's no longer with us. But I knew he was different, man. They were different. But, I mean, I grew up with the bad boy father, like in the eighties and nineties. So, like, the bad boy Father today looks just like me, the bad boy, father, The eighties and nineties. We're talking about a man who was like outside in, like tight jeans, in a t shirt, a ripped t shirt covered in tattoos, aviator sunglasses on, you know, I mean, always like a cigar in his mouth or something like that. Motorcycles calendars a women in the go like this he was a wild guy right and and was the coolest person in the world right will wake me up in the middle of the night. I'd come home with my older brother, sleep my mom sleep. Come on, come on, come on. We go outside. He start up the motorcycle. Harley Davidson riding loud, his motorcycle on the planet, him on the watch days. He's not the motorcycle that Tommy when the back of it. And we will ride around the neighborhood. You will see the lights turning on. Everybody waking that upset. Right. And he loved it just to do it right Or like he it was homecoming one time. He's like, yo, I'm taking him taking gave me this amazing I still have it Harley-Davidson motorcycle jacket right They put this over this I put his boots on. Right And then we pulled up on the back in the hall. It's a homecoming, right? And it's like, Yo, he made me cool, right? And so I think my mom always say my mom is who taught me how to view the



world, how to view life. Right. She gave me the perspective, Right. My father is really, really who taught me as I got older, who taught me how to move through the world. Right. He taught me like charisma. He taught me. I feel like he gave me magnetism in a particular way because he was one of those guys. Like he walked in the room. Temperature changes. He got to say nothing, right? That kind of like he had like a thing that I think hopefully and I think is what I have. My mom doesn't really have that per se. She has a presence, but it's a very different kind of presence. She has the presence where it's like she must be important, but like I might not want to talk to her yet. My dad had a presence was like, I don't know who he is, but I definitely need to know. Right.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

What was school like for you growing up? Did you excel? Did you struggle?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

You know, I was good until middle school. I skipped second grade. I was I was starting off. I mean, I was I was fresh out the gate. I came out the gate like I'm rocking and rolling. And it's just because the way my my parents treated me in the household, you know, I mean, we would have a whole conversation and I wasn't babied very much. It was just sort of like, hey, you know, these are the things we're expected to do. This is how we talk to you. This is you know, my neighbors were all it was. I don't know. I was more like a little man. They sat me at the table with everybody. I didn't handle Hatchet right in those days



and right here with the rest of us. And I would just sit and listen and and observe and watch. I had a little rocking chair with my mom would be in the kitchen cooking, and I would sit right at the door in my rocking syringes, observe, like I was sort of always a bit older. And so elementary school seemed like a breeze. I felt like I was too old to be there. Right? And so they moved me forward to third. Which put me two years behind everybody because I have a birthday. And so everything is fine until it's time for middle school. And now in middle school comes my parents split, so everything happens at the same time Grandma dies, parents split, all kinds of stuff. You know, I'm starting to write poetry. All of this is happening simultaneously, and I'm going to this new school because my mom then my dad was gone. My neighborhood school was terrible. And so she sends me to Catholic school. Man. Culture shock. I wear a uniform. Hey, I was away from my friends, away from my neighborhood. It was. It was terrible, right? I'm ten years old. I'm two years younger than everybody else, so I'm tiny. And I immediately started to do poorly if I, you know, my first DS are coming in D in Science D and. Right. Like, I'm, I'm upset about my period situation. And then after that I began to be manipulative because I knew I could. And it's a good excuse raised like I'm going, my brain's breaking that right. Meanwhile, I'm just like not doing anything. And all of my Republicans say the same thing is not living up to one's potential raise, that kind of thing, which I have some. I mean, for me it's like, yeah, that's true. But also I'm not sure my teachers were living up to their potential either, and the ones that were I perform for.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:



Tell me about some of those that pushed you.

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JASON REYNOLDS:

Mr. Williams My senior year, he taught a class called Global Studies, and I really I always say, you know, Mr. Williams taught me how to be a person. He was almost like the glue between my parents. It was like, All right, My father gave me these things. My mother gave me these things. My friends gave me sort of a force feel right to be safe and creative in myself. But Mr. Williams, at the time in which he came into my life, he gave me just a little bit of like tether. It's like a little bit of glue that kind of makes all of this stuff work, right? Um, there was one day we came to class. Mr. Williams says I have a fish that I bought for you all. It's going to be a class pet, but we're all seniors, so of course we're like, Bro, we grown like, Oh, who cares? And he puts it in his tank, an aquarium. He says, Listen, you can feed the fish every day. You come the class. I need you to name the fish. Now, the only rule is you can't touch the fish right now. If I see you with your hands in the tank for any reason, for any reason, your fingers or anything grazes the fish. Don't try to lift it up out of the tank. Don't play around with it. Right. And if I. If I see you do that, then I'm going to start pinching. That's it. You're going to you're going to be in trouble. Cool. Time passes, and we're feeding the fish every day. And one day we come to class, and Mr. Williams takes the fish tank and puts it on the floor. We all gather around, we're confused and mortified as the fish is flapping and flapping and gasping for air. Finally, two young ladies run over. They pick the fish out of the fish back on it, saying it saved the Fishers life. And Mr. Williams says, grab your backpacks and head on down to the principal's office. You're



suspended. The rules are the rules, right? Of course they're upset. We're upset. Everyone's upset. And he's like, I told you that if you touch the fish, you'll be suspended. I told you this was non-negotiable and you touch the fish, and so, unfortunately, you're suspended. I'm sure your parents will call. It's fine, but you are suspended. You get zero. I'll see you on Monday. And as they're leaving the classroom, he says. But. Hold your heads up because you did the right thing. But sometimes doing the right thing has consequences. I had to then sit down and for the rest of the class I had to sort of wallow in my cowardice. And in that moment, I made a decision to, you know, to save the fish every day. It's a thing I think about once a week, probably, you know, like, am I. Am I willing to go the extra mile? Am I willing to throw my body at a think through my mind that I think throw my voice at something that could be that that might not be beneficial for me, but for the betterment of our children, for the betterment of our elders, for the betterment of somebody who's less fortunate. Or do I have it in me? And every day I check myself to make sure that I do. And that's all because of what I was taught in that class.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

You got introduced to poetry through music. Running through that?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

Yeah. That seventh grade year. Right. As life is turning upside down. Pop is that Mom and Pop split. Grandma is dying and eventually does die. And then I am forced to reckon with the sounds of my mother crying. Right. What a



strange thing we talk about. Sounds this idea on the soundscape. It's the thing that has stuck with me for 30 years, you know, because it was the first time. And I think that anybody who's ever seen or heard their mother crying like the first time is a wild experience because this is your giant, right? You only know them as that in a particular way. And I needed to figure out a way to make her feel better. I couldn't live with knowing that she was in pain and I couldn't do anything about it. So just before this, save my money and I buy Queen Latifah's black ring. This is the album with you, and that's why I want it. You know, we can love Classic. And I read those lyrics and those liner notes, and I realized that this was poetry. I realized that. You know, I'm reciting it, too, in class, right? I am the doctor. Read that right, Langston Hughes. And you realize that like, Oh, this is the same thing, right? Looks the same. Right? It may sound a little different, but this is the same thing. Perhaps all these rappers are writing poetry. Perhaps if I look at all the words, I can see it differently. And that's how I was introduced to poetry. So then Grandma dies. Mom is crying and I do the only thing I know to do at that time, which is to write a few words, not a rap. Just trying to do, just trying to figure out how to write something that makes me feel the way Queen Latifah makes me feel or the way Tupac makes me feel or Slick Rick makes me feel to make my mother feel a little better. People got to see that my family and got to see that and got to engage with it and then let me know how they felt like, Oh man, this really made me feel better. Oh, man. Those words you say that you wrote really made me feel something. And then, you know, as a young person like, Oh, wait, you mean to tell me that I have power? That's all I needed, right? I have power because I have language and language has power. And now that I know that, you know, I can I can wield this sword and shield in a very different way.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

I'm curious, why do you write?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

For a lot of reasons. You know, I think I write to try to understand myself. You know, I think that's why I started just trying to figure out where do you put it. You know, I think you go through. You go through life. The biggest misconception is that is that we walk through life in in in sort of slickers. And what I mean by that is as if nothing kind of sticks to us. And the truth is, everything does. Everybody sticks. Every experience sticks. It all sticks. It may not be top of mind, right? But it all lives in your subconscious. Every person you meet, every conversation you have, every story you hear, every time someone tells you a secret or or confides in you, it's all in your body, you know? And I was trying to figure out as a young person where to put it. Got to get it out of my body. Right. I don't have the capacity to hold it all. And I'm an anxious child at that point. Right. And I don't have the capacity to carry all of this. I don't have my my body is filling up. Right. My mind is filling up. I don't know if I'm going to be able to manage. And so it it came at the right time and it gave me an opportunity to just sort of excavate and exercise some of my thoughts and feelings, which we all need. Right. That's the first reason. And I still do it for that reason. The second reason, though, is because I think I also realized that. I am of service. My mother taught us that as kids that, like everybody's purpose in life, is the same, and that is to be of service to your



fellow man. The tricky part is everybody's vehicle is different. And I found my vehicle, and because I found my vehicle of service, then I then I do my job because it is what I meant to do, right? My job is to make somebody else's life a little better. My job is to leave the world a little better than it was when I got here. And the way that I choose to do that or the way that it's been that it's sort of come on to me, is through this, through storytelling, through language, through through and through whatever sort of, you know, iteration of wordplay. I know what it's for. It's not it's not for you. I take it very seriously. I think there's too much power to play around with it. At the same time, I think that in the playing of it all, you discover new things and new powers. Right. But it's too. It's too important to take lightly. It's too powerful to take lightly. I think people are a little a little a little cavalier about language. And the truth of the matter is, as far as I'm concerned, it's almost like casting spells, right? And not in a sort of sense, right. But just in the sense that like, you know, whatever you say and whatever you write could very well. Teachers know this better than anybody could very well turn a child into a giant or turn that child into an name. Right. All based on what you say. Right what you say, the words that you formulated. And so I know that going into and so I think about all those things. And now I think it's just it's my it's my life. My lot in life is to be of service. This just happens to be the vehicle. And when I feel like my time is up, the writing will continue. The profession may change, but the writing will always be the way that I just try to learn myself, try to understand the world around me. Um, you know, it's a life saver. It saved my life in a real way.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:



Your classification of the types of books that you write fall under young adult fiction. How were you able to connect with your young readers?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

It's a good question. You know, I think I think what it has to do with is my mother and father acknowledging the fact that I was a person even as a child. And the model that I bring home to see my father. Teach me at the table, isn't he? Did you try your best? Tell me the truth. Right. I want you to tell me the truth. And don't lie to yourself. So tell me the truth. Did you try your best? Sometimes I'd say yes. Sometimes I'd say no, depending upon the truth. Right. And if I would say no, he would say, Well, since you didn't try your best, there has to be some sort of discipline. You have to have some sort of punishment here. And we're going to we you have to hold you accountable. Right. And so we need to figure out what ways are we going to make sure that people like you understand that it is the sea doesn't bother me. You're letting yourself down. You're not pushing yourself to do your very best. It's something that is that is unacceptable because life is coming right. And you can't let you down. You don't have to get inside, but you always have to put your best foot forward. Right. And in the moments where I said I did my best, people say, let's work a little harder next time. Good job. Would just work a little harder next time. That's it. Right. It's a very different way to sort of like instead of being like a is the only way. It was sort of like, let me talk to my kid and figure out where he's right. My mother, too. Right. How you feel it? I'm mad about this. I'm upset about this. You said this to me. You hurt my feelings, and I just don't think I deserved it. My mother was never the type to be. Like I



say what I want to do. Because you are my child, right? My mom was like, Oh, if I hurt your feelings, I apologize. I meant what I said, though. I meant what I said. You know, when you wrong, you wrong. But at the same time, she could own that. Like, perhaps she went too far. So when I sit on a two page, I'm looking at these young people. This as people when I go and see them at the schools, in the libraries and in the community centers and all the other places. The one thing they say to me most often is man thinks we're just talking to us like people, right? Care to them is pejorative, right? Because to them they're saying like, man, you know, they always remind us that our brains aren't developed. Imagine what it feels like to be a kid and people would look at you and say, like, you know how you feel because your brain ain't developed. Meanwhile, the child is like, but I but I do know how I feel. And I'm telling you, I'm I'm even vocalizing to you how I feel. And what you keep saying is no, you're not saying you're just hungry. There's nothing more frustrating than being dismissed that way. And adults know that more than anybody. And yet we do it to these young folks. Right. And my job is to say, like, I'm never going to do that. I can't if you feel it, I know you feel it, but I'm going to write it in a book. Right? I'm not going to dismiss your feelings or your experiences. I'm not going to dismiss even some of the confusion that does exist in your brain. All of that's still very real, right? That exists in your body. And it could cause some anxiety. It can cause mistake making. It can cause all sorts of things. So let me honor that by putting it on the page in the way that my parents honored it, by allowing me to sit at the table and have some discourse without just assuming they knew everything about me. Right? They asked me, tell me what's going on, and then we'll adjust accordingly. So I think it comes from NIMH.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

You wrote a book, all-American Boy, with Brandon Kiley that was banned.

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JASON REYNOLDS:

Yeah.

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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

Why was it banned?

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JASON REYNOLDS:

And the one liner is Rashad and Quinn, Black boy and a white boy growing up in the very same neighborhood to go to the same school. And they even had the same set of friends, but they do not know each other. And on Friday night, Rashad is accused of stealing in the grocery store and in his abuse by a police officer. And Quinn witnesses it and knows the cop as his father figure. And then he sets off on these two weeks where the two of them are trying to reckon with this experience. Right. That book was made because nobody wants to ever talk about police officers in any way that isn't sort of like these are the greatest human beings in the world, as if they're not human beings. And furthermore, and nobody wants to complicate the argument. It's not we're not even saying, like this book is about how this cop was a good man to



this boy and did a bad thing. So then the question becomes, who is who is he in this space and how do we grapple it? And Rashad has a police officer, a former cop, father who has also done a bad thing. It is not to say that we are you know, I think people listen. I think we live in a country that is unfortunately has become anti-intellectual. Perhaps because we're not reading anymore. And I think that the easiest thing to do for all of us is, is to simplify our arguments. What's necessary is for us to constantly be complicating our arguments. Right in this book works to help complicate the argument, while also bringing light to the fact that, like police abuse is a real thing. Always has been a real thing. By the way, it's not a new phenomenon, always has been a real thing. And it's affecting a lot of people every day in this country. That's it. I mean, that's it, right? I think I think for parents of a lot of places, like we don't want our kids to see officer friendly as anything other than officer friendly. And it's like, well, I think the real question is, do your children know that officer friendly as a human being? And if he's a human being, that means that he comes with all the things that human beings come with. The only difference is he's been giving an outsized amount of authority. So he has all the same mess that we have. And a gun and a badge. That's it. Which complicates all of our relationships around it. Right. And we should probably okay with Bob. Okay. We'll get okay with engaging in having discourse around what that actually means and what that looks like down the line. Does it matter? But.

00:30:17:00

MATTHEW HENDERSON:



You know, for an artist who's poured his work into a book, how does it feel for someone to not be discredited but in a sentence you're banning it in certain industries.

00:30:25:00

JASON REYNOLDS:

It feels disrespectful to the kids. Right. If it hurts my feelings, but it's disrespect to the children. It hurts my feelings because it makes me feel like people think that I'm out here to try to harm children. But I think it's disrespectful because what it says is that adults actually don't respect the intellectual capacity of young people as if they don't already know, as if they're not already having these conversations. They have the Internet, right? They have like, that's my that's the part that I'm most confused about. I'm like, you do know that they that they are already wrestling with this. It's like saying like, don't write a book about gun violence. Don't write a book about school shootings the way you do know they do school shooter drills. So I don't know why this would be a complicated conversation. They don't write a book about sex. You do know there are there are people being pregnant in their schools now. You know they're having sex, right? Anyone who believes that the teenagers are not having sex is like, I don't know what we are. This is a human experience. It's a human experience. I'm just trying to create a place for them to lay so that they understand what it is that's happening to them, what's happening around them. That is our actual jobs, right? My job isn't to be the captain of the ship. My job is to be the lighthouse. Right. I'm not. I'm not trying to, man nobody's boat. That's for them. It's their lives. My job is to point in the direction that is safe. That that way is the journey. Right? We're



going this way. But not to teach you. Not to tell you how to row. That's all you write. That's. And that to me, that's what our job is, to teach them which way to go, but not to teach them how to go there. You know, I mean, you know, everybody's afraid of it. And I get all kind of nasty comments and. It is what it is, man. I'll tell you what. I'll tell you what I'm most exhausted about. I have to talk about this all the time. And what I would rather put my energy in is talking about all these librarians and teachers who are fighting on the other side, who are putting their lives at risk, their jobs at risk every day to make sure that books like mine stay in the bookstore, stay in the library and stay in the schools. They really are the ones who deserve to be sitting in front of this camera and telling you what's really going on. Man, I'm going back to my ivory tower so I can be an artist. But they're real lives, real human beings who are not famous, who are fighting on behalf of our children every day.

00:32:35:00

MATTHEW HENDERSON:

Why is storytelling important?

00:32:37:00

JASON REYNOLDS:

Storytelling is important because as far as I'm concerned, this is this is the the most valuable of the human technologies. This is the most human thing. We have to offer one another to be better. Human beings are most influential to other human beings. Nothing influences us more than each other. And so the more we share our stories, the more whole and will be collectively. And we'll realize they were not actually that different.

END TC: 00:33:25:00