

How It Went Down Study Guide

How It Went Down by Kekla Magoon

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Plot Summary

How it Went Down, by Kekla Magoon, tells the story of a community that is thrown into tumult after a young black man, Tariq Johnson, is gunned down by a white man on the sidewalk one evening. As a result of this tragedy many of those living in the community must face the ultimate reality of their situation, and light is brought to shine on a larger, more racially charged, issue that rocks many impoverished areas in America, today.

Jennica was the first on the scene. She and Noodle had been sitting across the street on the stoop outside of Noodle's house. They had just finished smoking a joint and were starting to make out when they heard a 'pop'. Looking across the street they see a white man standing over T's body, and in horror, they watch him shoot T one more time. The man jumps in the blue car and drives quickly away.

Jennica runs over to try and do CPR on Tariq, but it is too late. He has been shot in the chest and there is blood everywhere. Noodle tells her that they need to leave before the police arrive since they are high. Jennica refuses to do so and only leaves when the paramedics arrive. Jennica hadn't really known T that well, but they had gone to the same school. She is devastated.

The store owner, Rocky, talks to the police and tells them that T had come in for some items for his mother. He had been in such a hurry that he'd run out of the store without his change. Rocky went after him, calling for him to stop.

Brian Trellis tells police that he saw T running from the store, heard Rocky yelling 'Stop thief' and had stepped in Tariq's way to slow him down. He tells police that the boy had told him to get out of his way. There were gang members, the Kings, that were nearby and they were egging T on. T had dropped all of his items and started to puff up like he was going to fight Brian. Then, Brian says, he heard someone say that there was a gun. Brian had put up his hands and backed off saying he didn't want any trouble.

There was a squeal of tires and a white man in a blue car had pulled up. A man had jumped out of the car with a gun and had come up to where T and Brian stood on the sidewalk. T had told the man to mind his own business. At that point the white man shot T in the chest, then when T was down, shot him again. Then he drove away.

Noodle and Jennica are interviewed by the police. Jennica tells them that T didn't have a gun, that he was holding a Snicker's bar in his hand. Noodle distinctly remembers seeing a gun, but also notes that it isn't anywhere on the ground to be found. He doesn't want to make Jennica look like a liar to the police, especially since the police don't like gang members, or their women.

Brick, the leader of the Kings gang, is upset that T is dead. He'd had plans for T which included him coming to be his second in command in the organization. Back when they were both younger they had agreed that they would take over the Kings. The two boys



had bonded over the fact that both of their sisters were 'special' and were learning disabled.

Back at T's apartment, his mother doesn't know that T is dead. She's wondering where he has gotten to. Tina, T's sister is impatient for her Snicker's bar. She tells the reader that T always takes good care of her and is the best brother ever. The reader also meets Redeema, T's grandmother, who also lives with them. Terrence, T's father, abandoned the family years earlier.

The police notify Vernesha, T's mother, that he has been shot. She is appalled that they are suggesting that her son was a gang member and that he had been involved in the sale of drugs. Redeema becomes angry and tells the police to get out of the apartment when they also state that T had stolen some items from Rocky's store.

On the other end of the street Tyrell is watching the news. T's face and name have been released. Ty is terrified and horrified. T was his best friend. The two of them were the only holdouts to not join the Kings.

In the beauty shop where she works, Kimberly refuses to look out of the window when the sirens start wailing. This is a common occurrence in that part of town. She tells her customer that inside the salon there is no outside. And that's the way Kimberly intends to keep it. One day, she knows, she will find a way to get out of Underhill.

In Washington, DC the Reverend Alabaster Sloan receives a call from his assistant. She tells him that she received word of a shooting in Underhill. That a black boy had been shot by a white man. The boy had not been armed. The Reverend is running for political office and sees his chance to further his platform on racial lines. He gets on board a plane. When he lands he immediately goes to Underhill, and stops into Kimberly's salon. He asks her if she can do his makeup before the press conference. Kimberly is starstruck and readily agrees. The Reverend Sloan, who is married, thinks that if it weren't an election year that he would definitely bed this young girl.

Sammy is also interviewed by the police. He swears that he saw a gun. He is angry because he, himself, has a gun and he didn't use it to protect T. He feels like a coward. When he gets to his apartment complex and gets on the elevator, an older girl named, Melody, is there. He tells her about T.

Melody is stunned that T is dead. They had drifted apart over the years, but T had been her first true boyfriend. She gives the reader insight into who T really was. He hadn't been like the other boys. T was smart, kind, and didn't let people talk smack. He was also incredibly caring to his sister, who was special needs. Melody is truly sorry for his death.

Tyrell thinks about when he, T, Sammy, and Junior were all younger and would have sleepovers at his house. One time, they all took three big sleeping bags and unzipped them, then re-zipped them into one large bag. They all slid into that and Ty remembers feeling as if they would always be friends, and that they would be safe as long as they were together. They'd all sworn, then and there, that they wouldn't be gang members.



Ty tells the reader that Sammy, then Junior, had been the first to break that oath. In the end, it was only T and Ty that managed to keep their promise. Junior had been arrested shortly afterward and sent to the state penitentiary for murder.

The man that shot T, Jack Franklin, goes to his friend's house, Tom Arlen. He originally had been visiting Tom the day of the shooting, when he came to borrow a car as his was being serviced. Now, he's back at Tom's asking if he can lie low there. The media have descended on everyone and Jack is being hounded. Tom reluctantly agrees. Jack tells Tom emphatically that the boy had a gun.

Meanwhile everyone in Underhill is upset because Jack has been released from police custody. The police ruled it a justifiable homicide as Jack was standing his ground and defending himself. No one in Underhill is buying that statement. A vigil is organized that evening.

Kimberly goes to the Reverend Sloan's hotel and brings him his briefcase. After doing his makeup, she impulsively kisses him. The Reverend asks her if she will be his personal assistant while he's in town. She readily agrees.

At the vigil, a boy named Will shows up. He used to live in Underhill but when his mother remarried, they were able to leave the area. Will misses his friends and lies about where he's going after school so he can still come to Underhill and hang out with them. He goes to the vigil and when the singing starts, he thinks that his stepdad, Steve, just doesn't get it.

Tyrell is frightened. He used to walk with T to school and the two of them would be safe walking through Stinger (a rival gang) territory. Now, without T, and without belonging to the Kings, he knows he's got a target on his back. He reluctantly agrees to take a ride with Brick, the leader of the Kings.

Jennica and her boyfriend Noodle begin to have problems. Ever since the murder Jennica's eyes have been opened to how her life could also end up. She wants to break up with Noodle and she wants to leave Underhill as soon as she can. Noodle becomes physically abusive towards her when she tells him she wants to break up.

The next day in Kimberly's salon, Jennica comes in to have her hair done for T's funeral. She is so sore that it hurts when Kimberly works on her. Kimberly doesn't say anything but she knows what has most likely happened. Jennica starts crying and the two begin a friendship. They both have dreams of leaving Underhill.

At the funeral Ty goes into the restroom to gather himself. While there he sees T's father, Terrence in there crying. Ty wants to give him a piece of his mind, about how he has some gall to come back to the funeral when he wasn't a part of T's life. But, he just offers his condolences and leaves.

After the funeral Ty is pressured into going to a King party at Brick's house. They pick him up and on the way there they almost are involved in a gunfight with the rival gang. Jennica is in the car with Ty at the time. It scares both of them badly and after they



arrive at the party they both agree to wait until everyone is high and passed out and then they will leave.

Meanwhile, Will has decided that he's going to paint a mural in honor of T. Will is a graffiti artist and sneaks out at night to tag. He puts up a large mural of T on the spot where he was murdered. Will learns about a hoodie protest march the next day. He plans to be there.

The police pound on Vernesha's door. She lets them in and they give her a search warrant. They are looking for evidence of drugs, gang membership, or anything that would indicate that Jack's story was the right one. T's family are so upset that they call the Reverend Sloan. The Reverend gets there too late to stop the police, but he uses the incident to make an impassioned speech on television that night. Vernesha also offers a statement.

There is a protest march that evening. Everyone wears a hoodie with the hood pulled up. The media had insinuated that T was shot because he was wearing a hoodie. While there Jennica and Kimberly link arms. Later, when Ty shows up, he links arms with them too. Noodle starts to break them up, and wants to pick a fight with Ty, whom he's sure has stolen Jennica from him. Ty, in a desperate move to keep them away from him, tells Brick that he knows where Jack Franklin is. Ty had seen him earlier that day when he went to Tom's house to get the recycling. Unfortunately, Ty is told that since he found Jack, he gets to end him. They give him a red handled knife. Ty is terrified.

Back at T's apartment, his sister Tina has gone into his room. She has found a red handled knife similar to the one that Ty has been given. She knows that it is a bad thing and she knows that the police might find it and keep saying bad things about her brother. Even though she is seven years old, she takes the knife and hides it in her room.

Ty sits in a diner with Brick and his father. Ty hopes that his father will tell Brick that asking Ty to hurt Jack is a bad idea. He hopes that his father will stand up to Brick. He doesn't. Ty takes the knife that he's been handed and goes out onto the sidewalk. Noodle and Brick join him. Just then, Ty sees Tina running down the sidewalk by herself. This is not usual. Noodle tells him to forget Tina and get to the job at hand. Suddenly Ty finds his own inner strength and shoves the knife back at Noodle and Brick. He goes after Tina.

Tina has stuffed the red handled knife into her backpack and is determined to hide it somewhere. Ty tells her that he will help her. Ty takes Tina to the cemetery to bury the knife. Tina had earlier refused to go into the cemetery to bury T. Now, with Ty holding her hand, they both go and bury the knife. She tells Ty that he should be as strong as her brother and be himself. This is all Ty needs to hear, and he knows that he will never join the Kings.



Day One

Summary

Jennica shares with the reader that seeing the body on the ground doesn't seem real. There is a jug of milk that has been riddled with bullets and the white milk against the black of the ground, the red of the blood, seems somehow awful and artistic all at once.

A boy named Sammy also sees the shooting take place, and runs over to see if he can help the boy that was shot. He kneels down next to the boy, the eyes are open and unseeing. A small splash of blood gets into his mouth and he feels as if he might throw up, but he doesn't. The shooter sees him and the Sammy says that the shooter's look seems to have a voice of its own.

Another boy named Noodle tries to get Jennica to leave the scene of the murder, but she won't leave. Noodle is upset with her for this, but he realizes that he loves her because she has a good heart. She doesn't want to leave the dead boy even though both of them are still high on weed. He mentions the Kings, a local street gang, and that most of the members have already left the area.

The reader learns that the boy that was shot was named, T. His friend, Sammy, tells readers that he is in a panic and he feels that he could have so easily stopped the shooting from happening. He's running and following his friend named, Brick. He has a gun that he's tucked down into the waistband of his jeans. What's the use of having a gun if you don't use it, he thinks as he keeps running. He feels like a coward.

The 911 call is offered, in transcript format. The police dispatcher talks to the caller. The shooting has just happened, and as the caller is on the phone the shooter shoots one more bullet into T, then takes off. The caller and his friends try to get the license plate of the blue car that drives off with the white man in it that shot Tariq(T). The dispatcher tries to get the caller to stay on the line, but the caller hangs up and appears to be chasing after the car.

The timeline rewinds. It is moments before the shooting. Brian Trellis comes out of the hardware store and hears someone shout, "Stop, Thief!" Trellis says that he is tired of neighborhood thugs thinking they can do anything they want. He doesn't like the 8-5 Kings, a local street gang, but he can tell that the young boy in the hoodie is small and just another wannabe. Brian grabs him and the boy screams at him to let go. It seems as if the boy has a gun and Brian backs off telling him that he doesn't want trouble. Before the boy can run off there is a pinging sound and the boy falls to the ground. Brian hears the Kings who are standing nearby tell the members to run, that there is a gun and that the boy has been shot. There is a second pop and Brian screams for someone to tell him what just happened.



Jennica tells the police on the scene that she and Noodle were hanging out across the street when the first shot went off, and that she didn't see the first shot. But she did see the second shot. She did CPR and got blood all over her, using the CPR training that she had gotten in school. It didn't help. The ambulance had then come and taken the boy away, but Jennica had known that he was already dead. After the police leave, Noodle says that he's just mad at Tariq for even being there, wrong place, wrong time.

In the present, and at a safe distance, Brick and Sammy slow down to catch their breath. Brick goes over the events in his head, trying to make some sense of it. Before it all went down, Brick had been walking with T, trying to get him to step up for the Kings, for real. Then Brick left him and in a few minutes T had come running down the street and ran into the big light skinned man. Noodle says that at the time he was hoping that the big man would hand T his butt in a sack, but instead the man let him go. Just about that time a white man drove up, jumped out of the car, and people started screaming that there was a gun. T told the man to stay out of his business. Then the man shot him twice. The gun was a nine millimeter.

Noodle replays the events in his mind. He and Jennica are sitting across the street on the stairs. Noodle recalls that he had thrown himself down on top of Jennica to protect her. When the white man drove off, Jennica ran to T.

Back in the present, Noodle thinks that this was bound to happen because T never had any filters and would just always say the first thing he thought of. Always talking smack. Noodle thinks to himself that T had it coming, though he doesn't say it out loud.

The viewpoint shifts back to Brick. Brick says that Tariq didn't even want to be a part of the Kings. In fact, he was arguing with Brick before everything happened, saying that he wanted to go to college. He didn't want to be a part of the Kings.

Brick had been upset because he thought that T had, had something special that would have made the two of them lethal on the streets. They would have ruled it all. Then he and Brick had gotten into a fight, bad mouthing each other, talking trash. Then T went into the store, ran out, ran into a big man and pulled the biggest gun and pointed it at the white man. Brick says that for a minute he was really proud of T, that maybe he'd decided that college was a waste of good potential.

The viewpoint shifts to Tom Arlen. It is before the shooting. Tom had loaned Jack Franklin his car while Jack's car was in the shop. Jack came down to pick it up and they talked on the back porch. After they had a few beers, Jack took the car, thanked Tom, and drove off. Tom recalls that Jack didn't get fifty feet down the road before coming to a stop. Tom caught up with him and had seen that there was a disturbance in the street up ahead. There were gang members surrounding a white man who was looking frantic.

Jack got out of the car and went up to the gang members who had surrounded the white man and told them to leave the man alone. They told him to mind his own business. Then Tom and Jack saw the gun in the boy's hand. Tom called out to Jack that there was a gun, but then, there were two pops, and when Jack turned around, he had a gun



in his hand, too. The big guy was telling Jack 'thank you' for saving him. Jack got into the car quickly and drove off before the police arrived. Tom stood there wondering what had just happened. He still can't figure it all out.

Rocky Fry is the cashier at the grocery store. His version of the story is that T didn't steal anything from the store. He left without getting his change. Rocky chased after him to give him his change. Then, Rocky says, there was a fight that broke out between T and another boy. Not wanting to become involved in something like that, Rocky went back inside the store. He put Tariq's change in an envelope and put his name on it to give to him the next time he came in, or T's mother. Then, Rocky says, he heard the shots and the sound of a car squealing away from the curb. That's all he knows, and that's all he tells the police.

Sammy tells the reader that T was his best friend and he wonders how T would want this story told. He knows that T was never stupid, and that since they never found a gun on his body, then that's what happened...there was no gun. Jack Franklin is the white man that got out of his car with a gun and shot T down. That's the story Sammy says is true enough.

Kimberly works as a hair stylist not too far from where the murder happened. She says that she was doing a lady's hair when all of the sirens began. She had said to the woman in her chair that it was most likely something between the Stingers and the Kings. The neighborhood is screwed up with gangs she had said.

Noodle reports that the cops came, and by that time the only people still standing around are Noodle, Jennica, and the light-skinned big man. Jennica tells them that T didn't have a gun and that the white man shot him. Noodle says he doesn't say anything against Jennica's version of the story, but that T is sure as he did have a gun. But where the gun is Noodle doesn't know. Noodle thinks that if Tariq had just shot the white man, none of this would have been an issue.

Tyrell says that when the incident went down he was at the dinner table doing homework. He heard about the shooting on the television that was playing in the background. He heard that the shooting happened on Peach Street, which is his street. He looked out the window but it was all quiet on his end of the street. He called T to see if he could give him the 411 on what was happening. T always knew what was going on, he thought at the time. There was no answer.

Tina, who is Tariq's sister talks about sending him to the store to get her a Snicker's bar. He teased her before he left. Tina smiled and waited for him to come back to her. Now, in their apartment, Tina knows that her mother is angry because T hasn't come back right away like he'd said he would. They might eat dinner without him.

At the present time, and unaware of the events that have taken place, Vernesha, Tariq's mother, waits for T to return. Vernesha is upset because T is late coming back with the things she sent him to the store for. She says that of all her children, T is the most trustworthy and dependable. She sets the table. Vernesha's mother, Redeema, asks if



they can't go ahead and eat dinner, but suddenly Vernesha doesn't feel so well. She says there's a feeling in the pit of her stomach. And then someone pounds on her door.

Melody, another girl in the neighborhood, is walking home to her place on Peach Street. There are police everywhere and barricades. She notes that Ms. Rosalita is sitting by herself in the community garden, which is unusual because usually there are three or four older people that like to sit with her. Melody gets to her building and jumps into the elevator. Sammy is already in the elevator. She notes that he looks scared. She asks him if he's okay. He only nods and says that T has been shot and that he's dead.

Analysis

Just as in a real incident of this type, there are conflicting reports about what happened, what has been seen, and who is responsible. The reader is brought along as the police question all of the people in the area to try and piece together the truth. The reader is also privy to something that the police are not...the interior thoughts of most of the characters.

The theme of Violence is introduced on page one, setting the tone of the novel. This inciting incident remains the key conflict of the novel, and propels many of the characters to make changes in their lives and to reconsider their actions. This is particularly true of Jennica, who rushes over after the shooting to try and save T. She hadn't known T that well in school, but they had hung out in some of the same places. Jennica had taken CPR in school, as she aspires to become a nurse someday. Living in Underhill, having such hopes and dreams are costly. She ends up getting a lot of his blood on her, which is a loose metaphor for the violence staining her as well as the rest of the neighborhood. She begins to realize, and takes most of the novel to conclude, that she must do what it takes to remove herself from Underhill and the dangerous path she is on by dating a gang member.

Jennica remarks that the milk jug with the bullet holes in it seems out of place on the ground, mixing with blood, in stark contrast against the dark sidewalk. The author specifically draws the reader's attention to this detail because she wants to let the reader know that something as precious as a life, something that was good and wholesome, has just been ruined, spilled on the ground.

The reader also sees the theme of Racism shining through in Jack Franklin's statements about neighborhood 'thugs'. He tells his friend Tom Arlen that he was 'protecting his own' in a white versus black mentality. This type of racism is offered as a reason that several people report seeing the same event, but their details of the incident don't match, clouded by their own biases.

There are already several different types of characters being introduced in this first section. Jennica and T would seem to represent those bright and hopeful kids in the neighborhood who long to leave the violence that surrounds them behind. They are studying to have careers and to go to college. In stark contrast are the characters of



Brick, the leader of the Kings gang, and Noodle, Brick's second in command. Both of them are already hard and calloused to the violence and the death. Noodle and Brick are both proud of the fact that T died with a gun in his hand, sporting their King colors. Then, there are the innocent casualties of this violence. Tina, T's disabled sister, waits excitedly at home for her Snicker's bar, while T's mother wonders why he is late. Both of them are just about to have their world devastated, and to watch one more member of the neighborhood, another young black man, die in a violent way while the police do nothing.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Violence in this first chapter.

Discussion Question 2

Why did the author draw the reader's attention to the milk jug?

Discussion Question 3

What does Jennica's involvement tell the reader about her character?

Vocabulary

sequence, sprawled, wispy, coiled, echoed, retch, fumbled, indecipherable, initiation, buckles, squeal, cracker, fracas, jostling, sheaths, paramedics, gauze, barricades, ancient



Day Two

Summary

Tyrell is upset because T is not answering his texts. He's sent a dozen overnight and T is ignoring him. The news is back on again, so Tyrell makes his breakfast and goes to listen to the news. The newscaster states that they now have the name of the slain teen in the Underhill section of town. Tyrell thinks to himself that he doesn't need T after all... he'll just get the information from the news.

Reverend Alabaster Sloan's assistant calls and tells him to turn on his TV. He does while Kelly, his assistant, tells him that a young black teen has been shot by a white man. She says that the situation is going to blow up. Rev. Sloan thinks to himself that black kids have been shot for decades and no one cared - so why now? Kelly tells him that the teen was unarmed. The Reverend thinks that maybe now he has found the correct platform to further his war against the racism in their community.

Will, who goes by the street name of eMZee, wakes up and hears from his stepdad that their section of the community has made the national news. Steve, his stepdad, asks him if he's familiar with Peach Street. Will snorts to himself. Know it? He and his mom lived there when she and Steve were first dating. Obviously, Steve doesn't remember such things. The news says that the kid was sporting gang colors. Will thinks...no one does that by accident.

Steve Connors, Will's stepfather, is frustrated because he thinks that young black men just don't get it. There are unspoken rules about how to play the game in the world if you are black. Dressing thug only gets you treated like a thug, Steve thinks to himself. Why don't the kids today figure out that if you wear your pants sagging to the ground with a huge chain, that this doesn't command respect at all. That no one will hire you, trust you, or treat you like an equal. Steve remembers that since graduating from college, every single day since then, he's always dressed nicely, and spoken good English. This has made him successful, not representing the community by showing his underwear in public.

Tyrell says that once he knows that the dead boy on Peach Street is T, he can't think straight. T is supposed to come by his apartment in the morning to walk to school with him. The two of them were always safe walking through Stinger territory. But now? Now Tyrell is alone. Tariq is dead. He opts to stay home.

Rocky says that the cops won't leave him alone. For the fiftieth time they want to know if Tariq robbed the store. Rocky refuses to agree to that report. They also seem to be trying to get him to say that T had a gun, which isn't true, either.

Sammy is angry because Jack Franklin has been let out of jail. Noodle, who's riding in the front passenger seat of the car asks him what he expected. They listen to the radio



that says that T was sporting gang colors. Sammy and Noodle both agree that T most definitely wasn't wearing gang colors. His whole deal with Brick had been that he would join the Kings if he could keep it a secret from his Mama. Brick, who is driving the car, argues that he was standing right beside T when it went down and he says that T had a gun. Sammy doesn't want to argue with him because he's giving him a ride to school and he doesn't want to jeopardize it. So, Sammy says he didn't see anything because he was across the street.

Redeema is T's grandmother. She remembers that the last words she spoke with her grandson were that she'd swat him if she ever caught him mixed up in a gang. In fact, all of the do-rags that she finds they turn them into dusting rags. T had been dusting for her, using one of those, earlier in the morning when Vernie had sent him to the store to get milk. He'd shoved the rag in his back pocket. Redeema blames herself.

Reverend Alabaster Sloan is on a plane. He feels a bit guilty for using the poor boy's death to further his own campaign. He believes that his prayer for God to send him some platform to stand behind, to further the plight of the black people in the country, has caused T's death. He closes his eyes as the plane takes off and prays for forgiveness.

Brian Trellis states that there are so many versions of the story of the teen's shooting that now no one knows what really happened. Brian Trellis is the light-skinned big man that confronted T. He thinks back to the incident and he can't say for sure if T had a gun or not. All he remembers is seeing Jack with a gun and shooting the boy. He also remembers the look in T's eyes right before.

Tyrell is slowly coming to terms with T's death. His father calls to him and Tyrell tries to hide his grief. His father doesn't abide weakness. The news is on and T's picture shows up. Tyrell can't help it and sinks down onto the couch to watch it. He ignores his father's call. His father shows up and asks if 'that boy' was a friend of his. Tyrell snaps at him and tells him that T had been in their apartment a million times. His father starts tearing in to him for being a friend to a gangbanger. Before Tyrell can argue with him, his father leaves the room. T's picture is frozen on the TV.

Ms. Rosalita says that the cries for the dead boy were high and mournful like the cries of soaring birds. There is to be a vigil for the dead boy. Ms. Rosalita has been comforting all of the young ones that come to her, saying that they were the dead boy's friends. She reflects that the young have no idea what 'vigil' means. She says that a 'vigil' means to wait, and that the young have no experience with waiting. There's been a makeshift memorial where T was shot, and there are candles and flowers that litter the sidewalk. Rosalita thinks that maybe she has lived too long and seen too much.

Will goes to hang with some of the Kings. They are all talking about the vigil that evening. He is teased by some of them for living the 'high life' with Steve. Will jokes back with them, but secretly is embarrassed by all they have and how rich Steve is. When they reach the vigil there is singing going on, and everyone is holding hands, or



putting arms around each other. He feels a part of something for the first time in his life, and he likes it.

Kimberly says that she's not sad for T, but more sad for his sister, Tina. Tina has a learning disability and she might not understand why T isn't coming home with her Snicker's bar. Nobody ever remembers the little ones when there's a tragedy. Kimberly says that when her father died, and she was only four, there were so many strange people that had come into the house and all of them trying to hug her that it freaked her out. She didn't know what 'dead' meant. For so long she'd waited for her father to come back, until she realized that she'd be waiting a very long time. She wonders if Tina is feeling the same thing.

Tina says that her Nana wants her to go to the vigil, but Mommy says no. They don't want to see the spot where he died, where his blood is still staining the sidewalk. Nana takes Tina and goes anyway and tells Tina to look at all of the flowers and candles, that everyone loved Tariq so much. Tina tells her that no one loved him more than she did.

The Reverend Alabaster Sloan arrives in Underhill. He stops by a local salon to get his makeup done for the cameras. A girl named Kimberly is putting on a light coat of makeup. He looks looking down her shirt and reminds himself that straying this close to the campaign is a bad idea. There have been many other indiscretions but his campaign manager is right to warn him to lay off the women...at least for now.

Kimberly shares that while she is completely blown away by being able to do the makeup for such a celebrity like Reverend Sloan, the truth about Tariq is that she hated him. When she used to babysit for Tina, T's sister, she was always having to tell T to calm down, not to tease Tina. And Tariq had a smart mouth and called Kimberly 'fat face' which he told to all of his friends and before long everyone was calling her that. Though, if she had to wish for anyone to be shot, it would be Brick. Brick was the worst. Then she says that the Reverend looked at her, all soft and caring, and without thinking she just did it. She kissed him on the lips.

Tom Arlen says that it is always a sad thing when a kid dies. He's wondering why the media circus this time. It isn't like this type of thing hasn't been happening for the last twenty years that he's lived there. Tom says he believes it's because the guy that did the shooting is white. And if Jack hadn't have gotten his shot off first, then there would be no news. Just another white guy dead by a black guy. Tom Arlen states emphatically that he saw the gun in that kid's hand and doesn't understand why all of these people would lie.

Steve waits for Will to come home. He's late. When Will comes home, Steve notices that he's holding a wilted carnation. Steve asks him where he's been. Will asks where his mother is. When Steve tells him that she had to work late he seems to relax. Steve tells him that going down to Underhill is a bad idea. Will argues saying that he's from there and those people are his friends. Will storms off to his room.



The Reverend has finished his time at the vigil and returns to his hotel room. Once inside the door he sinks to his knees, spent, and stricken. Holding the boy's grandmother's hand had torn him from the inside out. This is no longer a statistic. It is real. And this type of violence must stop. He is ashamed that this tragedy was ever anything less than real to him.

Sammy is still upset that he didn't use his gun to protect Tariq. He saw Jack with the gun, and instead of pulling his own piece, he'd just frozen. He will never make that mistake again. His mind turns to the white man that they let go: Jack Franklin. Maybe, Sammy thinks, he'll turn in the small handgun for something that has a scope. Maybe it's hunting season.

Analysis

The section of town where the murder has happened, the reader learns, is called Underhill. The name has its own implication, suggesting that those that live in the area are somehow 'under' or 'below' the rest of the community.

Additionally, the themes of Racism, as well as Violence, are continued in this section. Tom Sloan can't understand why there's so much media attention over this. These types of things are regular occurrences in Underhill. And there had been a gun. The boy had a gun, Tom argues with himself. However, there is enough doubt in his statements that the reader understands that he is trying to support his friend, even though he's not sure that the boy had a gun or not.

Additionally, Steve Connors, Will's stepfather, argues with Will when they see that T has been killed. Will doesn't think that Steve understands. They live in an affluent part of the city, far removed from Underhill. Unknown to Steve and Will's mother, Will sneaks out to Underhill after school to hang with his friends. Steve is frustrated because he knows that Will is caught up in acting cool, but Steve knows that following that mindset is not going to lead to anything good.

Rocky looks at the newspaper headlines and shakes his head. The police had been in trying to make him say that T had stolen stuff from his store, and that the boy had been a gang member. Rocky had refused to agree to the police version of the story. And yet, he sees it printed in the newspaper. He guesses that if the truth comes out of a black mouth that it is less credible...and the thought makes him bitter. He also thinks, conversely, that if Jack had been the one that had been shot, there would have been no report at all of the incident. Just another white guy getting offed by a black man.

The theme of Violence is continued as the events of the shooting are still investigated by the police and by those who were there, or who knew T. It is clear that not everyone's stories line up, and that much of what is being shared with the police is not always exactly the truth. Sammy, Noodle, and others dislike and distrust the police, so they don't tell the series of events as they believe they saw them. In fact, their stories, as well as that of Tom Arlen's, are all colored by their personal biases, the emotion of the day,



and the area where they live. The author seems to be suggesting that personal experiences and biases can contaminate a crime scene just as easily as someone tampering with the physical evidence.

The theme of False Appearances is introduced through the character of Reverend Alabaster Sloan. It is interesting to note that, though he is a black man, his name, literally, means 'white'. Alabaster is a white stone. This would seem to suggest that though he is a black man, he presents a 'white' face to the public. Additionally, it becomes clear very quickly that for someone calling themselves a pastor, he has less than holy thoughts when it comes to women. His attitude toward women reflects many of the prejudices that the reader sees reflected in most of the young black men in the gangs. Thus, prejudice is extended beyond race, to include gender. Both Jennica and Kimberly face this throughout most of the novel.

Brian Trellis, the big light skinned man who tried to stop T on the sidewalk, continues to agonize about whether or not he saw a gun. He remembers some of the gang members across the street saying that there was a gun. He had immediately backed off when he'd heard that, but the question remains: Did he actually SEE a gun? He just can't be sure. That's what he keeps telling the police, even though they continue to press him to agree that T had a gun.

Though the theme of Community has been hinted at, when Jack Franklin is released due to the police ruling the shooting a 'self defense' action, the community in Underhill mobilizes. They form a group and hold an impromptu vigil. Where T was gunned down becomes a memorial, not only to T, but to the countless other young black men who don't feel as if they have any other way to live, but that of a violent life.

That night at the vigil, Will has slipped away from his home in suburbia to return to Underhill. He joins the crowd of people who are holding hands, praying, and singing. He feels part of something, and feels accepted. He wants to be a part of something like this. He knows his stepfather just doesn't get it. Will's interaction and thought processes at the vigil bring the reader to another theme, which is that of Peer Pressure.

Sammy is still fuming over T's death. He feels that he could have done something to save T. He had a gun, so why didn't he use it? This shame and anger turn to revenge. He decides that the only way to make things right is to kill Jack Franklin.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Racism in this section.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Tom's reaction to the media coverage.



Discussion Question 3

What motivates Sammy to think about hunting down Jack Franklin?

Vocabulary

annoyed, dramatic, cynicism, bias, ghettophobe, internship, associated, razzing, stunt, glare, ragging, hoopla, potion, righteous, alleged, refute, falters, whirl, clenches, peripheral, wailing



Day Three

Summary

Rocky opens the paper and Tariq's story is the main headliner. Rocky wishes he'd never gone out of the shop to try and get Tariq to turn back for his change. The papers have gotten it all wrong. They keep saying that Rocky was yelling, "Stop Thief!" when in reality all he'd been saying was, "Come back, Tariq." The headline states that Tariq was, indeed, unarmed. At least they got that right, thinks Rocky. Other reports in other papers, however, state that T had a gun, that he was a gang member, that he was a career felon. Rocky doesn't know what to believe anymore.

Will feels that he's in a hard place. His grades are really good, and he knows how to speak correctly. But, if he wore the nice preppy clothes that his parents want him to wear, and his friends find out that he is on the honor roll, and if they ever caught him talking correctly and not street, he knows that he would be toast. He shares how he lies to his mother about where he goes after school. They think he's at the library, when in reality he's in Underhill, hanging and tagging at night with them. Now, he says, his mother has taken away all of his hoodies. She says that a black boy wearing it could get shot. But without the hoodies he doesn't feel that he fits in. His mom just doesn't get it.

Reverend Sloan goes to visit Vernesha at her apartment. He stares at the pieces of a broken cell phone against the far wall. She tells him that people just won't stop calling her and she's tired of it. The reason Sloan has come to the apartment is to let Vernesha know that at some point she's going to have to make a statement. He is positioning himself to be her confidant and mentor through the media storm that she's likely to experience, and of course he will be there in the background for the photos.

The door rings at Tom Arlen's house. He goes to the front door and sees Jack Franklin standing there. Tom is shocked that Jack is there. He quickly tells him to come in and he shuts the door. Jack still has the gun on him and Tom thinks to himself that this is the gun that killed that poor boy. He has come to ask if he can stay at Tom's for a few nights. The reporters are bombarding his house and are camped outside on the street. Tom tells him that he can stay, but he already regrets it.

Jennica observes that Rev. Sloan is on the news a lot. She and others resent the fact that he's not from their area, but he's fast become the 'face' of the entire thing. A woman reporter comes into the diner where Jennica works. There's a cameraman with her. Jennica tells them that she can't talk until she's on her break, or they buy something. The woman plops down a hundred dollars and the camera rolls. Jennica tells her side of the story.

Kimberly is still reeling from kissing Rev. Sloan. And he had left so suddenly, Kimberly recalls. Maybe he was upset by it. He has left his briefcase so she knows that he'll come back to get it sooner or later. The TV is on in the salon and she sees the



Reverend on camera. She draws her fingers across her lips and thinks: I kissed those lips.

Tina shares that things are changing too much. She knows now that she will never hear Tariq's voice, be able to go to Rocky's store, see her mother smile, walk down Peach Street without crying, or eat Snickers. Things are not usual around her house at all.

Kimberly is at the Reverend Sloan's hotel. He never came for the briefcase and she knows that it is important to him. She intends to leave it at the front desk, but when she goes to the front desk, they tell her that he wants her to bring it up to his room. Once there he thanks her for bringing it to her and asks her if she will be his personal assistant for the next few days while he's in town. His usual assistants couldn't make it in and he needs someone. Kimberly eagerly accepts and finds that she really wants to kiss him again.

Analysis

The symbolism of the hoodies is introduced in this section. The papers report that T had been wearing a hoodie pulled up over his head. It seems that the papers were suggesting that if a black person wore a hoodie that it should be open season. So, in solidarity, and presenting the theme of Community, Underhill prepares to have a peaceful hoodie march in a couple of days. They will speak out against the injustice of letting Jack Franklin out of jail without any charges.

The Reverend Sloan arrives in Underhill, and immediately, the reader can tell that the pastor is a long time removed from an actual church. The way he treats the women around him indicates that he's had numerous affairs, and that he uses people. This is also evident in the way that he goes immediately to Vernesha's house to ingratiate himself with the family, to offer to be their advocate with the media. Since he is a celebrity, everyone is starstruck and agrees to let him help them.

However, many in the actual community resent the Reverend Sloan's appearance. This small scene where he appears and interacts with everyone demonstrates the theme of False Appearances. He isn't from there, doesn't know their issues, and on top of that, everyone knows that it is an election year. Using T's death to further his own aims does not sit well with many in the community.

Will, when he moved out of Underhill, was moved to a different school entirely. However, he still leaves his new school, tells his parents he's going to the library, then takes a bus back to his old neighborhood to hang with his old friends. He feels that he has to hide the fact that he makes good grades, that he lives in a good place, or that he has a chance to make a life for himself that doesn't involve crime. He recalls that he never had any of his friends over because he is ashamed at how well off they are in comparison to most of his friends. He felt that it would shame them.

In reality, it embarrasses Will. Will feels pressured to fit in with his old friends, so he acts and dresses like them. However, his parents want him to speak, dress, and act another



way. Will is trapped between two worlds and he is smart enough to know that at some point he's going to have to choose. The ice that his refrigerator makes is representative in Will's mind of how rich they are and how all of his friends would tease him mercilessly if they knew that they had such nice things.

Tom is shocked when he opens his door and finds Jack standing there. Tom quickly pulls him inside and prays that no one saw him. Tom, more so than Jack, understands the implications of Jack coming back into Underhill. Jack argues with Tom and tries to convince him that he had to shoot the boy, that the kid had a gun. He asks Tom to admit that the kid had a gun. Tom nods his head, but in reality, he can't be sure at all.

Discussion Question 1

How is Will in a difficult position in regards to peer pressure?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of False Appearances.

Discussion Question 3

What is Tom's dilemma?

Vocabulary

brandishing, alternative, unimaginable, fretting, khakis, whatnot, fronting, reassurance, disdainfully, holster, coverage, conflicting, gunman, inconvenient, musings, declaration



Day Four

Summary

Rocky pulls the stack of the day's newspapers into his store and puts them on the counter. He takes one off the top and reads it. The main headline is about Tariq's death. It shows protestors outside of the jail where Jack Franklin had been released. Tariq's mother made a statement calling for justice, and the Reverend Sloan suggests, in the article, that there needs to be further investigation and that racial bias might be in play. Rocky thinks that he might be on to something there as he thinks back to the police officers who had questioned him a few days before, trying to get him to tell them that Tariq had stolen something from his store and that the boy had a gun.

Melody notes that the police presence in Underhill has tripled over the last three days. Melody is on her way to the Starwood residence, which is an assisted living residence where she volunteers. Melody wants to be a nurse, so volunteering at the center gives her some good experience, she feels. When Melody goes into the room of the disabled girl that she usually works with, she finds the girl huddled in the corner, inconsolable. The orderly tells her that someone told her about Tariq and that the girl says that their brothers were friends. Melody goes to the girl and sits next to her, comforting her.

Tyrell remembers when they were all younger and he, Tariq, Junior, and Sammy would all have a sleepover. Junior almost didn't come over because he didn't have a sleeping bag, but they all went over to his house and made him come anyway. Then, because they only had three sleeping bags, they unzipped them all, then reziped them to form one big bag. All of them in the bag, safe, where no one could get to them. It was at this sleepover that they all agreed that they'd never join the Kings, or any gang. Sammy had broken that rule first, Tyrell remembers. He wishes that it could go back to those times before they forgot who they were going to be.

Junior, who is still in jail, thinks about how he and Tariq had been friends since second grade. They were in the same class and used to share the food out of their lunch boxes. When there was fruit at the end of the lunch line, they'd each take one of the other kind, then take them to the table and split them, each getting half a banana and half an apple. He remembers how Tariq's face had looked when he'd told him that he'd joined the Kings. Tyrell and T took that sleeping bag oath about not joining a gang more seriously than Sammy or he had. He had just figured that they'd get over it. Now, when he goes through the prison lunch line, he sees the fruit at the end of the counter and he knows that he can only have one kind of fruit, and that there's no Tariq to split it with him.

Sammy polishes his gun and practices slipping it into and out of his belt. The next time a 'Jack Franklin' opportunity comes along, he will 'ice' them. That's the way one makes their way up the ladder, he thinks to himself. Prove one's loyalty to the group. Brick calls him over to his house for an informal meeting of the Kings. Sammy goes and after everyone smokes a joint, Brick calls him into his bedroom for a meeting. Brick asks to



see his gun and wonders where Sammy got it. Brick accuses him of taking it off of T, which Sammy vehemently denies. He tells Brick that he would lie to protect T, but not to Brick. He promises that he always tells Brick the truth. Brick doesn't believe him.

Brick sends everyone home, and he thinks about when he met T. They both met at the park where their sisters played together. Both of their sisters were different in a special way, in that way that other people call 'simple'. Brick liked that there was someone else in the same situation, so it wasn't as embarrassing to take care of his little sister. His sister has to live at Starwood now, and most of his money from working the Kings, goes towards keeping her there. No one knows that, though.

Analysis

The theme of Racism is continued in many of the characters. Rocky is one of the first, as he reads the paper, to agree with the Reverend Sloan's call for a more in-depth investigation of the murder. He also thinks to himself that it has always been this way in the Underhill. Blacks die and nobody cares. Whites die and all of a sudden the full weight of the law is on the scene. It just isn't fair, he thinks. The police, when they are forced to come into Underhill, just try to wrap up their business as fast as they can. Rocky knows that for certain since they keep trying to get Rocky to make the entire thing nice and neat by telling them that T was a gang member, a drug user, a thief, and that he had a gun. Rocky determines that he won't give them that satisfaction.

The theme of Violence is depicted in Melody's scene with Sheila, Brick's younger sister. As Jennica mentioned earlier, and Melody points out again, no one stops to consider the impact of the violence on the youngest of the community's residents...the children. Sheila is inconsolable and the only person that can calm her down is Melody. It is a terrible thing when someone is killed, but no one focuses on the families and friends of the person who was killed. It's worse for them in many respects, Melody decides.

The reader sees, in a flashback, Tyrell's memory of when everyone was still alive, not affiliated with any gangs, and they were all just kids having a sleepover at his house. The symbolism of the sleeping bag is poignant, and even Tyrell tells it in a wistful manner. It was the one time when everything was right with the world for all of them. They all had each other, they were going to keep each other safe, and they would all get out of Underhill together.

Junior, who is already in jail at the time of the shooting, personifies several themes. First, he demonstrates the theme of False Appearances. He did not kill the man that he is convicted of killing. He did cut him and he was there when the man was killed, beaten to death by Sciss. Sciss told him to take the dive for the Kings because Junior, at the time, was still a juvenile. Sciss lied, though, and Junior is serving a major sentence.

Additionally, Junior is a product of the crime and violence in his neighborhood. The reader learns that Junior also came from an impoverished family, and that often he would receive food from the other boys' lunch boxes. Joining the gang, he felt later on,



was the only way to make some quick money for his family. He remembers when he and T used to each get a different type of fruit from the lunchline, then split it with each other. They used to laugh at how they'd 'beat' the one fruit only rule. Back then they had each other's back. Junior realizes that he's truly alone, which emphasizes that violence isolates people from those they love most.

Lastly, the reader gets to see a side of the fierce and callous gang leader, Brick. Brick has a sister that is a lot like T's sister, Tina. They are both learning disabled and have to have special care and education. It is something that T and Brick shared, and it bonded them. The reader learns that it is Brick who pays for his sister's stay at the Starwood residence facility. He became a gang leader so that he could take care of his sister. This illustrates the theme of False Appearances, and also suggests that most people, even those that seem violent, aren't always the true villain.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Violence in this section.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of the sleeping bags.

Discussion Question 3

How is racism depicted in this section?

Vocabulary

dreading, controversy, slain, alleged, tragic, milling, askance, practioner, unflappably, huddled, funky, goofing, avoidance, endeavor, unfathomably, holstered, roundabout, swipes



Day Five

Summary

Tom Arlen walks quietly to the front porch and gets the newspaper. Jack is still asleep in the spare bedroom, and has said that he doesn't follow the news, that he's sure of what he saw and what he did. Tom's not as sure, though. Today, he knows, is the day that they will bury the dead boy, Tariq Johnson.

Jennica goes to have her hair done at the beauty salon. Kimberly does her hair. Jennica is sporting sunglasses because Noodle had become upset with her the night before and had handled her roughly. Though 'roughly' is a euphemism that she thinks doesn't do justice to the beating he'd given her. The stylist works quickly and doesn't ask any questions about the bruises on Jennica's neck. Jennica comforts herself telling herself that Noodle didn't know his own strength, or that he'd hurt her. She just wants to look nice for Tariq's funeral. She can't shake the feeling that she's awakened from a very deep sleep and what she's waked to see terrifies her.

Sammy arrives at the church where they're holding the funeral. The Kings have all shown up wearing their jackets. He can tell that Tariq's mother isn't okay with that and she keeps giving them all dirty looks. He remembers when he'd gotten T to work for the Kings as a bagman. All he had to do was hold the dope in the bag while Sammy sold it. For two hours' work, T would make a hundred dollars. T was excited by the money and Sammy had hoped that he was going to join the Kings. But he hadn't. Not all the way. Not for real. And he hadn't shown up that night to hold the bag.

Brick watches Tyrell walk into the church and thinks how small Ty is. Without T to protect him, to act as a package deal, Ty is a sitting duck. The whole week has been hard on him, Brick thinks. No one to protect him. Brick had picked him up one day and taken him to school, out of respect for T. Now, out of respect for T he's going to make sure that the Kings adopt Tyrell and bring him into the outfit. It is what T would have wanted, Brick is sure.

Jennica comes to the funeral and sits with Noodle and the Kings. She feels a sickening feeling in the pit of her stomach and she knows that she wants out of 'the life'. She wants her own life, free of all of the violence, and of Noodle. She's tired of watching everyone she knows kill the other. It will never stop, but she doesn't have to be a part of it, she decides.

Tyrell goes to the bathroom at the church, hoping to compose himself after running into Brick and his Kings. When he gets in there, however, he sees Tariq's father. Tyrell is nice and polite to him but on the inside he is seething. How dare this man come back now, when his son really needed him for the last 10 years. Tariq's father asks where it all went wrong and Tyrell wants to tell him that it started when he showed Tariq his back.



Instead, Tyrell shakes his hand and tells him that he's sorry for his loss. Then, Tariq's father starts to cry.

The funeral concludes and Noodle and Brick are some of the first to come out of the church. The reporters swarm them. Noodle has practiced what to say, with Brick's help, and he manages to make a point of telling the reporters that Tariq was his best friend, that they were just playing around, and that Jack Franklin came up out of nowhere and killed him. He manages to state that it was just another white on black crime that is being swept under the rug before the reporters switch their attention to the front of the church where Tariq's mother is coming out. Noodle thinks, as the cameras turn from him, that at least Tariq has finally benefited him in some way.

Melody opted not to go to the funeral, but went to be with Sheila, Brick's sister, instead. The TV is on in her room and tuned to the news coverage when Melody arrives. There isn't much to see as the cameras aren't allowed into the church. But then Noodle and Brick come out and Noodle starts talking to the reporters. Sheila, who has been rocking back and forth, her fingers in her mouth, suddenly brightens and points to something in the upper left hand corner. Melody can't figure out what it is, but then the picture changes and Sheila grows silent again.

At the cemetery Tina refuses to walk through the gates. When Vernesha tries to pull her in, Tina starts shrieking and Redeema stays behind to be with her. Redeema is okay with not watching Tariq go into the ground. They had used Redeema's plot in the graveyard and she reckons that when they can bear to, they will buy another one. Tina stops screaming and comes to sit next to her grandmother.

Back home Tina comes running out of Tariq's room where she's been exploring. Her hand has been cut by a big knife with a red handle that she found in his room. The knife has King colors. Redeema washes the cut and asks Tina how she cut her hand. Tina won't tell her, and starts crying for Tariq. Redeema tells her that calling for him won't do any good any more. Tina feels as if her heart is breaking.

Analysis

The ambivalence that Tom feels is echoed by many of the characters who were present during the shooting, or were involved in some way. Tom knows that if it had been anyone other than Jack who'd done the shooting that he might be on a different side of the issue. He's lived in Underhill, a white man in a black neighborhood, for more than 20 years and he likes it there, has never had any trouble. He knows the families there, and he's torn between his allegiance to his friend, Jack, and the people he's lived among for two decades. He feels that maybe he is on the wrong side of the issue, however.

The theme of Violence is approached in a different manner this time with the introduction of domestic violence and date violence. Jennica's relationship with Noodle is not a healthy one, and this has been pointed at many times. Now, the violence has escalated to the point where Noodle has physically abused Jennica. She's begun to see



that the life that she and the others are living in Underhill isn't a life at all. She wants out and that means rejecting everything that Noodle considers important, namely the Kings. Noodle's entire identity and self-worth revolve around the gang and proving himself worthy of the number two position with Brick.

This section is rampant with ironic twists. First, there is the appearance of Terrence, T's father who abandoned the family many years previously. Now he's taken center stage, speaking to the media as if he were still an integral part of the family. When Tyrell finds him in the restroom, he is polite, but on the inside Tyrell wants to rail about Terrence for having the gall to come back for his son's funeral when he wasn't there for his son's life.

Later, when Noodle and Brick exit the church, the media corner them. They know that Noodle had been present during the shooting and they ask him to make a statement. Brick and Noodle had rehearsed for just such an occasion, should it arise and Noodle is going to make sure that he makes Brick proud of him. Though he disliked T, and was never his friend, his speech indicates that they were very close and that T's loss will be felt deeply by all of the Kings.

Sammy clears up the entire question of whether or not T was actually a part of the gang, though. T had not shown up to be the bag holder when Sammy had offered him the easy money. This shows that the money that T has gathered or managed to save, has come from other, legal, means. Therefore, the newspapers and the police's assumptions that since he was a young black man living in the 'hood' that he must have been a gang member, is shown to be false and a horrible stereotype. This also demonstrates the theme of Racism, which is always center stage in each section.

Tina's refusal to walk through the gates symbolically represents her unwillingness to acknowledge that her brother is dead. If she doesn't see him in the ground, or read his gravestone, then in her mind it isn't true. Her grandmother, Redeema, sits with her outside of the gates, comforting her while Vernesha and the others bury T.

Tina is focused upon more in this section than in others, not only because of her innocence, but because of her relationship with T. When she finds the knife, even as innocent as she is, she recognizes that it is probably a bad thing. She knows that the police have been to her house once already, and she is afraid that if they find the knife that they will say bad things about her brother. She will not let that happen, and she takes the knife. The color red is again prominent in that it is wrapped around the handle of the knife, indicating blood, and life. Now, for better or worse, this life has also touched Tina's life...something that T had hoped to protect her from.

Discussion Question 1

Why won't Tina go through the gates at the cemetery?



Discussion Question 2

What does it tell the reader about Tina when she recognizes that she needs to hide the knife?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Racism in this section.

Vocabulary

deny, morph, antennae, montage, mingling, emerge, relishing, pronunciation, jostling, cacophony, vernacular, risque, sidestepping, smudge, gleaming, barbs, saunter

Day Six

Summary

Tyrell is walking to school and realizes that a gang of Kings with Brick are headed his way. He also sees Noodle with them. He braces himself for the usual harassment. He only has to stay strong for sixteen more days until he leaves for summer break. He's going to the usual science camp that he has for the last two summers. Away from Underhill. The gang reaches him and Brick invites him to his house that night. Tyrell declines, but Brick won't take no for an answer and tells him that he'll pick him up around nine o'clock. Ty sighs after they walk on. Sixteen more days he says to himself under his breath.

Reverend Alabaster Sloan steps from the cab in front of Vernesha's apartment. He sees Tariq's father come out of the building. That sort of man, thinks Sloan, is the epitome of what's wrong in these neighborhoods. Never there for his children, then shows up for the limelight. Terrence sees Sloan but tries to walk quicker. Sloan catches up with him and walks with him, even though Terrence makes it clear he doesn't want to be around the good Reverend.

Tyrell is sitting outside on the stoop of his apartment building. He's waiting for Brick because he's afraid not to be waiting for him. He wishes desperately that he knew of someone else that had stayed out of the gangs, so he could ask for some advice about staying out. But there's no one he can think of. Maybe it won't be too bad. T used to go to a few of the parties and he managed to stay out.

Jennica is riding in Brick's car with Noodle, Sammy, and Tyrell. As they turn the corner they see a group of Stingers getting ready to cross the border, blatantly defying territorial claims. Brick drives up alongside where they are and both Noodle and Sammy threaten them with their knives. Then, Brick drives away. He tells the others that he's going to circle back around and that if they are still there that they need to be ready to get into it. Jennica is terrified, and by the look on Tyrell's face, so is he. When they circle back around the Stingers are gone and both Jennica and Tyrell are relieved.

Junior sits in his jail cell and thinks about the choices he's made in his life. The 'ifs' are long and he wishes he'd not listened to Sciss, the leader of the Kings at the time. It was Sciss that had told him to take the rap for killing the man, because as a juvie he'd only get a few years. He lied. The guy had died, but it wasn't because of the cut from Junior's knife. It was the beating that Sciss gave him. But he'd given his knife to T to hide so that they wouldn't give him a longer sentence. That hadn't helped and his court appointed lawyer hadn't given a damn.

At Brick's house Tyrell just wants to go home. He almost died tonight and he's really not in a partying mood now. Then Sammy gives him a joint; he breathes on it a few times.



Things don't look so bad. A girl comes up to him. A girl! This has never happened before, thinks Ty. Maybe being in the Kings isn't as bad as he thought.

It's dark. Will decides that since it's been a week since Tariq was killed, and since no one has put up a mural in his honor, that he will do it. He believes that it is destiny that he tag for the community, for Tariq. Where Tariq was gunned down is a massive blank wall...just waiting for him.

At the party Ty sits out on the window ledge, his cup of beer empty, tears streaming down his face. Jennica comes out to sit with him. This is her favorite place, too. She tells him that he doesn't have to do any of this, doesn't have to do what Brick tells him, that it will be okay. She tells him that they can leave, and he can tell Brick that he's just walking home some girl. It will save face. Ty says he's afraid of Noodle and what he might do to him. Jennica says that she's breaking up with Noodle so as far as he knows she just another girl at the party. Ty agrees.

Analysis

The theme of Peer Pressure is demonstrated heavily in this section through the character of Tyrell. Now that he's without T, who could always protect him from the Kings and their constant pressure to join their group, he feels exposed and vulnerable. He is vulnerable not only to harassment by the Kings, but by the rival gang, the Stingers. If the Stingers were to catch him walking alone, it could be bad. This is why he begrudgingly accepts Brick's offer of a ride to school.

However, the theme of Violence, is also demonstrated through Tyrell's character and the run in with the Stingers. He realizes that this is the wrong path to take. He can also tell that Jennica shares his same feelings about the gang and at Brick's house they form an uneasy alliance. Though Ty can see the immediate gratification of being with the Kings, he also is smart enough to know and to have witnessed where most of the gang members end up.

To that end, one of the scenes includes Junior in jail. The theme of False Appearances is demonstrated when the reader learns that he didn't actually commit the crime that he is accused of. He allowed the leader of the Kings, Sciss, to talk him into taking the fall for the man's death. This is despite the fact that Junior hadn't been the one that beat the man to death. However, because he was underage, Sciss convinced him that he would only serve a light sentence. Not only was this false, but the fact that Junior is considered a criminal and a murderer is false. Junior remembers the court appointed lawyer that he'd had, and how the man hadn't cared whether he was innocent or not. Junior concludes that to be a young black man in America is the worst thing in the world. This demonstrates the mindset that Racism fosters, and is once again, appearing as a theme.

Will's decision to honor T is significant, as well. Will didn't know T very well, but to Will, T represents how he, Will, might have ended up. Intelligent, but bound and forced into



living a life that was unwanted, Will feels that he had been granted a real chance to get ahead where T never did, and now never will. He goes to the place where T was killed and paints a mural in dedication of T.

Irony shows up once again in this chapter as the reader watches Reverend Sloan confront T's father, Terrence. Sloan berates Terrence for showing up to use his son's death for making a name for himself, to benefit from a relationship that he never had with his son. The irony, of course, is the fact that the Reverend, himself, is doing the same thing, capitalizing on T's death to further his political agenda and career.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the irony in this section.

Discussion Question 2

How is the theme of Violence and Racism discussed in this section?

Discussion Question 3

What is Junior's conclusion about life in general?

Vocabulary

high-wattage, swivels, intervened, altercation, gauntlet, mechanically, harassment, constricts, scurries, rendered, fringe, eclipse, lugging, begonia, radar, stammer

Day Seven

Summary

The Reverend speaks to yet another media outlet. He is irritable and wishes he'd never dragged Tariq's name into this storm. The reporter tries to manipulate Sloan into declaring war, but he deftly deflects those questions. The fact of the matter is that the questions that are being asked by the media of Jack Franklin are the questions that the police should have been asking all along. And why aren't the police talking to the other people who were there, Sloan counters. The interview concludes and Sloan feels bitter.

Tyrell is in the nurse's office at school. Drinking and drugs don't work for Tyrell he decides. He's only been sick at school one other time. That time it was a stomach flu and when he went home he'd caught his father in bed with another woman. His father had hated him ever since. Now, the nurse is sending him home again, only he knows he can't go home. He feels helpless. There's nowhere to go. He and T used to collect cans from people's homes for spending money. Ty saves his to put toward his college application fees. T would want him to keep up the route. He goes to several houses and soon has two trashbags full. The last house he goes to is a white man's house. He tells Ty that he has a big load this time. Ty apologizes as he didn't realize that the man had company. And then Ty sees who the company is: Jack Franklin.

The police bang on Vernesha's door, then when Redeema opens the door they push through and hand her a search warrant. They are looking for proof of gang or drug activity. They pen Vernesha and Redeema in the corner, but Tina darts between them all. They ignore her. Tina hides under her bed in her room. Then, the police go through the entire house. They come back with Tariq's can money. They write Drug Money on the plastic evidence bag. Vernesha calls Sloan.

Tyrell decides to take some of his can money and buy a bus ticket to the state prison to visit Junior. He gets there and Junior figures out why he's there. He tells him that if he had to do it all over again, he'd stay strong, stay true to their promise to stay strong. He urges Ty to stay strong, do what he's got to do to stay out of it. They are cut off before Ty can ask him what he should do about his Franklin discovery.

Analysis

The reader learns more about Tyrell's home life when Tyrell recalls going home from school because of illness and finding his father in bed with another woman. He also pinpoints his father's dislike of him to that exact moment. Tyrell does not want to go home and find his father there. T is gone, he can't go home, which makes Ty terribly unsettled and nervous. He decides to talk to Junior, to get his input on everything that is happening. He also needs to know what to do with the new information that he's learned....he knows where Jack Franklin has been hiding.



The theme of Racism and Violence are both touched upon when the police enter Vernesha's house and refuse to allow either woman to move from the spot of the house where they've cornered them. Tina, however, manages to evade them and hides the knife in her room. Unfortunately, the police continue to look for anything that might link him to a gang, and they find T's recycling money. They claim that it is drug money, indicating that the police are grasping at straws to make their story stick. The gross miscarriage of justice is blatantly obvious to the reader as well as T's family. Even Tina looks on with disgust.

Much of the interaction with the police is shown from the perspectives of Redeema and Tina. This is an interesting choice by the author, because these two characters have the ability to see things for what they truly are, and to suppress their emotions long enough to analyze what should be done. Though Tina is learning disabled, she retains enough ability to size up the fact that the police are not there to find her brother's killer. Even in her 'simple' state, she can see that there is wrongness in this path the police are following.

Discussion Question 1

Why are the police acting as they are?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the Reverend Sloan upset at the media?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Ty's visit to Junior and what came of his visit.

Vocabulary

hangover, inevitable, grinds, eponymous, inaccurate, accusation, contradictory, urge, flawed, leveled, eviscerated, blurbs, humiliation, misinterpreted, churning, bulging, underage



Day Eight

Summary

Will puts on his hoodie that he borrowed. There's going to be a hoodie march in support of T's death. Will plans to sneak out and attend. Steve catches him and they argue about going down to Underhill. Finally, Steve understands. Will doesn't say it, but Will believes that T's fate could have been his own. Steve helps Will find a better hoodie, then puts one on himself. He drives Will down to Underhill and Will shows him around the area. The parade starts and the chanting starts: Justice for Tariq. At one point Steve puts his arm around Will's shoulder. When Will looks up at him he sees that Steve has tears coming down his face, and then Will realizes that even though Steve is not his father, he loves him. And Steve cares. It is a moment that they share.

Tom Arlen still has Jack Franklin at his house. They can both hear the chanting from the hoodie march. Jack is thinking that he should have left town. Tom says that they are fine, but he is worried. Jennica decides to go to the hoodie march with Kimberly. When they get there they link arms, and soon Ty shows up and he links up with them, too. Jennica's phone keeps buzzing but she's not taking Noodle's calls. They aren't there for more than a few minutes when Jennica freezes. Noodle is steaming towards her with a look in his eyes.

Noodle pulls Jennica out of Kimberly's arms. Ty backs away, looking down. Jennica tells him that it is over and done. He grabs her arm and squeezes it until she screams from the pain. Realizing that people are looking at him he releases her. He asks if there's another guy and she assures him that she's just done with all of it and she wants out of her relationship and she wants out of Underhill. Noodle storms off.

Noodle goes back to where Brick and the Kings are, fuming. He continues to work himself up, and then he spots Tyrell. Brick tells him to back off. There are too many cameras and they don't need the bad press. He physically has to restrain Noodle to get him to calm down. Then Tyrell comes up behind them and tells Noodle that he knows where Jack Franklin is hiding.

Brick, Sammy, Noodle, take Ty to the side. They question him about where Franklin is. Noodle says that he will 'ice' him good. Brick turns to Ty and says, "Ty found him. Ty gets to finish him. Then he'll be a King." Ty swallows hard. This isn't what he bargained for. They decide that after the hoodie march breaks up, then Ty will do it. They go back to Brick's house to wait for the march to break up. But the march doesn't break up until somewhere near dawn. At this point Brick and Noodle are too wasted to care. Sammy catches Ty sneaking out of the house and catches up with him. He tells Ty that he knows he doesn't want to do it. Sammy convinces him to just tell him and he'll take care of everything. Ty brightens and gives him the information.



Analysis

The significance of the hoodie is explored in this section. The fact that the media has stated that T was wearing a hoodie and that this contributed to his being shot has outraged the community. In protest the community are organizing a hoodie march in Underhill. The hoodie symbolizes how ridiculous the statement by the media was and to bring attention to T's senseless death.

Will is determined to be a part of this protest. In Tariq, Will sees how he, himself, may have turned out had he stayed in Underhill. He also feels part of the community still and wants to support them. His mother has taken away all of his hoodies, denying Will's ability to protest. However, he has managed to borrow one from a friend and is planning to sneak out. Steve catches him and argues with him. But then, Steve takes a step back and realizes that the march is more than just a way to act out against Will's parents. Steve decides to honor this decision by Will and helps him find a better hoodie, then goes with him. This illustrates the theme of Community.

At the march that evening, Kimberly and Jennica meet and link up arms. This also demonstrates the theme of Community. This is not only in a show of solidarity for the hoodie comments and the racial bias, but it is also a type of solidarity between the two of them, that they will do what they must to get out of Underhill. When Ty arrives, they invite him over and link arms with him, too, thus including him in their small group. This feeling of protection ends when Noodle arrives and confronts Jennica and Ty. Jennica tells him that they are through and then Noodle threatens Ty. Ty tells him that he and Jennica are just friends. To seal the deal and take their mind off of the situation, he impulsively tells Brick that he knows where Jack is. This backfires when Brick tells Ty that he can have the 'privilege' of killing Jack.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of the hoodie and why the community decides to have a march.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ty offer up Jack Franklin's location?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of Community suggested in this section?



Vocabulary

shroud, jolt, vigil, smirks, gutter, defiance, murals, eerie, burst, initiative, tremble, bolstering, nudge, recruitment, reapers,amid, musty, murderous, dusk, dampen, deflates, bluster



Day Nine

Summary

Tyrell, his father, and Brick sit in a booth at the diner. Brick has just finished telling Ty's father about his plans for Ty. Ty's father tells him that he should go with Brick, that it will toughen him up. He can't make eye contact with his son. Ty is appalled and disgusted by his father's weakness and distance, that he won't try and protect him. Ty doesn't bother to take his backpack with him. His life is over, and he knows it.

Just as Ty stands on the sidewalk with Brick, the knife in his hand, he sees Tina running down the sidewalk. She's not supposed to be out by herself, he tells Brick. He starts to go to her, but Noodle tells him to forget her. Suddenly, Ty realizes what Tariq really would have done and what Tariq really stood for. And she was running down the sidewalk. He turns to Brick and drops the knife, telling him to kill him if he needed to do that. To his surprise, Brick's eyes soften and he tells Ty to go get her. As Ty crosses the street he hears Noodle calling him names.

Ty reaches Tina and she tells him that she can't go home until the hiding is finished. He questions her and she shows him her backpack. In it is the red handled knife. Ty takes her hand and they go to the cemetery. When they reach the gates Tina reacts as she did before. She resists. Ty tells her that it is the best place to hide it, doesn't she think? She agrees, then holds on to Ty just like she used to hold on to Tariq. She thinks that if she closes her eyes he feels like Tariq.

Vernesha follows Tina when she leaves the apartment, but doesn't let the little girl see her. She's been acting strangely, ever since the police came by. Now, she knows if she follows her daughter she might get some answers. She sees Ty take her hand. She follows at a distance and is shocked to see Tina agree to go into the cemetery.

Sammy goes to Arlen's house where Franklin is staying. When Tom Arlen answers the door, Sammy puts his gun under the man's chin and pushes him into the room. He ties Arlen up and threatens to cut him for harboring Franklin. Arlen tells him that there's no one there. Sammy goes through the house. It is evident that Jack has been there, but isn't any longer.

Back at the cemetery Tina and Ty bury the knife. Tina asks if Ty thinks that Tariq was bad. Ty tells her that she knew him better than anyone, what did she think? She says that Tariq was just Tariq. Then, taking Ty's hand, walking toward her mother who is waiting for them from the gate, she tells Ty..."and you just be you, too."

Analysis

The theme of Peer Pressure is presented in a different way in this section. Not only is Tyrell being pressured by Brick to join the gang and hurt Jack Franklin, but Ty's own



father is supporting Brick's decisions for Ty. He tells his son that it will 'toughen' him up. Ty, at this point in the novel, has hit rock bottom. His dreams seem like pipe dreams. No one gets out of Underhill alive, he thinks.

Ty's savior comes in an unlikely form: Tina. Tina has taken T's knife and is going to hide it so that the police don't find it. Seeing Tina, then hearing Noodle telling him to forget about her brings Ty to his senses and he tells Noodle that he won't do what he and Brick (and his father) are asking him to do. He shoves the knife back in Noodle's hand and goes to Tina.

Once again Tina is confronted with the gates. She reacts as she did before, refusing to go in. To go through them is to acknowledge that her brother is gone. Ty allows her to hold on to him, as she used to with T, and she is able to go through the gates. In Ty she has found someone that will keep her safe, just like T used to. She is able to say goodbye to her brother. In turn, she is able to remind Tyrell that he needs to be strong like her brother and just be who he was meant to be.

In contrast, Sammy takes the knife that Ty had originally been given and goes with Noodle to Tom Arlen's house. The theme of Violence erupts as they tie up and beat Tom for harboring Jack Franklin. Though Jack isn't there, it is evident that he has been there and they exact their vengeance on Tom, instead. Thus, the point is made: violence doesn't discriminate.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Peer Pressure in this section.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Ty's turning point in this section.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Tina finally able to go through the gates?

Vocabulary

liberally, pundit, evidence, slouch, punk, draping, reluctant, synergy, debris, flutters, involuntary, avenge, blurt, quell, lounging, solitude, determination, civilized, trowel



Characters

Jennica

Jennica is 16 and lives in Underhill, a part of the city that is known for its poverty and crime. She lives with her aunt and works in a diner to make money to supplement her aunt's income.

Jennica dates a boy named Noodle who is part of the Kings gang. Noodle is often violent towards Jennica, but she makes excuses for him, stating that he doesn't know his own strength, and that he really loves her.

Jennica gets good grades and plans to go to college, but can't figure how that is going to happen. She doesn't have any friends outside of Noodle, as he is obsessive. Later, she meets Kimberly who is sympathetic and they become friends. This is good because the two of them give each other strength to stand up to the Kings and resist the pressure to turn to drugs or prostitution. They both want to get out of Underhill and there is strength in numbers.

At the onset of the novel it is Jennica who runs across the street to try to save Tariq. She learned CPR the year prior in school and she knew Tariq from school. The shot was in his chest, though, and when she attempts to do CPR the blood splashes up on Jennica's face. She continues CPR until Noodle pulls her off of Tariq as the police and ambulance arrive. They had been smoking pot before Tariq was shot so Noodle is worried that the cops will arrest them.

Sammy

Sammy is one of four boys who formed a pact when they were younger. Sammy and the other three boys agree that they will not join a gang. However, Sammy, who is the most impulsive of the four, eventually is the first to join the Kings. He persuades Junior to follow him. Sammy's father does not like him and often tries to ignore Sammy or pretend that he doesn't have a son. Sammy feels that this is because he isn't big or athletic like some of his father's friends sons.

T (Tariq)

Tariq, nicknamed "T", is not alive for most of the novel. As the novel unfolds the reader learns that Tariq and Tyrell are the only two of the four boys, who made the pact to stay out of gangs, who really followed through with their oaths. Tariq mastered the art of putting off the Kings, just being friendly enough to keep them thinking he was considering joining them, but also befriendng their leader, Brick.



Tariq, on the day he was shot, was rushing to the corner convenient store to pick up a few items for his mother before dinner, and a Snickers bar for his disabled sister, Tina. He purchased the items, then seeing that he was late, dashed out of the store without waiting for his change. The store manager runs after him, yelling for him to stop. Since crime is a problem in the area, one of the other shop owners steps in front of T to stop him. T tells him to get out of his way that he has to get home and this is none of his business.

The man, Brian, a light skinned black man, is very big, and T feels threatened. He drops everything except his sister's candy bar. Brian backs up saying he doesn't want any trouble. At that time a white man driving a blue car drives up, gets out of his car and approaches T and Brian. T tells him to mind his own business. The man opens fire on T. Then, when T is down on the ground, he stands over T and shoots him one more time.

The reader later learns that T had been saving money by recycling cans in the neighborhood in order to pay for college applications and take the SAT exams. That he took care of his disabled sister, who adored him, and that when his father walked out on them, he took up many of the chores that his father had left undone.

Brick

Brick is the leader of the Kings. However, he is not the hothead that the previous leader, Sciss, was. Brick also has a disabled sister, named Sheila, so he and T had bonded over their similar situations. They used to both take their sisters to the park when all of them were younger and it was safer to go to the park.

When they would take their sisters to the park, they would talk about the Kings and how their organization was being mismanaged. Brick fantasized about how he would do things differently. In the present, Brick has been the leader of the Kings for a while and has implemented most of the strategies that he and T had discussed. He wants desperately to include T in his organization because he knows that T is intelligent.

Noodle

Noodle is Brick's second in command in the gang. He is of average to low intelligence, a drug addict, and is violent toward women, in particular his girlfriend, Jennica. He can't understand the big fuss over T's death when there are literally dozens of murders happening in this section of town all of the time.

He takes the limelight when the media find out that he was one of the first on the scene when T was shot, and that he witnessed the shooting from across the park. He pretends that he liked and knew Tariq, when in reality he hated T and was jealous of Brick's obvious preference for T to be his second in command.

Noodle is also violent toward Jennica, as the reader learns. Jennica decides to break things off with Noodle and it almost becomes lethally violent during a peaceful march in



the downtown area. However, Brick reminds him that the Kings don't need the bad press. Noodle is humiliated by Jennica walking out on him, but Brick assures Jennica that she has nothing to fear from any of the Kings.

Vernesha

Vernesha is Tariq's mother. She has had a rough life, as her own mother had to raise her and her siblings alone. Her mother lives with her, and so she has a disabled child, her mother, and her son to take care of.

Vernesha is devastated when T is shot and says at one point that she wishes that she could hate Jack Franklin for shooting her boy, but the sorrow is so great that this is all she has room for in her heart.

Vernesha is convinced by Reverend Sloan that she needs to address the media and the community about Tariq's death and to defend the allegations that he was a drug user, a thief, and a gang member.

Tina

Tina is 7 and is Tariq's younger sister. Though the reader never learns the type of disability that she has, it is clear that her thoughts are disjointed and immature. However, she is very clear on some things: she loves her brother and her family, and bad knives belong to bad people.

Tina finds a red handled knife in T's room when she sneaks in there to be near his things. She knows that it is a bad thing and that if someone finds it in there that the bad things they are saying about her brother will be true. So, she takes the knife and hides it in her room. Later, she and Ty take the knife to the cemetery and bury it.

Tina, at the end of the novel, changes her mind about the police in her community. She has a book called *Helpful People*. On page three and page four it talks about the police and how they are there to make people feel safe, and that the police can be trusted to do the right thing. She rips those pages out and throws them away because, in her mind, they lie.

Tyrell

Tyrell is best friends with Tariq. They were not together the day that Tariq is shot, however. Both of them were part of a larger group of boys (four in all) who agreed to never join a gang. By the time they are sixteen, though, half of them had already joined a gang. With Tariq gone, Ty feels unprotected and the pressure to join the Kings is intense.



Tyrell also wants to go to college. He's very good with numbers and goes to a science camp out of state every summer. He looks forward to that happening every year as it gets him out of Underhill and it encourages him to aim for a better way of life. At the time the novel takes place, there are only a few weeks left before summer break and Ty thinks if he can hold out from joining the Kings until the summer, then they will forget about him.

Brick is determined that since T is gone that Tyrell will need the Kings' protection. This is why he hounds Ty mercilessly to join them. He insists that Tyrell come to his house for a Kings houseparty. Ty doesn't want to attend in the least, but feels that if he doesn't that he might become a target.

Brick picks him up and while they are on their way to Brick's house they almost get into a gang battle with a rival gang. Tyrell sees that hanging with the Kings could wind up with him being dead like Tariq. Jennica witnesses Ty's horror and at the house party tells him that she wants out, too. The two of them join forces and leave the party together. This, of course, doesn't go down well with Jennica's boyfriend Noodle.

Ty learns where Jack Franklin is hiding and in a moment of panic trades the information for his own safety. The gamble doesn't pay off as Brick seizes upon the opportunity to make Ty one of the Kings by offering him the opportunity to 'blood in'. He gives Ty a knife and tells him to just go cut Jack up a little. Noodle says that he will give him a beating for good measure.

Ty goes to visit Junior, one of the other four boys who'd sworn off gangs. Junior is in jail already, for a murder he didn't commit. The former leader of the Kings, Sciss, had told Junior to take the fall for the murder as juvies only get a few year's sentence. Ty wants to talk to Junior and get some advice as to what he should do about the Kings. Junior tells him to save himself and stay out of all of it. Keep the oath, he tells him.

In the end, Ty stands up to Brick and Noodle, telling them that this isn't the life he wants for himself. He says that none of them knew T like he did and that they keep saying that what they want him to do would be what T would want him to do. But, he tells them, they are wrong. Noodle goes into Tom's house looking for Jack, but he's already gone.

Kimberly

Kimberly works as a hair stylist at the corner beauty salon. When T is killed she refuses to go and see what the sirens are for. Sirens in her neighborhood are frequent and she likes to believe that inside the salon it is a safe haven, where the ugliness of the 'hood' stays out.

Later, Kimberly is recruited by Reverend Sloan to do his makeup and he makes her see that she could do more than just live, work, and die in her neighborhood. She also develops a crush on the Reverend, feelings that he almost takes advantage of.



Kimberly lives with a roommate in her own apartment. When Jennica comes in to have her hair done for T's funeral, the girls talk. Later, at the march, they hook arms in solidarity and form a bond. The girls plan to help each other do what it takes to stay safe in Underhill and to leave as soon as they are able.

Tom Arlen

Tom Arlen has lived in Underhill for more than twenty years. He's never had any problems even though he is a white man. His friend, Jack Franklin, visits him to borrow a car while his own car is in the garage being fixed. Jack does not live in Underhill.

As Jack is driving away from Tom's place, he sees what he believes is a white man being held at gunpoint by a black youth. Jack jumps from Tom's borrowed car, shoots T twice, then speeds away from the scene.

Tom doesn't know how to feel about the entire event. He believes that his friend truly thought that T had a gun, and that he was saving Brian from being shot by T. He also hates that the entire thing happened at all. Tom agrees to give Jack a hiding place when the media attention gets to be too much at Jack's house. Tom is later tied up and gagged by Noodle, then beaten for harboring Jack.

Jack Franklin

Jack Franklin is Tom Arlen's friend. He comes to Underhill to borrow a car from Tom as his own car is being repaired. The two talk for a while, drink some beer, then Jack leaves. On his way home he sees a large white man being threatened by a black youth. Jumping from his car he approaches the scene where the black youth tells him that what is happening isn't any of his business. Jack tells him that he's making it his business. Jack swears that there was a gun, and he shoots T in the chest. Then, he stands over him and shoots him again, insuring that T is dead.

Later, after Jack cooperates with the police, he is let out of jail as the police believe that it was a case of self defense. The black community are all up in arms because had the circumstances been reversed, no one would have been released from jail. This makes Jack a hunted man, not only by the King gang members and the members of the community, but by the media.

Redeema

Redeema is Vernesha's mother, and T and Tina's grandmother. They sometimes call her their greatma or Nana. She had to raise her own children as a single parent, so she helps Vernesha as much as she can. She helped to deliver both of the babies with Ms. Rosalita's help. She helped raise Tina while Vernesha had to go back to work when Terrence left the family.



Redeema takes charge of Tina after T's death and manages her through the funeral, answering her questions, and often breaking the rules that Vernesha has set down because she feels that Tina needs closure and doesn't need to be made to try to understand something as big as death or murder.

Melody

Melody lives in Sammy's apartment building. She sees Sammy shortly after T has been shot. Sammy tells her that Tariq is dead and that a white man shot him dead on the steps.

Melody is shocked that T is dead. T had been her first real kiss in school. They had sort of drifted apart over the years, but he was always a good person. She can't believe that he is gone.

Will (eMZee)

Will is not one of the original four boys that swore that they would not join gangs, but he is friends with them. He is in a difficult position because his mother remarried a man whose income allowed them to move from Underhill. They live in a nice suburb. His stepfather, Steve, has tried to be understanding, but also wants Will to understand that the way many of the young men act in Underhill isn't the way that leads to any sort of success.

Will doesn't think his stepfather 'gets it'. He thinks that his stepfather has 'sold out' and is acting white. But, Will is worried because so far he's managed to hide the fact that his grades are good from the rest of the Kings. He's been lying to his mother about going to the library after school each day, and instead he's been going to Brick's houseparties.

However, T's death brings home many of the things that his stepfather has been telling him about Underhill and living that kind of life. Will also sneaks out of his room at night and creates murals on large blank walls in Underhill. He's proud of his tags. He goes to the vigil for T and is struck by the sense of community that he feels there. He wants to belong to something like that.

When he dresses up to go to the hoodie march in Underhill, his stepfather tries to stop him. Then, finally, his stepfather understands how this has impacted Will and he agrees to go with him. Will changes his mind about his stepfather and decides that his stepfather actually cares for him.

Steve (stepdad)

Steve Connors is Will's stepfather. He married Will's mother and they moved out of Underhill. Steve has worked hard to get where he is and to have enjoyed the success he has had as a black man. He tries to show Will how to be successful and how to



make something of himself. It is a difficult struggle as he is not Will's real father, and Will feels that he has to act 'black' in order to fit in. Steve tries to tell him that it's not like that everywhere, that there are others out there like him that value education.

Reverend Alabaster Sloan

Reverend Alabaster Sloan is a loathsome character in this novel. He is running for political office (though the reader is never told which office) and sees the incident in Underhill as a way of furthering his own agenda and platform, which is built upon racial disparities. He brings an entire media circus to Underhill. In one respect, he brings attention to the ongoing problems in Underhill, and other places like it, but on the other hand, he ends up placing himself front and center in the middle of an incident that he wasn't a part of, concerning individuals and a community that he wasn't a part of.

Ironically, he confronts T's father when he comes to the funeral and speaks to the media. The Reverend tells Terrence that he has some nerve using his son's death to make himself look good. This is highly ironic because this is just exactly what the Reverend is doing.

Additionally, it becomes evident that the Reverend has had many affairs and sexual encounters with his interns and assistants, all who are young and naive. He enlists Kimberly's help as an assistant when he arrives in Underhill, and then proceeds to flirt with danger the entire time. He doesn't view Kimberly as anything more than a good time, though she feels that he sees her as something worth having, that she is intelligent and talented.

Terrence Johnson

Terrence Johnson is T's father. He walked out on the family when T was ten years old, and Tina was only three. He used to cheat on T's mother all of the time, according to Ty's reports. He tries to assume the role of a grieving parent, which rubs Ty the wrong way. When they end up in the church bathroom together, it is all Ty can do to not scream at him for his hypocrisy.

Junior

Junior doesn't have too many pages dedicated to him as, of the time of the novel, he is already incarcerated. He was coerced into taking the blame for a murder that he didn't commit. Sciss, the former leader of the Kings, killed a man, and then asked Junior to take the fall for it because Junior was a juvenile. Thinking he would only get a few years, Junior agreed. The novel indicates that Junior was given a life sentence.

Ty goes to visit Junior in jail and asks him for advice about how to resist the Kings, or if he should continue to try to resist them. Junior tells him to fight to stay out of the gangs as long as possible. Junior felt that he didn't have a choice to join the gang because his



family was so poor, and his grades were so bad in school, that there was no other way to make money. He tells Ty that he and T were different, with the brains to make it out. He urges him to do that.

Sciss

Sciss never appears in person in the novel, but from all accounts the former leader of the Kings was ruthless and disorganized. He routinely engaged in horrific acts, put his men at risk constantly, and continued to work in ways that got nearly all of his men arrested. Sciss also set up Junior to take the fall for a murder that he, Sciss, committed.

Rocky

Rocky owns the store where T came in to get his groceries. When T left without his change, he ran after T and shouted for him to stop. Rocky regrets going after T because if he hadn't called out for him, Brian wouldn't have stopped him, that man in the car wouldn't have shot him, and a mother wouldn't be burying a son.

Ms. Rosalita

Ms. Rosalita never had any children of her own, but she boasts at having over a thousand that she's delivered. She is the community's oldest resident and often sits out in the community garden in the evenings. The young people often come and sit with her and she shares things with them. She is very wise and has seen much happen in all of her years living in Underhill.

Sheila

Sheila is Brick's younger sister. Like Tina, Sheila has a learning disability. Brick takes the money that he 'earns' from the Kings and uses it to keep his sister in the residential facility nearby. Sheila is inconsolable when T is killed because she and Tina had played together with their brothers in the park when they were younger.



Symbols and Symbolism

Milk jug with bullet through it

When T is shot he had been going to the store to get some items for his mother. One of the bullets hits the milk jug as well. The bullet through the milk jug symbolizes death of something pure and unspoiled. As the novel progresses, this rings true as T was shown to be one of the good kids in the neighborhood, with goals and dreams that would get him out of there.

Snickers Bar

T had gone to the store to get some items for his mother, but he also planned to get a Snickers bar for his disabled sister, Tina. It was something that he always did for her. The Snickers bar is later found to have been the culprit in the shooting, as Jack thought, in the half light on the street that the Snickers bar was a gun.

The Gun

The gun is hotly debated for most of the novel. Those who knew T the best eventually made the case for the fact that he never had the gun. On a deeper level, however, the gun represents violence and a desire to be plugged into a way of life that takes not value life, views the world as a hostile place, and is a dark symbol for a never ending life of broken dreams. The fact that neither Ty nor T own a gun, nor want one, indicates that they were two of the boys that might have had a chance to make it out of Underhill.

Conversely, Brick loves his guns and has an entire hidden panel in his closet full of them. Sammy also has one gun which he is very protective of. He finds himself wishing that T had a gun so that he could have taken it when he was shot. Noodle feels the same way about his gun and is always on the lookout for more guns.

College

College is a way out for most of the characters in this novel. Melody, Kimberly, Jennica, Ty and T all want to go to college and have been working quietly toward this goal. All of them have taken additional jobs to make sure they have money to take SAT exams and to pay for the college applications. College is a protection from the gangs.



Underhill

Underhill is the area where T and most of the characters live. It is an impoverished and violent part of the city. The name, itself, has significance and it suggests that the people who live there are somehow 'under' the rest of the city.

Flowers and Candles (memorial)

Where T is gunned down a makeshift memorial is created with candles and flowers. When Will goes to the spot to create his memorial to T, she shoves the flowers and candles aside, stating that they would fade and melt, but that his art never would.

Sloan's Makeup

When Kimberly places makeup on the Reverend, it symbolizes the fact that he puts on a face for the media and the rest of the public. He hides behind a false mask and isn't as he seems.

Ice

Will lives with his mother and stepfather in a better part of the city. He feels odd having his old friends over because they have things so nice. He focuses on the ice machine and knows that he would never hear the end of it if his friends from Underhill could see the fancy ice dispenser that they have on their refrigerator.

Vigil

The vigil that is held that evening after T's death is a time for the community to meet and grieve openly over T's death. Will sneaks out and goes to it and when the singing starts, he feels as if he is part of a larger group, that he belongs. He likes that feeling. Vigil, Ms. Rosalita muses, means to 'wait', and she thinks that none of the young people who attend the vigil have any idea of how to 'wait' for anything.

Change from the Store

The entire event was set into motion when Rocky called out for T to come back for his \$1.73 in change. Literally, for \$1.73 a young man lost his life. Rocky blames himself.

Sleeping bags

When Tyrell, Sammy, T, and Junior were ten years old they all zipped together three sleeping bags into one big one. Then they all got in it at a sleepover at T's house.



Sometimes they would have the sleepovers at Sammy's house, but Sammy's father was mean. While they were in the bag, the four musketeers they called themselves, they pledged and swore to each other that they would never become Kings or Stingers. They promised to help each other stay out of the gangs.

Apples and Bananas

Junior remembers how he and T would go through the lunch line at school and T would get a banana and Junior would get an apple. Then when they were at the table, they would split them so each could have both. While in jail, going through the lunch line, Junior feels a sense of loss because he had high hopes for T going on to make something of himself. There's no one to share with anymore.

Tiny Ketchup Bottles

Kimberly is impressed by the food that the Reverend Sloan orders for them in his hotel room. They come with their own miniature ketchup bottles. Seeing her joy in them, he makes sure to order additional bottles. She doesn't use all of them and takes them home to put on her window ledge where she can see them.

At first, the bottles represent her feelings for Reverend Sloan, but then later, they represent the possibility of a better life outside of Underhill.

Helpful People

Tina has a children's book that is her favorite. It is called *Helpful Friends*. In its covers are pictures of lawyers, doctors, firefighters, and policemen. On page three it says: *Policemen solve problems and help keep you safe.* And page four says: *Policemen are always on your side.*

After T is shot and she comes back from the funeral, she crumples up page four. Symbolically, at the age of 7 she has decided that the book lied. That policemen are not there to keep her or her community safe, and that they certainly aren't there to help her.

Hoodies

The media starts pushing the notion that T was shot because he was wearing a hoodie pulled up over his head. In defiance, many of the residents of Underhill start sporting hoodie jackets in solidarity. Later, there is a march where everyone wears their hoodies. The hoodie becomes a symbol of solidarity and of asking for the right thing to be done.



Red Handled Knife

When someone is indoctrinated into the Kings, they have to kill someone with a special red handled knife. Tina finds a knife like this in T's room and decides that she needs to hide it. She spends many days wondering if her brother really was a gang member like the press was saying. Later, it comes out that T took the knife from Junior after Junior cut the man for the Kings, because he thought that without the knife they couldn't pin the crime on Junior. They were wrong.

Later, Tina shows Ty the knife and they bury it in the cemetery so that no one will ever find it. They are in essence burying the hold that the Kings have on their families.



Settings

Peach Street

This is the street where Tariq is gunned down by Jack Franklin and where the demonstrations take place later.

The Johnson Apartment

Tariq's apartment is where the red handled knife is hidden (that Tina finds and hides). It is where the Reverend comes to visit Vernesha and Redeema. It is also where Ty remembers being when they were all younger.

Tom Arlen's House

Tom hides Jack Franklin at his house after he shoots Tariq. Tom regrets hiding the man, but he can't turn his back on his friend.

Sloan's Hotel

Reverend Sloan has a hotel room. He invites Kimberly there, and it is where he flirts with the idea of having an affair with Kimberly.

The Diner

This is where Jennica works, where she gives an on camera interview, and where Noodle confronts her when they break up.



Themes and Motifs

Racism

The novel, *How it Went Down*, has as one of its main themes that of racism. The novel starts with assumptions being made about T, the victim, simply because he was a intercity black youth. Wearing a dark hoodie, pulling it up over his face, and moving quickly from the store, many people assumed that he must have stolen something.

In fact, the police, after the shooting had occurred, kept trying to get Rocky, the store's owner, to tell them that T had a gun, that he was a gang member, and that he had stolen items from his store. Rocky refused to tell them that, but the newspapers didn't want to print the truth, so they wrote in ambiguous terms which made T look like the stereotypical dangerous black gang member.

The shooter, Jack Franklin, assumed that T started the confrontation with Brian, and he also assumed that T had a gun. This was done because Jack saw that T was a black boy arguing with a white man. In fact, Jack told Tom that someone had to stand up for people against the black gang members.

Racism is also depicted as being exploited by those looking to advance their own careers. This is certainly the case of Reverend Alabaster Sloan. The fact that he is, himself, a black man, only adds insult to injury. It may be that he is conflicted and feels upset by the incident, but as Tyrell points out, the good Reverend certainly didn't make a point of showing up for every other black boy that got murdered. It's just that it's an election year, points out Tyrell, and Reverend is down in the polls.

When the police present T's mother with a search warrant, they tell her that they are looking for anything that would tie T into gang activity. They emerge with a baggie full of money. This is money that the reader knows T earned by collecting and recycling cans with Tyrell, but the police shake the baggie in Vernesha's face and label the baggie: Drug Money.

Violence

The book starts off with a violent 'bang', literally. T is gunned down by a man who doesn't live in the area and assumes that something is going on that is not. T was already experiencing violence, however.

Brick, someone that he shared a bond with because of their sisters, instigated some of the largest portion of the violence in the area. He continues to pressure T, Tyrell, Sammy, and Junior to be a part of the Kings. Eventually, Junior and Sammy cave in and forget the promise that they'd made to the other boys. As a result, both Sammy and Junior have injured or killed people to be a part of the gang. Violence is shown to be a self perpetuating crime.



Violence also erupts when the community's members are outraged because the police chief let Jack Franklin go, claiming that he shot T in self defense. This leads to many of the community members looking for Franklin. And, when Ty finds out where Jack is hiding, he thinks nothing of giving that information to Brick, who wants him to complete the cycle of violence by harming Jack.

Noodle is violent towards Jennica, showing that not all violence is in the streets. It happens behind closed doors, too. Noodle is physically abusive to Jennica and she finally breaks up with him and is able to see that there is a better way to live. Kimberly, her friend, has been the victim of crime and bullying her entire life. Much of the bullying had been at the hands of T and Brick.

False Appearances

From the beginning, there is a plethora of misinformation surrounding the circumstances leading up to and including the shooting of Tariq Johnson.

Initially, on Days 1-3 no one's stories seem to gel. Someone says that they saw him with a gun, others say that he didn't have a gun, that the only thing in his hand was a Snickers bar.

Brick and Sammy both swear that T had a gun, while Tyrell and a whole host of others state that T wasn't the type of kid that would have a gun, even to hold it for someone. There was no gun found on him. Brick claimed that someone must have taken the gun to protect T, but in the end, the police state that there was no gun and that most likely he didn't have a gun.

Jack Franklin certainly thought that T had a gun and was holding it on Brian. That's why he charged out of his car brandishing his pistol. Jack assumed that Rocky wanted Tariq to stop because he had stolen something, when in fact, Rocky was just trying to give Tariq his change back.

The Kings appear to be all about community and solidarity and taking care of each other, but in the end, they are just an organized criminal unit. Ty and T are smart enough to see this, but their friends are not. Junior even warns Ty when he goes to see him not to be lured into the gang with their promises of quick money, drugs, girls, or protection.

Peer Pressure

Will is an interesting character in the novel and he serves to represent the theme of Peer Pressure the most. Will and his mother lived in Underhill for many years until his mother remarried Steve Connors. They moved out of Underhill into a nice neighborhood and a nice house. Will has nicer things than any of his former friends and this embarrasses him. He thinks that Steve doesn't understand why this would be a problem. To fit in, Will has to dress a certain way, not stick out, and talk a certain way.



When Will is home, however, he is expected to speak correctly, maintain good grades, and dress properly. When he tries to explain why he feels that he needs to dress like the others do, his mother won't hear him. Finally, when Steve sees that going to the hoodie march is that important to Will, his stepfather sees why it is important to Will.

Will feels that he is under pressure from his parents to do well in school and pursue a life that is deemed to be 'white' by his old friends. When he is in his former neighborhood they expect him to do certain things that he knows are wrong, but he does them so that he can fit in.

In the end, the author seems to suggest that one doesn't lose their ethnicity simply because they learn to 'play the game' even in a largely white dominated society. Will begins to see Steve's accomplishments, looks at Tyrell's stand against the Kings, and realizes that he can just be himself and that is enough.

Community

Ms. Rosalita seems to embody much of the theme of Community. She is one of the oldest women in the community of Underhill and she has lived there her entire life. She sits in the community garden in her worn lawnchair and speaks to everyone that comes by. They often stop to sit with her and ask her advice. She used to be the community's midwife and has delivered almost all of the community's residents.

The theme of Community is first viewed when Jack Franklin is let out of jail, claiming self defense. Those in the community who knew T and his family, knew that this was not a case of self defense and are outraged that Jack was so easily let go without more investigation.

The theme of Community is also shown when there is a vigil. Will attends this and suddenly feels as if he is a part of something larger and supportive. He likes how that feels and it makes him ambivalent toward living in the suburbs. Later, when there is a hoodie march to commemorate and bring attention to T's murder, Will and his stepfather, Steve, take part in the march.

The community comes together to bury T and it is the community that gather around T's family to keep the media from them. They also make sure that Vernesha and Redeema don't have to worry about food, going to work, or anything like that for a few days while things are sorted out.

When Terrence shows up and wants to be a part of the media frenzy, many of the community members come down on him for his desertion of the family. They tell him that he has some nerve coming back now that his only son is dead. The community, then, supports, defends, and advocates for its members.

In that respect, then, and by that definition, the Kings and the Stingers have developed their own type of 'community' within their own organization. It has its own culture, mission, rules, and codes of conduct that they all strictly obey.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view is spread across that of 10 characters, with five of them having more chapters and space dedicated to their thoughts. Jennica, Kimberly, Tina, Tyrell, and Reverend Sloan tell the majority of the story and all come from such different angles and perspectives on the incident that the reader is able to get a fuller picture than otherwise would be possible.

The author does this so that not only will more detail be available for the reader, but to also depict the types of personalities this type of poverty and violence develops in the inner city. The themes revolve around the points of view and the characters, all of which are designed to point toward the plight of poor black youths trying to break free of a cycle of violence, fear, and poverty in the areas in which they live.

Language and Meaning

The language may be difficult for struggling readers as much of the dialogue is written using the vernacular of the street. Words such as woulda, ghettophobe, and musta are used often, as well as swear words and cursing. Grammar and usage issues are included in dialogue as a characterization device.

Structure

The story is initially told as if the reader were silently riding along with the police as they interview the main witnesses and family members. There are also police dispatcher calls that are offered in transcript form, newspaper articles, and media reports from the television, as well as flashbacks utilized by the main characters.

There are days depicting the different sections instead of chapters. Each day represents an actual day in the timeline surrounding T's death and burial. The reader sees how, in the span of 9 days, the entire neighborhood of Underhill is turned upside down.



Quotes

The spilled milk seemed wronger than the blood, somehow.
-- Jennica (Day One)

Importance: This quote shows how disjointed everything is in Jennica's mind, and how out of place the milk seemed in comparison to all of the devastation.

Some of us look away when bad things happen. Some of us don't want to see.
-- Kimberly (Day One)

Importance: Kimberly was doing a woman's hair at the time of the incident and states that she did not even try to look out of the window because she doesn't like to think about the crime and destruction outside of her shop, which she views as an oasis.

If you dress like a hood, you will get treated like a hood. If you want to get treated like a man, you have to dress like a man. Simple as that.
-- Steve Connors (Day Two)

Importance: Steve is Will's stepfather. He is trying to convince Will that it matters how a person looks and acts, especially if you're black because you are judged twice as much.

I'm too old for tears. Old enough to see we're all caught up in a great big circle. Birth, life, death. I see the beauty in it all.
-- Ms. Rosalita (Day Two)

Importance: Rosalita says that she's been around for so many years, that she's seen it all. She thinks that the way the kids act to one another isn't natural, though, and that the death of the young is always a tragedy.

The people fold me in, and before I can breathe, I feel like a part of something.
-- Will (Day Two)

Importance: Will is embarrassed by the fact that his stepdad, Steve, is well off enough that they don't have to live in the projects anymore. Will still tries to fit in. When he goes to the vigil for T, he feels as if he is part of something larger and he likes it.

Their soft scent covers the hard truth of what has happened here.
-- Rocky (Day Three)

Importance: After the vigil, Rocky says that the scent of fading flowers perfumes the sidewalk where T died, and it seems wrong, somehow, that their scent would distract the mind's focus as to what really happened there.

Ty, my man," he goes. "You so much bigger than one letter."
-- Tyrell (Day Three)



Importance: Tyrell is remembering when he and T had a fight over Tariq's use of the letter "T" as his street name. That was when Tariq had told him that he was more than a street name.

But those sleepovers were maybe the best times we ever had — safe and close. Nothing outside could touch us.
-- Tyrell (Day Four)

Importance: This quote illustrates one of the larger symbols in the story, that of all of the boys agreeing that they would not become part of a gang. All four of them were going to take care of one another, all in one large sleeping bag together.

"My son wasn't perfect, but he was mine. The world isn't perfect, but he should still be in it.
-- Vernesha (Day Five)

Importance: Vernesha says this on the day that her son is to be buried. She wishes that she could hate Jack Franklin, but at this point her sorrow doesn't leave room for anything else.

I've been in this church plenty of times for other mothers' sons. They and I all wish you'd gotten here sooner.
-- Vernesha (Day Five)

Importance: Vernesha says this as part of Tariq's eulogy. She touches upon one of the themes in the novel...racism.

We're both in this car. Both rolling down the same dark road.
-- Sammy (Day Six)

Importance: Sammy says this to himself as he watches Ty get into Brick's car with the rest of them. The look of betrayal on Ty's face makes Sammy ashamed and angry that they are all breaking the oath they'd made to one another so long ago, to stay out of the gangs.

Mom's ifs were always about the future. Mine are all about the past.
-- Junior (Day Six)

Importance: Junior says this as he remembers how his mother used to play the lottery every week. She always planned what she'd do with the winnings. Junior, however, thinks about where he went wrong in the past and how if he'd made different choices things would be different.

"Maybe my whole life has been spent pissing into the ocean, trying to turn it yellow.
-- Reverend Alabaster Sloan (Day Seven)



Importance: The Reverend feels frustrated that he is a part of yet another racially biased investigation and that, once again, even though he's involved, nothing is going to be resolved, and Tariq will still be dead, Franklin still armed.

Jack Franklin killed more than Tariq that day. He killed me, too.
-- Tyrell (Day Nine)

Importance: Tyrell thinks this when he feels that he has no choice but to knife Jack Franklin like Brick wants him to. He sees his whole planned future, of college, of a career, gone in an instant.