



Safe Passage

written by G. Neri

illustrated by David Brame

About the Book

Genre: Fiction/Graphic Novel

Format: Paperback
224 pages, 6-1/2 x 8-7/8

ISBN: 9781643790343

Reading Level: Grade 8

Interest Level: Grades 8–12

Guided Reading Level: Z+

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Childhood Experiences and Memories, Courage, Diversity, Families, Fiction, Friendship, Overcoming Obstacles, Persistence/Grit, Realistic Fiction, Siblings, Teen Interest, YA interest

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/safe-passage

SYNOPSIS

In this stand-alone companion to the bestselling and highly acclaimed *Yummy*, Coretta Scott King Honor-winning author G. Neri returns with an epic journey across the South Side of Chicago for Darius, his little sister Cissy, and his best friend Booger as they set out to find an armored truck that has lost a payload of cash.

Fifteen-year-old Darius is going through a rough time. It's almost been a year since a terrible act of violence took the life of his mother and left him with a wound both in his leg and in his heart. With his stepdad out of work; his little sister, Cissy, always on his case; and the looming prospect of foreclosure on their house, he feels his world closing in on him.

But Darius's best friend, Booger, has a plan. A Brinks armored truck has crashed on a nearby highway and money is blowing everywhere. If they can get across town and back safely, they just might get rich! But to do it, they need to cross through some of the most dangerous streets in Chicago, staying ahead of the gangs that rule those neighborhoods.

Before long, their adventures blow up on social media as Booger documents their search for riches, and everyone is after them. Can they get home without falling victim to the violence of the streets? Sometimes, on the streets of Chicago, there is no Safe Passage.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Note About Teaching with *Safe Passage*

When my first graphic novel, *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty*, came out in 2010, something totally unexpected happened. The book, based on the short life of an eleven-year-old boy who was killed by his own gang in the '90s, took on a life of its own. It seemed to speak to urban kids and adults in a deeply profound way, creating a vehicle for tolerance and understanding beyond anything I could have imagined.

Because of *Yummy*, practically every time I go into a tough neighborhood school or juvie, young people open their hearts to me in a way that has been intensely moving. After *Yummy's* tragic ending, the large controlling gangs that ran the South Side were broken up, their leaders sent to prison, their crime activity thrown into disarray. In their place, hundreds of microgangs, or sets, took their place, and chaos reigned over the city in the 21st century. The result: Chicago became the most gang-infested city in America. These sets, with over 100,000 gang members, were run by younger leaders with little sense of the honor code of previous gangs. The city became a nightmare, especially for students, where an average teen might have to cross several different gang territories just to get from home to school and back again. To counteract this situation, a program called Safe Passage was created, manned by war veterans and other concerned parents, to ensure kids could get to and from school alive. But I started wondering, what would happen if you wandered off the path, deep into unfriendly territory? What if it was because you felt you had no choice? All bets would be off. This became the heart of a new story.

There are amazing people in Chi-town who work tirelessly against gun violence by providing hope, jobs, and direction to at-risk youth. Inspired educators, parents, activists, and social workers involved with peace-seeking and educational organizations have all made an impact. But poverty, inequality, and the closing of schools and after-school programs continue to plague these neighborhoods. *Safe Passage* is a follow-up look at what life after *Yummy* became. When I started writing it in 2018, the Black Lives Matter movement was just taking off, protesting police killings of young men and women from Trayvon Martin to Laquan McDonald to George Floyd. To be trapped between gang and police killings is a lot for any young kid to deal with. Who wouldn't dream of getting their hands on big money to find a way out? But what would you risk to get it? What path would you take? What would be your Safe Passage out? The choice is yours. Choose wisely.

Safe Passage in Chicago

The Chicago Public Schools Safe Passage program is designed to help equip schools with a trusted adult presence so that students can travel to and from school unharmed. The Safe Passage program is a coordinated effort between schools, law enforcement, communities, and caring adults all in the effort to provide safety to students. Safe Passage Maps are available to families, students, and educators in the Chicago area. To see which schools qualify for the program, go to (<https://www.cps.edu/services-and-supports/student-safety-and-security/safe-passage-program/>).

The Chicago Public Schools Safe Passage program was created in 2009 after the death of sixteen-

year-old Derrion Albert, who left his South Side high school one afternoon. It has since expanded to hundreds of schools, protecting well over 80,000 students (<https://blog.cps.edu/2018/08/30/safe-passage-how-it-works-the-impact-and-expansion/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/27/education/in-chicago-campaign-to-provide-safe-passage-on-way-to-school.html>). Another Safe Passage program started as a collaborative effort by the Black United Fund of Illinois, Inc. (BUFI) in 2007. This program was designed to keep children in at-risk communities safe and protected (<https://bufi.org/safe-passage/>).

Resources for Educators on Gun Violence and Trauma

Darius, Cissy, and Booger experience incidents with gun violence throughout *Safe Passage*, including before the events of the book take place. It is important as educators to talk and listen to students' feelings about traumatic events that occur in the community and around the world. Ensure students that educators are fully available to see them, understand them, and discuss what they're feeling at any time during the reading of the book. See the following resources below for additional information on how gun violence is affecting young people and how to support students and the school community:

- Learning For Justice, Gun Violence in Schools (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/gun-violence-in-schools>)
- Chalkbeat, "Stop the Shooting": Inside the effort to protect students from neighborhood gun violence (<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/9/13/23349462/students-shootings-community-gun-violence-school-security>)
- Center for American Progress, Gun Violence Is Having a Devastating Impact on Young People (www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/06/YouthGunViolence-fact-sheet.pdf) and "Community-Based Violence Interruption Programs Can Reduce Gun Violence" (<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-violence/>)
- Edutopia, 8 Ways to Support Students Who Experience Trauma (<https://www.edutopia.org/discussion/8-ways-support-students-who-experience-trauma>)
- Healthy Children, Childhood Exposure to Violence (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Crime-Violence-and-Your-Child.aspx>)

Teaching about Grief and Death

Safe Passage deals with death and grief throughout the story. Edutopia's "Teaching Students about Death and Grief" provides tips and strategies on how to prepare students when talking about death and discussing grief (<https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-students-about-death-and-grief/>). The National Association of School Psychologists also have general tips on supporting students through grief and also when addressing grief and death in the classroom or school settings (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/addressing-grief/addressing-grief-tips-for-teachers-and-administrators>). "Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers" (<https://chilliwackhospice.org/wp-content/>

[uploads/2017/09/7-A-Helping-the-Grieving-Student.pdf](#)) also details the basic concepts of grief, the stages of grieving, and how to support students during difficult and traumatic times in their lives.

Note about Drug Addiction

The story has a few instances featuring drug use. You will want to treat this part of the story with sensitivity, as drug addiction is a painful issue for some families and the disease may have personally touched the lives of some of your students. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has more information on drug addiction, how to get help, and more (<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>).

Discussing Homelessness with Students

The purpose of talking about the threat of becoming unhoused with students is to enable them to care for others, build compassion, strengthen character, and validate lived experiences. Explain that being homeless and temporarily unhoused means that a person or family does not have a place to live. They might be homeless for a day or two or for many weeks or months. A homeless person or family might live in a shelter with a lot of other people, or in a car, or have no structure surrounding them. Help students understand that being homeless does not mean that a person is bad or that the person did something wrong. Homelessness is not an illness, and it isn't anything someone wants. It is something that happens to some people who are having a very difficult time and is sometimes caused by bad luck paired with larger economic factors. Also point out that homelessness is not necessarily permanent and often people just need some help to get settled again.

You may have students in your classroom who are experiencing homelessness or who have experienced homelessness in the past. In either situation, be sure to lead these activities in a manner that is sensitive to the needs and emotions of your students and that demonstrates respect, rather than pity, for people who are unhoused.

For information about the use of *unhoused* vs. *homeless* please see: <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/news-events/ubssw-in-media.host.html/content/shared/socialwork/home/news/in-the-news/2023/why-homeless-giving-way-unhoused.detail.html>.

Additional Information and Resources about Homelessness

The New York Times offered a roundup of ideas and links for talking with children about homelessness: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/us/california-homelessness-kids.html>. While dated, "Unsheltered Lives: Teaching About Homelessness in Grades K-12" offers a wide range of resources, lesson ideas, and portrayals of homeless individuals in different circumstances. See <https://cottonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Unsheltered-Lives-2010.pdf>. The National Coalition for the Homeless has a Teaching Resources page that lists guides, manuals for educators and families, videos, and more, all in efforts to dispel the negative stereotypes surrounding homelessness and people experiencing homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless has additional articles about advocacy and ways to that you can help others in your community (<https://nationalhomeless.org/references/teaching/>).

Additional Note

Be cognizant of the students in your classroom and aware of students' circumstances prior to reading *Safe Passage*. Prepare to have engaging, rich discussions about the topics posed in *Safe Passage*. *Safe Passage* and the questions and activities in this guide help expose children to the realities of gun violence, homelessness, and safety in the United States.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What does safety mean to you? What does it mean to be "safe"? What are some important words that you associate with being safe?
- What do you know about gangs? Why do people join gangs?
- Have you ever lost someone close to you? Have you or a loved one have someone in your life pass away? What did you do to cope?
- How is family important to you? Who is in your family? How do you support one another?
- How are friends important to you? What do you and your friends do to support each other?
- Have you ever been in a situation that you were pressured to be in? What happened? What did it feel like?
- What comforts you when you're feeling sad, or scared? How do you handle those emotions?
- What is a shelter? Why do people need shelter? Whose responsibility is it to provide homes for people? If someone doesn't have a home, how might they find shelter?
- What do you know about gun violence? What is gun violence? How do guns affect people, particularly young people?
- What are the most important feelings or characteristics of "home" to you?
- Why is art important? How does art help you cope with different feelings? Have you ever used art to help you manage your emotions?
- What does it mean to be brave? Think about a time when you had to be brave. What did you do? How did you feel?
- What does it mean to be resilient? How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be resilient? Do you think it can be learned? How so? Who is someone from history that you consider to be resilient? Why?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book title exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *Safe Passage*. Ask students what subject they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- **Front cover:** Have students look at the front cover. Spend a few minutes flipping through the pages, noticing the illustrations. What predictions can students make?
- **Read author G. Neri's biography:** Read about author G. Neri on the last page of the book as well as on his website (gneri.com). Encourage students to think about what the writing and artistic processes are like and how G. Neri came up with the ideas for his book. What do you think inspired him to write *Safe Passage*?
- **Read illustrator David Brame's biography:** Read about illustrator David Brame on the last page of the book and discover his artwork through his Instagram page [@amazingdavidbrame](https://www.instagram.com/amazingdavidbrame). How does his artwork on his social media compare to the illustrations in *Safe Passage*? What do you think defines his artistic style?
- Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or hear new words.
- Have students quickly write a feeling in their notebooks during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it.
- **Graphic Novel:** Introduce students to the main elements of a graphic novel. Spend time defining these elements and pointing to each in the book until students are able to identify them:
 - **Panel:** A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text.
 - **Frame:** The lines and borders that contain the panels.
 - **Gutter:** The space between framed panels.
 - **Speech balloon:** These enclosed words come from a specific speaker's mouth to show dialogue between characters.
 - **Thought balloon:** These enclosed words show private thoughts with a series of dots or bubbles going up to it from a specific character.
 - **Caption:** These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc.
 - **Special-effects lettering:** This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights drama or exaggeration and reinforces the impact of words such as "bang" or "wow."
 - **Foreground:** The art can be perceived as closest to the viewer within the panel.
 - **Background:** Provides additional, subtextual information for the reader.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how Darius feels pressure to support his family
- how Booger entices Darius to join him in his plan
- why Cissy decides to come with Darius and Booger on their quest
- what money means to the characters and how money fuels their journey
- what happens to Darius, Booger and Cissy during their journey
- the life lessons that the characters learn during *Safe Passage*
- how guns and gun and gang violence are present in the story
- what safety means
- how family and friendship is important and the characteristics associated with positive relationships
- what the Safe Passage program is and the meaning of safety during the story
- how gangs and gun violence influence communities throughout Chicago

Encourage students to consider why the author, G. Neri, would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Many words can be found in the glossary at the end of the book, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.

Content Specific

choppers, South Side, Chi-raq, gangs, folks, people, *Safe Passage*, Drill City shorty, the Black Lords, digital tagging, White Mike, Escalade, snubby, gat, feed, Brinks, insured, lieutenant, influencer, Disciples, Smith & Wesson, gimp, po-po, P-Stone Territory, Black Lords, Laraza Boyz, Latin Deuces, .22, car muffler, eight ball, accountant, trap house, Allah, pop, pawn shop, Ibuprofen

Academic

scattered, clique, turf, warring, archrivals, sergeant, veterans, vacant, potential, hazard, opportunity, evicted, gentrify, depressed, insured, trespassing, truancy, loitering, hitch, impounding, mosque, eviction, righteous, expelled, defected, dimension

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Chapters 1-7

1. What question does Darius pose on the first page? What does he wish for?
2. What sounds does he hear outside?
3. What does Darius's stepfather ask them to do before school?
4. What does Darius mention about school closings?
5. Why does Darius's stepfather call it Chi-raq?
6. How was Chicago divided? Who were the gangs? What happened to the gangs?
7. Why was *Safe Passage* created? Why were veterans helpful with *Safe Passage*?
8. What is digital tagging? How do the gangs use digital tagging?
9. What are Darius's stepfather's rules?
10. What did Darius see in the kitchen? What did it say?
11. What is it the anniversary of? What does Darius's stepfather want to do after school?
12. Who is Booger? What does he tell Darius? What does he ask him to do?
13. Where do Booger and Darius go first? Who do they meet? What do they find?
14. What does Booger have? How does it make Darius feel?
15. What does Booger see on his phone?
16. Where is the money? How does Booger think they should get there?
17. Who does Darius see before he and Booger get on the bus? What does she think about Booger?

18. What does Booger say about Darius's stepfather? How does Booger use what Darius says about his stepfather to influence him to keep going?
19. How does the art change as the story flashes back to an earlier time? What happens in the flashback?
20. What video does Booger show Darius on the bus?
21. Who is White Mike? What is he known for?
22. Where do Darius, Cissy, and Booger go next? What did Booger put on his arm?
23. How do Darius, Cissy, and Booger get to the highway? Where do they go after that? What do they find?
24. Where do Darius, Cissy, and Booger hide from the police?

Chapters 8-14

25. What does Darius see? How does Cissy react?
26. What do they discover inside the Brinks bag?
27. What does Booger decide to do with the Brinks bag?
28. Where do they go next?
29. What happens on the bus?
30. How do people react to Booger's video?
31. Who is Booger's love interest? What does he do to impress her?
32. What does the white boy in the car ask Booger for? How does he respond?
33. What happens with the white boys in the car and Darius, Cissy, and Booger? Where do they end up?
34. What do they discover at the trap house?
35. What does Darius draw? What does envision in his flashback?
36. What's in Mama's list of love? What does she tell Darius about what her childhood was like?
37. What do Cissy and Darius argue about?
38. Who approaches Booger at the trap house?
39. Where do Booger, Cissy and Darius go next?
40. What do they do at the mosque? Who do they meet?
41. What does Darius tell the man at the mosque? What do they talk about?

Chapters 15-22

42. Where does Chapter 15 begin?
43. Why does Darius feel guilty for his mother's death?
44. What happens during Darius's flashback to his mother's death? What do they talk about? What

does she ask him not to do?

45. What does Cissy tell Darius about his mother's death? What does she mention about the art museum?
46. What happens when Cissy, Booger, and Darius see the car?
47. Who does Booger talk to on the phone?
48. What is White Mike going to do? How do Darius and Cissy react to Booger's phone call?
49. Who does Darius see in the car when they're leaving the L stop? What happens when they get in the car?
50. What happens in the pawn shop?
51. What happens to Booger's arm? How do Cissy and Darius get help?
52. Who does Darius see when he leaves to go get help for Booger? What happens?
53. How does Darius want Cissy to help? How does she react?
54. What does Booger say about his future?
55. Who does Cissy meet on her journey to the market?

Chapters 23-28

56. How does the homeless woman help Booger?
57. Where does Cissy end up?
58. What does Booger want to do to get Cissy back? How does Darius respond?
59. What happens when Booger and Darius meet White Mike?
60. What does Darius tell White Mike about the money? How does White Mike react?
61. What does White Mike remember about Darius's mother?
62. How does Darius ask White Mike to get his sister back?
63. How does White Mike respond to Darius's plea? What does he see that changes his mind? What does Darius offer to do for White Mike?
64. What's printed on the protest signs?
65. What do Darius and Cissy talk about in the end? How do they bond over their mother's death?
66. How does Darius's stepfather react to seeing them at the end?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. How does *Safe Passage* depict the challenges faced by unhoused individuals, particularly in large cities? Darius's stepfather, Darius, and Cissy, are faced with potentially becoming evicted and temporarily unhoused. How does this influence Darius's motivations throughout the book?

2. Unpack Darius's question on the first page, "What would you do if you was rich?" What does Darius want? How does that question unfold over the course of the book?
3. What is Cissy's role in this story? Why do you think author G. Neri had her come on Darius and Booger's journey? What do you think Cissy represents during *Safe Passage*?
4. What is the main problem in the story? Is there more than one? Does the problem get resolved by the end of the story? How do you feel about the way the story ends? Why?
5. What is Darius's stepdad like? How was his time in Iraq influential in his life? What's going on with his work and financial situation during the story? How does it affect how he acts with Darius and Cissy?
6. How do veterans play a role in Chicago's history? How did they help the Safe Passage program?
7. What character traits would you use to describe Booger? How did you feel about Booger? How was Booger a complex character? Provide examples from the text.
8. What is the role of family and friendship in helping Darius become who he is? How does Darius's journey with Booger and Cissy change him? What about the evolution of his relationship with his stepdad?
9. Consequences are the result or outcome of an action or decision. Why can it be difficult to face the consequences of your actions? Why is it important to face consequences? What consequences do the characters face in *Safe Passage*?
10. Describe how Darius's relationship with Cissy changes during the book. What is their relationship like at the end of the story versus the beginning?
11. What is the role of money in the story? Why do you think Booger wanted to get the money and risk their lives for money? Why do the characters need money? How does money influence their lives, in positive and negative ways?
12. Why does Darius's stepfather say, "Nothing in this world is free?" Why does Darius tell Booger that before they go on the quest to find the money from the Brinks truck? How do you think this quote influences the rest of the story? What do you think Darius and Booger learned from this quote?
13. During a flashback, Darius's mother says, "A circle unbroken is a family. This circle will keep this family safe as long as it stays whole." What does this mean? How does this influence Darius?
14. David Brame uses dotted lines around specific speech bubbles. What were the dotted lines used for? What do they represent? Why do you think he chose to do this with the text?
15. Why do you think G. Neri decided to include the conversation with Darius and the man at the mosque? What do they talk about? How does he influence Darius and his decisions during the rest of the story? What do his statements, "It's okay to accept help when you're down. It doesn't make you weak. Just grateful." mean to you? Do you think Darius follows his advice after their interaction?

16. How does G. Neri use flashbacks in *Safe Passage*? How are the flashbacks used to present the story's themes and messages?
17. How does Darius cope with the guilt that he feels regarding his mother's death? Why does he feel responsible? Why does he think his leg injury is his punishment?
18. How does art make Darius feel? How does he use art to cope with his feelings? What is the relationship between art and survival as depicted in the story?
19. What did you think of Booger's decision to film the video with the Brinks bag? How did this affect the rest of the story? What did they learn from filming this video?
20. Analyze Booger's character. Why do you think he wanted to get the Brinks money? What were his reasons behind lying about the money? What does he learn from getting shot, and how does he change over the course of the story?
21. What kind of role do each of the characters play? What does Booger represent? What about Cissy and Darius? How are they all different in their goals and needs? What similarities do they share?
22. What do lightness and darkness in the art represent in the story? How are they connected to the art in the story? What did you notice about how the page colors changed to black towards the end of book?
23. Why do you think author G. Neri decided to include Cissy's interaction with the homeless woman? What does Cissy learn from her? Why do you think this was an impactful moment in the story?
24. Analyze Darius's journey with Booger as a metaphor for Darius's life. Why do you think the author chose for Darius to join Booger's quest to get money? How does the journey represent Darius's life as a whole?
25. How does Darius deal with his mother's death over the course of *Safe Passage*? What are some things that he does to commemorate her life? How does he cope with his emotions? What does Darius still struggle with regarding his grief? How does his leg injury still affect him, and make him think of his mother and her death?
26. Examine the role of truth throughout the story. How do the characters tell the truth? When do they not tell the truth? How does Darius use the truth to get Cissy back?
27. In graphic novels, panels are used to show the passage of time. Time, and how fast or slowly it seems to pass, is important in how panels change. Can you find a sequence where the pacing is slow, observing a character or scene? How about a sequence in which everything speeds up?
28. Why do you think the illustrator, David Brame, created the images in black and white, without any other color? What effect does this palette have on the tone of the story? How might the story be different if the images were in color?
29. Revisit the title of the book. What does *Safe Passage* mean to you after reading?
30. *Safe Passage* ends with Darius's stepfather saying, "We can make it." Why do you think G. Neri decided to end the book this way?

31. Read the Author's Note at the beginning of *Safe Passage*. Why did G. Neri want to tell this story? How does G. Neri's Author's Note impact your reading of *Safe Passage*?
32. Why do you think the graphic novel format was used to tell this story? What do readers gain by experiencing the story visually as well as through words?
33. What sense of hope is there in the end? How can bad experiences lead to good things?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought that you had after reading this book?
2. What do you think author G. Neri's message is to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind G. Neri's intentions in writing and illustrating this book. What do you think he wanted to tell his readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do the children's experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Safe Passage*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world, such as on television or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
6. What does safety mean to students after reading? After reading *Safe Passage*, what does safety and security mean to you? Why is it important to feel safe in your home, at school, and in the world?

Multilingual (ML) Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading: 1) Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing. 2) Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key

details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.

4. Have students give a short talk about what they think the message of *Safe Passage* is.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose ML Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Flip through the pages of the book and focus on the characters' faces on each page. Describe how their faces look and name the emotions they convey. (You might also notice their body language). Use sticky notes to label various emotions. Ask students to act out specific sections of the story, using their faces and bodies to help convey feelings.
2. How does Darius demonstrate persistence and resilience throughout *Safe Passage*? Identify a scene from the story that exemplifies how Darius is persistent. What made you choose this scene? How did it affect you and what did you learn from Darius after reading *Safe Passage*?
3. Throughout the story, Darius feels the pressure of being an older sibling and taking care of Cissy. Have you ever felt pressure from adults in your life? If you have a sibling, do you feel pressure from your caregivers to make you're your sibling is safe? Do you feel pressure to have your sibling act a certain way? What does this pressure feel like and what strategies do you use to overcome those feelings?
4. What are the coping strategies and techniques that Darius uses during difficult moments? How does he evolve in his coping strategies throughout the story?
5. How has a family member impacted your life? How did Darius's mother influence his life? How does her death affect him in the story? How does the author show how Darius remembers his mother?
6. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with four columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give?

7. There are many kinds of families in the world. How does *Safe Passage* show different families and family dynamics? What are the different ways people show respect and care for one another in families? Students can brainstorm ideas on chart paper that can be presented and accessible for the whole class.
8. Loss is a theme in this story. Have you ever dealt with a loss of someone you love? Why do some people become angry during times of sadness or trauma? What are some other grieving processes people usually go through when dealing with the loss of someone they love?
9. Why is it important to have empathy for those we don't know? What does empathy look like in *Safe Passage*? Discuss how empathy is beneficial to social and emotional wellbeing.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Read G. Neri's stand-alone companion graphic novel *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* ([leeandlow.com/books/yummy](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/yummy)) alongside *Safe Passage*.** Ask students to compare each book with the following guiding questions: what is the central idea of each title? How are the titles connected? What themes or ideas do they share? How are the main characters similar? How are they different? What kinds of problems do they experience in the books? What are the ways that they solve critical problems and think about their actions? Have students plan their thoughts in a graphic organizer and write an essay afterward detailing their findings about *Yummy* and *Safe Passage*.
- **Conduct a G. Neri author study featuring his titles from Lee & Low, including *Safe Passage*, *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* ([leeandlow.com/books/yummy](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/yummy)), *Grand Theft Horse* ([leeandlow.com/books/grand-theft-horse](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grand-theft-horse)) and *Chess Rumble* ([leeandlow.com/books/chess-rumble](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/chess-rumble)).** Compare the different themes that each of the texts present. Why do you think G. Neri chose the graphic novel format for his books? What are the main characters like each in of the titles? What kinds of obstacles do the characters face? How do the characters solve problems? What kinds of social issues are presented in the books? Display a chart in front of students with three different columns so that students can brainstorm and organize their ideas. Then, students can write their reactions in a comparative essay and discuss

what they learned from these graphic novels and the themes and lessons presented in the texts.

- **Create a graphic novel unit, including other Lee & Low titles in addition to *Safe Passage* including *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* (leeandlow.com/books/yummy), *Grand Theft Horse* (leeandlow.com/books/grand-theft-horse), *I Am Alfonso Jones* (leeandlow.com/books/i-am-alfonso-jones), *The Witch Owl Parliament* (leeandlow.com/books/the-witch-owl-parliament-clockwork-curandera-1), and *Pitch Black* (leeandlow.com/books/pitch-black).** For more information on graphic novels and how to teach about graphic novels, consult “How to Study Comics & Graphic Novels” (<https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/files/howtostudycomicsgraphicnovels-agraphicintroductiontocomicsstudiespdf>). Edutopia’s “Using Graphic Novels and Comics in the Classroom” also provides helpful tips on getting started with graphic novels in educational settings (<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/graphic-novels-comics-andrew-miller>). Have students answer the following guiding questions: how was using the medium of a graphic novel helpful in conveying the books’ message? What kinds of social issues were present in the novels? What were the books’ main themes? Who were the main characters, and what kinds of problems did they have? How were their problems solved, or not solved? How did the artwork convey the books’ themes, and how was the artwork powerful in each of the books? Students can write a comparative essay after finishing the graphic novels and write about what it was like to read different graphic novels.
- **Encourage students to read two blurbs for *Safe Passage* and write their own review of the novel.** What would students want to include in their review? What do they want to tell other readers about this book? How did it affect them?
- **For ideas, check out this Book Review Template** (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/book-review-template-30200.html>) **by ReadWriteThink.org.** For a list of the reviews for *Safe Passage*, consult the book page at leeandlow.com/safe-passage and at the end of this guide.
- **G. Neri ends the Author’s Note by posing the following questions: “Who wouldn’t dream of getting their hands on big money to find a way out? But what would you risk to get it? What path would you take? What would be your *Safe Passage* out? The choice is yours. Choose wisely.”** Have students write an essay answering these questions. How did students react to these questions? Why are these important questions to contemplate? Students can share their answers with a partner, small group, or the whole class.
- **Tell students to imagine they will be interviewing G. Neri for a local newspaper or talk show.** Ask students to develop a list of interview questions they want to ask. What do they want to learn about in terms of G. Neri’s process of writing this graphic novel and how he got inspired to write *Safe Passage*? Lead a class discussion, creating a combined list of questions and then narrowing that list down to ten questions. Consider contacting G. Neri for an in-person or virtual visit at gneri.com.
- **Read other books that portray people experiencing or potentially facing homelessness, for instancing pairing *Pitch Black* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/pitch-black>) and *A Shelter in Our Car* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/a-shelter-in-our-car>) with**

Safe Passage. Talk about how each book presents different details and circumstances about homelessness, and the importance of considering different perspectives and situations when learning about a social issue.

- **Assign students different characters from the book and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: what and how can this character teach us?** Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and have also done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?
- **Have students identify a place in the story where Darius's character changes in *Safe Passage*.** Why do students think that was a point where Darius changed? How does Darius feel before the change, what causes the change, and then how does he feel and act after? Create a graphic organizer with a column on the left that says "Before," a column in the middle that says "During," and a column on the right that says "After." Afterward, have students write an essay using evidence from the text to support their findings about Darius's character change.
- **Envision a sequel to *Safe Passage* and have students title the second book.** What do they think it would be called? Then, students can write the first chapter to the second book. Does Booger stay friends with Darius? Do Darius and his family have to move? What's Darius's relationship like with Cissy? How does he continue his passion for art? Students can also create a cover for the book (for more details, see question 1 in the Art/Media section of this guide).
- **Analyze Darius's relationships with other characters in the book and divide students into their respective groups: Darius and Cissy; Darius and his mother; Darius and his stepdad; Darius and Booger.** Have students examine these relationships closely and think about how they help Darius develop as a character throughout the story. Then, have students share their findings and write an essay comparing their character's relationship with Darius and another group's character.
- **Prepare a persuasive essay that explains your views on which character changed the most throughout the course of the novel.** Defend your views by citing specific examples. Track their change through evidence from the book over the course of the story. What did you notice about how they changed? Readwritethink.org's "Inferring How and Why Characters Change" lesson plan provides additional details and ideas on how to teach about character change (<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/infering-characters-change>).
- **Write an alternative ending to the story that is different from the one in *Safe Passage*.** Ask students to think about the following questions: What would you change about the ending? What would you change about the characters? Why did you write the ending in this way?

- **Examine the role of the “villain” in *Safe Passage*.** For more information on how to teach about villains, see ReadWriteThink’s “Tracking the Ways Writers Develop Heroes and Villains” (<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/tracking-ways-writers-develop>). Have students consider the following questions: who is the villain in *Safe Passage*? Is there one villain, or multiple villains? What does it mean to be a villain? Can villains change over the course of the story? Students can discuss their findings with a partner, small group, or the whole class.
- **Examine the different literary elements that author G. Neri uses throughout *Safe Passage*.** Have students come up with a list and select portions of the text that showcase a specific literary device (i.e. foreshadowing, flashback, metaphor, etc). How do literary elements look different in a novel? How does the artwork help convey the literary elements, such as foreshadowing or a flashback? Afterward, students can select one literary device and write about how that was impactful when reading *Safe Passage*. How do literary devices make the story engaging, and how do they contribute to the story overall? Discuss how the artwork and literary elements work together to support the story’s themes and messages. See PBS’s “Literary Elements and Techniques” video for more information about how to teach about literary devices (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/litel18-fig/literary-elements-and-techniques-figurative-language/>).
- **Discussing a Graphic Novel:** Because *Safe Passage* is a graphic novel, there are some unique elements of the genre medium that students need to understand to comprehend the story. Incorporate these questions into discussions:
 - Point to where you see these elements of a graphic novel on the page: panels, frame, gutter, speech balloon, thought balloon, caption, special-effects lettering, foreground, background. How would the story change if you took out any one of these elements?
 - Graphic novels use both words and illustrations. What do you learn from just the words on this page? What do you learn from just the illustrations? Are they telling you the same or different information? How do they work together?
 - Expressions and gestures are important to how we understand characters. Have students select a character. Then encourage students to look for an example of a particular expression or movement that you think shows a significant character trait.
 - In graphic novels action happens “in the gutters,” or in the spaces between each panel. Sometimes big things happen in the time it takes to turn the page. Find a specific sequence of panels or a page turn and explain what actions or events happened in those in-between spaces or gutters. How do we know those actions took place if we don’t see them?
 - In graphic novels, panels are used to show the passage of time. Time, and how fast or slowly it seems to pass, is important in how panels change. Can you find a sequence where the pacing is slow, observing a character or scene? How about a sequence in which everything speeds up?

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a research study on the Safe Passage program in Chicago.** Use the resources from the Background section of this guide to get started on a study about the Safe Passage program in Chicago. Have students answer the following questions: What is the Safe Passage program? Why was it initially created? What is the purpose of the Safe Passage program? Where are the Safe Passage routes in Chicago? How is the Safe Passage program beneficial to young people and their families? Students can create informational posters with their research findings to present to the class.
- **Investigate the role of social media in gangs.** Examine the following articles that discuss the presence of social media and its influence in gangs: Stanford's "Gang-associated youth avoid violence by acting tough online, Stanford sociologist finds" (<https://news.stanford.edu/2019/05/01/gangs-use-social-media/>), Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center's "'Internet Banging'—Co-opting Social Media for Gang-Related Violent Activities" (<https://yvpc.sph.umich.edu/internet-banging-adoption-social-media-gang-related-violent-activities/>), and Harvard's "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Gang Violence" (<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/carr/our-work/justice-matters-podcast/role-social-media-shaping-gang-violence>). Students can answer the following questions and their relevance to *Safe Passage*: how do gangs use social media? Why do gangs use social media? What are the ways in which gangs use social media? How is social media used in *Safe Passage*? Do you think social media is helpful or a hindrance when it comes to gangs and gang violence? Students can write an essay detailing their findings.
- **Study the history of gangs in Chicago. Darius discusses the South Side gangs Folks and People and reference several other gangs during *Safe Passage*.** Consider the following questions: When did gangs originate in Chicago? Who were some of the most popular gangs? How did gangs influence communities? Why did young people join gangs? Have students read the following articles to get started on their research project: Encyclopedia of Chicago's "Gangs" (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/497.html>), and "What Do Chicago's Gangs Provide to their Members?" (<https://daily.jstor.org/what-do-chicago-gangs-provide-to-their-members/>). How do gangs impact their communities?
- **Research the impact of gun violence on youth in Chicago. The University of Chicago's Crime Lab's "Gun Violence Among School-Age Youth in Chicago"** (<https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/09/Gun-Violence-Among-School-Age-Youth-in-Chicago.pdf>) **provides resources, information and other statistics about how gun violence impacts youth and disproportionately affects youth of color.** *The New York Times'* interactive article "'A Bullet Could Hit Me Anytime'" (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/28/us/chicago-violence-walking-to-school-a-bullet-could-hit-me-and-my-kids-anytime.html>) helped to inspire *Safe Passage* and demonstrates the realities of how walking to school in Chicago can be dangerous. Other articles about gun violence affecting young people in Chicago include ([Teacher's Guide copyright © 2024 LEE & LOW BOOKS. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to share and adapt for personal and educational use. For questions, comments, and/or more information, please contact us at \[general@leeandlow.com\]\(mailto:general@leeandlow.com\). Visit us online at \[leeandlow.com\]\(https://leeandlow.com\).](https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/deadly-shootings-</p>

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[chicago-schools-communities/](#)) and (<https://www.wbez.org/stories/chicago-public-schools-grapples-with-a-spike-in-after-school-killings/ade22872-d7f0-4ad9-b6f9-c146a197d712>). Learning for Justice's "Gun Violence in Schools" (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/gun-violence-in-schools>) provides resources on how to teach about gun violence, school safety, and mental health. Have students discuss the following: who is impacted by Chicago gun violence? Where does the gun violence take place? How does it affect schools? What can be done to improve gun violence? How are gangs involved with youth gun violence? Students can write a research paper detailing their findings and connect what they learn to *Safe Passage*.

- **Have students research their school's or district's policies on bullying, gangs, and/or guns.** What do the policies say about parents', teachers', and administrators' roles in helping students stay safe and healthy? Have students design an argument to present to the principal, superintendent, school board, or parent organization on how the policies can be strengthened, can be improved to include student voices and actions, and can be made more accessible.
- **Ask students to research youth violence statistics in their city or community.** Is youth and/or gun violence an issue in your community? What factors do you think affect the lack or presence of youth and/or gun violence here? Students can present their research with information they find from credible resources online and texts that informed their search. Students can begin with The Pew Research Center's "Gun Deaths among US children and teens rose 50% in 2 years" (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/06/gun-deaths-among-us-kids-rose-50-percent-in-two-years/>) to begin their project. What are some of the reasons behind youth gun violence? What are different programs in place to help with the prevalence of youth gun violence?
- **Considering the importance of the middle school setting, students can create a timeline of Chicago Public Schools, including the challenges and successes.** Darius, Cissy, and Booger refer to the challenges with the school system during *Safe Passage*. Refer to *The Chicago Reporter's* "History of Chicago Public Schools" (<https://www.chicagoreporter.com/cps-history>) and the Chicago History Museum's "Schools and Education" (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1124.html>) for more information and for inspiration to get students started on their research projects. Students can look into example challenges such as student absenteeism, school safety, and the issues school librarians face. Create a visual presentation or other media detailing this history and legacy. Include a timeline if necessary. Account for unions, charter schools, the board of education, etc.
- **In pairs or groups, have students research school closings in the United States, focusing on Chicago.** What is the history of school closures in Chicago? How are school closings referenced in *Safe Passage*? WBEZ Chicago's piece, "A Generation of School Closings" provides more historical context about the crisis in Chicago (<https://interactive.wbez.org/generation-school-closings>). Why are schools being shut down? Who are the most impacted by school closings? Which cities and demographics throughout the United States experience school closings the most? Students should present their findings to the class.

- **Design a lesson or unit on how teens are affected by homelessness in the United States.** Darius and his family are threatened by potentially facing eviction in *Safe Passage*. Learning goals should highlight key aspects of the history of homelessness such as time periods, critiques, race, gender, and class demographics, media coverage, political positions over time, as well as connections to other global narratives of homelessness. Consult the resources below for more information to get started:
 - **History of Homelessness by Invisible People:** (https://invisiblepeople.tv/history-of-homelessness/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAloavBhBOEiwAbtAJ00o01oMo9Pik-mPbs56u2Foyc75T12RndNXJAY2hBqmlyHR9OIJEZLBoC09oQAvD_BwE) and *Places Journal:* (https://placesjournal.org/article/tent-city-america/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAopuvBhBCEiwAm8jaMdDt-LWw4qMHw8B_SVtug3iXqEmnLDAvWfZWU6GBT-crMOtAZTI_YFhoC4jwQAvD_BwE&cn-reloaded=1&cn-reloaded=1).
 - **Homelessness Through the Early 20th Century from the National Library of Medicine:** (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519584/>)
 - **A Brief Timeline of Race and Homelessness in America from Community Solutions:** (<https://community.solutions/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A-Brief-Timeline-of-Race-and-Homelessness-in-America-March-2019.pdf>)
 - **Homeless and Racial Disparities from the National Alliance to End Homelessness** (<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/inequality/>)
 - **Cornell University's "Staggering disparities': Homelessness risk varies across race" in Cornell Chronicle:** (<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2023/02/staggering-disparities-homelessness-risk-varies-across-race>)
 - **"Homelessness is a Housing and Racism Problem" from Housing Matters, an Urban Institute Initiative:** (<https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/homelessness-housing-and-racism-problem>)
 - **Demography's "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Lifetime Prevalence of Homelessness in the United States" from National Library of Medicine:** (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7665902/>)

Art/Media

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Photocopy pages of a chapter (or chapters) in the book, selecting one with multiple panels in a plot sequence.** Cut the panels apart and shuffle them so they are out of order. Place the mixed-up panels into an envelope. Prepare the adequate number envelopes you need to distribute them to pairs of students. After collecting their books, have students work in pairs to organize the panels in proper sequence. Prompt students to use cues and context provided by the illustrations and text, as well as their recall of the story. Walk

around asking questions and giving feedback. Have students use their books to check their work. Afterwards, have students create their own scene in *Safe Passage* with the Comic Creator from ReadWriteThink.org.

- **Examine the role of art and dealing with grief and trauma.** Darius uses his artwork throughout *Safe Passage* to cope with the death of his mother. How does art help Darius through challenging times? When does he turn to art during the story? How does Darius's art play a role in his character development and change over the course of *Safe Passage*? For more information on how art helps people cope with grief, see the following resources: Johns Hopkins Medicine's "Can the Arts Help Us Heal Our Grief" (<https://www.artsandmindlab.org/can-the-arts-help-us-heal-our-grief/>), *Psychology Today*'s "The Role of Creativity in Grief and Recovery" (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-art-of-grieving/202404/the-role-of-creativity-in-grief-and-recovery>), and Student Mental Health Toolkit's "Working Through Grief and Loss Through Art" (https://studentmentalhealthtoolkit.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/LessonPlan_GriefLoss_BW.pdf).
- **Analyze the cover art for *Safe Passage*.** Why do you think the illustrator portrayed Darius, Booger, and Cissy in this way? Is this what you envisioned during the story? How are the different themes from the story shown on the cover? Have students write an essay about the ways that covers can influence how they perceive the characters in the book.
- **For the question about the sequel activity in the English/Language Arts section, have students draw a cover image for their follow-up to *Safe Passage*.** What kind of materials do they want to use for the cover? Encourage students to consider what they think will happen in the second book, and how that reflects the artwork for the cover. How can they use the current cover to inspire their work?
- **Write an essay about the power of graphic novels.** Why do you think author G. Neri decided to create a graphic novel as opposed to a novel? How do graphic novels help you visualize the scenes throughout the book? What would it have been like to read a *Safe Passage* novel as opposed to a graphic novel? Students can read the following articles about the importance of graphic novels to get started: Markham Public Library's "5 Benefits of Reading Graphic Novels" (<https://markhampubliclibrary.ca/blogs/post/5-benefits-of-reading-graphic-novels/#:~:text=Graphic%20Novels%20Develop%20Visual%20Literacy&text=Graphic%20novels%20help%20simultaneously%20develop,on%20characters%20and%20plot%20development.>) and *The New York Times*' "How Graphic Novels and Comics Can Move a Story" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/28/insider/graphic-novels-comics-book-review.html>).
- **With a small group of students, make a Reader's Theater script of *Safe Passage*.** (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lessonplans/readers-theatre-172.html>). Choose students to say the speaking parts of Cissy, Darius, Booger, Darius's stepfather, White Mike, or whatever characters are pertinent to the scene. Choose two or three narrators to set each scene. Have students perform the story for the rest of the class and reflect on what it was like to read the scene aloud.
- **Ask students to write their own free verse or narrative free verse poem about a cause they care about.** Encourage students to have their poems reflect their personal

experiences and/or their feelings and opinions toward the topics. Have students perform their work.

- **Study with students how the illustrator portrayed feelings via facial expressions and body language in this book.** Have students create a self-portrait, or a portrait of someone they care about, in a similar style, with the goal of conveying an emotion through the artwork.
- **Put students in small groups.** Have them discuss reactions to the images throughout *Safe Passage*. What images stood out? What images were confusing? What story do the images tell? What illustrations resonated with them the most in the graphic novel?

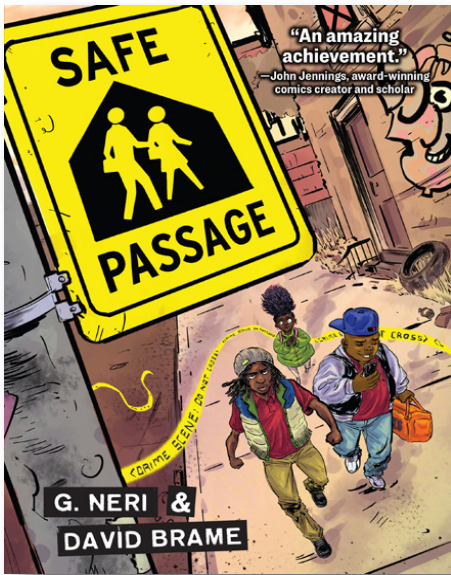
School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Ask students to create portraits of people who are their personal role models through drawing, collage, or photograph.** In writing, students should describe what actions and qualities they admire about this person. Students can write in prose or submit a poem or song.
- **Interview a friend or family member who has lost a loved one in the past.** Question their strategies for how they coped both before and after the loss. What lessons were learned? What memories will always be cherished?
- **Encourage students to share what they learned from reading *Safe Passage* with their families.** What did students enjoy about the book? What other books would they want to read that are like *Safe Passage*? What did students learn about Darius and the Safe Passage program in Chicago?



ABOUT THE CREATORS

G. Neri—Author

G. Neri is an award-winning author, including a Michael L. Printz Award for his contribution to *The Collectors* anthology as well as an Eisner nomination and Coretta Scott King Honor for *Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty*. He has written many books for young people, including *Ghetto Cowboy*, which was made into the movie, *Concrete Cowboy*, starring Idris Elba, debuting at #1 on Netflix. His books have been translated into multiple languages in more than 25 countries. In 2023, he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from SUNY for his literary output. Mr. Neri lives on the Gulf Coast of Florida. For more information, visit his website at gneri.com.

David Brame—Illustrator

Youme is the Eisner-nominated comic artist of *After the Rain*, whose art for the graphic novel was hailed as “bold and arresting” by *Publishers Weekly*. He was also a contributor to the graphic novel anthology *Young Men In Love: A Queer Romance Anthology*, which earned the GLAAD Award for Outstanding Graphic Novel or Anthology and the American Library Association’s award for Great Graphic Novel for Teens. David lives in Alaska with his three dogs. For more information, visit his Instagram [@amazingdavidbrame](https://www.instagram.com/amazingdavidbrame).

Ordering Information

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New York, NY 10016-8829

REVIEWS

“In this stand-alone companion to the award-winning *Yummy* (2010), a teenage boy learns that sometimes you can’t go around a problem: You have to go through it... Somber with a sprinkling of optimism and a firm grounding in unconditional familial love.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, **starred review**

“It’s an amazing achievement and is a prime example of what the comics medium can do when true masters are at the height of their craft.”—John Jennings, award-winning comics creator and scholar

“Honest and essential, *Safe Passage* is a harrowing look at a stark reality many Americans don’t see. In a country so willing to look away from the real struggles of its young people, Neri and Brame ask us, with beauty and compassion, to pay attention.”—A.S. King, Printz-winning author of *Dig*

“This book is incredible. From one page to the next, I couldn’t put it down.”—Raul the Third, creator of the World of *jVamos!*

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children’s book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, “about everyone, for everyone,” is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company’s goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.