

Colin Kaepernick: Change The Game

AUTHORS

COLIN KAEPRNICK AND EVE L. EWING

ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

High school star athlete Colin Kaepernick is at a crossroads in life. Heavily scouted by colleges and MLB as a baseball pitcher, he has a bright future ahead of him as a highly touted prospect. Everyone from his parents to his teachers and coaches are in agreement on his future. Colin feels differently.

Colin isn't excited about baseball. In the words of five-time all-star MLB player Adam Jones, 'Baseball is a white man's game.' Colin looks up to athletes like Allen Iverson: talented, hyper-competitive, unapologetically Black, and dominating their sports while staying true to themselves. College football looks a lot more fun than sleeping on hotel room floors in the minor leagues of baseball. But Colin doesn't have a single offer to play football. Yet.

This touching graphic novel explores the story of how a young change-maker learned to find himself and never compromise. How the right decision is very rarely the easy one, but taking the road less travelled can make all the difference in the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Colin Kaepernick is a professional Super Bowl quarterback who fights oppression globally. He founded the Know Your Rights Camps to advance the liberation and well-being of Black and Brown people through education, self-empowerment, mass-mobilisation, and the creation of new systems that elevate the next generation of change leaders. In 2019, he founded Kaepernick Publishing to elevate a new generation of writers and creators through the development and publication of meaningful works of all genres with the focus of amplifying diverse views and voices. *I Color Myself Different*, a *New York Times* bestseller, is his first book for children.

Dr. Eve L. Ewing is a writer, scholar, and cultural organiser from Chicago. She is the award-winning author of four books: the poetry collections *Electric Arches* and *1919*, the nonfiction work *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*, and a novel for young readers, *Maya and the Robot*. She is the co-author (with Nate Marshall) of the play *No Blue Memories: The Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*. She has written several projects for Marvel Comics, most notably the Ironheart series, and is currently writing *Black Panther*.

Ewing is an associate professor in the Department of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity at the University of Chicago. Her work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and many other venues. She is currently working on her next book, *Original Sins: The (Mis)education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism*.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Orlando Caicedo is a Colombian born illustrator raised in Atlanta Georgia. He graduated from Atlanta College of Art (currently known as Savannah College of Art and Design Atlanta) with his BFA in illustration. He has worked on various animated television shows for Adult Swim, FX, and Fox networks. He currently freelances in comics for various publishers such as Webtoon and Mad Cave Studios. Orlando loves to make and eat arepas.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - Who is Colin Kaepernick, and why is he famous?
 - What do you think this book might be about?
 - What can you see happening on the front cover?
 - What is interesting about the shadow in the cover artwork?
 - Read the back cover and as a class discuss what you think you will find in the book.
- Online, or in the library, search and see what you can find out about Colin Kaepernick, and why he is internationally famous.
- Colin says in the book ‘There are a lot of things around me I can’t control. But I can control how I react to them. How I manoeuvre in a situation.’ Do you think that this statement is true and fair? Can you think of an example from your own life of some thing or things that you can’t control? What are some different ways that you could choose to react to these situations?
- As a class, choose one of the scenes in the story, and brainstorm all the different ways that Colin could have potentially reacted to events during that scene. Then discuss how those reactions would have likely influenced future events.
- Why do you think Colin’s parents are so insistent that he cut his hair rather than grow it out? Do you think that parents have the right to dictate how a teenager should wear their hair? Why/why not? What instances can you think of where your answer might change because of extenuating circumstances?
- While at his sister’s horse riding competition, Colin’s father has a conversation with a man who is wearing a hat with a confederate flag on it. As a class, discuss the history of the link between confederate flags and racism, particularly directed towards African Americans (like Colin).
- For Colin, as for everyone else, it is important to feel as if you belong. In small groups discuss where and when Colin feels as if he belongs, and what situations in the book lead to him feeling that he doesn’t belong. What things could his teachers, classmates and family have done to change the extent to which he feels he doesn’t belong? Thinking about how Colin feels in the book, what are some of the subtler and more insidious ways we see that racism can manifest within a society—often without the individual realising it?
- What is the relationship between Colin and his Grandpa, and why is it so important to him? In pairs or small groups, write a brief descriptive passage detailing what you see as so important in this relationship and how it affects Colin in the long term.
- Re-read the dialogue on pg 57. Do you agree with Tiffany’s statement that ‘All of us got to where we are because someone cheered for us’? As a class discuss how her policy of ‘paying it forward’ can help foster a supportive and welcoming environment for everyone. Think of some ways in which people have helped you in the past, and in small groups brainstorm achievable ways of paying it forward to others. It might be as simple as offering to help someone with a homework problem, or cheering for someone at a school sporting event; or it might be as complex as working with your school to establish a lunchtime support group, or holding a charity fundraiser.
- Re-read pp 61–63. As a class, discuss this scene, and what impact these overheard comments have on people of colour.
 - Can you answer Colin’s question to himself about what it means to attack someone?
 - What leads people to make racist comments and jokes such as the ones Colin hears in the book?
 - How can/should people react when they see and hear racist behaviour from others?
 - What are some complicating factors that can make calling out this behaviour not always easy or possible for an

individual in specific circumstances?

- Which demographic holds the greatest responsibility, and has the greatest power to call out and end this type of racist behaviour?
- Look at the scene on p 67. What are the scouts at the baseball game doing, why are they there and why were they holding radar guns?
- Why does Colin's dad say he's ready when his mother says he's fidgeting?
- Discuss the question Colin asks about finding the right path as opposed to the easy one. How can we know whether a path is the right one?
- Why does the scout change how he is talking about Colin when Rick Kaepernick introduces himself as Colin's father? What does he mean about 'physicality'?
- Why is Colin's brother sending computer disks to every football team in the country? What is he trying to help Colin do?
- What is the symbolism of the baseball vs football imagery on pp 71 and 79?
- Why do you think Colin wants to play football rather than baseball? What are some of the things other than the game itself that you can see influencing his decision?
- Re-read Colin's description on page 85 of his later realisation about what it means when Black athletes are described as animals or beasts. As a class, discuss the history of racist imagery and descriptions, specifically as used in the US when referring to African Americans. Why were Black people historically perceived as being less intelligent or subhuman, and how and why does this racist belief persist within American society today?
- What is the importance to Colin of the feeling of being a part of a team, specifically when his football team loses the game on pp 96 and 97.
- Look carefully at all the individual chapter title pages, and as a class, discuss the imagery that you can see being used. In small groups choose one title page to analyse in more depth, and discuss what you think it symbolises in the context of Colin's story. Individually, use the title page as inspiration to help you draw and colour an image that you feel symbolises your present and future choices.
- Re-read pp 130–133: Looking at the last page, what do you think Colin does know for sure? Where does this image of him kneeling in his football uniform come from, why is it so important, and what are the events (not mentioned in the book) that led up to this moment? In small groups write an explanatory paragraph about why Colin Kaepernick going down on one knee in his football uniform is an important moment in the history of American race relations.
- What does the title *Change the Game* mean? Consider the different meanings of the phrase in the context of both the story, and of the final section where attendees at Colin's 2022 Know Your Rights Camp make declarations of how they intend to Change the Game.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE