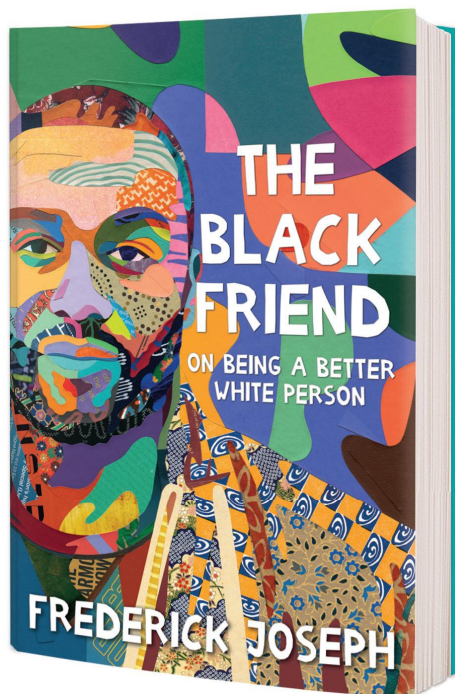


One Community One School One Book

When an entire community reads the same book, it becomes a point of reference for all members of that community. Conversation is sparked between teachers and students, librarians and patrons, booksellers and customers, parents and children, neighbors and friends. Story and reading become a part of that conversation.

THE BLACK FRIEND

ON BEING A BETTER WHITE PERSON



HC: 978-1-5362-1701-8
\$17.99 (\$23.99 CAN)
Also available as an e-book
and in audio

#theblackfriend



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"We don't see color." "I didn't know Black people liked Star Wars!" "What hood are you from?" For Frederick Joseph, life as a transfer student in a largely white high school was full of wince-worthy moments that he often simply let go. As he grew older, however, he saw these as missed opportunities not only to stand up for himself, but to spread awareness to those white people who didn't see the negative impact they were having.

Speaking directly to the reader, *The Black Friend* calls up race-related anecdotes from the author's past, weaving in his thoughts on why they were hurtful and how he might handle things differently now. Each chapter features the voice of at least one artist or activist, including playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney, who with Barry Jenkins received an Academy Award for the *Moonlight* screenplay; Angie Thomas, author of *The Hate U Give*; April Reign, creator of #OscarsSoWhite; and eleven others. Touching on everything from cultural appropriation to power dynamics, "reverse racism" to white privilege, microaggressions to the tragic results of overt racism, this book serves as conversation starter, tool kit, and invaluable window into the life of a former "token Black kid" who now presents himself as the friend many readers need. Back matter includes an encyclopedia of racism, providing details on relevant historical events, terminology, and more.



FREDERICK JOSEPH is a writer and an award-winning activist, philanthropist, and marketing professional who was once selected for the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list. He's also the winner of the 2018 Bob Clampett Humanitarian Award, given by Comic-Con International: San Diego, and was selected for the 2018 Root 100 list of most influential African Americans. He lives in New York City.

THE BLACK FRIEND

features conversations with such
artists and activists as:

ANGIE THOMAS Producer, storyteller, and author of the best-selling book *The Hate U Give*

NAIMA COCHRANE Career music-industry executive turned music historian and writer

APRIL REIGN Diversity and inclusion advocate and founder of the #OscarsSoWhite movement

AFRICA MIRANDA Author, host, and digital personality

RABIA CHAUDRY Lawyer, author, and podcast host

XORJE OLIVARES Queer Tejano border native, social commentator, activist, and media personality

TONI ADENLE (Toni Tone) Social media content creator and public speaker

DANIELA ALVAREZ Writer, editor, and social media manager

JESSIE DANIELS Writer and professor at the City University of New York

JOEL LEON Writer, author, storyteller, rapper, spoken-word artist, and TED Talk speaker

JEMELE HILL Journalist, host, sports expert, and overall dope person

JAMIRA BURLEY Activist and social impact consultant

SAIRA RAO Racial justice activist and entrepreneur

TARELL ALVIN McCRANEY World-renowned actor, playwright, and Academy Award winner

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author writes in a candid and conversational way, laced with humor, directing his words straight to the reader. Why do you think he chose this narrative style?
2. In the first chapter, the author makes a distinction between being “the token Black guy” and “the Black friend.” What is the difference?
3. The author describes visiting a white friend’s family in high school. After his friend’s brother makes a racist remark, the mother tries to apologize by saying that the family “doesn’t see color.” Why does this statement frustrate the author? How did you respond to the author’s description of his experience at this family’s home? Did you gain any new insights?
4. In her interview in the book, author Angie Thomas says, “I don’t need you to be color-blind. I need you to see me as I am, I need you to see that I’m a Black woman.” How is color blindness a way for white people to avoid seeing Black people? How does it protect white people and hinder racial progress?
5. What does the word *microaggression* mean in relation to race? Can you give some examples, from the book or elsewhere? Why are microaggressions harmful?
6. When the author was in second grade, he and a classmate of color, both excellent students, were falsely accused of cheating on a test. When forced to retake the test, the author was so unnerved that he did poorly. He poses the question, “What if I’d believed [the teacher] and lost the drive to ace those exams that ‘people like me’ weren’t supposed to ace?” (page 74). Consider, too, that the author didn’t tell his mother what had happened. What are some of the impacts of the kind of racism embodied in this incident—and why is this kind of racism sometimes hard to recognize and call out?
7. At his mostly white high school, white people often assumed that the author liked only stereotypically Black things, such as rap and basketball, and his white friends and teachers were surprised when his interests were more dynamic and layered than their assumptions. What sorts of false assumptions based on race or culture have you held about people you’ve met?
8. The author recalls a Halloween party at which white students dressed as Mexicans, complete with derogatory and stereotypical props. The students didn’t see their behavior as racist. What is the difference between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation? Is it ever OK to costume yourself as, or act like, someone from another culture or race?
9. The author points out that since mainstream culture is generally controlled by white people, Black people and other people of color tend to be familiar with white culture, but white people are less often familiar with cultures other than their own. Have you found that to be true, in or out of the classroom? To what degree have you taken it upon yourself to learn about some aspect of a culture other than your own?
10. Some white people might not see themselves as possessing white privilege because they don’t come from a wealthy background. How does the very fact of being white confer privilege? Consider things such as being seen as an individual, goofing around without fear of consequences, standing up for yourself, and feeling protected by police or the law. What are some other aspects of white privilege?



11. When lining up for a mock-trial tournament in high school, the author's (winning) team overheard a quip by a white parent about affirmative action. What is the purpose of affirmative action and similar programs? Whom do they primarily benefit? How do stereotypical attitudes about these programs harm people of color?
12. The author describes the term "reverse racism" being used by his opponents in a campaign for student government. He explains that "reverse racism" doesn't exist because racism affects people who have been systemically marginalized, and therefore applying the concept to people who have been systemically *privileged* is nonsensical. What are your thoughts about reverse racism? Did his discussion of the term deepen your understanding of privilege? How?
13. What does it mean to be an ally of a person of color? Can you give examples, including from your own life (either when you've been an ally yourself or were helped by one)? Is it possible to be an ally and also "live and let live" when witnessing intolerant words or behavior from family, friends, or strangers?
14. How is being an ally different from being an accomplice? The author describes a rare time when a white stranger acted as an accomplice by intervening in a store incident when he was young. Why does he believe it's not enough for white people to be allies and that they should aspire to be accomplices? What is required of a white person to do so? Can you offer any examples from your own life, from stories you've heard, or from history?
15. The author includes candid interviews with well-known people in arts, media, and other fields to further explore his themes. Why do you think he chose to include other voices in this book—and these voices in particular? Which interviews stood out for you?
16. Part of the book's title is *On Being a Better White Person*. Why did the author choose to address white people primarily? If you are white, has reading the book moved you to try to change in any way? If you are not white, what did you gain from reading the book?
17. What parts of the book were surprising to you? What parts were especially difficult or painful to read? Has the book broadened your understanding of yourself and of racism? In what ways?
18. The author's preface was written in mid-2020, after he had finished writing the book. It was a time when recent killings of Black people, in several cases by police officers, ignited major protests across the globe. The author chose not to directly address those events with his white readers, instead writing a letter to his younger brother to read when he is older. In doing so, he was following in the footsteps of such Black writers as James Baldwin writing to his nephew in *The Fire Next Time* and Ta-Nehisi Coates writing to his son in *Between the World and Me*. Why do you think he and these other authors chose to take such an approach?
19. How do you feel about what has happened in the realm of race relations in the United States and across the world between the time the author finished the book at the end of 2019 and the time he wrote the preface in mid-2020? Or between 2019 and now? Have your feelings changed or evolved in any way?
20. To what degree do you think Black people are responsible for educating white people—however well meaning—on how to recognize or respond to racism? What can be the cost to Black people of doing so—or of not doing so?





Praise for **THE BLACK FRIEND**

“For every white person who ever wanted to do better, inside this book, Frederick Joseph offers you both the tools and the chance.”

—Jacqueline Woodson, winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Award

“Toward the end of *The Black Friend*, Frederick Joseph writes that his book is ‘a gift, not an obligation.’ I respectfully disagree. This book should be an obligation for white people, especially white parents, because we must raise anti-racist kids who will never be perpetrators of or bystanders to white supremacy and who will never mistake tolerance or appropriation for respect. Don’t skip the painful parts—read every word.”

—Chelsea Clinton, author, advocate, and vice chair of the Clinton Foundation

“*The Black Friend* is THE book everyone needs to read right now. Frederick Joseph has written an essential window into the movement toward anti-racism. Read it, absorb it, and be changed because of it.”

—Angie Thomas, author of *The Hate U Give*

“With clear, powerful prose and a gentle dose of humor, *The Black Friend* is essential reading for anyone wishing to be part of a better world. I absolutely loved this book.”

—Julie Klam, *New York Times* best-selling author

