

# DEFIANT

Growing Up in the Jim Crow South

## DISCUSSION and ACTIVITY GUIDE

Written by **Wade Hudson**

Published by Crown Books for Young Readers

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Ages: 9 and up

### About the Book

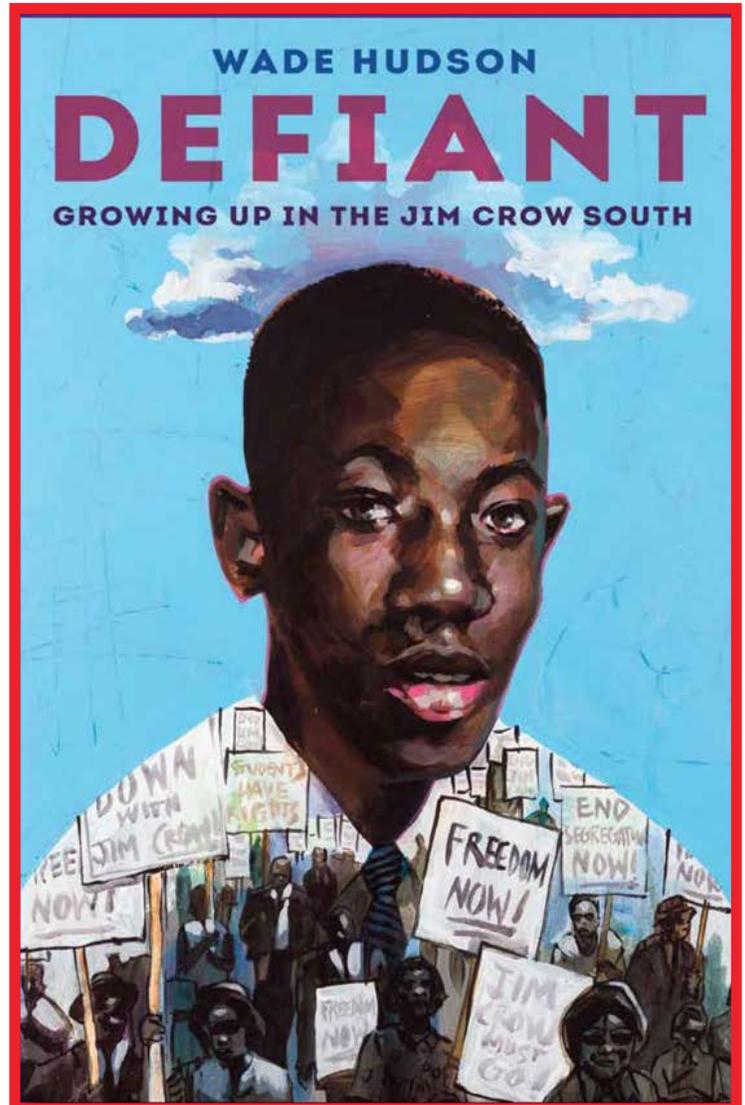
Born in 1946 in Mansfield, Louisiana, Wade Hudson came of age against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement. From their home on Mary Street, his close-knit family watched as the country grappled with desegregation, as the Klan targeted the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and as systemic racism struck across the nation and in their hometown.

Amidst it all, Wade was growing up. Getting into scuffles, playing baseball, immersing himself in his church community, and starting to write. Most important, Wade learned how to find his voice and use it. From his family, his community, and his college classmates, Wade learned the importance of fighting for change by confronting the laws and customs that marginalized and demeaned people.

This powerful memoir reveals the struggles, joys, love, and ongoing resilience that it took to grow up Black in segregated America, and the lessons that carry over to our fight for a better future.

### Awards

- Malka Penn Award for Human Rights in Children's Literature
- New York Historical Society Children's History Book Prize finalist
- Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices selection
- CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young Readers



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### Themes

Civil Rights Movement, activism, social justice, personal narrative, coming of age, history

**DEFIANT: Growing Up in the Jim Crow South** by Wade Hudson.

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#### REFLECT

- Why do you think the author named his memoir *Defiant*?
- If you were to write a book or poem about your life, what would you title it?
- How did the author begin writing? What experiences do you think helped him find his voice?
- What passage in *Defiant* did you connect with the most?
- Is there anything the author didn't cover in the memoir that you want to know more about?
- How significant of a role did the author's hometown of Mansfield, LA play in his experiences as a boy? Think about where you were born or where you live now and reflect on the same question.
- What's one thing the memoir helped you learn or understand better?

#### DISCUSS

- How does the time and climate the author grew up in compare with the present day and how you are growing up now? What's similar? What's different?
- Charly Palmer is the illustrator of *Defiant's* cover art. An excerpt of his bio reads: "Palmer's paintbrush is as a Griot." What does that mean and why do you think that's important for the art he did for this book?
- When does the author have his first direct encounter with racism? What happens? How does he handle it? Do you think it had a longterm effect on him?
- Why does the author write to US Attorney General Robert Kennedy and what is the result?
- During his Malka Penn Award acceptance speech, Wade Hudson said about his hometown of Mansfield: "there's something special about the town, but there's also something special about the people there who loved us and cared for and nurtured us." Who were some of those people and what was their impact on a young Wade Hudson?
- In Chapter 8, Madear reminds Wade and his brother PG: "Trouble's so easy to get into." What are some examples of trouble he gets into? Do you think any of those examples were the trouble Madear was talking about?
- Why was 1963 such an important year for the author? What happened? How did it shape him?
- Throughout *Defiant*, the author talks about many issues that were important to him as a boy. Name some of those issues then discuss as a group some off the issues that are important to you.

#### EXPLORE

- What are the origins of the term "Jim Crow"?
- Research youth led movements of history. How did they start? What strategies did they use? How did young people mobilize and what was the result?
- *Defiant* is categorized as a memoir. Is there a difference between a memoir and an autobiography?
- In the book, the author highlights people who were taking a "stand for freedom" including Daisy Bates, Stokely Carmichael and John Lewis. Research these freedom fighters. How did their activism begin? What causes were they fighting for? What impact did they make?
- Wade begins his formal participation in Civil Rights organizations during his first year in college (1964-1965). Research the social and political climate of that time. How did they differ from Wade's freshman year in high school?



Author Michelle Palmer, Wade Hudson, and Senator Christopher Dodd at the 2022 Malka Penn Awards presentation.

The Malka Penn Award is given annually to the author of an outstanding children's book addressing human rights issues or themes such as discrimination, equity, poverty, justice, war, peace, slavery or freedom.

- At the end of his memoir, Wade Hudson writes “Fighting for freedom and justice certainly isn’t easy” and that he will “continue to fight for change.” How do you think he did that after his college years? Research to learn more about how he fought for change throughout his career.

## CREATE

- Memoirs are full of stories about pivotal moments in the author’s life. Which pivotal moments in your life would make your memoir? Create a timeline to illustrate those milestones.
- Brainstorm synonyms for the word “defiant” and create a collage or use a computer to create a word cloud of those synonyms.
- Research the strategies community organizers from SNCC, CORE, and the Southern Student Organizing Committee (the group Wade Hudson joined as a college student) used in their work. Then create a campaign to raise awareness for and drive action in support of a cause you care about. How would you raise awareness and get people to act? Which tools and resources would you use today that organizers may not have had in the 1960s?
- As a young writer, the author explores many formats for his creative expression. Identify those formats



**Wade Hudson** is an author, a publisher, and founder with his wife Cheryl of Just Us Books, one of the nation’s leading publishers of children’s books that celebrate and center Black people, history, and experiences. His career as a writer spans 50 years. He has written more than 30 books including, *Book of Black Heroes From A to Z*; *Jamal’s Busy Day*, *Powerful Words*, and *Journey*, a collection of poetry. He is also co-editor with his wife Cheryl of several anthologies including *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices* and their latest: *Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life*. Wade’s most recent book, his coming-of-age memoir for middle readers, *Defiant: Growing up in the Jim Crow South*, was called a “powerful testimony from a children’s literature legend” (Kirkus Reviews) and is winner of the 2022 Malka Penn Award for Human Rights in Children’s Literature.

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Discussion guide written by Katura Hudson.