



A Good Kind of Trouble

by Lisa Moore Ramée

★ “A timely, funny, and unforgettable debut.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

Grades 3–7

Themes: Friendship, Black Lives Matter, Fitting In, Social Justice

About the Book

Twelve-year-old Shayla is allergic to trouble. All she wants to do is to follow the rules. But in junior high, it's like all the rules have changed. Now she's suddenly questioning who her best friends are and some people at school are saying she's not black enough. Wait, *what*?

Shay's sister, Hana, is involved in Black Lives Matter, but Shay doesn't think that's for her. After experiencing a powerful protest, though, Shay decides some rules are worth breaking. She starts wearing an armband to school in support of the Black Lives movement. Soon everyone is taking sides, and she is given an ultimatum. Shay is scared to do the wrong thing (and even more scared to do the right thing), but if she doesn't face her fear, she'll be forever tripping over the next hurdle.

Discussion Questions

1. In the opening chapter, Shayla states, “I’m allergic to trouble. It makes my hands itch.” What does this declaration say about Shayla’s character (p. 1)?
2. Describe Shayla’s best friends. Why do they call themselves the “United Nations” (pp. 6–9)?
3. Frustrated with her English teacher Ms. Jacobs, Shayla slumps in her chair and says, “I hate when a teacher assumes that just because I’m black, I’ll know all about slavery and civil rights and stuff like that. I’m the only black student in the class, so I know everyone’s staring at me, trying to see if I have bat wings or hairy armpits. Like being black is a whole different species” (p. 22). How do you think this type of attention affects Shayla?
4. Why did Shayla want to “abolish” the conversation about Emerson (p. 24)?
5. Julia plays basketball in an all-Asian league. Shayla was upset that she couldn’t join the league, and her father said that this league was “about lifting up the kids who played in the league” (p. 33). Discuss the value of representation in this space of the basketball arena and in other areas.
6. Shayla’s mother takes a different route home due to the protesting that is happening because of the trial. What does Shayla’s mom mean when she says, “People are acting like they already know what the verdict’s going to be” (p. 40)? Describe the conversation that Shayla and her mother have on the way home from school. Why does her mother stay silent at the end of this chapter?
7. Shayla talks with her mother about the dynamics of friendships. Her mom reminds her, “Just make sure you’re open to all sorts of people... You may find as you get older that there’s something...comfortable, or I don’t know, comforting, in having friends who can relate to things you might be going through” (p. 121). What do you think her mom is trying to tell her about growing up?
8. Bernard, Shayla’s lab partner and track teammate, is constantly reprimanded and picked on in class by Mr. Levy. Later, he is falsely accused of trying to throw Alex in the trash can. Why is Bernard assumed guilty? Why does Shayla change her view of him? In what way does the narrative surrounding Bernard echo the themes of the story?
9. How did Shayla’s family and community react after the verdict was announced (p. 260)? Do you agree with the verdict? Why or why not?
10. With a shrug, Bernard tells Shayla, “Some stuff it’s okay to get in trouble for” (p. 319). Reflect on this statement.



Extension Activities

Eyeball Journals. Create an “eyeball journal” like Shayla and her classmates did (p. 22). What do you notice in your community? School? The news? Talk in small groups about how these circumstances in your community impact the way you view the world.

Sports & Social Justice. Sports figures have been at the forefront of social justice. The story mentions NFL football player Colin Kaepernick; sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos; boxer Muhammad Ali; and other athletes who have protested police brutality, racism, and other injustices. Group students and have them choose one of these figures to research and prepare a presentation on.