



[The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person](#) by Frederick Joseph

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Candlewick Press, 2020

*Age Range: 12 and up (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: Grade 7 and up (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Writing from the perspective of a friend, Frederick Joseph offers candid reflections on his own experiences with racism and conversations with prominent artists and activists about theirs—creating an essential read for white people who are committed anti-racists and those newly come to the cause of racial justice.

“We don’t see color.” “I didn’t know Black people liked *Star Wars*!” “What hood are you from?” As a student in a largely white high school, Frederick Joseph often simply let wince-worthy moments go. When he grew older, he saw them as missed opportunities to stand up for himself and bring awareness to those who didn’t see the hurt they caused. Here, Joseph speaks to the reader as he wishes he’d spoken to his friends, unpacking hurtful race-related anecdotes from his past and sharing how he might handle things differently now. Each chapter also features the voice and experience of an artist or activist, including Angie Thomas, author of *The Hate U Give*; April Reign, creator of #OscarsSoWhite; and Jemele Hill, sports journalist and podcast host. From cultural appropriation to power dynamics, “reverse racism” to white privilege, this book is a conversation starter, tool kit, and window into the life of a former “token Black kid.” Back matter includes an encyclopedia of racism, including details on historical events and terminology.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ “Joseph adroitly manages what in 2020 seems a vanishing skill: delivering a tough message in a way that inspires people to listen.” —[The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books](#), **starred review**

★ “A hard-hitting resource for action and change.” —[Booklist](#), **starred review**

★ “A helpful, commanding guide for white Americans who are ready to learn how to dismantle the system of racism, specifically anti-Blackness, and how they can change.” —[School Library Journal](#), **starred review**

★ “Gearing this volume toward white people ‘who want to *be* better,’ Joseph offers anecdotes about his experiences with racism and white supremacy. . . . Interviews with author Angie Thomas, journalist Jemele Hill, and others contribute discussions on the problem with ‘color blindness’ and the importance of personal growth,

among various topics. In a genial, assured tone, Joseph invites and encourages readers to reflect on their own behavior, move toward anti-racism, and implement change.” —[Publishers Weekly](#), **starred review**

“Part memoir, part guidebook, this title explores scenarios of interpersonal and institutional struggle to introduce the next generation of White youth to anti-racism. . . . A smartly researched, well-intentioned provocation to inspire change.” —[Kirkus Reviews](#)

“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, National Book Award winner

“*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*

“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

“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

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A *Booklist* Editors’ Choice
- A *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* Blue Ribbon Winner
- A Bank Street College Best Children’s Book of the Year
- A Cooperative Children’s Book Center Choices List Selection
- An International Literacy Association Young Adult Book Award Winner

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Discussion Guide](#)
- [Teachers’ Guide](#)
- [Red Wine & Blue Author Interview](#)
- [PBS NewsHour EXTRA Author Interview](#)
- [Read Woke Author interview](#)

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

[Washington Post](#) columnist [Kate Cohen](#) responded to an attempt to ban the book:

“At a November school board meeting about an hour from my home in Upstate New York, a parent complained about a book his daughter had brought home from the middle school library: *The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person*, by Frederick Joseph.

“Tensions are running high in that particular school district, where locals have been wrestling for more than a year with whether to change their sports mascot from “Indians” to something less, well, racist. But the dad’s complaint is familiar to anyone anywhere in the country following the massive wave of parents around the country demanding that schools remove, ban and even *burn* books.

“According to the local paper, the father held up a copy of *The Black Friend* and said, “If this isn’t critical race theory, I don’t know what is.”

“I agree. He doesn’t.

“A young adult book of nonfiction, *The Black Friend* simply encourages White people to be thoughtful in their interactions with people of color. Chapters include “We Want You to See Race,” “Certain Things Are Racist, Even If You Don’t Know It,” and “So Your Friend Is Racist. What Should You Do?”

“It’s an entertaining and helpful guide, suffused with the optimism that animates all how-tos: the belief that people want to do better, and, with a little education, *can* do better.

“Or, as the father put it at the school board meeting: “It’s disgusting. It’s crap.” He also said he wasn’t going to return it to the library.

“Now whether this man thinks racism is overblown, or over—or just something Black people do to White people, he has to admit that it’s an issue in the world today. Even in his almost-all-White school district.

“He’s literally stealing from children a tool they could use to navigate their world.

“Personally, I’d like my children to have those tools.”

AUTHOR STATEMENT

[From an article in the *Houston Chronicle*:](#)

I think studying our history has never been more important. We are actively repeating history in a country that is erasing women’s bodily autonomy and erasing the right to vote. How do you get to tell a group of people that their experience and history are not important?

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.