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DISCUSSION GUIDE  
JUMP AT THE SUN

## About the Book

After his father is murdered, Keith and his mom are forced to move from Brooklyn, New York to Hollow Falls, Ohio. He's the only one at school with an Afro, a wardrobe out of the '60s, and a zealous appreciation of Jimi Hendrix, the greatest guitarist who ever lived. Through the storm of his tragic loss, Keith begins to see a few rays of happiness—especially when the beautiful Veronica, with her long blond hair falling everywhere, looks his way.

## About the Guide

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel including loss, racism, betrayal, family relationships, friendship, and forgiveness.



## Discussion Questions

- 1 Discuss Keith's relationship with his father. How does what he learns about his father change the way he feels about him? Would you have a similar reaction?
- 2 What do you think perpetuates racist behavior like that of Powers and Coles? Would this happen in any location? Is it a lack of education and ignorance? Stupidity only? Can these attitudes ever be eradicated completely? How?
- 3 What do you think it would be like to be in such a completely foreign environment as Keith is in Hollow Springs? Should Keith do anything to fit in more or is it futile anyway?
- 4 Keith's mom calls his dad a monster after she learns the truth and does not want to mark or honor his life anymore. Do you think this is a fair reaction or not?
- 5 Why do you think the author, Jaime Adoff, writes in this spare, elegant format for his novel? What does this add to the story? What can you learn about your own writing by studying it?
- 6 Discuss Keith's friendship with Veronica. How does she show herself to be a true friend? Do you think their friendship will grow into something else? Why or why not?
- 7 Compare Aunt Berny and Keith's mom. How do they react differently to the news about Keith's dad? Who do you think Keith will be more like when he's an adult—the ever-optimistic Aunt Berny or his mom? What can he learn from both of these women? What do you think would have happened to Keith and his mom if Aunt Berny were not in the picture?

- 8 Keith is influenced greatly by the music and lyrics of the great guitar player Jimi Hendrix. Whose music influences you most and why? Is there a current artist who you believe will have such a lasting impact on the music industry? Support your answer.
- 9 Jaime Adoff's writing is full of imagery and lyrical phrases. For example: "My heart getting caught in a car door./Slammed shut/all ripped up/and I can't/get it free." Find and share your favorite lines from the novel. Why did you choose this section?
- 10 Compare the lives of Keith and his brother Jimi. Who had the better relationship with their father? Who knew him best? Did he love one more than the other? Which son? Use examples from the book to support your position.

## Projects



- 1 Research the life and work of Jimi Hendrix. Listen to his music, read his lyrics and write a brief journal about what you learned.
- 2 Keith suffers from panic disorder in the novel. Research this debilitating disorder and the treatments that are available for it.
- 3 Create a piece of collage inspired by the book—use images from magazines, newspapers, the Internet or create your own. Layer color, words, and images until there is no blank space on a standard sheet of paper, then mount it on a larger colored piece.

## About the Author

Jaime Adoff is the author of two critically acclaimed books for young adults: *The Song Shoots Out of My Mouth* and *Names Will Never Hurt Me*. He is the son of late Newbery Award-winning author Virginia Hamilton and renowned poet Arnold Adoff.



## Author Interview

- 1 *How do you learn about your characters?*  
I let my characters teach me. I try to get out of their way and let them tell me their story. There is always some of me in my characters, and I use that as a base, but it really is only a small part. If, as the author, I am open to all the possibilities, and can see the characters from all sides, then they will really come to life, and make the reader truly care about them. Which, of course, is the goal.
- 2 *Are you a big fan of Jimi Hendrix music yourself? Did you use his music to inspire your work on this piece? How?*  
Oh yes! I'm a huge fan of Jimi's music. I would listen to his music before I started writing to get me in the mood and for inspiration. At times, I would also listen to his music while I was writing, and if I was writing a passage where Keith was listening to a particular Hendrix song, it really helped for me to be listening to that same song at the same time Keith was listening to it.  
I can't emphasize enough how Jimi's music helped to shape this book. Not just the music itself, but it's deeper social and cultural significance. Love really permeates what Jimi was singing about, and in the end, love is really what *Jimi & Me* is all about.

**3** *Describe your writing process for this book.*

This book was not easy to write. It went through many stages, and took over two and a half years to complete.

My process really started at an emotional level, which is where I feel most of my writing begins. Connecting with the emotions of the characters, Keith especially, then expanding from there. Using the style I write in—this poetic-prose style—I am able to start small, using each piece or poem as a small part of a much larger whole. In doing so, I feel I can really bring out the immediacy of any given moment and fit it into the larger context of the novel. When I'm writing, I never think, Oh God, I've got to write three hundred more pages, how am I ever going to do that?! I just take it one piece at a time. Letting each piece connect with the next, letting the pieces gather energy and a life of their own to tell the story. The key is not to impose yourself onto the story. As in songwriting, the author has to really let the story go where it wants to. If you try to make it go somewhere it wasn't meant to go, it usually just doesn't work.

**4** *What advice would you give to young writers?*

I am fortunate to be able to speak to many young writers around the country during my school visits and speaking engagements. I tell them to always be writing, and *revising*, which is the most important part of the process. It's not the most glamorous, but revising your work really is how the book develops and where everything is worked out, from style to plot, and everything in between!

I would say the single best piece of advice I could give a young writer would be to continually work on your individual style. Develop your voice. Your distinct way of telling a story or writing a poem is what will make you different from the rest and make your work stand out.

**5** *What music and stories influenced you when you were the same age as your main character, Keith?*

I grew up around a constant buzz of music and words. With both my parents being writers (Arnold Adoff and the late Virginia Hamilton) I was exposed to the creative process at a very early age. There were books everywhere, and music was always being played on the stereo. When I was Keith's age, I listened to the current music of the times, but

mostly I listened to the music of the '60s and '70s. Like Keith, I loved Hendrix, and Joplin, Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills, & Nash, Sly and the Family Stone.

I think instead of citing one particular song or story, for me it was more of an atmosphere that I grew up in, a vibe that helped to shape who I am today as not only a writer but as a person.

**6** *How did you develop your poetic voice?*

Well I think that having been a songwriter since high school really helped in that development. Writing songs from my teens into my twenties, I was really writing poetry—but with music. When I started writing professionally, I think I already felt comfortable with words and how to express myself. It was not that much of a stretch from songwriting to writing poetry. And from writing poetry to writing poetic novels was, I feel, a natural progression. Again, starting small then expanding. Just seeing one piece, working on that, then going on to the next . . . having great confidence in myself even if at the time I wasn't quite sure of what I was doing, or how I was doing it, but knowing in the end I would figure it out. I never questioned what I did or how my style was developing. I never tried to write like anyone else, or be too influenced by anyone else's style. I've always done things my own way, and for as long as I can remember, I wanted to be the one that set the trends, not follow them.

**7** *What do you hope readers take away from your stories?*

I hope readers will feel like they have read something that will stay with them. Something that will resonate in their own lives. My stories really are accessible to kids in all walks of life. *Jimi & Me* is a story of loss and love and the power of music, but it is also a story of finding oneself, going back to the past to help with the present.

I hope my stories are like a really good meal. You're satisfied and full, but still have room for a little dessert!

**8** *What are you working on next?*

Well, I am bursting to tell you about my next project. It is a trilogy that is truly out of this world. I would love to say more, but I can't—I don't think you have the security clearance!