

## A Read on the Rebellion

By Jervey Tervalon

Illustrated by Scott Gandell

Curriculum developed by Andrew Ramirez



### OVERVIEW

#### Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

<b>Student Population</b>	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 14-16/ 9th-10th grade
Genre/s	* Memoir * Vignette
Length	* 658 words (7 minute read)
Content Advisories	* References to violence * Mild language
One-Sentence Summary	A young writer witnesses a shooting on his evening walk with his dog, and recounts the event with a woman who is also in the neighborhood.

<b>Lesson Planning</b>	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Rodney King Riots</li> <li>* University culture</li> <li>* Los Angeles life</li> <li>* Neighborhood Planning/Differences</li> <li>* Financial hardship</li> <li>* Random chance</li> </ul> <p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Being an outsider</li> <li>* Honesty</li> <li>* Masculinity</li> <li>* Inequality</li> <li>* Gender Roles</li> <li>* Cycle of anger</li> </ul>
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Contemporary Los Angeles</li> <li>* 1992 Los Angeles Riots</li> </ul>
Complementary Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Novel Excerpt: <a href="#">The Flowers by Dagoberto Gilb</a></li> <li>* Article: <a href="#">“When LA Erupted In Anger: A Look Back At The Rodney King Riots”</a> by Anjuli Sastry</li> <li>* Interactive webpage: <a href="#">“An Atlas of American Gun Violence”</a> by The Trace</li> </ul>
Author	<p><b>Jervey Tervalon</b> is an Los Angeles-based writer and professor.</p> <p><b>Scott Gandell</b> is the Art Curator at Locavore Lit LA. He is also a Board Member of The Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles.</p>
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>Grades 9th-10th Common Core Standards:</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3</p>

## Author Biography

**Jervey Tervalon** was born in New Orleans and raised in Los Angeles, attending Dorsey High School. He earned his MFA in Creative Writing at UC Irvine. His thesis project became his first novel *Understand This* for which he won the Quality Paper Book Club’s New Voices Award. He is the author of six books. Currently, Tervalon is the Executive Director of “Locavore Lit LA,” an educational advocacy organization, and Creative Director of LitFest Pasadena. His latest novel is *Monster’s Chef*. (<https://lareviewofbooks.org/contributor/jervey-tervalon/>)

## Artist Biography

**Scott Gandell** wears many hats. He descends from a long line of creatives and business professionals. His experience is as diverse as the subjects he illustrates. He is a proud alumnus of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. ([https://www.gallerynucleus.com/artists/scott\\_gandell](https://www.gallerynucleus.com/artists/scott_gandell))

## SYNOPSIS

The narrator is attending college in LA when the Rodney King riots break out. The riots pose a real threat to the narrator and he walks with a baseball cap on to hide his light skin. One night, the narrator is walking his dog when he witnesses a drive-by shooting. He hides in the bushes with his dog, fearful he will be shot too. On his way home, the narrator sees a black woman working on her car and warns her about the shooting. Like a frustrated mother, she scolds the shooters, saying they shouldn’t be doing that. Nervous, the narrator is eager to go home. Before he leaves, the woman blesses the narrator and requests he do the same back to her. Not a religious man, the narrator is taken by something about the woman, and blesses her back. He continues on his way home.

## CURRICULUM

### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

#### Topic

Journaling:

In a 15-minute journal entry, explore the following prompt:

Reflect on a time when you felt both nervous and excited at the same time. Maybe it was before a big game, or a class presentation... maybe you were showing someone an artwork you made, or maybe you were talking to someone you hadn’t seen in a long time. How did it feel to be in that moment? Use rich language to describe the moment.

#### Main Ideas

Small-Group Discussion:

Do you think the neighborhood creates the person, or does the person create the neighborhood? Practice arguing for both sides, even if you are strongly opinionated on this. If you feel comfortable doing so, reference your own experiences. Discuss in small groups.

### Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passage from “A Read on the Rebellion.” Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

I was in my second year in UCI’s MFA program where good people and some asses agonized over the potential success of their fellow workshop writers when the Rodney King Rebellion exploded and I had something real to worry about. I took to wearing my Malcom X baseball cap to give my light skin ass some protection from flying bricks or whatever else. I didn’t really take my personal safety as that big an issue, but Gina did suggest that I stay home the night when it officially became a region wide riot. I needed to walk the dog and I went out into the night from our black working-class neighborhood that abutted the freeway. The city of Pasadena, like many cities, was brilliant at blowing up neighborhoods of color by building freeways or parking lots, just about anything to cut right at the economic heart of the black or brown community or Asian just to show us that they could do some vile racist city planning.

Question One: What do you think the narrator means when he says, “The city of Pasadena, like many cities, was brilliant at blowing up neighborhoods of color by building freeways or parking lots”? Is Tervalon speaking literally or figuratively? How do you know?

Question Two: Why does the narrator feel like he has “something real to worry about” when the riots break out? Do you think his classmates had to worry too? Why does the narrator, perhaps unlike his classmates, have to wear a “Malcom X hat” for protection?

### Universal Themes

What is the difference between a riot and a rebellion? Can they describe the same thing? How do different points of view affect the way those words might be used?

Think about the last time you felt like an outsider. What specific emotions/feelings did you experience? Share with a partner how it felt to be on the outside, and think of a few ways you could help others who might feel like outsiders to join groups you are currently a part of.

### Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
vile	abutted	working class
blessed	affluent	Rodney King Riots
devout	alight	MFA program
verdict	evolve	agonize
squeal	region-wide	workshop (writers)

engine jack	caravan (v.)	
peeled off	economic	

### Vocabulary Activity Options

- Using reliable sources, research the Rodney King riots. (You may wish to start at the following webpage from the article: “When LA Erupted In Anger: A Look Back At The Rodney King Riots” by Anjali Sastry. <https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots>)

Follow-up Discussion: How exactly is the narrator, in your opinion, caught between two worlds? What might those two worlds be, and do you think he is aware of this? Why or why not?

- Research gun violence throughout the United States. Be sure to refer to reliable sources. Take notes on your findings. (You may wish to start at the following webpage: Interactive webpage: “An Atlas of American Gun Violence” by The Trace. <https://www.thetrace.org/2018/12/gun-violence-interactive-shootings-map/?place=Illinois>)

In small groups, discuss differences in gun violence across the country. Where do you notice more gun violence? Where do you notice less gun violence? Look up where the narrator lives in Pasadena, California. Has it become more or less dangerous than when the narrator lived there in the early 1990s.

- Using the dictionary, define the **Working class**.

In a one-page response, respond to the following questions:

- What can we infer about the narrator, based on where he lives?
- In what ways is the narrator both a reflection of his neighborhood. In what ways does he challenge or appear different from his neighborhood?
- How does the narrator feel about the woman with the engine jack. How do we know?
- By the end of the story, is the narrator uplifted or saddened by his interaction with the woman? Do you think he feels the same way about the future of his neighborhood?

Share your ideas with a partner.

### Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

- Describe the narrator in three words.
- What makes the narrator different from people he goes to college with? What makes the narrator different from people in his neighborhood?
- If the city were a character in this story, would it be a protagonist or antagonist?
- What does the narrator mean by, “I’m not religious, but for that moment I was a devout Christian, blessed by a black woman who had more heart than I ever had in my life.”

### \*\* Text-Dependent Question Options

- Identify 2 moments where the personality of the narrator shines through. How do these moments give us insight to the narrator as a person? Please provide textual evidence to support your argument.

2. Do you think the narrator mattered as much to the woman as she mattered to him? Why or why not?
3. Examine the descriptive language leading up to the conversation between the narrator and the woman in “A Read on the Rebellion.” In what way does the writing show the woman’s dominance over the man? Provide specific examples to show how the author shows the power dynamic between the woman and the man. Why do you think the author chooses to have the woman “bless” the man?
4. In what ways does the artwork compliment or challenge the theme of “unity” in this story? Do you think that a group must undergo a civil war before they can be truly united?

## Writing Exercises

### Narrative

“A Read on the Rebellion” tells a personal narrative that is intertwined with historical fact — the aftermath of the Rodney King riots. Just like the narrator, we have all lived through big moments in our community’s history. Spend a moment thinking about a *big* event, and where you were when it happened. Note: This big event does not have to be a recognizable headline. It can be about winning the championship with your team, or going to an important academic event. You may choose to write about a family member leaving town, or a tough time you went through with a friend. Maybe you lost someone you loved, or met someone special at an unexpected time. Take some time to select your “moment.” After you pick your memorable moment, select one of the two options below...

Option 1: Write a “time stamp” narrative that tells the story of your moment in 4 distinct chapters labeled: 8AM, 12PM, 4PM, 8PM. Be sure to include how the story grows or changes over the course of the day, and what new discoveries or information you receive as your day progresses amidst your memorable moment.

Option 2: Tell the story of your memorable moment from the unique perspective of another person. You may include yourself as a character in the story, so long as the narrator is not you. (Consider taking the perspective of a family member, a person closely related to the event, or even a furry friend like a pet cat or dog!)

Share your first draft with your partner.

### Descriptive

“As I walked back to my neighborhood and when I got to Lincoln, I saw a black woman rolling a large engine jack into position to lower the engine out. I was surprised not because she was a woman, but that it was a one person job. When my dad or brother did that kind of thing, they had help. Obviously, this woman didn’t need it.”

In a one-page response, describe a moment when you felt surprised because you experienced something you did not expect to happen. Where were you when it happened? Who were you with? What happened before and after? It can be a small moment like Tervalon writes about in “A Read on the Rebellion” or it can be a big moment in your life. Use telling details and sensory language so your reader can visualize your experience.

### \*\* Analysis

When analyzing a piece of writing, it can be useful to consider authorial choices. In “A Read on the Rebellion” the narrator is self-described as a “light skin” while he describes the woman he meets in the

street only as “black.” Aside from these descriptions, we get no more indication of the race of Gina, or the people involved in the shooting. Interestingly, the race of the classmates is also left vague.

In a two- to three-page analysis, respond to the following prompt:

Why do you believe Tervalon chooses to omit overt discussion of so many character’s race/heritage in this story? What effect does it have on the reader? In your opinion, is this authorial choice effective as a storytelling tool? Why or why not?

Share your first draft with a partner. Ask them to write down three strengths of your analysis, as well as three places where you can improve. Revise into a final draft to turn in to your teacher.

### Complementary Text Option

Read this paragraph from Dagoberto Gilb’s novel *The Flowers*. It’s about a teenage boy, Sonny Bravo, who has a tough interaction with the LAPD in the early 90s (preceding the LA riots).

That was this time when the police scraped the tires of their black-and-white against the curb ahead of me. I was walking by myself. At first I didn't believe it was about me, but that policeman kept wanting to know what I was doing... Maybe a couple days earlier I pocketed a chocolate bar and I folded a baby comic book down my pants. It wasn't like the first time I did that, and when I did get caught this one and only time, when a drugstore man yelled something, I ran, and I never made it back to that store again and that was the worst of it and that already was back then, and no way anyone could still care or remember. So the passenger policeman who came up to me first, he goes, So what're you doing? and I'm like, Walking on the street, mister, which is when the driver policeman comes around to stand next to his partner, and he frowns at me too, like I'm stinky. Until a second or so later, he gets this expression on his face. His eyes go a little up to the sky, and his body gets kind of stiff, and he blows this fat old pedo. And so, like anybody would, I laughed. I did because it was funny, right? And so yeah I'm all guilty of laughing. But that's when they both get all blowed up mad — I'm disrespectful, and I got attitude, and who did I think I am? They got so close into my face I thought they were gonna kick the crap outta me. And so that's why I had to go to the juvie court, to hear a commercial about disrespecting the police and authority and to hear about all the potential trouble I was going to be in if I didn't go right and goodboy, straighten out and care about school and my education and get good grades.

#### \*\* Writing Exercise

In “A Read on the Rebellion,” Tervalon writes:

My usual walk was above the Rose Bowl with Buck, my beloved genius husky. Sometimes we would have a barn owl follow us and alight onto a stop sign where we would sit on a bench and watch it. This time though I heard squealing tires down at the Rose Bowl. I stood on the edge of the hillside and I could see cars caravanning around the 3.5 mile loop and then I heard rapid gunfire and then the cars peeled off in opposite directions. Then it occurred to me that they might want to drive through this affluent neighborhood and shoot it up and maybe even my working class/middle class ass might look affluent enough to shoot at. I disappeared into a hedge and pulled Buck low, but no cars came in our direction.

**10-Minute Quick Write:** Compare and contrast the two characters — the narrator from “A Read on the Rebellion” and Sonny from *The Flowers*. They are both faced with a scary situation that could have a bad outcome. What commonalities do you see in the way they handle a testy situation? What differences are there? Lastly, put yourself in either Sonny or the narrator’s shoes. How would *you* handle that situation?

## Activity Options

### Classroom Activity One

Google Drop:

The teacher drops the Google Maps yellow figure (bottom right hand corner on google maps) on any random spot in the world. Then, students write a short piece of creative fiction about that area. Maybe two people are fighting. Maybe a friend meets another friend. Or, like in “A Read on the Rebellion” perhaps a person has an interaction with a stranger. The path of the story is up to you, but be sure to use strong descriptive writing to paint a strong visual for the reader.

Journaling:

In a 10-minute journal entry, respond to the following question:

Would you rather live in the same neighborhood for the rest of your life... or wake up in a new neighborhood *every month* for the rest of your life?

### Classroom Activity Two

Class Discussion:

Have students group up into fours. Each group will discuss these four questions, and then share their responses to the entire class (have each group member present one question):

1. One thing they loved about the story
2. One question they have about the story
3. One suggestion to make the story better
4. One connection to their lives, or most relatable moment

Journaling:

In a 10-minute journal entry, explore the following questions:

The narrator in “A Read on the Rebellion” says: “I’m not religious, but for that moment I was a devout Christian, blessed by a black woman who had more heart than I ever had in my life.”

What do you think the narrator means by “heart”? Why would someone with heart be important during a trying time? Next, think of a moment when you showed heart — either in a tough game, a long day at school, or maybe a shift at work. How did you make it through? Did you feel like you showed heart in that moment? Why or why not?

Share your ideas with a partner.

### Home Activity: Imaginary Conversation

In “A Read on the Rebellion” Tervalon employs basic, straight forward dialog between the narrator and the woman, as well as strong descriptions of the woman and how she surprises the man. Practice observing people around your neighborhood, or at the park or mall. Take simple notes — what the person looked like, how they walked, etc. Then go home and write a “short dialog” between you and that person. Be sure to use rich, descriptive language to tell your story. Do not feel like anything important or surprising has to happen in your story. Focus more on describing the moment well and letting the characters speak from a place of honesty.

Turn your story in to your teacher.



## COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

*This story and its exercises are appropriate for 9th grade and above. 9th- and 10th-grade standards are cited.*

### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

### Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

**Post-Reading Class Discussion Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A: Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, a. Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes )d include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics, multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, oc( extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

**Text-Dependent Question Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

**Writing Exercise Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas d and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

### **Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

### **Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B: Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.