

A Discussion Guide for



Ages 14 & Up

BY HANNAH V. SAWYERR



AMULET

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In the vein of *Grown* and *The Poet X*, Hannah V. Sawyer's *All the Fighting Parts* is a searing and defiant young adult novel-in-verse about reclaiming agency after a sexual assault within the church community.

Sixteen-year-old Amina Conteh has always believed in using her voice as her weapon—even when it gets her into trouble. After cursing at a classmate, her father forces her to volunteer at their church with Pastor Johnson.

But Pastor Johnson isn't the holy man everyone thinks he is.

The same voice Amina uses to fight falls quiet the night she is sexually assaulted by Pastor Johnson. After that, her life starts to unravel: her father is frustrated that her grades are slipping, and her best friend and boyfriend don't understand why the once loud and proud girl is now quiet and distant. In a world that claims to support survivors, Amina wonders who will support her when her attacker is everyone's favorite community leader.

When Pastor Johnson is arrested for a different crime, the community is shaken and divided; some call him a monster and others defend him. But Amina is secretly relieved. She no longer has to speak because Pastor Johnson can't hurt her anymore—or so she believes.

To regain her voice and sense of self, Amina must find the power to confront her abuser—in the courtroom and her heart—and learn to use all the fighting parts within her.

## PRAISE FOR ALL THE FIGHTING PARTS

★ “An **unforgettable story of healing** told through **phenomenal poetry.**”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS, starred review

★ “**Achingly profound** and **inspiring**; a must for all collections.”

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, starred review

“**Gutsy and defiant**, *All the Fighting Parts* is a **battle hymn for loud-mouthed girls**, and a searing invitation to all—but especially survivors—to **speak their truth.**”

—JOY McCULLOUGH, *New York Times* bestselling author

“**Perfect for readers of *Shout* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo**... A must read for anyone who has ever felt the words ‘me too’ in their heart.”

—DANTE MEDEMA, author of *The Truth Project*

“**Incredibly moving, beautifully written, and oh-so powerful**, *All the Fighting Parts* is a stunning debut novel-in-verse. Hannah V. Sawyer is a **talent to watch.**”

—LIZ LAWSON, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Agathas*, *The Night in Question*, and *The Lucky Ones*

“**A heroic and candid debut.**”

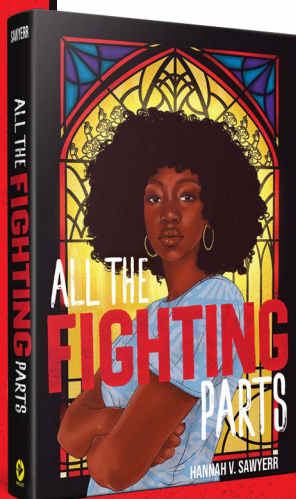
—ASHLEY WOODFOLK, critically acclaimed author of *Nothing Burns as Bright as You*

“**A powerful story** about what must be done with silence. Sawyer gives us the answer that we all need to hear: Break it.”

—OLIVIA A. COLE, author of *Dear Medusa*

“**Raw, no-nonsense verse**... An incredible, empowering book.”

—KIP WILSON, award-winning author of *White Rose* and *The Most Dazzling Girl in Berlin*



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## A LETTER TO THE READER

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to dive into Amina's story. *All the Fighting Parts* is first and foremost a hug to survivors like my younger self. Secondly, it's my way of calling out abusers and the organizations and communities that protect them. Often, when abusers are respected or admired people like Pastor Johnson, they're protected rather than held accountable. But no level of respect or admiration can change the fact that these people are predators, and survivors deserve protection and community support.

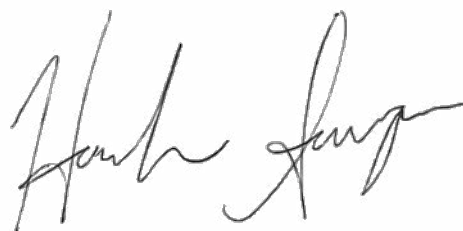
As survivors, we often think of all the ways in which we could have prevented what happened to us. We think *If I didn't go to that party*, or *If I didn't choose to wear that dress*, or *If I didn't trust them the way I did*. What I want survivors to know after reading the novel is that the shame we feel about our experience is not ours to carry. And it never was.

I wrote this book while awaiting a trial after my assault, a time in my life when I carried a lot of shame and felt like I had no control. At that moment, *All the Fighting Parts* was the thing I *could* control. I wanted to write a story that made me feel empowered, that made me laugh, cry, and ultimately explore what it means to fight back. If I could tell my younger self and young survivors one thing, it would be that even during the days you feel defeated or small, you are still a fighter, because every day you survive.

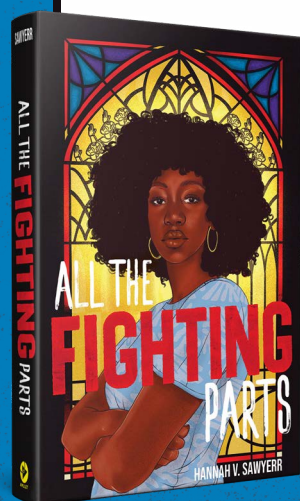
*All the Fighting Parts* is a story from the lens of a teenage girl who is angry, loud, and makes honest mistakes, much like my teenage—and I'll be honest, my adult—self. But above all, it's about a character whose healing journey is often both quiet and loud, fearless and fearful, and her story deserves to be amplified for all that it is. Because even silence carries a story worth telling.

Thank you so much for picking up a copy of *All the Fighting Parts*. I hope you feel as empowered reading it as I felt while writing it. I hope Amina's story is one that speaks to you.

Best regards,



Hannah V. Sawyerr



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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## PAGES 1-105

- At the beginning of the novel, Amina feels out of place in her honors history class. Why doesn't she feel like she belongs in the class?
- When Amina's dad learns that she cursed at a classmate, he forces her to volunteer at the church with Pastor Johnson. What does her father's response show us about his relationship with the church, religion, and Amina?
- Although Amina has her own personal issues with the church, she knows that her father considers the church a place of refuge. How might this affect her decision to come forward?

## PAGES 106-193

- Despite Amina's fiery tongue, when she is catcalled by a group of older men at The Shack, she responds by mouthing the words *thank you*. Why do you believe she responded this way? How does this response differ from the Amina that we've known so far?
- When Pastor Johnson is arrested for a different crime, Amina's community is shaken. How does the community's response to Pastor Johnson's arrest reflect how our society reacts when sexual assault cases involve popular or respected figures?
- Amina's mother passes before the novel begins, but her presence is felt throughout the story by Amina and her father. In what ways is Amina's mother still a present figure in their lives? What are the similarities and differences in the way that Amina and her father are individually affected by her mother's death? How does her mother's passing affect their relationship?

## PAGES 194-306

- Leading up to Amina's trial, we get a deeper look into how her relationships are affected by the assault. Do Amina's relationships with others change, and in what ways? Has her relationship with herself been affected? How has her personality changed from the beginning of the novel?
- Throughout the novel, Amina often relies on her community—her best friend Talia, her boyfriend Deon, her father, her teacher Ms. Hamilton, and Mr. Richard—to hold her up. In what ways does Amina's community show up for her? Why is it important to show up for your community?

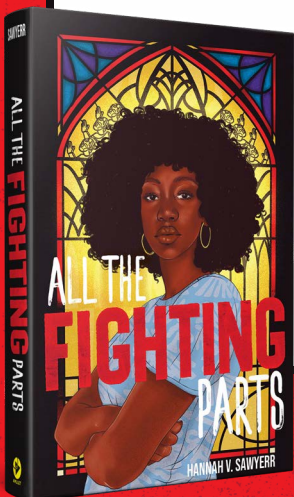
## PAGES 307-387

- In therapy, Amina learns that for every 1,000 people who are sexually assaulted, only 310 people choose to report (page 329). Why might a survivor of sexual assault choose not to report?
- Return to the lines *I am a warrior on the days I shout / and on the days when silence wraps me / in its arms like my only friend.* on page 4, and consider the role of silence in Amina's life and the lives of the people around her. How does Amina use silence to protect herself? And how does her silence harm her?

- Discuss the verdict of Amina's trial. What has she and the rest of her community learned about survival? About themselves?

## AFTER READING

- Consider the title of the novel, *All the Fighting Parts*. In which ways do individual characters in the novel choose to fight?
- Discuss the author's decision to write this book using verse and mixed-media. How would the story change if the novel had been written using traditional prose?



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# POETRY ACTIVITIES FOR AFTER READING

## BLACKOUT POETRY

Revisit the poems “All I Remember (Censored)” and “All I Remember (Uncensored)” (pages 174–75 and 367–68, respectively). Consider the words that are left behind in “All I Remember (Censored)” after the majority are blacked out.

**What is an erasure poem?** “Erasure poetry, also known as blackout poetry, is a form of found poetry wherein a poet takes an existing text and erases, blacks out, or otherwise obscures a large portion of the text, creating a wholly new work from what remains.” (definition from Poets.org)

When writers create blackout poetry, the goal is to create a new piece out of an already existing one. “All I Remember (Censored)” is called a blackout poem or an erasure poem. In this case, “All I Remember (Uncensored)” is the already existing text.

**Directions:** Using an already existing poem, create your own blackout poem. First, read the original text, taking note of the tone of the poem. Consider how certain words or line breaks make you feel. How may the author have felt while writing the piece? Read the poem once more, this time taking note of any impactful, colorful, or interesting language used. (You may choose to underline these words lightly with pencil if you are using a printed copy!)

Remember the tone you inferred from the poem. How will your new poem be in conversation with the existing one? What might the similarities and differences be between the message in the blackout piece you plan to create and the original version? Using a marker, begin blacking out words in the original poem, taking note of the words and lines you previously underlined, to create your blackout poem.

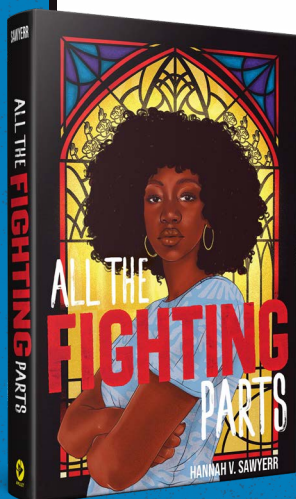
**Suggested poems:** [“Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou](#), [“The New National Anthem” by Ada Limón](#), [“Now That We Have Tasted Hope” by Khaled Mattawa](#). (You may also consider newspaper articles or magazine clippings!)

## SURVIVAL POEM (TESTIMONIAL)

**Note from the author:** I wrote the poem “Testimonial” (page 387) years before writing *All the Fighting Parts*. I carried the poem with me in my heart as my own personal piece of encouragement. I consider a survival poem to be another form of resistance. Today I challenge you to create an uplifting and celebratory poem that you may also carry with you.

**Directions:** In therapy sessions with Amina, Ms. Hamilton suggests that Amina write her feelings down in a journal. Read the following uplifting poems: [“See It Through” by Edgar A. Guest](#) and [“won’t you celebrate with me” by Lucille Clifton](#). Remember a time when you prevailed over an obstacle that you weren’t sure that you could overcome. For fifteen minutes, free write encouraging pieces of advice to yourself in a private journal entry. (You may choose to write this as a typical journal entry or as a bulleted list!)

Using this journal entry, take fifteen minutes to revise what you wrote and create a survival poem. You may choose to share this poem with your group or keep it privately in your journal.



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## RESOURCES

**ME TOO:** The “me too.” movement supports survivors of sexual violence and their allies by connecting survivors to resources, offering community organizing resources, pursuing a “me too.” policy platform, and working with researchers to add to the field and chart the way forward. Learn more at [metoomvmt.org](http://metoomvmt.org).

**RAINN:** The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) is the nation’s largest anti–sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800-656-HOPE) in partnership with more than one thousand local sexual assault service providers across the country; it also operates the Department of Defense’s Safe Helpline. RAINN carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Learn more at [rainn.org](http://rainn.org).

**TURNAROUND:** TurnAround’s mission is to educate, empower, and advocate for all people impacted by intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. Learn more at [turnaroundinc.org](http://turnaroundinc.org).

**NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER:** NSVRC provides research & tools to advocates working on the frontlines to end sexual harassment, assault, and abuse with the understanding that ending sexual violence also means ending racism, sexism, and all forms of oppression. Learn more at [nsvrc.org](http://nsvrc.org).

**1in6:** The mission of 1in6 is to help men who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences live healthier, happier lives by providing information and support resources on the web and in the community. Learn more at [1in6.org](http://1in6.org).

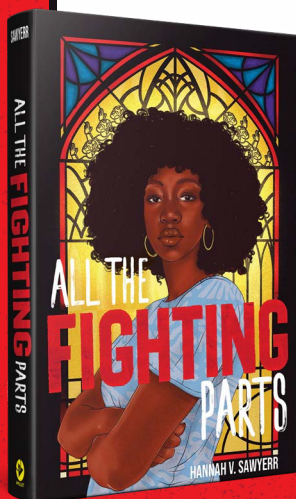
**TAKE BACK THE NIGHT FOUNDATION:** Take Back The Night Foundation’s global mission as a charitable 501(c)(3) Foundation is to end all forms of sexual violence, including sexual assault, sexual abuse, trafficking, stalking, gender harassment, and relationship violence, and to support survivors in their healing journeys. Hundreds of events are held in over 30 countries annually. Events often include marches, rallies and vigils intended as a protest and direct action against rape and other forms of sexual, relationship, and domestic violence. Learn more at [takebackthenight.org](http://takebackthenight.org).



Photo by Missallaneous Media

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hannah V. Sawyerr was recognized as the Youth Poet Laureate of Baltimore in 2016. Her spoken word has been featured on the BBC’s World Have Your Say program, as well as in the National Education Association’s “Do You Hear Us?” campaign. Her written word has been included in gal-dem, Rookie, and xoNecole. She holds a BA in English from Morgan State University and an MFA in creative writing from the New School. Sawyerr is an English professor at Loyola Marymount University and lives in Los Angeles, California. *All the Fighting Parts* is her debut novel.



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