A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

TOGETHER WE SEE

BY ARI TISON

This edge-of-your-seat Indigenous murder-mystery set in Costa Rica from Pura Belpré and Walter Dean Myers Award-winning author of *Saints of the Household* is perfect for fans of *Firekeeper's Daughter* and *Patron Saints of Nothing*.

★ "An adrenaline rush-inducing must-read."
—*School Library Journal,* starred review

★ "A powerful and moving depiction of seeking justice amid mourning." —*Booklist*, starred review

How far would you go to protect your land? To protect your family?

Told from multiple points of view, *Together We See* follows Ulá Dominguez, a Bribri-American teenager, searching for the truth behind her land-activist father's mysterious death on their Native territory in Costa Rica. Ulá and her brother, Kabék, uncover secrets and corruption as they face off against illegal loggers, kidnappers, settlers, and the local government in the hunt for clues. Their only allies are a few family friends and relatives still living in Bribri, as well as a young journalist, who may be in danger himself. But as details of their father's death emerge, long-held trust is broken. And in this sinister web of deception, *no one is safe.*

Inspired by real-world missing, dead, and attacked Indigenous activists, award-winning author Ari Tison writes her first novel in prose and pushes the envelope yet again by pulling together a propulsive story full of grief, environmental justice, and the fight for retribution.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

ARI TISON is the award-winning poet and author of YA hybrid novel *Saints of the Household* (2023) and *Together We See* (2026) with FSG/Macmillan. *Saints of the Household* was the winner of the Walter Dean Myers Award, the Pura Belpré Award, the Amelia Walden Award, the Américas Award, and a finalist for the William C. Morris Award and the International Literacy Award. Ari's work has been chosen as a Best Book of the Month by Amazon, and Best Book of 2023 by *Kirkus Reviews, School Library Journal,* New York Public Library, *BCCB,* and Chicago Public Library along with receiving several starred trade reviews from *Kirkus, BCCB, Booklist,* and *SLJ.* Ari's poetry and short work have been widely anthologized and published in various literary magazines. Ari teaches at Hamline University's MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults. Ari is Afro-Indigenous and belongs to the Bribri tribe, one of the eight federally and globally recognized tribes of contemporary Costa Rica. She lives in her hometown of Twin Cities, Minnesota with her sons.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. In order for students to build background knowledge regarding the primary setting of the novel, the Talamanca rainforest, as well as a historical context of the Bribri peoples and culture, have them conduct a mini-research project. Use pre-generated research questions to help them gain deeper knowledge and appreciation of the perspectives represented in this novel. Some potential questions are:

   I. Setting: Talamanca Rainforest
      A. What are the defining characteristics of the Talamanca rainforest?
      B. What is the climate and biodiversity of the area?
      C. What are the human interactions with the land and what are the impacts of those interactions?

   II. Historical Context: The Bribri and European Colonizers
      A. When did the Bribri first interact with European colonizers? What were the major impacts of this interaction on the Bribri people and culture?
      B. Who was the last king of the Bribri people? When did he reign? What were the defining moments of his leadership? Why is he the last Bribri king?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9

2. Students can develop a personal connection and curiosity for the text by analyzing the cover art and blurb. Using a graphic-organizer template or having students create their own, ask them to examine the cover, title, and synopsis blurb. They can use their examination to write an initial plot summary. Then, have them identify the genre and describe the genre conventions they expect to encounter while reading. Encourage them to make inferences. Finally, ask them to predict the main conflicts that will arise in the novel, and consider how these situations may relate to their own life experiences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1

DURING READING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Activities

1. As students read, have them practice analyzing the novel through a continuous Double-Entry Quote Journal. Using a physical or digital notebook, have them divide the page into two columns. Throughout the reading, students can place significant quotes and small passages, with the page number, in the left-hand column. They may select quotes and passages that are meaningful to them, or the teacher can direct students to select quotes and passages that reveal character motives, display plot development and/or themes, and use symbolism. In the right-hand column, they can write their personal responses and reactions to each quote or short passage. Encourage students to go beyond summarizing and paraphrasing, and challenge them to respond with a direct comment (speaking back to the text), a question, a personal connection, or an analysis and explanation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

2. To support retention and comprehension, students can use their annotations and discussion-question responses to design an illustrated story map. Using images, visuals, and textual evidence, have them address the following:
   - Characters: Who are the people who were involved? Which ones played major roles? Which ones were minor?
   - Setting: Where and when do the events in the novel take place? Over what period of time?
   - Plot: What key events advance the tension and mystery of the novel?
   - Thematic Statement: The larger meaning or importance, the moral, the "so what?"

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1:CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2:. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

By discussing these questions, students are leveraging skills of critical thinking and finding and applying the most relevant textual evidence to best support their analysis and proof of comprehension as they read and engage with the novel.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1

Key Ideas and Details

1. How are individual identity and collectivist values presented as complementary or conflicting forces?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2:

2. How is the theme of identity developed through Ulá's struggles with heritage, family expectations, and self-acceptance?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

3. How does the theme of community influence Ulá's journey and understanding of belonging?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2

4. Reflect on the relationship between the diaspora of Bribri peoples and different characters' proximity to the Bribri culture, and how their strengths and abilities move the plot. For example, consider how Ulá's physical distance from Costa Rica and the Bush contribute to both her deep understanding of Bribri stories and culture and her sense of not being fully a community insider. How does this impact her actions and contributions? Further compare how close characters, such as Kabék and Manuel or Lilo and Mu, are to their Bribri community and culture, and how this develops their contributions to the novel as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

5. How do friendships or other community relationships challenge Ulá's assumptions? For example, analyze and reflect on her relationship with Wiké and the impact that loss had on Ulá (page 21) or Tia Paloma's desire for modernity and how this formed a strain on her relationship with Andres that Ulá could relate to.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

6. How do family, community, and intergenerational connections influence Ulá's understanding of belonging? Analyze how family legacy and the voices of ancestors complicate or strengthen Ulá's and other characters' choices.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

7. How do Ulá and Kabék change from the beginning to the end of the novel? Trace that development through their responses to cultural knowledge, family legacy, grief, and the tension between individual identity and collective responsibility.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3:

8. Analyze how the novel develops the tension between modernity and cultural preservation. Specifically, reflect on the tensions between REDD+ and the indigenous stewards of the land, and Ulá and Andres's shared appreciation of agro farming (page 181).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2:

9. How do matriarchies and connections to ancestors influence Ulá's choices and sense of responsibility?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

10. How does the plot explore the relationship among people, land, and culture in the Talamanca rainforest? For example, what significance is built by referencing the Ocean Woman throughout the novel, parallel to the recognition of the burdens and responsibilities held by women in Bribri and other Indigenous cultures across the Americas (for example, on page 272: "Her words hit me, and I realize the shitty circumstances we women are handed.")

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

1. What does the novel suggest about the relationship between personal identity and cultural or family history?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

2. Analyze how the shifting narrative voices of Ulá and the ancestors as the collective "we" redistributes authority, connects individual experience to communal memory, and affects the interpretation of key events. Track from the first time the narrator shifts to the ancestors (chapter 8). What is the impact of the ancestors being introduced at that point, and how does it influence the reader's understanding? What is gained through the narrative shifts that would not be present with a single narrator, or even in a novel written entirely from the point of view of a collective narrator?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5

3. Which turning points in the novel most significantly redirect the plot, and why? Consider excerpts involving the Ocean Woman story, a family revelation, or a conflict over land, and explain how that moment changes the characters' goals, relationships, or understanding of their history.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5

4. What role do animals play in the novel's symbolism and cultural meaning?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

5. Analyze specific Bribri phrases and their meanings by comparing and contrasting how they are defined in the novel versus in English translations. Explain what is gained or lost when these ideas are translated.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4

6. How do the novel's references to Bribri heritage and rituals shape Ulá's and Kabék's understanding of themselves and their community?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

7. In the final act, Ari Tison very intentionally resists the hero's journey (see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 1949) by not showing Ulá having a traditional "coming home" to the United States to honor her dual belonging to Costa Rica. How does Ulá's journey align with The Heroine's Journey (reference the heroine's journey graphic here: https://tinyurl.com/TWSHJ)?In what ways does Tison intentionally divert from the expectations of Western storytelling, and how does this further develop Ulá's sense of belonging to both places?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

POST-READING AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Literary Analysis:** Have students reflect on the use and impact of the multiple narratives throughout the text and write an explanation of their analysis. Encourage them to consider the author's purpose in making this choice and make connections to the historical context they have developed throughout reading.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2

2. **Inquiry and Research:** Ask students to investigate a key conflict within the text and analyze the motives of the people and groups involved. For example, they can further investigate what REDD+ is and the organization's mission, and analyze how the relationship it has cultivated with the Bribri juxtaposes and potentially contradicts their mission.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9

3. **Alternative Endings and Sequels:** Students can further engage with the novel in a creative and para-collaborative way by rewriting the ending of the story from an antagonist's perspective or writing a one-chapter sequel.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

Guide prepared by Kit Robinson, a middle-school teacher in Colorado who identifies with the Cherokee Nation. Sheearned a bachelor's and master's degree in secondary English education from Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. She has experience teaching Language Arts to multilingual students at Fort Morgan High School, teaching English Language Development at Aurora Central High School, and teaching MYP Language and Literature and MYP Individuals and Societies at Discovery Canyon Middle School. Her research focuses on creating equitable and rigorous Language Arts and Social Studies instruction through accessible texts, primarily young adult literature.