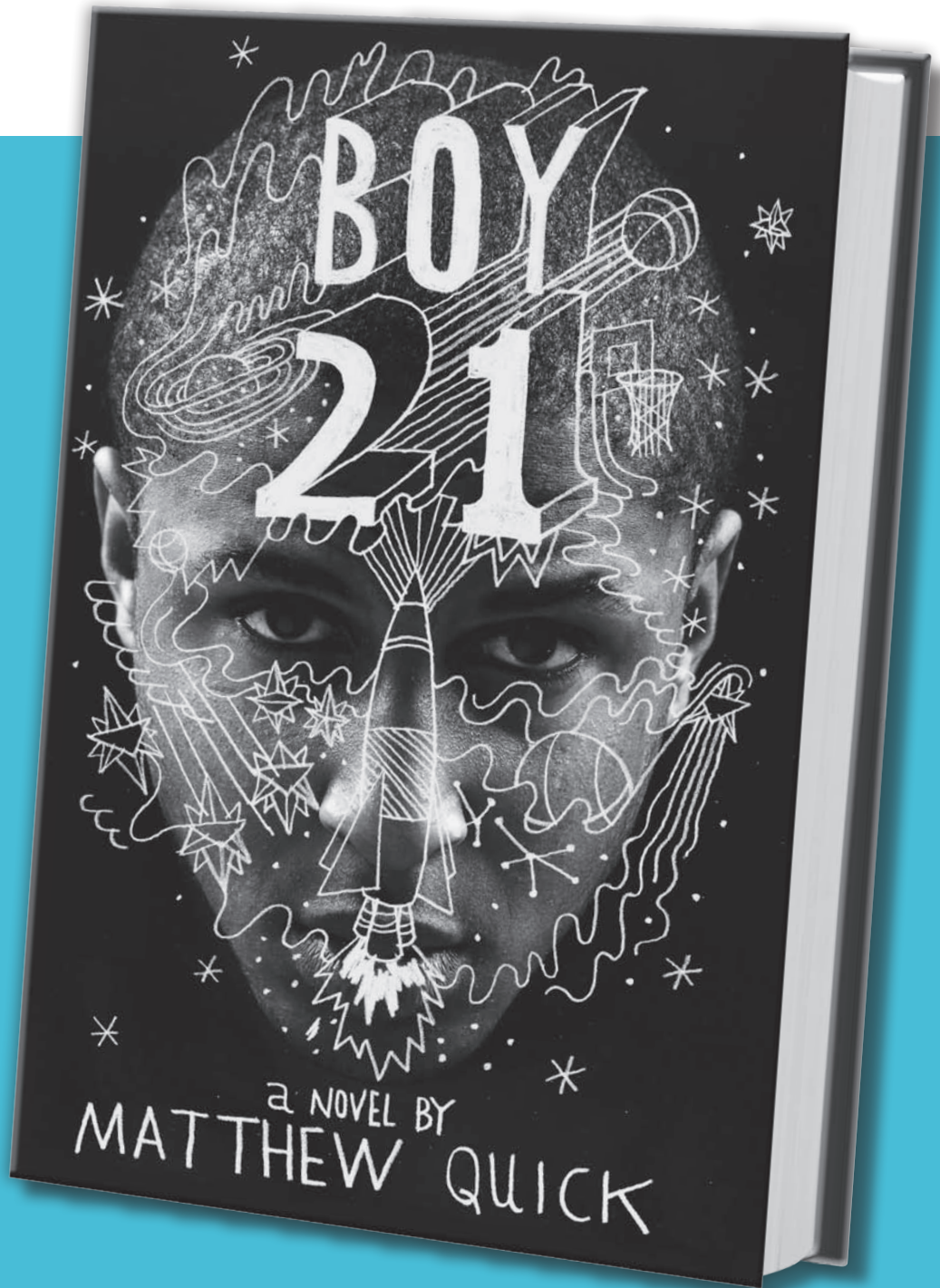


BOY21

curriculum connections

- ❖ Social Issues
- ❖ Mental Illness
- ❖ Prejudice
- ❖ Sports

Ages: 12 & up



by
Matthew Quick

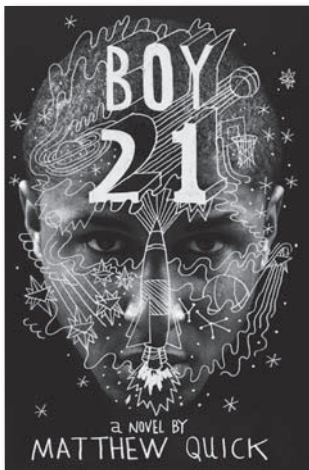
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider the novel's cover. In what ways is the image symbolic of the events that transpire over the course of the novel?
2. Describe Finley. What makes him a dynamic character? Is he the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not?
3. In the novel's preface, Finley states, "You can lose yourself in repetition—quiet your thoughts; I learned the value of this at a very young age." In your opinion, what is the significance of Finley being able to escape from his thoughts? What does he hope to accomplish? Do you ever utilize a similar technique to cope with life? If so, what do you do?
4. Do you think Coach Wilkins makes the right decision selecting Finley to help Russ? Why or why not? In your opinion, is his request a selfish act? Do you think Finley ultimately benefits from befriending Russ?
5. In your opinion, what is Russ's motivation to not play basketball to the best of his abilities? What can readers infer about him from this choice? What does Finley have to lose by encouraging him to return to the game? Do you agree with his decision to encourage Russ? Why or why not?
6. How would you describe Finley's family? In what ways has the absence/loss of his mother impacted how the family functions? Is his family in any way similar to your own? If so, in what ways?
7. Why do you think Russ feels so connected to Finley? How would you characterize their relationship, and how does it change over the course of the novel?
8. Consider the variety of settings for *Boy21*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
9. When his teammate Wes is teased for reading *Harry Potter*, as a sign of solidarity, Finley checks out copies from the public library, and forms a book club with him which focuses on the books and the films. How does this simple act speak to Finley's character? In your opinion, why do Finley and Russ feel connected to characters from this magical world?
10. Finley shares, "Erin's one of the few people who I know is okay with silence and, since I don't like talking, it makes us a perfect match. I don't stutter or anything like that. I just *choose* not to speak so much." How is Finley's quiet demeanor interpreted by others? What does Erin understand about Finley's quiet nature? In what ways is his silence symbolic of the larger issues in his life?
11. Explain why you believe Russ deals with his loss in such an unusual manner. What role does Finley play in helping Russ come to terms with being himself rather than "Boy21"?
12. *Boy21* is told in first person; how would the story be different if someone besides Finley were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?

13. Russ is profoundly affected by the murder of his parents. Given these emotional obstacles, he often finds himself unable to confront the reality of his circumstances. Identify the catalyst(s) that drives Russ to be able to overcome these challenges and learn to deal with his loss. In what ways do you expect him to be changed by these experiences?
14. Throughout the novel, readers witness the complexities of the various relationships among the characters. Consider whose relationship seemed most similar to one of your own personal relationships. What about it reminded you of your experiences?
15. At the end of the novel, Finley is strongly encouraged by his father and Pop to leave their impoverished, gang-ridden town and not return. What do these experienced characters understand about the cycle of poverty? What do they want for Finley?
16. Using the phrase, –“This is a story about...” –supply five words to describe *Boy21*. Explain your choices.



about the book



BOY21
by Matthew Quick
978-0-316-12797-4

Basketball has always been an escape for Finley. He lives in broken-down Belmont, a town ruled by the Irish mob, drugs, violence, and racially charged rivalries. At home, his dad works nights and Finley is left to take care of his disabled grandfather alone. He's always dreamed of somehow getting out, but until he can, putting on that number 21 jersey makes everything seem okay.

Russ has just moved to the neighborhood, and the life of this teen basketball phenom has been turned upside down by tragedy. Cut off from everyone he knows, he won't pick up a basketball—but answers only to the name Boy21, taken from his former jersey number.

As their final year of high school brings these two boys together, “Boy21” may turn out to be the answer they both need. Matthew Quick, brings readers a moving novel about hope, recovery, and redemption.

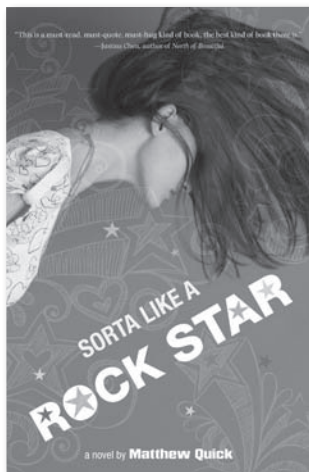
about the author



Matthew Quick is the author of *Sorta Like a Rock Star*, which received a starred review in *School Library Journal*, and was called “a searing story of redemption” by *Publishers Weekly*, as well as the adult novel *The Silver Linings Playbook*. He lives in central Massachusetts with his wife, novelist Alicia Besette.

His website is
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also by Matthew Quick



SORTA LIKE A ROCK STAR

978-0-316-04353-3

ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection

★“This book is the answer to all those angst-ridden and painfully grim novels in the shortcut lingo of short attention-span theater. Hugely enjoyable.”—*School Library Journal* [starred review]

“A searing story of redemption.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“The multidimensionality of [Amber’s] character—its bittersweet possibility and utter improbability—will suck readers completely into her world, where they will ride waves of tears through to a world washed clean.”—*Bulletin for the Center of Children’s Books*



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

www.lbschoolandlibrary.com

Educator’s Guide prepared by Rose Brock a teacher, school librarian, and doctoral candidate at Texas Woman’s University, specializing in children’s and young adult literature.