

finding your VOICE

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Speaking truth to power is never easy. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. Ruby Bridges endured daily threats of violence for one year as she single-handedly integrated her elementary school. As Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa insists, “Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out.” The price for speaking up against the status quo can be steep. Yet, for many, the price of resistance—of speaking up and out—is worth it. For, as black feminist writer bell hooks reminds us, “Sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because they recognize your power—not because they don’t see it, but because they see it and they don’t want it to exist.”

Finding Your Voice includes texts that highlight the necessity and power of young people speaking up despite challenges, social pressure, and even the threat of bigger dangers. Whether it is finding righteous anger as a superpower or speaking up through poetry and art, *Finding Your Voice* features young people speaking out against racism and other injustices in order to make the world better.

There are many ways to find your voice; however, the books in this series focus on a few key ways young people speak truth to power. First, the texts emphasize the significance of one’s individual voice, no matter how seemingly small or powerless that voice is. Secondly, the texts emphasize standing up for oneself; this could mean standing up to a sexist bully, calling out an adult who misjudges you, or speaking out against racial profiling. Finally, these novels illustrate young people empowering others to use their voices through writing, art, and community organizing to advocate for institutional change and social justice.

1 *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*

Gabi, A Girl in Pieces is an epistolary novel that chronicles the eventful senior year of high school student Gabi Hernandez. Along with her best friends Cind (who becomes a teen mom) and Sebastian (who comes out as gay), Gabi has to navigate her father’s drug addiction, her mother and aunt’s strict rules, and the politics of high school in a small town.

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class community in Harlem is home, but the street harassers who ogle and taunt her make her angry and ashamed of her body. Xiomara, whose name means “one who is read for art,” combats these experiences by writing her thoughts in a journal and creating poetry. She also meets a music-lover named Aman who shares her love of words. Her parents tell her “pero tu no eres fácil” that she’s not easy and she isn’t. Xiomara stands up for her introverted twin brother Xavier with her words and her fists, but she wonders who will stand up for her. As a novel in verse, *The Poet X* highlights Xiomara’s thoughts and experience in poetic yet accessible language. *The Poet X* invites the following questions: how do you stand up for yourself when you are constantly under surveillance? How do you get others to advocate for you? How can you channel art to express and liberate yourself?

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Anger is a Gift has an ensemble cast of young people of color, but at its heart is Moss Jerries. Still reeling from the murder of his father six years earlier, Moss wrestles with an aching pain. He finds support in his friends, mother Wanda, a host of adults in his community, and in Javier, a new romantic interest. While Moss is a thoughtful person and a dedicated student, his high school is a battlefield where school resource officers and metal detectors seemingly outnumber schoolbooks.