

CURRICULUM & READING GUIDE

WE THE INTERWOVEN, VOLUME 3



**CHANGING THE WAY IOWA
TALKS ABOUT IMMIGRATION**

**WE THE
INTER
WOVEN**

AN ANTHOLOGY OF
BICULTURAL IOWA

VOLUME 3

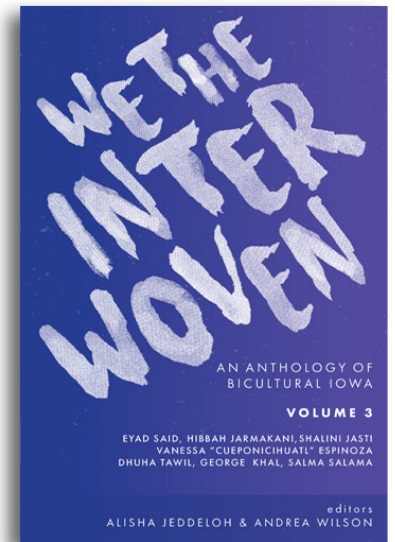
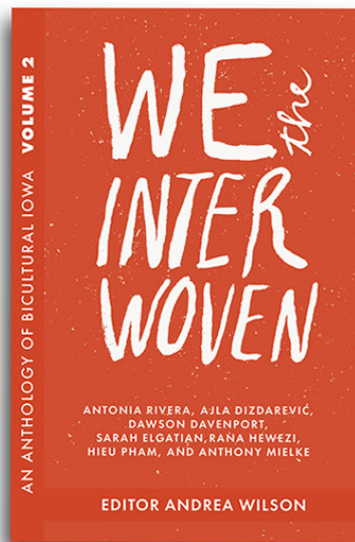
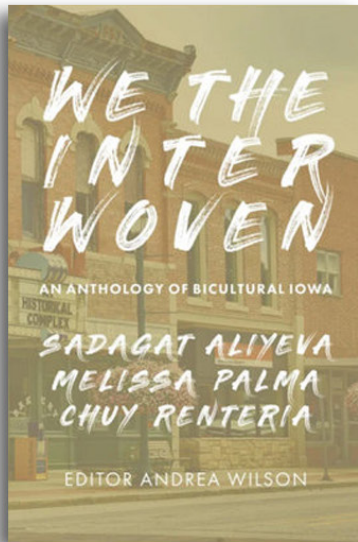
EYAD SAID, HIBBAH JARMAKANI, SHALINI JASTI
VANESSA "CUEPONICHUATL" ESPINOZA
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WE THE INTERWOVEN

IOWA'S FIRST BOOK SERIES BY IMMIGRANT AND NON-NATIVE IOWANS



ABOUT THE SERIES

We the Interwoven is the state's first book series written by emerging writers who are immigrants and non-native Iowans. The series is a testimonial to the story of today's Iowa—a uniquely beautiful tapestry woven from people of many backgrounds, many of whom are experiencing America for the first time through the lens of our state. The story of Iowa most represented in literature is one of European descendants and farming communities; however, Iowa's story is much more dimensional

than it appears. *We the Interwoven* allows the evolution of Iowa's cultural story to be told by the voices of those who are living these changes, those who have come to America from other lands to make this their home. In raising their voices directly through this series, readers can gain new perspectives of the many threads woven into the tapestry we call home.



iowa writers'
HOUSE

EVERY STORY NEEDS A BEGINNING

The series is written through the Bicultural Iowa Writers' Fellowship (BIWF), the state's first residency for emerging writers who are immigrant, first-generation, or second-generation Iowans. The program residency and book series were created by Andrea Wilson and Alisha Jeddelloh, who both grew up in small Iowa towns with growing diversity. Columbus Junction, Wilson's home, houses over 13 different minority populations from across Latin America as well as substantial populations of Congolese and Chin Burmese. Jeddelloh's home of Fairfield is the location of the world-renowned Maharishi University, bringing citizens and visitors from across the globe.

Many readers of *We the Interwoven* have been surprised to discover the Iowa written about in these stories is very different from the image they held in their minds. Each writer shares their experience in visceral and moving language. Each story is a window into another world, another land, another people, and all of the traditions they brought to Iowa's fields of opportunity.



ANDREA WILSON



ALISHA JEDDELOH

BY THE NUMBERS

3 BICULTURAL ANTHOLOGIES

17 IMMIGRANT AND NON-NATIVE IOWAN WRITERS

150+ IOWA LIBRARIES WITH THE SERIES ON THEIR SHELVES

8 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES OF TRANSLATION

THE POWER OF STORY

We the Interwoven began as an idea, a vision to find storytellers who could help us “listen” to what it means to be a new American living in the heart of our country. This series provides a bridge for discussion and understanding into the complex topics surrounding Iowa communities and the impact of our state’s changing cultural landscape.

Story is an empowerment tool and a psychological springboard into a healthier future for all of us. When people are able to access the power of narrative for a purpose and are given a platform that allows these stories to take hold in the collective psyche, the arc of their future changes, as does our collective future.

As Iowa high schools, colleges, and universities have begun to adopt our anthologies into their diversity curriculums and communities have used them to facilitate difficult conversations on race and immigration, we have seen this change begin to take effect at an exponential level.

These stories are the experiences of individuals sharing both their sorrows and their joys, and they offer a window into a collective of voices that merit our listening. Our newest residents have much to teach us about the American experience, and with Iowa as the setting, the dimensionality of the heartland begins to shine. Through these stories, we may be able to find threads that help us weave a more authentic representation of modern American life, bringing us closer to her ideals of liberty and justice for all.

“*We the Interwoven* was monumental in opening doors in my writing journey. It wasn’t only about writing some stories, it was about those stories and my identity receiving validation. It was about having my platform amplified so others like me could hear those stories. The impact of being in the first bicultural anthology cannot be overstated, from providing a direct path to getting my first full-length publishing deal with the University of Iowa Press to connecting me with literary contemporaries exploring what it means to be a BIPOC creative in America. It is an experience I will always champion. A shining example of a process that puts in the work and scooches the chairs free for people like me to have their seat at the table.”

Chuy Renteria, inaugural BIWF fellow and author of the forthcoming *We Heard It When We Were Young* from the University of Iowa Press

FROM A PAST FELLOW

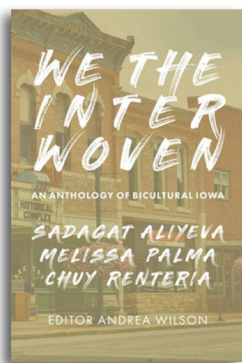


ENHANCE YOUR READING EXPERIENCE

Reading can change our hearts and minds, but fully engaging with a story often takes place as much off of the page as it does on it. That's why we've provided online resources in addition to this reading guide, available at wetheinterwoven.com/curriculum. There you can get to know each of the writers of the *We the Interwoven* series, view video readings of their stories, find printable worksheets, learn tips on how to best conduct a discussion group, and more.

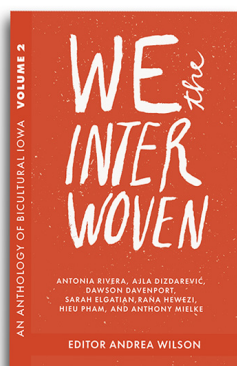


The first two volumes of *We the Interwoven* have led conversations on challenging issues, impacting communities around the state. Below are just a few of the accomplishments of the series thus far. Head to wetheinterwoven.com to see even more of the impact, including author achievements and our campaign to get the series in every library in Iowa.



VOLUME 1

- Candidate for the “One Community, One Book” program of the UI Center for Human Rights
- Chosen discussion book for the City High United Latina Association
- Recommended as a National Standardized Test Excerpt Passage
- Sold out twice during its first printing



VOLUME 2

- Nominated for consideration as an All Iowa Reads selection
- Featured on the Iowa Public Radio's Culture Buzz with John Busbee
- Over 100 copies donated to libraries around the state through philanthropy from the 100+ Men Who Care: Hawkeye Chapter

READING GUIDELINES

The foundation of this project is the anchor standards for reading listed below, provided by the **Common Core State Standards Initiative**. We've included the guidelines to help students get into the mindset of what they are reading and what they can “listen” and “look” for.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.



DISCUSSING COMPLEX CULTURAL NARRATIVES

Discussing stories that feature real people of different backgrounds and races along with complex societal issues can be emotional and even challenging. It is expected that readers will have varying views, and the series was designed to create an opportunity to discuss and share ideas. It may be helpful to know, however, that the primary goal of this series is for readers to learn about themselves through what they experience in the texts. By sharing in discussion, readers can see and understand how their own personal histories inform how they experience each piece and allow them to relate to the story. They can see how every reader has similar experiences in some way—a lens of a life through which to view the life of another.



It is helpful to remember that we all have a story and a history. All of our lives are relevant within discussion; however, the beauty of a democracy is that we each are able to have and express our own opinions. For this reason, and also to enjoy discussion as a learning experience for all, it is important that no one dominates the conversation and that all responses are respected and respectful.

Our ultimate goal is to learn from each other.

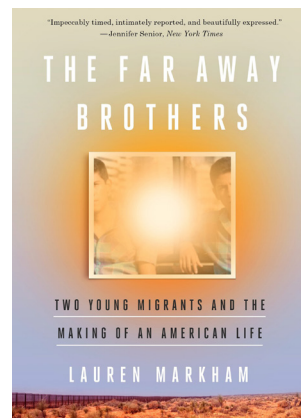
THE STORIES IN *WE THE INTERWOVEN* are about Iowa, but in reality, states all across the country are experiencing migration and demographic changes to their communities. In short, while these are Iowa stories, we hope that they will be relevant to readers across the United States. In the publishing process, we send the book to various writers to read ahead of time and provide a quote that can be inside the front cover. These quotes, which you may have seen in other books you've read, are called blurbs. Having well-known writers read your book is a way to show potential readers that it has merit.

The writers who have supported our book are some of the top writers today on the subject of immigration. **Lauren Markham**, author of *The Far Away Brothers*, won the 2018 Ridenhour Book Prize, the Northern California Book Award, and a California Book Award Silver Prize. **Janine di Giovanni**, journalist and author of *The Morning They Came for Us: Dispatches from Syria*, was awarded the International Women's Media Foundation Courage in Journalism Prize in 2016 and is a Senior Fellow and Professor at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. Syrian American poet and storytelling activist **Amal Kassir** has performed her spoken word poetry at Hancher Auditorium in Iowa City and across 10 countries and over 100 cities worldwide. **Dina Nayeri** was the recipient of the 2019 Paul Engle Prize, and her book, *The Ungrateful Refugee*, was the winner of the 2020 Geschwister-Scholl-Preis.



HERE'S WHAT WRITERS SAID ABOUT *WE THE INTERWOVEN, VOLUME 3*

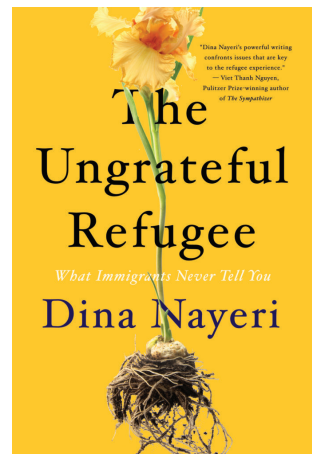
“The essays compiled in this book are a testament to the conjuring, soothing, and subversive power of words, and the essential service of memory to the public good. These writers ask the reader to look more closely at oft-overlooked objects and consider their true significance: a document is more than just a piece of paper; a meal more than just food on a plate; a wall both the seal of a house, but also a barricade of oppression. Individually, these are beautiful personal stories of migration and transformation. Together, they are an essential text of contemporary history and geopolitics that everyone should be so lucky to read.”



LAUREN MARKHAM, AUTHOR OF *THE FAR AWAY BROTHERS*

reviews

“These stories grabbed me from the first page, and each feels like a return to a particular urgent moment: home as it was, and as it receded. Honestly narrated, viscerally remembered, beautifully rendered, they are created by artists who understand both the storytelling traditions of home and the West. The result is something powerful, important, and effortlessly moving.”



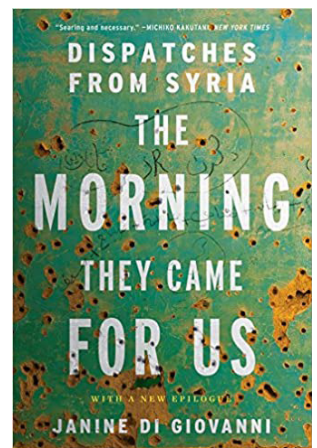
DINA NAYERI, AUTHOR OF *THE UNGRATEFUL REFUGEE* AND *REFUGEE*



“The stories in *We the Interwoven, Volume 3* feel like the warmest welcome into someone’s home. The hospitality of each and every writer is characterized through the detail, love, attention, and effort they put into crafting these beautiful, powerful stories; it was like a feast, and by the end of my reading, I was so full. The writers give you the kindness of their culture, but also the truth of their trauma. There is pain and healing, war and peace, fighting and resting; there is something for everyone here. The writers capture the complexities of the entire human experience through the depths of the bicultural journey. I am in awe of these stories, and I feel honored to be witness to them. Thank you, writers of *We the Interwoven*, for giving your reader a home and a family.”

AMAL KASSIR, SYRIAN AMERICAN POET & STORYTELLING ACTIVIST

“Due to climate change, wars, oppression, and human rights abuse on a wide scale, we are witnessing millions of people fleeing their homelands, perhaps never to return. Capturing the tragedy and sorrow of life in exile is vital in recording history. This is the power of narrative storytelling—so that we never forget, so that we continue to remember, so that no one can ever say, in one hundred years’ time, that it did not happen.”



JANINE DI GIOVANNI, AUTHOR OF *THE MORNING THEY CAME FOR US*

ABOUT THE BOOK

America is at a crossroads. In the great experiment of democracy, a defining moment has arrived, a time of reckoning:

What does it mean to be an American?

Does the American Dream still exist?

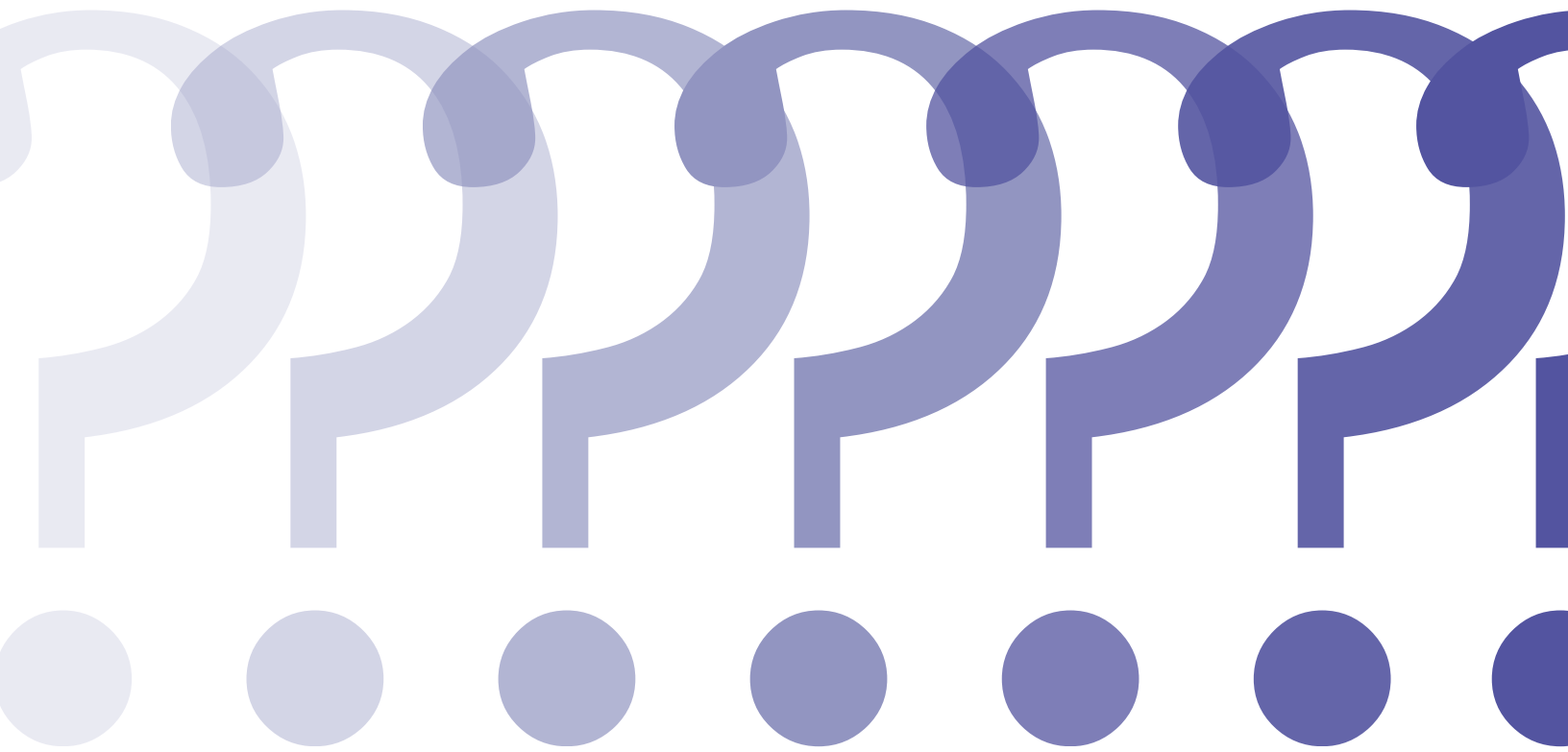
In a country created by immigrants, could our differences become a source of strength?

From deep in the heartland, a view of American life through the eyes of our newest citizens may help us begin to answer these questions.



In this collection, Syrian father **Eyad Said** and his young family must build a life together in the U.S. while contending with the horrors facing their people back home. Palestinian American **Dhuha Tawil** grapples with her decision whether or not to wear the hijab. **Shalini Jasti** tries to balance her love of the English language with her mother’s desire to preserve her connection to their Indian culture and mother tongue. **Vanessa “CueponiCihuatl” Espinoza** tells of her first legal documents after crossing the Mexican–U.S. border as a child. In a moving letter to his parents, **George Khal** looks back on his life in Palestine, Egypt, and the U.S. through the lens of gratitude and grief. **Hibbah Jarmakani** tells of her family’s struggle to create a new home in Iowa after leaving their generational home behind in Syria. After speaking truth to power as a journalist in Sudan, **Salma Salama** migrates to Cairo and then the United States, where she must start anew in her career, language, and community. These seven stories show us that this country is as complex as the people who live in it, and that every resident plays a role in determining the America of tomorrow.

Each feature includes a translation published alongside the story in order to provide accessibility to the bicultural language communities and to honor the language. The book also includes cultural glossaries and artist statements to help readers contextualize the work and connect with the writers.



OPENING QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be in community with others?
- What is the value of culture and cultural identity to you?
- What do you know about your own culture or your family's heritage that reading this book made you remember?
- What do you believe America's culture is?
- What is your experience of Iowa and of being Iowan?
- What do you hope we might gain from conversation today?
- What do you want to discuss about what you read in the book today?

THE POLITE GUEST: A SYRIAN FATHER'S STORY

BY EYAD SAID

- What did you learn from *The Polite Guest: A Syrian Father's Story*?
- What did you feel when you read about Syrians being detained for speaking out against the Assad regime?
- How does the freedom of speech affect our society?
- Have you ever had to hide your feelings and act like “the polite guest”? How did it make you feel?



story questions



THE WHITE GATE

BY HIBBAH JARMAKANI

- What did you learn from *The White Gate*?
- What did you feel when you read about Hibbah's family losing her aunt? Have you ever had to deal with grief? How did it impact you?
- How do cultural traditions impact younger generations?
- What does it mean to build up an emotional gate to protect yourself and your family?

volume 3

MOTHER TONGUE | BY SHALINI JASTI

- What did you learn from *Mother Tongue*?
- How does language shape who we are?
- What did you feel when you read about Shalini recognizing her “otherness”? Have you ever felt like an outsider? How did it make you feel?
- How do family expectations affect our aspirations and sense of self?



MORE THAN A PIECE OF PAPER

BY VANESSA 'CUEPONICIHUATL' ESPINOZA

- What did you learn from *More Than a Piece of Paper*?
- How do names form and affect our identity?
- Do you have a memento from your past that holds a great significance? How has it impacted who you are today?
- How do cultural and family traditions influence younger generations?



UNCOVERING MY TRUTH | BY DHUHA TAWIL

- What did you learn from *Uncovering My Truth*?
- What did you feel when Dhuha's classmates changed their perception of her in reaction to the events of 9/11?
- How do the labels we are given affect our sense of identity?
- What did reading about Dhuha's journey to take off the hijab make you think about your own self image?
- How do we begin to understand our authentic selves?



UNDER THE NEW CRESCENT MOON

BY GEORGE KHAL

- What did you learn from *Under the New Crescent Moon*?
- What did you feel when George was hesitant to tell people he was from Palestine? How does fear and shame affect one's personal and cultural identity?
- How does returning to your childhood home impact you?
- What do we owe our parents? Our children?



volume 3

story questions



THE HOLE IN THE WALL

BY SALMA SALAMA

- What did you learn from *The Hole in the Wall*?
- What does it mean to offer the best you have to give to others?
- What did you feel when you read about Salma's relationship with her grandmother?
- How might starting over in a new place affect your sense of self?

WRITING ACTIVITY

Now that you've discussed the book and its stories, this activity will help add another dimension to thinking about the ideas they brought up.

WRITE A SHORT STORY ABOUT YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Everyone in the United States who isn't Native American came from somewhere, even your family—and even Native Americans were often forced to relocate around the country. Do you know the story of how your family came to the United States? To Iowa?

In this activity, take some time to write down what you know about your family story, even if it's only a little. Consider the following prompts as you write. Afterward, share your stories with your fellow readers.

- Who were the “characters”?
- What homeland did they leave, and why did they decide to make the journey?
- Were they “pushed out” by challenging circumstances or “pulled” to a better life? Or both?
- What obstacles did they overcome? Was anyone lost in the journey, or were there great tragedies?
- What hopes were in the hearts of the people who came?
- What area of the US did they first arrive in, and then how did they arrive in Iowa?
- What (if any) traditions or family celebrations remain in the way you live today?
- How has your ancestors' courage and fortitude to change their lives changed the circumstances of your life?
- What might your life look like today if they hadn't come?
- What do you hope for the future of your family in America?

concluding questions

Do the issues raised in these stories affect your life? If so, in what ways?

What perspectives or assumptions did the text disrupt for you?

What risks have you taken by telling your truths to others?

What did you learn from the glossaries?

How did seeing the translated pieces affect you? What do you believe about the importance of people maintaining literacy in their native language?

What do you think our state or our community could do as a result of what we have learned through these stories?

Given the current turbulent socio-political climate in America, how do you think reading books like this might contribute to change?

What step might you take, whether big or small, as a result of what you have learned through these stories?

How could our differences become a source of strength?

What is a wish you have for our shared future?

What do we hope for in the story of America?





***Thank you for engaging with
these writers' stories.***

*We hope they've provided a jumping-off point
for thinking about the diversity of stories in
Iowa as well as your own experiences.*

WANT MORE RESOURCES? HEAD TO WETHEINTERWOVEN.COM

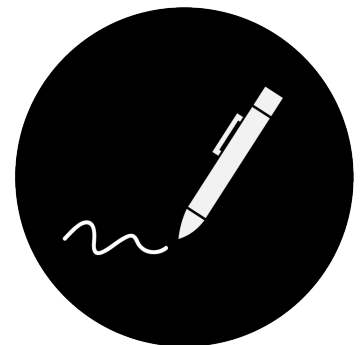
— THERE YOU WILL FIND —



VIDEO READING
SERIES



ADDITIONAL
READING GUIDES



PRINTABLE
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