READER COMPANION

IJEOMA OLUO

HOW EVERYDAY PEOPLE ARE FIGHTING OPPRESSION

AND CHANGING THE WORLD-AND HOW YOU CAN, TOO

**Welcome** to the reader companion for *Be* a *Revolution* by Ijeoma Oluo. We hope this serves as a helpful and empowering tool for conversation, reflection, and action. You'll find talking points and journaling prompts as well as suggestions for actions your group might take together when you meet to discuss the book.

"I have seen what revolution looks like in the everyday. It looks a lot like love. I hope that as you read these testimonies of these amazing people that you will find your own revolution as well."

**—IJEOMA OLUO** 

## CHAPTER 1: PUNISHMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ABOLITION

"I'm seeing and I'm experiencing in real time that folks are realizing that it takes many different people within our communities to create these futures we're trying to create. That's revolutionary in and of itself."—MANNIE THOMAS

### DISCUSS

- 1. How does the white supremacist patriarchy contribute to both individual and state-sanctioned violence? How would addressing patriarchy contribute to the deconstruction of oppressive systems?
- 2. What methods can we employ to foster environments of healing and accountability within communities that have borne the brunt of incarceration and state violence?

### **JOURNAL**

- 1. Think about an instance where you have observed or personally felt the detrimental impact of patriarchy in your own life or within your community. How did it affect you and those around you?
- 2. Contemplate the notion of a revenge culture and its part in perpetuating harm. How can we transition toward a culture centered on accountability and healing?

- 1. Research businesses and organizations that make money from prison labor and seek alternatives to help you limit your support of the prison-industrial complex.
- 2. Explore book donations for prisons or prisoner pen pal projects you can support.

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# CHAPTER 2: GENDER JUSTICE, BODILY AUTONOMY, AND RACE

"Having these people around me was just so motivating, so inspiring. And such a great place for me to feel like, Yes, I can do these things." —NORMA TIMBANG

### **DISCUSS**

- Reflect on the relationship between race and gender, and how it impacts
  marginalized communities. Specifically, how does it affect issues related to bodily
  autonomy and reproductive justice?
- 2. Consider the unique obstacles that Black women face in combating sexual violence. How can we, as dedicated allies, boost their visibility, and acknowledge their struggles and triumphs?

### **JOURNAL**

- 1. Think back to any instance where you observed or experienced the intersectionality of race and gender concerning bodily autonomy or reproductive justice. How did this situation affect you or those involved?
- 2. Analyze the power relationships within your community that might be fueling sexual violence. What steps can you initiate to dismantle these dynamics and make your surroundings safer for everyone?

- 1. Pull up a newspaper and scan it for news items around gender or bodily autonomy.
  Do you feel the media presents the full scope of the issues? Could it be more representative?
- Research organizations and initiatives that privilege the voices and experiences of marginalized groups combating sexual violence and abuse and explore ways you can support them.

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## CHAPTER 3: HIERARCHIES OF BODY AND MIND, DISABILITY AND RACE

"Ableism became the lens that helped me understand the relationship between all kinds of oppression. It became, really, that nexus for me, where I was like, Oh, inside all of these other things I experience, I see how ableism supports them and makes them function."—DR. SAMI SCHALK

### DISCUSS

- 1. The author describes how this chapter "truly changed me—changed how I see activism, how I see the world, and how I see my place in it." Did you relate to that experience after reading the chapter?
- 2. Consider your current setting or discuss upcoming events you're attending. In what ways could they be made more accessible?

### **JOURNAL**

- 1. Reflect on a situation where you observed or experienced ableism in a social justice context. What effect did it have on the mission at hand?
- 2. Ponder the ties between ableism and racism. How does this correlation influence your viewpoints on social justice?

- 1. Explore workshops or training sessions on disability justice you might attend.
- Promote and bolster the voices of disabled activists of color. You can do this by sharing their initiatives on social networks or showing up at events.

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### CHAPTER 4: RACE, LABOR, AND BUSINESS

"I think that sometimes institutional policy feels big and slow. And yes, culture feels big and slow. But in terms of something that I can do, just by being a little bit more intentional, you and I—and the other hundred million, one in three Americans that opt in to Small Business Saturday—can decide to be a little bit more intentional a little more often, and we can actually close those gaps for small businesses owned by women and people of color."—LAURA CLISE

### DISCUSS

- 1. In your understanding, how have labor movements in the U.S. been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? What are some examples you can think of?
- 2. What role does race play in labor concerns and organizing efforts? Can you cite instances where race has been a significant determinant?
- 3. Is there a communication gap between unions and the younger workers? If yes, how can they better engage and educate younger workers about the importance of labor movements?

### **JOURNAL**

- 1. Think back to a moment when you felt unsupported or mistreated at your workplace. How did that experience influence your well-being and motivation?
- 2. Consider the intersectionality of worker well-being. In your opinion, in what ways do race, gender, and disability intersect with labor issues?

- 1. Identify and offer your support to labor organizations or unions in your local area.
- 2. Identify and offer your support to small businesses in your community that are owned and operated by women and people of color.

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## CHAPTER 5: RACE, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND ENVIRONMENT JUSTICE

"It's our responsibility as relatives of this earth to work together. I'll support your movements in the different ways I can, and you can come along and support the work that we're doing in different ways as well." —MATT REMLE

### DISCUSS

- How does environmental injustice intersect with racial and economic injustice? Use examples from the text to illustrate your points.
- 2. Identify examples of environmental racism mentioned in the book. How do these instances further the narrative on environmental justice?
- 3. Based on the insights from our reading, in what ways can we work towards a more inclusive and equitable environmental movement?

### **JOURNAL**

- Reflect on a personal experience related to environmental injustice. Write about your emotions during that time and articulate the actions you took or wished you had taken to effect change.
- 2. Take a moment to consider how your privilege might influence your understanding and involvement in issues of environmental justice. How can you leverage this privilege to aid marginalized communities?

- Immerse yourself in local history: spend a few minutes researching the history and current status of the land you live and work on. Seek to acknowledge, honor the Indigenous peoples who were the first guardians of the territory.
- 2. Spend some time researching the environmental justice groups that you support.
  Do they share your values? If not, in what ways can you work toward holding them accountable?

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### CHAPTER 6: RACE, EDUCATION, AND THE PEDAGOGY OF OUR OPPRESSORS

"Focusing on the heartwork, the headwork, and the community for a holistic approach, being able to create spaces like that, that really center BIPOC story, BIPOC narrative, BIPOC experience, has been amazing."—SAARA KAMAL

### **DISCUSS**

- 1. In what ways does the historical backdrop of racism in the education system continue to impact students and educators of color in the present day?
- What are some specific hurdles that educators of color face in predominantly white institutions? How can understanding these challenges help us create a more inclusive environment?
- 3. How can we bridge the gap between educators and activists to orchestrate more inclusive and anti-racist classrooms?

### **JOURNAL**

- 1. Reflect on a moment when you either witnessed or experienced racism in the education system. What were your feelings during this encounter? What impact did this experience have on your outlook toward the education system?
- 2. Pause and consider your own biases and privileges concerning education. How can these reflections guide you in using your influence to sow the seeds of positive change?

- 1. Get to know your local school board. Make a commitment to pay close attention to upcoming school board elections.
- 2. Determine ways you can support majority Black and brown, PTA, school supply, and fundraising drives. Share teacher wish lists and fundraisers on social media.

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### CHAPTER 7: ARTS, RACE, AND THE CREATIVE FORCES OF REVOLUTION

"One person can change culture. It is possible to change culture through one story. I always tell people: 'Don't be afraid to tell your story. We need your story. Your story might be the thing that pivots us." —FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ

### DISCUSS

- 1. How might the underrepresentation and underfunding of BIPOC artists impact the storytelling, healing, and preservation of culture? How have artists circumvented these challenges as mentioned in the text?
- 2. In what ways can mainstream arts spaces better support and recognize BIPOC artists and promote cultural equity?

### **JOURNAL**

- Reflect on a moment when a piece of art (visual, performative, or written) deeply moved you or changed your perspective.
- 2. How can you personally contribute to supporting BIPOC artists and their work, in the light of their importance in social justice movements?

- Identify a local BIPOC artist or arts organization whose work resonates with your group's mission. Make a collective plan to support them, either through donations, sharing their work, or advocating for them in your networks.
- 2. Engage in group poetry reading. Each member can select a poem by a BIPOC artist that speaks to "Resistance and Activism". Share and discuss the relevance and significance of these pieces in today's social justice movements.

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