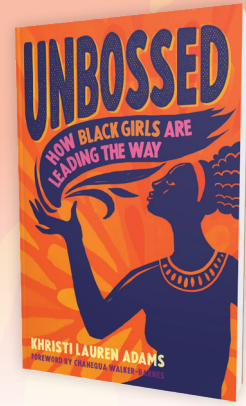


UNBOSSSED: HOW BLACK GIRLS ARE LEADING THE WAY

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

When you read the compelling stories of eight Black girls in Kristi Lauren Adams’s *Unbossed: How Black Girls Are Leading the Way*, you may find yourself inspired, frustrated, determined. You may close the book feeling ready to act—and the following questions are designed to get you started. This guide serves as a companion to *Unbossed*, providing accompanying questions for each chapter so you can pause and reflect on each girl’s story and leadership style. Whether you go through them alone or with a group, these questions can help you consider what you have learned, what you have yet to learn, and how you can step up as a leader and nurture leadership in others. But don’t let this be your stopping point; ask your own questions: of this book, yourself, and your community.

Each of these young women demonstrates a balance between looking to others for inspiration and becoming a source of inspiration themselves. As you read, pay attention to the similarities these leaders share and to the ways their paths diverge. Young or old, we can all learn from the examples of Ssanyu, Tyah-Amoy, Hannah, Grace, Jaychele, Amara, Kynneddy, and Stephanie. They are truly leading the way, and they reveal the possibilities we all have to become agents of change within our own communities and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

1. Adams dedicates this book to her sister, saying that her “leadership inspires me every single day” (p. 5). Who are some of the people that inspire the work you do?
2. Can you give an example of a time when you had to work with people different from you, whether from different backgrounds or of different ages? What are the benefits of working with people who have those differences? What are some of the challenges?
3. Were there any names mentioned in the introduction that you had never heard before? Why do you think you have not heard their stories before now? How can you find ways to learn about other stories of leaders who may not be commonly known?
4. What does it mean to be “unbossed”?
5. Have you ever considered yourself a leader? What kind of leader are you?
6. Each of these girls has a team of people around her, helping her reach her goals. What experiences of working on a team have you had? What does teamwork mean to you?

CHAPTER 1

1. One of the influential pieces in Ssanyu's life was a book. What is a book that has influenced you? Why is it important to you?
2. Reading about Rosa Parks's life inspired Ssanyu. How does learning about people's stories influence our own?
3. Ssanyu's name means "joy" or "gladness." What does your name mean? What do you think about the meaning of your name? How does your name tell your story?
4. Ssanyu talks about how she finds comfort in God. What brings you comfort?
5. Did you grow up reading diverse books? Why do you think it's important to read books by authors from diverse backgrounds and with diverse experiences?
6. Adams writes: "Black youth are not only aware of the lack of representation in literature; they are proactive in the solutions" (p. 12). What does it mean to be proactive about the problems in your life? Can you think about a time when you identified a problem and worked toward a solution?
7. How do you go about achieving your goals? Do you set long-term and short-term goals? How do you balance multiple goals?
8. Ssanyu talks about how the values she learned in church shaped her. What is the source of your values? How often do you think about your values? How have you translated your values into action?
9. Adams recalls her frustration when she couldn't find a group to join on her college campus. Her mentor told her, "If you can't find it, then start it" (p. 19). Is there anything in your life that you're hoping to find that you haven't yet? How can you be a part of starting something new to address an existing need? What does it take to start a new movement?
10. What do you think is the balance between faith and action? Do you lean more toward one side versus another?
11. As Adams points out, sometimes hard work isn't enough to achieve a goal. Can you remember a time when you worked hard but still failed? What did you learn from that situation?
12. Adams recalls a question she was asked as a teenager: "If you could do anything in the world and you never had to worry about money, what would it be?" (p. 20). What would be your answer to this question?
13. Ssanyu cautions against measuring success as the amount of money gained. How do you measure success? If success were a recipe, what would be the ingredients, and how much of each would you need?
14. In what ways do you take care of yourself so that you can avoid burnout?

CHAPTER 2

1. Tyah describes how the Black students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were continually overlooked in the conversation about gun violence and its impact on the Black community. Are there ways in which you have overlooked the experiences of people and communities? What role can you play in amplifying their voices?
2. Tyah transforms her community by asking questions of it. What are some of these questions, and what questions do you need to be asking of your own community?
3. Adams writes, “Transformational leadership focuses on liberty, justice, and equality” (p. 32). Would you revise this definition in any way? Would you add any values to it?
4. What does it look like to “acknowledge power and privilege” (p. 32)? Does this come naturally to you, or is it challenging? In what ways do you have power and privilege? In what ways do you lack it?
5. Is it necessary to deconstruct a system before transforming it? Why or why not? What does equitable change look like?
6. What do you think of the way March for Our Lives responded to Tyah’s and others’ questions and calls for accountability? In what ways can it still grow? Can you think of other examples of when a movement or organization responded favorably to critique? What about movements or organizations that have not responded favorably to critique?
7. How does Tyah demonstrate activism? What can you learn from her approaches?
8. How do you know if you’ve strayed from your “values and ethics” (p. 34)?
9. Fannie Lou Hamer said, “There is so much hypocrisy in America” (p. 35). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
10. What does it mean to be your authentic self? Is there anything standing in the way? How can you move past those obstacles? Conversely, what would need to happen to help you be your most authentic self?
11. Do you agree that “being our true, most authentic selves is a form of resistance” (p. 36)? Why or why not?
12. Is it easy for you to believe that God loves your real self, or do certain beliefs get in the way?
13. Does it come naturally to you to take care of your mental health? What kind of support would you need to be able to take care of your mental health?
14. Do you believe it is the responsibility of people of faith to engage in the conversation about gun reform and school shootings? How can your faith inform the values you bring into the conversation?
15. At the end of Tyah’s chapter, Adams asks her one last question: “What wakes you up in the morning and gets you doing all this work?” (p. 39). What would be your response?

CHAPTER 3

1. Despite turning tides in the conversation, conversations about mental health can still carry stigma. How do you think we, as a society, can destigmatize the conversation about mental health and provide support to those who need it?
2. What systems and approaches needed to change in order to produce a better outcome in the story Hannah shared at the beginning of the chapter?
3. Hannah and her brother Charlie make a good team, pairing vision and skill. Who are the people in your life you consider to be your partners?
4. Hannah and Charlie also have the support of their parents. In what ways do you provide support to others? In what ways do you receive support?
5. Why do you think there is a stigma around asking for help? What are some ways to normalize it?
6. Which part of visionary leadership—idea, word, or action—appeals to you most? How can you bring others on board to fill in the gaps as Hannah did with her brother Charlie?
7. Hannah said that “being a leader is having an idea and acting on the idea for the benefit of the masses instead of the minority” (p. 54). Can you think of leaders who embody this idea well? What about leaders who seem to lead only for their own benefit?
8. Do you have a vision or idea that hasn’t yet been realized? What steps would you need to take to begin making your vision a reality?
9. Visions are a persistent motif throughout Christian scripture. What are some of the different visions people received, and how did they respond?
10. Do you feel like it’s “okay to not be okay” (p. 57)? Why or why not? Where do you think this belief came from?
11. How can you make space for yourself and others to share honestly when you or they don’t feel okay?
12. What makes you unique? What do you like about being unique? What makes it difficult to be comfortable in your uniqueness?
13. What parts of yourself do you love? What parts of yourself are you still learning to love? How does self-love impact the way you view and treat others?

CHAPTER 4

1. Have you ever had someone downplay your experience or disbelieve what you told them? What did that feel like? How do you think Grace and her mother felt when the doctor treated them that way?
2. Did you know about discrimination in health care prior to reading Hannah’s and Grace’s stories? How have their experiences in the medical field changed your perspective?
3. Grace’s mother clearly advocated for her daughter in the doctor’s office that day. Has anyone ever advocated for you? Have you ever advocated for yourself or for others?

4. When did you first become aware of implicit bias? What do you think is the right way to address it within yourself or others?
5. Grace felt joy when she gave her clothes up to the two young girls who lost their home. To her, giving something up did not mean she needed to feel sad or resentful but rather happy that she could be a part of helping someone. How do giving and serving help us work through our own challenges?
6. Do you agree with Nelson Mandela that what makes a good leader is someone who serves? Would you add anything to that definition?
7. What does it mean to listen actively? How does it feel when someone actively listens to you? How does it feel when someone is distracted while listening to you?
8. Why is listening an important trait in servant leadership?
9. Servant leaders often make deep impacts on their communities yet rarely receive the recognition they deserve. How can communities better acknowledge the hard work of their leaders?
10. Look at the names and corresponding movements that Adams lists on page 74. Are any of them familiar to you? Take some time to do a quick search on one of them and report back to the group what you discover.
11. How can joy be an act of resistance in your life?
12. What images come to mind when you hear the word “hospitality”?
13. What does hospitality look like on an individual level? What about on a community and societal level?

CHAPTER 5

1. When tragedy strikes, where do you find hope?
2. Often, it’s natural to talk about what we can learn from those who have gone before us—those who are older and presumably wiser. But what can we learn from younger generations?
3. Even at a young age, Jaychele can trace her steps back to several experiences from her past, acknowledging how they have shaped her into the person she is today. When you look back at your past, what are some of those defining moments for you?
4. How did your past successes and failures help you learn?
5. What motivates you? Have you ever been a part of a movement with a motivating leader?
6. What do you think about mobilizing leadership? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses?
7. Who are the mobilizing leaders in your life and community?
8. When you address a situation, do you tend to focus more on the problems or the solutions? What would it look like to tackle problems with possible solutions in mind?

9. As Adams points out, “resistance and activism come in different forms” (p. 95). What do resistance and activism look like to you?
10. Of Jaychele, Adams says, “She knows anger is part of the work, and she’s not afraid of her emotions” (p. 97). Are you comfortable facing your anger? Do you feel like it is an important emotion? What purpose can it serve?
11. What comes to mind when you think of being the best version of yourself? Though it may require vulnerability, what steps could you take to continue growing in that direction?
12. Where does your peace come from? Is it an internal source, or does it come from external influences? Describe a time when you felt at peace.

CHAPTER 6

1. Despite the problems Amara faced in Maine, she decided to stay and cultivate a more hospitable environment for herself and for others like her. Was there ever a time you had to stay or chose to stay rooted in your environment, even if you wanted to leave?
2. How did Amara’s experience on the playground make you feel? How do you think it impacts children to encounter racism at such a young age?
3. When did you first become aware of race? Was it an exact moment, or was it something you’ve always known about? Did anybody in your life talk to you about race, or did you pick up on people’s attitudes toward it indirectly?
4. Have you ever tried to change yourself to fit people’s expectations of what you should be? How did that make you feel?
5. In your opinion, why do people often turn against the person who reports wrongdoing rather than the person who committed the wrong? Have you ever spoken up against something you believed was wrong? How did people respond?
6. Consider where you work, worship, go to school, and generally spend time. Have you ever given thought to the ways the space is structured and who it serves? Can you think of any ways in which certain people may not feel welcome or safe there?
7. Have you ever participated in discussions about the environment? Who or what takes center stage in those conversations? Has anybody ever brought up racial justice in connection to environmental activism?
8. Amara describes how “one in three African American individuals live within thirty miles of a coal plant” (p. 110). This is one instance of environmental racism. Can you think of others? What about where you live? What communities have been marginalized in your own community?
9. Have you ever considered your relationship to the land on which you live? What kinds of thoughts does this bring up? Do you have a desire to build a connection to the land and to steward it? In your opinion, what does it mean to steward land? What kind of relationship does that entail?
10. How do you determine if behavior is ethical? What traits make someone an ethical leader? Do you agree with Peter Northouse’s five principles (pp. 115–116)?

11. Does self-evaluation come naturally to you? What tools, resources, or approaches do you use to reflect on yourself?
12. What does it mean to love where you live? Does it require you only to view it positively? Do you agree that it's possible to be critical of what you love?
13. Share a time when you loved being out in nature. How do you feel when you're outside? Do you feel excited? Do you feel scared? What makes you feel that way?
14. When did someone make you feel like you belonged? Have you ever been a part of a group but not felt like you belonged? Consider Mary Beth Hewitt's question: "How do you know you belong to a group?" (p. 119).
15. Consider Amara's questions. What are your answers to these three?
 - A. What are your practices?
 - B. Do you have equity within those practices?
 - C. Are your practices formed thinking of not just one individual or one community but of all individuals in all communities?

CHAPTER 7

1. Kynneddy talks about her mother when thinking about how she got to where she is today. Who are the people who have supported and sacrificed for you throughout your life?
2. What is your favorite type of music? How does music make you feel? Do you listen to different genres for different moods and situations?
3. Has art ever had an impact on you? Describe a time when a piece of art (in any form) touched you.
4. How often do you give yourself permission to explore your creativity?
5. What dreams do you have that haven't yet been made a reality? What about your circumstances need to change in order to create a different outcome? Can you make that dream happen even now?
6. Have you ever had to ask yourself if you "fit" when you enter a new space? If so, how has that made you feel? If not, why?
7. Have you ever come to a point when you wanted to give up on a situation? How did you make your decision? Do you now wish you had decided differently?
8. Do you have people in your community you can count on? If not, what steps could you take to begin creating that community?
9. Where do you want to be in ten years? Are you where you expected to be ten years ago?
10. How does it make you feel when you connect with others who have shared experiences? Why is it important to have that opportunity?
11. What are some of the "teachable moments" from your journey?

12. Do you feel like you're able to balance working hard and enjoying the rewards of your hard work? How do you strike that balance?
13. Do you consider yourself the hero in your own story? Why or why not? How do you play a supporting role in other people's stories?

CHAPTER 8

1. Public speaking is a common fear. What is one of your fears? What has helped you work through it?
2. What are your intersections of identity? In what ways are you privileged, and in what ways do you experience marginalization? How, if at all, does awareness of your intersectionality affect the way you move through the world?
3. How can we introduce an intersectional approach to conversations so people don't have to choose one facet of their identity over another?
4. Who do you see frequently centered in conversations about race, climate change, feminism, etc.?
5. Do you think it's important to include Black liberation in education? Why or why not?
6. Stephanie started a movement with Black Feminist Collective and created a website to give space to many different voices, not just her own. How can you use the space around you to make room for others?
7. How do you know when it's time to step up, and how do you know when it's time to step back and let others lead?
8. What systems do you think need to be reformed, and which ones do you think need to be abolished altogether? Remembering Jaychele's example from chapter 5 to focus on solutions, not just problems, what should replace the systems that need to be abolished?
9. Can you remember a time you exercised agency over your life? How did that feel? What does it feel like when you don't have a sense of agency?
10. Do you agree that words matter? Share a time when someone's words impacted your life, for good or bad. How can you live as though your words matter?
11. Has there ever been a time when your words impacted the life of someone else, for good or bad?
12. Stephanie shows us how powerful it is to advocate for others from a place of compassion. What does compassion mean to you?
13. What does it look like to advocate for ourselves? Is that easier or harder than standing up for others?
14. What does liberation look like to you? Do you experience this on an individual level, community level, or both?

CONCLUSION

1. Which of the girls' stories resonated most with you? Why?
2. What style of leadership resonated most with you? Why?
3. After reading these stories, can you think of yourself as a leader?
4. Who were the people around each of these girls who helped them succeed? How can you nurture the leadership gifts of young Black women in your life?
5. These girls have stepped up in their own communities with or without the recognition they deserve. What can you do to pay more attention to the leaders around you?