

**Title: *Dear Justyce***  
**Author: Nic Stone**  
**Genre: Realistic Fiction**

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Alexandra D., 9<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Date Reviewed: May 9, 2021**

*Dear Justyce* tells the story of Vernell LaQuan Banks Jr., better known as Quan, and the events leading up to his incarceration for the suspected murder of a police officer. As a black teenager in a family which struggles to make ends meet, Quan faces prejudiced teachers in school and his mother's abusive, controlling boyfriend at home. Quan himself is witty and intelligent, though he hates to admit it, and runs away from his neighborhood home in modern-day America at an early age. His story is told through snapshots of his childhood, chapters from the perspective of his nerdy, fair-minded friend Justyce McCallister, and letters to Justyce from Quan's holding cell.

Through Quan's memories of his younger self, we meet his mother's boyfriend Dwight, his siblings Gabe and Dasia, eventual friend and delinquent Montrey, and visionary arms dealer Martel. When things go awry at one of Martel's parties and a police officer is shot, Quan is taken in for questioning and coerced into "confessing" before being placed in a cell to await trial. His friend and ally Justyce, who is studying law at Yale, vows to prove him innocent and clear him of suspicion; in prison, Quan begins to think about family, race, and the prejudice inherent in America's judicial system against people like himself.

*Did the plot (for fiction) keep you interested?*

Yes—as the story progresses, more and more of Quan's backstory comes to light, interspersed with snippets of time spent in his holding cell and Justyce's effort to prove him innocent. The first few chapters kept me interested in who exactly the main character was, and the sections where the plot began to advance in present-time held my interest for the remaining half of the book.

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The pace of the book was just right. The first half of *Dear Justyce* focused on building up the reader's understanding of Quan through snapshots, but the latter was written much more directly, and the pace slowed to accommodate Quan's journey to self-discovery in the days leading up to his trial.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

This book is appropriate for grades 7–12. While it deals with heavy themes such as racism, poverty, and family, its writing style is simple and to the point, making the story compelling and the text easy to digest.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would recommend *Dear Justyce* to readers looking to explore the theme of prejudice through the eyes of a teenager affected by the justice system. Quan's story is short but vivid, and by building up his childhood through snapshots into the past, *Dear Justyce* shows how society's expectations can influence the person one grows up to be.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*  
*Dear Justyce* was written as a companion book to the first novel in the series, *Dear Martin*, which is told from the perspective of Quan's friend Justyce. Reading *Dear Martin* will give readers a better understanding of what happens throughout *Dear Justyce*, but this book is also comprehensive enough to be read on its own as a standalone novel.

*5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!*

Quan's story was not only compelling but told brilliantly. The first few chapters drew me in with abrupt cuts in and out of Quan's life as a child, and I found myself invested in his fate after the incarceration. Most of *Dear Justyce* is narrated by Quan, who has a strong inner voice emphasized by clear, bold formatting; letters from him to Justyce gave me a glimpse into his attitude towards a friend, a "positive influence" which Quan himself says he never had the chance to have.

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Brian Z., 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Date Reviewed: January 20, 2022**

*Dear Justyce* is a story about the struggles of an African American teenager named Vernell Quan LaBanks Jr., also known as Quan by most people. Quan is imprisoned for the death of a police officer, Tomas Castillo. The story shows Quan's past, and the events that led up to his imprisonment, as well as how he eventually becomes a free man.

The story takes place mostly in Quan's hometown of Wynwood Heights, set in modern times. The story starts by showing Quan's past. His father and mother are divorced, and his mother's boyfriend is abusive. The story shows how Quan is smart, loyal, and determined to help himself and, more importantly, his younger siblings Dasia and Gabe.

Due to family, economic, racial prejudices and emotional issues, Quan starts stealing and is arrested a few times at an early age. He meets a fellow African American teenager, Montrey Filly, whom he feels he can identify with. Montrey, or Trey, introduces Quan to someone named Martel. Martel runs a gang who sells weapons, and Quan feels he can identify with the people there.

Unfortunately, things go downhill when two police officers show up one night when the gang is having a party. Things escalate and one of the officers, Tomas Castillo, is killed. Quan is arrested a few weeks after and is coerced into a confession. In the present time of the book, Quan is in prison and writing letters to his old friend, Justyce, or Jus for short. These letters reflect his deep thoughts and concerns about race, injustice, and how they were influenced in a bad way at a young age due to problems beyond their control.

Jus is a Yale law student and is determined to help Quan. With the support of Jus and Jus's friends, Quan is able to prove that he was not the one who killed Castillo and become a free man.

*Did the plot or presentation of the story keep you interested?*

The plot of the story kept me interested. It was formatted in a way where the present was made clearer with flashbacks and memories from the past, as well as letters to Jus from Quan in jail. It kept me engaged wanting to find out how his past built up to his present, as well as helped build up a better understanding of Quan's life and feelings.

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The pace of the book moved slowly in parts, but I think that was important for building things up to explain why Quan did what he did, and it helped me truly understand the character.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

I think this book is perfect for middle schoolers and older. It has a lot of deeper meaning and interpretation in it, which will keep older kids engaged. The language and events in the book can also be better understood by teenagers.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would recommend this book to readers who like to follow a truly developed character in real life problems, as well as readers with an interest in law and African American culture.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

This book is an enjoyable read and requires you to fill in some gaps and understand the main character. It kept me engaged and was written in a unique way that blended the past and present, as well as incorporating family, culture, everyday problems and issues together. It gave fragments of the past and fragments of the present that allowed the reader to put it together like a puzzle.

I would rate this book a solid 5 stars

It was formatted in a interesting way and kept you engaged and had you understanding the main character and his world. His letters to his friend Jus really showed his feelings and his world through his own words and eyes. The flashbacks built up anticipation and understanding, while the present tied it all together.