

Discussion Guide for *PULL*

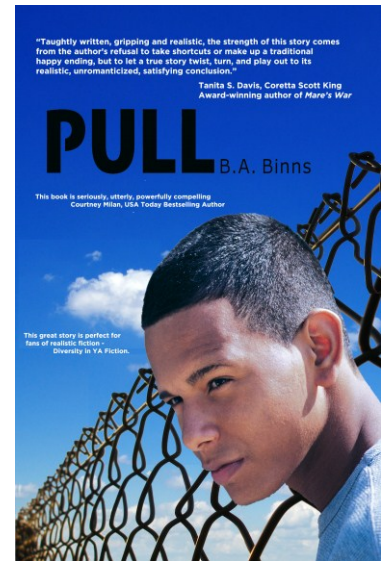
Reading level

Grade 8 and up

About PULL: [ISBN 978-0-9881821-0-3](https://www.isbn-international.org/details/9780988182103)

High school senior David is now the man of his family. His father sits in prison for killing his mother, and David changes his last name because he wants no connection with the man—he refuses to even call him “father.” David and his sisters move to a tough inner-city Chicago neighborhood where he fights off PTSD, attends high school and works to provide for his family. His mother’s dream was for him to go to college, but she wanted her children kept together.

He fights growing resentment as he struggles to balance family, work, school, and his attraction to Yolanda Dare, the hot girlfriend of the school's even hotter "king." But he can't escape the flashbacks of that one terrible night. When an opportunity to get a college scholarship comes his way, David must decide whether to follow his mother's dream of going to college or leave school to keep his family together.



Discussion topics (may be done before reading the book)

- Domestic Abuse: What are some of its causes? How does it affect family members? How can it end?
- Self-esteem: People sometimes present a false self to the world because they fear the truth will make others look down on them. Sometimes it takes time and effort to see past the masks individuals use to hide their innermost selves.
- The Future: Most of us have plans to graduate and go to college before entering the work world. Are there valid reasons why some people would chose to make different life plans?
- The Past: Does rejecting the past solve past problems? Is it ever better to just forget?
- If we see someone in trouble, is there a requirement to step in?

Pull has several themes, one of which is that genetics and family are not destiny. The protagonist worries:

Maybe DNA trumps everything. Because deep down, I'm too much a Murhaselt. (chapter 28)

Does DNA define human beings? What about upbringing? After being raised in a family of violence, is it possible for people to change their futures?

Questions (Can be answered as short-answer evaluation points for teachers wishing to evaluate students after a specific reading assignment, or as discussion topics after reading)

Chapter 1

- As you first meet David Albacore, how is he like you and your peers? How is he different?

Chapters 2-4

- Why does David refuse the teacher's offer to let him drop the Marriage and Family class? What do you think David really expects to learn in this class?
- How is David's treatment by the men at the construction site different from his treated by fellow students? Why would he feel more at home on the job than in school?

Chapters 5-8

- Why does David go to Malik's party? Why did Yolanda come to her boyfriend's party late?
- What does David feel about being a spectator instead of being on the court playing? What makes him want to defend the coach's actions?

Chapters 9-12

- What effect does learning about Yolanda's family and foster brother have on David?
- What do you think made Aunt Edie take her brother's children into her home?

Chapters 13-16

*If you listen you can hear
Real love cannot disappear.
Now they fly beyond our sight
But in the end we'll all unite
Inside God's unending light.*

- What does Yolanda's poem say about herself? Why do the words affect David so deeply?
"Your job. That's what I meant. I'd dare go after your job."
I wait for his laugh. I can't believe I've said this to the man whose approval means so much to me.
"Let me give you some advice, kid." He doesn't seem offended. He looks solemn, as if he's speaking to his own boss. "Aim higher."
- Why would David's boss tell him to "aim higher?"

Chapters 17-20

- What makes David consider love a fairy tale?
Her hands tremble. "People don't want to be alone. Having no one is the worst."
- What would make a popular girl like Yolanda think that "having no one is the worst?" How do you feel about that idea? Why would she rather have people think she is a thief?

Chapters 21-24

- I'm still not sure I did the right thing letting you foul Malik that way." He sighs again, the long-suffering kind of sigh that parents use when they're upset with their kids.
- Why does the coach allow David to foul Malik during the game? Do you feel the action is justified?

Obviously, my brain cells are the ones missing because I expect a little gratitude when I turn to Yolanda. But she's standing there with her arms crossed over her chest, head high, eyes pure steel, proclaiming nothing's wrong, even though her quivering chin says the opposite.

- After David stops an argument between Yolanda and her abusive boyfriend, she grows angry at David. What makes David step in? Why would Yolanda be angry? And why would she then decide to start having lunch with David and his friends?

Chapters 25-28

Life's just reality." Her voice is soft and husky. "All we're supposed to do is experience it. There's no win or lose."

- Do you agree with Yolanda's assessment on life? Why or why not?

"After your father left—"

"Antwon," I correct her.

Another long silence.

"Have you spoken to your father since—"

"Antwon."

- What does David's refusal to call Antwon "father" tell you about him? What makes him say that getting a gun was Antwon's way of getting help?

Chapters 29-32

- What does David react when Yolanda finally tells her friends the truth about herself?
- Why is it important to David that he defeat Malik without having to fight him?

Chapters 33-35

- What is the state's solution for David's family after his aunt suffers a stroke? How does he react to the idea that one sister might have to leave the country, and the other go into foster care?
- David has different options for his future, presented by his mother, his boss and his coach. Why does he make the choice he does? Do you think this is the best choice for his future?

Vocabulary:

▪ <i>amnesia</i> (chapter 13)	▪ <i>hypocrite</i> (chapter 7)
▪ <i>apprentice</i> (chapter 16)	▪ <i>outsourced</i> (chapter 27)
▪ <i>arbitrary</i> (chapter 3)	▪ <i>paralysis</i> (chapter 32)
▪ <i>automaton</i> (chapter 10)	▪ <i>pinnacle</i> (chapter 3)
▪ <i>blueprint</i> (chapter 17)	▪ <i>post traumatic stress disorder</i> (chapter 7)
▪ <i>controversy</i> (chapter 8)	▪ <i>premonition</i> (chapter 2)
▪ <i>critical path</i> (chapter 16)	▪ <i>psychology</i> (chapter 1)
▪ <i>fraud</i> (chapter 1)	▪ <i>realist</i> (chapter 2)
▪ <i>horde</i> (chapter 2)	▪ <i>stereotype</i> (chapter 25)
▪ <i>humiliate</i> (chapter 13)	▪ <i>unique</i> (chapter 25)

Writing Exercises

Writing is an important part of common core and getting students ready for higher education. Students may write papers using one or more of the styles below.

POV

Pull is written from a single POV, that of David Albacore. He is seventeen, new to the school, and with a giant chip on his shoulder. Since he knows no one at Farrington except his sister, everyone and everything is new. Readers observe and discover every other character through his eyes, ears and understanding. One of the benefits of sticking with one POV is that the reader is free to care deeply about this character and discover the world through their eyes. One of the dangers is that, if he misunderstands another character's motives, the reader gets that same incorrect assumption.

Write a paper discussing the effects of the POV selected on you while reading, and how the narrators style and insights affected you. Explain how your experience be different if you had known Yolanda's secret earlier. Do you think Malik may have redeeming qualities that David never sees or notices? What might have made Malik the kind of person David sees?

I take the place of Julian's injured defender and Julian moves fast, takes a pass and rushes the basket. He scores almost before I'm in position. I'm about to congratulate him when he gets this stupid look on his face, lifts his chin and makes a checkmark in the air in front of my face.

The boy needs a lesson.

The next time the ball's in his hands, I steal it so quickly, he's left staring as I drive for the basket. And my legs—my wings—reject gravity and lift me high as I dunk the basket for an easy two.

All eyes are on me when I land.

Re-write this scene from Julian's POV, showing what Julian would notice, think and feel about the events.

Descriptive Writing

Gameday. I step onto the court and my body knows practice time is over.

Muscles, get ready to make me fly. Where's that whistle?

No caged tiger was ever more ready for release. *How the hell did I ever give this up?*

My enemies stand before me, clad in green and white—sissy colors. My fingers itch for the ball. I'm ready for battle. *Blow the whistle, Ref.*

The opposing center eyes me. I won't pretend or smile. Sportsmanship? Mercy? Hell no! We're enemies.

He thinks he has a chance. He should just surrender now. That ball belongs to me.

It's mine.

Blow the whistle, Ref, or I'll blow it my own damned self.

That kid's not touching my ball.

Finally I hear the whistle. Time stops. The world narrows and there's only me, my opponent and the ball, flying into the air.

My legs are jet afterburners, defying the laws of gravity. I grab the ball and send it hurtling towards my teammate. Adrenaline burns my throat as I race for the basket, turning to wait for the pass. Chapter 21

Write a descriptive paper that uses sensory images, metaphors and/or similes, to help tell your story. Use strong verbs and powerful adjectives and adverbs. Make sure to include as many of the senses--sight, sound, smell, touch, taste--as you can.

Narrative Writing

The last time I touched a ball, there were less than twenty seconds left in the game. Only seconds on the clock and a twelve-point lead. Grogan Hills was about to win. I'd already scored eighteen points, ten rebounds and blocked five shots. But the cheerleader on the sidelines who'd promised me that sweet reward if we won was blowing me kisses and I wanted her to see me fly up in the air one more time. I jumped high for block number six. But my tired legs couldn't hold me up when I came back down. (*Chapter 12*)

Write a narrative paper about a sporting event, or other school activity. Make sure your reader will be able to picture the scene and feel they are there.

Editing/Revision

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Re-write this event from Julian's POV.

Research paper

"Jamaica is a lovely place. I truly envy her," the social worker says.

Maybe she does, but she wasn't the one being sent far from everything she knows and everyone she loves.

David's youngest sister is about to be sent from their home in Chicago to live with a relative in Jamaica. Write a research report on Jamaica. Investigate facts, including the distance between the island and your hometown. Check travel costs and times for a visit there. Review the climate, terrain, language, largest cities and per capita income. Describe an average day-in-the-life of a child living in Jamaica.

Conversation/dialogue

Several characters in Pull have to make painful or embarrassing confessions. Write a conversation between two friends where one reveals a painful or embarrassing secret.

Persuasive Writing

Trey, Marybeth, and Malik all committed violent acts against others. Write a persuasive paper that discusses which one was the most aggressive or cruel to their victims, and why you came to that conclusion.

Critical Thinking

Why do you think the title of this novel is Pull? Who is being pulled, and by what?

“...everything, even a weekend at the Dells, or a day trip to visit relatives, or even just visiting a different neighborhood around here opens the mind and pushes you towards maturity. So does dealing with problems.” (Chapter 30)

One of the themes of Pull is that life experiences bring maturity. Which do you believe is more important to developing maturity, calendar time, or problem time? Justify your answer.

David makes a choice he views as the right decision for him. Do you agree? What alternatives might you think of, if you found yourself in his dilemma with his family needing him.

Developing Empathy

How does Farrington High school, its students and teachers, compare to high schools in your community?

Malik’s girlfriends admit he is abusive. Why do you think they continue to put up with him?

How do you think Aunt Edie felt when faced with taking in her nieces and nephew?

All three siblings, David, Barney and Linda, are dealing with the trauma of domestic violence and the loss of a parent. Each displays their grief differently. How do their actions show their feelings? Can you tell which one hurts the most?

FUN

- Create a book trailer depicting some of the memorable themes, actions in one or more of the character’s lives.
- Choosing two or more characters from the book, write a script or create fan fiction that follows an incident from the novel, but adds additional depth to further clarify the plot and characters.
Examples:
 - Follow the team to Franks after their first victory.
 - Have David visit prison and confront his father.
 - Bring David home for a weekend visit from his construction job.
 - Move ten years in the future and show how the characters lives have changed.. What are they proud of? What do they regret?
- Make a storyboard or multi-panel cartoon of at least six frames depicting an incident from the novel. Use at least five vocabulary words appropriately.
- Write a script for a radio talk show that discusses bullying and family violence. Have various people call-in to discuss different experiences and solutions

Enrichment across the Curriculum:

Language Arts: Have students write a poem, song or rap about something or someone important in their lives they have lost.

Architecture: The reality is that while David will get instruction as part of his apprenticeship, he will have to return to school if he is to advance into construction management. Research construction, including project planning and architecture and handling risks. Report on the education requirements for different jobs in this industry.

Drama: Partners should choose a scene in the book and write a skit based on it. Act it out or make a video movie trailer for *PULL*.

Social Studies: Investigate the role unemployment plays in family dynamics. Look at David's own rising anger as he looks for work.

Resources:

NCADV: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
<http://www.ncadv.org/>

Child Sexual abuse information from the National Center for PTSD
<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/child-sexual-abuse.asp>

Crisis Hotlines (including child abuse and domestic violence numbers)
http://www.allaboutcounseling.com/crisis_hotlines.htm

US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

American Institute of Architects
<http://www.aia.org/>

About the Author:

B. A. Binns is the pseudonym of Barbara Binns, a Chicago Area author who finds writing an exercise in self-discipline, and the perfect follow-up to her life as an adoptive parent and cancer survivor. Like the protagonist in *PULL* she was forced to assume an adult role during high school when her parents divorced and had to learn that her future was in her own hands. She holds Masters degrees in both Biochemistry and Computer Science. Following a career as an Information technology analyst she studied creative writing at Roosevelt University and Chicago State University. She writes to attract and inspire both male and female readers with stories of “real boys growing into real men...and the people who love them.”



She is a member of RWA (Romance Writers of America), the Chicago Writers Association, SCBWI (Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators) and YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association). In addition to *PULL* she is the author of *Die Trying* ([ISBN 978-0-9881821-9-6](#)), a collection of short stories designed to attract Reluctant Readers. Her new novel, *Being God* (ISBN 978-0-9881821-1-0), will be released in February, 2013, with Malik Kaplan’s untold story.

Her achievements include a first place in Oregon’s 2009 Golden Rose contest, 2010 National Readers Choice Award in the Young Adult category, finagling in the RWA Golden Heart® contest. *Pull* is on the School Library Journal’s 2011 list of Best Books for Youth in Detention, YALSA’s 2012 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and was an Indiana 2012/2013 Eliot Rosewater award nominee.

In the Author’s Words: Why I Wrote *PULL*

I have been researching reluctant readers and the “reading gap” ever since I attended a panel titled “Why Johnny Won’t Read” during the 2008 Association of Writing Professionals conference. Teachers, librarians, and bookstore owners joined in lamenting the lack of books designed to capture young males. Since then I have come full circle, writing *Pull* expressly designed to capture both male and female readers, to entice reluctant readers and still hold the attention of good readers. I also give talks to teacher and librarian groups, having appeared at the 2011 ALAN, the 2011 and 2012 Ohio Educational Library Media Association (OEMLA), the 2012 Indiana Library Federation (ILF) and ALA conference (scheduled for June 2013)

Pull is dedicated to my late nephew, Craig Houston, Jr., a closet reader who wanted more books he could relate to. Like *Pull*’s protagonist, Craig left school to make it on his own in the so-called real world, but after several years he decided it was time to settle down and finish his education. Unfortunately he never got to complete college; he died during his junior year following a severe asthma attack. In his memory, I wrote a book about young people discovering that they are more than they think they are, and about a young man making his own choices about his life, no matter what other people think he should do or become.

Connect with the author on

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