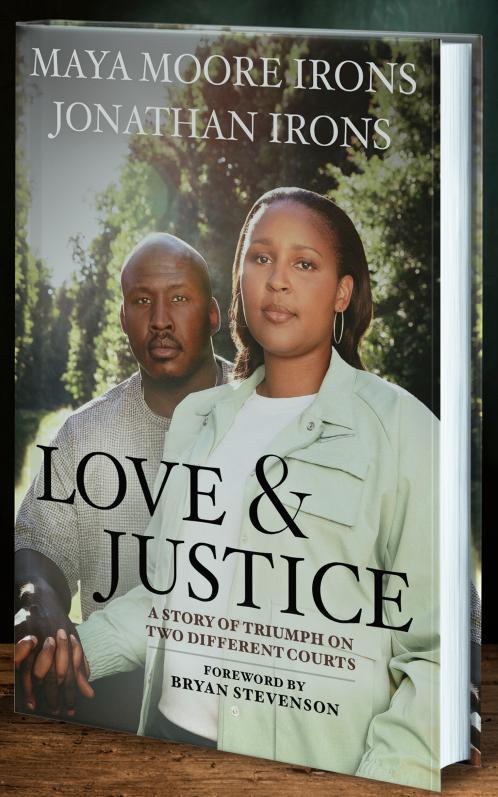
LOVE & JUSTICE

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ANDSCAPE

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In their inspiring memoir, Maya Moore Irons and Jonathan Irons explore their unwavering faith, their deep connection, and how Maya stepped away from basketball to pursue justice—both to prove Jonathan's innocence and to inspire activism in others.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of *Love & Justice*. We hope these themes and questions enhance the journey you took with Maya and Jonathan.

"I hoped this story would one day bless people and give them hope in dark times."

-JONATHAN IRONS

"I could never have believed that in the midst of a career where I wore the number 23, I would also be in the middle of this profound twenty-three-year-long story of love and justice."

-MAYA MOORE IRONS

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- Early in the book, Maya says the following about her childhood: "I now know that it can be a very discouraging experience to be Black in Missouri, but my childhood did not end up being defined by that. Thankfully I never experienced racism in a way where I was afraid. I also didn't understand how it felt to be stuck like a lot of people do, shackled to a place where you felt like you had no opportunity." Considering both Maya and Jonathan were born in Missouri, in cities less than one hundred miles apart, why were their experiences so different?
- When Maya is in sixth grade, her mother takes another job and relocates them to Charlotte, North Carolina. Why is moving a "game changer," as Maya describes it?

- In chapter 3, Jonathan goes from dreaming of being a police officer to being locked up in the county jail—a sixteen-year-old kid surrounded by grown-up convicts. How do you feel about the treatment he receives after being arrested and when he is questioned by detectives at the O'Fallon Police Department? How does his life illustrate the unfortunate reality of the school-to-prison pipeline, in which so many youths—many who are Black or Brown, with histories of poverty and abuse—are funneled out of public school and into the juvenile/criminal legal systems?
- Several people help Jonathan early on while he's in prison. One of them is Conrad, a former Green Beret, who says to Jonathan, "You're in the jungle, and this is the law of the land. You stand up for yourself, because if you don't, nobody will stand up for you." How does this advice apply not only to Jonathan in prison but also to his journey through the legal process to eventually getting an evidentiary hearing?
- Maya calls her mom her great collaborator in thinking through all Maya's possibilities and potential for life after high school. Her mom always kept the big picture in view while planning out the details to move life forward. Have you had collaborators in your life like this? How can you be a great collaborator with your children or loved ones?
- Maya believes that if there's one secret to her success in basketball, it's this: "It's the little things that make the biggest difference. Being excellent at playing your role in anything you do begins with the little stuff, and I learned that every year playing season after season of basketball. You have to stay consistent, focusing on the small details in each day that comes." How can you apply this mentality to moving forward in your own life? What small details that come each day can make a big difference?
- When Jonathan meets Mr. Flowers, a retired music teacher who volunteers as a choir director, how does the elderly man help change Jonathan's life forever? What actions does Jonathan take after being influenced by Mr. Flowers?
- When you deprive people of their basic and fundamental needs, you put them in a dogfight for resources and respect." How does this description in chapter 8 of the conditions that lead to a prison riot reflect our society?
- **9** How did you react when Jonathan is told by his aunt that Granny passed away? How would it feel to be told this news three weeks after she died?
- As Jonathan sits on that bus, leaving The Walls for good and being taken to a new prison, he tells himself, "I may be in prison, but I am not of prison." What does this mean? If someone is physically imprisoned, how can their mind, spirit, and soul still be free?

- When Maya first meets Jonathan in prison, she does something incredible: She makes him feel human. How was she able to show this sort of kindness to a convicted stranger? How can we show similar kindness to strangers we come across?
- There is an amazing juxtaposition between Maya's story and Jonathan's story. While she is winning championships and battling other basketball players, he is losing all freedoms and battling for his life. What are some of the most notable differences in their lives?
- After the University of Connecticut Huskies make it to the Final Four during Maya's freshmen year, they are stunned by a defeat to Stanford of 82–73. Losing on a national stage is one of the hardest things Maya goes through as a young player. As Coach A tells the press afterward, "That's why this is such a difficult game to lose. . . . All you remember now is what happened in those forty minutes. You don't remember all the things that led to getting here." What impact do moments like this have on Maya and how she battles for Jonathan?
- Chapter 11 details Maya's experience of UConn's famous winning streak. This chapter is almost a mini book inside the full story. What lessons did you learn from Maya's look back on the success of the Huskies?
- One theme in *Love & Justice* is showing up and being present, and being committed to doing what you say you're going to do. Maya illustrates this in chapter 16 when she visits Jonathan while he's still in the hole. She wants him to know that whatever he is going through, he isn't alone. She is there, and she loves him. How can we apply this commitment to following through and being present to our own lives? How can we show up and let others know they're not alone?
- The relationship between Jonathan and Maya changes when he makes a flirtatious comment to her and she thinks, "Hold up. That's not something a brother says to a sister." Jonathan owns up to it, and then, in typical Maya form, she says, "Well . . . I didn't hate it." What parts of their relationship over the years stand out to you the most? Did their foundation of friendship pave the way to finding love?
- In chapter 16, Jonathan says, "I held Maya in my hand. It was an open hand, held up as high as I could reach." He knew the reality of their situation, and he didn't want to hold her hostage or keep her trapped in their relationship. What would you have done if you were in the same shoes as Maya or Jonathan? How difficult would it be to love someone knowing you couldn't be with them?

- Jonathan goes through three grueling stretches of solitary confinement. In chapter 18, the prison system almost succeeds in breaking him. After he is unjustly placed in the hole, he loses all hope. How does he end up seeing light in the darkness?
- When advocating for himself, Jonathan files and loses eleven appeals in a row. This prompts Maya to tell him how his determination and perseverance are amazing. Is there a moment when Jonathan realizes he has a legitimate reason to hope for a release and redemption? What keeps him from giving up on himself and the process? How do Maya and Jonathan help each other in their own lives?
- Maya feels called to action when she helps form Win With Justice. Her desire is to create something that inspires people to better love their neighbors. "When we focus on approaching the law with the right spirit of goodwill toward man," Maya says, "we can watch our communities be more alive than ever." How do you feel about this approach toward justice? What effects does it have on an individual and at a community level?
- In 2017, Maya pours herself into learning what it means for her to be a citizen. Books like *The New Jim Crow* and *Just Mercy*, along with documentaries like *13th*, help educate her about how the justice system works. How has the shift in our culture toward justice reform impacted you? Have you found ways to be part of your community and learn more about that world?
- Maya writes about her ultimate decision to step away from the game: "I'm the conviction person, but it seemed like my convictions were living somewhere other than Basketballville." What does it take for Maya to step away from the game? Did her decision surprise you?
- Even after Reggie discovers what is ultimately the smoking gun for Jonathan's case—the undisclosed fingerprints belonging to someone else—Jonathan faces a long road toward justice: the extraordinary procedure of crafting his habeas petition, then waiting for an evidentiary hearing, then being hit by delay after delay. As Jonathan writes, "Freedom for the innocent should not be this difficult to find." Did this arduous process surprise you? Why is the process so difficult?
- Nelson Mandela wrote in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, about the people who wrongly imprisoned him for twenty-seven years: "If I still hated them, they would still have me. I wanted to be free. And so I let it go." In Jonathan's pursuit of justice, how does he exemplify the spirit of embracing dignity instead of hate, especially toward those who have wrongly imprisoned him, including his accuser?

- While speaking to Robin Roberts on *Good Morning America*, Maya said, "I feel like a lot of us are searching for purpose and for meaning and for reasons to get up, and sometimes they're not as far away as you think. Sometimes they're right around you and it's just about continuing day by day, being faithful to pouring out what you can to those people around you." What does she mean? How does Maya demonstrate this sort of purpose?
- Bryan Stevenson writes in his beautiful foreword that he sees *Love & Justice* as "a compelling and powerful narrative exhorting all of us to care more about one another, to bear one another's burdens." What do you feel *Love & Justice* is ultimately about? Love? Justice? Family? Redemption? What was at the heart of this story for you?
- In their note to the reader, Maya and Jonathan write the following: "Our story of transformation proved that there are no quick fixes. Twenty-three isn't just a number on a basketball jersey but it is also the number of years it took to free a blameless juvenile. Transformation takes time. It takes being a better neighbor and becoming someone who learns about a person who is different than you. It takes not frantically guarding your own comfort and privilege, but rather using the power and privilege you have to empower others." What does this statement mean to you? How has reading their story changed your perspective on justice and being a better neighbor?

MAYA MOORE IRONS JONATHAN IRONS

I STORY OF TRIUMPH ON

TWO DIFFERENT COURTS

FOREWORD BY
BRYAN STEVENSON

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