
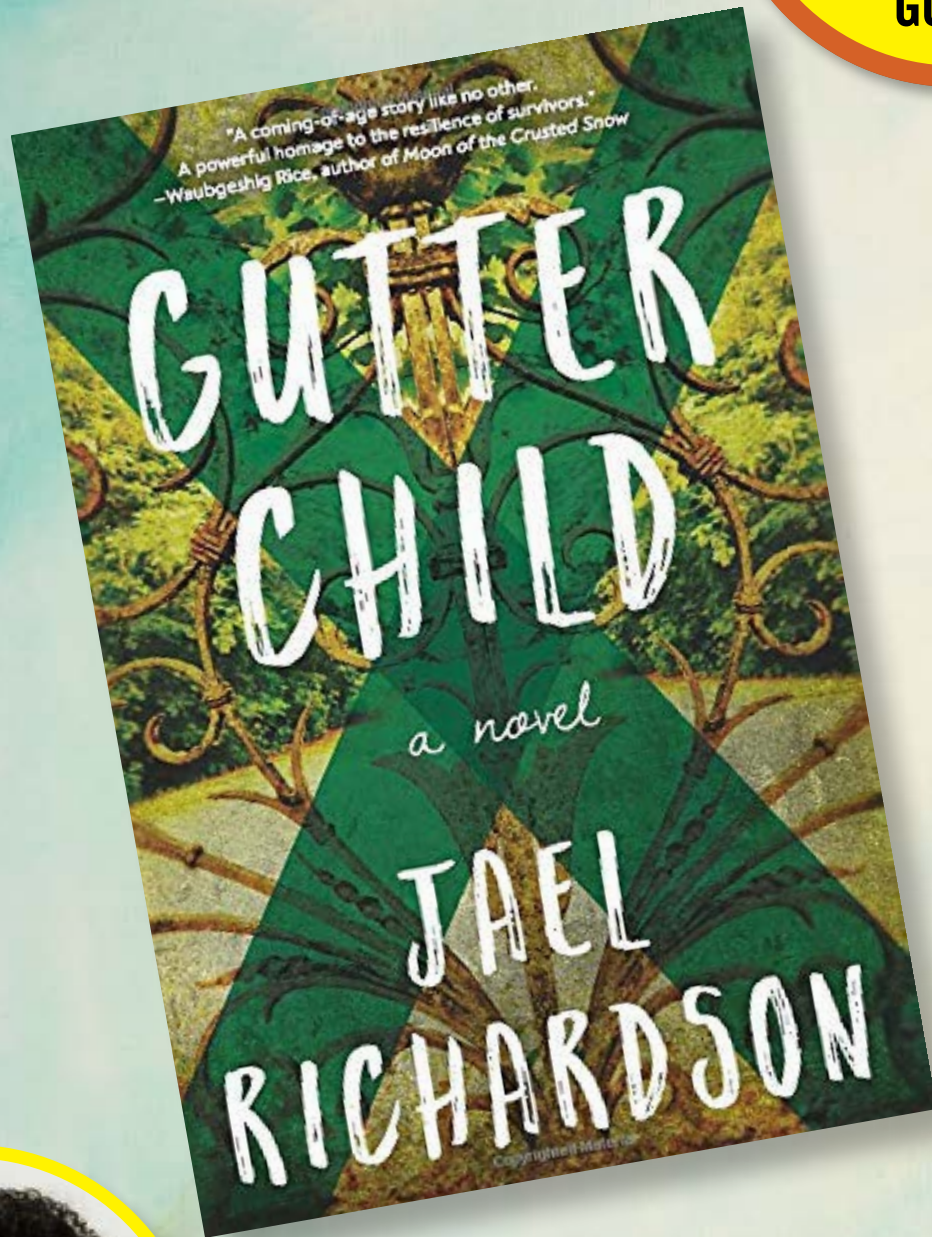


JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

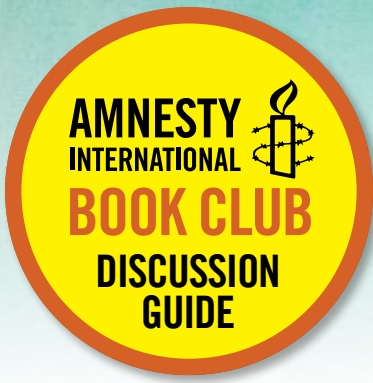
**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL   
**BOOK CLUB**  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE



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## GUTTER CHILD

BY JAEL RICHARDSON



## JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022 DISCUSSION GUIDE

# WELCOME AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS

It's hard to believe 2022 has already begun! And what better way to kick the year off with the highly requested; *Gutter Child*. "A fierce and illuminating debut from FOLD founder, Jael Richardson, about a young woman who must find the courage to determine her own future and secure her freedom.

Set in an imagined world in which the most vulnerable are forced to buy their freedom by working off their debt to society, *Gutter Child* uncovers a nation divided into the privileged Mainland and the policed Gutter. In this world, Elimina Dubois is one of only 100 babies taken from the Gutter and raised in the land of opportunity as part of a social experiment led by the Mainland government.

But when her Mainland mother dies, Elimina finds herself all alone, a teenager forced into an unfamiliar life of servitude, unsure of who she is and where she belongs. Elimina is sent to an academy with new rules and expectations where she befriends Gutter children who are making their own way through the Gutter System in whatever ways they know how. When Elimina's life takes another unexpected turn, she will discover that what she needs more than anything may not be the freedom she longs for after all.

Richardson's *Gutter Child* reveals one young woman's journey through a fractured world of heartbreaking disadvantages and shocking injustices. Elimina is a modern heroine in an altered but all too recognizable reality who must find the strength within herself to forge her future and defy a system that tries to shape her destiny." (Harper Collins, 2021).<sup>1</sup>

We're very much looking forward to kicking off another year with you. Keep a lookout for the announcement of our lineup for this year's books and for more ways you can get involved this year with the Book Club!

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1. <https://www.harpercollins.ca/9781443457835/gutter-child/>

### About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than ten million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

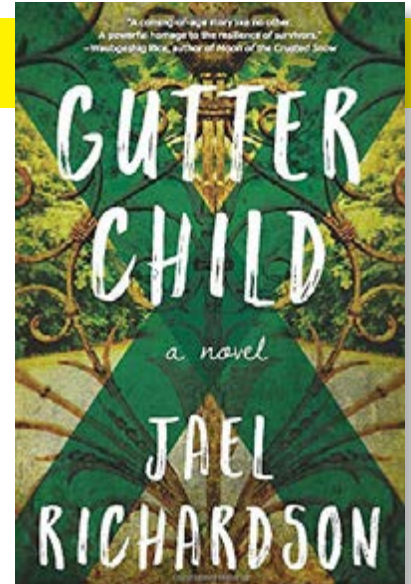
For more information about Amnesty International visit **[www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca)** or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.



# January/February 2022: *Gutter Child*

## ABOUT THIS MONTH'S AUTHOR, **JAEL RICHARDSON**

JAEL RICHARDSON is the founder and executive director of the Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD), the books columnist on CBC Radio's *q* and an outspoken advocate on issues of diversity. She is the author of the nationally bestselling novel *Gutter Child*, which was a finalist for the Amazon First Novel Award and the Forest of Reading's White Pine Award. She is also the author of *The Stone Thrower: A Daughter's Lesson, A Father's Life*, a memoir based on her relationship with her father, CFL quarterback Chuck Ealey, which was also published as a children's edition. Jael Richardson received an MFA in creative writing from the University of Guelph. She lives in Brampton, Ontario.



*The Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD), founded by Jael Richardson, is the first literary festival devoted to celebrating under-represented authors and storytellers.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB

1. The author reflects that *Gutter Child's* origins lie in the moment when "I started asking questions about what it looks like to grow up in a world that's designed for your failure." Gutter residents and the Sossi people overall in *Gutter Child*, are grappling with the deep and oppressive effects of colonization on a personal, interpersonal and systemic level.
  - a) Discuss with your group the ways in which Gutter life has manifested for each character within the book, the ways in which striving for Redemption Freedom affects not only their day to day, but also the ways in which they have relationships with others, how laws are formed, decisions one makes for their life, etc.
  - b) Now discuss how oppression continues to manifest in personal, interpersonal and at a systemic level for those made most vulnerable by colonization in Canada.
2. The importance of lived experience is explored in the book through the eyes of Elimina as she joins the Gutter Redemption System through the Academy and later in her life as an adult. In chapter 27, when Elimina is talking to Miss Charlotte regarding the birth of Tilly's child, she states, "I nod like I agree with her, like I don't see what Miss Charlotte can't accept- that Gutter life requires us to make impossible decisions, ones she'll never understand" (pg. 435).  
  
Discuss with your group the importance of understanding lived experiences and their relation to developing a better and more inclusive environment for those around us, and revealing the systems and structures at play. How do the lived experiences of each character play out in terms of how they acted, the jobs they accepted, their understood purpose in life, etc.?
3. A few of the kids from the Academy, including Elimina, sneak away to read poems from a contraband book in secret and in chapter

fourteen, Elimina states "I think of how those poems from Violet's book fed me in a way no other story has" (pg. 264). What does this mean? What does the book of poems represent to that group of kids from the Academy?

4. Throughout the book, we see complacency and its relationship to systemic issues called into question, for example, through the Hill house opportunity or how Mr. Gregors treats his students versus other Headmasters. Racism and oppressive behaviour can continue to perpetuate harm without being overt and we all have responsibility to put an end to such practices and rhetoric. Discuss with your group a moment where you saw or experienced complacency being shaken and reflect upon the ways in which you can be an agent of change, not only on an individual level but also amongst your own groups, communities, classrooms, and workplaces.
5. Protests are about freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly – without fear or unlawful interference. Yet, in a report released in 2020 following the Black Lives Matter protests in the US, Amnesty International documented 125 separate incidents of police violence against protesters in 40 states and the District of Columbia between 26 May and 5 June 2020. This was in marked contrast to the law enforcement response to much smaller, but largely white, and sometimes armed, protests against government policies to address the COVID-19 pandemic for example.  
  
Discuss how Jael Richardson portrays this stark contrast of protests in *Gutter Child*, through the differences in reactions of the protests of the Sossi people versus those of the Mainlanders.  
  
How is this rhetoric flipped within media? Why is there such continued strong-armed crackdowns on protests and protestors by governments around the world?
6. Who would you recommend *Gutter Child* to? Why?

## BACKGROUND

### ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND POLICING:

### KEEP UP THE PRESSURE



"Silent Demo" against racism and police brutality in Berlin, 6 June, 2020.

The history of colonization around the world is a story about control of land and perceived resources: the juggernaut of colonial power moving its way from territory to territory, continent to continent, claiming lands, resources, and people across the globe.

As this powerful system travelled around and gobbled up people to enslave, it also gobbled up the land that had been cleared of its rightful caretakers, land that was rich in quantity, quality and economic resources both above and below the soil. The two processes are connected: removing humans through whatever means, including forced displacement, labour, social collapse and infection; and asserting ownership over territory through violence, edicts, and renaming. All to gain economic, geographic, and political power.

There have been several examples of violence against Indigenous, Black, and Afro-Indigenous people in this country by police departments and the RCMP. Some chiefs of police and RCMP leaders, including Commissioner Brenda Lucki had initially asserted that systemic racism is not a problem in their organizations. Their comments were later retracted, yet their statements and refusal to critically examine and address racism in their own forces show a lack of fundamental understanding of systemic racism, the intent behind

the creation of police forces in Canada as well as a blatant dismissal of decades of inquests, inquiries, royal commissions, and external investigative reports into police conduct.

State violence is not just created by policing. It includes racial laws, inequitable provision of services, intentional neglect and exclusion, social bias, and the ways institutional policies impact the well-being of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. State violence includes the child and family welfare system, the education system, representation in governments at all levels, and healthcare, among many others. This is so deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, to the extent that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger White society.

Black and Indigenous communities know their own histories and priorities for the future. They have been building and advocating for solutions for a long time. The most supportive work that could be done in collaboration, would be to empower, echo and fund the suggestions and demands of Black and Indigenous people for how to build a society that respects human rights and ensures that all people thrive and create better futures.



## TAKE ACTION

### CANADA: STOP ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND OVER-POLICING

Communities have told officials what they need, and it isn't more enforcement. Urge your Premier to support new transformative approaches to upholding public safety.



The United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent has raised alarms about systemic racism within Canada's justice system, including specific concerns on how police practices such as carding disproportionately impact Black people. Those concerns are also documented in numerous other reports, including from the Ontario Human Rights Commission and Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.

Communities have been speaking out for decades about how Black people experience policing in Canada. It's time to listen: racism is not up for debate – it's systemic.

#### **A Comprehensive reform agenda should:**

- ban the practices of carding, street checks, and racial profiling by police,
- overhaul the approach to wellness checks,
- refrain from additional funding for law enforcement,

- consider significant reductions in spending on policing,
- curtail militarization of police forces,
- discontinue programs that put police in schools, ban the use of facial recognition technology by police for mass surveillance,
- address the intersectionality that exists in policing Black women and Black trans individuals,
- comprehensively overhaul police oversight,
- and end all other harmful and racist policies and practices.



**[Click here](#) to call on  
Canada's premiers to  
empower communities**

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If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at: **Bookclub@amnesty.ca**