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ENGL-112B, Sec 01

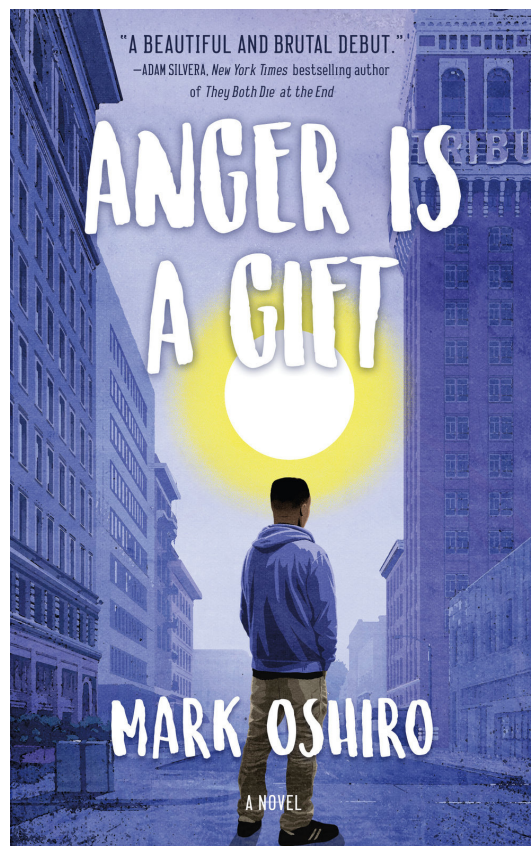
Dr. Warner

19 October 2023

Book Talk: Anger is a Gift

Anger is a Gift (2018)

Novel by Mark Oshiro



About the Author:



Image Source and Author's Website: <https://www.markoshiro.com/about/>

Mark Oshiro (they/them), is a queer Latinx author and activist from Los Angeles, California. He is best known for his debut YA contemporary novel *Anger is a Gift*. Oshiro is also known for his book/TV series analysis video blog, "Mark Reads and Mark Watches". When not engaged in writing/content creation, Oshiro engages in social activism online and offline.

Summary

Sixteen-year-old Morris Jefferies Jr, or "Moss", to this day is plagued with the trauma of his father's passing six years ago at the hands of Oakland's police brutality and judicial injustices. Now entering his second year of high school, Moss and his classmates face an administration that treats their student bodies like criminals; implementing metal detectors and random locker inspections when students in his English class don't even have enough books for everybody to read! In an effort to reclaim their right to a peaceful environment, the students

decide to organize and fight back. In the midst of the chaos, Moss unravels what it means to be black and queer in Oakland; and that if he wants change, he needs to empower himself and his community.

Quote no. 1

“We live in Oakland, this is how it is. Its nothing new. No one trusts us.” (122, this and all other quotations in this Book Talk are taken from *Anger is a Gift* by Mark Oshiro).

Immediately after Moss’s high school implemented the usage of controversial metal detectors on the school's front steps, Reg became the first victim of the machine's magnetic force. Metal rods in Reg’s leg from a severe car accident two years ago, reacted to the metal detectors, causing immense trauma to his legs. Pain so severe, Reg passed out as blood seeped from his legs. Students were already being subjugated to random ladder searches and seizures, being treated as prisoners in their own schools. Now with one of their own lying in a pool of blood, fears for their safety and anger from injustice grow inside of them. This quote highlights Moss feeling helpless in his own community, a common opinion among students in his school. This quote also highlights how underserved the marginalized community in West Oakland is, and the daily struggle its residents face.

Quote no. 2

“We been in this community, trying to make it better, for a long, long, time” (210)

Moss, along with his friends, sick of the injustices they face on a daily basis from the school administration decided that they can't just sit and let this happen anymore. They decided that they must act. Coming from a family of leaders and community activism, Wanda, Moss's mother, his mother is deeply rooted in the Oakland community. With her connections, she pulls the residents of West Oakland together to deal with a problem in their community. This quotes the novel's notion of the importance of community, how the power does not own or belong to anyone, but the people.

Quote no.3

“They [OPD] never protected the community”(359)

Tired of always feeling tired, powerless, and defeated, Moss marched to Oakland's police department headquarters and chained himself onto their front steps, protesting for justice for Javier. Passerbyers, bikers, and pedestrians would stop and ask him what exactly was he doing on a Sunday evening, in the cold of winter. Moved by Moss's unwavering love for his victimized love, Javier, Moss's solo sitdown protest, slowly grew in numbers. People resonated with his story of police brutality and injustices. A common theme shared with various members of the community is that the police do not serve and protect the community, they terrorize it. It is only when the community comes together and demands justice does change finally happens.

Classroom and Why “For Teens”

I would use *Anger as a Gift* in my classroom to highlight the importance of community and perseverance. Moss and the students of West Oakland High School could never have brought

changes to their school until they banded together as a community. If Moss ever gave up fighting for Javier's justice, then Javier would just be another statistic of brutality and corruption from Oakland's police department. Students in middle-high school are in a stage of life where they are trying out and forming their identities and their perception of life. This book encourages themes of self-empowerment and follows a 16-year-old protagonist, allowing students to easily excerpt themselves into the novel and see how they, just like Moss, can make a difference in their own community.

I would also use this book in my classroom because the book contains many different kinds of voices in Oakland; people from different ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. With a diversity of voices, this book employs the narrative that in one city, everyone has their own story, thoughts, feelings, and emotions; that to categorize people as being either black or white, takes away our ability to empathize with them, to see them eye to eye. Our protagonist Moss is black and queer, his boyfriend was Guatemalan and came to the US with no green card. Moss's friends are Muslim, White, rich, poor, and different, and yet they are able to find solace in one another. This book teaches empathy, something that this world lacks so much of.

How It Fits Best In Chapters 4-8 in Adolescents in the Search for Meaning:

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences:

- This book highlights real-life experiences of police brutality in marginalized communities.
- This book highlights how children in underserved community view and approaches the world.

- Moss's protest started with just him, but his perseverance allowed a movement to grow and changes to happen because he made the effort to. This highlights how changes in real life start with one person first.

Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss:

- This book opens with Moss and his panic attacks whenever he sees or is in the presence of the police. Moss lost his father because the police saw the color of his skin as a threat. Moss must overcome his trauma in order to demand justice for Javier.
- Moss finds love in the sea of chaos that is his life. As a black, queer teenager, love is not easy to find much less to keep. Being able to find refuge and solace in Javier made him feel almost *normal* again. To have him ripped from his life by the same very thing that took away his father compels him to not only fight, but to demand justice for the people he lost, and the people of his community.

Chapter 6: “Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions”:

- This book is a commentary on community and progressive activism, how the power belongs to no one but the people. This novel follows Moss and the people in his marginalized community. We see the many different perspectives of Oakland, how the lives of people who live in West Oakland differ from the lives of people in the East, like that of people from the North. The disparity between poor and rich Oaklanders, and how people like Moss’s and Javier’s mothers work as mail carriers and in nail salons, while Esperanza’s white parents travel to conferences to talk about plants.
- Throughout the novel, Moss struggles to find a balance between his identity as being black, poor, and also queer. The novel highlights the struggles young gay teens deal with

on a day-to-day basis, but also highlight the hidden struggles of queer people of color as they run into people who only want to fetishize and use their body.

Chapter 7: “Books about Courage and Survival”:

- Moss and his friends struggle to find courage in themselves, to believe that they have the ability to make change in their own community.
- Moss also finds courage and perseverance to tackle the police head-on, even when it is the police who are the root of his trauma.

Chapter 8: “Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable”:

- When Moss visits Javier’s mother and his apartment after his death, Moss finds an incomplete comic book of Javier’s. The comic had an unfinished picture of a black superhero, hands in hand with a Latinx man. This comic alludes to the relationship Moss and Javier shared, empowering Moss to fight for Javier’s justice.

Quantitative:

Word Count: 116,000 words

Page Count: 463 pages

Lexile: Grade: 9-12, HL710L

AR: ATOS Book level 5, Interest level: Upper Grades 9-12, AR points: 13.0

Overall, I would recommend *Anger is a Gift* to 10th graders and higher.

Qualitative:

Levels of meaning:

- The novel talks of unchecked police power and brutality, and the real-life struggles of black and brown people.

- The novel talks about persevering, even when it feels as though the whole world is against you
- The book highlights the student's struggles with the school administration and its policies, how their on-campus resource officers treat the students as though they are prisoners
 - This relationship between the resource officers and the students is a metaphor for the strained relationship between the people in Moss's community and the OPD.

Structure:

- This novel is written in the third person format, which allows the reader to understand the complexity of what it means to be a part of a community through the many voices of Oaklanders.
- There are a variety of different sentence structures: both short and long as well as blunt and abstract.

Language Conventions and Clarity

- Generally uses simple and easy-to-understand words

Knowledge demands:

- There are truly not many knowledge demands as this novel follows the experience of Moss Jefferies, a black queer teen navigating life in Oakland, and as an activist, fighting for Javier's justice.
 - However having some knowledge of how Oakland is laid out and knowing some history of the Bay Area, allows for some of the nuance experiences in the novel of "The Bay" to be more palatable for the consumerist masses.