

Book Club Discussion Guide



Call Us What We Carry by Amanda Gorman, Page 1 (May 2022)

Call Us What We Carry: Poems

By Amanda Gorman

About the authors:

Amanda Gorman was named the first National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States in 2017. In 2021, she became the youngest poet to write and read her work at a presidential inauguration. The 22-year-old enthralled the Biden inauguration audience with "The Hill We Climb," which referenced both painful history and hope for the future. Gorman also read a poem at the Super Bowl in 2021, co-hosted 2021's Met Gala and was named an Estée Lauder Global Changemaker. In addition to poetry, Gorman is an activist who advocates for climate issues, equality and education. She's been interested in a presidential run since she was 11, and plans to run in 2036, the first cycle in which she'll be old enough to be elected. Prior to performing, Gorman recites the following mantra: "I'm the daughter of Black writers who are descended from Freedom Fighters who broke their chains and changed the world. They call me."

Source: Biography's website: (<https://www.biography.com/>)

About this book:

Formerly titled *The Hill We Climb and Other Poems*, the luminous poetry collection by #1 New York Times bestselling author and presidential inaugural poet Amanda

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Gorman captures a shipwrecked moment in time and transforms it into a lyric of hope and healing. In *Call Us What We Carry*, Gorman explores history, language, identity, and erasure through an imaginative and intimate collage. Harnessing the collective grief of a global pandemic, this beautifully designed volume features poems in many inventive styles and structures and shines a light on a moment of reckoning. *Call Us What We Carry* reveals that Gorman has become our messenger from the past, our voice for the future.

Source: Publisher's website (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. A ship's manifest is a record of what is on the ship. In "Ship's Manifest," the speaker says, "To be accountable we must render an account." Who is the "we" to whom the speaker refers, and what does the speaker list in the manifest? What is the significance of this "capsule" and why must it be preserved?
2. The speaker encourages us to pay attention to the smaller details of our lives, exemplified well during quarantine. The three poems, "There's No Power Like Home," "What We Did in the Time Being," and "Surviving" are a timeline of sorts. They invite us to think about the many ways we survived, grieved, and hoped for pandemics to end. Which of these poems, lines, and words resonate with your own experiences during this time?
3. "Call Us" depicts the ways Black people's bodies have been denigrated and dehumanized. Yet, the speaker entreats the reader to remember all the ways that Black people have been integral. What is the responsibility that the speaker puts on the reader when they say, "We are not me— / we are we"? Why must we, then, "call us / what we carry"? What is the importance of acknowledging the harm done to Black people? What happens if we do not?

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4. Consider “Every Day We Are Learning” and “Cordage, or Atonement.” What does this pair of poems suggest about persistence, resilience, and humanity? What might these lines from “Cordage, or Atonement” suggest about the cost of change: “Often we cannot change / without someone in us dying”?
5. In the poem “Pre-Memory,” the speaker explains: “Pre-memory defines who we are as a people. Will we / forget, erase, censor, distort the experience as we live it, so / that it cannot be fully remembered? Or will we ask, carry, / keep, share, listen, truth-tell, so it need not be fully relieved?” What might happen if we choose to tell our stories without a full reckoning with or accounting of our pasts?
6. Gorman juxtaposes history with her imagination in “The Surveyed: Report on Migration of Roes” in response to the understanding of the 1919 Chicago race riots. On pp. 139–140, she offers, “Through some fictions we find facts; in some fantasies we / discover / ourselves & then some.” How does the form of the poem, told through a combination of real and imagined survey answers, help us to think about this moment in history, what actually happened and what we know and don’t know? What are the fictions and facts that this poem encourages us to recognize?
7. What have we learned as “we mourn & we mend,” especially during these last few years? Note the ways the speaker uses “morning” and “mourning” in “The Miracle of Morning.” What is the relationship between these ideas and words in the poem? How do we survive and thrive beyond this moment?

Source: Publisher’s website (<https://penquinclassroom.com/>)

Please note: This is only a sampling of questions from the Educators Resources.