

I Am Alfonso Jones

Tony Medina

Stacey Robinson, Illustrator

John Jennings, Illustrator

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Tony Medina tackles the issue of race and police brutality, in the unique, teen-friendly graphic novel *I Am Alfonso Jones*.

Alfonso Jones, a black teenager, is killed by an off-duty police officer who mistakes a coat hanger in Alfonso's hand for a gun. Alfonso had been studying *Hamlet* in school, and Medina uses the conceit of ghosts relating information to educate Alfonso about the long history of police shootings and abuse against black people as he meets with many such victims in the afterlife. Alfonso learns even as he silently watches his family, friends, and even the police officer who shot him deal with the aftermath of his death.

It's a complicated and controversial topic, and Medina does a good job of balancing practical advice (one character provides a list of "rules" for dealing with the police, including "don't run") even while pointing out that seemingly harmless violations (like running away) don't justify fatal violence. Medina's characterizations are detailed and appealing, using language natural to teens, and the kinetic art that accompanies them forcefully conveys the myriad emotions that the book's subject raises. The use of actual victims' stories makes Alfonso's fictional tale ring all too true.

Alfonso's class goes on to adapt *Hamlet* as a hip-hop play, and the bits that Medina shows are intriguing enough that he might consider a full hip-hop graphic novel adaptation. *I Am Alfonso Jones*, meanwhile, stands as a valuable tool for educating young people about the history of police injustice.

PETER DABBENE (November/December 2017)

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