

Social Action Project

Make a Little Ruckus

Inspired by the novel *In the Neighborhood of True* by Susan Kaplan Carlton (Algonquin)



A social action/engagement project for grades 8-12

Book Talk

After her father's death, Ruth Robb and her family transplant themselves in the summer of 1958 from New York City to Atlanta. In her new hometown, Ruth quickly figures out she can be Jewish or she can be popular, but she can't be both. Eager to fit in with the blond girls in the "pastel posse," Ruth decides to hide her religion. Before she knows it, she is falling for charming Davis and sipping Cokes with friends at the all-white, all-Christian Club. Does it matter that Ruth's mother makes her attend services at the local synagogue every week? Not as long as nobody outside her family knows the truth. At temple Ruth meets Max, who is serious about the fight for social justice, and now she is caught between two worlds, two religions, and two boys—until a violent hate crime forces Ruth to choose between all she's come to love about her new life and speaking out for what she believes.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Ages 14 and up, Grades 9 and up
320 pages, 6" x 8"
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About the Author

Susan Kaplan Carlton teaches writing at Boston University. The author of *Love & Haight* and *Lobsterland*, her writing has also appeared in *Self*, *Elle*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Seventeen*. She lived for a time with her family in Atlanta, where her daughters learned the finer points of etiquette from a little pink book and the power of social justice from their synagogue.

Praise for *In the Neighborhood of True*

"The story may be set in the past, but it couldn't be a more timely reminder that true courage comes not from fitting in, but from purposefully standing out . . . and that to find out who you really are, you have to first figure out what you're not." —Jodi Picoult, *New York Times* bestselling author of *A Spark of Light* and *Small Great Things*

"Carlton captures the racism, anti-Semitism, and social interactions of the time and place with admirable nuance. The dialogue and setting are meticulously constructed, and readers will feel the humidity and tension rising with each chapter." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

Make a Little Ruckus

"When hatred shows its face, you need to make a little ruckus." —*In the Neighborhood of True*

"Make a Little Ruckus" inspires students (book clubs, social justice groups, communities of readers) to write letters from the heart about the issues that matter most to them. In the poem *Spelling*, Margaret Atwood writes, "a word after a word after a word is power." Letter writing is an empowering way for young activists to raise their voices and to foment real change.

In the Neighborhood of True explores themes of privilege, identity, belonging and speaking up, even when it's hard and heartbreaking. Tragically, hate crimes against marginalized groups are not a thing of the past. What can we do today in the face of such hate?

We can take a page from Ruth who finds strength in words. While social media is accessible and immediate, there is real retro power in writing longhand. Putting pen to paper (no matter how messy your handwriting!), gives you a connection to the words—one that's more personal than typing on a keyboard or texting an emoji. The very rarity of the handwritten letter gives it influence as a tool of change.

Gather stationery or a notebook, an envelope, and a stamp. Then ask yourself:

What do you want to stand up for: Think of a cause you really care about—from erasing Islamophobic graffiti to fighting for trans rights.

Who do you want to reach out to: Research who has the power to advocate or legislate on this issue. Is it the mayor of your city? Your state assembly person? The principal of your school?

Where can you find inspiration and information: Look at letter writing campaigns at change.org, read examples of persuasive writing at the Op-Ed Project (theopedproject.org), check out the 100postcards project on Instagram and the Love Brigade chapters on Facebook. Also gather a solid statistic or bit of evidence (from a person, from a newspaper article) to give your argument credibility.

Now you're ready to write.

- **Start right in:** There's no need for my-name-is introductions. Be direct and start with the idea closest to your heart and your cause. For example, *Dear Senator Collins, I'm asking you to listen to my ideas about gun violence.* Or *Dear Rabbi Goldfinger, How can I forgive arsonists who set Jewish homes on fire?*
- **Be personal:** Add details to convey your passion for/experience with the issue you're advocating for. If you're arguing for a greater number of diverse books in your classroom, you might point out instances of 'othering' you've noticed on campus.
- **Consider objections:** Slip into your reader's shoes—what might convince them to agree with you? You might speak up in favor of building accessible trails around the pond near your house—and you might anticipate the town commissioner will object to the cost. Perhaps you can suggest a community-wide volunteer day to get the project rolling.
- **End with a plan:** What, specifically, do you want your reader to do? Host a town meeting? Circulate a petition? Hold a rally? Offer to help and recruit others to join you.
- **Ask a friend to read before you send:** All writing gets better when we ask others to read it and make suggestions. You might ask a friend a few key questions: What is the main point? Is it persuasive? Does it make you care about the issue? Why or why not?
- **Mail your letter into the world:** Make sure the recipient's correct address—and your return address—are on the envelope, stamp it, and drop in a mailbox.
- **Think of other ways to make a ruckus:** You might organize an email campaign, flooding the mailbox of a person who has the power to change things. Or tape up notes in your school bathroom advocating for free tampons and pads. Or send paper origami birds to school board members who ban a book about the Japanese internment. Or, or, or.

Common Core Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.B](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D](#);

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5](#)