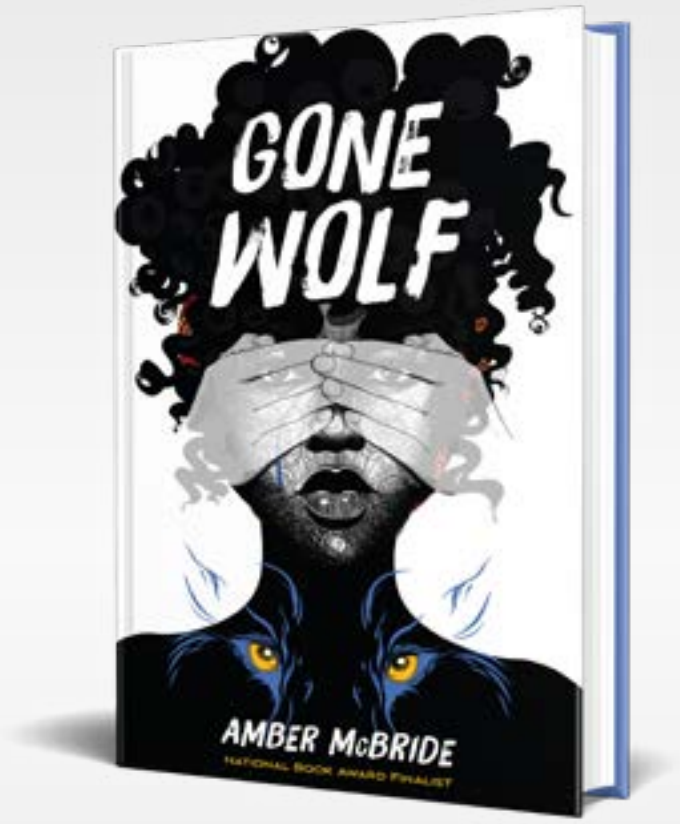
GONE WOLF

Discussion Guide



About the Book

In her first middle-grade novel, the award-winning author Amber McBride explores Black pain, trauma, and, ultimately, healing through the story of what might happen if white supremacists ceded from the rest of the country.

In the future, a Black girl known only as Inmate Eleven is kept confined—to be used as a biological match for the president's son, should he fall ill. She is called a Blue—the color of sadness. She lives in a small-small room with her dog, who is going wolf more often—he's pacing and imagining he's free. Inmate Eleven wants to go wolf too—she wants to know why she feels so blue and what is beyond her small-small room.

In the present, Imogen lives outside of Washington, DC. The pandemic has distanced her from everyone but her mother and her therapist. Imogen has intense phobias and nightmares about confinement. Her two older brothers used to help her, but now she's on her own, until a college student helps her see the difference between being Blue and sad, and Black and empowered.

About the Author

Amber McBride's debut young adult novel, *Me (Moth)*, was a finalist for the National Book Award, and won the 2022 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent, among many other accolades. Her most recent young adult novel is *We Are All So Good at Smiling*.

Gone Wolf marks McBride's middle-grade fiction debut. She is a professor of creative writing at University of Virginia, and lives in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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Discussion Questions

1. *Gone Wolf* is divided into two sections, Blue and Black. What did you think of this formatting choice when you started the book? Did your feelings change or remain the same once you finished the story?

2. Why do you think the author chose *Gone Wolf* as the title? What is the significance of "going wolf" in this story, and in life?

3. When Imogen meets the President, she sees a boy in the room with blue skin like hers for the first time ever. How does Imogen feel when she sees him? Why is this significant?

4. Larkin visits Imogen's new room and calls her Inmate Eleven instead of her new name. Why do you think this is? How does this make Imogen feel? Why does Larkin feel stuck between his father and Imogen?

5. When Imogen meets with the President for lunch, he calls her "stupid" for asking him a question and then smiles as she cries. On the Bible Boot flashcard that appears at the end of this chapter, it says that Clones are "peaceful and kind." Do you think the President was "peaceful and kind" in this scene? If not, how would you describe him? Can you find other instances in the book where the Bible Boot flashcards don't match up to how things actually are in the Bible Boot?

6. When Imogen and Mr. King talk about fighting for a more equal world, Imogen says, "Sometimes you do things no matter the consequences. You have to do them or you feel strange about living." What do you think she means by this?

7. In Mr. King's speech, he mentions, "We have to be brave even if we are afraid." Discuss instances in the novel where you see characters being brave even when they are afraid. Was there ever a time you had to be brave when you were afraid? What was the outcome?

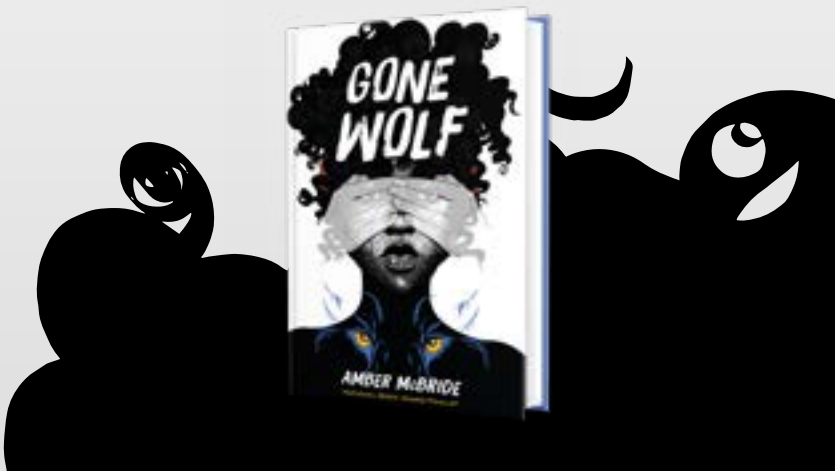
8. When Imogen asks what a vote is, Rabbi Heschel explains that "voting is when you have a say in what happens in America." Why should everyone be able to vote? Why do you think some people choose to not vote? What can we do to encourage people to vote?

9. At Ms. Carmen's house, Imogen and Larkin see their pictures on the news with a reward for their return. The news reporter says that "under the Fugitive Blue Act, all escaped Blues are required to be turned in." This law is based on the Fugitive Slave Act that was passed in 1850 and required the enslaved to be returned to their owners even if they escaped to a free state. What do you think of this law? When do you think it is ok to break the law?

10. The author included excerpts from a book called *Black History for Kids* at the end of some chapters. Why do you think this was done? How do these pages contrast with the Bible Boot flashcards? Why are these historical facts important for everyone to know?

11. In the book *Black History for Kids*, it says, "Equality continues to be something African Americans are protesting for." What are some ways you see inequality present today? What can we do to create change and fight for a more equal world?

12. At the end of the story, Imogen tells her mother and Dr. Lovingood the truth about why she feels sad and blue. What did Imogen go through and how is she starting to heal from this trauma? What can we learn from her story?



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