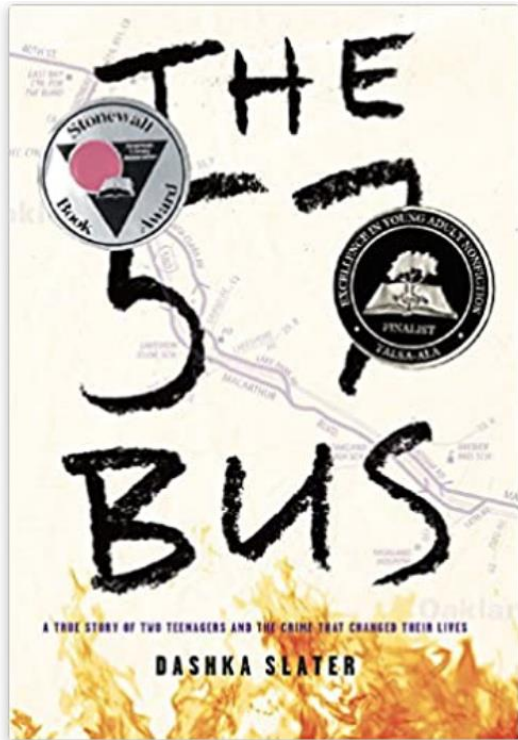


The 57 Bus

By Dashka Slater



What You Should Know

The 57 Bus was recommended to students in 8th grade ELA without parental awareness. It contains strong profanity, sexual content and gender identity topics.

The book was officially challenged by a KSD parent but the reconsideration committee's decision was to retain the book in the library for children's free use.

Senior administrators agreed that *The 57 Bus* **should not be assigned or recommended** to middle school students based on its content and assured parents that it would not be.



Shortly thereafter it was featured on a **recommended book shelf** in the middle school library.

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homosexual—Physically attracted to people of the same gender.

pansexual—Physically attracted to people across the gender spectrum.

TERMS FOR ROMANTIC INCLINATION

aromantic—Not romantically attracted to anyone.

biromantic—Romantically attracted to both men and women.

cupioromantic—Doesn't feel romantic attraction, but is still interested in romance.

heteroromantic—Romantically attracted to people of the opposite gender.

homoromantic—Romantically attracted to people of the same gender.

panromantic—Romantically attracted to people across the gender spectrum.

quoiromantic—Doesn't understand the difference between romantic and platonic love.

Karl was out for a run on Hillegass Avenue, a residential street close to the border between Oakland and Berkeley. It was late November 1987. He was in his early twenties, unmarried, and working at a nearby café. Fugitive scents wisped past his nose as he ran: oak leaves, fog, jasmine, car exhaust, ocean breeze, his own sweat. He was lost in the staccato thud of his shoes hitting the pavement, the huff of his breath, the metronome of his heart.

“Hey, I like your legs!”

A truck slowed down to roll behind him.

Heartbeat louder now, his chest a megaphone. A side-eye peep: three young guys in a pickup.

One leaned out the window. “Let me suck your prick.”

Adrenaline gushed into Karl’s veins. He veered down busy Alcatraz Avenue, legs churning. The truck followed. He doubled back

he showed the lighter to Lloyd and then swung to the opposite side of the silver pole, closer to Sasha.

He flicked the lighter by the hem of Sasha’s skirt. Nothing happened.

Lloyd was still shouting up to the front of the bus.

“Hey! Light-skinned girl!”

“Light-skinned girl.” Jamal kept repeating what Lloyd said, his deep voice like an echo from the bottom of a well.

Lloyd bounced up the aisle to where the girls were sitting, perching on the edge of a nearby seat.

“Go ahead, you do it,” Jamal said to Richard. Richard flicked the lighter again. Nothing.

Rebuffed by the girls, Lloyd returned to his companions, stopping in front of Sasha’s sleeping form to shout an abrupt, parrotlike “Hey!”

Sasha stirred, but didn’t wake.

“Whoa, nigga. You said, ‘Hey!’” Jamal echoed. “Screamin’ and shit.”

Lloyd leaned close and screeched in Jamal’s ear. Richard laughed and slapped Lloyd’s head.

“Aw, nigga, you just broke my neck,” Lloyd yelled. “Damn, pussy, bitch, fuck!”

Richard brandished the lighter, pretending to light Lloyd’s sleeve. He looked at Jamal.

“Do it,” Jamal urged.

Lloyd danced between them, landing half on Jamal’s lap.

“Move, nigga! Get off me,” Jamal grumbled. He kept his eyes on Richard, his phone poised. “You might as well do it,” he said again.