

“Powerful. Authentic. A riveting gut punch. **This is how you galvanize young activists.** A voice not soon to be forgotten.”—**Tiffany D. Jackson**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Weight of Blood*

PLAY THE GAME

By Charlene Allen



From debut author Charlene Allen comes a captivating YA contemporary mystery and coming-of-age story, celebrating the power of friendship, first love, and exploring the criminal justice system from the lens of restorative justice. Perfect for fans of Tiffany D. Jackson, Nic Stone, and Maureen Johnson.

In the game of life, sometimes other people hold all the controls. Or so it seems to VZ. Four months have passed since his best friend Ed was killed by a white man in a Brooklyn parking lot.

When Singer, the man who killed Ed, is found dead in the same spot where Ed was murdered, all signs point to Jack, VZ's other best friend, as the prime suspect.

VZ's determined to complete the video game Ed never finished and figure out who actually killed Singer. With help from Diamond, the girl he's crushing on at work, VZ falls into Ed's quirky gameiverse. As the police close in on Jack, the game starts to uncover details that could lead to the truth about the murder.

Can VZ honor Ed and help Jack before it's too late?

PLAY THE GAME • On-sale 1/31/2023 • Katherine Tegen Books
ISBN 9780063212794 • \$19.99 • Ages 13 and up



Charlene Allen works with community organizations to heal trauma and fight injustice, especially the beast called mass incarceration. She received her MFA from The New School, her JD from Northeastern University, and her BA from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She lives in Brooklyn with her fabulous family and their very silly dog. *Play the Game* is her debut novel. You can visit her at www.charleneallen.com.

Additional Praise for PLAY THE GAME:

“A compelling look at different ways of approaching grief and justice.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“Honest, raw, and absolutely alive. *Play the Game* is a tour de force, and Charlene Allen has announced herself as a powerful new voice.” — Matt de la Peña, author of *Mexican WhiteBoy* and *Last Stop on Market Street*

“Fast-paced, insightful, and highly relevant, Allen’s novel illustrates the application of restorative justice practices to real life situations. A must read for all young people impacted by racism and those adults who love them.”
— Angela Y. Davis, Distinguished Professor Emerita, UC Santa Cruz

“Compelling.” — *Booklist*

“Teens will find VZ’s story a rewarding read with undeniably difficult lessons to teach.”
— *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

Interview Questions for Charlene Allen

- Congratulations on the release of your debut novel PLAY THE GAME. Can you tell us what inspired you to write this book?
- Is there any specific reason you chose *Play the Game* to be based in Brooklyn?
- You mentioned as an activist your work to promote restorative justice and end mass incarceration—how did you decide to incorporate these ideas into the plot of your book?
- Can you discuss the role of grief in your book? Was it important to show VZ and Jack dealing with Ed’s murder differently?
- When writing the book, did you know how you planned to end it from the beginning? Are you a plotter or a pantsner?
- This book deals with some heavy topics like racial discrimination and violence. How did you ensure the portrayal of these sensitive topics in a respectful way to young readers?
- Without any spoiler, can you tell us how VZ completing Ed’s unfinished video game relates to the murder mystery?
- Diamond’s character not only added a layer of romance to the story but also the female gamer perspective. What motivated you to add Diamond to this story and how does she influence VZ’s journey?
- What message do you hope readers will take away from this book? And what do you hope they remember most about your writing?
- Lastly, as an author and an activist what advice do you wish to share with aspiring writers who are also passionate about social justice and creating their own stories?