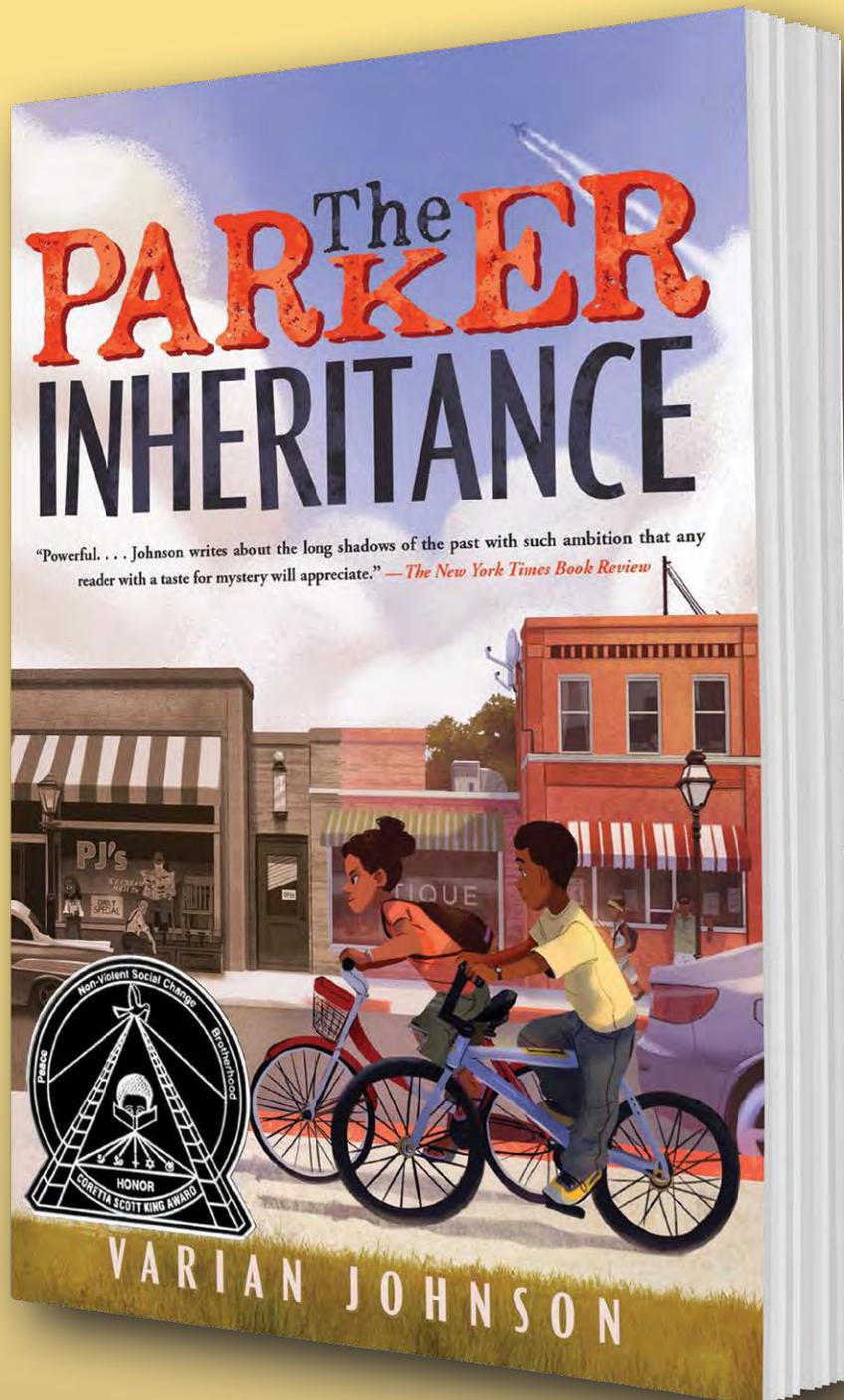


EXPLORE LOCAL HISTORY, FAMILY  
STORIES, AND LITERARY THEMES WITH

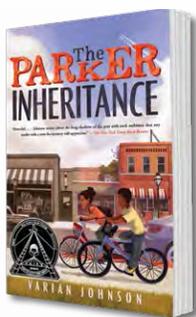
# **The** PARKER INHERITANCE

BY VARIAN JOHNSON



Ages 8-12  
Grades 3-7

# ABOUT THE BOOK



When Candice finds a letter in an old attic in Lambert, South Carolina, she isn't sure she should read it. It's addressed to her grandmother, who left the town in shame. But the letter describes a young woman. An injustice that happened decades ago. A mystery enfolding its writer. And the fortune that awaits the person who solves the puzzle. So with the help of Brandon, the quiet boy across the street, she begins to decipher the clues. The challenge will lead them deep into Lambert's history, full of ugly deeds, forgotten heroes, and one great love; and deeper into their own families, with their own unspoken secrets. Can they find the fortune and fulfill the letter's promise before the answers slip into the past yet again?

## LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

*The Parker Inheritance* is a puzzle mystery, but it also tackles real social justice issues, which are just as important. Specifically, much of the novel was inspired by an interaction with my brother while in high school.

During his junior year, my older brother was chosen to participate in a weeklong leadership camp in Florida. When it was over, I picked him up at the airport.

We had just placed his baggage in the trunk when a white man walked up to us and flashed his badge. He was a police officer, patrolling the airport for drug smugglers. And we were suspects.

The officer explained that he singled us out because we looked out of place, like we didn't know each other. And that's when I knew he was lying about his justifications for stopping us. My brother and I did not look like strangers. He is older than me . . . by five minutes. We are identical twins.

But all this police officer saw was what he wanted to see: two black kids that must have been drug dealers. Never mind that one may be returning from a leadership conference. Never mind that we were clearly related. Never mind that we would go on to graduate as co-valedictorians of our high school class.

We quickly opened the trunk and let the police officer inspect the bag. After his search came up empty, the officer sheepishly explained that he was just doing his job. He did not offer an apology.

That scene has stayed with me, but it wasn't until recently that I began reliving it, over and over and over again. George Floyd. Trayvon Martin. Michael Brown. Alton Sterling. Philando Castile. Sandra Bland. Eric Garner. Why are we always assumed to be a threat? A danger that must be neutralized?

As I wrote *The Parker Inheritance*, I found myself thinking about the power of perception. How it can be a danger to those without power . . . and also how we can manipulate that perception. What if we dress in a different way? Talk in a different way? Have different friends? How much of yourself is worth giving up if it allows you a chance to survive?

I hope, as you read, you'll consider the weight of perception in both the fictional town of Lambert, South Carolina . . . and the very real world we live in today.

With gratitude,

**Varian Johnson**

# UNIT PLAN AHEAD

Use the following ideas to build an immersive learning experience with the novel, bookended by a class yearbook project, and/or find activities that will enhance pre-existing lessons with interdisciplinary approaches. Suggestions that follow are tied to national standards in their respective subject areas.

## Prepare for Social Emotional Learning

*The Parker Inheritance* will lead to transformative conversations, filled with teachable moments, as students confront the types of bigotry that historically marginalized groups have faced in the past and still experience today. Utilize exit passes as a system to check for understanding and create a safe space for inquiry. At the end of a lesson, ask each student to write down any questions they still have (on sticky notes in person or by commenting in a virtual chat) in order to exit the classroom. The most frequent response may be “no questions,” however all questions asked should be researched overnight and answered at the beginning of the next lesson, addressed to the whole class.

## Model Information Literacy

Explain to students that good detective work depends on trustworthy sources. Introduce them to **WE THE PEOPLE [wethepeople.scholastic.com](http://wethepeople.scholastic.com)**, a civics and media literacy resource from Scholastic. Refer to the grades 4–6 document titled “Know the Source” as you respond to exit passes. Modeling good research habits will empower students to be life-long learners, so cite sources and explain why they are authoritative, creating lists of teacher-recommended books and websites. Further use exit pass themes to make nonfiction recommendations for books in the school and/or classroom library.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Activate prior knowledge about yearbooks, sharing concrete examples from your school if possible. Discuss their purpose and what sections they usually include. Share that parts of the book are set in the 1950s, and introduce the **DigitalNC collection of African American high school newspapers and yearbooks** [digitalnc.org/collections/yearbooks](http://digitalnc.org/collections/yearbooks). Explain that until the Supreme Court ruled that it was illegal, African American students went to separate schools from white children, and that the book reflects this time period. Have students choose a yearbook image from 1957 of a group of kids, such as a club or a team, and share two or three observations about the image with the class or in a journal. Return to these observations and the images during the novel at the points where studying yearbooks factor in to solving the mystery.



# THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Use the following prompts with your students to discuss important topics and increase engagement with the text.

## Choosing Your Words

Candice’s grandmother tells her that a mistake isn’t a failure, it’s a learning experience (p. 9). How can something be both a mistake and a learning experience? Discuss how word choice can change perspective or tone. Brandon tells Mr. Gibbs he should say “African American” instead of “colored,” which earns him a “long, hard look” from his grandfather (p. 45). What might be going through Mr. Gibbs’s mind at that moment before he responds? Candice’s dad hates the word “crazy” (p. 82). Why is it so hard for her to stop using it?

## Facing Fear and Intimidation

Candice figures out Milo’s summer schedule so that Brandon can avoid him—and avoid being bullied. What are other ways that Brandon or Candice might have solved that problem? When Ms. McMillan interrupts the assistant principal harassing Candice and Brandon, she asks them if they are okay (pp. 131-132). Why don’t they say anything? Compare Tori’s reaction to the highway patrol car to Brandon’s avoidance of Milo (p. 151). In what ways do each of them learn to handle intimidation by the end of the book?

## Responding to Racism

Race relations impact the decisions that many characters make, Big Dub and Reggie in particular. All things considered, how does each team both win and lose the 1957 tennis match? What does Siobhan’s mom mean by “the difference between vengeance and justice” when she is talking to Big Dub (pp. 182-183)? Coach Douglas teaches Reggie a controversial survival strategy (p. 228). How does following the coach’s path—passing as a white person—lead to both success *and* failure for Reggie in the book?

## Communication Between Generations

When Mr. Gibbs uses the term “colored schools” and Brandon says “African American” (p. 45), Brandon’s mom explains later that his grandfather is from “a different generation” (p. 254). Why is that significant? How does that impact your understanding of the exchange on page 45? When they are talking, Candice’s father admits to her, “I am not ready for this. . . . I planned to tell you when you were older” (p. 306). How well do the different generations—grandparents, parents, and kids—communicate with each other in the book? Where is there room for improvement?

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

## Advisory

Review the use of Milo’s schedule in the novel and discuss the consequences of avoiding a problem instead of solving it. If appropriate for your group, consider sharing personal stories or encouraging advisees to share stories as a way of relating this to their own lives. Return to the details of the schedule and ask advisees to make observations about how Milo spends his time (pp. 108-109). Have advisees create a grid on notebook paper with seven columns (labeling them with the days of the week) and 24 rows (for the hours of the day). Ask them to analyze how they usually spend their own time by filling in all 168 spaces on the grid, sharing their observations with the rest of the advisory. Develop time management goals with advisees and create new schedules to support those changes.

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.7; CASEL 5: Self-Management; CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.MD.A.2*

## Art

Ask students to create comic strips illustrating a scene from the novel when a clue was solved or a new piece of evidence was discovered. Discuss chapter 31 and the series of paintings that depict the 1957 tennis match between the schools (p. 52, p. 188, pp. 191-201). Challenge students to reproduce one or all of the tennis paintings in a medium of their choice based on the descriptions. Discuss Reggie and the Washingtons abruptly leaving Lambert, and then introduce the artist Jacob Lawrence and his 60-panel great migration series. Ask students to research and storyboard their own nonfiction artwork series, capturing the details of an event in recent history.

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.7; National Core Arts Anchor Standards 2, 6, 7, 8, 11*

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS (CONT.)

## Language Arts

Explain that while figurative language can bring the text to life in a good way, it can also be used to illustrate negative ideas. Research the origins of idiomatic expressions like “paper bag test” and “good old boys” for mini-lessons before students encounter the terms. Read the sections of the author’s note about “passing,” and discuss what the term infers about *failing*. Have students identify and research unfamiliar phrases and uses of figurative language as they read the novel, as well as vocabulary. For each instance, ask them to reflect on whether its use reinforces a positive or negative idea.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4

## Library

*The Parker Inheritance* is both a mystery and historical fiction. Review the meaning of the term *genre*, survey students for their prior knowledge of the “rules” for each of these genres, and have them share their favorites. Create book lists of student recommendations in different genres that can be shared and updated. Consider also suggesting and creating lists of stories in other formats, such as games, movies, or podcasts. As you read the novel together, help each student discover a new book in their favorite genre that shares a theme with *The Parker Inheritance*. Read and develop an engaging booktalk for *The Westing Game*, by Ellen Raskin. Use these independent reading selections for compare and contrast activities, modeling with *The Westing Game*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10

## Math

Rather than tell the story chronologically, *The Parker Inheritance* goes back and forth in time. Ask the class to compare and contrast the novel to other books, movies, or media they can recall that also do this. Work with students to diagram and create a detailed timeline of events for the novel, layering in relevant national and world events for each decade. Use this tool to analyze how the three different generations in the novel have an impact on each other.

CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP4; CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP1;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

## Physical Education

Introduce students to the sport of tennis, starting with the debate over who invented it. Whether in person or in a virtual setting, have students learn and practice different drills, serves, hits, and how to score the game. Create an intramural tennis tournament. Adapt or duplicate the workout shared by a present day tennis player on social media. Share the article from **The Undefeated: The Rich and Nuanced History of Black People in Tennis** [theundefeated.com/features/the-rich-and-nuanced-history-of-black-people-in-tennis](https://theundefeated.com/features/the-rich-and-nuanced-history-of-black-people-in-tennis) and show video footage from the athletes’ most well-known matches.

SI.E1.5; SI.E3.5; SI.E6; SI.E25; SI.E26; S2.E5; S3.E2;  
SI.M13 - SI.M17; S2.M7; S2.M8; S5.M5; S5.M6

## Social Studies

One of the skills Candice and Brandon develop as they investigate is doing interviews. Have the class work in small groups to analyze how well their interviews went with different characters. Introduce Scholastic’s **My History Project** [classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/my-history.html](https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/my-history.html) and work on the news story activity (#2). Teach methods for collecting interviews and summarizing central themes, and facilitate multimedia options for publishing their news stories. Archive these publications for the school library or a time capsule.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.C; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.5;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.D;  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.7

# POST-READING ACTIVITY

## Class Yearbook Project

Organize the students into groups that will work together to create an informal class yearbook, referring to the **DigitalNC yearbook** website once again for inspiration [www.digitalnc.org/collections/yearbooks](http://www.digitalnc.org/collections/yearbooks). Have groups work together to curate and respond to each other's classwork from the unit on *The Parker Inheritance*. The finished project can include their news stories, genre based lists of favorite movies/books/games, intramural tennis 'team photos' and tournament results, and time management grids. Finally, ask each student to design their own yearbook page with: a photo of themselves, illustrations that reflect their favorite genres and how they spend their time, the goals they set in advisory, and a meaningful quote from *The Parker Inheritance*. Provide a print copy to each student or share a final PDF file, and archive a copy of the yearbook in the school and classroom library.

## VOCABULARY

ACCLIMATE, p. 63  
CIRCUMFERENCE, p. 190  
DEROGATORY, p. 46  
FALLACY, p. 206  
INCOMPETENT, p. 18  
INEPT, p. 18  
INHERITANCE, p. 313

JUNETEENTH, p. 99  
LAUGHING STOCK, p. 8  
LEGACY, p. 110  
"N" WORD, p. 129  
OUTLANDISH, p. 75  
PASSIVE, p. 260  
PI, p. 190

REITERATE, p. 74  
RETRIBUTION, p. 135  
RINGLEADER, p. 38  
SAVOR, p. 283  
SUPERFLUOUS, p. 35  
SUPERSTITION, p. 12  
VENGEANCE, p. 18

## RESOURCES

### **Casel 5: Social Emotional Learning Framework**

[casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CASEL-SEL-Framework-10.2020-1.pdf](http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CASEL-SEL-Framework-10.2020-1.pdf)

### **Common Core State Standards Initiative**

[corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org)

### **DigitalNC: North Carolina African American High Schools**

[digitalnc.org/exhibits/north-carolina-african-american-high-schools](http://digitalnc.org/exhibits/north-carolina-african-american-high-schools)

### **Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education**

[shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/upload/Grade-Level-Outcomes-for-K-12-Physical-Education.pdf](http://shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/upload/Grade-Level-Outcomes-for-K-12-Physical-Education.pdf)

### **Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series**

[lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/the-migration-series](http://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/the-migration-series)

### **My History Project**

[classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/my-history.html](http://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/my-history.html)

### **National Core Arts Standards**

[nationalartsstandards.org/sites/default/files/Conceptual%20Framework%2007-21-16\\_0.pdf](http://nationalartsstandards.org/sites/default/files/Conceptual%20Framework%2007-21-16_0.pdf)

### **The Rich and Nuanced History of Black People in Tennis**

[theundefeated.com/features/the-rich-and-nuanced-history-of-black-people-in-tennis](http://theundefeated.com/features/the-rich-and-nuanced-history-of-black-people-in-tennis)

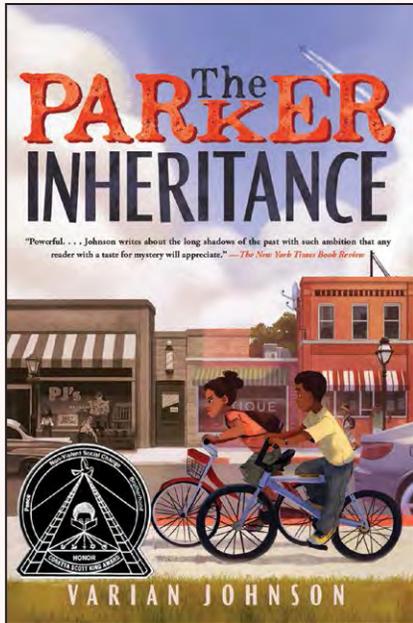
### **We The People: A Civics and Media Literacy Resource**

[wethepeople.scholastic.com](http://wethepeople.scholastic.com)

### **The Westing Game Discussion Guide**

[scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/westing-game-discussion-guide](http://scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/westing-game-discussion-guide)

# Books by Varian Johnson



Hardcover: 9780545946179 • \$16.99  
Paperback: 9780545952781 • \$7.99  
Also available as an ebook and audiobook

## Praise for *The Parker Inheritance*

★ “A must-purchase.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “A candid and powerful reckoning of history.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “A compelling mystery and a powerful commentary on identity, passing, and sacrifice.”

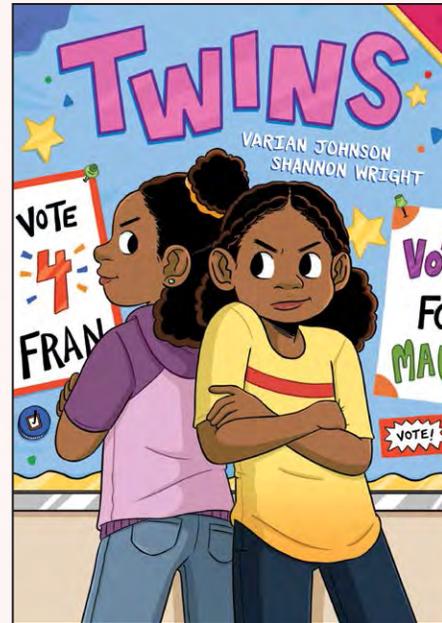
—*Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, starred review

★ “Johnson’s Westing Game–inspired tale is a tangled historical mystery, a satisfying multigenerational family story, and an exploration of twentieth-century (and contemporary) race and racism. . . . His protagonist is intelligent, endearing, and believable.”

—*Horn Book*, starred review

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## Praise for *Twins*

★ “A touching, relatable story of identity, sisterhood, and friendship.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “A beautiful reflection on sisterhood and coming of age that belongs in every collection.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

★ “A must-read for middle grade comic lovers. Expect high demand from fans of comics like those by Svetlana Chmakova, Jerry Craft, and Raina Telgemeier.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “A relatable story for all middle-schoolers.”

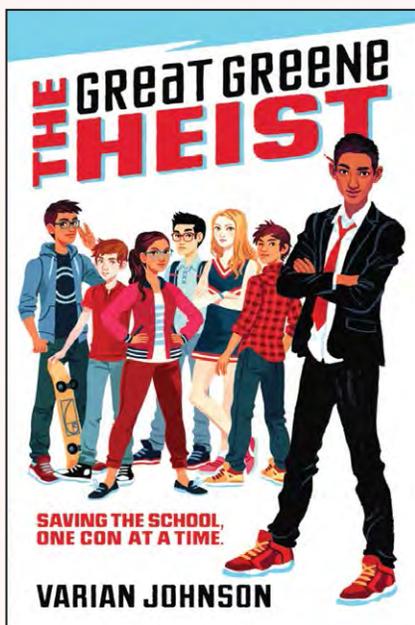
—*Horn Book*, starred review

★ “An engaging read that speaks to worries of burgeoning self-identity and tween change.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

A Junior Library Guild Selection

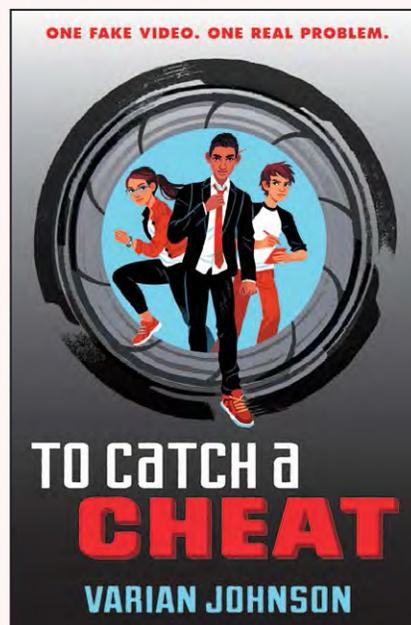
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Hardcover: 9780545722391 • \$16.99

Paperback: 9780545722407 • \$6.99

Also available as an ebook

## Praise for *The Great Greene Heist*

★ “The elaborate bait and switch of this fast-paced, funny caper novel will surprise its readers as much as the victims. They’ll want to reread immediately so they can admire the setup.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

## Praise for *To Catch a Cheat*

★ “An intricate plot, fast-paced action, short chapters, and changing perspectives characterize this smartly structured tale.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



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## About the Author

Varian Johnson is the author of *The Parker Inheritance*, which won both Coretta Scott King Honor and Boston Globe/Horn Book Honor awards; *The Great Greene Heist*, an ALA Notable Children’s Book and a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book; and the graphic novel *Twins*, an NPR Best Book. He lives with his family near Austin, Texas. You can find him online at [varianjohnson.com](http://varianjohnson.com).

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