



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, *Director*
Susan Friedberg Kalson,
Chair, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker Building
2027 Massachusetts Avenue NW, at Kivie Kaplan Way,
Washington, DC 20036
202.387.2800 @theRAC RAC.org

RAC Reads Guide: *Crossing Lines* by Melanie Weiss

Prepared by Shay Orentlicher and Sophie Stein

Introduction:

The following guide is intended to facilitate conversations about *Crossing Lines* by Melanie Weiss. Weiss lives in Oak Park, Illinois and has also authored *Spoken*, which won a 2019 Readers' Favorite Award for Young Adult - Social Issues.

RAC Reads is a program by the Religious Action Center to encourage reading groups that explore contemporary social justice topics in the context of Jewish teachings and values. The discussion guides are designed for families, congregations and communities. As such, not all of the facilitation tips and discussion questions may be applicable in all cases. Feel free to take from and adapt the information provided here as you structure your own conversations.

We hope that this guide will spark engaging and challenging discussions among Reform Jews about the complexities of gun violence. For more information about the RAC's current work on gun violence prevention, visit our website at www.rac.org.

Questions for Discussion

1. Brandon's political views are in large part a result of his family background. Do you agree with your parents on politics? Do you think it is easy for people to develop a worldview that is different from their parents'?
2. Brandon more openly discusses how his parent's views have shaped his political leanings, but Alli is clearly also very influenced by hers. Does recognizing this about ourselves change how much we let our parents' views influence us? Does acknowledging the influence make that better or worse?
3. The political world has grown increasingly polarized in recent years, making it difficult for people to form relationships across the divide. Alli and Brandon face this struggle, but they are eventually able to find common ground. Do you think you could do the same? What makes it so hard for people to get along with people who have different political views? How can we overcome this as a country?
4. The issue of gun violence prevention is one that can be deeply personal to many, as it is for Alli. Are you affected in such a personal way that has shaped your views on gun violence? If so, would that make it more difficult for you to make a compromise on the issue? If not, how would you work through trying to be respectful while trying to find common ground with someone who is so deeply affected?
5. In this book, we see Alli and Brandon as the main characters. How does their experience as white suburban teenagers responding to an incident that targeted other white suburban teenagers influence their activism differently from the experiences of people of color, people who live in urban environments, people affected by suicide?
6. For many young people, the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School was the catalyst for their interest in gun violence prevention. Do you remember your reaction when it first happened? How did it motivate you to care about this issue? What have you done since to act on your feelings about it, and what plans do you have for doing so in the future?

7. The first protest at Alli and Brandon's school is frustrating for Alli. Why do you think she felt it was so ineffective? What measures are necessary to ensure these kinds of protests are meaningful and not just a blip in a normal day?
8. Brandon and Alli's parents both seem to feel strongly that their relationship is a bad idea because of their political differences. Do you think this is fair? Should politics matter in a teenage relationship? In any romantic relationship?
9. Who do you identify with more ideologically, Brandon or Alli? If you were in their position, how hard would you have fought for this issue? Would compromising the way they did be a realistic option for you, or would things have ended less united/amicably? Would you have pushed for them to change their beliefs at all, let them have their differences, or ended things based on this issue?
10. If gun violence prevention wouldn't be a deal breaker political issue for you, are there others that would? If so, what are some of those, and what is the reason those might be while others are not?
11. The car crash clearly had a significant impact on Brandon and Alli's relationship and acted as a catalyst for much of what happened in their activism. How do you think you would've reacted to this? Would you have been able to reconcile the relationship after that, let alone be able to come away from that as a more united front?
12. In the beginning of the book, Alli doesn't know very much about politics, and she even has to Google libertarianism to understand what Brandon is talking about. Do you think it is a problem that many teens, like Alli, don't know much about politics? When did you start to become more politically aware? Was there a single event or particular reason you began being more politically invested and knowledgeable?
13. Brandon mentions his parents primarily watching Fox News and The History Channel, while Alli says her family prefers to stick to ESPN. How does the information our parents bring in our lives influence us? How do the news and information sources available to us influence our families' political beliefs?
14. Although Brandon's parents disagree with his speech, they approve of his choice to give it. How do you think your parents would react to you giving a speech that might contradict their political views? If you were a parent, how do you think you would react?
15. Gun violence is an issue that has a huge impact on youth, whether it takes the form of school shootings or neighborhood violence. How do you think Brandon and Alli's view of the issue as teenagers is different from their parents as adults? Do you think that's something that either Brandon and Alli or their parents have considered, and how should that factor into the conversations they have? What steps do you think we need to take to educate and protect youth facing gun violence?