

# VERIFY

by JOELLE CHARBONNEAU  
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

## Author's note

Throughout history, people in positions of power have limited the knowledge of others. Libraries have been destroyed, books burned and words and history eliminated so that no one can contradict the version of the truth they wish people would believe. We know it has happened before. We should be able to stop that kind of thing from happening again. But sometimes it is easier to believe what we want to be true instead of what is provable by facts. It is easy to point to news we don't like and pretend it isn't real. But what happens next? What happens when facts stop mattering? In *Verify*, I do my best to find out.

## Book talk

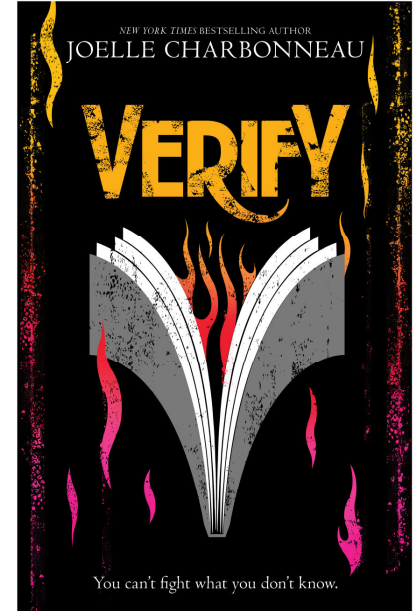
In a near-future U.S. the government determines the "truth" by editing words, concepts, and history out of existence, until a teen discovers the books and knowledge those in power don't want her to see.

## Before reading

1. Lead students in reading and analyzing the First Amendment. A major focus of this novel surrounds the issue of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.
2. Have students conduct brief research – in small groups or individually – into current ecological and environmental issues and the perceived impact of them on the future.

## Discussion/Response Questions

1. How was the First Amendment to the Constitution referenced in *Verify*? Why do you think the author chose to make the deletion of facts and words part of the story?
2. What events cause Merriel to question the story of her mother's death?
3. Who is Mr. Webster? What role does he play in Meri's decision to join the Stewards?
4. By what name does Meri call Atlas before he officially introduces himself? Why is this significant?
5. Which character are you most like? Why?
6. Would you choose to join the Stewards or would you be satisfied living in a world without words like "verify"?
7. Which character knows the truth about how Meri's mother died and pretends it isn't real? Have you ever had people in your life who were determined to believe something, even though it wasn't the truth? How did you deal with it?
8. Where does Meri find the inspiration for her mother's unfinished painting?
9. Ask students to make predictions for Merriel's next steps (following the ending of the book). Do you think people will be willing to believe the truth?



Grades 8 & up

## While Reading

1. Identify a theme and track its journey through the novel. A few ideas: individualism vs. conformity, the positives & negatives of technology, the power of words
2. Use strategies such as those in *Notice & Note* by Beers and Probst to help students notice important ideas. An example: use the “Again & Again” strategy to track Meri’s reactions as she is confronted with the differences between what she has been told and what she observes actually happening.
3. Have students plot Chicago area landmarks throughout the reading. In small groups, discuss the influence of the locations on the suspense and adventure of the story.
4. Encourage students to identify and track specific words used in *Verify*. These could be words that are new, used in different ways, or that simply stand out to them personally. Have students arrange them in an artistic way, either creating an image or typing them into an online program like WordCloud ([www.wordcloud.com](http://www.wordcloud.com)). Discuss in small groups the words and why they were chosen.
5. Journal/diary entries—Ask students to choose a character besides Meri and in a series of journal/diary entries, have them tell the story from that character’s perspective.

## Projects

1. Research historically important characters mentioned throughout the novel. Present how one of those figures would feel about the government in *Verify*.
2. The code names used by members of the resistance are significant. Present reasons for why you think the code names were chosen then have students choose their own Stewards code name and write a poem to demonstrate why it fits them.
3. In *Verify*, the resistance is composed primarily of small groups, sometimes working together, but often working separately. Have students research how small groups have historically led to big change. Some examples to consider: groups leading to the War for Independence, abolitionists, women’s suffrage, the Civil Rights Movement, antiwar groups in the 1960s and 1970s.
4. “Words have power” is a theme throughout the novel. Have students create a collage of important words and then discuss their choices in small groups.



## About the Author

Joelle Charbonneau never thought she’d be a writer. She performed in opera and musical theater productions across Chicagoland telling other people’s stories before she began telling her own. She is the New York Times Bestselling author of young adult books and lives in the Chicago area with her husband and son.

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