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# ACE OF SPADES

EXTRACTS AND NOTES FOR  
KS4 TEACHERS



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## INTRODUCTION

### Suitable for: Ages 14+

Explore themes of: Marginalised Groups ♠ Privilege ♠ Secrets ♠ Happy Endings

### A note on the resources:

This pack works particularly well within a book club or PSHE-oriented setting. The questions and activities can be adapted and delivered at the teacher's discretion.

## CONTENTS

### ♠ EXPLORING KEY QUOTES

Objectives: Identify different forms of privilege and their impact; analyse key quotes and write 3 reflections from the perspectives of different characters.

### ♠ LOOKING AT AN EXTRACT: (taken from Chapter 30 – Chiamaka)

Objectives: Consider the representation of marginalised groups in the news and social media; analyse an extract and explore how your perceptions have been shaped by the world around you.

### ♠ FURTHER ACTIVITIES

Objectives: Write a book review and responsibly share it on social media; plan and write your own thriller about uncovering a secret at a school.





## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Hello, Niveus High. It's me. Who am I? That's not important. All you need to know is...I'm here to divide and conquer. – Aces*

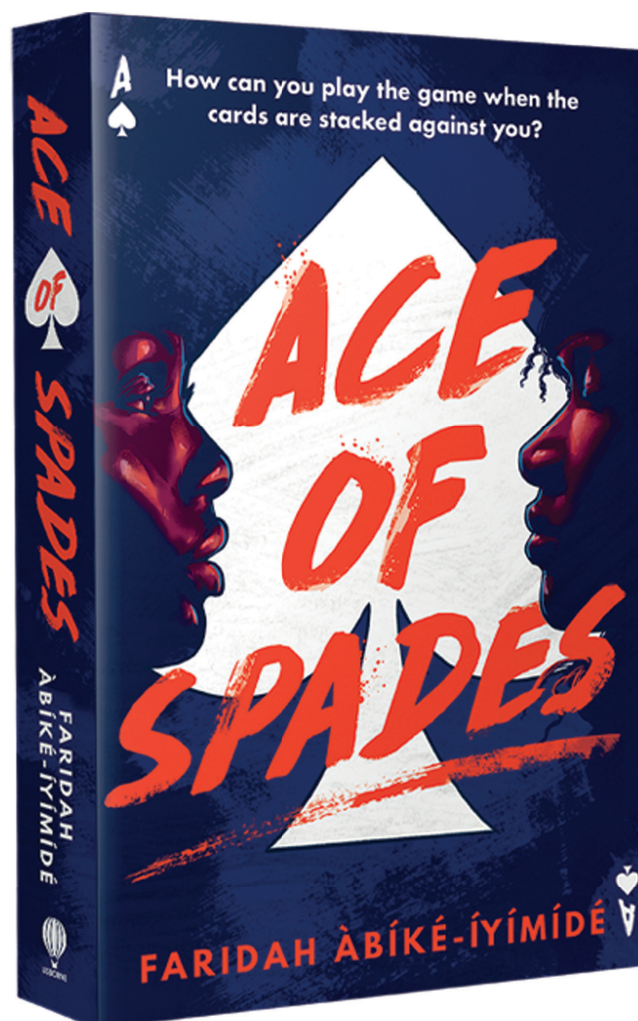
Welcome to Niveus Private Academy, where money paves the hallways, and the students are never less than perfect. Until now. Because anonymous texter, Aces, is bringing two students' dark secrets to light.

Talented musician Devon buries himself in rehearsals, but he can't escape the spotlight when his private photos go public.

Head girl Chiamaka isn't afraid to get what she wants, but soon everyone will know the price she has paid for power.

Someone is out to get them both. Someone who holds all the aces. And they're planning much more than a high-school game...

Unputdownable and utterly compulsive, this high-octane thriller takes a powerful look at institutionalized racism. Perfect for fans of Karen McManus, Holly Jackson and Angie Thomas.



ACE OF SPADES



*' There are many things I hate about Niveus, like how no one (besides Jack) is from my side of town and how everyone lives in huge houses with white-picket fences, cooks who make them breakfast, drivers who take them to school, and credit cards with no limit tucked away in their designer backpacks.*

*Sometimes being around all of that makes me feel like my insides are collapsing, cracking and breaking' ...*

## PRIVILEGE

What does this mean to you?

What forms can privilege take?

**Create a mindmap above**

## EXPLORING KEY QUOTES

*'I don't usually allow myself to dream that much – disappointment is painful, and I like to control the things that seem more possible than not'* Devon

*'High school is like a kingdom ... In this kingdom, the queen doesn't inherit the crown. To get to the top, she destroys whoever she needs to. Here every moment is crucial ... One mistake can have you sent to the bottom of the food chain'*  
Chiamaka

*'In my middle school ... I was everyone's favourite punching bag, because apparently my whole essence screams 'gay easy target'. Even when I tried to hide it from everyone and myself'* Devon

*'They don't all have white hoods or call us mean things, I know that. But racism isn't just about that – it's not about being nice or mean. Or good versus bad. It's bigger than that'* Terrell

### THEMES

SCHOOL

HAPPY ENDINGS

PRIVILEGE

CLASS

CULTURAL IDENTITY

SECRETS

HOMOPHOBIA

FRIENDSHIP

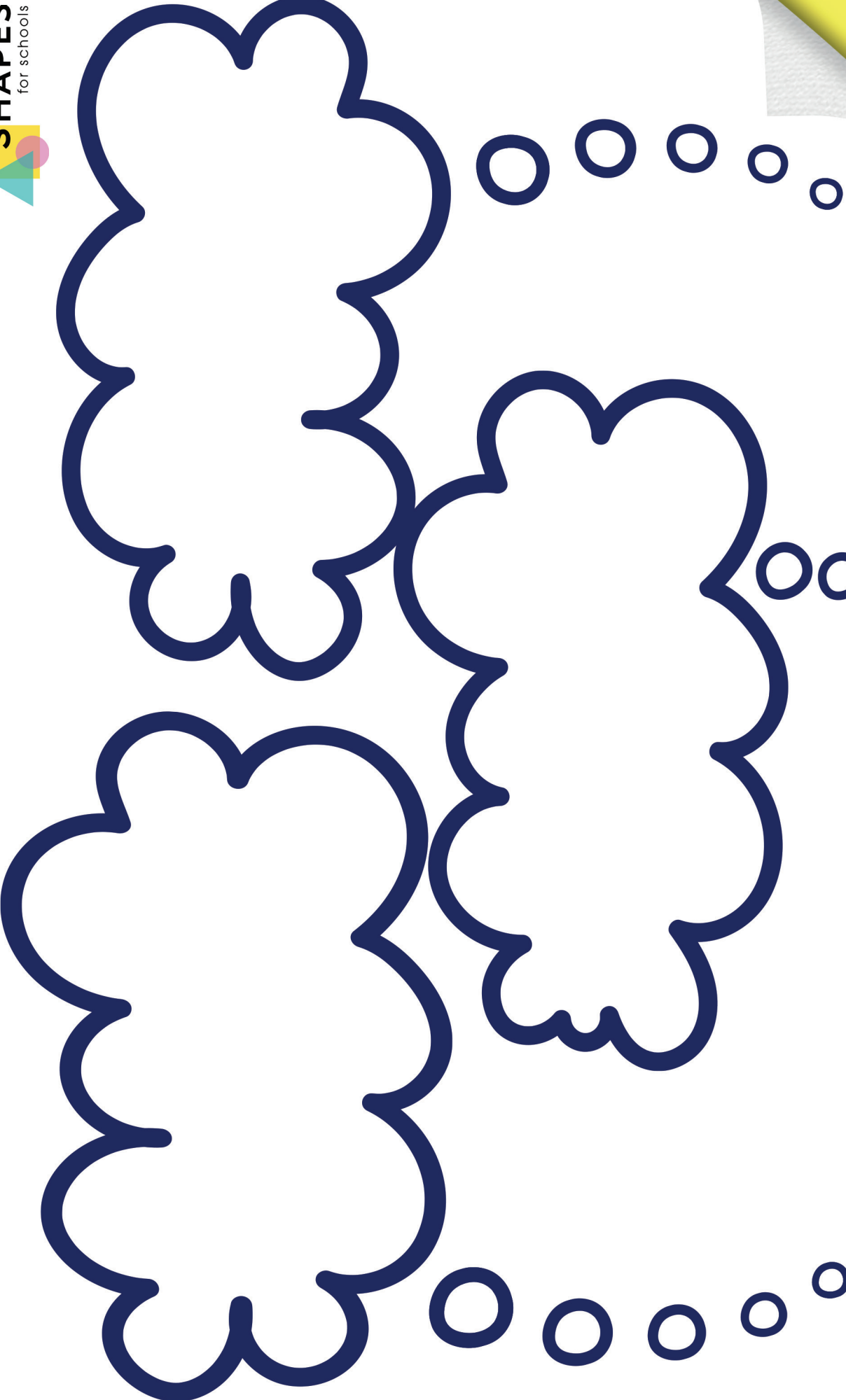
INSTITUTIONALISED RACISM

LOVE



## ACTIVITY: THOUGHT CLOUDS

- ♣ Spend a few minutes reading over the quotes above from *Ace of Spades* and discuss how they connect with each of the themes above. Which of these themes are the most prevalent in relation to each character? How do each of these themes overlap with one another?
- ♣ Then, in each of the Thought Clouds below, write a reflection from the perspective of each character about the thoughts, feelings, and emotions behind their quote(s). Discuss your ideas together and link them to your own experiences if you are comfortable to do so.



**DEVON**

**CHIAMAKA**

**TERRELL**

# LOOKING AT AN EXTRACT

(TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 30 – CHIAMAKA)

*This section of the library is empty. No one at the computers. I stare at computer 17. It's watching me... like any moment it will transfigure into the girl, tackle me to the ground, lift its scary mask and smile. A gentle laugh distracts me, my face heating up when I hear the familiar sound of people kissing. I inch forward, not wanting the couple to be alerted by my presence. Kneeling, I reach out for one of the yearbooks – 1965 – and take a seat on the ground by the shelves as I run my fingers down its hard navy spine before I reach the sharply contrasting red of the flag at the bottom. The confederate flag.*

*I gaze up at the wall of creepy photos, hundreds of white faces watching me. And in the odd photo, Black faces stare out, wearing blank expressions, their hair beaten into submission like mine. The Black faces aren't always in the photos. That's to be expected. Most good schools didn't let people who looked like me in, and when they did, it wasn't many of us. I can't imagine what life would have been like for them, having protestors outside their schools every day, parents complaining about their existence there. Like they were these dangerous criminals, just because their skin was brown and not cream. I look at all of them closely, tracing their faces in each photograph. Wait a minute...*

*My eyes scan the pictures over and over, the thrumming in my ribcage making me feel jittery. 1965...1975...1985... The Black students; they all just... disappear. Their senior year.*

*Opening the yearbook, I search for their dark faces, eventually landing on a section titled "Camp Aces 1965".*

*One hundred years later, we proudly live up to our ancestors' legacy, I read. A hundred years before would be 1865... the end of the Civil War. The war that preceded the abolition of slavery.*



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ♣ The confederate flag is considered a symbol of white supremacy in America. What similar symbols exist in Britain? Why is it important to constantly question these symbols?
- ♣ What do you know about Black British history? Which important events, narratives and people can you talk about? Why is it important to teach Black British history in schools?
- ♣ What else is being done to challenge institutionalised racism? What can you do? What could your school or other institutions do?
- ♣ What does Chiamaka realise in this extract? What is the agenda of Aces? Did you see this twist coming? If you did, think about the moments in the text which suggested this agenda.
- ♣ How does the writer create tension throughout the text? What makes it a great thriller?

## ACTIVITY: TIME TO REFLECT

- ♣ With a partner, spend a few minutes discussing the news and your social media feed over recent days. Discuss together:
  - ♣ Are marginalised groups represented?
  - ♣ How are these groups represented?
  - ♣ Do you notice any biases, patterns or inconsistencies?
  - ♣ What are the dangers of misrepresentation or a lack of representation altogether?
- ♣ Next, write a reflection about how your perceptions of marginalised groups have been shaped by the world around you. Perhaps your outlook has changed considerably over time? In your reflection you might wish to consider the following things: the law; societal and cultural influences; education; the media; and anything else you think has had an impact on you.
- ♣ Together, discuss your reflections and the different groups you considered. Think about the importance of texts such as *Ace of Spades* in changing people's perceptions. Can you think of other texts you have read or would like to study?
- ♣ Use these ideas to create a Class Reading List of suggested texts that give a voice to marginalised groups in society.

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

*"I like happy endings," I tell her ...*

*"I really want to emphasise just how much I would love Black kids to see they deserve a happy ending.*

*"With all the protests happening and Black people being institutionally harmed and all these systems working against them constantly, it can be so easy for them to feel they don't have a place or any bright future.*

*"I want them to know that the book was written so they can see there is light at the end of the tunnel."*

*- Faridah Àbíké Íyímídé, author of *Ace of Spades**



Photo © Joy Oluigboyege

**CONSIDER:** Why is it important to read stories where Black characters have happy endings?

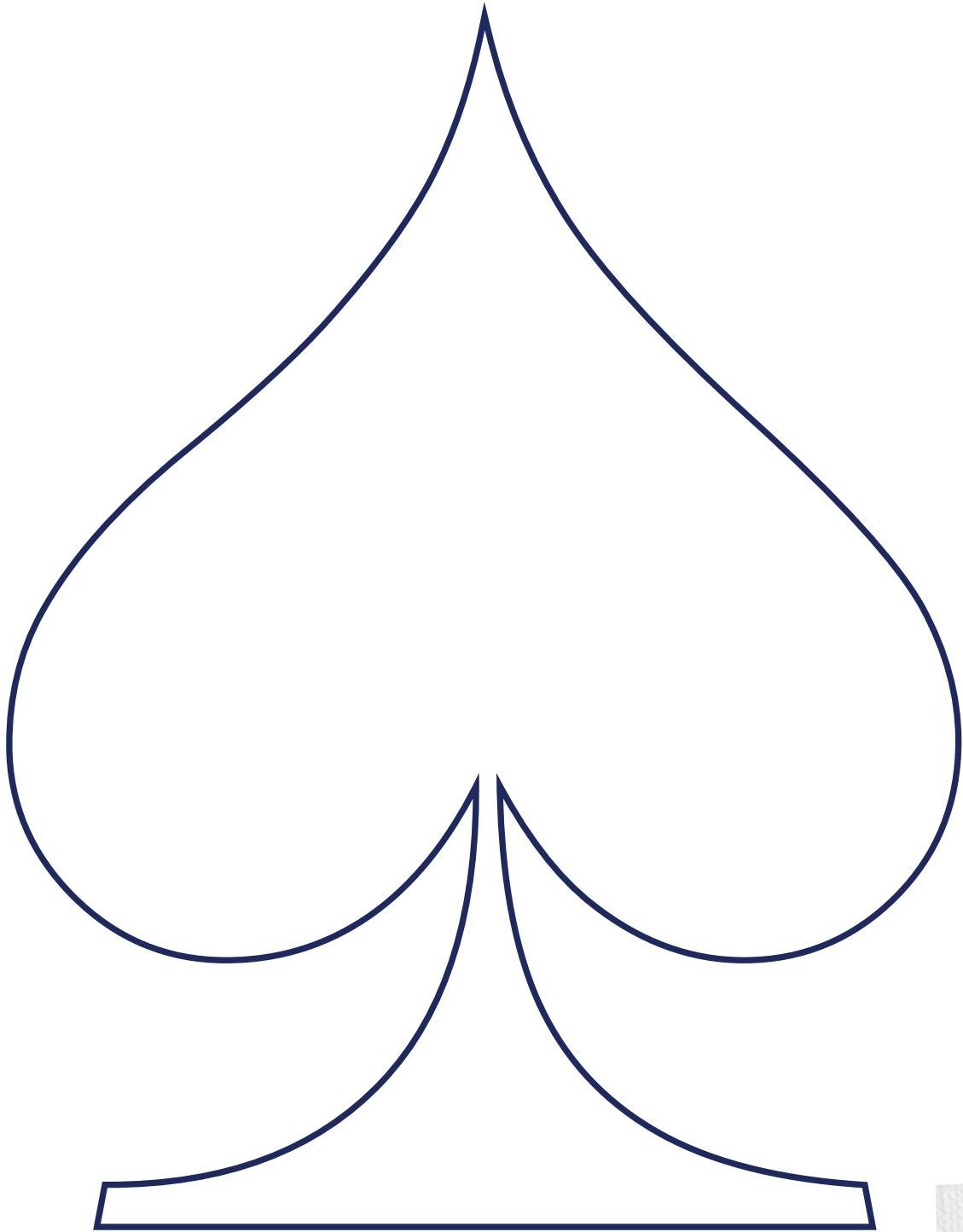
**TAKE A MOMENT TO:** Think about the ending of *Ace of Spades*. To what extent would you describe this as a 'happy ending'?



## ACTIVITY 1: #ACEOFSPADES

♠ Take a moment to reflect on who you follow on social media. For instance, are you exposed to voices from marginalised groups? Are you supporting and following positive role models? Do you tweet and post responsibly?

♠ In the spade template below, write a short book review for *Ace of Spades*. Try to communicate as succinctly as you can what you enjoyed about this thriller, as well as the important messages it left you with. Perhaps even share your positive post on social media!



## ACTIVITY 2: SCHOOL SECRET

♠ *Ace of Spades* is full of secrets which haunt its characters and means no one knows who to trust. Using the text for inspiration, it's now your turn to write a thrilling narrative about uncovering a secret at a school.

♠ Plan your narrative carefully using the Ideas Bar below and the School Secret mindmap to help you. Make sure that you don't use any real details or names of your school or people in it. The events of your story can still be inspired by the news and real-life events but use your imagination to make sure your thriller remains fictional.

CHARACTERS

THE SECRET

REPRESENTATION

SETTING

HAPPY ENDINGS

THE CLIMAX

CREATING TENSION

♠ Write up your story in full and share them together as a group. Give each other positive feedback and consider how *Ace of Spades* inspired this task.

♠ Finally, decide upon the next text you will read from the Class Reading List you devised together earlier.



SCHOOL SECRET



Create a mindmap above

ACE OF SPADES

