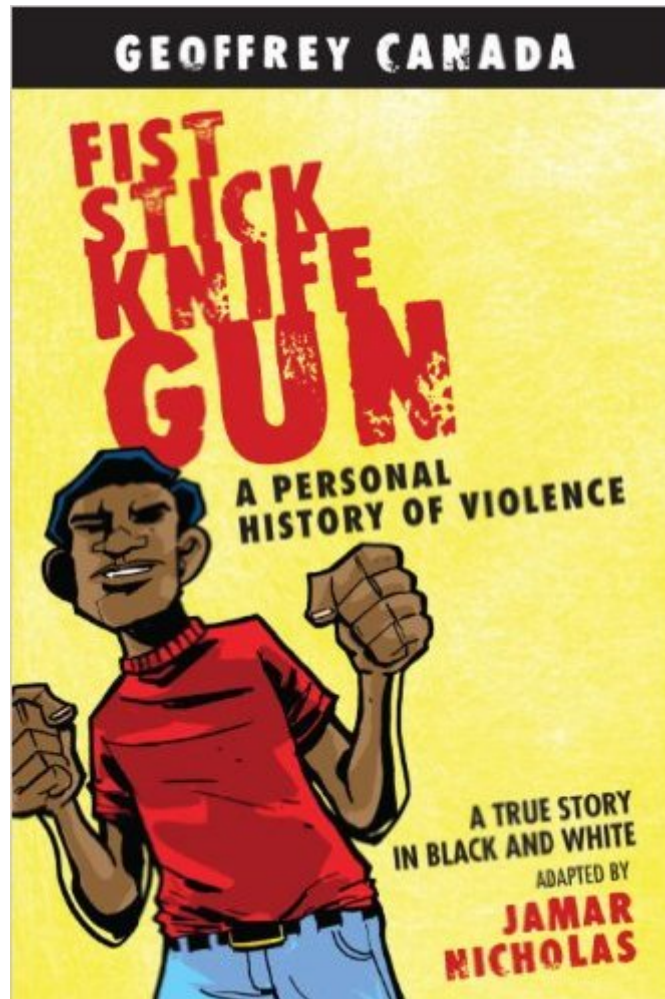


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# Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History Of Violence



## Synopsis

Long before President Barack Obama praised his work as an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck anti-poverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children, and First Lady Michelle Obama called him one of my heroes, Geoffrey Canada was a small and scared boy growing up in the South Bronx. His childhood world was one where sidewalk boys learned the codes of the block and were ranked through the rituals of fist, stick, knife, and, finally, gun. In a stunning pairing, acclaimed comics creator Jamar Nicholas presents Canada's raw and riveting account, one of the most authentic and important true stories of urban violence ever told.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1020 (What's this?)

Series: Fist Stick Knife Gun

Paperback: 124 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press; Revised edition (September 14, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807044490

ISBN-13: 978-0807044490

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (75 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #200,242 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in [Books > Teens > Social Issues > Violence](#) #22 in [Books > Teens > Biographies > Social Activists](#) #73 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Violence](#)

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

As a graphic novel in the traditional sense, "Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence" is not a particularly exciting read. However, FSKG is not a traditional graphic novel, but an illustrated memoir and examination of the street culture that gave rise to the violence that plagues our ghettos and causes hardship for so many who find themselves unable to extricate themselves and succeed in life when life has taught them nothing but aggression. The story sidesteps many opportunities to be preachy and allows the reader room to connect the dots themselves as the author simply recounts his life experiences growing up in the South Bronx and the social structure and cultural

change that would eventually lead to what we now know as gang violence. Author Geoffrey Canada has spent his life educating people and attempting to offer children the chance to grow up free of violence by starting the Harlem Children's Zone, which is a program that seeks to provide the adult role models and supervision that he and so many other urban youths did not have growing up. That's what you "call putting it where your mouth is". Universal praise is hard to come by in these politically-divided times, but Mr. Canada has indeed earned it. FSKG is really not so much a graphic novel as it is illustrated autobiographical expository prose. This is to say that there is very little dialogue from the characters and the story is told via narration rather than unfolding based on character interactions. As a story it lacks many things (including a climax or even a proper conclusion), but one thing it has in spades in believability. After all, one can hardly expect real life to unfold like a fictional Hollywood production or classic novel. The purpose of this comic is not to entertain, but to educate.

Canada grew up poor in the South Bronx in the '50s. Violence, then, as now, was a way of life. All boys fought - life was worse for those who refused. Violence and the rituals surrounding it established the social pecking order. In the preface to his memoir Canada says, "The difference is that we never had so many guns in our inner cities." Canada's first memory of street violence came at age 4, when his two older brothers had a jacket stolen at the playground. The boys' mother sent them right back to fetch it, promising them a beating "ten times as bad as what that little thief could do to you," if they failed. They left the house in tears and returned triumphant, with the jacket. Their mother sat them down and told them it was a lesson in not becoming a victim. The author, her youngest, was unconvinced. Then a neighborhood boy who habitually refused to fight was "stretched" over a car and savagely beaten by a group of boys. "The lesson was brutal and unmistakable. No matter who you fought, he could never beat you that bad." Canada's memoir is a thoughtful, moving portrayal of social behavior in a culture of violence. A quick study, Canada learned to use posturing, attitude and negotiation as well as his fists to minimize the number and severity of violent encounters. But he is absolutely convinced that violence is a learned response, not innate. He and the other small boys, says Canada, were aghast at the prospect of fighting. Only fear of worse violence and a life of cowering in corners spurred them to fight. Today, says Canada, the same imperatives operate. But guns have shattered the ritualized formality of the pecking order. Toughness is no longer determined by fighting skills or "heart" but by willingness to pull the trigger.

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