

Dear Booksellers,

Thanks for reading *Swim Team*! I began noodling with this story almost a decade ago to process feelings I had about almost drowning as a child. It started as an autobiographical comic, but it was too close to the bone, so I put it away. However, it kept rising to the surface, as did my discomfort with the water. Taking adult swim classes reminded me that the fear never went away. I needed to revisit, *go deeper*. Since it's more comfortable for me to speak through fiction, I gave the experience—my fear and anxiety around the water—to Bree. This distance and Bree's bravery allowed me to venture further out.

This is a book I very much wish *I'd* had growing up. I thought my experiences and feelings were unique until I began hearing of similar ones from other folks I know. Now, often when I tell the story of *Swim Team* to a Black friend or colleague, I'll hear the too-common refrain, "Something like that happened to me as a kid." (In fact, I heard someone say this just *today*!) But that doesn't have to be the end of the story! We can have a happy ending for so many of our young people.

Growing up, I often heard the phrase "each one, teach one." I don't teach swim lessons, but I do tell stories, and this is how I can contribute to the cause—by making a book that I hope readers will read again and again, with lovable, relatable characters, humor, and the magical sense of discovery that one can have in middle school.

If you aren't familiar with my work before now, I think this book is the finest representation of who I am: a storyteller, son of immigrants, poor swimmer, and erstwhile Floridian with an undying belief that through the power of story we can make our world a better place. I thank you for reading—I thank you for wading into these waters with me.

Let's dive in!

—Johnnie