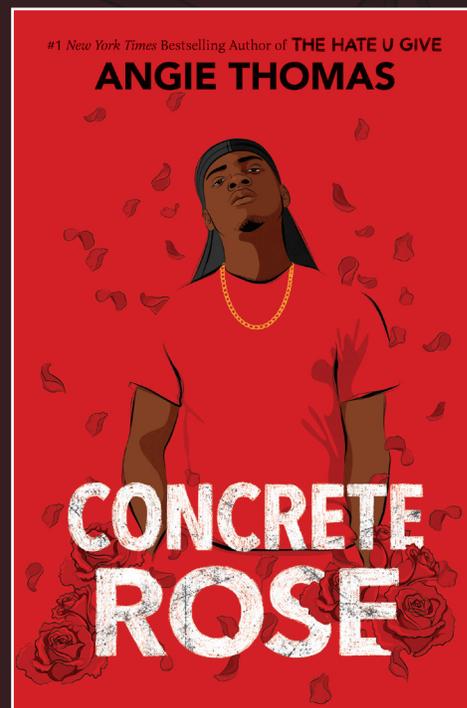
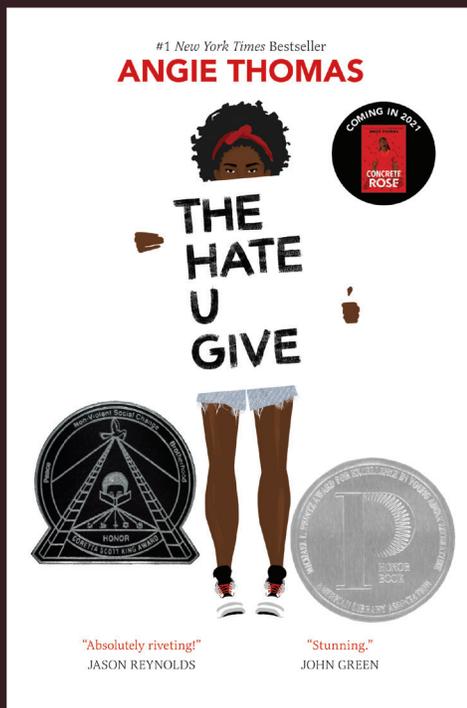


# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ANGIE THOMAS'S



Includes discussion questions and behind-the-book features for reading and discussing Angie Thomas's work with young adults.

# Reading, Discussing, & Sharing *The Hate U Give* and *Concrete Rose* with Young Readers

Whether you're considering using *The Hate U Give* and *Concrete Rose* in a large setting as a whole class, school, or community read, or using it in small group literature circles, or recommending it to individual readers, these novels can be used as a springboard for timely conversations about the following themes:

Racism

Community

The Black Lives Matter Movement

Family

Activism

Justice

Law Enforcement

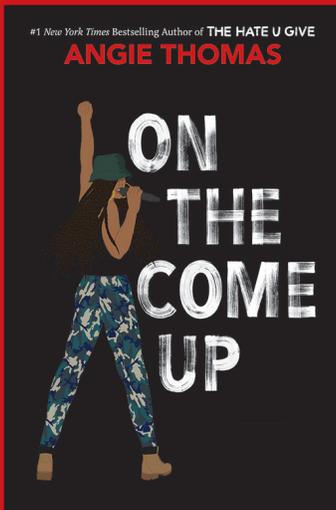
Identity

The Complexities of Gang Culture

Teenage Parenthood

Class Equity

## Also by Angie Thomas



### About the Book

Sixteen-year-old Bri wants to be one of the greatest rappers of all time. Or at least get some streams on her mixtape. As the daughter of an underground rap legend who died right before he hit big, Bri's got massive shoes to fill. But when her mom unexpectedly loses her job, bills start piling up and homelessness looms. Now Bri no longer just wants to make it—she has to make it.

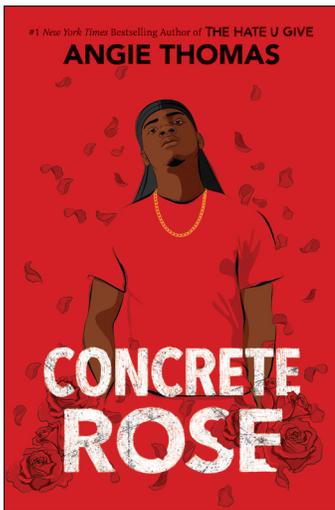
*On the Come Up* is Angie Thomas's homage to hip-hop, the art that sparked her passion for storytelling and continues to inspire her to this day. It is the story of fighting for your dreams, even as the odds are stacked against you; of the struggle to become who you are, and not who everyone expects you to be; and of the desperate realities of poor and working-class black families.

Brilliant, insightful, and full of heart, this novel is another modern classic from one of the most influential literary voices of a generation.



### About the Author

Angie Thomas is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning author of the novels *The Hate U Give*, *On the Come Up*, and *Concrete Rose*, as well as *Find Your Voice: A Guided Journal for Writing Your Truth*. A former teen rapper who holds a BFA in creative writing, Angie was born, raised, and still resides in Mississippi. You can find her online at [www.angiethomas.com](http://www.angiethomas.com).



# CONCRETE ROSE

## About the Book

Seventeen-year-old Maverick Carter has a girlfriend he loves, protection on the streets (thanks to his father's reputation), and a steady source of income—which he has to hide from the big homies. But when he finds out he is a father, everything starts to fall apart. His girlfriend drops him like the lowlife her family has always said he is. He promises his beloved cousin he would stop dealing drugs, but now he needs the money more than ever. Between being up all night with the baby and working hard to make ends meet, he can barely stay awake in class. When tragedy strikes his family, he has to figure out what it means to handle loss, loyalty, and revenge, all while taking care of his family like the man he wants to be. This prequel to *The Hate U Give* offers an unforgettable look at what it's like to come of age in a society that offers you few choices.

## Discussion Questions

1. Much of this book's power lies in the reader's judgment of characters' choices. Discuss your reactions to Maverick's choices at different points throughout the narrative. Did your initial judgments change as the story progressed? How do your judgments of his behavior reflect or contrast with society's values and beliefs about manhood, morality, and personal versus societal responsibility?
2. Iesha is another character whose behavior may have inspired strong reactions in readers. Did you find yourself judging her as a person? If so, why? Discuss what Iesha's perspective might have been, if we could see her side of the story. How might gender roles and power dynamics complicate her decision-making?
3. When Lisa's pregnancy was revealed, did your reaction differ from your reaction to Iesha's pregnancy? Why or why not? Do you predict these two young women will be treated differently as young mothers? Is that fair or unfair?
4. Maverick lashes out at his father for getting on his case when his father isn't there for him in daily life. Do you think Maverick's frustration was justified? Do you think it was wrong of Don to try to tell Maverick how to handle himself? Does a parent lose that right when their own choices have failed their family?
5. King's relationship with Maverick is complicated, and when they disagree, King becomes unrecognizable to Maverick. Discuss their friendship and the issues that strained it. How do you think you would feel about Maverick if you were in King's position?
6. The rules of street life permeate the story and Maverick's world. Gang life is presented as both necessary to survival and a lose-lose situation. Discuss some of the rules Maverick has absorbed and how he navigates them. Does your world have rules? How would you define your world, and what are some of its unspoken rules?
7. Maverick's mom helps with the baby, but she makes sure to let Maverick bear the brunt of the responsibility. At some points, he feels like his childhood is over. Discuss the transition from childhood to adulthood in our society. Should everyone who is sexually active be prepared to become a parent?
8. Maverick narrates his story the way he would speak, in dialect. How did his narration style affect your reading of his character, his education, his intellect, his background, and his prospects in life? Discuss the assumptions often made about someone's intelligence (or lack thereof) based on the dialect they use. Can you use this book to make a case against these assumptions?
9. Dre, Maverick, and Don each view their lives differently after becoming a parent. How and why did becoming a parent change these characters and their priorities? Do you think most people change upon becoming parents?
10. Discuss the desire for revenge, and the loyalty that sometimes drives it. When Maverick planned to kill his cousin's murderer, was any part of you rooting for him to do it? Does forgiveness require strength? Is doing nothing a weakness? How can families for whom justice isn't served find closure?

# Extension Activities

## Before Reading

**Concrete Rose.** Reflect on the title of the book. What ideas does this phrase conjure in your mind? How do the book's cover and title give you a sense of what is to come? After your immediate associations, read and reflect on "The Rose that Grew from Concrete" by Tupac Shakur. What additional expectations does this poem create for you as you prepare to read the book?

**Word Association I.** Open a journal and do timed word association or stream of consciousness writing, using the following prompts (1-2 minutes each):

Most teenage mothers \_\_\_\_\_ Most teenage fathers \_\_\_\_\_ Being in a gang \_\_\_\_\_ Leaving a gang \_\_\_\_\_

Save these writings. You will return to them after reading the book.

**School to Prison Pipeline.** Do some research on the "school to prison pipeline." Create an information sheet about what it is, its causes, and solutions suggested by experts and social justice activists.

**Cost of Living.** Research the minimum wage in your state. Then use a tool such as the Living Wage Calculator (<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>) to determine the cost of living in your area and the "living wage." Compare the minimum wage to the living wage and investigate how local job opportunities measure up. What kinds of decisions do low-wage workers have to make when providing for themselves and their families?

## During Reading

**THUG Connection.** If you have read *The Hate U Give*, draw connections between Maverick's character in that book to this origin story. What did you see here that may have influenced the man and father? If you did not read *The Hate U Give*, predict what kind of father you think Maverick will be based on this story. Partner with someone who hasn't read *The Hate U Give* and compare connections with predictions.

**Black Fatherhood.** The stereotype of the absent Black father dominates American culture so much that Maverick's struggles may seem unrealistic to some readers. Do some research to uncover the truth about Black fathers' presence in their children's lives. Present your findings to the class and discuss.

**Another Reality.** Choose a secondary character whose life is affected by Maverick's choices, or whose choices affect Maverick's life. Write from that character's perspective, creating a letter, journal entry, or a scene with Maverick. Share your writing with a small group, explaining why you chose that character and what you learned by considering their perspective.

## After Reading

**911 Is a Joke.** The 1990 Public Enemy song "911 Is a Joke" critiques the response time of paramedics in an inner city neighborhood. In Maverick's response to Dre's murder, he doesn't even consider seeking justice through law enforcement. Use art from popular culture to critique the failures of public service institutions in specific communities. Present your analysis in a creative way, such as a video, a powerpoint presentation, or artwork of your own.

**Word Association II.** Without re-reading your first responses, repeat the Word Association journal activity. When you have finished, pull out the word association or free writing you did before reading *Concrete Rose*. Are your responses different? If so, how? Discuss with a partner what you have found.

**Carlton vs Gangster.** Maverick calls Lisa's brother "Carlton" derisively. Watch the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* episode in which Carlton tries to prove himself to Will by hanging out in Compton. What does the nerd versus gangster dichotomy say about our culture's ideas about manhood and about Blackness? What do you think it means to be a man? What does authenticity mean in your cultural, racial, or ethnic group?

# A Letter from Angie Thomas

## Dear Reader,

Confession: I never planned to write a prequel to *The Hate U Give*.

The moment I typed “the end” on Starr’s story, I thought it literally was the end for me and these characters from a creative standpoint. Of course, it wasn’t the end in other ways. Since *The Hate U Give* was published, I’ve heard countless tales of how these characters have found their way into your hearts. Whether it was Khalil and the potential of what could’ve been or the strong desire to see DeVante and Nana in the film (I promise y’all, they are okay), you have shown me just how much these characters mean to you. But there has always been one character that seemed to resonate with you more than the rest: Maverick Carter.

I have to admit, it’s the same for me. I feel like a bad author-parent by saying this, but Maverick has always been my favorite. Maybe it’s because he’s the very thing that you have been led to believe doesn’t exist—an actively involved Black father, who once checked every box on the “stereotypical young Black man” list but overcame all of that. More importantly, Maverick doesn’t hide from his past or his mistakes. He embraces them. He embraces his authenticity. He never changes who he is to make anyone comfortable. A lot of you have wanted to know how he came to be this way. It led me to wonder the same and think of him beyond the pages of *The Hate U Give*.

However, I have to give credit to Russell Hornsby for this book.

Russell’s portrayal of Maverick in the film adaptation of *The Hate U Give* was truly a gift. While I was on set, this character I had imagined for years was suddenly standing in front of me. Russell walked a certain way when he was in character; he spoke a certain way. During breaks, he listened to a Tupac-filled playlist that Maverick would’ve made. He was Maverick. Over the course of filming, he and I had several conversations about the character, and Russell asked me questions that I’d never gotten before; questions that made me think even deeper about Maverick, and in turn, fueled my desire to tell his story.

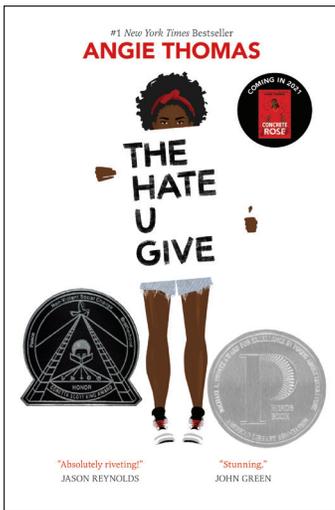
So thank you, Russell, for the gift you gave us in the adaptation, and for inspiring me to write this book.

Maverick’s story isn’t an easy one. It’s not a fairy tale in any way. However, it shows a young man who is what Tupac described as a rose growing in concrete—full of beauty and potential despite the harsh world around him.

I hope by reading Maverick’s story, you recognize the rose you are or the roses in concrete that are growing around you. More importantly, I hope you decide to look past circumstances and marvel in the beauty.

Welcome back to Garden Heights.

**Love,  
Angie**



# THE HATE U GIVE

## About the Book

Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: her predominantly white, suburban private school and her poorer, mostly black neighborhood. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Everyone wants to know what really went down that night, and the only person who can speak up is Starr. But what she says—or does not say—could destroy her community and even endanger her life.

## Discussion Questions

1. As Starr and Khalil listen to Tupac, Khalil explains what Tupac said “Thug Life” meant. Discuss the meaning of the term “Thug Life” as an acronym and why the author might have chosen part of this as the title of the book. In what ways do you see this in society today? (p. 17)
2. Chapter 2 begins with Starr flashing back to two talks her parents had with her when she was young. One was about sex (“the usual birds and bees”). The second was about what precautions to take when encountering a police officer (p. 20). Have you had a similar conversation about what to do when stopped by the police? Reflect upon or imagine this conversation.
3. Thomas frequently uses motifs of silence and voice throughout the book. Find instances in the book where silence or voice and speech are noted, and talk about the author’s possible intentions for emphasizing these motifs.
4. At the police station after Starr details the events leading up to the shooting, the detective shifts her focus to Khalil’s past. Why do you think the detective did this? Discuss Starr’s reaction to this “bait” (pp. 102–103). Discuss the way that Khalil is portrayed by the media. How does Starr work to counteract this media portrayal?
5. How do you think Starr would define family? What about Seven, DeVante, Kenya, and Khalil? Do you have to be related by blood to consider a person family? How do you define family?
6. Once news of Khalil’s shooting spreads across the neighborhood, unrest arises: “Sirens wail outside. The news shows three patrol cars that have been set ablaze at the police precinct . . . A gas station near the freeway gets looted . . . My neighborhood is a war zone” (pp. 138–139). Respond to this development and describe some parallels to current events.
7. Chris and Starr have a breakthrough in their relationship—Starr admits to him that she was in the car with Khalil and shares the memories of Natasha’s murder (pp. 298–301). Discuss why Starr’s admission and releasing of this burden to Chris is significant. Explore the practice of “code switching” and discuss how you might code switch in different circumstances in your own life.
8. How and why does the neighborhood react to the grand jury’s decision (Chapter 23)? How does Starr use her voice as a weapon, and why does she feel that it is vital that she does? Refer back to “Thug Life” and discuss how the acronym resonates in this chapter.
9. Maverick’s rose garden is a recurring symbol throughout the course of the novel. Discuss the symbolism of the rose garden and how it contributes to the overall theme.
10. Starr pledges to “never be quiet” (p. 444). After reading this book, how can you use your voice to promote and advance social justice? Reflect on how you and your community discuss and address inequality.

# Extension Activities

## Before Reading

**Video.** Watch a video in which author Angie Thomas discusses how Tupac, artistic activism, and Black Lives Matter inspired her to write *The Hate U Give*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6ufAb82GJ0>

**KWL Chart.** Have students complete a KWL chart for the Black Lives Matter movement. In the first column of the chart, have students record what they already Know about the movement. Next, have them write down what they want to learn Want to learn during the novel study. Revisit the chart at the end of the unit to reflect upon what they Learned about Black Lives Matter.

**Artists as Activists—Tupac Shakur.** Have students perform a close reading annotation of Tupac’s poem, “The Rose That Grew from Concrete.” Discuss as a class the meaning of the poem and the ways that his message is relevant today.

**Identity.** As a journal/free writing activity, have students respond to the following prompts: How would you describe the environment at your school? Is it inclusive? Clique-y? What do friend groups have in common (sports teams, common interests, ethnicity, etc.)? What would make it hard for someone to find their place?

## During Reading

**Double Entry Journal.** Create a double entry journal to reflect on especially poignant passages from the text. Encourage students to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections.

**Identity Playlist.** Create a playlist for Starr that shows both sides of her, the Garden Heights Starr and the Williamson Starr. Have students explain their song choices by referring to specific events in the novel.

**Conflict.** Create a chart to keep track of the emerging internal and external conflicts that the following characters face throughout the course of the novel: Starr, Maverick “Big Mav”, Lisa, Seven, Uncle Carlos, DeVante, Kenya.

**Media.** Divide students into small groups and assign each of them a different media format (newspaper article, social media, filmed news segment, podcast, photo journal, etc.) Have each group produce a news segment that uncovers the story behind Khalil’s murder.

## After Reading

**Bravery.** Many characters throughout the novel exhibit bravery. Discuss the individual actions of various characters who chose to be courageous. Do you think bravery is an inherent trait, or is it something that develops because of being faced with adversity? Compose a response to this question and cite evidence from the text to support your response.

**Family Tree.** Create a visual family tree for the Carter family. For each family member represented, include the following information: a quote from the text that represents the character, details from the text about their physical description, and an adjective to describe them.

**Difficult Conversations.** Starr has some challenging conversations about race with Chris, Maya, and Hailey. Some of these conversations are productive and lead to a deeper respect and understanding, while others are unsuccessful and leave both parties feeling hurt. As a class, discuss the best strategies you can use to engage in challenging conversations in your own life.

**Activists.** Tupac, the Black Panthers, and Dr. Martin Luther King are a few real-life activists mentioned throughout the course of the novel. As a culminating research project, choose an activist who you find to be inspirational and create a short digital presentation to share with the class.



# Angie Thomas's Inspiration for *The Hate U Give*

I remember the first time I saw Emmett Louis Till.

I came across his photo in a *Jet* magazine that marked the anniversary of his death. At the time, I was convinced he wasn't real, or at least that he wasn't a person. Mutilated beyond recognition, he looked more like a prop from a movie to me; a monster from some over-the-top horror flick.

But he was a person, a boy, and his story was a cautionary tale, even three decades after he died. "Know your worth," my mom would say, "but also know that not everyone values you as much as I do."

Still, Emmett wasn't real to me.

In a way, he was a tale of yesteryear. There was no way I'd ever have to worry about anything like that happening to me or to someone I knew. Things had changed, even in Mississippi.

I grew up in a neighborhood that's notorious for all the wrong reasons. While everything they showed on the news was true, there was so much more that you wouldn't see unless you lived there. My neighbors were family. The neighborhood drug dealer was a superhero who gave kids money for snacks and beat up pedophiles who tried to snatch little girls off the street. The cops could be superheroes too, but I was taught at a young age to be "mindful" around them. We'd all heard stories, and they were realer than Emmett.

I remember the first time I saw the video of Oscar Grant. I was in college, which was in a nicer part of town than where I lived, but only ten minutes away from it, and it was very, very white. I did everything I could so no one would label me as the "black girl from the hood." I could leave home blasting Tupac loudly, but by the time I arrived to pick up a friend, I was listening to the Jonas Brothers. I kept quiet whenever race came up, despite the glances I'd get because as the "token black girl," I was expected to speak.

But Oscar did something to me. Suddenly, Emmett wasn't history. Emmett was still reality.

The video was undeniable evidence that had never been provided for the stories I'd heard. Yet my classmates, who had never heard such tales, had their own opinions about it:

"He should've just done what they said." "I heard he was an ex-con and a drug dealer." "They were just doing their job." And I hate to admit it, but I still remained silent.

I was hurt, no doubt. And angry. Frustrated. Straight-up pissed. I knew plenty of Oscars. I grew up with them and I was friends with them. This was like being told that they deserved to die.

As the unrest took place in Oakland, I wondered how my community would react if that happened to one of our Oscars . . . or if I became an Oscar.

From all of those questions and emotions, *The Hate U Give* was born.

**I expressed  
those feelings  
the best way I  
knew how . . .**

I've always told stories. When I can't find a way to say the words out loud, I create characters who do it for me. *The Hate U Give* started as a short story, and I thought I was done telling Starr and Khalil's story because I foolishly hoped Oscar wouldn't happen again.

But then there was Trayvon. Michael. Eric. Tamir.

And there was more anger, frustration, and hurt for me, my peers, and the kids in my neighborhood who saw themselves in those gentlemen. So I expressed those feelings the best way I knew how, through story, in hopes that I would give a voice to every kid who feels the same way I do and is not sure how to express it.

But my ultimate hope is that everyone who reads this book, no matter their experiences, walks away from it understanding those feelings and sharing them in some way.

And maybe then, Emmett Louis Till can truly become history.

**I grew up in a  
neighborhood that's  
notorious for all the  
wrong reasons.**