

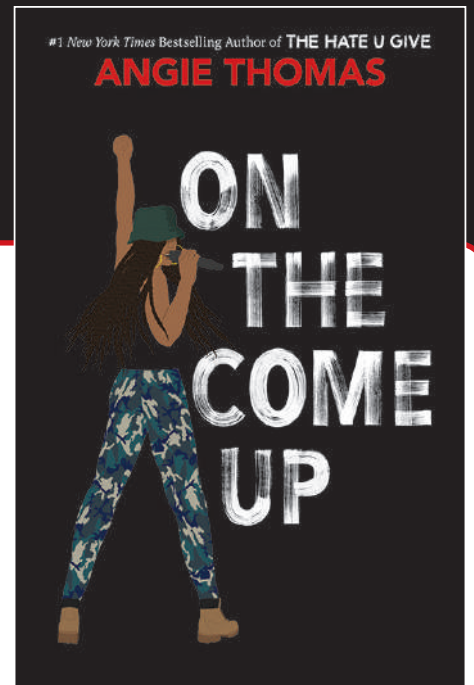
# ON THE COME UP

## Discussion Guide

### About the Book

Sixteen-year-old Bri wants to be one of the greatest rappers of all time. Or at least win her first battle. But it's hard to get your come up when you're labeled a hoodlum at school and your fridge at home is empty after your mom loses her job. So Bri pours her anger and frustration into her first song, which goes viral . . . for all the wrong reasons. She soon finds herself at the center of a controversy, portrayed by the media as more menace than MC.

With an eviction notice staring her family down, Bri doesn't just want to make it—she *has* to. Even if it means becoming the very thing the public has made her out to be.



### On the Come Up Themes

Hip-Hop

Criminalization of Black & Brown Teens

Resistance

Self-Determination

### On the Come Up Themed Discussion Questions

#### Hip-Hop

1. “Nothing’s been the same for me since Nas told me the world was mine . . . It was like waking up after being asleep my whole life” (p. 25). How does hip-hop make Brianna feel powerful? What makes you feel powerful?
2. Art is a reflection of the times in which we live. What is the role of art and music in liberation movements? Can a song stir people to violence? To good? What is the power of music and art in the world today? In your own life?
3. How does Bri define “the come up” throughout the novel? In what ways is the idea of the come up connected to Bri’s artistry, and in what ways is it connected to saving her and her family? Does Bri get her come up at the end of the novel?

#### Criminalization of Black & Brown Teens

1. When Jay and Bri are in the principal’s office, what examples does Bri give of being targeted at school (pp. 61-67)? What is racial profiling? Do you think Bri is racially profiled at her school?
2. When Bri comes back to school after the incident with school security, she is scared to walk through the doors (p. 139). Bri feels like she has been treated like a criminal. What is the impact of criminalization and racism on people’s bodies and minds? What are examples of the people Bri loves who are dealing with that impact?
3. When Jay goes up to the mic to speak to the superintendent about the protest (p. 321), she says, “Is this the kind of message you want to send to your students? That the safety of some of them is more important than the safety of others? If that’s the case, there is no concern for the safety of *all* of them” (p. 323). What point is Jay making about safety? Is Bri safe in her school? Is it possible to be safe in a world that considers you a threat?

4. How does the media frame the story of the school protest? Who do they interview? Where do they place blame (pp. 242–46)? How do students from the Black and Latinx Coalition see the protest (pp. 235–40)? How does their point of view differ? Why? How can our positionality shape what we see, hear, and understand?

5. A concerned white mother writes an article encouraging people to ban Bri’s song, stating that “we must do more to protect our children” (pp. 264–65). Whose children is she talking about? Do you think Bri is included in her definition? Why or why not?

## Resistance

1. How does Bri portray herself in her song “On the Come Up” (pp. 110–12)? Who is she speaking to? Who is she speaking for?

2. Through her music, Bri becomes a hero in the Garden and a villain to the world. How does the Garden make its own hope in a system that often seems determined to oppress classes of people who operate within it?

3. What does our understanding of who is a hero and who is a villain have to do with our values? Bri says that people in the Garden make their own heroes (pp. 88–89). Why do you think that is? Is the creation of our own heroes a form of resistance?

4. Why does Bri feel like her dreams could rescue her and her family (pp. 366–67)? What is your dream? Have you ever felt like a dream could save you?

## Self-Determination

1. Reputation is important in hip-hop. How do Milez’s and Bri’s journeys toward developing a reputation in the hip-hop community differ or align? How are they both shaped by things they can’t control (i.e., gender, race, sexuality, economics, neighborhood)? How does your identity shape who you are and who you imagine you can be?

2. Curtis says, “Yeah, people leave us. But it doesn’t mean we alone” (p. 340). Who are Bri’s people? How

have they all suffered under the weight of capitalism, racism, and violence? How have they survived and held one another up?

3. When Trey says he wouldn’t be who he is today without Bri (p. 362), how does that shift Bri’s understanding of herself, her relationships, and her own power/responsibility? How do the people who love you help you to know yourself better?

## Creative Writing Prompts

- When Bri is recording her first song, Doc, the producer, says, “This your introduction to the world. . . . What you want the world to know? . . . What’s the world done to you lately?” (p. 108) How does Bri introduce herself to the world? How would you?

- When Pooh played Nas’s album *Illmatic* for her when she was eight years old, Bri learned from Nas that the world could be hers. What makes you feel like you can conquer anything? Similar to Bri with rapping, is there something you feel you are meant to do?



## About the Author

Angie Thomas made her debut with the #1 *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning novel *The Hate U Give*. A former teen rapper who holds a BFA in creative writing, Angie was born, raised, and still resides in Jackson, Mississippi. You can find her online at [www.angiethomas.com](http://www.angiethomas.com).