

THE HATE U GIVE

READING GUIDE

BOOK TALK

Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter is thrust into the national spotlight after her childhood friend is killed by a white police officer after a routine traffic stop. As she works through her grief and her relationships with family and friends, she must navigate the vastly different worlds of her suburban private school and her poor, urban neighborhood. This gripping debut novel by Angie Thomas echoes conversations about police brutality dominant in the news and moves readers beyond Twitter hashtags. Readers will feel energized to promote and advance social justice against police brutality and racism.

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? (Chapter 1, p. 21)
 - The acronym that is the title of the book is referenced multiple times and can be “answered” throughout the book. “The Hate U Give Little Infants F*cks Us All” is important because as infants and children Black people are still weaponized and demonized. For instance, Tamir Rice was 12-years-old but a “threat” with a toy gun, yet white men are apprehended alive by police.
 - Blacks have a much harder time achieving upward mobility. Failing, run down schools, etc.. play a role in how Black and Brown people develop into adulthood and that affects more than just individual communities.
 - Real life examples on how the acronym plays out in today’s society?
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 (Chapter 2, p. 24). 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” (Chapter 6, pp. 103–104).

- Connection to Central Park 5 – Prosecutors and society used the boys’ pasts against them and still do when they make their decisions on how to treat them or view them. Detectives “baited” the boys the same way Khalil was baited.

5. 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” (Chapter 9, p. 138). Respond to this development and describe some parallels to current events.

- Local examples – Timothy Thomas – 2001, Sam Dubois – 2015, riots, curfews, boycotts, fear (no one stepping foot downtown/OTR), police force

6. How do you think Starr would define family? What about Seven? How do you define it?

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 (Chapter 17, pp. 296–301). 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.

- Explain - changing speech, mannerisms, and behaviors to fit circumstances
- Examples from book (Jade)
- Can code switching be viewed as being ashamed of who you are in front of a certain group?
- Why code switch? (playing the game)
- What groups of people code switch?
- How does the audience code switch? When and around what people?

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.

- In our current climate, how can you use your voice in the community?

9. Starr pledges to “never be quiet” (Chapter 26, p. 438). 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.

- Equity – how to bring equity to our communities? Identify inequalities but need to achieve equity not equality. Equal opportunities on equal playing field. Giving up some of your equality doesn’t make you oppressed or suffering. It means giving others a fair chance.

10. Lisa (Starr’s mother) says “white folks want diversity but not too much diversity.” What does that mean? What does that look like? Do you see that in your own community?

11. Does/Could the reader’s race, environment and/or socio-economic background affect how they react to the novel? How? Do the same characters hold as much weight regardless of the reader’s race?

MOTIFS, THEMES, SYMBOLS

- Motifs
 - Tupac Shakur's concept of THUG LIFE - explains the cyclical nature of poverty and crime that occurs as a result of an oppressive, racist social system.
 - Hip Hop - tracks speak to emotional experience mirroring black experience and how white mainstream media dismisses that experience. For instance, Tupac Shakur's "thug life" sounds as if it glorifies gang violence, but it actually comments on the circumstances creating violence in poor black communities.
 - The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air – represents Starr's fantasy of being able to be her whole self at all times and all situations.
 - Harry Potter - references highlight double standards between black and white heroes. White heroes are admired for civil disobedience in the face of Voldemort's takeover while Black heroes face smear campaigns and threats of arrest
- Themes
 - Identity and Blackness - Starr struggles to navigate the primarily black world of Garden Heights and the primarily white world of Williamson Prep and code switches, changing her speech, mannerisms, and behaviors to fit whichever circumstance she finds herself in.
 - The Weaponizing of Stereotypes Against Black People - Society uses stereotypes of black people to justify violence and racism against them. These stereotypes protect white communities, such as the students at Starr's school, Williamson Prep, from reflecting upon systemic racism. The media disguises the racism in One-Fifteen's actions by portraying them as logical and hence justified. For example, news coverage emphasizes Khalil's alleged gang connections, perpetuating stereotypes of black boys as violent and dangerous.
 - Cyclical Nature of Racialized Poverty - widespread racism keeps black communities from the opportunities and resources needed for financial prosperity, and poverty feeds on itself, affecting generations. This cycle is difficult to break because black communities, like Garden Heights, do not have adequate access to resources such as education, employment, and protection from police brutality.
- Symbols
 - One Fifteen - By referring to Brian Cruise only by badge number, Starr reduces One-Fifteen to a symbol of racism in the system of law enforcement, making the larger point that Khalil did not die because of One-Fifteen, but because of the way law enforcement criminalizes black youth.
 - Maverick's Roses – Maverick's work in his rose garden represents his values as a parent. He mentions that gardens need conversation to grow, and we see conversation as an important part of his parenting style.
 - Garden Heights - The name "Garden Heights" carries symbolic weight because it emphasizes the fact that children, like plants, need care and attention to grow and are the products of the place in which they grow up. Garden Heights may represent a garden, but it is a garden filled with thorny dangers and difficult circumstances in which children, like plants, struggle to survive and grow.