

Hate U Give (Thomas)

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The Hate U Give

Angie Thomas, 2017

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Summary

Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: the poor neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school she attends.

The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Khalil was unarmed.

Soon afterward, his death is a national headline. Some are calling him a thug, maybe even a drug dealer and a gangbanger. Protesters are taking to the streets in Khalil's name. Some cops and the local drug lord try to intimidate Starr and her family.

What everyone wants to know is: what **really** went down that night? And the only person alive who can answer that is Starr.

But what Starr does—or does not—say could upend her community. It could also endanger her life. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—ca. 1987-88
- Where—Jackson, Mississippi, USA
- Education—B.F.A., Belhaven University
- Awards—Walter Dean Myers Grant
- Currently—lives in Jackson, Mississippi

Angie Thomas is an African-American author and former teen rapper. Her debut novel, *The Hate U Give*, whose manuscript was the object of a 13-publishing-house bidding war, was released in 2016 by a HarperCollins young adult imprint. The book has received wide acclaim, starred reviews, and considered required reading by the *New York Times* and *Entertainment Weekly*.

Thomas was raised, and still lives, in Jackson, Mississippi. From a young age, she was enthralled by stories and books. At the age of six, while out riding her bike, she was nearly trapped in the middle of gun fire. After that frightening experience, Angie turned to books and escaped into another world, soon using her own imagination to tell and write stories. Knowing budding talent when she saw it, her third grade teacher asked Angie to read one of her stories to the class every Friday after lunchtime.

Several years on, Thomas became a teen rapper—a proud achievement was a feature article about her in *Right-On* magazine. Thomas went on to graduate from Belhaven University where she studied creative writing. She won the very first Walter Dean Myers Grant, awarded in 2015 by We Need Diverse Books. (*Adapted from various online sources, including the author's website (<http://angiothomas.com/>)* .)

Book Reviews

Through the main character Starr, whose family lives in the projects while she attends a private school in the burbs, Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* delivers a unique perspective to YA readers.... *The Hate U Give* made me think. And cry. And cringe at the widely varying experience Americans have — depending on their zip code and race. READ MORE ...

Abby Fabiaschi, AUTHOR - LitLovers

[A] page turner brimming with pop culture references and humor...I marveled at the balancing act between dead-serious politics and concerns familiar to kids and former kids of all backgrounds. ...[T]here's plenty for readers of all ages to enjoy.

Marjorie Ingall - New York Times Book Review

(*Starred review.*) [H]eartbreakingly topical... authentic.... [A] teenage girl... attempts to reconcile what she knows to be true about their lives with the way those lives are... completely undervalued (*Ages 14 & up*).

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*) The first-person, present-tense narrative is immediate and intense, and the pacing is strong, with Thomas balancing dramatic scenes of violence and protest with moments of reflection.... [A] powerful debut (*Gr. 8 & up*). —*Mahnaz Dar*

School Library Journal

(*Starred review.*) Beautifully written in Starr's authentic first-person voice, this is a marvel of verisimilitude as it insightfully examines two worlds in collision. An inarguably important book that demands the widest possible readership.

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) [S]mooth but powerful prose delivered in Starr's natural, emphatic voice, finely nuanced characters, and intricate and realistic relationship dynamics... This story is necessary. This story is important (*Ages 14 & up*).

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

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. 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 (*Chapter 2, 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" (*Chapter 6, pp. 102–103*).

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, pp. 136–139*). Respond to this development and describe some parallels to current events.

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. 298–302*). 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. Starr pledges to "never be quiet" (*Chapter 26, 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.

(Questions issued by publishers.)

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AUTHOR ANGIE THOMAS'S INSPIRATION FOR THE BOOK

I remember the first time I saw Emmett Louis Till.

I couldn't have been more than eight years old. 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. What was supposed to be his face was 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 for a black girl in Mississippi who was born more than 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. 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, which is unfortunately more known for its racism than anything else. Nobody ever told me to sit on the back of the bus or made me drink from a "Colored" fountain. I never saw a KKK member. I had never been called nigger. Emmett and the stories of his time were history. The present had its own problems.

I grew up in a neighborhood that's notorious for all the wrong reasons: drug dealers, shootings, crime, insert other "ghetto" stereotypes here. I wasn't worried about the KKK wandering onto my street; I was more worried about the gunshots I heard at night. Yet, while those things were daily threats, they were slightly outweighed by the good – the things 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. So were my friends. We'd all heard stories, and though they didn't come with mutilated photos, they were realer than Emmett.

But just like Emmett, I remember the first time I saw the video of Oscar Grant.

I was a transfer student in my first year at the fine arts college I'd later graduate from. It was in a nicer part of town than where I lived, but only ten minutes away from it, and it was very, very white. A majority of the time I was the only black student in my creative writing classes. I did everything I could so no one would label me as the "black girl from the hood." I would leave home, blasting Tupac, 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 in discussions, 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 shocking for multiple reasons, one being that someone actually caught it on tape. This 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."

"He was resisting."

"I heard he was an ex-con and a drug dealer."

"He had it coming. Why are people so mad?"

"They were just doing their job."

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. I also wondered if my classmates would make the same comments if I became an Oscar. I wasn't an ex-con or a drug dealer, but I was from a neighborhood they were afraid to visit. They once jokingly said it was full of criminals, not knowing that's where I lived until months later.

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

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 my senior year. It was cathartic at the time, 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. There were more conversations just like the ones I heard at school but on a wider scale. Politicians and officials echoed my classmates, which led to more anger and disappointment for me, my peers, and the kids in my neighborhood who saw themselves in those gentlemen. In the midst of it, three words suddenly created a variety of reactions whenever uttered: Black Lives Matter.

I did the only thing I knew how to do: I expressed my feelings through story, in hopes that I would give a voice to every kid who feels the same way I do. As we witness injustice, prejudice, and racism rear their ugly heads again in this political climate both in the US and abroad, I think it's even more important to let young people know that they aren't alone in their frustration, fear, anger, and sadness. We must also provide glimmers of light in the midst of the darkness. I hope that I've done that.

But my ultimate hope is that every single person who reads *The Hate U Give* walks away from it understanding those feelings and sharing them in some way. And then, maybe then, Emmett Louis Till can truly become history.



The Hate U Give Themes

Buy Study Guide

Injustice

Khalil's shooting and the ongoing investigation of Officer Cruise put the theme of injustice at the forefront of the novel. The fact that Khalil was unarmed and did not threaten the officer makes his murder unjust. The police are unjust at other points, too, such as when they force Maverick to the ground and pat him down. Race is tied into this theme of injustice as well, since pervasive racism prevents African-Americans from obtaining justice. Starr and Maverick in particular are focused on bringing justice not only for Khalil but also for African-Americans and other oppressed groups, such as the poor. The activist group that Starr joins is called Just Us for Justice because it fights against police maltreatment on the basis of race. At the end of the novel, Starr accepts that injustice might continue but reinforces her determination to fight against it.

Community

The theme of community is significant to the novel, as seen in the way that Garden Heights residents draw together in the face of unspeakable tragedy. At the end of the novel, when Starr and her friends and family work to rebuild Maverick's store, they are supported by cries of encouragement from passerby. This reflects the strong sense of community felt by those who live in Garden Heights, even after their neighborhood has faced physical and emotional destruction. The importance of community is the factor that keeps Maverick tied to the Garden Heights house even though he recognizes that the area is more dangerous than the suburbs. It's evident in the way that Ms. Rosalie's neighbors bring her food when there is no other way they can express their deep sympathy. It's also why Maverick is so determined to help DeVante get out of the gang system, because he knows that the gangs bring about ruptures in the unity of the community.

Race

Race is central to the story that *The Hate U Give* tells. Starr's identity is heavily informed by her race, and Khalil's death is due in part to entrenched racism in the police force. The tension that Starr feels between Garden Heights and Williamson Prep is due to differences in wealth and in race. Most of her classmates at school are white, but most of her neighbors are black; Starr feels torn between making sure she's not seen as "too black" at school and making sure she's not "too white" at home. The novel is also undeniably a celebration of blackness. The stereotypes and racism to which African-Americans are subjected is revealed to be extremely pervasive and harmful, even bringing about the death of innocent young men. By dealing directly with the issues of police brutality and protest, the book enters the broader conversation about race relations in America.

Belonging

One of the central issues that Starr faces is a struggle with belonging. From the very beginning of the novel, Starr recognizes that her personality is two-sided. When she's at Williamson, Starr worries that her classmates will think she's "too ghetto." She recognizes that being one of the few black students at the school makes her automatically "cool," but at the same time she censors her own behavior to fit in. Back at home, however—as evidenced by how she feels at Big D's party—people say that Starr thinks she's "all that" and doesn't hang out with them enough, because she attends Williamson. Because of this struggle, Starr is never truly able to be herself in any situation. As the novel progresses, however, Starr learns to embrace both sides of herself, and she brings both sides of her personality together along with friends from both of the spheres of her life.

Bravery

Many people tell Starr that she is brave for speaking up about Khalil, especially when she gives a nationally televised interview. Starr, however, does not share this view. She protests that she isn't brave, that she has been "misdiagnosed" by the people around her who commend her courageousness. It takes Lisa's perspective to point out that bravery is not the same thing as not being afraid. In fact, the very nature of bravery is to act in the face of fear, to refuse to back down even when the task is frightening. By the end of the novel, Starr undeniably demonstrates bravery when she stands on the top of the patrol car to give a speech, lead a chant, and ultimately throw a can of tear gas back at the police. Starr's future in activism will likely be fueled by her continued bravery, which is inspired by the connection she feels with her loved ones both living and dead.

Family

Just as community is an important part of *The Hate U Give*, family is central to the novel as well. The book offers a perspective on nontraditional families and the way these families provide support systems. For example, Starr's family is atypical because Seven doesn't live with the family; he has a different mother than Starr and Sekani. Nevertheless, Maverick and Lisa are able to support Seven in many different ways: they go to his graduation, convince him to go to college outside of the city, talk to him about the importance of not joining a gang, and watch out for him when he goes to the park the day after riots. However, the book explores dysfunctional families as well. King abuses Iesha and his children, and DeVante essentially sacrifices himself in order to remove King from the household, because Iesha is unable or unwilling to stand up to him.

Speaking Up

Starr struggles with speaking up for Khalil for a variety of reasons. She worries that she doesn't deserve to defend Khalil since they had grown far apart in the time before Big D's party. She is also afraid to speak up, and in the midst of trauma and grief, it's difficult for her to take on such an emotionally taxing project as

standing up for Khalil in the face of national attention. Kenya inspires Starr to speak up because of her resounding logic: Khalil would have fought for Starr, had she been the one to get shot that night. Maverick also explains that Tupac would have wanted Starr to use her voice, because she can help fight against the oppressive systems that keep minorities from getting ahead. By the end of the book, it's clear that Starr has conquered her fears and recognized the importance of speaking up.

Starr Carter

Starr Carter is the novel's protagonist, a sixteen-year-old African-American living in the mostly poor and black neighborhood of Garden Heights while attending the upscale, largely-white private school Williamson Prep. When she was ten, Starr saw her friend Natasha killed in a drive-by shooting; the trauma of this experience is repeated at the beginning of the novel when Starr witnesses the death of her friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. The novel follows Starr as she attempts to navigate the two worlds of Garden Heights and Williamson Prep while simultaneously dealing with grief over Khalil's death and her forays into activism in response to the unjust shooting.

Maverick "Big Mav" Carter

Maverick, Starr's father, owns and operates a grocery store in Garden Heights and is a firm believer in the tenets of Black Power espoused by Huey Newton. A former gangbanger, Maverick spent three years in prison before fatherhood inspired him to get out of the gang system. He supports Starr throughout the novel, inspiring her to not be silent in the face of injustice. Although he feuds with his brother-in-law and struggles to accept Starr's white boyfriend, by the end of the book Maverick makes peace with those who care about Starr.

Lisa Carter

Lisa, Starr's mother, is an invaluable source of support and care for her daughter throughout the novel. She encourages Starr to do as much as she is comfortable with in terms of activism and speaking out. Lisa worries for the safety of her family and convinces Maverick that their family should move out of the Garden Heights neighborhood. At the beginning of the book, she works as a nurse in a Garden Heights clinic, but she later secures a higher-paying job in a different hospital which makes the family's move financially feasible.

Seven

Seven is Starr's half-brother; Maverick is Seven's father, and Iesha, the gangbanger King's girlfriend, is his mother. Seven has a close relationship with Starr—they play basketball together every month, he drives her home from school every day—and he supports his sister during the difficult grieving period following Khalil's death. He's eighteen, and is accepted to many colleges, but doesn't want to leave Garden Heights because he feels the need to protect Iesha and his sisters from King's physical abuse. Ultimately, Maverick convinces Seven to pursue the opportunities open to him and attend a college outside of the city.

Sekani

Sekani is Starr's younger brother, who also attends Williamson Prep. At first, Starr's parents don't tell Sekani that Starr witnessed Khalil's death, but eventually tell him as Starr gets more involved with efforts to protest the shooting. Starr and Sekani frequently have good-natured fights and bicker with each other.

Chris

Chris is Starr's boyfriend. He shares Starr's love for Jordan sneakers and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. However, he's also rich and white; Starr feels that this creates distance between them, while Chris insists that Starr let him into the side of her life she usually tries to hide from her Williamson friends. Although Maverick doesn't accept Chris at first, the two grow closer throughout the novel.

Hailey Grant

Hailey is one of Starr's friends at Williamson Prep. At the beginning of the novel, their friendship is strained because Hailey unfollowed Starr's Tumblr account after Starr posted a picture of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy murdered for whistling at a white woman. Hailey doesn't redeem herself throughout the novel, either; she insinuates that Khalil is better off dead because he sold drugs, and she repeatedly makes racist comments to Starr while denying that she herself is a racist. The tension between the two friends builds until they get into a physical altercation at school. At the end of the book, Starr decides to cut Hailey out of her life, since the negative aspects of the friendship outweigh the positive.

Maya Yang

Maya is one of Starr's closest friends at Williamson. Like Starr, Maya plays for the school's basketball team. She also lives on Carlos's street. Maya is Asian-American, and when Hailey makes racist comments about Maya's ethnicity, Maya and Starr agree to make a "minority alliance" and refuse to allow Hailey to make prejudiced remarks towards them.

Kenya

Kenya is one of Starr's friends who lives in Garden Heights. She and Starr share a brother, since Maverick is Seven's father and Iesha is the mother of both Kenya and Seven. Kenya has an outsized personality and isn't afraid to fight people, but she also calls Starr out for not speaking up for Khalil as she believes Khalil would have if their roles were reversed. In addition, Kenya has to deal with physical abuse from King.

King

King is the most notorious gangbanger in the neighborhood, a King Lord deeply involved in drug dealing and violent acts. When Maverick took a prison charge and saved King from getting locked up, King allowed Maverick to leave the King Lords. King is also abusive towards his girlfriend, Iesha, and to his kids, Kenya, Seven, and Lyric. The neighborhood ultimately turns on King, turning him in to the police after he sets fire to Maverick's store.

Iesha

Iesha is King's girlfriend and the mother of Seven, Kenya, and Lyric. Although Seven and Iesha have a strained relationship because Seven believes that she doesn't reciprocate his love—she didn't even show up to his high school graduation—Iesha makes sacrifices for Seven as well. She is a point of contention in Maverick and Lisa's relationship, because Maverick conceived Seven with her after having a fight with Lisa.

DeVante

DeVante is a teenager who lives in Garden Heights and ends up getting involved with the King Lords. He joins the gang and sells drugs in an attempt to find a kind of family and to make money to provide for his mother and brother. Fearing that he will end up dead or in prison, DeVante turns to Maverick for help in getting out of the King Lords. Maverick sends him to live at Carlos's house. At the end of the novel, DeVante agrees to turn witness against King to protect Iesha, Seven, Kenya, Lyric, and the Garden Heights community.

Khalil

Khalil, Starr's best friend from childhood, is shot while unarmed by a police officer who had pulled him over for having a broken taillight. Although Khalil's death occurs in the first few pages of the novel, his presence reverberates throughout the novel. Khalil sold drugs because his mother, Brenda—who struggles with addiction—was in debt to King. King tried to persuade Khalil to join the King Lords, but Khalil refused.

Carlos

Carlos, who is Lisa's brother, serves as a police officer in the same force with the officer who shot Khalil. When Maverick was in prison—from when Starr was three years old until she was six—Carlos served as a father figure to Starr. This creates tension between him and Maverick; they both have Starr's best interests at heart. Carlos is put on leave from the police force after he punches the officer who shot Khalil. He lives in a suburb that is wealthier than Garden Heights.