

Did you know?



On the Come Up

By Angie Thomas

Recommended reading Grades 8-12 and

Recommended Reading Hamilton County Schools, TN

Overview

Sixteen year old “Bri” wants to follow in her father’s footsteps and become a rapper. (Her father was murdered in gang-related violence.) Bri’s Aunt Pooh is a drug dealer, Bri’s mom, Jay, is a former crack addict. Money is tight for Bri’s family. Her brother, Trey, graduated from college and is working at a pizza restaurant to help support the family. Bri gets in some trouble and writes a rap song about her frustration & anger. Her song is used as a “declaration of war” and students chant the song as they beat School Security Officers. The book portrays police officers as the “bad guys”, while drug dealers are seen as ok and even helpful since they have money to support people in the neighborhood. Vulgar language, excessive violence, and anti-police messages make this book inappropriate for students and especially unacceptable for use in a school setting.

Page 3: I might have to kill somebody tonight. It doesn't matter how many punch lines they spit or how nice their flow is. I'll have to kill them.

Page 4: Usually I'm cool with an entire hour of not knowing what the president tweeted. They call us the "Unholy Trinity"

Page 6: You're **fucked**

Page 11: *The school security guards, Long and Tate, keep an eye on them. Those two are always on some mess. Nobody wants to say it, but if you're black or brown, you're more likely to end up on their radar even though Long himself is black.*

Page 22: *Last year a kid was murdered by a cop just a few streets away from my grandparents' house. He was unarmed, but the grand jury decided not to charge the officer. There were riots and protests for weeks. Half the businesses in the Garden were either intentionally burned down by rioters or were casualties of the war.*

Page 23: *The cops constantly drive by, but that's the new normal in the Garden. It's suppose to be some "Hi, I'm your friendly neighborhood cop who won't shoot you" type **shit**, but it comes off as some "We're keeping an eye on your black **asses**" type **shit**.*

Page 24: *He made 'Jesus' and 'penis' rhyme! C'mon! 'Jesus' and 'penis' Okay, it's probably offensive if you're Jesus, but still Legendary.*

Page 32: [Rap song] I ball hard, so why bother? This ain't a battle, more like a slaughter. I murder this chick in cold blood, like someone did her **wack-ass** father.

- The **fuck**? "What the hell you say?" "You li'l **asshole!**"

Page 33-34: *Murder the chick in cold blood. I can still hear the gunshots that took him from us.*

*-Like someone did her **wack-ass** father. I can still hear Jay wailing. Murder...**Wack-ass** father. I can still see him in the coffin, all cold and stiff. **Shit**. I **fucking** blanked. Shake that **shit** off!*

Page 35: [Dad shot by gang.]

Page 49: Jay calls it their “they needed grant money and wouldn’t nobody give it to them for just a bunch of white kids initiative.”

Page 56: School pride turns into gangs. “Man, **fuck** your li’l lollipop-head-looking **ass**.”

Page 58: “Seeing that cop get away with murder probably made them think they’re invincible too.” Malik’s been on another level, always talking about social justice and reading up on stuff like the Black Panthers.

Page 60: [Bri has been selling candy at school, which is not allowed. She gets stopped by the School Security Officer, refuses to cooperate when they want to inspect her backpack, and gets into a struggle with the officer.] Before I know it, my chest hits the ground first, then my face is pressed against the cold floor. Long’s knee goes into my back as Tate removes my backpack. “Yo! What the **fuck!**” He’s not a cop. He doesn’t have a gun. But I don’t wanna end up like that boy.

Page 65: “...Long and Tate like to go after the black and Latinx kids!” “The security guards have the right to conduct random searches. I can assure you Brianna was not ‘targeted.’” “**Bullshit!**”

Page 66: “Do the white girls who make slick comments get sent to your office every other week too?” I just say stuff my teachers don’t like. All of them except Mrs. Murray, who happens to be my only black teacher.

Page 68: **Fuck** that word. **Fuck** that school. **Fuck** all this.

Page 70: “Sometimes the rules are different for black folks, baby,”

Page 78: Security loves to target black and brown kids.

Page 79: “Yo! That **shit!**” “Y’all, she redid Big’s ‘Ten Crack Commandments.’ It’s dope as **hell**, too.”

Page 81: No matter where I’m at, I keep an eye for police. They’ll unload them mags, make me a hashtag.

-Yeah, they’re gang bangers, and they’ve done all kinds of foul **shit** that I don’t even wanna know about. But I’m enough to them, so frankly, they’re enough to me.

Page 87: “you won the popular vote ‘cause everybody loved you in the Ring, but you still lost the election since he the one getting fame?” (Election reference)

Page 88: The kids in the projects love Aunt Pooh because she gives them money. They don’t care how she gets it. [She’s a drug dealer. So, the message is cops are bad, but drug dealers are just fine.]

Page 97: If Trey can’t make it by doing everything “right,” who can? [Trey went to college and is working at a pizza shop. The book is pointing out that drug dealers make more \$ than a college graduate.]

Page 101: “You know how many rich white folks come to the courthouse on drug possession?” “Every single one gets a little slap on the wrist and goes right back into society, like it’s all good. Black folks or poor folks get on drugs?” “We’re ruined for life,” Jay says. “Sounds about right.” “You mean sounds about white.”

Page 108: If I was Aunt Pooh, I would’ve whooped their **asses**, no lie. [Talking about School Security Officers]

Page 109: Across the garage, Scrap shows Doc and his boys his two pieces. One’s got a silencer. “Run up on me and get done up. My squad got more heat than a furnace.” “Silencer is a must, they ain’t heard us.” Nobody hears us around here. Like Dr Rhodes or all those politicians who flooded the neighborhood after the riots. They did all these “stop gun violence” talks, like we were to blame for that boy’s death. They didn’t care that it wasn’t our fault.

-Scrap points his Glock at the door to show it off. He even cocks it. If I had one, I would’ve aimed it and cocked it yesterday. [Her altercation with School Security Officers]

Page 110: [Rap song the main character, Bri, writes]

Run up on me and get done up. Whole squad got more heat than a furnace. Silencer is a must, they ain’t heard us. We don’t bust, yet they blam us for murder. You think I’m a tug? Well, I claim it.

This Glock, yeah, I cock it an aim it. That’s what you expect, **bitch**, ain’t it? The picture you painted, I frame it. I approach, you watch close, I’m a threat. Think I bang, think I slang, claim a set. Cops can draw, break the law, ‘cause you fret. Yet I bet you won’t even regret.

Pin me to the ground, boy, you **fucked** up. Wrote me off, called you squad, but you lucked up. If I did what I wanted and bucked up, you'd be bound for the ground, grade dug up. Boys in blue rolling all through my neighborhood, 'cause I guess they think that we ain't no good. We fight back, we've attacked, then they say they should

Send in troops wearing boots for the greater good. But let me be honest, I promise, If a cop come at me, I'll be lawless. Like my poppa, fear nada. Take solace in my hood going hard in my honor.

Strapped like backpacks, I pull triggers. All the clips on my hips change my figure. 'Cause I figure they think I'm a killer. May as well bust them thangs, go gorilla.

Page 132: What kind of heterosexual **bullshit** is that?

Page 143: I "jump to conclusions faster than lice jump between white kids' heads."

Page 148-149: 'Unarmed and dangerous, but America you made us, only time we famous – Is when we die and you blame us,"

Pages 150-151: "A bunch of us have been talking about how Long and Tate seem to target certain students more than others." "You mean the black and brown kids." "A bunch of us were talking, and we've decided that we're gonna do something about this." "We've formed an unofficial black and Latinx coalition."

Page 198: I grab my (white) American History book."

Page 215: They still think I'm a hood nigga. I don't walk outta there a broke nigga, I bet you that. "You know what white kids in the suburbs love? Listening to **shit** that scares their parents. You scare the **hell** outta their folks, they'll flock to you like birds."

Page 128: "Pooh and her drug dealing money, saving the day." It is kinda messed up. Here my brother is, doing everything right, and nothing's coming from it. Meanwhile, Aunt Pooh's doing everything we've been told not to do and she's giving us food when we need it. That's how it goes, though. The drug dealers in my neighborhood aren't struggling. Everybody else is.

Page 221: “Shoot first, ask questions later behind bars.”

Page 223: “Stabbed an ex-boyfriend who used to beat her up. She snapped one night and stabbed him in his sleep. But since he wasn’t doing anything to her at that moment, it wasn’t self defense or whatever. She got locked up. Meanwhile, he’s still around the Garden, probably beating somebody else’s momma.”

Page 231: [School Security Officers (Long and Tate) are back to work after the investigation] Dr Rhodes said there would be an investigation and disciplinary action would take place if the administration saw fit. Long and Tate throwing me to the ground must not have “fit” their idea of bad behavior. “How the hell can they be back?” “There wasn’t enough noise made about what they did,”

[Students begin to chant Bri’s rap song]

This is a call to war. A fist connects with Long’s jaw. The bullhorn flies from his hand. Suddenly, it’s as if that punch was the green light some students were waiting for. A cluster of boys charge Long and Tate, taking them to the ground. Fists fly and feet kick.

Page 237: “They’ve got reason to believe we’re all threats now. I bet there will be armed cops at the doors.” Ever since that boy got killed, my heart races whenever I see a cop. I could’ve been him, he could’ve been me. “Look, all I know is we were tired of Long and Tate treating us like **shit** and getting away with it, so we whooped their **asses**. Plain and simple.”

Page 245: It’s not the fact that those two **assholes** harassed all the black and brown kids.

Page 249: The Fish Hut is one of the only places still standing. Aunt Pooh says it’s ‘cause Mr. Barry, the owner, put ‘black owned’ on the doors during the riots. Yeah, she was out during all of that. Even looted some stores and got a couple TVs.

Page 252: “Truthfully, this is probably the best thing that could’ve happened to you. Publicity is publicity, I don’t give a damn how bad it is. It made you number one on Dat Cloud, didn’t it?”

Page 255: “Truth is, you’ve got a unique opportunity here, Bri. Situations like this, publicity, like this, don’t come around often. You gotta take advantage of it.”

Page 265: **Fuck** Emily [white mom complaining about the rap song inciting violence]. Yeah, I said it. **Fuck** her.

Page 266: **Fuck** what they say.

Page 267: “It’s stupid as hell.” Hell yeah. **Fuck** censorship. “Besides, if I am strapped like backpacks, maybe it’s ‘cause I gotta be, **bitch**. Ain’t my fault if it makes you uncomfortable.” **Fuck** em all.

Page 268: [Underage drinking]

Page 306: Midtown considers all of us black and brown kids threats now. **Shitty** things happen in my life on repeat.

Page 317: He’s in full Malik X mode, with a wooden black power fist hanging from his necklace. His sign says, “School or prison?” with a picture of an armed cop.

Page 319: It’s different for me and students who look like me at this school, Dr. Cook. Both Officer Long and Officer Tate were known to target black and Latinx students far more than anyone. We were more likely to be subjected to pat-downs, to random locker checks, and to secondary screenings. Several of us have been in physical altercations with them. Now that armed police officers have been brought on, honestly, many of us fear for our lives.”

Page 336: Make sure you ain’t rapping stuff that makes white ladies **shit** themselves.

Page 341: **“Fuck!” “Fuck, fuck, fuck!”**

Page 351: “Screw them.” “Why should I hesitate? They didn’t hesitate to come at me.”

Page 380-381: “In the hood they call me PMS, I make chicks...bleed” “I Love that sassy black girl **shit**.”

Page 405-406: “Your dad wants you to be an **asshole**? “Your dad makes you pretend to be straight?” “He does make me pretend to be straight.”

Page 432: Your aunty should've shot to kill when she had the chance"

Whack-ass father, **shit**, **fucking** blanked, mesmerized by his **ass**, whooped that **ass**, lollipop-head-looking-**ass**, talk that **shit**, **Fuuuuuck**, greedy **ass**, nerd **shit**, **Shit** ton, every **fucking** time, dope **shit**, lost her **shit**, street **shit**, **fucking** hoodlum, **bullshit**, **shit's** straight fire, the **fuck?**, write **shit**, this **shit**, **raggedy-ass** jobs, his ass took the **shit** seriously, street **shit**, writing her **shit**, them Crown **bitches**, **bitch-ass**, move in on our **shit**, goddamn Twilight Zone, start some **shit**, what that **bitch** doing, **asses**, who the **fuck** you think you talking to?, sit your li'l **ass** down, that **shit** you rapped, **ass-wipe** Hype.

Finally, on page 440, Bri decides to start making better choices. How many students read through to page 440?