



YA Café Podcast
Episode 44: *On the Come Up*
07 February 2019

- Danielle: [00:00](#) Welcome to the YA Cafe where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage friends, and Let's talk books.
- Ad: [00:21](#) Have you tried the Radio Public app? It's a great app where you can find all of your favorite podcasts like this one. You'll experience the same great content for free and we'll receive a small kickback every time you listen there. This is a great way to support any podcasts you enjoy. Come find us over on Radio Public.
- Music: [00:41](#) *Music*
- Amanda: [00:43](#) Welcome, y'all. As always, our first segment will be spoiler free and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher.
- Danielle: [00:50](#) I'm Danielle Hall, an 8th and 9th grade English teacher, and I blog at teachnouvelle.com.
- Amanda: [00:57](#) Today we're discussing *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas. Bri Jackson isn't interested in the prescribed future of college and career her mother has in mind for her. All she wants to do is follow her passion and talent and become a hip hop artist, like her late father. After a triumphant debut at the ring, a local venue for rap battles. Bri is ready to rise to the top. Unfortunately, the world has its own ideas about how a teenage black girl is expected to act. She faces relentless racism and oppression just for being a normal high school girl, even without the reputation she gets for rapping. Will Bri be able to stay true to herself and follow her dream? So Danielle, what did you think?
- Danielle: [01:32](#) So, I have been looking forward to this book for a really long time. Um, Angie Thomas had like a breakout debut with *The Hate U Give*. She got a movie deal and this book actually got pushed back in terms of publication and really because she was on set all the time. So, I've been seeing like buzz about this on her Instagram and out there in Bookstagram for a long time and it's finally here. I really liked it! I thought it was lots of fun, I liked Bri, I liked all the supporting characters and just a Really fun book. What did you think, Amanda?
- Amanda: [02:10](#) I also really loved it. Uh, one thing I particular I loved was the way that Bri really cared about rap. We have done a lot of books where the main characters, have passions and interests and things like that. And sometimes it's very front and center and sometimes it's less so and I just loved how it was constantly a touchstone for Bri. Like she would hear a word and if she didn't want to think

about it she would just go through and find the rhymes, like and just roll words around in her head to find rhymes. And I really loved all the rap elements in the book.

- Danielle: [02:43](#) You know, how we talked about that thing where characters anagram sometimes?
- Amanda: [02:49](#) Yes.
- Danielle: [02:50](#) I feel like she was doing that,
- Amanda: [02:51](#) Yeah, its like a lyric thing.
- Danielle: [02:53](#) Yeah, and I love how hard she worked. Like it was really obvious that she had of this work behind her in getting good. It wasn't just like something she fell into, it was something that she like planned on being good at, was passionate about and worked for.
- Amanda: [03:09](#) Yep. And you definitely saw a lot of it, like you said.
- Danielle: [03:11](#) So, she's got this mentor in her aunt Pooh...
- Amanda: [03:17](#) Mentor is a strong word.
- Danielle: [03:17](#) ...but that's what she calls her in the book. She says, "mentor".
- Amanda: [03:21](#) Oh, she does . Okay.
- Danielle: [03:22](#) But, it ends up being a strong word, but it's definitely Pooh who like tells her to be tough and who is her cheerleader at the beginning. And then we can talk more about the evolution of that relationship later. But Bri says, "She said I'd have to do double the work to get half the respect on top of that. I got to be just as cutthroat and I better not show weakness." You know, she's talking about being a girl that raps, being a young girl that raps.
- Amanda: [03:50](#) Yeah, It's not easy to be a female rapper, like there's not a lot of them that are as famous as the male rappers because they just don't have as many of the opportunities. But the ones that are famous like are excellent because they had to be really good. Just like aunt Pooh said.
- Danielle: [04:06](#) Bri also has this baggage of her father who was killed by gun violence and he was a rapper who was famous in their neighborhood and I didn't really like get a sense of how famous he was outside of their neighborhood.
- Amanda: [04:19](#) I don't think he was at all. I mean they mentioned like underground hip hop artists or rap artist, I can't remember, but it did not seem to extend past the neighborhood, the ring. By the way, we didn't mention this is also set in the same neighborhood as The Hate U Give and the events of The Hate U Give are actually mentioned. Like Bri talks about how there's been this shooting in the last year and there were a lot of riots in the neighborhood.

Danielle: [04:43](#) There're still stores that haven't recovered. Um, there's a heavy police presence in the neighborhood that wasn't as present before, but obviously like was present because that, those, that precipitated the events in *The Hate U Give*.

Amanda: [04:56](#) Right?

Danielle: [04:57](#) But it's amped up.

Amanda: [04:58](#) Right.

Danielle: [04:59](#) As have the tensions. So her dad had this legacy. And so like throughout the book people are like, Oh you're, you're carrying the mantle, you're like taking the torch. And she's like, I'm lighting my own torch.

Amanda: [05:14](#) This is my thing.

Danielle: [05:15](#) Mine.

Amanda: [05:16](#) I just happen to be *Lawless's* daughter. Yeah!

Danielle: [05:19](#) Loved it! She lives with her mom, Jay and her brother Trey. And she and her mom have this really contentious relationship because her mom was a drug addict and is clean now. But you know, Bri was raised by her grandparents for eight years.

Amanda: [05:38](#) I don't think it was really contentious. I mean I think that she and her mom had sort of like um, and understanding going on, but I mean I think that their relationship was not as at each other's throats as some other books that we've read or other child parent relationships. It's just because they do have this history but they don't really fight or get in spats and things like that.

Danielle : [06:05](#) Okay. So contentious was the wrong word, but like it is there, it is a tension.

Amanda: [06:10](#) Yes.

Danielle: [06:11](#) And I thought that this was really well done in the presence of the grandparents. So, they're *Lawless's*, parents and Jay's in-laws. And they are like, especially the grandmother there as a constant reminder that, yeah, we raised Bri for eight years and we have a claim over her because of that.

Amanda: [06:33](#) Yeah, I think that felt very real to me for sure. So, when I was a child who was in a similar situation, not like very similar, not as far as like drugs and that sort of thing, but I was raised by my grandparents for a while when my parents were not living in the house. And just the way that, that really shapes, um, parental and grand parental relationships, especially in the high school years when it's sort of this, uh, we stepped in when you didn't kind of thing. Uh, that felt very real to me as far as just how tense that relationship could tend to be.

- Danielle: [07:06](#) And the grandmother and grandfather dealt with it very differently. I feel like the grandfather had a lot of grace for Jayda and the grandmother had like, no grace, gave her no quarter.
- Amanda: [07:20](#) Yeah, she was like, really the TV mother in law, like, you know what I mean, never be good enough for my son, and then you left her children ****Laughter****
- Danielle: [07:29](#) It really reminded me of Ruby and Blackish except like there was no humor in it.
- Amanda: [07:37](#) Yeah.
- Danielle: [07:37](#) Ruby cuts down Bow at every opportunity, but like obviously it's a comedy. So the thing...
- Amanda: [07:43](#) So, it's really absurd.
- Danielle: [07:46](#) Yeah.
- Amanda: [07:46](#) One thing that really struck me about the book was the way they portrayed Bri as being a very normal teenage girl who does normal teenage girl things like rolls her eyes and get sent to the principal's office for it and get suspended for it. I thought that was so crucial to put in there because that is what happens to black girls in high school. Um, and Danielle, you might have more insight on this as a teacher and as a person who read Pushout, which is all about black girls being shoved out of the classroom through these disciplinary measures. Did you have thoughts on it?
- Danielle: [08:20](#) Yeah, I thought that was really important to include. It really underscored the fact that Bri was dealt with differently by her teachers and the administration then her white classmates would have been in the same situation. Pushout by Monique Morris is an excellent book that not only outlines the main problems in the school to prison pipeline for girls, but shows the larger implications for society and for how those girls grow up. And so I really liked seeing that on the page and I think that it was really important to the story because Bri made some bad decisions that we can argue about in the spoiler section because I know...
- Amanda: [09:04](#) Oh, we're gonna ****Chuckle****
- Danielle: [09:04](#) I know you don't agree with me, but like her rolling her eyes when she doesn't like the book they're reading in class is not a bad decision and she shouldn't be sent to the principal's office.
- Amanda: [09:16](#) Right.
- Danielle: [09:17](#) So, loved that. And with that, friends were going to take our first break. When we come back we'll share about Things We Like a Latte and then we'll return to our discussion of on the come up and dig a little deeper. ***Music****
- Ad: [09:37](#) Hey friends! We're in episode 44 and it's time to get real. We need your support to keep making this podcast happen. One easy way to show your love is to order

our book choices through our affiliate links. Up next we'll be discussing, *We Set the Dark on Fire* by Tehlor Mejia. Preorder this book through our link in the show notes and help us keep bringing you great content. Happy reading.

****Music****

- Amanda: [10:10](#) Welcome back. It's time for Things We Like a Latte! Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?
- Danielle: [10:17](#) Well Amanda! ****Laughter****
- Amanda: [10:19](#) Well Danielle.
- Danielle: [10:21](#) Well, uh, so I'm reading this book called *The Firebrand and the First Lady* by Patricia Bell-Scott, and it is, it's not like a dual biography, but it is an exploration of the friendship between Pauli Murray and Eleanor Roosevelt and it's partially told through letters and partially told through prose, but it's so awesome that I got to kind of co read that with *On The Come Up*, because I think that Pauli is exactly what Bri will be like when she's older. Pauli is fierce and like ready for social justice and does not back down. And when she sees injustice in the world, she writes about it and she uses her words as her weapons to make change happen. And she basically schools, Eleanor Roosevelt on being a good person. I'm just like really digging this book, *The Firebrand and the First Lady* by Patricia Bell-Scott. How about you Amanda? What's your Thing You Like a Latte?
- Amanda: [11:23](#) Well, I read a great article that I think fits really well with this book on the Black Youth Project. Which is a blog website...
- Danielle: [11:32](#) Blog site. ****Chuckle****
- Amanda: [11:33](#) Blog site. I'm not sure exactly how they classify themselves, but there's great stuff on there and one of the articles that I read this week was the "The anti-Blackness of believing there's no support for queerness in the hood" by Benji Hart. And it's basically a long article about how the author lives in this neighborhood in Chicago that is black and poor and the strongest figure in this neighborhood for many people is this queer, older black woman. And there are many queer and Trans folx living in this community. And it talks a lot about how this whole idea of the black community being homophobic or trans-phobic and these kinds of things are very rooted in like ideas of white violence and replacing black queer spaces with white queer spaces and the violence of gentrification and how this narrative feeds into that in a large way. And I found it absolutely fascinating because I had never thought about it in those terms before and I really appreciated reading this article and reading their perspective about how this affects them in their day to day lives as far as having this idea that blackness is anti queer and how that erases black queer folx, black trans folx and how that is not an acceptable way to think and frame conversations particularly about violence against trans women, which is most often perpetrated on trans women of color. I thought this was really relevant for this book too in particular because you have all of these great queer characters who are part of the community and the way that they worked into this community. I thought it was really great to have this article right on the heels of that, so that

is "The anti-Blackness of believing there's no support for queerness in the hood" by Benji Hart.

- Danielle: [13:23](#) That sounds really interesting. I'll definitely have to check that out, especially because we had some conversations about black queerness last week.
- Danielle: [13:43](#) We're going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll return to our discussion on On the Come Up. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back after this quick break. *Music**
- Amanda: [14:04](#) Welcome back to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on On the Come Up by Angie Thomas. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.
- Danielle: [14:16](#) Spoilers! **Singing voice**
- Amanda: [14:17](#) Its too late! Its too late! **Laughter**
- Danielle: [14:20](#) Okay, so here is our kind of main dispute that we started having a couple of days ago.
- Amanda: [14:28](#) And we've been fighting ever since. **Laughter**
- Danielle: [14:34](#) Okay, so Bri releases this song called On the Come Up. And she talks about how people are going to perceive her as a "hood rat" as like quotes, all these things are in quotes, right. As "ghetto" or a "thug" quotes all quotes, um, no matter what she does. And so, you know, she talks about getting thrown down by the security guard that school and how she wasn't doing anything but how their racism and their violence against people of color just like lead them to do that because of their assumptions about her. Okay, sorry, that was really long but important because that's like the crux of the book. And so she releases the song that kind of says, well, if you're going to think I'm going to be like that, like here's what you're thinking. And she in her song, she has like violence in her lyrics and things like that. And she's basically saying like, all get back at you. But she knows that she's intending to talk about how they are perceiving her and not like the reality of her life. Everyone around her is like, you can't say that because people are gonna think that that's like how you are.
- Amanda: [15:53](#) But, like Bri artist. She is creating a piece of art that is also a social commentary and it's not her responsibility to ensure that people don't immediately think that she's like "ratchet" or a "hood rat" or whatever. She is an artist, she's creating a work of art. She has every right to do so and by all accounts it's a really good work of art and the people that understand it, understand it. So, I don't think that she should get the choice of creating good art taken away from her just because of how the world's going to view her.
- Danielle: [16:28](#) I mean, I think that that's definitely like an interesting point and valid, but at the same time, like people who know her and know her best intentions but also know the community. Like Pooh, Malik and Trey, her brother, you know, they're

saying like, don't do this. Don't put your name on this because that's not how you are. And she loves and respects those people but she disregards their advice completely and like it turns out poorly for her. And then she sees the six year old wrapping her lyrics about carrying guns and being violent and she like, is shocked! Kind of like a gut punch. Like, oh my God this is exactly what they said would happen.

- Amanda: [17:16](#) I don't know. I mean I think that it's unfair to point out that like kids were rapping it as like evidence that she made the mistake because not everything is created for children, you know, like she can't be responsible for what kids are exposed to in this way. You know, like, I don't think it's fair to hold Bri to this expectation of like you need to say exactly the right thing in exactly the right way. Like she's angry. She has every right to be angry. The world has been unfair to her and I think it kind of sucks that the people that you say love her best and know her best and all these kinds of things, don't stand in her corner when she's like and that I created this, they say, oh, this is really good, but you shouldn't put it out there. That's not fair. I don't think that's fair to her.
- Danielle: [18:04](#) Yeah, I get what you're saying. It's like it's almost like tone policing.
- Amanda: [18:08](#) Yeah. I think that's exactly what it is. She was slammed on the ground by a security guard in her school. Nothing that she says should come even close to that and I think that she is in an unfair world and the world is unfair to black girls and I think the people who loved her had, the best of intentions telling her not to put this out and the things that they said we're going to happen did come to pass. But I don't think that is a sign that Bri is wrong. I think that's just a sign that the world is wrong and they knew that, but I don't think that that means that Bri has to mold herself in that way.
- Danielle: [18:43](#) Well said.
- Amanda: [18:44](#) Thanks friend. ****Laughter****
- Danielle: [18:47](#) Thanks wife. ****Chuckle****
- Danielle: [18:49](#) So one thing that I thought was really interesting, like, okay, this was kind of another bad decision that Bri made, but I think this one's legit. Like she had this moment where she hovered around not her true self, like she had this moment where she was trying to decide whether to buy into a Supreme, the skeezy manager guy like to his vision for how to make her career successful. And Angie Thomas used comments, lyrics from I Used to Love H.e.r. I Used to Love Her and I thought that that was so cool as an inspiration for this book because it's, you know, it's all about like being true to yourself in your poetry versus like selling out and going commercial and lying about yourself to like project an image.
- Amanda: [19:40](#) So you mentioned Pooh versus Supreme, Aunt Pooh wanting to be her manager versus Supreme wanting to be her manager. Supreme is like the skeezy...
- Danielle: [19:49](#) He was her dad's manager.

- Amanda: [19:50](#) Yeah, you know, just your general scumbag manager guy. And so, I liked this choice that she had to make were both choices were a little bit bad ****Laughter**** because you aunt Pooh who loved her, like clearly wanted the best for her but was real bad at her job ****Laughter****
- Danielle: [20:09](#) Didn't know anything. ****Laughter****
- Amanda: [20:10](#) I had no idea what she was doing versus this highly competent kind of skeezy guy, who could definitely get her a lot of money but did not care what happened to her along the way. So I really, I thought that was an interesting counterbalance to each other. I liked having both of them in there and being like, well Pooh kind of sucks, but Supreme kind of sucks.
- Danielle: [20:30](#) And I liked like when her mom was like, "I'd manage you before I let him manage you". And she was like, nope ****Laughter****
- Amanda: [20:39](#) Shut it down. ****Laughter**** Yeah, parents as managers, that never goes bad. ****Laughter****
- Danielle: [20:44](#) I love her mom's character. She is fierce and determined and like I love when she goes, that school board meeting speaks up on behalf of Bri and then asks the superintendent for a job ****Laughter****
- Amanda: [20:58](#) Well, I have your attention ****Laughter**** and you feel real bad about how your goons manhandled my daughter. Here's my resume. ****Laughter****
- Danielle: [21:07](#) Literally gives him her resume on the spot.
- Amanda: [21:09](#) Yeah, it was great.
- Danielle: [21:10](#) So she says to Bri, and this is like her criticism of Bri expression, which we already argued about, but like, you know, here it is in her mom's voice. "People are going to assume things about you, about me, no matter what we say or do, but here's the difference between me and you, Brianna. I'm not giving people more reasons to make those assumptions" and she's just basically like cautioning her. I mean whether or not she is stifling Bri, creative talent. You can still receive a word of caution. So there was this middle ground, right? Her mom like could have supported her and cautioned her at the same time and eventually does, right?
- Amanda: [21:50](#) Yeah, I think they get there. I just really, I really liked Bri. I liked that she was angry, she has so many reasons to be angry and I just wish she had more people in her corner. Not only loving her because clearly she has a lot of people that care about her, but I wanted her to have some more people in her corner who were like, yeah, this is terrible. Let's burn things. ****Laughter****
- Danielle: [22:09](#) You're right. You're right. You convinced me.
- Amanda: [22:11](#) Great! I love when I convince you.

Danielle: [22:13](#) You win, marriage is competition.

Amanda: [22:15](#) And I won.

Danielle: [22:16](#) Marriage is competition. Life advice from the YA Cafe. ****Laughter**** Keep score.

Danielle: [22:22](#) All right, so I wanted to talk about something really cute.

Amanda: [22:27](#) Ugh.

Danielle: [22:27](#) ****Laughter****

Amanda: [22:27](#) Oh wait, Oh, this is a cute thing. I thought you were going to talk about Malik again and I was saying ugh.

Danielle: [22:33](#) Okay, Okay, Alright So, you mentioned Sonny who is queer and he is Bri's friend and he has an online romance. And of course Bri and Malik are like super skeptical and they're like, you're getting catfished and Sonny say "No, I recently read this book about these two guys who fall for each other over email. Reading that maybe go, maybe this could work for us too." And he's talking about Simon vs. The Homosapiens Agenda by Becky Albertalli. And here's how I know listeners, if you don't know this, Angie Thomas and Becky Albertalli are BFF's.

Amanda: [23:10](#) Love it.

Danielle: [23:11](#) I love it too.

Danielle: [23:12](#) And like that moment for me was like meta representation, like it was like talking about the importance of representation in books.

Amanda: [23:22](#) But, wait. I thought we said that it's Becky Albertalli canon that somebody's Starr's Cousin?

Danielle: [23:29](#) Bram.

Amanda: [23:30](#) Bram is Starr's cousin?

Danielle: [23:31](#) Yeah.

Amanda: [23:32](#) But.

Danielle: [23:33](#) Oh! Oh no!

Amanda: [23:35](#) Yeah. Yeah.

Danielle: [23:35](#) Oh, this breaks the cannon.

Amanda: [23:37](#) It breaks it. ****Laughter****

Danielle: [23:38](#) Okay, so if Bram is Starr's cousin...

Amanda: [23:42](#) Where does reality end and the book again ****Laughter****

Danielle: [23:46](#) How does Simon vs. the Homo-Sapiens Agenda exist within the world?

Amanda: [23:50](#) Yeah, there you go.

Danielle: [23:53](#) Oh Wow! Way To go, Amanda.

Amanda: [23:55](#) I mean, I'm just saying ****laughter****

Danielle: [23:57](#) We might as well end there.

Amanda: [23:59](#) This is a great book, however it breaks the world ****Laughter**** No, this book is wonderful. I love it, I love Bri. I think that she is a protagonist. I want to read more of and be mad at the world with sometimes and read her great rhymes and I'm so happy that we read this book.

Danielle: [24:18](#) Me Too.

Speaker 1: [24:19](#) That's our show for today, friends. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you! And if you're enjoying this show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. Happy reading! ***Music***