

**Title: *On the Come Up***  
**Author: Angie Thomas**  
**Genre: Realistic Fiction**

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Ella O., 9th grade**

**Date Reviewed: January 2, 2021**

*On the Come Up* begins with Brianna (often called Bri) Jackson sitting in a classroom in Garden Heights, awaiting a phone call from DJ Hype. He is the one to let her know if she can perform in a rap battle in the Ring, a center for rap battling, that evening. Bri is the daughter of a famous rapper, Lawless, who was murdered by a gang called the Crowns twelve years ago. An hour later, the call comes, and she is escorted to the ring by her Aunt Pooh, not only her aunt but a good friend because of their small age difference. She is supportive of Bri, and believes that this rap battle could open doors for her. During the battle, Bri goes up against Milez, the son of Supreme, her late father's manager. After Milez insults Lawless, Bri retaliates fiercely and wins the battle. The next morning on her way to school, her friends congratulate her on her win. But then, as she tries to go through security when entering school, she is asked to have her backpack searched. She refuses because she has 'forbidden' candy in her backpack, which she had been selling to her classmates in hopes of saving up for a pair of Timberland boots. These are significant because they are often worn by hip hop rappers who come from New York. In their attempt to search her, she is slammed to the ground by one of the security guards. After the incident, the principal claims the assault was not racially motivated, and suspends Bri for selling candy. Bri discovers the same day that her mother has lost her job. After, Aunt Pooh comforts Bri, and tells her she has found a way for her to record one of her songs. Feeling angry, Bri writes and records a song about the issues and stereotypes that she has to face as a black woman. On the school bus a few days later, she lets her classmates listen to her song, and they love it. That weekend, Supreme listens to her song, and feels the same way her classmates did about it. As the song ("On the Come Up") begins to go viral, and spreads around her school, pressure causes her to portray herself in the media as a stereotype, a menace to society. She is quickly submerged in controversy, with very little options to display herself otherwise. She continues to accumulate fame, but as she does, she begins to experience its dangers. Friendships are lost, and her community pins its hopes on her, expecting her to be as much of a star as her father had been. Her life becomes more difficult and violent the more famous she becomes, including conflict with gangs her aunt and father had been affiliated with, and she has to fight all odds to find a way forward for herself and her family.

*Did the plot keep you interested?* The plot of this book kept me interested throughout. It was thought-provoking but also funny, and it presented a set of complex, dimensional characters that show loyalty, compassion, and friendship in the way you and I would. This book was written in the modern day, and this makes it an even better read because of all of the contemporary references made. What I loved in particular was the way the element of music was integrated into the story. This unique component made it an even better read!

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?* For me, this book moved at a good pace. The writing was great, and the inclusion of the lyrics to Bri's songs showed you how talented Bri (and by default Angie Thomas) is. The dialogues between the characters felt relatable, not as if they were written by an adult trying to be 'hip.'

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?* This book would be appropriate for 8th grade and above. There are topics such as racism, gang violence, abandonment, poverty, and drug use explored within this novel, and some events depicted include a character being slammed to the ground by high school security guards and teens held at gunpoint by a gang member. Additionally, there are drug references and the use of explicit language. On the other end, I don't think there is anyone 'too old' to enjoy this book. It was extremely well-written and told a great story while also imploring you to also look into and reconsider the stereotypes you have unintentionally placed upon others.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?* I would recommend this book to a reader who enjoys realistic fiction, and someone who not only loves music but words. Angie Thomas writes Bri's raps with skill, and the clever wordplay is exciting to read. Any teenager would like this book, the characters are relatable and the story is entertaining. It masterfully addresses a series of social issues that need to be recognized, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and more. Thomas also wrote *The Hate You Give*, and if you read and enjoyed that book, *On the Come Up* would be a good fit for you. The two share similar themes and this book further showcases Thomas' talent as an author. I found Bri to be a more complex character than Starr, and aside from a shared location, this book stands independently of the aforementioned novel.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?* When reading this book, I think it's important to appreciate how Angie Thomas, the author, represented a wide variety of backgrounds and stories. In her story, she not only addresses various social issues, but tells the story of black and LGBTQ+ teens with dignity. Growing up with a far different background than Bri and her friends, this book helped me understand and gain a perspective on the struggles that others go through.

*Rating: 4.5 stars*

I enjoyed this book because of how real it felt: Brianna, her relationships, her friends and family and her love for music. This book was intense in the best way possible. Angie Thomas incorporates themes regarding social justice in her stories, and she adds real elements of danger to her plotlines. An example of this would be when Bri has a battle at the Ring, and as she and her Aunt Pooh prepare to enter, a Crown (a rival gang) member sees her father's chain, threatens Bri, and he and Pooh draw guns. However, there are positive messages as well. Thomas explores complex relationships with Bri's best friends, mother, brother, aunt, and grandparents, and at the end of the story, most end in a good place. There are moments of happiness and humor, and there is a strong message that tells readers, "your voice matters." Last but not least, this book is clever and well written. I end with one of my favorite lines, an excerpt from Brianna's first song. "You'll never silence me and you'll never kill my dream, just recognize when you say brilliant that you're also saying Bri."