Aaron Cao

September 2020

ENGL-112B

Warner

*The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas

1. Author Biography

Angie Thomas is a YA Literature writer who was the first black teenager to graduate in creative writing at Belhaven University, a private Christian college. She obtained her BFA, and was inspired to write her debut novel, *The Hate U Give,* after the shooting of Oscar Grant. Thomas cites Tupac Shakur as an inspiration for her writing and strives to "show truth and tear down stereotypes" in her writing,

2. Summary

Starr Carter is a teenage girl who navigates both her poor neighborhood and her wealthy private school. These two places are completely opposites of each other, as Starr has to be careful in her language at the private school to avoid being stereotyped as the “ratchet” black girl. Starr’s life changes drastically when she witnesses the shooting of her best friend, Khalil, and is afraid to speak out. However she eventually finds her voice to testify against the police officer. When the police officer that shot him becomes acquitted, riots occur throughout the neighborhood and best friends turn against each other due to beliefs. Although the police is a major antagonist, looming over Starr’s neighborhood is the gang leader King, who is the drug dealer and gangster that threatens Starr’s family.

3. Significant Quotes

“For at least seven hours I don’t have to talk about One-Fifteen. I don't have to think about Khalil. I just have to be normal Starr and normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I’m Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang- if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she’s the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is non-confrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto.” (71).

Although fictional, this book depicts the struggles many Black students face in school, with their linguistic identity expressions constantly switching between places. Starr compromises her cultural identity in the predominantly white area that expects her to talk in a certain way, alienating their everyday language for a White Mainstream English. Starr’s experience with switching the way she communicates is a common experience for many Black students in schools.

“You got the folks like Brenda, who think they need them [the drugs] to survive, and then you got the Khalils, who think they need to sell them to survive. The Brendas can’t get jobs unless they’re clean, and they can’t pay for rehab unless they got jobs. When the Khalils get arrested for selling drugs, they either spend most of their life in prison, another billion-dollar industry, or they have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling drugs again. That’s the hate they’re giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That’s Thug Life.” (170).

This quote explains the systemic racism ingrained within society against Black people. The novel explores racial injustice towards blacks such as police brutality, as well as the community formed within Black neighborhoods that involve gangs. Starr’s father explains how the entire system is against Black people, explaining the vicious cycle that prevents Black people from rising in society. Once the Khalils who are desperate for money and resort to selling drugs get arrested, they have trouble rehabilitating to society and continue back to their previous crimes, most likely receiving a second sentence that is much harsher.

“I’ve seen it happen over and over again: a black person gets killed just for being black, and all hell breaks loose. I’ve tweeted RIP hashtags, reblogged pictures on Tumblr, and signed every petition out there. I always said that if it happened to somebody, I would have the loudest voice, making sure the world knew what went down.

“Now I am that person, and I’m too afraid to speak.” (34-35)

After witnessing the murder of his best friend, Starr is afraid to speak because of the repercussions that she might face, potentially alienating her friends at school or giving police further cause to target her or her family. Throughout the novel, Starr struggles to find her voice and be active for the movement and readers see the growth and bravery that causes her to eventually testify against the police officer.

4. Plans on Teaching

In a classroom setting, this book explores topics relevant in the 21st century, which are issues that have been brought up in society. Some children and adolescents have certainly already been exposed to issues of racial injustice, whether through the news on television or other media. This novel would teach young adults to recognize such a current social issue as well as prepare them for it.Additionally, it could be introduced alongside the canonical novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as both novels contain issues of racial injustice and discrimination. While students may feel that *To Kill a Mockingbird* occurs in a century where values are different from the ones today, *The Hate U Give* would show that despite a shift in values over the decades, the racial issues still exist in 21st century society. The pop culture references within the novel are fairly recent ones that most students would understand, showing how recently the book was written. An age appropriate level would be in high school, as the novel contains graphic descriptions of a murder and various drug references. It ventures beyond the self in the Stages of Literary Appreciation, exploring social issues such as racial injustice. In addition, it fits within both categories of “Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss” as well as “Chapter 6: Books about Identitiy, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions.” Starr loses her best friend Khalil, and struggles with her identity in a predominantly White school, facing discrimination for skin color, and struggles to speak up and testify in the case regarding the loss of his friend.

5. Text Complexity

Quantitative Complexity: According to the Lexile and ATOS tools,  *The Hate U Give* has a Lexile range of approximately 420L-820L and an ATOS level of 3.9. This means that the novel is extremely easy to follow, containing sentences that are shorter and more familiar concrete words. In addition, the dialogue’s usage of slang incorporates the students’ everyday language making the vocabulary even easier for students to understand. The easier sentences clearly reveal the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist throughout the story and are shown in the everyday dialogue.

Qualitative Complexity: The novel contains drug references, sexual references, slang, and cursing, which are relatable to students, especially with the various pop culture references. The language used adds to the complexity because it shows the contemporary time of the novel, showing how relevant the issues are today. In addition, the language shows the strong emotions and conflicting feelings of the narrator as she goes through her everyday life. Her language shown at school in the story is different from from her internal dialogue, however this language is a perfect match when she interacts with those who live near her. This book is different from other books of its genre because it showcases other facets of racial injustice that may not be seen: police brutality, casual racism from everyday stereotypes, as well as how deeply ingrained racism is within the system.

Reader Task Considerations: *The Hate U Give* certainly relates to the political movement *Black Lives Matter* or other social movements which are commonly shown throughout the media. Some students today may not be informed of such an issue, or would like to explore more about such a serious issue that is affecting America today. *The Hate U Give* may not give an answer to such an issue, but it informs those unaware about how racial injustice affects Black-American citizens in society, and encourages them to take a stand against such injustice. In addition, minorities and people of different cultures can relate to the novel’s experiences throughout high school, and can even be prepared to deal with racial issues in life, whether it’s the casual racism of peers or much more. Overall if implemented within a teaching unit, students will be interested in reading *The Hate U Give* because of the language and current issues addressed within the novel.