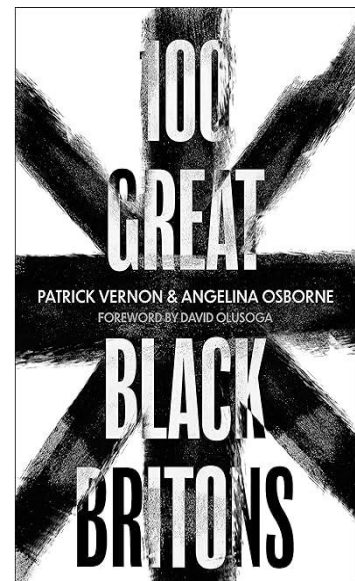
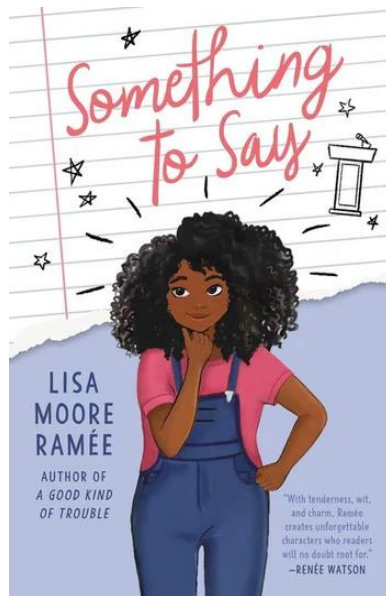
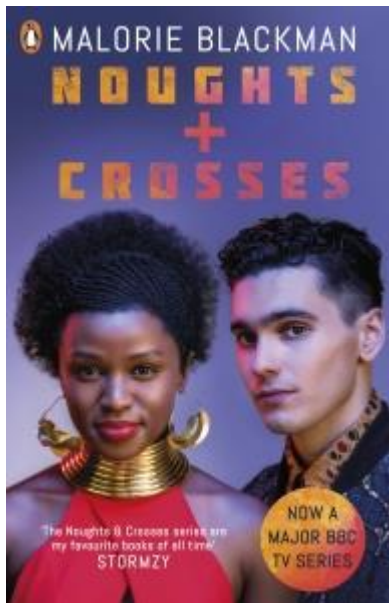


Welcome to the Cardinal Pole School collection of **brilliant Black literature.**



The book is divided into three sections:

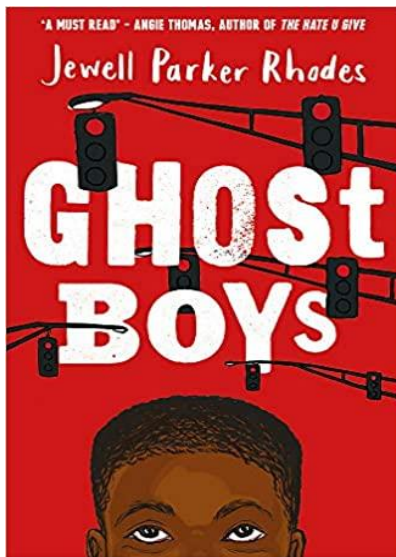
Years Seven to Nine

Years Nine and Ten

Sixth Form

All books featured are available in our Library.

Years Seven, Eight and Nine



Here is the blurb for this novel:

ALIVE

Twelve-year-old Jerome doesn't get into trouble. He goes to school. He does his homework. He takes care of his little sister.

Then Jerome is shot by a police officer who mistakes his toy gun for a real threat.

DEAD

As a ghost, watching his family trying to cope with his death, Jerome begins to notice other ghost boys.

Each boy has a story and they all have something in common...

Bit by bit, Jerome begins to understand what really happened - not just to him, but to all of the ghost boys.

DEAD

How small I look. Laid out flat, my stomach touching ground. My right knee bent and my brand-new Nikes stained with blood.

I stop and stare at my face, my right cheek flattened on concrete. My eyes are wide open. My mouth, too.

I'm dead.

I thought I was bigger. Tough. But I'm just a bit of nothing.

My arms are outstretched like I was trying to fly like Superman.

I'd barely turned, sprinting. Pow, pow. Two bullets. Legs gave way. I fell flat. Hard.

I hit snowy ground.

Ma's running. She's wailing. "My boy, my boy." A policeman holds her back. Another policeman is standing over me, murmuring, "It's a kid. It's a kid."

Ma's struggling. She gasps like she can't breathe; she falls to her knees and screams.

I can't bear the sound.

Sirens wail. Other cops are coming. Did someone call an ambulance?

I'm still dead. Along on the field. The policeman closest to me is rubbing his head. In his hand, his gun dangles. The other policeman is watching a like she's going to hurt someone. Then, he shouts, "stay back!"

People are edging closer, snapping pictures, taking pictures with their phones. "Stay back!" The policeman's hand covers his holster.

More people come. Some shout. I hear my name. "Jerome, it's Jerome". Still, everyone stays back. Some curse; some cry.

Doesn't seem fair. Nobody ever paid me any attention. I skated by. Kept my head low.

Now I'm famous.

Chicago Tribune

Officer: "I had no choice!"

Jerome Rogers, 12, shot at abandoned Green Street lot. Officer says, "He had a gun".

Alive

December 8

Morning

"Come straight home. You hear me, Jerome? Come straight home.'

'I will.' I always do.

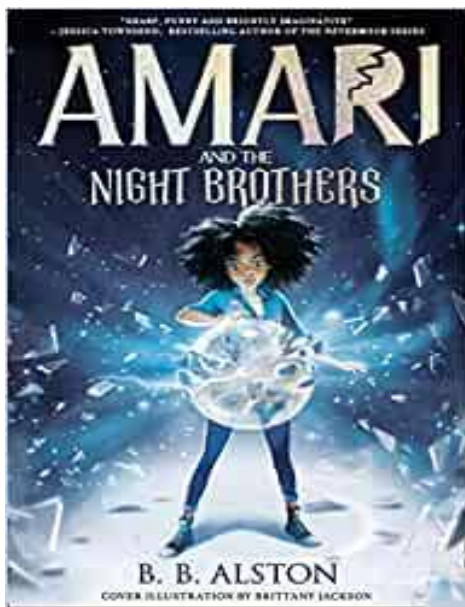
Ma leans down, hugs me. Grandma slides another stack of pancakes on my plate.

"Promise?"

"Promise." Same ritual every day.

I stuff a pancake into my mouth. Kim sticks out her tongue.

I'm the good kid. Wish I wasn't. I've got troubles but I don't get *in* trouble. Big difference.



This extract comes from close to the start of the novel. The protagonist has just taken delivery of a briefcase which she is not allowed to open before midnight...

Amari Peters knows three things.

Her big brother Quinton has gone missing.
No one will talk about it.
His mysterious job holds the secret . . .

So when Amari gets an invitation to the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs, she's certain this is her chance to find Quinton. But first she has to get her head around the new world of the Bureau, where mermaids, aliens and magicians are real, and her roommate is a were dragon.

Amari must compete against kids who've known about the supernatural world their whole lives, and when each trainee is awarded a special supernatural talent, Amari is given an illegal talent – one that the Bureau views as dangerous.

With an evil magician threatening the whole supernatural world, and her own classmates thinking she is the enemy, Amari has never felt more alone. But if she doesn't pass the three tryouts, she may never find out what happened to Quinton . .

11.58pm

I'm in my room, sitting at the head of my bed with my knees pulled up to my chest. The briefcase sits at the foot of my bed, looking suspicious.

I check the hallway again. Mam's been home for a few hours, but no light shines under her door. She must be asleep. Good. Whatever's inside this briefcase, Quinton made it clear that I'm supposed to see it.

11:59pm.

I pace back and forth. Okay, I'm totally tripping, right? What do I honestly think is going to happen?

12am

CLICK! HISSSSSS...

I swear I jump a whole foot in the air. I creep over to my bed and take a seat. After a calming breath, I lift the top of the briefcase. Green and purple stripes stare back at me.

I reach inside, pull the smooth fabric from the briefcase and hold up what seems like a suit jacket to the light. It might be the ugliest thing I've ever seen. I reach inside and pull out the matching trousers. I have no idea what's going on but can't help a smile. This is definitely Quinton's corny sense of humour at work.

And there's more in the suitcase – an envelope and a pair of thick metallic shades. Attached to the shades is a chain of Post-it notes.

Please lie down before putting these on

I'm serious about lying down first

#Pinkie-swear level serious!

OK, OK, I get it! I bring the shades closer. Aside from being heavy, they seem pretty normal. Certainly not dangerous enough for three warnings. Are they supposed to make them dizzy or something? Well, if it's pinkie-swear serious then fine, I'll lie down.

I shove the briefcase to the edge of my bed and slide back before sliding the glasses on to my face. I'm not sure what the big deal –

'Amari?' comes a voice I'd recognise anywhere.

Quinton?

Chapter three

I whip my head around to see my brother standing in the middle of my bedroom, a nervous grin on his face. I scramble off the bed so fast I trip over my own feet. Next thing I know I'm across the room with my arms wrapped around the middle. I'm shaking as his arms wrap around me too.

'I missed you too.' He laughs.

I relax my grip on him and he steps back, out of my arms. I don't think I've ever really felt so happy in my whole life. My big brother is here. Like really here. 'How? Where have you been? We've got to tell Mama!' I can't get the words out fast enough as I stare up at his very alive face, a big, goofy grin suiting below his wide eyes and uneven hairline.

'I'll explain everything. But for now, I just need you to trust me. OK?'

Of course I trust him. But how did he just appear out of nowhere? 'Um, OK.'

'Follow me!' He turns and runs out of the room.

I give chase, skidding to a stop in front of Mama's darkened doorway. I have to tell her Quinton is back. She won't need to be sad any more. We won't have to fight any more either. Everything can go back to the way it was before.

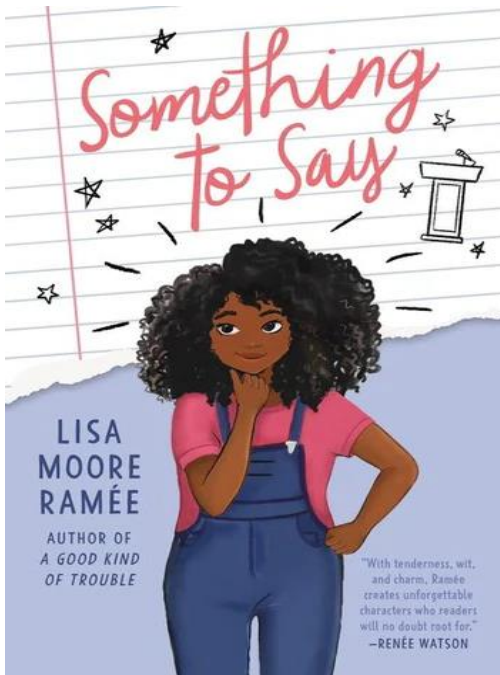
'There's no time,' Quinton calls from the living room. 'We've got to hurry.' He opens the front door and dashes into the hallway.

I glance back at Mama's door as I sprint through the living room, wondering if Quinton's voice might have woken her. Her light doesn't click on.

But I can't let Quinton go now. I run after him and it's all I can do just to keep up. 'Where are we going?'

'The roof,' he calls back.

The roof?



This is an extract from the middle of the novel:

Used to be, Saturday mornings were magic.

Mama sleeps in on Saturdays, so even though in the afternoon she would have a whole list of chores for me, the morning was my time.

If I wanted, I could do absolutely no homework. Just lie in bed until ten and watch stuff on my laptop or count cracks in my ceiling.

Malcolm would get up, toss down some breakfast, and then spend hours outside, practicing his ball handling and taking a million shots. If I was feeling nice, I'd get up and rebound for him. But sometimes I'd pull the covers over my head and wish he'd find something else to do on a Saturday morning.

That was before.

I didn't know how much I'd miss the badoonk, badoonk of the ball when Malcolm went away to college. I knew I'd miss him, but I didn't think I'd miss the noise, or the stinky uniforms in the laundry room, or his bad attitude after a loss. But I missed it, maybe because Malcolm was all those things. Like if we are all puzzles, then those were Malcolm's pieces.

And he's back, but there's no basketball. So what does Malcolm's puzzle look like now? What's he made of after I've taken such a big piece away?

Maybe it's silly of me to think that Rox could help piece Malcolm together, but it's the only plan I have, so I reach over to my nightstand and grab my phone.

I missed you at the fish fry last night. Malcolm did too. He said so. And the shrimp was yummy!

Rox sends back a crying emoji face. Like she's real sad to have missed it.

That's a good sign. I nestle in my covers, trying to slide into the magic of a Saturday morning. I want to feel loose.

Eleven-year-old Jenae doesn't have any friends—and she's just fine with that. She's so good at being invisible in school, it's almost like she has a superpower, like her idol, Astrid Dane. At home, Jenae has plenty of company, like her no-nonsense mama; her older brother, Malcolm, who is home from college after a basketball injury; and her beloved grandpa, Gee.

Then a new student shows up at school—a boy named Aubrey with fiery red hair and a smile that won't quit. Jenae can't figure out why he keeps popping up everywhere she goes. The more she tries to push him away, the more he seems determined to be her friend. Despite herself, Jenae starts getting used to having him around.

But when the two are paired up for a class debate about the proposed name change for their school, Jenae knows this new friendship has an expiration date. Aubrey is desperate to win and earn a coveted spot on the debate team.

There's just one problem: Jenae would do almost anything to avoid speaking up in front of an audience—including risking the first real friendship she's ever had.

And I almost do it too. I snuggle into my cozy blankets and comfy pillow, letting worry and guilt slip off me like forgotten socks, but then loud bangs outside make me leap out of bed.

Were those gunshots? In our backyard?

I run out of my room and smack into Mama.

‘Stay inside!’ she hollers at me.

Malcolm’s door opens, and he sticks his head out. ‘What is going on?’

‘Watch Jena!’ mama shouts at him as she bolts downstairs. More gunfire pops, and then Mama’s out the back door, and I hear her yelling but I can’t make out what she’s saying.

‘Malcolm?’ I ask my brother, my heart racing in my chest. But he doesn’t know what’s going on either and just reaches back into his room for his crutches.

It doesn’t take me more than a few seconds to make it downstairs, but it takes Malcolm longer, and I’m already at the French doors with my hand on the doorknob before Malcolm can catch me.

But his voice makes me stop.

‘Jena!’ he hollers. ‘Hold up.’

I stop, but that doesn’t stop me from staring outside, my hand twisting on the knob.

It’s not hard to see the whole backyard. Not hard to see Mama shouting at Gee, who’s got a tiny pistol in his hand. It’s dull gray, and so small, and it looks ridiculous in his big hand.

Mama tries to grab the gun from him, and everybody knows that’s a bad idea.

Gee raises his hands and switches the gun from one hand to the other while Mama tries to jump and reach his hand. My heart thuds in my chest like cannonballs. What is he doing with a gun?

‘What is wrong with him?’ Malcolm says, pushing me out of the way and opening the door.

‘He’s going to shoot mama!’ I cry, following behind him.

Malcolm grabs me by the shoulder, as if he knew I was going to try and race outside. ‘No, he’s not.’ His grip on my arm tightens. ‘Stay. In. Side.’ He gives my arms a shake, and his fingers are starting to pinch. I nod fast.

Then he crutches outside, leaving me all alone.

‘Gee!’ Malcolm shouts. ‘Hey Gee!’

Mama yells at Malcolm to go back inside, but he ignores her. Gee looks at Malcolm, and then at mama, and then up at the gun he’s still holding above his head. His hand lowers, and with all my might I think, STOP!

And Gee crumples to the ground.

Suggested Further reading for Years 7-9

Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History

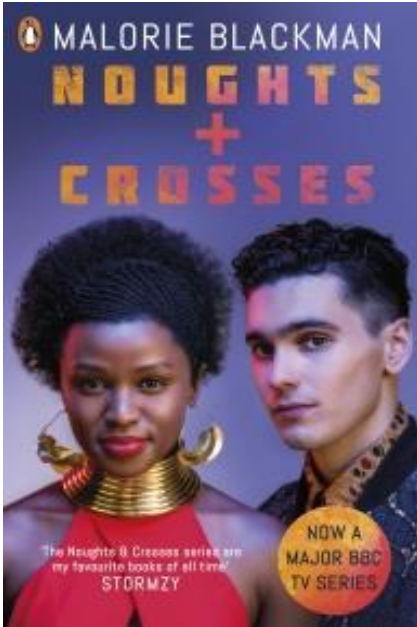
Little Leaders: Exceptional Men in Black History

What Mamma Left Me by Renee Watson

Ghost by Jason Reynolds

Striking Out by Ian Wright and Musa Okwonga

The following books are suitable for **Years Ten and Eleven:**



This classic novel is a retelling of Romeo and Juliet. It follows Sephy, who is a Cross: she lives a life of privilege and power. Callum is a nought: he's considered to be less than nothing - a blanker, there to serve Crosses. What would happen if the two fell in love?

twenty-three. Sephy

One of these days, Callum's going to forget himself and actually look pleased to see me. I just won't hold my breath whilst I'm waiting, that's all. 'There's your ticket.' I handed it over to Callum. I'd raided my bank account to get enough to buy two first class tickets. I could've asked Mother for the money, or Sarah, but then they would've wanted to know exactly why I wanted it. No, this was much better. It made the day 'ours' somehow, because the money was mine and nothing to do with my mother or anyone else. I smiled. 'This day is going to be perfect.' I could feel it in my water.

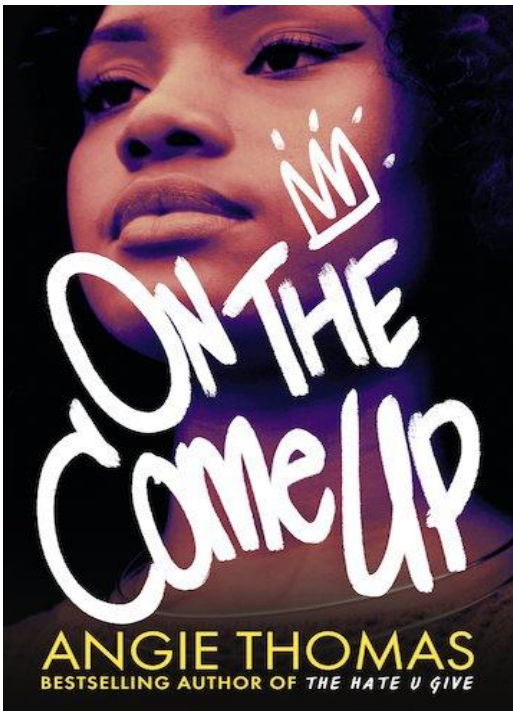
twenty-four. Callum

The train journey from hell, that's what it was. A journey which ruined the rest of the day as far as I was concerned. We were on our way to Celebration Park. There were only three more stops to go – when they got on. Police officers on a routine inspection. Two of them, boredom plastered over their faces. 'ID passes please. ID passes please.' Sephy looked surprised. I wasn't. We both dug out our ID cards as they made their way up the first-class train carriage. I watched the cursory glances they gave the ID passes of all the

Crosses in the carriage. I was the only nought. Would they stop and ask me lots of questions? Huh! Is pig poo smelly? An officer of trim build and sporting a pencil-thin moustache stood right in front of me. He looked at me then took my ID pass without a word. 'Name?' he snapped out. What's the matter? Can't you read? 'Callum McGregor.' 'Age?' 'Fifteen.' Can't read numbers either, huh? That's too bad. 'Where are you going?' None of your business.

"They had the scent of blood in their nostrils and I didn't stand a chance, no matter what I said or did."

'Celebration Park.' 'Why?' To cut my toenails. 'Picnic.' 'Where d'you live?' On the moon. 'Meadowview.' Meadowview by euphemistic name only. Rubbishshackview would've been more appropriate. The officer looked from my ID card to my face and back again. My thumbprint was on the card. Was he going to break out a magnifying glass and ask me to hold out my right hand so he could compare the imprint on the card to my print? It wouldn't've surprised me. 'You're a long way from home, boy.' I bit down on the inside of my bottom lip, not trusting myself to speak. Both officious officials stood in front of me now. There was barely enough room to get a paperclip between their legs and my knees. I sighed. Ladies and gentlemen, for your delectation and delight, another performance of 'You're a nought and don't you ever forget it, blanker boy.' 'Let me see your ticket.' I handed it over. 'Where did you get the money to buy this kind of ticket?' I looked up at them, but didn't speak. What was there to say? They had the scent of blood in their nostrils and I didn't stand a chance, no matter what I said or did. So why bother? 'I asked you a question,' Moustaches reminded me. As if I'd forgotten. 'Did you buy this ticket?' Moustaches' accomplice asked. The truth or prevarication? What was Sephy thinking? I couldn't see her. The no-brain brothers were in the way. If only I could see her face. 'I asked you a question, boy. Did you buy this ticket?' 'No, I didn't,' I replied. 'Come with us, please.' Time to get my posterior pummelled. Time to get my derrière dealt with. Time to get my bum bounced right off the train."



Bri wants to be one of the greatest rappers of all time. As the daughter of an underground hip hop legend who died right before he hit big, Bri's got massive shoes to fill. But when her first song goes viral for all the wrong reasons, Bri finds herself at the centre of controversy and portrayed by the media as more menace than MC. And with an eviction notice staring her family down, Bri no longer just wants to make it – she has to. Even if it means becoming the very thing the public has made her out to be.

Aunt Pooh knocks on the side door. Feet shuffle and someone hollers out, "Who is it?"

"P" is all Aunt Pooh says.

Several locks click, and when the door opens, it's like that moment in Black Panther when they go through the hologram and enter the real Wakanda.

It's like we just stepped through a hologram that showed everyone else a run down house and into a studio.

It's not the fanciest, but it's better than I expected. The walls are covered in those cardboard cup holders that restaurants give when you have multiple drinks to carry. Soundproofing. There are several computer monitors at a table, with drum pads, keyboards, and speakers nearby. A mic sits on a stand over in a corner.

A potbellied bearded guy in a vest sits at the table.

"Whaddup, P?" he says with a mouthful of gold. His words come out slow, like somebody turned down the tempo on his voice.

"Whaddup, Doc?" Aunt Pooh slaps palms with him and the other guys. There are about six or seven of them. "Bri, this is Doc, the producer," Aunt Pooh says. Doc nods at me. "Doc, this is Bri, my niece. She 'bout to murder this beat you got for her."

"Hold up, you made that for this li'l girl?" some guy on the couch asks. "What she gon' do, spit some nursery rhymes?"

There go the smirks and snickers.

This is that stale and predictable nonsense Aunt Pooh warned me about when I first told her I wanted to be a rapper. She said I'd have to do double the work to get half the respect. On top of that, I gotta be just as cutthroat, and I better not show weakness. Basically, I gotta be one of the guys and then some in order to survive.

I look dude on the couch dead in his eyes. "Nah. I'll leave the nursery rhymes to you, Father Goose."

"Ooh," a couple of the guys say, and one or two crack up. Just like that, I'm one of them.

Doc chuckles. "He wish this beat was for him, that's all. Check it out."

He clicks some stuff on one of the computers and a bassheavy up-tempo beat blasts through the speakers.

Well, damn. It's nice as hell. Reminds me of soldiers marching for some reason.

Rat-tat-tat-tat ta-ta-tat-tat.

Rat-tat-tat-tat ta-ta-tat-tat.

I get my notebook out and flip through. Agh. Nothing I've got seems to go with this beat. It needs something new. Something tailored to it.

Aunt Pooh bounces on her heels. "Oooh-weeee! We really gon' be on the come up once this drops."

On the come up.

"Dun-dun-dun-dun, on the come up," I mumble. "Dundun-dun-dun, on the come up."

I close my eyes. The words are there, I swear. They're just waiting for me to find them.

I see Long throwing me to the ground. One false move would've stopped any chances of a come up.

"But you can't stop me on the come up," I mutter. "You can't stop me on the come up."

I open my eyes. Every single person in here watches me. "You can't stop me on the come up," I say, louder.

"You can't stop me on the come up. You can't stop me on the come up. You can't stop me, nope, nope."

Smiles slowly form and heads nod and bob.

"You can't stop me on the come up," Doc echoes. "You can't stop me on the come up."

One by one, they join in. Slowly, heads nod harder, and those few words become a chant.

"Yo! That's it!" Aunt Pooh shakes my shoulder. "That's what we—"

Her phone goes off. She glances at the screen and slips it back in her pocket. "I gotta go."

Hold up, what? "I thought you were staying with me?"

"I got some business to take care of. Scrap will be here."

He nods at her, like this is an agreement they made already. So *that's* why he's here. What the hell? "*This* is supposed to be our business," I say.

"I said I'll be back later, Bri. A'ight?"

She walks out, as if that's that.

"Excuse me," I tell the others, and rush out. I have to jog to catch up with Aunt Pooh. She opens her car door, but I grab it and shut it before she can get in. "Where you going?"

"Like I said, I got some business to take care of."

"Business" has been her code word for who knows what since I was seven years old and asked her how she made enough money to buy expensive sneakers.

"You're my manager," I say. "You can't leave now."

"Bri. Move," she says through her teeth.

"You're supposed to stay with me! You're supposed—"

To put that all aside. But truth is she never said she would.

I assumed.

"Bri, move," she repeats.

I step aside.

Moments later, her Cutlass disappears down the street, and I'm left in the dark, without a manager.

Worse, without my aunt. Curious eyes wait for me back in the studio. But I can't show weakness. Period. I clear my throat. "We're good."

"All right," Doc says. "You gotta come hard on this one. This your introduction to the world, know what I'm saying? What you want the world to know?"

I shrug.

He wheels his chair closer to me, leans forward, and asks, "What's the world done to you lately?"

It put my family in a messed-up situation.

It pinned me to the ground.

It called me a hoodlum.

"It's done a hell of a lot," I say.

Doc sits back with a smile. "Let 'em know how you feeling then."

Suggested Further reading for Year 10 and 11

Poor by Caleb Femi

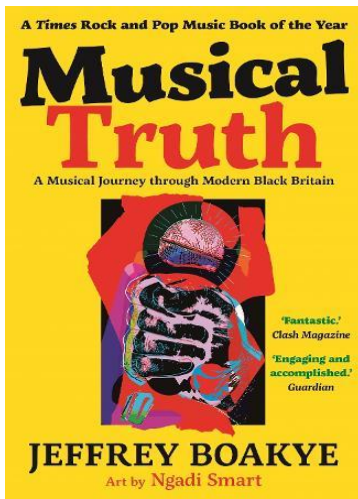
Slay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible

Legendborn by Tracy Deonn

Black Artists Shaping The World

I Will Not Be Erased: Our Stories Growing Up As People of Colour

Concrete Rose by Angie Thomas



Music can carry the stories of history like a message in a bottle.
Lord Kitchener, Neneh Cherry, Smiley Culture, Stormzy ...

Ground breaking musicians whose songs have changed the world. But how? This book features a song by a Black artist which reflects a specific moment in Black British history. This book redefines British history, the Empire and postcolonialism, and will invite you to think again about the narratives and major moments in history.

Black by Dave (2020)

So where do we go from here? This whole book has been about exploring black history and now here we are on the edge of 2020. Where do we go now? What does the future look like?

In 2019, a young rapper called Dave looked like the future, or at least part of a generation of young artists taking UK rap into the future.

Sometime you have to look back before you go forward. The song 'Black' does exactly this. It explores what it means to be black and British in the twenty-first century by looking carefully at black history. It's a slow, thoughtful song that talks about what it was like for African and Caribbean people who came to live and work in the UK, the difficulties faced with poverty and prejudice, and the strength we draw from our community. There is sadness in this song. Going further back, 'Black' talks about the history of colonialism that ripped Africa apart centuries ago, leaving place names like the Grain Coast, the Gold Coast, the Ivory Coast and the Slave Coast, based on what traders found most valuable.

But it also talks about how beautiful it is to be black. How black culture has been so popular for so many years, steering mainstream culture along the way.

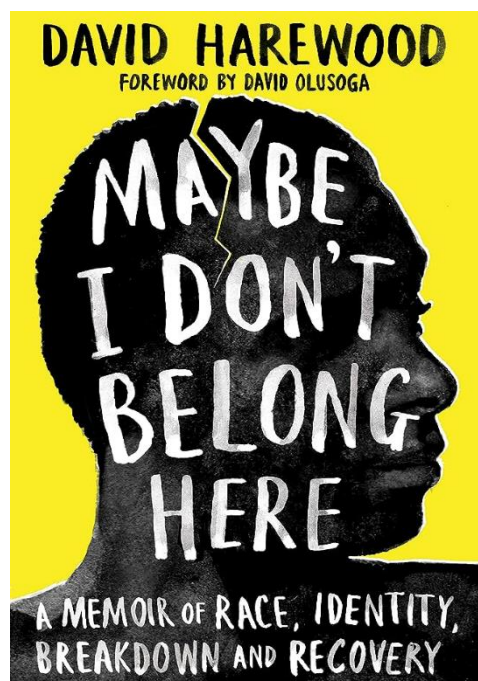
Dave is young, only twenty years when he wrote 'Black' but his words sound old and wise. In 2020, Dave performed a live version of 'Black' with extra lyrics criticising the government and calling the prime minister, Boris Johnson, racist. Later that year, during the COVID-19 lockdown, he posted message on Instagram accusing the government of not caring about NHS workers. He explained how his mother had worked for the NHS for years but hadn't been offered all of the help she needed to live comfortably.

At the beginning of this book I said that music can be three important things: a celebration, a way of talking about oppression and a type of resistance. 'Black' is all three of these things at the same time. It's angry but it's also poetic. It says that black is beautiful but painful. It's a fight against racism that makes you think.

Now, it's impossible to know where the journey will take us next. Maybe Dave, and others like him, will go into politics. Maybe they will inspire a child who will grow up to be the first black British prime minister. Maybe his songs, and all of the songs in this book, will end up being studied at schools and in history

exams. Who knows? We're living at such an exciting time, with musicians and artists taking a leading role in inspiring future generations.

The following books are suitable for students in Years 12 and 13



A Guardian review of actor David Harewood's memoir, *Maybe I Don't Belong Here* (2021).

In his hospital records, the esteemed actor David Harewood is described as a "large Black man". This means that during his stay on a psychiatric ward, aged 23, he was administered diazepam (to manage anxiety) and haloperidol (used to treat schizophrenia, delirium and agitation) at four times the recommended level. "Were they afraid of me?" he asks upon reading the files that detail the breakdown he had more than 30 years ago. There's a racist history of classifying black men as "giant" or "superhuman". Their perceived size has long been used as a justification for brutality. Think of the 2014 murder of Michael Brown, shot dead by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Wilson described himself as "like a five-year-old holding on to [wrestler] Hulk Hogan". "I'm absolutely convinced that had I been in America at the time of my breakdown, I'd most likely be dead," writes Harewood. "It took not one or two but six police officers to hold me down. One false move by me or any of them could have ended my life."

Britain could have killed him too. Despite making up around 3% of the population, black people account for 8% of deaths in custody. Their mental health is also at disproportionate risk. "Clearly, there is something about living in Britain that is tough for Black people," writes Harewood. Yes, and that something is racial trauma, the meat and bones of his staggering memoir, *Maybe I Don't Belong Here*. This isn't the story of someone who is simply grateful his life wasn't folded up into a statistic. Nor is it a tale of personal triumph, despite the fact that Harewood went from a prison cell, having been sectioned twice, to starring

in TV series *Homeland* and the Oscar-nominated film *Blood Diamond*. This is a story about a young man who, despite his talent and ambition, was eaten alive by white supremacy.

That Harewood, during his first psychotic episode, heard the voice of Martin Luther King telling him to head to Camden, north London, at 3am on a mission to close the spiritual gap between good and evil has everything to do with the post-racial vision of the famous “I have a dream” speech. “I felt I was already living Dr King’s dream,” writes Harewood. But he wasn’t. Having just graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, he struggled with a series of negative work experiences, from bullying to bad reviews: “Looked more like Mike Tyson than Romeo,” one critic wrote. This period, coupled with a weed habit, caused Harewood’s mind to unravel.

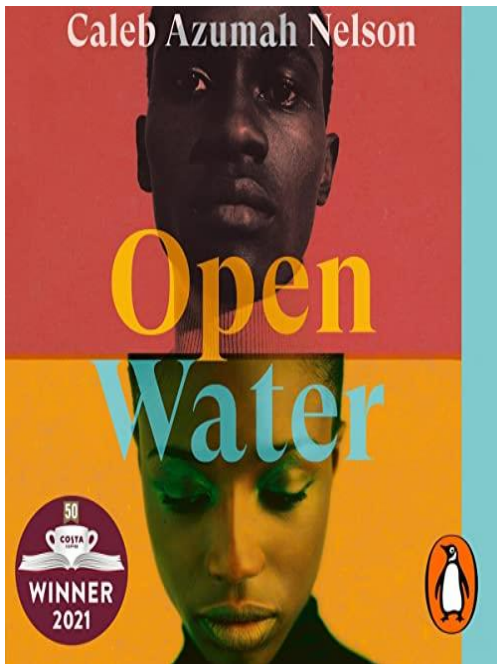
Fragments of glass ended up in his breakfast one morning after someone threw a brick through his family’s window

His troubles can be traced back to his childhood. Born in 1965 to parents who’d arrived in Birmingham from Barbados, Harewood, like his father (who was also sectioned), found that the assimilation process led to deep emotional conflict and placed a big strain on his mental health. He turned his nose up at his mother’s West Indian cooking in favour of sausages and chips – an early sign of internalised anti-blackness – and racism seeped into every corner of his life. Fragments of glass ended up in his breakfast one morning after someone threw a brick through a window, while he was called a “coon” by Leeds United fans. He details a pivotal moment when, aged seven, an elderly white man called him a little black bastard and told him to get “the fuck out of my country”, causing him to split in two. “There was now a Black half and an English half and I could feel myself slowly coming apart,” he writes. Those halves remained segregated for a long time. Medical notes from Whittington psychiatric hospital read: “Patient believes he is two persons”.

David Harewood: ‘I could feel myself slowly coming apart.’ Photograph: Noah Asanias/The Guardian
There are many sweet anecdotes in the book. Harewood gets into Rada after almost cancelling the audition, unaware of its reputation at the time. Lock-ins at the Birmingham wine bar where he worked saw him reciting Shakespeare to his wide-eyed friends. In New York, he even meets Maya Angelou, who would “slip into poetry mid-conversation if something caught in her mind”.

But, refreshingly, there’s no happy ending. Though Harewood recovered and never saw the crusty walls and parquet floors of a mental institution again, he’s aware that the environment that contributed to his psychosis is unchanged. “The country’s seemingly rising tide of populist nationalism reminds me of a time I’ve lived through before, only this time instead of people chasing me through gardens, they are writing newspaper columns and spewing division from social media, from radio shows and from parliamentary pews,” he writes. “This time it’s my mind that has to be nimble and quick to survive.”

Maybe I Don’t Belong Here is a harrowing read and one I’ll never forget, not least because in the wake of the [race report](#) by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, a shared story is a lifeline for my people.



Two young people meet at a pub in South East London. Both are Black British, both won scholarships to private schools where they struggled to belong, both are now artists—he a photographer, she a dancer—trying to make their mark in a city that by turns celebrates and rejects them. Tentatively, tenderly, they fall in love. But two people who seem destined to be together can still be torn apart by fear and violence.

You lost your grandma during the summer you were sure you could lose no more. You knew before you knew. It wasn't thunder's distant rumbling like a hungry stomach. It wasn't the sky so grey you were worried the light would not shine again. It wasn't the strain in your mother's voice, asking you not to leave home before she got there. You just knew.

You return to the memory of a different time. Sitting behind the compound in Ghana, where embers of heat so late in the day make you sweat. As your grandma sits on a rickety wooden stool, chopping ingredients for a meal to be prepared, you'll tell her that you met a stranger in a bar, and you knew before you knew. She will smile, and laugh to herself, keeping her amusement contained, encouraging her to go on. You'll tell her how this woman was slight, but tall, carried herself well, not in a way as to intentionally intimidate or placate, but in a way that implied sureness. She had kindness on her features and didn't mind when you hugged her.

What else? Your grandma will ask.

Hmm. You'll tell her that when you and the stranger introduced yourselves, you both played down the things you did, the things you loved. Your grandma will pause at this detail. Why? She'll ask. You don't know. Perhaps it was because you had both lost that year, and though you kept telling yourself you couldn't lose any more, it continued to happen.

So? There's no solace in the shade, your grandma will say.

I know, I know. I think both of us kind negate the whole encounter. It was too brief. There was too much going on. It wasn't the right time.

Your grandma will put down the knife, and say, It's never the right time.

You'll sigh and gaze towards a sky which shows no signs of darkening, and say, I guess there was something in the room that night, which I didn't feel until I met her. Something which, looking back, I couldn't ignore.

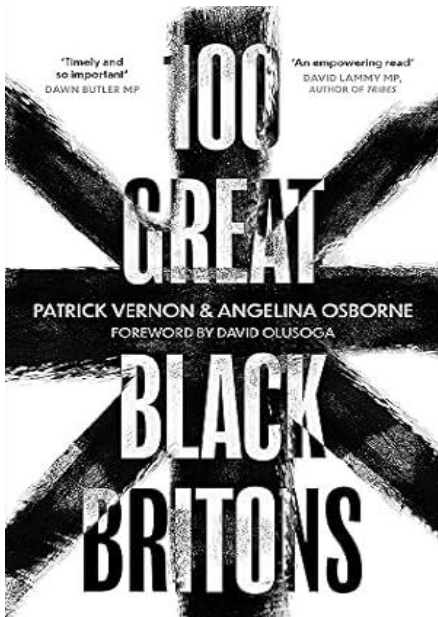
When you sow a seed, it will grow. Somehow, some way, it will grow.

Mmm. I agree. I just... met this woman and she wasn't a stranger. I knew we had met before. I knew we would meet again.

How did you know?

I just knew.

And in this place, a memory from a different time, you would like to believe your grandma will be satisfied with this. That she will give the same wry, contained smile and laugh to herself again.



Benjamin Zephaniah's poetry is a living entity that reflects Britain's ethnically diverse nature. He is the people's laureate and was a

pioneer of the performance poetry scene in the late 1970s and 1980s; his talent saw him shortlisted for the chair of Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1989. Zephaniah engages with a dual vision of British society in his poetry that is staunchly Black British; it transcends racial and cultural boundaries, and is a product of the meeting of two cultures and traditions: British and Caribbean. In 2008, Zephaniah was included in The Times's list of Britain's top fifty post-war poets; he received international acclaim and has contributed to many radio programmes and documentaries about culture, literature, politics and race.

Zephaniah's success is all the more remarkable as he had great difficulty reading and writing as a boy (a consequence of undiagnosed dyslexia), and has been written off by his teachers as a failure. He learned his poetic skills on the street, in church, from sound systems and from listening to poems by the Jamaican folklorist Louise Bennett. Born in Birmingham of Jamaican-Barbadian heritage, Zephaniah's negative school experiences were exacerbated by him having to frequently move house with his mother to escape his violent father. By thirteen he was expelled from school and got involved in petty crime; a later incident saw him sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The time he spent in detention made the young Zephaniah decide to do something more constructive with his life. A lover of words and performance, as a child Zephaniah had written his first poem in opposition to a teacher who told him that Christopher Columbus had discovered America. He had been performing in church since he was eleven, when he was admired for his ability to rap all the books of the Bible. He became a DJ on the local sound-system scene and was popular for lacing his 'toasts' with humour and sharp social commentary. Immersion in sound-system culture made Zephaniah more confident in his writing, and in 1979 he moved to London, and the following year he published his first collection of poems, *Pen Rhythm* (1980) with Page One Books, an underground publishing house that Zephaniah had founded

Patrick Vernon's landmark 100 Great Black Britons campaign of 2003 was one of the most successful movements to focus on the role of people of African and Caribbean descent in British history. Frustrated by the widespread and continuing exclusion of the Black British community from the mainstream popular conception of 'Britishness', despite Black people having lived in Britain for over a thousand years, Vernon set up a public poll in which anyone could vote for the Black Briton they most admired.

The response to this campaign was incredible. As a result, a number of Black historical figures were included on the national school curriculum and had statues and memorials erected and blue plaques put up in their honour. Mary Seacole was adopted by the Royal College of Nursing and was given the same status as Florence Nightingale. Children and young people were finally being encouraged to feel pride in their history and a sense of belonging in Britain.

Now, with this book, Vernon and Osborne have relaunched the campaign with an updated list of names and accompanying portraits - including new role models and previously little-known historical figures. Each entry explores in depth the individual's contribution to British history - a contribution that too often has been either overlooked or dismissed.

with some of his friends in Stratford, East London. He started performing at various venues and built a large following on the performance poetry circuit. In 1985 his second collection, *The Dread Affair: Collected Poems*, caused a stir as it reflected the frustrations of a generation of Black British youth and contained a number of poems attacking the British legal system. He extended the political nature of his poems internationally with *Rasta Time in Palestine* (1990), inspired by a visit to the Palestinian occupied territories.

In 2003 Zephaniah was at the centre of a controversy when he turned down the honour of an OBE offered to him by the Blair government. He explained his reasons for rejecting the honour in an article written in the Guardian, describing what empire conjured up for him:

It is because of this concept of empire that my British education led me to believe that the history of black people started with slavery and that we were born slaves, and should be grateful that we were given freedom by our caring white masters. It is because of this idea of empire that black people like myself don't even know our true names or our true historical culture...Benjamin Zephaniah OBE – no way. I am profoundly anti-Empire.

This position was consistent with Zephaniah's long-held anti-establishment stance, showing how he viewed the poet as a public figure. Zephaniah's poems are defined by their rhythm and their approach to language, and are filled with hope, humour and laughter. He once called himself an 'alternative broadcaster,' a social commentator and observer, covering many topics poetically, from race relations to the royal family, from the environment to politics. He also uses satire to criticise and denounce the exploitation of underdeveloped countries by the 'first world,' negative stereotyping and the power of the tabloid press. His 2001 collection *Too Black, Too Strong*, inspired by his tenure as poet-in-residence at Michael Mansfield's QC's Tooks Chambers, is a celebration of the best of Britain as expressed through its ethnic diversity, and is also an assertion of his Black Britishness. Benjamin Zephaniah is an important player on the British literary and cultural scene. He is a wordsmith, a griot, who uses satire, parody and political commentary to shine a light on what unites and divides Britain.

Further reading for Sixth Form

Anything by Audre Lorde

Anything by Octavia Butler

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison

Poor by Caleb Femi

Part of a Story That Started Before Me: Poems Selected by George The Poet

Unspoken by Guvna B

Africa is Not a Country by Dipo Faloyin

Don't Touch My Hair by Emma Dabiri