

TEACHERS' NOTES



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These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

From the international phenomenon Angie Thomas comes a hard-hitting return to Garden Heights with the story of Maverick Carter, Starr's father, set seventeen years before the events of the award-winning *The Hate U Give*.

With his King Lord dad in prison and his mom working two jobs, seventeen-year-old Maverick Carter helps the only way he knows how: slinging drugs. Life's not perfect, but he's got everything under control. Until he finds out he's a father... Suddenly it's not so easy to deal drugs and finish school with a baby dependent on him for everything. So when he's offered the chance to go straight, he takes it. But when King Lord blood runs through your veins, you don't get to just walk away.

This novel will raise themes and issues that will allow purposeful links with the curriculum for Sex and Relationships Education in KS4. You may find the following websites and resources useful:

- <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/sex-and-relationship-education-sre-21st-century>
- <https://www.fpa.org.uk/relationships-and-sex-education/teachers>
- <https://schoolofsexed.org/>
- <https://www.brook.org.uk/rse-workshops-for-young-people/>
- <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/teaching-resources>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/gcse-national-5-pshe-modern-studies/zfwtrj6>

Themes and events will also allow opportunities to link with Drug and Alcohol Education. The PSHE Association contains a wealth of curriculum guidance and resources to support teachers' subject knowledge and students' learning in this area, including specifically targeted resources for KS4: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/drug-and-alcohol-education-%E2%80%94-teacher-guidance>

The novel also raises questions about the euro-centricity of the American public school curriculum, which is equally relevant to the British education system, and the lack of Black history taught to students. This may prompt reflections about the wider school curriculum available to the pupils reading this book. Organisations such as The Black Curriculum (<https://theblackcurriculum.com>) and texts such as *Black and British: A Forgotten History* by David Olusoga (Pan Macmillan) or *Black and British: A Short, Essential History* (Pan Macmillan) will help to further develop teachers' and students' curriculum knowledge and understanding in this area. Other websites and resources to explore this idea further can be found here:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z7g66v4>
- <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/black-history-month>

These discussion points are designed to support students in reading the text as part of a book group or whole class study, but could also be provided to students reading the book individually.

Reading is a social process and students having points to discuss such as these will enrich the reading experience, allowing them to provide opinions and alternative viewpoints and to discuss and debate themes, characters and issues raised, with each reader bringing their own personal experiences to create a richer shared understanding and to think more critically about the text as a whole.

The questions and reflections outlined in these notes could be suggested prior to reading the given chapters so that the pupils are thinking about them as they read, or could be suggested following reading the relevant chapters.



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Before You Start:

- Pupils may have read Angie Thomas' other novels and, as this book is a prequel to *The Hate U Give*, her debut novel, you may want to find out if the group have read the book or if they have seen the film and discuss their responses to this, reflecting on what they might expect of the story and characters given this prior knowledge.

Chapters 1-6:

- Consider the title of the book, *Concrete Rose*, alongside the dedication at the start of the book; what does this suggest to you about the novel? What do you notice about the imagery created by this juxtaposition between the hard concrete and the delicate rose? Who do you think might be the "roses growing in concrete" that the book is dedicated to?
- Reflecting on the opening chapter, what does the reader learn about the setting and characters in the story? What role does the voice of the narrator have in giving you a clear sense of time and place? How does the language used reinforce this? Are you able to work out where the book is set based on the language used? Does it feel authentic to you? Why or why not?
- What does the dialogue between the different characters in the opening suggest to you about the dynamic of the group? What can you learn about the hierarchy of the gang? What do you notice about the gender dynamics at play here? Do you think this will continue as you read on?
- What impression do you form of the central character Maverick? Does he remind you of other characters you have met in books or films, or maybe in real life?
- Considering the remaining chapters, what more do we learn about Maverick in these chapters? What impression do you have of his relationship with his mother? Were you surprised Ilesha ran away? What might have caused her to do this? What do you think of the dynamics between men and women, as well as girls and boys, in the novel so far?
- What impression do you have of how Maverick's life has changed in such a short space of time? How do you think he might cope with these changes longer term?
- What do you learn about Maverick's relationship with his father? What does Maverick's name suggest to you about his parents' personalities and their ambitions for their son? Does this challenge any stereotypes you think might exist about men in gangs?
- What do you notice about the support network Maverick has in place? Reflect on the moments of shared tenderness between Dre and Maverick as they bond over their experiences of fatherhood – is this what you expected given how the novel opened? What do you notice about the way in which the characters relate to each other in private, versus how they relate to one another in public? How does this contrast with the opening of the book and the impression of the characters created initially? Why do you think these differences in behaviour occur?
- Consider Mr and Mrs Wyatt, what role do you think they might play as the novel progresses?
- What did you notice about Lisa and Maverick's relationship? What do you notice about her ambitions for herself and her ambitions for Maverick? Are you surprised she reacted in the way that she did to the news of his fatherhood? What do you think each character might be thinking or feeling inside? How does this compare or contrast to how they show their feelings externally?

Chapters 7-11:

- Discuss the section in which Maverick first helps Mr Wyatt with his gardening, particularly in planting the roses. What do you notice about the developing relationship between Mr Wyatt and Maverick? What stood out to you or made a



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particular impact on you in this section of the novel? Did this relate back to any of the thoughts or ideas you had at the start of the book when you reflected on the title and dedication? Are there parts of this section that feel like they might be symbolic or metaphorical?

- Reflect on the relationship between Dre and Maverick and the different male role models that Maverick has in his life. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? What do you notice about Dre's ambitions for Maverick? In what way do they mirror his parents' and Lisa's ambitions for him? Why do you think he doesn't share these ambitions yet? What did you think when Dre challenged Maverick's notions of what defined him on p.107?
- Were you shocked that a central character like Dre was killed so early on in the novel? What was your reaction to his death?
- What do you notice about the way in which Maverick describes grief as a boulder you have to carry? What do you think about his idea that "men ain't supposed to cry" on p.112? Why do you think he might have this opinion?
- What more do you find out about each of the characters from their actions following Dre's murder?
- Given how the first section of the novel ends, what do you predict will happen next? Why do you think the first part of the novel was called Germination?

Chapters 12–19:

- What do you notice about Shawn and the way he supports Maverick? In what ways is his behaviour similar to Dre's? Is this what you expected? In what ways have all the men in the novel so far defied stereotypes? In what ways are they more nuanced characters than you might find in other novels, TV programmes or films which depict similar groups or individuals? Why do you think this might be?
- Discuss the passage in which Mr Wyatt asks Maverick to reflect on why Black men are portrayed in American culture as not feeling emotions, on p.150-151. You may wish to explore this further, and in relation to toxic masculinity across the US and UK, by reading some of the articles and watching videos from Jordan Stephens, of hip-hop duo Rizzle Kicks, such as:
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/23/toxic-masculinity-men-privilege-emotions-rizzle-kicks>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-45488644> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kamDDChUn0A>
Where do such ideas and stereotypes evolve from? How can these be harmful and to whom? How do you think we can change these ideas moving forward in society?
- What do you notice about the way King mocks Maverick for wanting to pursue his ambitions to finish school, get a stable job and raise his son? How does his behaviour differ from some of the other men in the novel so far? In what ways do you think he influences Maverick's decisions and choices? Why do you think Maverick is so affected by King's opinion of him?
- Reflect on Lisa's and Maverick's unplanned pregnancy; how do you think this will affect the young couple? What might this mean for Lisa's ambitions for both herself and Maverick? How do you think Maverick's mother feels about his second unplanned baby? What do you think Lisa is thinking and feeling at this point? What options might she have at this point and what would each option mean for her, her life and the relationships she has with key people?
- Discuss Maverick's interaction with his father in the jail; did you expect him to react in this way? Why do you think Maverick behaved in the way that he did?
- Consider the Thanksgiving gathering and the way in which Maverick reflects on how his life has changed since he became a father and Dre died. Consider the family dynamics revealed by this scene. What do the interactions further reveal to us about Maverick's personality?



- Discuss the end of part two of the novel and Maverick's declaration that "the way Dre wanted me to live just don't work". Do you think he is right? Why do you think he feels he has no choice but to go back to selling drugs? How do you predict the rest of the novel will progress?
- Reflect on why the second part of the novel is called Growth.

Chapters 20–30:

- Why do you think Maverick is convinced that Red murdered Dre? Do you think he is right? What do you think he will do about this? What do you think he should do? Are your thoughts about each of these questions the same or different? Why? How might each of these things change the course of the story, and Maverick's life?
- What do you notice about the options put to Maverick by the school counsellor? Why do you think he dismisses the suggestions given by the school counsellor? Do you think Maverick has enough support to complete his schooling, given that he is juggling parenthood, work and his education?
- Reflect on the role teachers have in the novel as well as how education more generally is portrayed. Do you think the system is fair and provides equality for all of the students in the book? What about in the wider world? Do you think we have a fair and equal education system? What inequalities do you recognise, how and why do you think these came about and what ideas do you have about how the system can become more equal for all?
- What do you notice about Maverick's interaction with King in chapter 22? Do you think Maverick will kill Red or do you think his assertion at the end of chapter 22 is bravado? What makes you think this?
- Reflect on the way Iesha is portrayed in the novel, how does this compare with the way in which Lisa is portrayed? How does the first person narrative mode of storytelling impact on the portrayals? Do you think each character is fairly represented?
- Are you surprised by the events in chapter 23 or did you see this coming? Why do you think his mother's admission of her sexuality has changed the way in which Maverick views his father's life in jail? Why do you think Maverick keeps the fact that he can't graduate from his mother? How do you imagine she might react when she finds out?
- What do you think about Maverick's surprise trip for Lisa? What further insights does this give us about his character? What do you notice about Lisa's continued ambitions for Maverick? What do you think about his ambitions for himself? Why do you think he won't allow himself to dream about going to university? Why do you think he has such a low opinion of himself at this point in the novel? What do you hope for Lisa at the end of the novel? What do you hope for Maverick? Do you think the novel will end in the way you hope it will? Why? Why not?
- Discuss the opening of chapter 26 and the different contradictions and challenges Maverick has identified in his father's actions as a former drug dealer. Reflect also on how Maverick feels at the opening of the chapter and the internal conflict he feels about Dre's murder. What do you think this reveals to us about his own internal struggles?
- Reflect on the way in which Maverick describes visiting his father in jail as a child and on their interaction together in this scene. Are you surprised his father doesn't tell him what to do one way or another? What do you think his father was trying to suggest to Maverick with the words he chooses to say to his son? Why do you think he chooses to respond in this way?
- Discuss the way in which Maverick describes his neighbourhood in chapter 27; how does this compare to how you imagined it up until this point in the novel? What do you notice about the way in which he compares the neighbourhood in the night time to the day time?



- Why do you think chapter 28 is just a single line of text? What does the white space around this line before the next chapter cause you to do as a reader? What impact did this sentence and the way it was presented have on you? Did you expect this on the page turn?
- Are you surprised that Maverick didn't kill Red? What do you notice about Lisa's reaction to Maverick's admission that he couldn't go through with it? Discuss his response to the incident and how you think the novel will end.
- Discuss the final interaction between Maverick and King; how does this reveal to you how much Maverick has changed since the opening of the novel? What do you expect King will want Maverick to do in the future?
- Discuss the opening of chapter 30 and Maverick's realisation that the roses he planted have bloomed, as well as the deepening relationship between Mr Wyatt and Maverick. Why do you think Angie Thomas has slowly built up to this occurring at the end of the story? What metaphorical connotations might this event have in relation to the wider story?
- Reflect on the ending of the novel, particularly how Maverick has evolved as a character and what his hopes and dreams for the future are. Consider the name Maverick and Lisa choose for their unborn baby and use this as a springboard to discuss the significance of names more generally in the novel.
- Reflect on why the final part of the novel is called Dormancy. Then come back to all the section titles. Why do you think she chose to section off the narrative in this way? Why did she choose the places she did to bookmark the sections and what do the section titles mean to you now you have read the whole book? Come back to the main title Concrete Rose; why do you think Angie Thomas chose this as the title? Why do you think she chose the dedication that she did? How do your thoughts compare or link to those you had before you started reading?
- Take time to reflect on the book as a whole. What did you like or dislike about it? What connections did you make with the text? Did it remind you of other books you've read, TV shows or films you've seen, music you've heard or events or experiences you've had in your own life? What questions are you left with after reading? Would you recommend this text to someone else? Who do you think it would most appeal to and why? What would you want to tell them about the book, and what would you hold back so that you don't give a false impression or give too much away?

After reading, you could:

- Explore other books by Angie Thomas:
 - *The Hate U Give*
 - *On the Come Up*
- Find out more about the author, her inspiration and motivation for writing: <https://angiethomas.com/>
- Explore the importance of music to Angie Thomas as a writer, particularly the work of Tupac Shakur and how it has influenced her writing. You may wish to build on this by looking at recent work around hip-hop pedagogy and discourse in education. This approach attempts to address deep-rooted ideologies to social inequities by creating a space in education for students to re-examine their knowledge of hip-hop lyrics, examining, discussing and debating the intersections with race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; while analysing and theorising to what extent hip-hop can be used as a tool for social justice in education and beyond.
- You could watch the following video, showing how a high school teacher in New York uses hip hop to help his pupils find their voice in writing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL82x-diQAY>, and discuss how these boys feel about their experiences of writing and what they are able to do in their writing through working in this way. Consider together what being able to write in this way brings to these students personally, socially and emotionally and



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discuss more widely whether the students themselves are influenced by any particular kind of music and whether they write their own lyrics.

- You could go on to provide students with opportunities to look at and analyse the themes, lyrics and ideas in some of the music of artists specifically mentioned in the book, such as songs like *Changes*, *Keep Ya Head Up* and *Dear Mama* by Tupac Shakur, facilitating critical discussions around these and how themes and issues raised in the music link with those in *Concrete Rose* and empowering students to critically reflect on these with their wider knowledge of the world in mind. You will need to be aware that the lyrics contain what is now commonly referred to as the “n-word” and it will be important to make clear from the outset that this is how the word should be expressed if or when referring to this as part of the discussions. Before engaging with such discussions, it would be useful for adults engaging with the students to read this article by Darren Chetty and Adam Ferner, which provides practical and useful advice about engaging in classroom discussions about race: <https://www.tes.com/magazine/article/how-talk-about-racism-schools>. As part of students’ reflections and engagement with the lyrics and use of this term, it will be important to provide opportunities for them to engage in wider reading that will support their knowledge and understanding of its origins, its use in music, particularly US rap and hip hop and to ensure that offensive language is not reinforced. Chapter 10 “Britain and America” from Akala’s book *Natives* (Two Roads) will be essential reading and integral to such discussions, alongside wider reading such as:

- *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge (Bloomsbury)
- *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped from the Beginning* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi (Little, Brown Young Readers US)
- *This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do The Work* by Tiffany Jewell, illustrated by Aurélia Durand (Frances Lincoln)
- *What is Race? Who are Racists? Why Does Skin Colour Matter? And Other Big Questions* by Nikesh Shukla and Claire Heuchan (Wayland)
- *How To Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi (Bodley Head)
- *Don’t Touch My Hair* by Emma Dabiri (Penguin)

- Through studying the book and music that was produced at the time when the novel is set, students can build a wider understanding of the societal issues and injustices of the period and beyond. They may also look at how to reflect on current societal issues and injustices in their own writing, including lyrics of their own.
- You could also allow students to reflect on the power of the first person narrative that Angie Thomas writes in and how they could use this mode of storytelling to present narratives of their own that encompass issues that are pertinent in their own lives in fictional narratives. You could provide photographs of scenes featuring young people in the real world to stimulate their writing if they struggle to get going or come up with ideas of their own.



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