

Chapter 23: YA On the Air: A Scaffolded Podcast Assignment on YA Literature

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1. “Food for Thought” by Alejandra Santana, Oriana Gonzalez, Amy Vong, and Jailyn Fierro

Using Angie Thomas’s 2017 novel *The Hate U Give*, “Food for Thought” explores how the main character, a Black teenager named Starr, grapples with the death of her friend at the hands of a White police officer. “Food for Thought,” through discussions of Starr’s sense of double consciousness, close reading, relevant music, and honest, hardline opinions about police brutality, aims to teach listeners—high school juniors and seniors—about the perils of police brutality and soft racism.

Transcript

Scene 1: Introduction to Food for Thought (0:00–0:34)

[*Fade in music: “It Was a Good Day” by Ice Cube. Music lowers and stays in the background. Bag of chips rustling.*]

Alejandra Santana: That was a bag of Flamin’ Hot Cheetos and Tapatio Doritos. Welcome to the first episode of “Food for Thought,” a podcast where we offer you social commentary from young writers’ perspectives. My name is Alejandra.

Oriana Gonzalez: My name is Oriana.

Amy Vong: I’m Amy.

Jailyn Fierro: And I’m Jailyn.

Alejandra: We’re all literary majors at UC Irvine; we’re broke, and we’re hungry. We as students understand the role that literature plays in developing character and understanding the way that the world works. Today we’ll be discussing Angie Thomas’s book *The Hate U Give*.

Scene 2: THUG Intro (0:34–1:29)

[*“It Was a Good Day” continues to play in the background.*]

Amy: *The Hate U Give* follows the story of 16-year-old Starr Carter, who witnesses the death of her best friend Khalil at the hands of a White police officer. As Starr struggles with the lack of justice for Khalil, she is also dealing with balancing her two worlds in Garden Heights, a low-income, Black neighborhood, and Williamson, a White-dominated suburban prep school. Her struggle between these polar opposite worlds displays how she acts with a double consciousness as she switches the way she speaks and acts depending on her audience.

Jailyn: With *The Hate U Give*, topics such as police brutality and soft racism are mentioned, and we will continue the conversation by highlighting the significance of these topics as well as the importance of finding your own voice. We started learning about these topics as college students, but we believe that high school youth should be exposed to issues related to social injustices. So, we are offering this podcast to you, the seniors and juniors of IUSD . . .

[*“It was a Good Day” fades out, and “F*ck Tha Police” (instrumental version) by N.W.A fades in.*]

Jailyn: . . . as our way of introducing a repetition of historical and structural disadvantages that the Black community faces on a daily basis.

Scene 3: 1st Discussion Topic (1:29–3:08)

[*“F*ck Tha Police” continues.*]

Alejandra: *The Hate U Give* is centered around the murder of unarmed Khalil, a teenage boy with a whole life ahead of him. He was killed by Officer 115. Thomas was inspired by the lives of many other victims of police brutality such as . . .

[*“F*ck Tha Police” fades out to mention the name of the victims of police brutality.*]

Alejandra: . . . Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, and the infamous case of Emmett Till. We’ll now have a moment of silence for the victims.

[*Music fades out for a moment of silence. Seven seconds of silence. Music fades in after the moment of silence.*]

Alejandra: Khalil was profiled the same way Tamir Rice and Michael Brown were; they were seen as threats and then “taken care of” as such. The criminalization of these victims led to the victimization of the police officers who committed the murders. I emphasize on “murder” because they did it on purpose.

Oriana: Police officers are supposed to protect civilians; civilians shouldn’t be afraid of the people who are supposed to protect them. Cops take an oath in which they promise to “uphold human rights” and “accord equal respect to all people.” Big Mav, Starr’s dad, had a conversation with Starr in which he explains how she’s supposed to act around the police because he knows that the color of her skin labels her. This talk would not be necessary if cops followed their oath. Martin Luther King said it best.

[*“F*ck Tha Police” fades out. “White Man’z World” by Makaveli fades in.*]

Oriana: In his “I Have a Dream” speech, he wanted to live in a nation where people would “not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Scene 4: 2nd Discussion Topic (3:09–5:26)

[*“White Man’z World” by Makaveli continues.*]

Jailyn: There’s issues of soft racism in the book. Starr’s best friend, Hailey, shows her ignorance towards other races, specifically by making “jokes” towards Starr and Maya’s race. During a basketball practice, Hailey tells Starr to pretend that the ball is fried chicken, as she implies it will motivate her. This remark is obviously meant to reference one of the stereotypes that are believed of African Americans. Hailey’s comments are not just a one-time thing but a recurring problem. Both Starr and Maya have a conversation together about how they have tolerated her racist jokes because she is their friend, and this goes to show how often friends can ignore each other’s racist remarks. I think this shows a pressing issue that we have a tendency to normalize racist jokes either because they are intended to be “harmless” or because they come from friends.

Amy: Hailey fails to see or acknowledge the severity of her actions and represents how racist comments have become normalized in today’s society. Coming from a well-off, White background, Hailey was born into a system that acts in her favor. Having the privilege to benefit from her social standings ultimately gives way into her blindness and blatant ignorance to the suffering and racial issues that are prevalent in Starr’s and Maya’s lives. When Hailey decides to unfollow Starr on Tumblr for her constant reblogging of injustices against Black people, she is further uplifting the social structure

that fosters hate and prejudice. Her upbringing is not her fault; however, her decision to ignore the harsh realities minorities face is detrimental to those who were born into less fortunate circumstances.

Oriana: I believe that because racism is now being spoken of because of the Black Lives Matter movement, we believe that we're "woke," which Urban Dictionary defines as, "a reference to how people should be aware in current affairs," specifically those related to racism. Thus, we become so comfortable with these topics that we think we can make jokes about them. This can be seen when Hailey jokes about Maya's Chinese heritage and says that she and her family eat cat for Thanksgiving. Hailey uses the excuse that since it's just a joke, it's okay. It's important for us to speak up against these "jokes," to let people know that they're not "okay," and that way we can find our voice.

[*Music fades out.*]

Scene 5: 3rd Discussion Topic (5:27–8:33)

[*Fade in music: "Keep Ya Head Up" by 2Pac.*]

Amy: Starr's character development as she finds the courage to speak up for what she believes in is truly remarkable and something us as young adults can all relate to. As previously mentioned, Starr no longer felt intimidated by Hailey or the thought of losing their friendship, and so she called Hailey out for her continuous racist remarks. Starr developed the self-confidence that allowed her to realize there is no reason to keep people in her life that belittle or hinder her ability to speak her own opinions.

Oriana: We see at the beginning of the novel that Starr is called out for not speaking out about Khalil's death. As the story progresses, she realizes the importance of fighting for justice, not only for Khalil, but for her entire community that is victim to institutionalized racism in America. Starr finds her voice with the help of her family, friends, and music to give a public interview as well as court hearings telling the true story of Khalil's death. Despite her fears, she realizes setting the record straight on Officer 115's racism and calling attention to police brutality surpasses her personal troubles.

Alejandra: Leading up to Starr's interview, she is advised and almost coached, in a sense, on how she should portray herself to appeal to the public, and not give them any reason to stereotype her as a typical Black girl from the hood. However, Starr breaks the script she was given and tells the story in the way that will most effectively illustrate Officer 115's brutality and heartless actions to the media. By using the outlet she is given, Starr incites outrage and protests by calling for action against police brutality. During one of the main riots, Starr is even handed the microphone to address the crowd and express her resentment and anger towards the result of Officer 115's trial. Starr's character makes a complete 180 from being too scared to speak out to amplifying the anger she has towards a system that fails to do right by the victims of racial injustice, and instead, protects the true criminals.

Jailyn: *The Hate U Give* is also a way in which Thomas was able to find her own voice through Starr, which I think could also help others find their own voice. Through Starr, Thomas is able to criticize the systematic oppression of Black youth as well as inspire others to speak out against these injustices. It's important to have someone as young as Starr find it important to speak out about issues that are obviously affecting her. Hopefully, Starr's story can also encourage those who aren't directly affected by it, like us for example, to speak up because it's human to care about these issues, and because we acknowledge that there shouldn't be any form of social inequalities.

[*Music fades out.*]

Scene 6: Conclusion (8:34–10:45)

[*Fade in music: “They Don’t Care About Us” by Michael Jackson.*]

Alejandra: Starr’s voyage to the self discovery of her own abilities relating to social activism worked to prove how prominent even the most minute actions can be. In the grand scheme of things, the realities of fear and mourning combined with knowledge and a lust for the truth make for a balance on the scales of justice, even if it was just for one person. The fictional characters in the novel represent all the lives that did not make it this far, because their deaths will not be forgotten.

Oriana: We believe that by making this podcast, we are using our voice as students, and also as the future generation, because we are speaking up against issues that we believe are unfair. Angie Thomas does the same by writing this book. She uses her voice as a writer to tell a powerful story as her form of activism against racism.

Jailyn: As young adults, we want to make other young adults aware of the issues that are affecting Black youth. Our voice is arguably more important because we are considered to be the future, and we need to use this voice for good. *The Hate U Give* is a powerful novel that can make others aware of the hardships that many Black youth face, and that’s something we believe everyone should be aware of.

Jailyn: My name is Jailyn.

Amy: My name is Amy

Oriana: My name is Oriana

Alejandra: And my name is Alejandra. We are students of UCI, and as Literacy Sponsors we recommend *The Hate U Give*.

[*Rustle of bag of chips.*]

Alejandra: Thank you for tuning in to “Food for Thought.”

[*Music fades out.*]

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