



BLACK GIRL RISING

A Guide for Older Readers

By Brynne Barnes, Illustrated by
Tatyana Fazlalizadeh

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About The Book

In this deeply moving celebration and rallying cry, and in the face of the many messages that still work to convince Black girls that they should shrink themselves, hide their light, know their place, Brynne Barnes and Tatyana Fazlalizadeh reclaim that narrative: A Black girl's place is everywhere, and her selfhood is everything she can dream it to be.

About The Author

Brynne Barnes has colored the world with her pen writing stories, poetry, and music since earning her BS from the University of Michigan and MA from Eastern Michigan University. She has taught at several colleges and universities. Her picture books include the award-winning *Colors of Me* and *Books Do Not Have Wings*. She lives in Southfield, Michigan.

About The Illustrator

Tatyana Fazlalizadeh is based in Brooklyn, New York, and is an artist, an activist, the creator of *Stop Telling Women to Smile*, and the illustrator of *Libba: The Magnificent Musical Life of Elizabeth Cotten*.



“we are the ones we have been waiting for”
 – June Jordan, 1978

An educator’s guide for older readers on a journey to find their unique voices.

Black Girl Rising is a lyrical ode to the power and perseverance of Black girls everywhere. Highlighting historical figures in art, writing, dance, music, and beyond, the book bursts with opportunities for students to reflect and discover their greatest potential. Uplifting images and celebratory language mute negative stereotypes, filling young readers with purpose, pride, and an urgency toward self-determination. Using the strengths of the past and the promise of the future, readers will harness their inner voices, rise from the ashes, and fly like sparrows.

“Lyrical, timely, and marvelously illustrated, this work extols the beauty, bravery, and possibilities of young black girls.”
 – School Library Journal

**this non-standard punctuation is how the poem is presented on the author’s website. We chose to keep it authentic.*

This guide was created by Tara Baldrige and Angela K Sherrill, co-owners of Varia, a passionate literary services team on the south side of Chicago. With over two decades of book industry experience, they are committed to promoting diversity in literature through access, education, and purposeful content.



Many Muses

“Who are you to RISE, Black girl, like Angelou say?”

In this line from the book, Brynne Barnes draws inspiration from one of Maya Angelou’s most famous poems, “Still I Rise.” Maya Angelou was a poet and activist who has influenced the work and lives of countless others. Some would call her a **muse**. Below are a few of the **muses** we find in the words of Brynne Barnes and the illustrations of Tatyana Fazlalizadeh.

ACTIVISTS

Amanda Gorman

Demonstrates through her confidence that I can stand up and speak before the whole world.

Fannie Lou Hamer

Teaches me that my voice is powerful and I can demand attention, especially when fighting for what is right.

MUSICIANS

Nina Simone

Composed songs and music that make me feel hopeful.

Esperanza Spalding

Brings her own style to music while teaching me to push past negative voices and stay true to myself.

VISUAL ARTISTS

Amy Sherald

Uses art to show the beauty of Black people and makes me want to see and learn more about them.

Oge Mora

Creates colorful pictures that bring to life some of my favorite stories.

ATHLETES

Misty Copeland

Shows me that I can be brave, strong, and beautiful doing something I love.

Althea Gibson

Reminds me to always try new things, even if they are scary or people say I can't.

WRITERS

Nikki Giovanni

Wrote poems to help me understand the stories of oppressed people.

Zora Neale Hurston

Told me to “jump at de sun,” which makes me feel like I could do or be anything!

many
MUSES

My Muses

*"I am proud of my past; I hold faith in **my future!**" – Alice Dunbar Nelson, 1916*

Map out the muses in your own life and write down how they inspire you to rise!

WRITERS

ATHLETES

ACTIVISTS

MUSICIANS

VISUAL ARTISTS

YOU can be a muse, too! Imagine yourself rising to your full potential. What could you do or say that will inspire someone else?

Climbing The Crystal Stair

In the text, Barnes references the poet Langston Hughes with:

“Don’t you dare climb, climb, climb, Langston’s Crystal Stair.”

In Hughes’ poem “Mother to Son,” he writes about overcoming obstacles and remaining steadfast to reach your goals.

Pick a muse from your “my muses” worksheet. Learn more about their life. What were challenges to their success? Who inspired them? How did they rise above obstacles? Think about your own goals. What are some of the issues that could stand in your way? How will you rise?

Change The Narrative

At the beginning of the book, the reader is faced with many negative comments demanding they give up, remain quiet, and suppress their potential. By the end of the book, words of encouragement, confidence, and perseverance diminish those messages.

“You’re supposed to dim your light and never be seen. But you don’t, girl — you won’t, girl — you know you’re a queen.”

Ask students to think about a time when their goals seemed impossible or someone else’s words dashed their hopes. Have them write their own verse in which they change the narrative and rise above the negative voices.

Searching For Symbols

“Electric Butterfly, you are more than you seem.”

- ✦ Symbolism, the use of words and images to represent ideas, plays an important part in this book.
- ✦ Have students look for symbols within the book, make inferences about the meaning of the symbols, and identify evidence that connects the symbols and their meanings.
- ✦ Create a list of the symbols the students identify in the text ONLY and ask them to discuss which images support the central theme of the book, rising.

Rise Up And Speak

“You are the wish and the word, the voice and the muse.”

Students can recite their own verse or choose a poem that invokes one of the themes from Black Girl Rising.

Remind them to:

- ✦ Introduce themselves and the poem.
- ✦ Practice reciting the piece several times until they have taken it to heart.
- ✦ Speak slowly enough so classmates can hear each word or phrase.
- ✦ Be confident; let their words ignite!