

# BLACK BOY JOY



17 Stories  
Celebrating  
Black Boyhood

EDITED BY **KWAME MBALIA**  
*New York Times* bestselling author of the Tristan Strong series

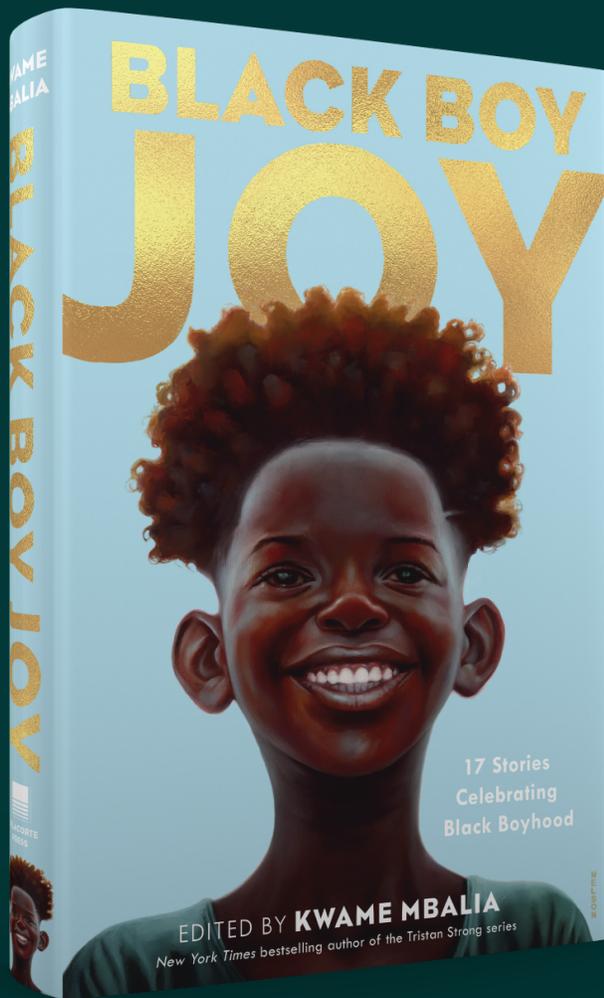
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## EDUCATORS' GUIDE



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Edited by Kwame Mbalia  
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## ABOUT THE ANTHOLOGY

Celebrate Black joy with this vibrant collection of stories, comics, and poems about the power of joy and the wonders of Black boyhood from seventeen acclaimed Black male and nonbinary authors:

**B. B. Alston**  
**Dean Atta**  
**P. Djèlí Clark**  
**Jay Coles**  
**Jerry Craft**  
**Lamar Giles**  
**Don P. Hooper**  
**George M. Johnson**  
**Varian Johnson**  
**Kwame Mbalia**  
**Suyi Davies Okungbowa**  
**Tochi Onyebuchi**  
**Julian Randall**  
**Jason Reynolds**  
**Justin Reynolds**  
**DaVaun Sanders**  
**Julian Winters**

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**AND WRITING TIPS**  
**FOR THE NATIONAL**  
**WRITING PROJECT'S**  
**THE WRITE TIME**  
**PROGRAM**

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Kwame Mbalia is a husband, father, *New York Times* bestselling author, and former pharmaceutical metrologist, in that order. His debut middle-grade novel, *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*, and its sequel, *Tristan Strong Destroys the World*, were published by Rick Riordan Presents/Disney-Hyperion. A Howard University graduate and a Midwesterner now in North Carolina, Kwame survives on dad jokes and Cheez-Its. Find him at @KSekouM.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*Black Boy Joy* features accessible stories in various genres, which can be read as an entire collection or one at a time. Each can be read, analyzed, and discussed in one lesson. This guide features questions that not only allow readers to practice analyzing text but also offer them self-help tools and an opportunity to reflect on social emotional development. Explore the activities, discussion questions, and prompts for each short story.

**HEAR FROM THE CONTRIBUTORS!**

## BEFORE READING

Reflect on this quote: “To the ones they called angry, broken, sad, hopeless, but were silent amidst your joy.”

- What does it mean to be silent amidst someone else’s joy?
- Who do you think “the ones” refers to?
- Who is this quote addressing?
- Who is “they”?

## DURING READING

### “THERE’S GOING TO BE A FIGHT . . .”

- Why is Cornell making a list of superheroes?
- Cornell seeks advice from his family and friends as he prepares his list (for the cafeteria “fight”). Describe a time when you sought advice from loved ones.
- How do Raven, Dad, and Pop-Pop change Cornell’s list?
- This story is about family as well as heroes. Think about the people in your family. Do you and other members of your family hold the same people in high-esteem? How are they similar? How are they different? How are the people in your family heroes to you?
- Why do you think Cornell decides to make a drawing of Fan Girl and show it to Amaya?

### “THE McCOY GAME”

- “You’re either a doer, or a spectator. And the world already got enough spectators.” Explain the quote from Big Mac in your own words.
- Why do you think this adventure brings Jamal and Dre closer together?
- Jamal finally figures out how to open the golden door. Explain how he does it.

### “THE LEGENDARY LAWRENCE COBBLER”

- Why does Jevon cheer up when G’Ma says that she likes boys and girls?
- When Jevon added chili powder instead of cinnamon, he thought he had messed up. But when his family tastes his creation, the mistake turns out to be a hit. Describe a time that you thought you’d messed up, but the result was better than expected.
- What is the message of the story?
- There’s a saying in Jevon’s family about fear: “Fear is nothing but Forgetting Everything’s All Right.” Explain the saying in your own words. Describe a time when that expression applied to your life.

### “FIRST-DAY FLY”

- The first day of school is very important to the narrator. Why?
- Draw or describe your favorite outfit. On what occasion would you wear it?
- The author tells this story in the second person voice; for example, he writes, “In your room, you stand in front of the mirror for your dress rehearsal.” How do you feel reading a story written in second person? How might the story feel different if it had been written in the first or third person?

**“FIND YOUR JOY,  
FORTITUDE, AND  
IT’LL BE YOUR  
NIGHT-LIGHT WHEN  
EVERYTHING IS DARK.”**

**—“The Griot of Grover Street,  
Part One”**

## "GOT ME A JET PACK"

- Rodney finds out his father and his aunt are sundashers. What do sundashers do? What does Rodney's mother do for the sundashers?
- "I guess if we're in space, we're all aliens." What does Rodney mean by this?
- Rodney has a nickname that becomes his racing name. Do you have a nickname? How did you get it?

## "EXTINCT"

- When Dylan, T, and Laila are at the library, Dylan realizes that he has lost his important postcard. Describe a time that you lost something valuable to you. How did you react? How did things turn out?
- Toward the end of the story, Dylan mentions something that Jarvis's grandmother said: "The one who gets close to a good tree, good shade shelters him." What do you think this means? Explain.
- Dylan is very interested in the dodo and the T. rex. What is one of your favorite animals (living or extinct)? What do you like about that animal?
- The author gives us some very specific instructions: "Why don't you write a poem about someone special using important facts you know about them? These might include their favorite color, their smell, an object you associate with them, and anything else you think is important from your memory or research." Follow those directions, and let's see what you create!

## "EPIC VENTURE"

- Grandpa Charlie was part of a group of pilots known as the 332nd Fighter group—better known as the Tuskegee Airmen. Research the Tuskegee Airmen. Based

on your research and what you read in this story, write two questions you would want to ask Grandpa Charlie about his experiences during World War II.

- During their flight, Grandpa Charlie tells Wes stories about the war, and Wes starts daydreaming about the story. When he wakes up the dream feels very real to him. Describe a dream you've had that felt real.
- Wes looks up to his grandpa and wants to be like him one day. Is it important to have idols? How can they impact you?
- Throughout this story, the author makes several references to dreams. Why do you think dreams are so important?

## "THE DEFINITION OF COOL"

- Desmond loves to dress like DJ Amplified. Whose style do you appreciate or imitate? Explain.
- What makes Desmond change his attitude about what others think and say about him?
- What makes the other concertgoers change their minds about Desmond and how he looks?

## "FIVE THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS TO HOME"

- Keziah thinks he doesn't like math, but he loves puzzles. How are math and puzzles similar?
- Keziah and Adanna encounter a puzzlehunt during their adventure. Explain what a puzzlehunt is in your own words.
- Explain how Keziah and Adanna use their individual talents and knowledge to work together and return home.

## "COPING"

- Throughout the story, CJ talks about his dream of competing in the X Games. What is one of your dreams?
- CJ's dream was put on hold when he crashed and broke his arm. Have you ever had a dream put on hold? What happened? How did you deal with the frustration and disappointment?
- The story reveals some activities that CJ and his mom did during the pandemic lockdown. What did you do for fun during that time?

## "THE GENDER REVEAL"

- Malcolm likes to design clothes and designed a breathtaking birthday outfit. What forms does your creativity take? Explain.
- Malcolm has very loyal and loving friends and family. Why is it important to have people in your life who appreciate you?
- The personal pronouns shift toward the end of the story from he/his to they/their. Explain why that shift happens when it does.
- Malcolm knows that their father loves them; why would they be nervous to let him in on the big announcement?
- On the day of Malcolm's birthday, they had butterflies in their stomach. Describe a time when you had butterflies.

## "KASSIUS'S FOOLPROOF GUIDE TO LOSING THE TURKEY BOWL"

- One English translation of the Spanish word *fuerza* is strength. Explain how the author uses the word *fuerza* in this story. Kassius's *Fuerza* is "portals." Explain what that means; what is he able to do?
- The football game in this story is different than any football game any of us have ever seen. Explain.

- Describe what Kassius's plan is. What is Maya's *Fuerza*, and how is it part of the plan?

## "BUT ALSO, JAZZ"

- What favor does Pastor Sweat ask of Brandon and Mikkel? How do they react to his request?
- "I got nothing, fam. The song, I got nothing. Like, zero." What is happening at this point in the story?
- How does Momma (along with Earth, Wind, and Fire) help Mikkel and Brandon with their problem?

## "OUR DILL"

- At the beginning of the story, Mia gets Jay to relax by saying the word *booty*, which always makes him giggle uncontrollably. What is a word or phrase that gets you to laugh or smile?
- According to Jay, Will Banks has "overflowing confidence." What are two things he does that demonstrate confidence?
- Jay says that he and Mia are best friends. How does he come to realize that he has romantic feelings for her?
- How do you think Jay and Jasmine end up going to the dance together? Do you think

**"SOMETIMES YOU  
FORGET HOW MUCH  
YOU LOVE SOMEONE  
UNTIL YOU SEE  
THEM LAUGH."**

—"But Also, Jazz"

they made the right choice?

- How do you think the dance affects Jay's relationship with Mia? Explain.

### **"PERCIVAL AND THE JAB"**

- Research traditional folklore characters of Trinidad and Tobago—what a *jab* and a *soucouyant* are in particular. What is something you learned about those creatures from the story that you did not learn in your research (or vice versa)?
- Toward the end of the story, we learn something new about Ms. Marabella. Were you surprised? Explain.

### **"EMBRACING MY BLACK BOY JOY"**

- Throughout the story, the narrator mentions different activities. What is an activity you enjoy that not many others you know enjoy?
- The narrator also talks about thinking of joyous things. What are some joyous things you like to think about?
- On the last page, he talks about spreading joy. How do you spread joy?
- On more than one occasion, this story mentions stereotypes. Are stereotypes good or bad or both? Explain.

### **"THE GRIOT OF GROVER STREET: PARTS ONE, TWO, THREE"**

- In part one, the author introduces us to a place called "the Between." Explain what it is.
- In part two, Mr. G speaks of four emotions that work together in the universe ("all part of the same four-sided coin"): fear, anger, joy, and sadness. Think about the stories you've read in this book. In which one(s) did you see the most of any one of those emotions? Which stories involved all four emotions?

- Look up *griot*. Explain how Mr. G (and eventually Fortitude) fit that definition.
- Look up the word *fortitude*, and explain why Fortitude is an appropriate name for the main character of these three stories.

## **AFTER-READING: THEMATIC QUESTIONS**

- What do "The McCoy Game," "Five Thousand Light Years from Home," and "Percival and the Jab" have in common?
- One of the themes that runs through the stories in this collection is the importance of positive intergenerational relationships. Describe three positive parent/child or grandparent/grandchild relationships that you encountered while reading this book.
- Explain the role music plays in two of the stories in this collection.



Cosby Hunt, a full-time history teacher in Washington, DC, created this guide with the help of his own Black boy joy—his sons Freeman and Ellington.

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"From stories to poetry and comics, *Black Boy Joy*  
**HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERY TYPE OF READER."**

—*The New York Times Book Review*

★ **"THIS BOOK IS A MUST-HAVE** in every collection  
for its variety of topics and its celebration of  
Black boyhood in all its forms."

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ **"Pick up *Black Boy Joy* for  
A HEAVY DOSE OF HAPPINESS."**

—*Booklist*, starred review

★ **"Some are humorous, some are poignant,  
but all are compelling reading. . . .  
A UNIQUE, TIMELY, AND NECESSARY READ."**

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ **"This anthology for middle-graders is  
BEAUTIFULLY AND UNAPOLOGETICALLY WRITTEN,  
allowing anyone, regardless of age, sex or race, to  
feel a sense of pride and joy in being true to themselves."**

—*Shelf Awareness*, starred review

★ **"LUMINOUS. . . . An exuberant celebration of  
carefree Black experiences. . . . Any reader will appreciate  
how this genre-bending collection  
EXPANDS THE HORIZONS OF WHAT  
JOY FOR BLACK BOYS CAN BE."**

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review