



A Guide to Using  
**WE ARE HERE**  
at Home and in the Classroom

Ages 4-8  
Grades P-3

The  
Power  
of Story

Building Equitable  
Bookshelves

 SCHOLASTIC



# A NOTE FOR EDUCATORS AND CAREGIVERS

As we delve into the celebration of *We Are Here*, we are invited to enjoy, learn, and honor the ways in which Black culture and history shows up in our lives.

If you are a Black educator, librarian, or caregiver, it can be both joyful and emotionally exhausting to teach or highlight literature that reflects your experiences. One way to find support and resilience for yourself is by finding affinity groups or community spaces that uplift and showcase Black joy. For those who are not Black, it might feel intimidating to engage with topics surrounding the past and present experiences of Black people in the United States, but it's important to educate yourselves and increase your understanding of the contributions and legacy of Black people throughout history and today. As you prepare to read and discuss this book, please review the following considerations, as well as the resources included in the free guide for the companion title *All Because You Matter* available online at [bit.ly/AllBecauseYouMatterGuide](http://bit.ly/AllBecauseYouMatterGuide).

*We Are Here* depicts a wide range of historically and culturally significant people, events, themes, and ideas. This book celebrates these contributions to Black culture while reminding us that being Black is not a monolithic experience. All Black people are different. All Black people have various family structures, home languages, foods they enjoy, and music they like to dance or sing to! Encourage readers to consider how these distinctions hold true within in the cultural groups to which they themselves belong.

Whenever we prepare to celebrate a culture that is different from our own, we need to ensure we are participating in the celebration through appreciation and not appropriation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, cultural appropriation is “the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the practices, customs, or aesthetics of one social or ethnic group by members of another (typically dominant) community or society.” Encyclopedia Britannica further clarifies, saying, “An imbalance of power between the appropriator and the appropriated is a critical condition of the concept.”

Instead of appropriating, look for opportunities to appreciate culture. These opportunities provide a way to enjoy and understand a culture without perpetuating harm. This could look like attending a Black history parade, supporting Black-owned businesses regularly, or learning about the culture from a member of the community. Two resources for finding Black-owned businesses in your area are Black Culinary History's Black Restaurant Map: [blackculinaryhistory.com/black-restaurant-map](http://blackculinaryhistory.com/black-restaurant-map) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's list of Black-Owned Small Business Directories: [uschamber.com/co/start/strategy/black-owned-businesses-directories](http://uschamber.com/co/start/strategy/black-owned-businesses-directories). Appreciating another culture means that you care about learning and understanding what is important to the people in that community, that you value their history, and that you celebrate their joy!

## LEARN MORE ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

- **Education Week | Addressing Cultural Appropriation in the Classroom: Tools and Resources**  
[edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-addressing-cultural-appropriation-in-the-classroom-tools-and-resources/2016/12](http://edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-addressing-cultural-appropriation-in-the-classroom-tools-and-resources/2016/12)
- **Learning for Justice | Appreciation and Appropriation Outside the Classroom**  
[learningforjustice.org/magazine/appreciation-and-appropriation-outside-the-classroom](http://learningforjustice.org/magazine/appreciation-and-appropriation-outside-the-classroom)
- **Mom.com | How to Explain Cultural Appropriation to Your Kids**  
[mom.com/kids/how-to-explain-cultural-appropriation-to-kids](http://mom.com/kids/how-to-explain-cultural-appropriation-to-kids)

## ABOUT THE WRITER OF THIS GUIDE

Vera Ahiyya was raised in El Paso, Texas, with her wonderful mother and amazing grandparents. Vera has taught kindergarten and first grade for the last 16 years. Her online presence is dedicated to influencing other educators by spreading her vast knowledge and love of diverse children's books. She is the author of *Rebellious Read Alouds*, a professional development book for educators. She is also the author of two picture books, *You Have a Voice* and *KINDergarten*.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide includes discussion prompts, a book list, a playlist, and other resources to help you support and extend young readers' engagement with *We Are Here*. Use the following questions to start discussions about the words, pictures, and historical and cultural references in *We Are Here* (and refer to the book's back matter for additional insights). Encourage learning and celebration by supplementing these conversations with the resources provided, including the further reading list and music playlist. Share the reproducible activity page with young readers and invite them to apply what they've learned to their own lives and celebrate themselves and their place in the world!

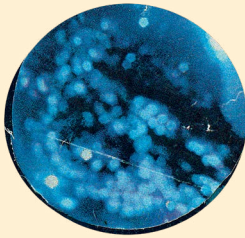
## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- **Did you notice the balloon drifting through the story?** It seems to follow the family on their journey. It is always with them. Do you have someone or something that always stays with you? Think about something or someone you always carry with you in your heart or mind. How does their memory or presence make you feel?
- **What did you notice about the people featured on the page that starts, "It's the music of our past"?** Several of the people pictured here helped create a genre of music known as R&B, which stands for "rhythm and blues." The book's back matter shares more information about each of these people. Have you ever listened to R&B music? Learn more about the musicians featured on this page and listen to their music featured in the playlist in this guide.
  - **Muddy Waters**  
[biography.com/musician/muddy-waters](https://www.biography.com/musician/muddy-waters)
  - **Ella Fitzgerald**  
[ellafitzgerald.com/biography/#](https://www.ellafitzgerald.com/biography/#)
  - **Howlin' Wolf**  
[britannica.com/biography/Howlin-Wolf](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Howlin-Wolf)
- **Did you notice the woman standing next to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?** In 1939, opera singer Marian Anderson famously performed the National Anthem on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial for a crowd of over 75,000 people after an organization called the Daughters of the American Revolution denied her the opportunity to sing in their concert hall in Washington, D.C. The reason she wasn't allowed to sing at the concert hall is because she was Black, but her historic performance at the Lincoln Memorial was a landmark moment in the struggle for racial equality. Can you think of other moments in history when Black people have been denied access to events or spaces because of racism? Learn more about Marian Anderson: [britannica.com/biography/Marian-Anderson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marian-Anderson)
- **Do you know the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing"?** It is also known as the Black National Anthem or the Negro National Anthem and was originally written as a poem by NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson in 1900. His brother, John Rosamond Johnson, composed the music. You can listen to the song by visiting the playlist included in this guide.
- **Did you notice the man holding his hands up on the page that begins, "One heart, uma alma . . .?"** What do you notice about the other people on this page? Sometimes, people will use their physical presence, voices, and even posters or signs to call attention to or speak out against something they believe to be wrong or harmful to them or a group of people. This is called a protest. There is a long history of protest in the United States and it has been proven to be an effective way to encourage change. What do you think the people on this page might be protesting about? Why do you think illustrator Bryan Collier chose to leave their signs blank? During the summer of 2020 there were many protests. Have you ever been to a protest before? What is something you would use your voice to speak up for?
- **Did you notice the students wearing masks on the page that begins, "We are fearless"?** Many people wore (and continue to wear) masks to help protect themselves and others from sickness. How might wearing a mask be a way to help your community?



# DISCUSSION PROMPTS (CONT.)

- **Did you notice the houses featured in the background of many pages in this book?** This building style is known as a “shotgun house” and is commonly seen in the southern United States. Bryan Collier drew inspiration from the work of artist John Biggers to create the illustrations for this book. Learn more about John Biggers and his work: [thejohnsoncollection.org/john-biggers](http://thejohnsoncollection.org/john-biggers)
- **Did you notice the patterns of repeated shapes in the illustrations?** What are some examples of places or things where you might find that kind of pattern? Many quilts are constructed from smaller pieces of fabric sewn into patterns like this. Did you know that quilting has a long history in Black culture? Faith Ringgold and Bisa Butler are two Black textile artists living and working today. Learn more about their work:
  - **Faith Ringgold website**  
[faithringgold.com/about-faith](http://faithringgold.com/about-faith)
  - **Bisa Butler website**  
[bisabutler.com/about-5](http://bisabutler.com/about-5)
  - **Bisa Butler feature in *Scholastic Art* magazine, December 2021**  
[art.scholastic.com/issues/2021-22/120121.html](http://art.scholastic.com/issues/2021-22/120121.html)



## RESOURCES FOR LEARNING ABOUT BLACK CULTURE AND HISTORY

Use these websites, lesson plans, and podcasts to continue exploring Black culture and history.

- **New York Public Library | Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**  
[nypl.org/locations/schomburg/research](http://nypl.org/locations/schomburg/research)
- **Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture**  
[nmaahc.si.edu](http://nmaahc.si.edu)
- **The 1619 Project Educational Materials Collection | Activities for Engaging K-12 Students**  
[1619education.org/builder/lesson/1619-project-books-activities](http://1619education.org/builder/lesson/1619-project-books-activities)
- **Museum of Food and Drink | Legacy Quilt Project Lesson Plans**  
[mofad.org/quilting-lesson-plan](http://mofad.org/quilting-lesson-plan)
- **Rock & Roll Hall of Fame | Early Influences**  
[rockhall.com/inductees/categories/early-influences](http://rockhall.com/inductees/categories/early-influences)
- **Black Culinary History**  
[blackculinaryhistory.com](http://blackculinaryhistory.com)
- **Diaspora Food Stories Podcast**  
[podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/diaspora-food-stories/id1631759962](http://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/diaspora-food-stories/id1631759962)
- **Southern Foodways Alliance**  
[southernfoodways.org](http://southernfoodways.org)
- **Parents | How to Teach Black History Through African American Cuisine**  
[parents.com/kindred/how-to-teach-black-history-through-african-american-cuisine](http://parents.com/kindred/how-to-teach-black-history-through-african-american-cuisine)
- **Virginia Tech | Library Guide: African-American Culinary History**  
[guides.lib.vt.edu/c.php?g=10336&p=5734891](http://guides.lib.vt.edu/c.php?g=10336&p=5734891)
- **Bricks Magazine | Fashion Trends that Originated from Black Culture**  
[bricksmagazine.co.uk/2020/06/29/black-culture-in-fashion-a-brief-history-of-trends-that-originated-from-black-communities](http://bricksmagazine.co.uk/2020/06/29/black-culture-in-fashion-a-brief-history-of-trends-that-originated-from-black-communities)

*Ask a librarian from your school or community for further recommendations to learn about Black history and culture including local and national history, cultural organizations and events in your area, and books and other media!*

# YOU ARE HERE!

Throughout the book, Bryan Collier uses circular shapes that look like planets in outer space to remind readers to claim their place in the world and celebrate our shared existence by shouting loud enough to reach the sky that  
“WE ARE HERE!”

What do you love about yourself? How do you celebrate the things you love about yourself? What shapes, colors, or other imagery represents the things you love about yourself? Use a separate sheet of paper to create a picture that answers these questions.

## PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY AFFIRMATIONS

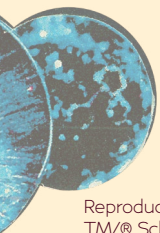
The last page of the book features an important affirmation. It reads, “**You are brilliant, extraordinary, far-beyond-ordinary . . .**” Affirmations are an important way to build confidence and self-esteem. Use the space below to write a personal affirmation for yourself or someone you care about, and write a group affirmation for (or with) your class or household.

**YOU ARE** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,

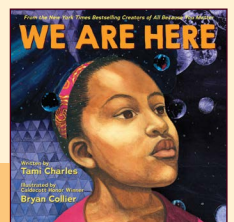
**FAR BEYOND** \_\_\_\_\_.

**WE ARE** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,

**FAR BEYOND** \_\_\_\_\_.



From the guide for *We Are Here* by  
Tami Charles and Bryan Collier





# WE ARE HERE AUTHOR'S NOTE

For a long time, I have wanted to write something in honor of my daughter, whom I didn't get to meet. When the global pandemic occurred, coupled with the horrific acts of injustice against people of color like George Floyd, I began to wonder: How would I have shown my daughter this world? How would I prepare her to face it?

This is how *We Are Here* was born—from a dire need to drown out the hatred with something far more powerful: love.

If *All Because You Matter* was an affirmation, then *We Are Here* is a celebration! In my heart, I know there is one more missing piece of the puzzle . . . the confirmation. A forthcoming third book in the series, *United Together*, forms a complete, unified thought and seeks to affirm, celebrate, and confirm the power and greatness that lie within all our children.

*We Are Here* is for my daughter, Grace, and the wonder of who she could have been and of what this world could be. It's for the joy I would have shown her, the beauty and excellence of our ancestors I would have taught her. We come from a civilization who built ancient places, like Benin City, with their own hands; whose early scientific discoveries led to the creation of the 365-day calendar and even the world's first astronomical site! We sing like Mahalia Jackson and Marian Anderson, win Olympic gold medals like Constantin Henriquez de Zubiera, spark movements with poetry like Jason Reynolds, Jacqueline Woodson, and Elizabeth Acevedo.

We are here. We have always been here—influencing and contributing our gifts to the world, for all to see and enjoy. As a mom, these words are my gift to Grace, to my son, Christopher, and to all children who need to hear them.

Our children represent the very best of who we are and the legacy from which they come. Their joy is our protest.

## TAMI CHARLES



Photo: Krisann Binetti.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tami Charles is the author of numerous books for children, ranging from picture books to middle grade and young adult, including her middle-grade debut, *Like Vanessa*, and latest YA novel-in-verse, *Muted*. She is also the author of the *New York Times* bestselling *All Because You Matter*, which earned three starred reviews and was named the #1 Amazon Best Children's Book of 2020, a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of 2020, and a Barnes & Noble Best Book of 2020.



## WE ARE HERE ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTE

In the process of creating a visual storyline for this project, I looked to a painting from one of my favorite artists, John Biggers, who painted multiple shotgun houses much like the one in Georgia he was raised in.

I thought these row houses could serve as a timeline by which I could document important markers in history, such as cultural innovations ranging from the African drums to blues, jazz, rap, and hip-hop. Also woven in is the history of protest and struggle for equality for all and fair treatment under the law. And in the end, you will see that we are one great big community and that this is the evidence, with our fists thrust to the sky, shouting: WE ARE HERE!!!

### BRYAN COLLIER



Photo: © Bryan Collier

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Bryan Collier has won four Caldecott Honors, five Coretta Scott King Awards, and three Coretta Scott King Honors. His books include the Coretta Scott King Award and Ezra Jack Keats Award winner *Uptown*, and *We Shall Overcome*, which has earned three starred reviews. He is also the illustrator of the *New York Times* bestselling *All Because You Matter*.



# FURTHER READING

## BLACK MUSIC HISTORY AND CULTURE

- *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* | Written and illustrated by Kadir Nelson
- *Muddy: The Story of Blues Legend Muddy Waters* | Written by Michael Mahin, Illustrated by Evan Turk
- *RESPECT: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul* | Written by Carole Boston Weatherford, Illustrated by Frank Morrison
- *The Roots of Rap* | Written by Carole Boston Weatherford, Illustrated by Frank Morrison
- *Trombone Shorty* | Written by Troy Andrews, Illustrated by Bryan Collier
- *The Undeclared* | Written by Kwame Alexander, Illustrated by Kadir Nelson
- *We Shall Overcome* | Written and illustrated by Bryan Collier
- *When Marian Sang* | Written by Pam Muñoz Ryan, Illustrated by Bryan Selznick
- *When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop* | Written by Laban Carrick Hill, Illustrated by Theodore Taylor III

## BLACK QUILTING HISTORY AND CULTURE

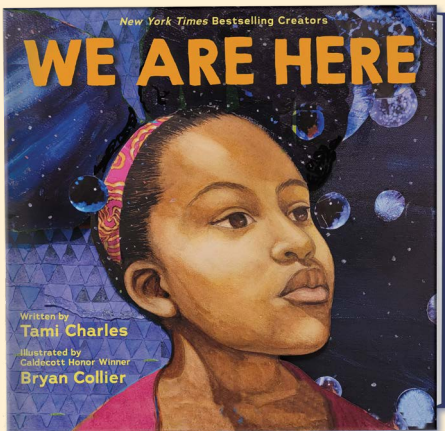
- *The Patchwork Quilt* | Written by Valerie Flournoy, Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
- *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* | Written and illustrated by Susan Goldman Rubin
- *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt* | Written by Patricia McKissack, Illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera
- *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* | Written by Deborah Hopkinson, Illustrated by James Ransome

## WE ARE HERE PLAYLIST



This playlist includes music and artists referenced in *We Are Here*, plus a selection of pieces that represent various aspects of Black music throughout the history of the United States. Scan this code or visit [bit.ly/WeAreHerePlaylist](https://bit.ly/WeAreHerePlaylist) to find the playlist on Youtube!

## ABOUT WE ARE HERE



Lyrical, affirmational, and bursting with love, *We Are Here* is a poignant story about Black and brown heritage and community. Full of assurance, tenderness, and triumph, this much-anticipated follow-up to the *New York Times* bestselling picture book *All Because You Matter* offers an equally inspirational and arresting ode to all of the Black women and men throughout history who have made momentous contributions from the beginning of time.

*We Are Here* celebrates readers with pride, joy, and love, reminding them of their roots, inviting readers to imagine a future that shines ever bright, and strengthening them for their triumphant days to come!

HC: 9781338752045 • Ages 4–8, Grades P–3

Also available as an ebook and an audio download

★ “A powerful narrative about Black yesterdays that have built the foundation for all our tomorrows.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



[Scholastic.com/PowerOfStory](https://www.scholastic.com/PowerOfStory)

