A Teacher's Guide for

Onyx & Beyond

by AMBER MCBRIDE

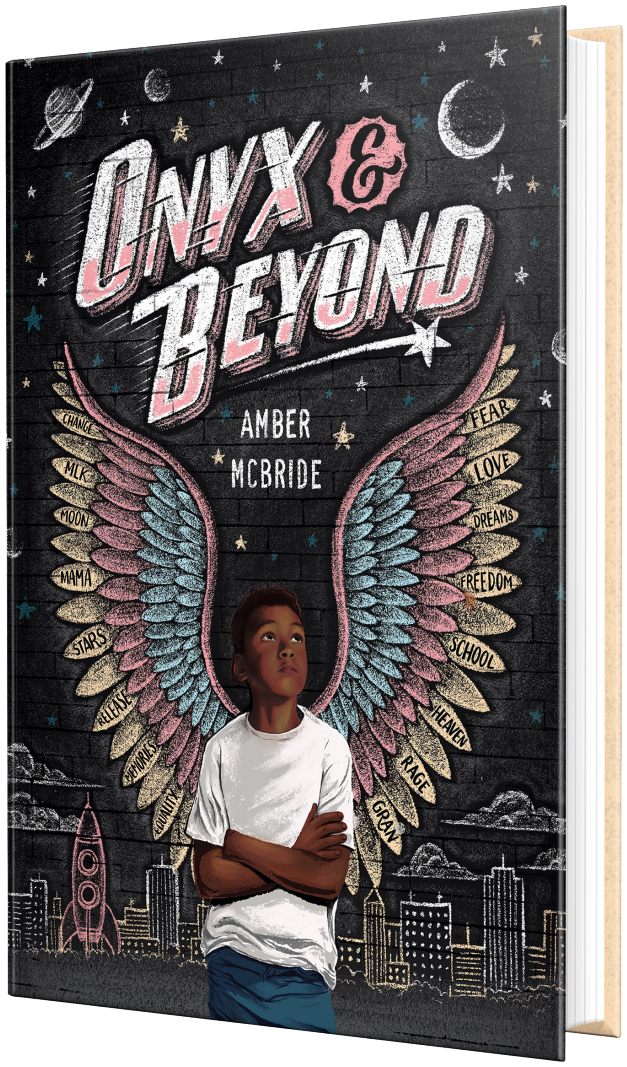
ABOUT THE BOOK

Praised as "a story of perserverance and love" in a starred review by *Kirkus Reviews,* here is a story about keeping dreams alive.

Onyx lives with his mother, who is showing signs of early-onset dementia. He doesn't want to bring attention to his home—if Child Protective Services finds out, they'll put him into foster care.

As he's trying to keep his life together, the Civil Rights Movement is accelerating. Is there anywhere that's safe for a young Black boy? Maybe, if only Onyx can fulfill his dream of becoming an astronaut and exploring space, where none of these challenges will follow him. In the meantime, Onyx can dream. And try to get his mom the help she needs.

Based on her own father's story of growing up in the 1960s and facing the same challenge with his own mother, award winner Amber McBride delivers another affecting depiction of being young and Black in America.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AMBER McBRIDE estimates she reads about 100 books a year. Her work has been published in literary magazines including Ploughshares and Provincetown Arts. Her debut young adult novel, *Me (Moth)* was a finalist for the National Book Award, and won the 2022 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent, among many other accolades. She is a professor of creative writing at University of Virginia, and lives in Charlottesville, Virgina.

PRE-READING RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

CRYSTAL EXPLORATION

Onyx collects rocks and crystals. Spend time exploring the different crystals that he collects and what meanings they have (Reference Link)

REMEMBER THE TITANS CONNECTION

Onyx & Beyond is set in Alexandria, Virginia, the same city as the film *Remember the Titans*. Watch the film to learn about the school segregation that was taking place in Alexandria.

Use this article to get a better understanding for what happened in the movie and what happened in real life: https://www.espn.com/page2/s/closer/020808.html

Use this article to hear from the team about the real story of football in Alexandria: https://northernvirginiamag.com/culture/culture-features/2021/09/23/remember-the-titans/

DURING READING RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

PART 1: NEW MOON, 1968

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Do you or someone you know have a collection? What is it you or that person collect? Why do they collect it? If you don't have a collection, what is something you would want to collect? Why?
- Video Exploration: The Moon
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EkT_7jC_FntI-GwWg3uKtt4JyP6PRnys/view?usp=drive_link
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PcRGQfHftxNpqklapZJyrA6tsmDIm_cy/view?usp=drive_link
- Video Exploration: The Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vUt5Y3rEJ12oHZkF9uBlRYouJaNyf1R8/view?usp=drive_link
- Ending Discussion Questions: What do we learn about the narrator, Onyx, in the opening part of the book? What stood out to you about him? Why did it stand out?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-part-1/899c2168-1994-49a9-a98c-3284899a06f7

PART 2: WAXING CRESCENT MOON, 1970

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Do you have a nickname, and if so, what is it? How did you get your nickname? Do you like your nickname?
- Video Exploration: Alexandria, Virginia
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ltxDvbN6itHpBmfNCsWBYkWDSPNl7Fn0/view?usp=drive_link
- Video Exploration: Malcolm X
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/16M3NaAtk7GFZxqaTfQPBhH4g4yq4kIhz/view?usp=drive_link
- Video Exploration: Igbo Landing
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/14XtzIawfPDt6fj_CZei-OyWCakLWVMPP/view?usp=drive_link
  https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/events-african-american-history/igbo-landing-mass-suicide-1803/
- Video Exploration: *Amistad* Mutiny
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mIWsGmv8YnE7qr0jcXv1nY17eZoZFLb2/view?usp=drive_link
- Ending Discussion Questions: Onyx talks about several challenges he is facing. What do you think is the biggest challenge he is dealing with? Why is it the biggest?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-part-2/820a7e72-201b-4a61-b990-d8405257f25d

PART 3: FIRST QUARTER MOON, 1970

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Are you good at keeping secrets? Do you think it is important to keep secrets? Why or why not?
- Video Exploration: School Integration and Youth Civil Rights Protests
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1v3858xBnqg2cZWr_PBmXjG6bFl72l-SW/view?usp=drive_link
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/16Ooyh_0d42BA0uhXynWjrufG0RYKQvig/view?usp=drive_link
- Video Exploration: Dementia
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/175ENozjCxnjXlZZstUS1je0ur9kbGBwR/view?usp=drive_link
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tSFHilHnZW9RSjFQrzTQolJRNuPY29qa/view?usp=drive_link
- Ending Discussion Questions: Onyx continues to talk about his "wings." What does he mean by his wings? Why do you think he keeps talking about them? What significance do they hold in his life?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-part-3/ce14d3bc-9ad6-4301-97f7-f150e1ed44b4

PART 4: WAXING GIBBOUS MOON, 1970

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Describe a time you got into a fight with a friend or former friend (physical fight or verbal fight). What was the fight about? Did you stay friends after?
- Video Exploration: Ruby Bridges
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S8dMO1L3jwPkhoXoac7vpOPQxWJoT1oX/view?usp=drive_link
- Video Exploration: Moon Landing
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AUqBiJ2LdUD49kMukatkmprKkjG8xws6/view?usp=drive_link
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/18C916K8SM-z8pIG8f9Gd55cE_Ma8mm9P/view?usp=drive_link
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/11f1booS74J-h1fGoPl3Y-8ZUHThsljL8/view?usp=drive_link
- Ending Discussion Question: Onyx talks a lot about his relationships with different people. Pick one of the following characters and describe his relationship with them: Mama, Gran, or Pops. What significance does the person hold in Onyx's life?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-part-4/e3c52483-92b4-440b-a763-91a8532f3e0d

PART 5: FULL MOON, 1970

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Can you describe a time when you tried to do something but failed at it or weren't able to do it? It could be something related to school, sports, video games, your personal life, etc. How did you feel when you weren't able to do it?
- Video Exploration: Natural History Museum
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/13uzgHObdhiwE_tnHDs6ROo6eXndJyMr2/view?usp=drive_link
- Video Exploration: The Story of Icarus
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wQyVkbE3SysfWyaZd1Vi3ffnJpfWHZcY/view?usp=drive_link
- Ending Discussion Questions: Onyx tries to "fly" from his window but fails (pages 160 to 162). Why did he try to fly? Why is this moment significant for him?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-part-5/e5e4d935-672b-4574-b35d-9418b6e04589

PART 6: WANING GIBBOUS MOON, 1970

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Describe a time you tried to secretly do something but got caught. What did you try to do? How did you feel when you got caught?
- Video Exploration: Moon Rocks
  https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_eT-tcRYmCehchhgNPDSJLXdrmQu2OaJ/view?usp=drive_link
- Ending Discussion Questions: The section ends with Onyx asking, "Now what will happen to Mama?" Why does Onyx think that he has failed his mother? Do you think he has failed her? What would you do if you were in Onyx's situation?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-part-6/3b512985-a099-473a-b2b1-752252f4915a

PARTS 7–9: THIRD QUARTER MOON, WAXING CRESCENT MOON, AND NEW MOON AGAIN

- Brainstorming Discussion Questions: Describe a time your family helped you with something. What did they help you with? How did it make you feel?
- Article Exploration: Robin Gibson
  Overview of Racial Violence in Alexandria: https://www.alexandriagazette.com/news/2017/jun/12/flashes-violence-alexandrias-history/
  Original Story in *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/07/archives/weeks-disorders-end-in-alexandria.html
- Ending Discussion Questions: Onyx says, "I can fly. I can do anything." Why does he now believe he can fly? Why is this moment significant for him? Do you believe he is in a better situation now?
- Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/share/onyx-beyond-parts-7-9/f7668c5f-8e24-4670-b94f-690b77ae7b2e

POST-READING RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

- *Onyx & Beyond Essential* Question Exploration
  - Explore the essential question: What are some of the biggest challenges Onyx faces and how does he handle them and overcome them?
    - Visual Representation: Create a drawing or series of drawings which focus on Onyx's challenges and ability to overcome them.
    - Presentation: Create a slide deck which looks at ten to fifteen key moments in the text and Onyx's challenges and ability to overcome them.
    - Poem, Rap, or Song: Create a short poem, rap, or song which highlights Onyx's challenges and ability to overcome them.
    - Music Playlist: Create a playlist of ten to fifteen songs which explore Onyx's challenges and ability to overcome them.

- Textual Evidence Analysis: Identify ten to fifteen key lines in the text which showcase Onyx's challenges and ability to overcome them.
- Analytical Essay: Write a three to five paragraph essay responding to the essential question around Onyx's challenges.
- Narrative Writing Task #1: Create an alternative ending to the book.
- Narrative Writing Task #2: Choose a specific moment in the book and write it from another character's perspective.

- Journal Entry
  - Onyx keeps a "super secret" journal where he shares stories, speaks to his relatives, and confesses secrets. Write a "super secret" journal entry to yourself in the same style as Onyx.
- Create Your Wings
  - Onyx talks about his desire to create wings and fly. The cover of the book also features wings. Draw a set of wings for yourself. On the wings write the following information:
    - A family member who helps you find success.
    - A friend who helps you find success.
    - A dream you have for your future.
- Post-Reading Discussion Questions

1. What character did you find the most interesting? Why?
2. What character do you think was the most helpful to Onyx? Why?
3. What was the most surprising part of the book? Why?
4. What challenge did you feel was the most difficult one Onyx faced? Why?
5. What did you feel was a worse choice for Onyx: trying to fly or trying to steal the moon rock? Why?
6. How do you think you would've handled Onyx's situation?
7. What part of the book did you connect to the most? Why?
8. What do you think Onyx could've done differently to handle the difficult situations?
9. Were you surprised with how the book ended? Why or why not?
10. If you were Onyx's friend, what advice would you have given him?

This teacher's guide was written by Wyatt Oroke (Mr.O), a nationally recognized middle school English teacher in Baltimore City. Mr. O was named Baltimore City Teacher of the Year in 2020, Maryland State Teacher of the Year in 2021, and was a two time featured guest on the Ellen DeGeneres Show.