



Title: Black Boy Joy
Author: Kwame Mbalia
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(Recommended by *School
Library Journal*)

BOOK RESUME: BLACK BOY JOY

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Black boy joy is...

Picking out a fresh first-day-of-school outfit.
Saving the universe in an epic intergalactic race.
Finding your voice—and your rhymes—during tough times.
Flying on your skateboard like nobody's watching.

And more! From seventeen acclaimed Black male and non-binary authors comes a vibrant collection of stories, comics, and poems about the power of joy and the wonders of Black boyhood.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★“An anthology spotlights the many ways Black boys find joy as they learn and grow in the world.

Seventeen writers, some very well known—Jason Reynolds, Jerry Craft, Varian Johnson—others representing newer voices, present short pieces that depict Black boys exploring their communities, families, sexuality, and even space and time as they come of age and grow in confidence and understanding. Editor Mbalia contributes a story in three parts that provides a metanarrative that further emphasizes the magic of taking joy in life and in storytelling. While the thematic thread provides a scaffold, each of the stories is independently successful. Readers experience Black boys seeking excellence in, among other things, a debate about superheroes, a baking contest, learning to pilot a plane, skateboarding, and determining the true meanings of *fly* and *cool*. There is acceptance and celebration of differences in the expression of Black masculinity, along with respect for girls and women. Reflections of Black culture give the stories richness and texture. There are many examples of strong family connections and community support. Most of the contributions are prose, but the compilation includes a graphic story as well as one in verse. There is variety in tone and style: Some are humorous, some are poignant, but all are compelling reading. The length of the stories makes them ideal for discussion and student responses. A unique, timely, and necessary read.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★“According to Gary the Griot, joy is cultivated through stories, and it is to be shared and distributed to the masses. That is exactly what he teaches his successor, young Fortitude, as they embark on a journey to collect Black boy joy. A collection of short stories aimed at middlegraders, this title offers a fierce line up of seventeen Black male and nonbinary authors exploring what exactly it means to exist as a Black boy (or person) without a hyperfocus on the inescapable pains of Black life in America. The contributors offer a warm embrace of the plurality of Blackness, with stories spanning from intergalactic world saving, expressing one's true gender identity, whipping up tantalizing dessert recipes, and the process behind getting first-day-of-school

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fly, just to name a few. All the while, Mbalia lovingly connects the stories as through his three-part contribution, *The Griot of Grover Street*. Though the title and cover may convince you otherwise, it is important to note that this book doesn't shy away from sadness, fear, or anger; what sets it apart, however, is that the stories are predicated upon joy. In a world where Black boys' stories are often tragedies, statistics, and stereotypes, this work surely reclaims ownership over the boldness, creativity, and wholeness they possess. A great addition to a classroom collection and an even better family read; pick up *Black Boy Joy* for a heavy dose of happiness." —*Booklist*, starred review

★ "It can be challenging to find resonant books for middle grade Black boys that reflect the diversity of their experiences. A solution is right here with this excellent anthology. This exuberant collection runs the gamut, featuring prose and verse with illustrations from 17 Black male and nonbinary creators. Contributors include authors across a variety of youth literature genres, such as Jason Reynolds, Tochi Onyebuchi, Dean Atta, and Julian Winters. The stories themselves are short enough to appeal to reluctant readers and address all kinds of topics, from losing a close relative to saving the galaxy to getting injured doing a sport and the first day of school. Relationships and connection are the throughlines that render these seemingly disparate stories a cohesive whole. No matter if readers are into music, art, sports, church, or fantastical adventure, there is something in this book that they will connect with. VERDICT 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

★ "This luminous middle-grade anthology edited by Mbalia (the Tristan Strong series) features 17 stories by as many Black male and nonbinary authors focusing on Black boys' happiness. Mbalia kicks off the magic with *The Griot of Grover Street*, in which a boy takes a leap of faith to an unknown place guided by an eccentric elder. In *There's Going to Be a Fight in the Cafeteria on Friday and You Better Not Bring Batman*, Lamar Giles presents a superhero-loving child who embraces a rich range of superheroes with the help of his family, while Varian Johnson offers a lesson in championing individuality in *The Definition of Cool*. And Julian Winters's *The Legendary Lawrence Cobbler* combines baking with a touching coming-out revelation that brings a family closer together and emphasizes the significance of intergenerational bonds. Filtering perennial subjects such as friendships, gender identity, and family through the lenses of magic, science, space travel, superheroes, and more, this is an exuberant celebration of carefree Black experiences; while it will especially resonate with Black readers, any reader will appreciate how this genre-bending collection expands the horizons of what joy for Black boys can be." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ Discover: 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

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“Sixteen stories plus an interwoven framing narrative by editor Mbalia celebrate “the revelry, the excitement, the sheer fun of growing up as boys in and out of the hood.” Subjects range from compiling superhero lists for the cafeteria debates to creating a song for church to intergalactic parent-rescuing adventure; a few standouts are Jason Reynolds’ *First-Day Fly*, an homage to being well dressed on the first day of school; Justin A. Reynolds’ *Our Dill*, which nimbly subverts the predictable narrative about a best female friend and a big dance; and P. Djèlí Clark’s *Percival and the Jab*, wherein a boy can’t shake off the chaotic folkloric sprite from his Trinidadian heritage. Throughout, there’s a ton of love for relatives, especially grandparents (George M. Johnson’s *The Gender Reveal*, about a kid’s coming out as nonbinary, has a prime example in Big Nanny), and there’s also just plain enthusiasm—for superhero obsessions, for skateboarding, for the importance of the dodo’s extinction, for clothing whether it be the perfect white tee or the perfect floral-print suit. It’s therefore a book that in addition to celebrating joy reminds readers that getting excited and caring—about people, about stuff—is cool and rewarding. Readers will appreciate being able to pick and choose, and many entries will make for lively readalouds as well, providing an opportunity to spread the joy even further. Biographies of the contributors are appended.” —*The Bulletin*

“This short story collection, edited by 2020 Coretta Scott King honoree Mbalia (for *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*), makes it clear that Black boyhood is something to celebrate, starting with the beautiful cover portrait by Kadir Nelson depicting a smiling Black boy with the book’s title in glittering gold letters above him. The volume opens with a story by Mbalia, in which Fortitude (Fort) Jones is attending his aunt Netta’s funeral. Overwhelmed, Fort leaves the church and accidentally runs into the eccentric Gary the Griot (Mr. G). In the crash, Mr. G’s mysterious “joy jar” is broken. Fort agrees to help refill the jar—and finds himself on an intergalactic journey to find joy. The seventeen stories represent that joy as the authors and illustrators—all Black men, including Jason Reynolds, Jerry Craft, Varian Johnson, and others—present readers with a diverse representation of Black boyhood. The boys are from the United States, Nigeria, and the Caribbean. Their use of language is representative of where they are from. They are straight and gay. Some are cisgender, while others are gender nonconforming. They like to bake, rap, sew, and play football. The engaging stories are told through prose, verse, and the graphic novel format. No matter who the boys are, they are satisfyingly surrounded by loving extended family members who encourage them to be themselves. Short biographies of the contributors are appended” —*The Horn Book*

“In a short introduction to *Black Boy Joy*, anthology editor Kwame Mbalia (*Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*) reveals three secrets: He doesn’t like watching the news, he cries when he is happy, and he wants readers to be happy. He describes *Black Boy Joy* as what happened when he combined those three secrets with the contributions of 16 fellow Black authors.

In addition to his role as editor, Mbalia also contributes the book’s framing story, *The Griot of Grover Street*, in which 11-year-old Fortitude Jones is called away from his aunt’s funeral to help a strange older man travel through the mysterious space between worlds to collect moments of joy. A mix of well-known and up-and-coming authors, including Jason Reynolds, Varian Johnson, Tochi Onyebuchi,

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and Jerry Craft create the moments themselves in 16 stories that highlight the sweetness of the extraordinary and the ordinary. Fantastical tales burst with the energy of intergalactic battles and magical games, and one story written in verse includes instructions for writing your own poem. In Lamar Giles' incomparably titled *There's Going to Be a Fight in the Cafeteria on Friday and You Better Not Bring Batman*, a boy named Cornell gets advice on a superpowered showdown from three generations of family members. In B.B. Alston's *The McCoy Game*, two cousins reconnect after having grown apart. The young chef in Julian Winters' *The Legendary Lawrence Cobbler* learns that his father's love for him isn't changed by the revelation that he likes boys. And a tween uses their 13th birthday as the occasion to come out as nonbinary in George M. Johnson's *The Gender Reveal*. Every story's protagonist is instantly endearing as they offer humor and hope and share their fears and dreams. The stories are honest and fresh, and the affection each contributor must have felt for both their characters and the reader while writing comes through clearly on every page. *Black Boy Joy* is a treasure to share and return to again and again.—*Bookpage*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- SELECTION ILA Notable Books for Global Society Award List
- SELECTION Kansas National Education Association Reading Circle
- SELECTION Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices - Fiction for Children
- NOMINEE New York State Three Apples Award
- SELECTION CCBC Best of List
- SELECTION Junior Library Guild
- HONOR BCALA Children's and Youth Literary Award
- SELECTION Publishers Weekly Best Books
- SELECTION SLJ Best Books of the Year
- SELECTION Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Books
- Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award
- Michigan MISelf in Books
- MISelf in Books, 2021, Upper Elementary
- New York 3 Apples Children's Book Award
- Rhode Island Middle School Book Award
- Texas Bluebonnet Award Nominee

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Educators' Guide](#)
- [Teaching Resources from the Texas Bluebonnet Award](#)
- [Discussion Questions from the NEA](#)

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