

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussion groups or library programs.

Meet Ohio author Hanif Abdurraqib and learn about his works.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading and sharing *Go Ahead in the Rain*.

Discover websites and informational texts to explore topics and themes in depth.

Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to A Tribe Called Quest

By Hanif Abdurraqib



About the Book

The first chronicle of A Tribe Called Quest—the visionary, award-winning group whose jazz-infused records and socially conscious lyrics revolutionized rap in the early 1990s.

How does one pay homage to A Tribe Called Quest? The seminal rap group brought jazz into the genre, resurrecting timeless rhythms to create masterpieces such as “The Low End Theory” and “Midnight Marauders.” Seventeen years after their last album, they resurrected themselves with an intense, socially conscious record, *We Got It from Here . . . Thank You 4 Your Service*, which arrived when fans needed it most, in the aftermath of the 2016 election. Poet and essayist Hanif Abdurraqib digs into the group’s history and draws from his own experience to reflect on how its distinctive sound resonated among fans like himself. The result is as ambitious and genre-bending as the rap group itself.

Abdurraqib traces the Tribe’s creative career, from their early days as part of the Afrocentric rap collective known as the Native Tongues, through their first three classic albums, to their eventual breakup and long hiatus. Their work is placed in the context of the broader rap landscape of the 1990s, one upended by sampling laws that forced a reinvention in production methods, the East Coast-West Coast rivalry that threatened to destroy the genre, and some record labels’ shift from focusing on groups to individual MCs.

Throughout the narrative Abdurraqib connects the music and cultural history to their street-level impact. Whether he’s remembering *The Source* magazine cover announcing the Tribe’s 1998 breakup or writing personal letters to the group after bandmate Phife Dawg’s death, Abdurraqib seeks the deeper truths of A Tribe Called Quest; truths that—like the low end, the bass—are not simply heard in the head, but felt in the chest.

**THIS IS THE
THIRD BOOK BY
HANIF
ABDURRAQIB.**

**IT IS A LOVE LETTER
TO A GROUP,
A SOUND,
AND AN ERA.**

**IT IS CALLED
GO AHEAD
IN THE RAIN:
NOTES TO A TRIBE
CALLED QUEST.**

THIS IS A CIRCLE
THAT TELLS YOU
THIS BOOK IS A
NEW YORK TIMES
BEST SELLER.

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“I understand more clearly now what I didn’t understand then: how ‘The Low End Theory’ isn’t only about that which cannot be heard, but it is also about society’s unseen, the people who exist but may be able to navigate an entire landscape as invisible, until some violence or some tragedy deems them less so.”

Book Details

Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to A Tribe Called Quest by Hanif Abdurraqib. University of Texas Press, 2019. ISBN 9781477316481. 216 pages. utpress.utexas.edu/books/abdurraqib-go-ahead-in-the-rain

Available as an ebook and digital audiobook through the Ohio Digital Library: ohiodigitallibrary.com

Available as a downloadable talking book through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program: olbpd.klas.com

Awards:

The book became a *New York Times* Bestseller, was a finalist for the Kirkus Prize, and was longlisted for the National Book Award.

About the Author

Hanif Abdurraqib is a poet, essayist, and cultural critic from Columbus. He is also the author of ***The Crown Ain’t Worth Much***, nominated for a Hurston-Wright Legacy Award; ***They Can’t Kill Us Until They Kill Us***, named a best book of 2017 by NPR, *Pitchfork*, *Oprah Magazine*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Slate*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Publishers Weekly*, among others; the collection of poems ***A Fortune for Your Disaster***; and his latest publication, a history of Black performance in the United States titled ***A Little Devil in America***. He is a Callaloo Creative Writing Fellow, a poetry editor at *Muzzle Magazine*, and a member of the poetry collective Echo Hotel with poet/essayist Eve Ewing.

Hanif Abdurraqib’s website
www.abdurraqib.com

Hanif Abdurraqib reads from *Go Ahead in the Rain* at Politics & Prose Bookstore
youtu.be/6AEpOkhiHxw
Video, 1 hour 3 minutes; Includes a Q&A.

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Also by Hanif Abdurraqib:

A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance. Random House, 2021.

A Fortune for Your Disaster: Poems. Tin House, 2019.

They Can’t Kill Us Until They Kill Us: Essays. Two Dollar Radio, 2017.

The Crown Ain’t Worth Much. Button Poetry, 2016.

Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing **Go Ahead in the Rain**.

- Were you a fan of A Tribe Called Quest or familiar with their music before reading the book? If so, what did you learn about the group from reading? If not, did the book inspire you to listen to the group?
- Before you started reading, what did you think this book would be about versus what it actually was: a collection of deeply personal music essays? Would a straightforward, objective biography of the group read differently? How so?
- How does Abdurraqib approach his own story—with a sense of irony, sympathy, distance, comedy, or something else entirely?
- How does Abdurraqib's poetry background influence his writing style?
- What feelings did **Go Ahead in the Rain** evoke? Were there aspects that were particularly relatable to you? If so, why?
- Which passages from the book especially stood out to you and why?
- Abdurraqib traces his love for music to his upbringing in Columbus, where he was the youngest of four children. How did your childhood shape the music you enjoy?
- What was your biggest takeaway from reading **Go Ahead in the Rain**? Would you recommend this book to someone? Why or why not?

Check It Out

Recommended for readers of **Go Ahead in the Rain**.

Can I Kick It? by Idris Goodwin.
Haymarket Books, 2019. ISBN 9781642591767.

Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation by Jeff Chang.
St. Martin's Press, 2005. ISBN 9780312301439.

Check the Technique: Liner Notes for Hip-Hop Junkies by Brian Coleman.
Villard Books, 2007. ISBN 9780812977752.

The Concise Guide to Hip-Hop Music: A Fresh Look at the Art of Hip-Hop, From Old-School Beats to Free-style Rap by Paul Edwards.
St. Martin's Griffin, 2015. ISBN 9781250034816.

Hip Hop Family Tree Book 1: 1970s-1981 (Hip Hop Family Tree) by Ed Piskor.
Fantagraphics Books, 2013. ISBN 9781606996904.

Music to My Years: A Mixtape Memoir of Growing Up and Standing Up by Cristela Alonzo.
Atria Books, 2019. ISBN 9781501189203.

Queens Reigns Supreme: Fat Cat, 50 Cent, and the Rise of the Hip-Hop Hustler by Ethan Brown.
Anchor Books, 2005. ISBN 9781400095230.

The Rap Year Book: The Most Important Rap Song from Every Year Since 1979, Discussed, Debated, and Deconstructed by Shea Serrano.
Abrams Image, 2015. ISBN 9781419718182.

Go Further

Ideas for extending the experience of reading ***Go Ahead in the Rain***.

A review published in *The Nation* stated "At the heart of ***Go Ahead in the Rain*** are questions about ourselves; it asks how and why we love artists, and what we can do with that love." With this concept in mind, compose a letter to a musician or band that helped shape who you are today.

Using the Ohio Digital Library (ohiodigitallibrary.com), check out the title ***Hip-Hop Poetry and the Classics*** by Alan Sitomer and Michael Cirelli (2011) and complete one or more of the poetry writing exercises contained within. The direct link to this ebook is: ohdbks.overdrive.com/media/540653.

Listen to A Tribe Called Quest by checking their albums out through your local public library or, if you have access, utilizing a streaming service. Watch one of their music videos here: www.youtube.com/channel/UC2Vr5tIVtYmM46jMU9vjoyA.

Check out the documentary *Beats, Rhymes & Life: The Travels of A Tribe Called Quest (2011)* from your local public library. Directed by Michael Rapaport, it chronicles the 2008 reunion tour of A Tribe Called Quest, offering a behind-the-scenes look at their journey and contributions as a band.

Research hip-hop history using online resources available to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (www.ohioweblibrary.org).

Explore More

*Additional ideas and resources to use with ***Go Ahead in the Rain***.*

Hanif Abdurraqib

Read more of his writing online at www.abdurraqib.com/publications
Listen to him read "Hanif's Letter to Phife's Mom," an excerpt from the book, here: youtu.be/J6EUKrHqHWk

Police Brutality and Race in Music Fanbases

Long before the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, before cell phone videos and social media existed to highlight police killings and the mundanity of racism in the United States, hip-hop served as a historical record of the nation's racial violence and injustice. Read the article "Protesting Police Violence, a playlist" from the Harvard Gazette, accessible here: news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/07/hiphops-long-history-of-exposing-police-brutality/

Sampling: The Foundation of Hip-Hop

Learn about the creative concepts and technological practices on which hip-hop music was constructed. Investigate what it means to "sample" from another style, and who has used sampling and how by exploring this lesson plan from WOSU and PBS Learning Media: wosu.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/e611-soundbreaking/e611-soundbreaking/

Hip-Hop Documentaries

There are a number of hip-hop documentaries and docuseries chronicling the origins and history of the movement and its impact on visual art, politics, dance and fashion. Consider viewing any or all of the following: *Hip Hop: The Songs that Shook America (2019)*, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes (2006)*, *Hip-Hop Evolution (2016)*, and *Hip Hop Uncovered (2021)*.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: library.ohio.gov/ctro.

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