

Coming Home

Brittney Griner
with Michelle Burford

ADAPTED FOR YOUNG ADULTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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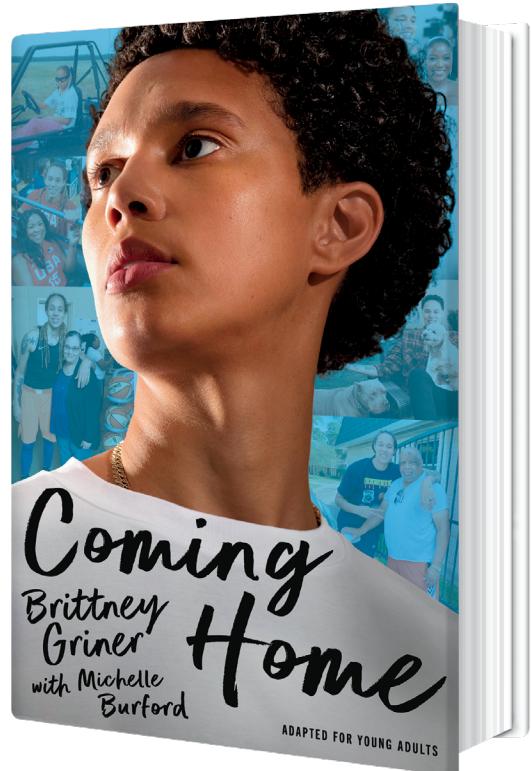


About the Book

On February 17, 2022, Brittney Griner arrived in Moscow ready to play for a Russian women's basketball team. Instead, a security checkpoint became her gateway to hell, and she was arrested for mistakenly carrying a small amount of an illegal substance in Russia. Brittney's world was violently upended in a crisis that would capture the interest of an entire nation.

Brittney shares this harrowing story of courage and strength, while recalling her teenage years where she found meaning and empowerment in sports, and overcoming her own struggles with her sexual identity. Her principles of fortitude and courage are ever evident as she goes on to recount her feelings of isolation while navigating a foreign legal system, her emotional and physical anguish as the first American woman ever to endure a Russian penal colony, the chilling prisoner swap with Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, and her remarkable rise from hostage to global spokesperson on behalf of other detained Americans.

Young readers will identify with Brittney's story of overcoming insurmountable odds, finding strength within herself, and navigating the ups and downs of coming of age as a queer Black woman. *Coming Home* is both a story of survival and a testament to love—the bonds that brought Brittney home to her family, and ultimately to herself.



About the Author

BRITTNEY GRINER is a pioneer, humanitarian, and activist and was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2023. Griner is an NCAA champion, a WNBA champion, and a three-time Olympic gold medalist. Winner of the Best Female Athlete ESPY Award and a nine-time WNBA All-Star, Griner is one of the most decorated and influential athletes of this generation.

About the Co-Author

MICHELLE BURFORD is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and a founding editor of *O: The Oprah Magazine*. She is a Harvard-trained journalist whose work has taken her to more than thirty-five countries on six continents. A native of Phoenix, Burford now lives in New York City.



About the Adapter

TONYA ABARI is an independent journalist, author, essayist, collaborative writer, and reviewer. Her words have been published in the *Nashville Scene*, *Essence*, *AllRecipes*, *Ambrook Research*, *The Kitchn*, *USA Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Parents*, *Romper*, *Good Housekeeping*, *PBS Kids*, and many more. When she's not writing, Tonya can be found discovering new places, dancing to an early 2000s playlist, homeschooling two children, and enjoying food pop-ups with her family, whose names all also begin with T. A native of Baltimore, she now lives and writes from Nashville.



Prereading Questions and Activities

- What does *home* mean to you? What does the title *Coming Home* mean to you? What are its connotations? What does home represent?
- Have you read any other books or seen movies or TV shows about a journey home? What are the central conflicts and tensions in these narratives? What are the usual barriers to getting home?
- What do you know about Brittney Griner's life and career?
- What are your identities—the different aspects of yourself that combine to make you *you*? Consider bringing together the different elements of your identity in a poem that follows the template of the George Ella Lyon poem "Where I'm From."
- Write a short story, poem, or essay about a time that you have longed for home or a place that felt like home.

During Reading

- What motivated Brittney Griner to go to Russia? What made her hesitant?
- How was basketball essential in shaping her identity?
- How does she balance her work with her personal life?
- Why does she suggest she was stopped in the Russian airport?
- How would you characterize the Russian authorities? How would you characterize the prison facilities?
- Griner writes, "The country felt like a second home, but only because I'd never actually been inside that house. From my place on the porch, I couldn't see the dirty politics, the corruption, the old-school views of women" (p. 52). What is Griner saying about Russia and her perspective of it? What is the metaphor she is using, and why is it effective?
- What narrative is the Russian propaganda perpetuating? How is she being used as "Putin's pawn"?
- Why does Griner feel she is forgiven by her mom? What does she think she needs to be forgiven for?
- How was Griner supported by her family? In what ways did she feel unsupported by her family?
- What effect does her detention have on her loved ones?
- What is the significance of Griner being deemed "wrongfully detained" by the U.S. State Department?
- What is Dr. Danielle Gilbert's theory on hostage "deservingness"? How does the WNBA campaign seek to increase "deservingness"? What do you think about this theory and their campaign?
- What is Griner's legal team's defense strategy?
- How does Griner feel during the trial and during the ruling? What are reactions to the ruling?
- What does Russia rely on its prisoner population for? Why are female prisoners so valuable?
- How can class determine a prisoner's early release?
- How is IK-2 different than detention? What are its conditions?
- How does Griner's return home come about?
- What are the challenges of transitioning home for Griner and her family? How does Griner cope with these challenges?
- Why are some people angry that Griner was released instead of Paul Whelan? What does she do to keep the spotlight on him?
- What does Griner make of the WNBA's decision to fly their athletes commercially? Why?
- How does Griner's relationship with home change over the course of the narrative?



After Reading

Choose at least five identity markers to trace throughout the memoir, comparing how power and privilege are negotiated in two contexts—the U.S. and Russia. Use direct evidence from the text to support your reasoning.

Identity	In the US: How does Griner's identity give or limit power and/or privilege?	In Russia: How does Griner's identity give or limit power and/or privilege?	What changes, if anything? Why?
Language			
Skin color			
Gender			
Class			
Talent/skill			
Nationality/ immigration status			
Family structure			
Ability/disability			
Body size/ appearance			
Mental health			
Interests			

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After Reading

• After completing your organizer, take an intersectional approach to exploring social identities. Examine how two or more identities are intertwined, and how power and privilege operate differently when we see identities as interlocking. Patricia Hill Collins writes in *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*¹: "Women are murdered, but some women are at a higher risk, because public policies targeting violence against women do not take into account that the protection of Black and non-Black women might require different measures for each group. Violence, or the lack thereof, does not fall equally on everyone—and one can only reach this conclusion by adopting an intersectional approach." So while a national statistic might show that murder of women is declining, murder of Black women is increasing. This is just one example

of how, when we take an intersectional approach, we can better see how power is really operating, and who really has power. Choose at least two intersections of identity to trace throughout the memoir. Using this same framework, notice how identities intersect, comparing how power is negotiated in two contexts—the U.S. and Russia. Use direct evidence from the text to support your findings.

- Research Americans who have been wrongfully detained abroad. Consider learning what you can do to support their fight for freedom or even to take steps to join their cause.
- Notice the quotes that introduce each part of the narrative. Research the person each quote is attributed to. What is the context for the quote? What is its significance? Are there other quotes that you like that you would use to introduce each section?
- Throughout the memoir, Brittney Griner uses the motifs of the cage and the spectacle. Trace one or both motifs to answer the question: What is Brittney Griner's message for readers?



¹ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press, 2019.

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