



2021 FST WEBG

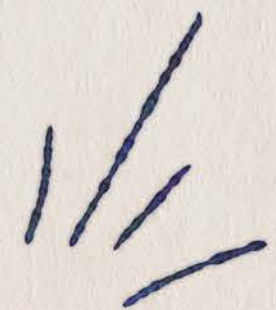
WRBG
FEST 2021

Author _____

Title _____

	Editors Note	3
NOV 3	Flowers For My Sister	4-5
NOV 15	Booklist	6-7
DEC 20		
OCT 6	Homage to My Hair	8-9
OCT 13	The Blueprint	10-11
NOV 10	WRBG Playlist	12
APR 5		
APR 12		
APR 14		
MAY 3		
APR 6		
(Form 16)		

festival!



Well-Read Black Girl

FESTIVAL 2021

✧ ✧ ✧ Shining a light on black brilliance ✧ ✧

toxo the intern team



I love who I am. Unapologetically Black, insanely curious, and full of joy. Always unafraid of the future...but slightly pensive. I was this way as a little girl.

I can still recall so many of my childhood dreams. I wanted to be a teacher, ballerina, and writer - in that order. I vividly remember the books I read again and again. How the sentences stuck in my head and I scribbled in the margins of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. I think back to reading Toni Morrison for the 1st time or reciting an Eloise Greenfield poem aloud. So many moments of trying, failing, and trying again. When I launched the 1st Well-Read Black Girl Festival in 2017, I didn't realize that I was ultimately reconnecting to my younger self. I was gathering the memories of my childhood and creating a community. When we gather - whether in-person or virtually - it's a model for belonging. Our small but mighty team is striving to build safe, creative spaces filled with love and care for others. We are collectively reading and transforming ourselves with every book, with every tender exchange of truth & vulnerability. Thank you for being a part of our thriving collective of readers, writers, and everything in between. We are dedicated to introducing future generations to diverse writers of all backgrounds including contemporary authors who are non-binary, queer, trans, and disabled. We want our libraries to be rich with beautiful, expansive narratives.

We're so grateful to be finding new ways every day to engage with each other in literature — this year's five year celebration of the festival only marks the beginning of our journey together. — *Gloria*

Editor's Note

BLACK FRIENDSHIP

Flowers For My Sisters

By Nakya Ward

“She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It’s good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.”

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

This Toni Morrison quote from her novel *Beloved* is one I always go back to that beautifully describes the significance of friendship- a safe and sacred place you share with another person. No matter if we have a bad day, week, or year, our sisters gather us and put us back together in all the right order. A genuine friendship is a transformative love. Black girl friendships are as colorful as we are. A cultural bond we’re naturally called to.

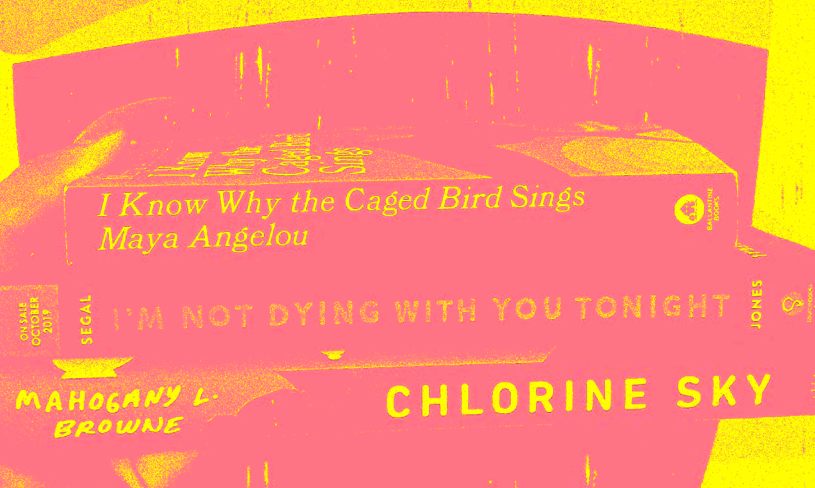
Black women speak a language that can only be comprehended by our experiences. The way we dress, our hairstyles, the way we cheer one another on and uplift sisterhood. Our experiences are unique, stitched with pain, beauty, and grace. We validate these struggles and victories like no other can.

Growing up, my older sister Tanzy and I were always close. We bonded through poetry, books, our favorite TV shows, and just being. I wanted to do everything she did, admiring the complexity and quirks of her girlhood. I like to brag about the fact that the opportunities I’ve had have all been through the support and brilliance of other Black women. My first friendship outside of family began in 6th grade. We are still best friends at twenty-three and twenty-four years old. We met as two young girls navigating south west Atlanta in the early 2000s with weird personalities and distinct styles. We bonded over Childish Gambino’s *Because The Internet* album, rapping 3005 word

“I believe we grow through sisterhood, evolving into our true selves.”

for word every chance we got. We watched the show *Community* and cackled over *A Different World*. Shauna and I often laugh about how without our friendship, we wouldn’t be who we are today. I was given the space to comfortably embrace my differences. Even in our disagreements, and life pulling us apart, she has always been there with open arms and vice versa. To me, that is love. She taught me the value of a thing you cannot buy—sisterhood beyond blood. I believe we grow through sisterhood, evolving into our true selves.

Platonic romance has played a pivotal role in my life. In the presence of my sisters, I don’t have to be strong and tough all the time. I can be soft and silly. I can also be outraged about the politics of our community without being considered bitter or the angry Black woman. I attended a Historically Black University, Clark Atlanta, and coincidentally attended Black schools my entire life. Most of my friendships are from high school and University. It wasn’t until I began to work in white spaces that I realized how lonely it felt to exist in a space where there’s no one like you culturally.. I was always searching for a unicorn Black girl to bond with and make the shift bearable. I’m thankful for the foundation I had in my Blackness from years of community support and friendship, or else I would have folded. My sisters and I laugh and shit-talk about these experiences now. When we’re slipping up, we check each other out of love, and like Toni said, put the pieces back together again. Our friendships support, fulfill and bring happiness. Black sisterhood is to be cherished and protected at all costs.



WELL-READ BLACK
GIRL INTERN
BOOK STACKS
FROM THE START
OF THE SUMMER.

BOOK LIST

Curated by Giselle Buchanan



- Spin a Soft Black Song—Nikki Giovanni
- Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo—Ntozake Shange
- Black Girl, Call Home—Jasmine Mans
- The Poet X—Elizabeth Acevedo
- Pet—Akwaeke Emezi
- Black Girl Magic Anthology—Mahogany Browne, Jamila Woods, Idrissa Simmonds
- Akata Witch—Nnedi Okorafor
- All About Love—bell hooks
- Their Eyes Were Watching God—Zora Neale Hurston
- Parable of the Sower—Octavia E. Butler

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Maya Angelou



Homage To My Hair

by Nakya Ward

8

Growing up a Black girl meant you expressed yourself through the architecture of your hair. I remember when my mama pulled out the Bergamot hair grease, rubber bands and hair-bows. My favorite hairbows and berets were white and pink...There were so many clicked together, matching perfectly with my little pink shorts and white t-shirt. I felt confident as a child through the love of hair care. Since my mama was a hairstylist, I would always go through her products and all the pretty hair bows she bought for us. Eventually, I even taught myself.

I believe that your hair is your glory, your crown, and a significant aspect of your identity. It is a source of attention, and we are constantly grooming it. Whether it's shaved all off, covered or loc'd, it has meaning. Black hair has a history rich with guidance, rebellion, and creativity. Black girls communicate with one another through hair. Walking down the street we compliment your individuality, ask you about your hair journey, or how you get your lace so laid. As children, the barrettes held our pigtails together and made us bright and colorful. Historically, the creator of the barrette is unknown. It is said that the hair barrette has been used since ancient Egyptian times, which is evident through the images we see of hair clippings in their drawings. The Egyptians would often use barrettes made of gold used to hang from braids and other various styles, like us today. Clear, black, and white beads dangled and clicked from our braids and twists like instruments and swung effortlessly.

I got my first set of individual braids at the age of 8. and I thought I was the cutest girl in the world. Braids have been gracing the scalps of Black women as early as 500 BC in the motherland. Braids represented tribes, social class, coded language, and, of course, beauty. Wigs, weaves, and extensions were also present in ancient African text and images. It's glorious how we subconsciously represent our ancestors through the way we style our hair. Cornrows, sisterlocks, freeform locs, and standard locs also date back as early as 3000 BC and signified age, religious beliefs, kinship, marital status, and wealth. During my loc journey, coming up on

three years, I've learned the dedication, commitment to self, and actuality of growth that the experience offered.

During the 1970s, thanks to the Black power movement, braids and afros became the image in our communities. This shift in culture was primarily due to the Black Panther Party and demand for Black liberation. Black people wanted to take control of their image and reject white beauty standards. During this natural hair revolution, perms and relaxers declined in sales, however, resurfaced in the 1980s. Our hair is diverse ---- changing like the weather each week or month that we want to be brand new. In the recent Hulu documentary, Summer of Soul, the most mesmerizing thing was the aesthetic of that time. Looking into the audience I saw the most beautiful hair and head wraps...they truly looked like royalty. I remember feeling grateful to have access to our predecessors in such an intimate way. A week after watching, I taught myself how to do a headwrap. Existing as a Black woman makes me proud and I wouldn't want it any other way. James Baldwin once said, "History is not the past. We carry history with us every day." During American slavery, women would wear headwraps because the oppressors saw natural hair as a distraction. Headwraps also protected Black women against dust, sweat, and water. Headwraps are now considered a representation of beauty, strength, creativity, and culture.

These statements that we make with our hair go back timelines before us, connecting our everyday routines to these ancient practices of those from into our everyday routines thousands of years before later. The radical history of Black hair continues to inspire the entire world. From the runways to the streets, we see the effects of our influence and culture. Black women have always been the blueprint. What's on your head tells the story of a thousand ancestors. We pay homage everyday with style and grace. As I do my hair, I tap back into my childhood watching mama pour love into my scalp. I think about the Black girls after me that will do the same things and remember how we continue to live and thrive.



Illustration by Jenni Oughton

9



The Blueprint

By Deavihan Scott

As a child, my mother had me dressed. As in cutest church shoes from Payless dressed. Stylish turtlenecks for picture days dressed. Matching summer sets dressed. To top it off, loving godparents had me dripped in whatever was popular at the time, so as a child I was comfortable in the security that my style was predetermined. I was mostly concerned with whether what I wore would allow me to keep up with my older cousins who liked to swing on monkey bars and play tag. Transitioning into elementary school wasn't that different - my school required uniforms that didn't leave much to the creative imagination. The most daring of us decided to cuff our khakis and wear jewelry from Limited Too. It wasn't really until I got locs in the 3rd grade that I started paying intentional attention to my own style. It wasn't because I had discovered a new and personal self-interest, but instead because I developed a gnawing worry that with my short cropped hair, I looked like a boy. It was hard not to be anxious when everyone wanted to look like the little girls on the front of the Just For Me relaxer kits. So came the copious butterfly clips in my hair, ballet flats on my feet, and flower-patterned cardigans (also all courtesy of Limited Too). It's important to note that we didn't have then what we have now - no natural hair movement to assuage the worries of an 8 year-old girl. Reassurances and no-nonsense pep talks from my mom were comforting but only did so much. There was nothing particularly wrong with my style, but I was worried because I wasn't trying to be me - I was trying to fit myself into boxes of who I thought I should be.

In the hot girl Megan Thee Stallion's own words, being a hot girl is "being unapologetically YOU, having fun [and] being confident."

Media didn't really start filtering into my self perception unless you count the endless hours I spent on Wattpad in middle school, but I did follow trends. Edward vs. Jacob magazine covers stuffed in binders (which team were you?). Silly bandz snapped on wrists. It was then I found small ways to sneak style into my everyday wear: touches of jewelry, bookish pins on my bookbag, manipulating my locs in different ways. I was becoming more confident in myself, and that began to extend to my self image. Looking back, I still felt strangely separated from myself in a way that I couldn't put into words until now: unknowingly, the mirror I was trying to perceive myself in had been influenced by the ideas of femininity and whiteness that I wanted to fit into. That feeling dimmed in high school but didn't truly leave me. I was learning and loving myself through the grueling wheel that is puberty, but it was a process. Not because I didn't care about my self image, but because it felt pointless at times in a world that seemed to gloss over my existence. With the rise of social media, and faster widespread trendsetting, I began to notice more and more how Black women were always at the forefront of the iconic moments that shaped my generation, but never got the coins they deserved. Megan Thee Stallion alone deserves a street dedicated in her name for the amount of times I've heard "Hot Girl Summer" used.

So I didn't notice when "it" happened because it didn't occur all at once. It was more like a wave that slowly knocked against and crashed down the smallness inside me, building up something stronger. "It" felt akin to being in awe when I stayed up until 3 in the morning watching Beyoncé headline Coachella. Screaming along to Moment 4 Life witnessing Nicki Minaj eat the stage at a summer New York concert in fur boots without breaking a sweat. Waiting on the edge of my seat seeing Naomi Osaka demolish the tennis court with fiery red braids. Moments

of seeing Black women in their element taking the world by storm. It helped curb the hesitation always nicking at my heels, over awareness about how I looked or what I liked. It encouraged me to sit with my ideas of desirability and how that had to start with myself, not other people's perceptions of me. In a world that revolves around social media and trendsetting - whether we like it or not - Black women continue to set the standard in popular culture and refuse to be ignored in a world that steals our likeness for profit. So many trending TikTok dances have been choreographed by Black women. Lil' Kim's colorful wig collection still remains as the inspiration from which people draw from today. And when you and your friends were fighting over who was which Cheetah Girl, who didn't want to be Galleria? Seeing Black women embrace their greatness also encouraged me to step more into finding out how to navigate my own fashion sense (which I now know is ever changing!). Chunky platforms. Acrylics. Bootcut jeans. Silk skirts. Bamboo earrings. My hair in updos, space buns, high ponytails and french braids (locs are very versatile). It extended to more than just my style. Seeing these women on my screen gradually allowed something freeing to open up inside me. In the hot girl Megan Thee Stallion's own words, being a hot girl is "being unapologetically YOU, having fun [and] being confident." Approaching life with a hot girl mindset is something I would recommend for everyone I will tell you! Delving more into my creative passions and living for myself is a journey that I'm so looking forward to exploring more and more. And for that I can thank the Black women who encourage me every day - in my life and on my screen, because they are truly the blueprint.

Black Girlhood Playlist

1. Diddy Bop - Noname feat Cam O'brian and Raury
2. Free Mind - Jems
3. Peng Black Girls Remix - ENNY feat Jorja Smith *friend date*
4. I! Gits! Weary! - Keiyall
5. Have Mercy - Eryn Allen Kane
6. Rider - Mercha
7. Love Affair - UML
8. Brown Skin Lady - Black star
9. Locked In Closets - Solange
10. Hey - We Are King
11. Dixon's Girl - Dessa
12. Cruel - Monica Martin
13. If You Love Me - Brownstone
14. Young Love - Cleo Sol
15. Holy - Jamila Woods
16. Love To Dream - Doja Cat
17. Shea Butter Baby - Ari Lennox ft J. Cole
18. I Got the Juice - danelle Monae ft Pharrell Williams
19. ♡ Black Girl Magic - Londrelle

Thank You!

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