

TAMI CHARLES

"Redemption is a heartbeat away."

-GUADALUPE GARCIA MCCALL, AUTHOR
OF THE PURA BELPRÉ AWARD-WINNER
UNDER THE MESQUITE

ONE
BOOK
BALTIMORE

2021 Reader's Guide

BECOMING BEATRIZ



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Foundation



About this project



***One Book Baltimore** is honored to partner with Tami Charles to engage Baltimore City Schools' students and their communities in the shared experience of reading **Becoming Beatriz** and in the rich conversations about resilience.*

***Becoming Beatriz** was selected with help and input from students, teachers and other Baltimore community members, and representatives from these groups will lead the conversations around this work. In our fourth year, One Book Baltimore can extend these needed conversations across the city with guided and thoughtful purpose.*

***One Book Baltimore's** broad group of local community-oriented organizations will connect students and community members to increase discourse and actions toward resilience through schools, libraries and other community spaces, with the dual goals of promoting literacy and enriching our community.*

This initiative is made possible through the efforts and contributions of Baltimore City Public Schools, Enoch Pratt Free Library, the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, Johns Hopkins University, Maryland Humanities, and the T. Rowe Price Foundation. These efforts are further supported and amplified by the partnerships with the Healing Youth Alliance, Creative Alliance, Turnaround Inc, the Maryland Book Bank, CityLit Project, and others.

Additionally, if you are the owner of this book, the Baltimore Book Bank generously invites you to bring this copy to the book bank upon finishing it, where you can trade it in for up to three other books of your choice, free of charge.

*We thank you for picking up this book and invite you to join us in the shared experience of reading **Becoming Beatriz**. We hope you will also join us in ongoing conversations about resilience in our communities.*

Sincerely,

The One Book Baltimore Planning Team

Suggestions on how to use Discussion Guide:

- Feel free to use books and content during in school time instruction and/or out of school time programming.
- Themes identified in the book can be used to guide students' discussions around identity, decision making, goals, dreams, family, community, trauma informed care, grief, resilience, and social emotional learning.
- Content can be possibly used for Social Emotional Learning programming and discussions. I.e., SEL Wednesday

About the author

Tami Charles is the New York Times bestselling author of *All Because You Matter* and numerous books for children and young adults.

An undergraduate of Saint Elizabeth University, Tami received her Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies. She went on to earn a Master's degree in Educational Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University and thereafter became certified in principalship for the states of New Jersey, New York, and

Pennsylvania. Tami pursued her doctoral studies in Educational Leadership at Walden University, where she reached ABD status. For fourteen years, Tami served as a classroom teacher before following her childhood dream of becoming an author.



This would not have happened without the encouragement of her students. During her tenure, Tami and her fifth grade students explored a wide array of diverse middle grade novels and picture books. Doing so inspired Tami and her students to write their own short stories and plays, with some performed for the school and community at-large.

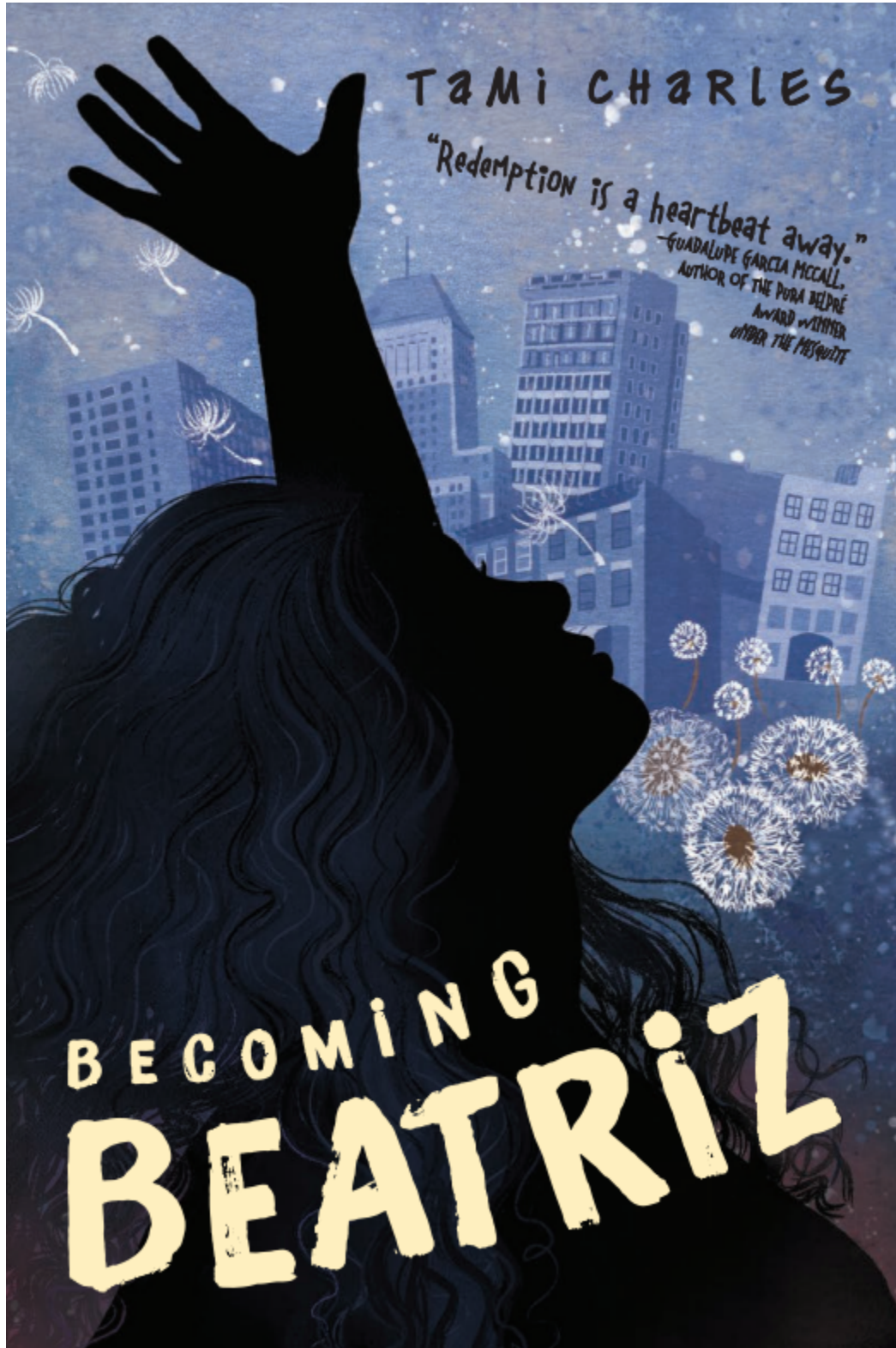
Published in 2018, *Like Vanessa* was Tami's debut middle grade novel. It went on to earn Top 10 spots on the Indies Introduce and Spring Kids' Next lists, three starred reviews, and a Junior Library Guild selection. Since then, she has published such titles as *Definitely Daphne*, *Fearless Mary*, *Serena the GOAT*, and *Becoming Beatriz* to name a few.

Her latest titles include YA novel-in-verse, *Muted*, which was a BuzzFeed Top 40 pick, and lyrical picture book, *My Day with the Panye*, which received a starred review from School Library Journal.

Tami's work has been spotlighted in such outlets as *Essence Magazine*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Marie Claire*, *The Today Show*, and *Good Morning America*. When she isn't writing, Tami can be found presenting at schools both stateside and abroad. As a former educator, Tami understands

the true power of teaching. It extends beyond lesson plans, data collection, and testing. Teachers are in a unique position to empower students and cultivate the next generation of writers and thought-leaders.

About the book



Up until her fifteenth birthday, the most important thing in the world to Beatriz Mendez was her dream of becoming a professional dancer and getting herself and her family far from the gang life that defined their days—that and meeting her dance idol Debbie Allen on the set of her favorite TV show, *Fame*. But after the latest battle in a constant turf war leaves her brother, Junito, dead and her mother grieving, Beatriz has a new set of priorities. How is she supposed to feel the rhythm when her brother's gang needs running, when her mami can't brush her own teeth, and when the last thing she can remember of her old self is dancing with her brother, followed by running and gunshots? When the class brainiac reminds Beatriz of her love of the dance floor, her banished dreams sneak back in. Now the only question is: will the gang let her go?

Set in New Jersey in 1984, Beatriz's story is a timeless one of a teenager's navigation of romance, her brother's choices, and her own family's difficult past. A companion novel to the much-lauded *Like Vanessa*.

Themes in book:

Resilience
Dreams
Gang Life
Code of the streets
Immigrant life

Getting to know the Characters

- **Beatriz Mendez** - Main character of the book has her life altered, ultimately from a difficult decision she made. Throughout the book she has to make many decisions, some good, some not in the best interest of her friends, family or dreams.
- **Junito Mendez** - Brother and provider of the family. The leader of the local gang in his community. Has a secret affair, and has an argument that causes his three families to be on unstable ground.
- **Diablos Gang** - Members of the group get tested when their rival takes out their leader. Who will step up and continue their way of life? Using schools as their main source of income, will things change when a leader in the crew, Beatriz starts to follow her dreams?
- **Nasser Moreau** - A new studious student who catches Beatriz's eye, from being the polar opposite of what she is used to. He is able to excel in everything he tries, and he is very interested in getting to know the true Beatriz.
- **Abuela** - Grandmother to Beatriz and Junito. Very nosey and opinionated, and not afraid to let everyone know. She helps keep the family together when things look dark for Beatriz and her mother.
- **Amy Marcel** - Beatriz's quiet tutor who has more connections than anyone imagines. A shy math wiz that never forgets how to solve problems.

- **DQ** - Steps up to be the de facto leader of the gang. He also steps in as Beatriz's older brother to provide her with guidance and direction of what it means to be a high level gang member.

Terms to Highlight

Identity: the distinguishing character or personality of an individual

Ethnicity: a particular ethnic affiliation or group

Race: any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry

Nationality: membership in a particular [nation](#)

Afro Latinx: refers to people from Latin American countries with African ancestry. is commonly used by as a more inclusive, [nonbinary](#) term than *Afro-Latino* or *Afro-Latina* in Spanish

Bodega: a usually small grocery store in an urban area
specifically : one specializing in Hispanic groceries

Gang: a group of persons working to unlawful or antisocial ends

Act One: Unraveling

1. Friday, April Thirteenth

Summary: It is Beatriz's birthday but it gets interrupted by a shooting. Junito is shot in front of Beatriz.

- a. Describe your favorite memory from a birthday that you have had.
- b. After the shooting, why do you think it was necessary for the police to secure the area before checking on Junito and Beatriz?
- c. Beatriz dreams of becoming a dancer, what do you dream of becoming to take you to your next level?
- d. Junito says to Beatriz, "All you gotta know is I ain't letting nobody take over what I built. And sometimes you gotta send a message to let people know that." Do you agree with Junito? Do you think he made the right choice by sending a message?
- e. Why do you think they decide not to shoot and kill Beatriz?

2. Conversations with Five-O

Summary: Beatriz wakes up in the hospital following the shooting of her brother.

- a. Beatriz decides not to tell the police anything she remembers, why do you think she does this? Do you agree with Beatriz not telling the police anything? Why or why not?
 - i. Beatriz says the code is to "never snitch," do you agree with the idea of never snitching? Is there ever a time when you would snitch?
- b. Prediction: Beatriz says her and Junito are going to do something about the people who came after her, what do you think she is going to try and do? Do you think she is going to be successful? Why or why not?
- c. Mami and Abuela seem to not know Beatriz and Junito are in a gang, how do you think Beatriz feels about her family defending her despite her actually being involved with a gang? Do you think she should tell her family that her and her brother are involved in a gang? Why or why not?

3. Fast Forward: September the Fourth

Summary: Beatriz is trying to avoid going to the first day of school after the death of her brother but her friends convince her to attend.

- a. How is the family handling the death of Junito?
- b. What is your favorite part about the first day of school each year? What is your least favorite part of the first day of school?
 - i. What are some emotions you experience during the first day of school?
- c. Why does Beatriz decide she doesn't want to dance anymore? Do you think she should stop dancing? Why or why not?

4. New School, New Problems

Summary: Beatriz gets called into the office on the first day of school.

- a. What is Beatriz's mood towards school? Why do you think she feels this way?

- b. Why do you think Mrs. Ruiz decided to pull Beatriz into the office on the first day of school and meet with her? What type of relationship does Beatriz have with Mrs. Ruiz?
- c. Beatriz says, "Two feelings break out in a war- hate and loyalty. And honestly, I can't shake either." Why does Beatriz feel this way? Have you ever had an experience where you had two conflicting feelings at the same time?

5. Nights of Fame

Summary: Beatriz watches her favorite show Fame with her family. Beatriz has a flashback of her family growing up.

- a. When you think of the word "family" what words, thoughts, ideas, or memories come to mind?
- b. Beatriz, Mami, and Abuela all love the show Fame. Why does Beatriz love this show? How does she connect this show to her own life or her own dreams? Is there a show that you can relate to?
- c. We meet Papi in a memory Beatriz shares. What do we learn about Papi? Why does Beatriz wake up from this memory afraid?

6. A Call to Order

Summary: Beatriz attends her first gang meeting since the murder of her brother.

- a. Beatriz says, "It's these drugs that keep food on the table, but in reality, it's those same drugs that took my brother away." What do you think Beatriz should do about this conflict?
- b. Beatriz, DQ and Paco beat up Juan. Why do they beat up Juan? Why does Beatriz eventually stop it? Do you think they were justified in beating up Juan? Why or why not?
- c. The chapter ends with Beatriz questioning who she is. Why is she questioning who she is? Have you ever felt like Beatriz before? What choices do you think she is going to make going forward?

7. Game of Lies

Summary: Beatriz has a meeting with the principal and Mrs. Ruiz about getting on track at school. Beatriz meets Nasser for the first time.

- a. Beatriz says school is a complete waste of time. Why does she seem to think this way? Have you ever felt the same way? What could be different about school so it doesn't feel like a complete waste of time?
- b. Beatriz meets a new boy at school named Nasser. What happens during their first interaction? How do you predict their relationship will develop during the course of the book?

8. Fame Wannabes

Summary: Beatriz goes to gym class and it turns out to be a dance lesson where she gets paired with Nasser. Beatriz thinks she recognizes someone from the murder of her brother.

- a. How does the relationship between Nasser and Beatriz develop during the course of the chapter?
- b. Prediction: Beatriz thinks she recognizes someone in the crowd of people at the end of the chapter. What do you think is going to happen between Beatriz and the person?

9. Beatriz vs. Beatriz

Summary: Beatriz has a short run-in with Mr. Martin. DQ and Beatriz discuss getting revenge for the killing of Junito. Beatriz has a flashback.

- a. What is Mr. Martin's relationship with Mami? How does Beatriz feel about it? How does DQ feel about it?
- b. DQ wants to get revenge for the killing of Junito. Do you think he should? Why or why not? How does Beatriz feel about it?
- c. Beatriz has another memory about her family growing up. What was Junito's relationship like with Papi? What impact do you think this had on Junito growing up?

10. Finding My Way

Summary: Nasser invites Beatriz to take a dance class and try out for Fame. A mysterious picture falls from Beatriz's locker.

- a. How does the relationship between Beatriz and Nasser develop in this chapter?
 - i. Prediction: Do you think Beatriz is going to decide to go to the dance class with Nasser? Do you think she should skip the gang meeting on Friday for the class? Why or why not?
- b. What falls out of Beatriz's locker? What do you think it means?
- c. Do you think Beatriz will audition for Fame? Do you think she should? Why or why not?

Act Two: Awakening

11. Priorities

Summary: It's Halloween and Beatriz has to choose between her Diabla duties and going to the dance class. She bumps into a strange figure on her way to dance class without pleasantries.

- a. Why wouldn't DQ mention that he has seen that car before?
- b. Give three reasons why Beatriz stayed with her crew and three reasons why Beatriz wanted to go to dance practice.

12. First to Dance

Summary: Beatriz goes to dance class with Nasser and then drives home with him. Beatriz has a memory of when they left their father in Puerto Rico and came to America.

- a. When was a time you tried something new (it could be a sport, activity, club, etc.), how did you feel when trying it for the first time? Were you nervous?
- b. How do you think Beatriz feels joining the dance class for the first time? How would you feel if you were in Beatriz's situation?
 - i. How does Beatriz feel when the dance class is over? Is this how you expected her to feel?
- c. How does the relationship between Beatriz and Nasser evolve in this chapter?
- d. Beatriz has a memory, what is her memory of? How did this moment impact her future?

13. Making the Call

Summary: Mr. Hankerson recommends Beatriz get a math tutor. Beatriz talks about cancelling the Diablos meeting.

- a. Mr. Hankerson recommends Beatriz get a peer tutor, what does this tell us about Mr. Hankerson? Do you think Beatriz will start going to tutoring sessions? Why or why not?
- b. Beatriz says she wants to cancel the Friday meeting. Why does she want to cancel the meeting? What does this tell us about Beatriz?

14. Figuring it Out

Summary: Beatriz and DQ talk about the Diablos and their path forward. Beatriz starts to question whether she wants to stay in the gang or not.

- a. What does DQ tell Beatriz is handled? How does Beatriz react? What does this tell us about Beatriz and her mindset about the gang?
- b. Beatriz starts to debate whether she wants to be in the Diablos? Why is she having a change of heart? What do you think she should do? What consequences might she face if she tries to get out? What do you predict she is going to do?

15. Beatriz vx. The Human Turtle

Summary: Beatriz gets paired with Amy for tutoring but it quickly doesn't work out and Amy gets up and leaves. Nasser becomes Beatriz's new tutor?

- a. How does Amy react when Beatriz shows up? Why do you think she reacted this way?
- b. Nasser says he wants to be Beatriz's tutor. Why do you think he wants to be her tutor? Do you think this is a good idea for them?

16. Revelations

Summary: Senorita Amaro works to prepare her dancers for the Fame audition. Beatriz and Julicza aren't on the same page.

- a. How does Senorita Amaro interact with her dancers? What is her relationship like with Beatriz?
- b. Why does Beatriz change her mind about going to the Fame audition? What does this tell us about Beatriz?
- c. What is Julicza's relationship like with Beatriz? Why do you think Beatriz isn't telling her what is really going on? What do you predict will happen with their friendship?

17. Keeping Secrets

Summary: Beatriz decides to keep secrets from her friends. Nasser writes Beatriz a poem.

- a. How does the relationship between Beatriz and Nasser continue to develop in this chapter?
- b. Why does Beatriz decide to keep secrets from her friends? Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?

18. Remember My Name

Summary: Beatriz and Nasser audition for Fame but aren't chosen. But a new opportunity presents itself.

- a. What advice would you give Beatriz and Nasser after they were not selected, and why would you hope they follow your advice?
- b. Do you think Beatriz was ready for this audition? Could she have done anything to be more prepared? Do you think she was satisfied with her performance, why or why not?
- c. Do you think it is possible to learn from a failure?

19. Suspicious

Summary: DQ surprises Beatriz and inquires about where she has been and what she has been doing. Beatriz thinks long and hard about her application.

- a. Why is DQ asking so many questions of Beatriz? How would you describe his actions? Is he truly concerned about her Abuela?

20. The Art of Hiding

Summary: Beatriz is still keeping secrets from Nasser, her friends and her family.

- a. What could happen if Beatriz's family went to Nasser's house for Thanksgiving dinner?
- b. Is Beatriz right for keeping the different parts of her life separate? Could she exist in a space where they all knew everything about each other?

21. An Unlikely Thanksgiving

Summary: When everyone is feeling a time of peace for the holiday, Beatriz is reminded that the crosshairs are on her and the ones she loves.

- a. Why does Beatriz feel uncomfortable about the relationship between her mother and Mr. Martin?

- b. How does Beatriz feel when she hears about Vanessa's success?
- c. Do you think Vanessa and Beatriz were close friends at some point? What are some of the key details that make you feel that way?

22. Better Left unknissed

Summary: Beatriz has a memorable experience during dinner with Nasser's family, and even more exciting events on the ride home after.

- a. Have you ever found it hard to be honest with yourself about the feelings you have?
- b. Beatriz is in the middle, with two groups of friends encouraging her to go down opposite paths, do you think she can continue going down both?

Act Three: Becoming

23. One Word at a Time

Summary: Beatriz receives another picture and it appears that everything is happening to her from all angles. Nasser says goodbye, DQ tells her that he knows about her dancing and that Julicza is ready to take her spot in the organization.

- a. What was the advice Beatriz gives Nixida Vigo, and why does she tell her that?
- b. What does the action of hearing the word "Baila" mean to Beatriz and her mother?

24. Forgiveness

Summary: Beatriz uses Nasser again and gets mad when he shares a hard family secret, even though she is content keeping secrets from him.

- a. Have you ever found it hard to forgive someone, or to ask someone for forgiveness? Please provide examples.
- b. With all four pieces of the 'puzzle' how should Beatriz feel about what she is involved in?

25. Almost Home for Christmas

Summary: Beatriz has an altercation with someone from her past and saves the life of someone she does not know.

- a. Does her plan, three steps to getting her life together, sound feasible?
- b. How are they more alike than they both want to believe?

26. Feliz Navidad

Summary: Beatriz relieves a talk with Jaunito's and his secret that causes her to see how much she is like her father.

- a. Why do you think Beatriz is concerned about Amy? Would you show the same amount of concern for Amy if you were Beatriz?
- b. What happens when a person has to hide who they really are, just to fit in? Do you think they truly fit in with the people they are trying to please?

27. Promises

Summary: Nasser finally meets with Beatriz to see how she is doing. She realizes that she can't make him any promises, when she can not keep her own promises to herself.

- a. Does Beatriz have the right to ask Nasser for another chance at a relationship?
- b. How would things be different if Beatriz was not a member of the Diablos?

Encore: Soaring

28. If You Believe it, then Act-So!

Summary: Beatriz and Nasser do their best in the Act-So competition with support from her family and instructors.

- a. Is there an activity that brings you as much joy as dancing brings Beatriz? (Your answer could be dancing also) When was the last time you were able to experience that feeling?
- b. Do you think you would be able to perform in front of an audience of people after practicing and perfecting your talents?

29. Another Year, Another Shot

Summary: One year after the shooting, Beatriz celebrates her birthday with Nasser. Beatriz is getting stronger in knowing who she is and who she will become.

- a. Beatriz celebrates her Quinceañera (16th birthday) today, is there a custom or tradition that you celebrate in your household that you would like to discuss?
- b. Recall a time when you had to complete a task on your own, and describe in detail what it was and how you felt once you were finished?

30. Taking Flight-Three Months Later

Summary: Beatriz announces to the Diablos that she is leaving the gang. She heads to the national ACT-SO competition. She reflects on the past, looks towards the future, and embraces her dream of dancing.

- a. Have you ever had to leave past relationships behind to embrace your future?
- b. What do you do to make peace with the past?
- c. Do you think Beatriz will continue with dancing?

Debatable Topics

Choose a topic and debate.

A Claim and 3 Warrants

Students are given a claim and asked to identify three convincing warrants to support that claim.

Choosing the Best Warrant Mini Debates

Students are placed in groups of three and are either given or identify a claim from a text and three supporting warrants. Each student defends a different warrant and the group decides together which warrant is strongest.

Evaluating Warrants Table Debate

Students work in small groups of 2-4 and take turns defending and rebutting arguments that are made up of different warrants and the same claim. Students then evaluate which warrant is the strongest and supports the claim.

Analyzing the Best Warrant Writing Exercise

Students are asked to identify at least two warrants to support a claim given by the teacher. The students then write two reasons for why the stronger warrant supports the claim and two reasons for why the weaker warrant does not.

Using Evidence Soapbox

Students are presented with a statement from a previously read text with which they agree or disagree. Students will speak for 30 seconds, explaining their warrants for agreeing or disagreeing.

Evidence Scavenger Hunt

Students are given one claim or a set of claims and, after reading a text, must determine whether to agree or disagree with the claim(s). They then find support to agree or disagree with the claim(s) in the text. They must also explain why the cited evidence backs up the claim.

Using Evidence Four Corners

Students are given a claim based on a previously read text and are asked to go to the labeled corner that aligns with their position. Once the students have arranged themselves, they can volunteer or be called on to defend their position by citing evidence from the text.

Resources

Interested students can research the following City Schools sites for taking their artistic talents to the next level and furthering their educational aspirations.

- [Baltimore School for the Arts](#)
- [Baltimore Design School](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Fame opening credits](#) - Youtube
- [NAACP Act-SO Achievement Program](#)
- [Enoch Pratt Library](#)
- [Baltimore Urban Debate League](#)
- [Baltimore City Public Schools](#)
- [Turnaround Inc - Trauma Resources](#)
- National Gang Center
800-446-0912
www.nationalgangcenter.gov