Bklyn Book Club Kit

How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship, and Community

Mia Birdsong

2021 Brooklyn Public Library Book Prize Finalist
BOOK SYNOPSIS

*How We Show Up* is both an invitation to create community and a model for fostering connections.

After almost every presentation activist and writer Mia Birdsong gives to executives, think tanks and policy makers, one of those leaders will quietly confess how much they long for the profound community she describes. They have family, friends and colleagues, yet they still feel like they’re standing alone. They’re "winning" at the American Dream, yet they’re lonely, disconnected and unsatisfied.

It may seem counterintuitive that living the "good life"—with a well-paying job, nuclear family and upward mobility—can make one feel isolated and unhappy. But in a divided America, where only a quarter of us know our neighbors and competition is strongly encouraged, we've forgotten the key element that helped us make progress in the first place: community. In this provocative, groundbreaking work, Mia Birdsong shows that what separates us isn't only the ever-present injustices built around race, class, gender, values and beliefs, but also our denial of our interdependence and need for belonging. In response to the fear and discomfort we feel, we've built walls; instead of leaning on each other, we find ourselves leaning on concrete.

Through research, interviews and stories of lived experience, *How We Show Up* returns us to our inherent connectedness where we find strength and support in vulnerability and generosity, in asking for help and in being accountable. Showing up points us toward the promise of our collective vitality, leading us to the liberated well-being we all want.
AUTHOR BIO: MIA BIRDSONG

Mia Birdsong is an activist, facilitator and storyteller. A senior fellow of the Economic Security Project, she was also an inaugural Ascend Fellow of The Aspen Institute and New American California Fellow. She was founding co-director of Family Story and vice president of the Family Independence Initiative. Birdsong speaks widely at conferences and gatherings across the country. She lives with her loved ones on the occupied land of the Chochenyo Ohlone people (Oakland, CA).

LEARN MORE ABOUT MIA BIRDSONG AT MIABIRDSONG.COM
BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

1. Foreword – WHEN FAILURE LEADS US HOME: Have you ever been in a retreat space like the one described in this section of the book? What was your experience like? How did you feel?

2. Chapter One – WHEN FAILURE LEADS US HOME: How do you feel about the American Dream? Does your dream align with the American Dream? How does your identity and background influence this? Does the American Dream feel like a burden or freedom?

3. Chapter Two – ME AND US: How do you care for yourself? How have you worked to address baggage or trauma? What does “emotional hygiene” look like to you? What does your community do for you? Do you have a circle like Birdsong describes?

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Chapter Three – LOVE IS ABUNDANT, AND EVERY RELATIONSHIP IS UNIQUE: What are a few ways that we can care for one another? What spaces in our lives could we open up to one another? What parameters have been set for us by convention that are keeping us out of one another’s business?

Chapter Four – I LOVE YOU TILL ASHES OR DIRT: What does family look like? What does a chosen family look like? What are the advantages of being “raised by a village”?

Chapter Five – THE BEST OF THE PEOPLE WE KNOW: How do the stories in this chapter show the value of community? Why do we still value independence, even when community has proven to create healthy relationships and lives?

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7 Chapter Six – MAKE THIS SPACE FOR PEOPLE, MAKE THIS SPACE FOR ME: How have hardships revealed or clarified relationships? How do we share these complex stories?

8 Chapter Seven – A GATHERING AND A CALLING HOME: How do spirituality and community interact and coexist? How do we show gratitude? To whom do we express our gratitude?

9 Chapter Eight – WE CAN’T BUILD SAFETY WITHOUT COMMUNITY: What are the best ways to protect members of a community? How can a community be built to protect members at risk?

10 Afterword – HOW WE SHOW UP: How has Mia’s book shaped or changed your view of community? How will you show up? How do others show up for you?

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INTERVIEWS WITH MIA BIRDSONG

- WBUR / Kind World – "Author and Activist Mia Birdsong On Why We Need Our ‘Village’ Now More Than Ever"
- Spirituality & Health – "How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship and Community"
- Dear White Women – "The Intersection Between the American Dream and White Supremacy: An Interview with Mia Birdsong"

How We Show Up: A conversation with Mia Birdsong and fellow author Dani McClain from Hachette Books.

BIRDSONG ALSO CREATED A PODCAST MINI SERIES WITH THE NATION. LISTEN TO MORE THAN ENOUGH HERE.

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FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING FROM THE AUTHOR

TRUTHOUT / “Ten Lessons for Creating Safety Without Police”

BLACK YOUTH PROJECT / “Romance is Not the Only Type of Black Love That Matters”

WASHINGTON POST / “Toni Morrison Taught Me That I Owe Myself My Whole Self”

SIOHAN CROSSLIN WORDPRESS / “On Queerplatonic Relationships, From Someone Who’s Actually In One”

VULTURE / “John Wray’s Clubhouse”

BOSTON REVIEW / “Dying of Whiteness”

PACIFIC STANDARD / “How Disabled People Care for Each Other When Doctors Can’t”

THE ATLANTIC / “Why You Never See Your Friends Anymore”

THE ATLANTIC / “Workism is Making Americans Miserable”

US NEWS & WORLD REPORT / “‘Traditional Masculinity’ Is Harmful to Boys, Men”

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: HOW WE SHOW UP
BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy *How We Show Up*? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below:

- *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* by Brittney Cooper
- *The New Better Off: Reinventing the American Dream* by Courtney E. Martin
- *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown
- *THICK: And Other Essays* by Tressie McMillan Cottom
- *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* by Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld
- *Mastering Community: The Surprising Ways Coming Together Moves Us from Surviving to Thriving* by Christine Porath

You can access the list and place holds on these titles in multiple formats through the BPL catalog: [BORROW.BKLYNLIBRARY.ORG](http://BORROW.BKLYNLIBRARY.ORG)

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BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES (CONT.)

- *THICK: And Other Essays* by Tressie McMillan Cottom
- *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* by Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld
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