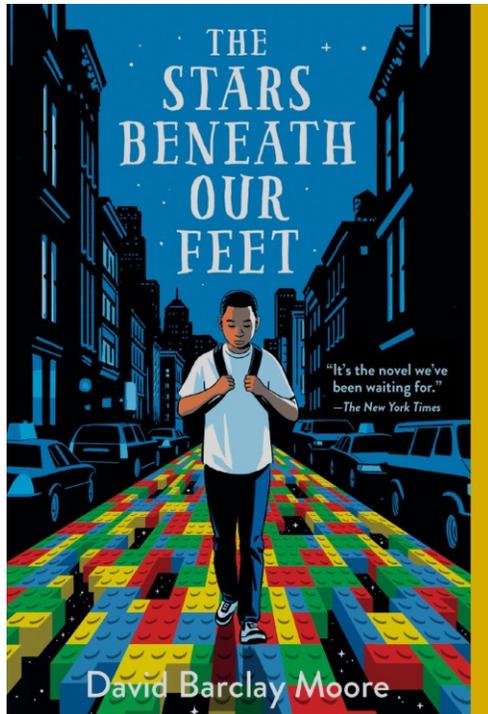


# THE STARS BENEATH OUR FEET



*Juvenile*

**By David Barclay Moore**

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## **Book Summary:**

A twelve-year-old boy who lost his older brother to a gang-related murder, learns to cope with his environment and circumstances through his art.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains violence; references to racism, suicide, and illegal immigration; inexplicit sexual activities; controversial racial and social commentary; mild/infrequent profanity and derogatory terms; alcohol use; reference to drug use; and alternate sexualities.

**2** /5

**Teen Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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6	<p>“Merry Christmas!”</p> <p>“Yo, man, I don’t celebrate White Jesus Day no more!” he shouted. “This is the holiday of the Oppressor.”</p>
7	<p>“Merry Christmas, old drunk,” I said to him.</p> <p>“Show respect, boy!” he shouted after me. “I ain’t no drunk. I only booze it up twice a year—”</p> <p>“Yeah, I know, Moses: when it’s your birthday and when it’s not your birthday.”</p>
10	<p>“Whattup,” he said, and then sang very sweetly: “I’m dreaming of a Black Christmas.”</p> <p>...“You think your ma got you that smartphone you wanted?” he asked.</p> <p>I shrugged and rolled over on my side. “She says it’d put me in danger.” I pointed an imaginary gun at him and pulled the trigger. “She don’t wanna paint a big target on her boy’s chest.”</p>
11	<p>He said, “I got a gay aunt, we just found out. She just told my mother at Thanksgiving.”</p> <p>Vega picked up a city bus. I always got nervous when somebody handled my Legos. “But everybody knew already. She act just like a dude. Drives a big bus for the city. Vroom!”</p> <p>“Butch,” I said, describing how she acted.</p> <p>...And right then, our doorbell rang again. I knew it was Daddy, and I jumped up to answer the door before Ma could. I thought that if she answered it and Daddy peeked in and saw her girlfriend in our kitchen cooking, he might turn right around and leave.</p>
14	<p>Steve went on, “If you only expose yourself to whatever everybody else does, you’ll never create anything new. I think that’s what got your brother: He couldn’t see any other way out of here besides dealing. Got caught up in that street lifestyle, like that sheisty Rockit and all them.”</p>
18	<p>In fact, I knew that my daddy blamed Mr. Jonathan for making my mother gay.</p> <p>“Dat limp-wrist friend of your mum still hang about?” Daddy would ask me whenever I saw him. When I would say yes, then Daddy would go on and on and on and on about how that Mr. Jonathan had been jealous of him and Ma’s joy and had convinced her that she liked women, when she really didn’t.</p> <p>I wasn’t even sure how that worked. Could you really make somebody gay just by chatting with them?</p> <p>I hoped that I wouldn’t turn out that way, because I talked to a lot of gays. I actually do like them, but they got too much drama to deal with. So many people hate them and call them names that I don’t think it’s something anybody would really pick to be if they had a choice in it. Who would choose to be gay when they knew it was so much easier to be straight?</p>
22	<p>“Your brother that got shot?” she asked.</p> <p>“That’s the only brother he got, stupid,” Vega said to her. “Yo, Loll, I bet Rockit gave you a box full of drugs.” He shook the present. “Or a Glock!”</p>
33	<p>Her parents had been born there. But ever since my grandma found out her daughter had started dating women, she didn’t speak to Ma too much.</p>
37	<p>For somebody white from Ohio, she had a big butt.</p> <p>When she strolled up here every day along Frederick Douglass Boulevard from the A train, Ms. Jenna would get all kinds of shouts and whistles from dudes wanting to hit her up because of her big butt.</p>

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53	His main job was construction work. He installed toilets and hand dryers in buildings all around the city even though he had lived in this country illegal for years.
57	Usually it was because there was some trouble in the neighborhood. Some type of danger like a beef between dealers or a gang battle. This time, it was a shooting. Some fourteen-year-old dude was shot in front of a bodega nearby. Sunny heard it was because the dude had slapped some girl the day before who was the girlfriend of some dealer.
62	I mean, if these white people lived in Harlem, why didn't they get their hair cut at our barbershops? Maybe they thought Black barbers wouldn't know how to cut white heads. Or maybe the white people thought we wouldn't like them in there. It was weird. I guess they liked staying invisible. And they liked to hide.
65	It was a long way down to the ground from up here. A few times, people who lived at St. Nick had jumped. Couldn't take the lives they were living, I guess. ...Tonight I was so high up. A big blast could take me right over this edge. I wondered what it would feel like to fall.
72	Though Ma tried to dodge him, he kissed her and dragged her away, back into their room, and shut the door.
76	Harp and Gully's crew had even made a stupid music video, rapping about how they were going to shoot up folks they had beef with.
84	Daryl R. shrugged and kept drawing on his tablet with his index finger. His crew design was a fist and another hand holding up two fingers, with a Glock and a dove in the background.
88	"My bibi told me that if you do it with a girl before you're old enough, your thing will shrivel away like a twig in a fire." ...We had to look out for police because the park had shut for the night, and we also had a lit loosey. None of us was older than fourteen. "Yo, Mohammed," Daryl Reynolds said, giggling. "Your grandma told you that for reals?" Mohammed nodded. You could tell he didn't understand why we had all laughed at him. Kofi took a drag from the cigarette they was passing around and tried to share it with Mohammed, who waved it away, pouting.
90	"April E. got a fat booty, don't she?" I nodded, grinning. "Not as big as Tisha's!" Freddy called out, munching on fries. "Shut up, Freddy!" Daryl said. "But April talk too much." He took a drag on the cigarette and passed it around. ...I had never smoked before, but took a quick puff on the cigarette and tried to pass it away. "That's not how you do it!" Daryl said. "You gotta inhale!" They were all watching. I tried again, inhaling deep. The smoke flew down my throat and a bunch of coughing came back up. I was hacking so hard, I felt like I was about to throw up.

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101	I sighed and wondered how many people had died in these waters. Either by jumping into them themselves, or by somebody pushing them.
132	“You wish your ma was gay?”
146	He was in his world. Built out of drugs.
190	<p>Cold as iced-over pavement.</p> <p>That’s how I felt in the back of the police car. It was those same two cops—the white dude and Black woman that had shined their light on us—who showed up at the bodega after Manny had called them.</p> <p>They asked Vega and me lots of questions, but me and him didn’t answer most of them. We didn’t know who had jumped us or why. We didn’t get a good look at them. We didn’t want no ride back to where we lived.</p> <p>That was the last thing Vega and me had wanted—to get dropped off at St. Nick projects by two cops and have everybody see us and start wondering if we had snitched on somebody.</p>
206	He liked my African hat and called it “cute.” He must’a been gay, I thought. Straight boys didn’t call nothing cute unless they were talking about a female.
234	<p>He grabbed his instrument and lightly placed it beside me and knelt down on his rug to pull a shoebox out from under the bed.</p> <p>Inside that box was a black Glock. At first, I thought it was a toy gun, but I could tell by the way he handled it that it was real. Without saying nothing, he passed it to me, handle first.</p> <p>In my palms, it weighed heavy. And it was real cold.</p> <p>I didn’t know what Vega wanted me to do with this gun. I was wondering what he had planned to do with it when the idea suddenly popped into my head.</p> <p>He had been acting funny ever since Harp and Gully had jumped us at Manny’s bodega. Plus they had already ganked Vega’s new coat that he had loved so much.</p> <p>“They need to feel this,” Vega said toward the gun in my hands. He looked at me. “They need to be scared.”</p>
257	<p>His voice was deep for somebody dressed like he was. “Anything for a friend of Jonathan’s. I just hope this Tuttle character doesn’t try it.”</p> <p>By “try it,” Aston meant: try to take advantage of us. Years of listening to how gay people talk had taught me a few things.</p>

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Nigger/Nigga	4
Piss	7