

**Being God: ISBN 978-0-9881821-1-0**

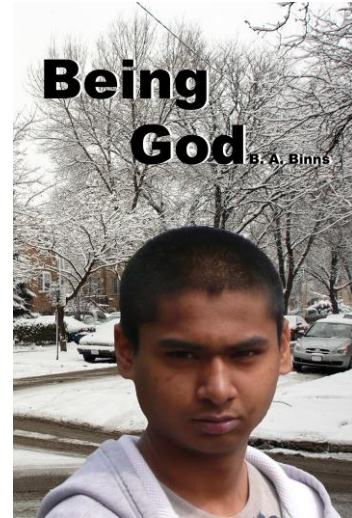
Reading level

Grade 8 and up

Malik Kaplan has his own set of problems that never came out in PULL, involving his family and lifestyle. The Kaplan men have always been the top dogs at Farrington High School, with Malik determined to make himself the worst of the worst. But as his senior year draws to a close, he discovers there's a price to pay for holding on to his older brother's legacy. He goes from the basketball court to the legal court, and finds that he's not the toughest thing around. The cost of that lesson may include his own life when he becomes the reluctant hero of his worst enemy's sister.

Barney.

Yes, Barnetta Murhaselt returns and finds herself fighting alongside Malik instead of against him as they work to "take back the streets."



### **Classroom discussion topics (may be done before reading the book)**

- **Bullying:** What are some of its causes? What differentiates between being bullied by a stranger or schoolmate and by a member of the family?
- **Self-esteem:** People sometimes present a false self to the world because they fear they are not good enough to be accepted. How do you get beyond the masks individuals use to hide their innermost selves.
- **The Future:** Many of us have plans and dreams for our futures. Do you believe anything is possible? Why or why not?
- **The Past:** How much do the things that have happened to us in the past affect us now? Can things like alcohol or drug use make us forget? Is forgetting the right answer?
- Is there a difference between forgiving something, and forgetting it?
- Many of us face daily challenges, including bullies, drugs, and gangs. How do we handle those challenges?

**Discussion** (Questions can be answered as short-answer evaluation points for teachers wishing to evaluate students after a specific reading assignment, or as discussion topics after reading)

### **Chapter 1**

- As you first meet Malik Kaplan and Cesare Russo, what do you think of their friendship? How are they like each other? How are they like you and your peers?

**Chapters 2-6**

- How would you describe Malik's relationship with Nicole? Do you see what attracts them to each other? What do you predict about the longevity of this relationship, and why?
- What do you think about Malik's relationship with his father? Why would he say he "almost" admires the man after their trip home from jail?

**Chapters 7-11**

- What do you think the lawyer means when he says, "The geographic cure seldom fixes real problems."?
- Malik's cousin John is a devout Jew who works in a hospital, and has arranged for his job to give him the religious holiday's off. Why would his employers be so accommodating?

**Chapters 12-16**

- Spencer was hated in school until he played the role of wounded victim. How does that change him into Mr. Popular?
- Barney thinks that no one likes being hated, but Malik insists that he wants people to hate him. Fear, yes. Respect, even better. Hero-worship—never. Why do you think he feels this way?

**Chapters 17-21**

- Malik urges Barney to run when the gang member comes after them. What do you think about the decision to run vs standing and fighting? When is it right to flee and when should you stand your ground?
- Malik receives a book from his friend, the person who knows him best, that says him:  
 We are neither superhuman nor magical. Feeling powerless is an occasional and unfortunate fact of life. We prove ourselves by what we do afterwards.  
 What do you think his friend was trying to tell him? Have you ever felt powerless? How did you react to that feeling?

**Chapters 22-26**

I hate Horst.

- What makes Malik suddenly hate his favorite singer?
- What are Malik's unavailable choices? What makes him think they can never happen?

**Chapters 27-31**

The pain of failure enables us to remember and profit from our mistakes. It's cruel, but there's really no choice—that's how human beings learn.

- Malik's father claims that failure is important. How do you feel about that idea? Is there ever a reason not to help when you see someone in trouble?

**Chapters 32-36**

"No, you do not have to marry that girl."

"Don't do it."

"Be smart."

- Everyone tells Malik he should not marry Nicole just because she is having his child. Are they right? Is there ever a situation where high school students should marry because of a coming child?
- Malik's friend tries to tell him that his problems begin when he takes the first drink. What kinds of problems does alcohol cause him?

**Chapters 37-41**

- Malik is not the only one with dreams he thinks can never be realized. John would like to go back to school and become an RN. Do you feel there are barriers holding you back from achieving your dreams for your future?  
 Sometimes I feel like I'm holding onto a ledge by my fingertips. They're blistered and bleeding and you're the only thing holding me up. I'll drink again without you.

- Does Malik have a right to put the responsibility for his continued sobriety on Barney's shoulders? Why does he try this tactic?

**Chapters 42-45**

You're Anonymous, aren't you?

- Why would Mr. Kaplan want to keep the things he does for the community a secret?
- Lamont agrees to allow his brother to leave with Malik after he hears about the relationship between Malik and his brother. Why do you think that story made him change his mind?

**Vocabulary:**

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▪ <i>allegiance</i> (chapter 15)	▪ <i>liability</i> (chapter 7)
▪ <i>amber</i> (chapter 21)	▪ <i>masochist</i> (chapter 29)
▪ <i>arcane</i> (chapter 17)	▪ <i>neurotic</i> (chapter 26)
▪ <i>chivalry</i> (chapter 43)	▪ <i>pheromones</i> (chapter 35)
▪ <i>consequences</i> (chapter 26)	▪ <i>philosophy</i> (chapter 7)
▪ <i>derelict</i> (chapter 31)	▪ <i>precision</i> (chapter 26)
▪ <i>endeavors</i> (chapter 29)	▪ <i>sadist</i> (chapter 13)
▪ <i>freeloader</i> (chapter 29)	▪ <i>statutory</i> (chapter 9)
▪ <i>impropriety</i> (chapter 31)	▪ <i>technicality</i> (chapter 7)
▪ <i>inconsistent</i> (chapter 26)	▪ <i>threshold</i> (chapter 34)
▪ <i>inhibit</i> (chapter 13)	▪ <i>vermin</i> (chapter 42)
▪ <i>international</i> (chapter 24)	▪ <i>violate</i> (chapter 7)

**Essay Writing**

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Writing is an important part of common core and getting students ready for higher education. Students may write papers using one or more of the styles below.

POV

Being God is written from a single POV, that of Malik Kaplan. Readers observe and discover every other character through his eyes, ears and understanding. One of the benefits of sticking with one POV is that the reader is free to care deeply about this character and discover the world through their eyes. One of the dangers is that, if he misunderstands another character's motives, the reader gets that same incorrect assumption.

OR

Write a paper discussing the effects of the POV selected on you while reading, and how the narrator's style and insights affected you. Explain how your reading experience might be different if you had understood Spencer's problems earlier, or if you had understood Dwayne

Kaplan's childhood. How would things be different if told from the point of view of Malik's best friend, Cesare?

### Descriptive Writing

Dad stands with his hands thrust deep into his coat pocket, chatting with the cops about his disappointment of a son. He isn't a short man, but I grabbed a bunch of height genes. He has to look up to meet my eyes, something he rarely bothers doing. Under his coat I see a dark suit and tie. You'll never find him out of uniform, not even in a police station at two in the morning. His hair is heavily laced with some anti-gray formula he buys from a corner shop in Chinatown. He swears by that kind of off-beat crap. Dad cultivates the oily snake look, claiming customers expect that. He's the perfect businessman who makes money just by breathing and cheating customers. He started with cars, and now he's moving into real estate. His dark brown eyes are constantly measuring, evaluating, rejecting. (Chapter 5)

Write a descriptive paper that uses sensory images, metaphors and/or similes, to help tell your story. Use strong verbs and powerful adjectives and adverbs. Make sure to include as many of the senses--sight, sound, smell, touch, taste--as you can.

### Narrative Writing

The last time I touched a ball, there were less than twenty seconds left in the game. Only seconds on the clock and a twelve-point lead. Grogan Hills was about to win. I'd already scored eighteen points, ten rebounds and blocked five shots. But the cheerleader on the sidelines who'd promised me that sweet reward if we won was blowing me kisses and I wanted her to see me fly up in the air one more time. I jumped high for block number six. But my tired legs couldn't hold me up when I came back down. (Chapter 12)

Write a narrative paper about a sporting event, or other school activity. Make sure your reader will be able to picture the scene and feel they are there.

### Research paper: pick one of the following:

He's a jellyfish all right. And his stingers have real poison. (Chapter 30)

Malik's father is described as a jellyfish. In reality, jellyfish are some of the most dangerous animals on Earth. Write a research report on Jellyfish. Include locations where they are found and types of poisons and their effects on humans.

OR

I feel like some first grader's art project as he cuts the material into thin strips, then uses the superglue, Dermabond, whatever, to attach each strip of material to one side of the cut. (Chapter 13)

Research Dermabond, how it was discovered, what it is used for, and what medical science understands about its properties.

OR

"What's Depakote?" I ask. Some kind of street drug I've never heard of?

"Medicine. It's a mood stabilizer," Barney says. (Chapter 40)

Research Depakote and bipolar disorder. Tell what it is used for, and the effect it has on the brains and moods of people when used properly. Include information on side-effects and contra-indications (situations where it should not be used)

**Persuasive Writing**

Malik really wants his Mustang Boss returned to him. Write a persuasive paper to Mr. Kaplan explaining why Malik deserves to have his car returned to him.

OR

I'm supposed to do five hundred words, like some grade-schooler." Five hundred words of "I'm sorry." Might as well be five million, because that will never happen.

"Do you even know five hundred words?" Cesare asks, and then ducks when I toss a punch at him. "How's it going?"

"Vandalism is bad. Fighting is worse." I laugh. "Four hundred ninety-four more words and I'm done." (Chapter 8)

Complete Malik's essay and persuade a judge he has learned his lesson.

**Critical Thinking**

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Sometimes I just want him to see me. To forget my brother and think that maybe I'm the son he always wanted instead of the second stringer he's forced to make do with. (Chapter 5)

Malik doesn't want people knowing that he helped Barney. His father doesn't want people knowing he is "anonymous." Compare their motives for keeping their actions secret.

"Some endeavors deserve to fail. Sometimes people are better for it. It's about drive and independence and the future. The pain of failure enables us to remember and profit from our mistakes. It's cruel, but there's really no choice—that's how human beings learn." (Chapter 29)

Dwayne Kaplan talks about the pain of failure. Do you think he's right or wrong? Have you ever learned a lesson from failing at something?

**FUN**

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- Create a book trailer depicting some of the memorable themes or actions in one or more of the character's lives.
- Choosing two or more characters from the book, write a script or create fan fiction that follows an incident from the novel, but adds additional depth to further clarify the plot and characters.  
Examples:
  - Cesare's parents pick him up from jail.
  - Malik tells his grandfather the "favorite Grandson" game has to end.
  - Move ten years in the future and show how the characters' lives have changed. What are they proud of? What do they regret?
- Make a storyboard or multi-panel cartoon of at least six frames depicting an incident from the novel. Use at least five vocabulary words appropriately.
- Write a script for a radio talk show that discusses bullying and family violence. Have various people call-in to discuss different experiences and solutions

**Enrichment across the Curriculum:**

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**Language Arts:** Have students write a poem, song or rap about a bad habit they have worked to change or an action they regret.

**Drama:** Partners should choose a scene in the book and write a skit based on it.

**Social Studies:** Investigate the effects of parental alcohol or drug abuse has on the children. How does this illness affect parenting skills and styles?

**Resources:**

AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) - <http://www.aa.org>

ACOA (Adult Children Of Alcoholics) - <http://www.adultchildren.org/>

Families Anonymous, for friends and family members struggling with loved ones who have problems of addiction or mental illness - <http://familiesanonymous.org/>

Alanon (for adults) and Alateen for families dealing with an alcoholic member - <http://al-anon.alateen.org/home>

NA (Narcotics Anonymous) - <http://www.na.org/>

Depression and Bipolar support alliance - <http://www.dbsalliance.org>

**About the Author:**

B. A. Binns is the pseudonym of Barbara Binns, a Chicago Area author who finds writing an exercise in self-discipline, and the perfect follow-up to her life as an adoptive parent and cancer survivor. She holds Masters degrees in both Biochemistry and Computer Science. Following a career as an Information Technology analyst, she studied creative writing at Harper College and Chicago State University.



She writes to attract and inspire both male and female readers with stories of “real boys growing into real men...and the people who love them.” She is a member of RWA (Romance Writers of America), the Chicago Writers Association, SCBWI (Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators) and YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association).

In addition to *Being God*, she is the author of *PULL* ISBN [978-0-9881821-0-3](#) and *Die Trying* ISBN [978-0-9881821-9-6](#), a set of short stories designed to attract reluctant readers. *Pull* is on the School Library Journal’s 2011 list of Best Books for Youth in Detention, YALSA’s 2012 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and was nominated for Indiana’s 2012/2013 Eliot Rosewater award.

Her writing achievements include a first place in Oregon’s 2009 Golden Rose contest, a 2010 National Readers Choice Award in the Young Adult category, and being a finalist in the RWA Golden Heart® contest. She also gives talks to teacher and librarian groups, having appeared at the 2011 ALAN, the 2011 and 2012 Ohio Educational Library Media Association (OEMLA), the 2012 Indiana Library Federation (ILF) and 2013 American Library Association.

**In the Author’s Words: Why I Write**

I have been researching reluctant readers and the “reading gap” ever since I attended a panel titled “Why Johnny Won’t Read” during the 2008 Association of Writing Professionals conference. Teachers, librarians, and bookstore owners joined in lamenting the lack of books designed to capture young males. Since then I have come full circle and now write to capture both male and female readers, to entice reluctant readers and still hold the attention of good readers. I write about young people discovering that they are more than they think they are, and becoming everything they ever dreamed. In 2013 I come full circle, by giving a workshop on ways teachers and librarians can reach out to reluctant readers at the American Library Association. I would love to come and talk with you or your students about reading and writing.

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