

# SHAPING YOUR OWN CROWN



## CROWN: ODE TO THE FRESH CUT

By Derrick Barnes, Illustrated by Gordon C. James,  
and published by Agate Publishing

### THE FESTIVAL

Welcome to the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival! Where is the festival happening? Right here in your space, in your hands. By creating art based on *Crown*, you are taking part in a celebration of books and book creators from across the African Diaspora. You are also telling *your own* story!

### THE BOOK

Look for the read aloud of *Crown* on BeautifulBlackbird.com. If you look at the cover of *Crown*, you will see that the boy is surrounded by small yellow crowns. Illustrator Gordon C. James included these crowns to honor one of the most famous artists of our time—Jean-Michel Basquiat. A Black artist with a Haitian father and Puerto Rican mother, Basquiat often painted crowns on portraits of his Black heroes and himself to show their greatness and ambition for greatness. Gordon C. James' crowns remind children of *their* greatness, a greatness that is so easy to touch when you step into the barber for a fresh cut.

### THE ART ACTIVITY

*When do you feel beautiful and powerful?* This activity invites you to create your own Jean-Michel Basquiat and Gordon C. James-inspired crown that contains all your feelings of greatness. Once made, a crown is meant to either sit on or hover over your head. Only then can you feel its full power. Where can you place your crown so that feeling of greatness can be felt as often as possible?

#### Materials:

Yellow Poster Board or any thicker paper including a food box  
Scissors  
Glue or glue stick  
Drawing & coloring tools

Make a collage with items from your home like beads, buttons, stickers, old jewelry, fabric, ribbons, patterned paper, tinfoil, and magazine cut-outs that make you feel something good and strong.

#### Watch a Video:

<https://beautifulblackbird.com/books/crown-an-ode-to-the-fresh-cut-by-derrick-barnes-illustrated-by-gordon-c-james/>

#### Suggested Steps:

1. Find a big piece of paper. Yellow poster board is ideal, but not necessary. You could work with a cut-up paper bag, food box or color a blank sheet of paper.
2. With a pencil, lightly draw triangles overlapping each other to make the crown spikes. It does not need to be neat. Both Gordon C. James and Basquiat made wonderful shapes with their crowns with the spikes being all different sizes.
3. Cut out your crown outline.
4. Think about times when you feel strong and beautiful. What words remind you of those feelings? For example, in *Crown*, the author Derrick Barnes uses words like: royalty, princely, intellectual, brilliant, blazing, star, shine, swagger, fine, cool, important, angel, majestic, masterful, love, gold medal, fly, and flawless. Write your words (in any language)—and even some of the book's words if you want—on your crown.

Maybe other people in your home can contribute words to your crown—they could share words that make them feel strong, too.

5. Crowns often have jewels or patterns. What can you find in your home to glue? Tin foil? Buttons? Pieces of fabric? Glitter? Colored paper? Keep adding things until the crown shines with the power you have given it.

6. Now let's think about where you could place your crown so you can feel its power. You could place it on a wall, so you and your people could pose underneath it. You could hang it from the ceiling with a string so it is there above your head making you majestic. You could even do a self portrait of yourself and glue the crown onto it.

Whatever you do with your art, know that you are royalty, brilliant, blazing, a star, shining, full of swagger, fine, cool, important, angelic, majestic, masterful, loving, gold medal-winning, fly, and flawless.

**Share your Experience!** If your family, guardian, or teacher agrees and if you can protect your privacy, take a picture or video of your artwork and share it with the hashtag #BeautifulBlackbirdCrown.

Our thanks to Wee the People in Boston, Massachusetts for this art project and all the ways they crown kids with the power of books, art, activism.

