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English 10H/The Bluest Eye

*NOTE: The following was written in response to media scrutiny of Quvenzhané Wallis, a nine-year-old African American girl nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress in 2013. Reporters told her that they could not pronounce her name so they were just going to call her "Annie," (after a role in which she has been cast). Quvenzhané insisted that they call her by her right name.*

## **The Thing About Being A Little Black Girl In the World: For Quvenzhané Wallis**

by Mia McKenzie, February 25, 2013



The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that even when you are the youngest person ever to be nominated for an Academy Award, many people will use the occasion not to hold you up for all of the amazing things you obviously are, but to tear you down for the ways you don't look like them, the ways your name isn't their kind of right, the ways you don't remind them of themselves, the ways you are not blonde or blue-eyed, as if those things could possibly matter when set against the otherworldly talent and beauty and brilliance you possess.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that you come into it already expected to be less than you almost certainly are, the genius and radiant darkness you possess already set up to be overlooked, dismissed or erased by almost everyone you will ever meet.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that even when you are everything, some people will want you to be nothing. They will look at you through the nothing-colored glasses they will put on every time you enter a room. And the bigness of you, the outstandingness, the giftedness, will be invisible to them.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world who is already, at nine years old, confident enough to demand that lazy, disrespectful reporters call you by your name, is that most people will not understand the amount of comfort in one's own skin it takes to do that, will not be able to grasp the sheer fierceness of it, the boldness, the certainty, the love for yourself, and will not be blown away at seeing you do it, though they should be.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that your right to be a child, to be small and innocent and protected, will be ignored and you will be seen as a tiny adult, a tiny black adult, and as such will be susceptible to all the offenses that people two and three and four times your age are expected to endure.

But take heart.

Because the thing about being a little black girl in the world is that you are descended from people whose incredible strength and resilience are alive and kicking in you.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that you are made from beauty and struggle and soul.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that when you have talent, you probably have more of it in your tiniest toe than most of the people who tear you down have in their entire families.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that if you are lucky enough to know your own worth, you know everything you need to know.

The thing about being a little black girl in the world is that you will be surrounded by other black girls who know. And they will hold your hand and braid your hair and laugh with you. They will tell you that you are a gift. They will let you be perfect and let you be flawed. They will rock you in their arms and protect your heart. They will whisper and shout about all that you are. And in a world that wants you gone from the very moment you are born, they will help you stay alive. Some of them will even help you get free.

We got you, girl.

With so much love.

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*Mia McKenzie is a writer and the creator of **Black Girl Dangerous**. She studied writing at the University of Pittsburgh. She's a smart, scrappy Philadelphian with a deep love of fake fur collars. She is the winner of the Astraea Foundation's Writers Fund Award ('09) and the Leeway Foundation's Transformation Award ('12). She's a black feminist and a freaking queer. You can find her short stories in *The Kenyon Review* and *make/shift*.*

*Her debut novel, **The Summer We Got Free**, has been described by author and critic Jewelle Gomez as "a brilliant tapestry filled with exuberance and anxiety." Her work has been recommended by *The Root*, *Colorlines*, *Feministing*, *Angry Asian Man*, and *Crunk Feminist Collective*, among others.*

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