

Brown Girl Dreaming Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Poetry: How does poetic form affect your perception of this text? What impact do aspects like word choice, line breaks, rhythm, or other poetic devices have? Why would Woodson write in poetry instead of prose?

History: In what way does this book provide a unique historical account? How does the poetic form play into this?

Memoir: Think about the nonfiction elements of this text, wherein Woodson isn't only telling a story, but her own story. How does this offer a different understanding of the text and its themes?

Identity: How does Woodson describe the ways she comes to understand her sense of self and her identity as a writer? What does this offer readers?

Social Relevancy: How is this book relevant in today's social climate? What discussions might it begin? How might this book be meaningful to those who relate to Woodson's experience? How is it important for those readers who perhaps do not have similar experiences?

Daybook Possibilities

- Jacqueline Woodson's works are often considered very teachable texts. Why do you think this is, and how would you use this text in a classroom setting? What challenges might it present?
- Read Jacqueline Woodson's Newbery acceptance speech, and research some of the controversy surrounding the presentation of her 2015 honor book (concerning Daniel Handler). Write about your views related to these events.
- Jacqueline Woodson is an acclaimed and prolific writer. Research some of her books—how do they seem similar? What awards has she won?
- Return to the question of models of childhood and chart how this book interacts with others we've read this semester in the depictions of children.
- Choose another historical event to write a short narrative poem about. How does describing history with poetry change your perception of it?
- Talk to a friend or family member who has had an experience that you think is significant, then write their story in the form of narrative verse.
- Track similes and other poetic devices in the text and write about how these add to the story.
- Look closely at the National Book Award winners in the books for young people category. What do you notice about these winners?

Suggested Critical Reading

"'Best Batch I Ever Fried': Food and Family in Jacqueline Woodson's Picture Books" by Michelle H. Martin

"Of Black Bodies, Watermelons, and a Series of Unfortunate Events" by George Yancy

"Is There Poetry in Children's Poetry?" by Janice Bogstad

"Poetry for Children: A Neglected Art" by Michael Benton

"The trouble isn't making poems, the trouble's finding somebody that will listen to them": Negotiating a Place for Poetry in Children's Literature Studies by Anita Tarr and Richard Flynn

Background and Context

A writer of picture books, novels, and poetry for both children and young adult readers, Jacqueline Woodson is a famed and award winning author who tackles realistic "big issues" including a focus on "individuals who are ignored or forgotten in mainstream America." *Brown Girl Dreaming*, which won the National Book award and was a Newbery Honor last year (2015), is a verse memoir in which Woodson recounts her experience growing up in South Carolina and New York the 1960s and 1970s.