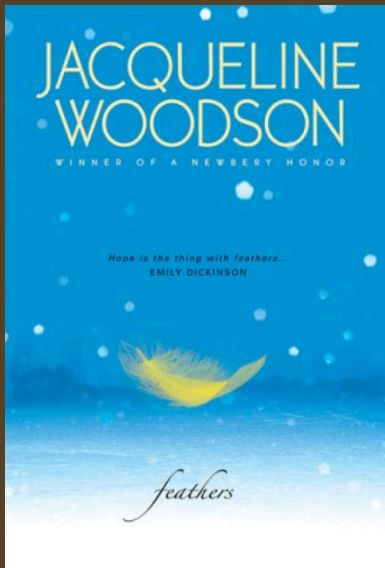


Feathers Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

- Hope:** What ideas does Woodson present about the concept of hope, and how does she weave these together using several parts of the story?
- Jesus Boy:** What does Frannie learn from the Jesus Boy? What does he seem to represent to her and the other characters of the text, and how does this grow more complicated as the novel develops?
- Historical Fiction:** What elements of this story define it as a historical fiction text? Why are these important, and how does Woodson engage this moment of history?
- Deafness:** How does Woodson uniquely present Sean's deafness and the role this plays in his life and his relationship with Frannie?
- Education:** What commentary on education and the role of teachers does this book offer, especially in the portrayal of Ms. Johnson?
- Families:** What does this book reflect about parents and families? How does this compare to other books we've read this semester?
- Faith:** Why do you think Woodson would include Samantha's emphasis on faith and church in her depiction? What role does this have in the story?
- Ideology:** How does this book engage ideologies related to class, race, disability, and religion? What messages does the text send about these social concerns?

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.
- Consider perspective, rewriting part of the book from the point of view of another character. How does this change the story?
- Think about the use of Emily Dickinson's poetry in the text, and research poetry's inclusion in other children's books. Consider connections to poetry you could make with other texts you've read.

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
- "An Author as a Counter-Storyteller: Applying Critical Race Theory to A Coretta Scott King Award Book" by Wanda Brooks, in *Children's Literature In Education*

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 winner author who tackles realistic "big issues" including a focus on "individuals who are ignored or forgotten in mainstream America." *Feathers*, which offers a complex look at race, class, religion, and other ideological elements, was a 2008 Newbery Honor book, and Woodson was also awarded the Newbery Honor last year (2015) for her newest work, *Brown Girl Dreaming*.