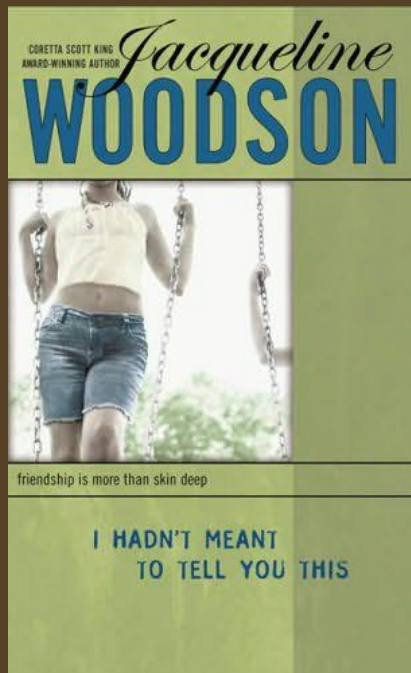


I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Abuse: Why doesn't Lena tell anyone about what Marie confides to her? Were you surprised by her decision? What ideas does this novel present about the problems teens face and the complexity of solving them?

Same and Different: Compare Marie and Lena—what makes them different and how are they similar? Why would Woodson portray two teens this way?

Parents: How are parents—both mothers and fathers—portrayed in the text?

Race: How does Marie's father feel about white people? What experiences has he had to make him feel that way? How does this complicate notions of race?

Loss: What commentary does this story make about the pain and effect of loss? What kinds of loss does it portray, and how do characters respond?

Class: In what ways does class or socio-economic status affect Marie and Lena's relationship? How do they learn more about each other's perspectives, and what conflicts are caused by this and other differences between them?

Problem Novel: Many early works of adolescent fiction very purposefully show a teenager who faces a particular problem and learns an important lesson. How does *Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* shift this model and/or break from these kinds of stories? How does it compare to *Chocolate War* and other books you've read?

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?
- Consider perspective, rewriting part of the book from the point of view of another character. How does this change the story?
- This about the setting (time and place) of the story? How does the unique local Woodson has chosen affect what story she is able to tell?
- Write about the ending? Why would Woodson choose to offer such a lack of closure?
- Check out the novel's sequel, *Lena*. How does your perception of the story change after reading or learning about this continuation?

Suggested Critical Reading

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

"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*

Jacqueline Woodson: "*The Real Thing*" by Lois Thomas Stover

Just Us Girls: The Contemporary African American Young Adult Novel by Wendy Rountree

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." *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, which offers a complex look at race, class, abuse, and other ideological elements, was a 1994 Coretta Scott King Award book, and Woodson was also awarded the Newbery Honor last year (2015) for her newest work, *Brown Girl Dreaming*.