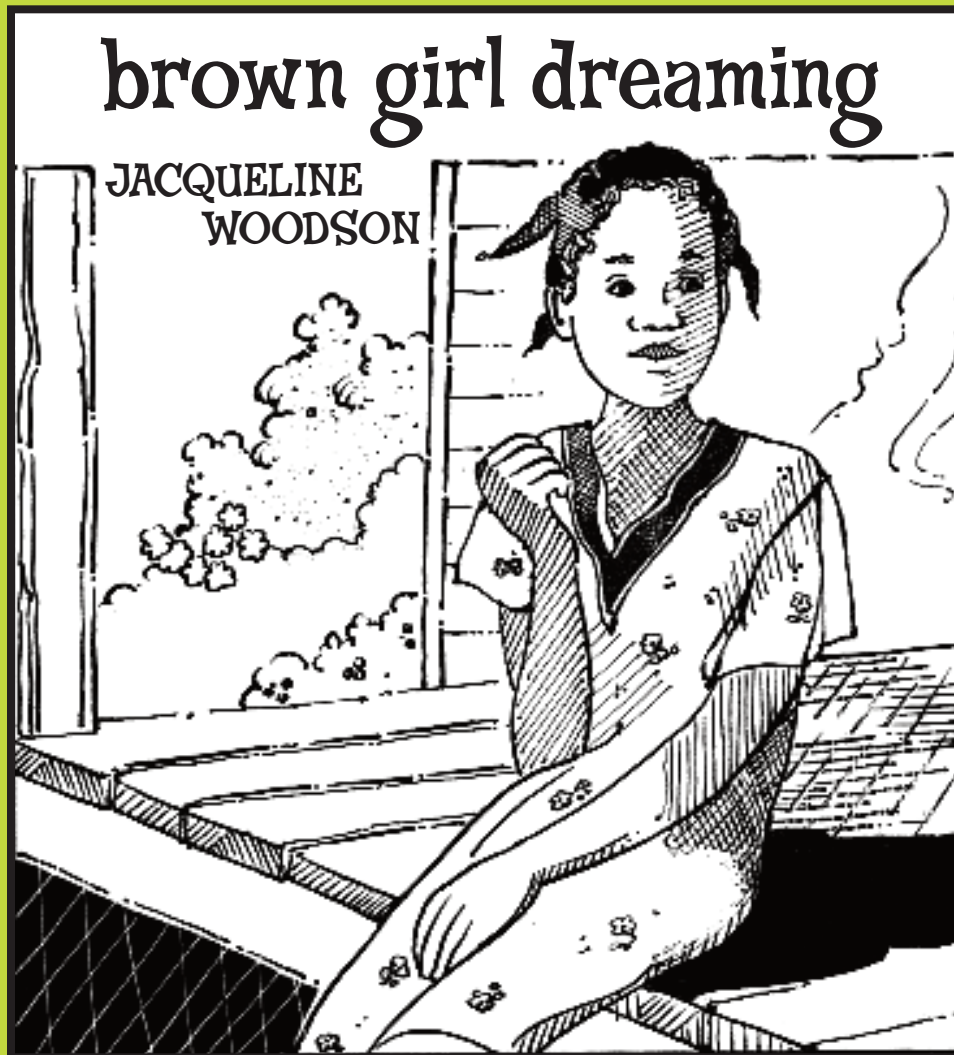


Novel·Ties



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of lessons to use in conjunction with the book *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, and extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different book at its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each book, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for guided reading by distributing the book and a folder to each student. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter or group of chapters; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

SYNOPSIS

In this book, written in free verse, Jacqueline Woodson tells what it was like as an African-American to grow up in Ohio, South Carolina, and later in Brooklyn in the 1960s and 1970s. Her mother never felt at home in Ohio and looked forward to her annual visits to South Carolina with her three children. There the warmth of her family overshadowed the remnants of Jim Crow in a still-segregated South.

Woodson's father, on the other hand, a possible descendant of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, and the great-great grandson of a free black man, despised the South. It is not clear whether this difference in outlook and heredity caused the breakup of his marriage.

As a single parent, Jacqueline's mother returned home to South Carolina with her children and lived under her parents' roof. Although the children flourished with the love and care of their grandparents, their mother no longer felt like an independent adult in her parents' home.

Jacqueline's mother joined the other black members of the community to peacefully protest their lack of civil rights. Although Greenville became less segregated, she now yearned to leave the South and live in New York City with her children.

When Mother left Greenville periodically to live and work in New York City, Grandmother, an avowed Jehovah's Witness, shared her religious practices with her grandchildren. There was bible study almost every evening and the children had to distribute religious literature on Sundays. Grandfather, who was suffering from an illness that left him fatigued from constant coughing, never became involved in these practices.

After several years, Mother returned to Greenville to gather her children together, to introduce them to their new baby brother Roman, and to take them to New York where she had an apartment waiting for them.

Life in New York City was a great disappointment to Jacqueline and her family. The crowds, the frenzy, the miserable apartments where they lived, and their poverty made life a challenge. When Roman became hospitalized with lead poisoning, Jacqueline's mother sent the children back to Greenville for the summer. Slipping back into the ways of the South confused the notion of "home" for Jacqueline and her siblings.

Returning to New York at the end of the summer, Jacqueline was saddened by the continuing ill health of her little brother, but pleased to make a best friend and participate in street games with other neighborhood children. Since her mother was working again, there was food on the table and less stress at home.

Time passed with the children spending the school terms in New York and returning to Greenville in the summers. With each passing year, Roman's health improved, but Grandfather became weaker until he died at home with his family present. Uncle Robert was jailed for illegal activities and became a practicing Muslim while incarcerated. He came out of prison a calmer individual than he was before.

Although Jacqueline was overshadowed by her sister's academic excellence, she began to display her talent as a writer. As the book ends, Jacqueline has conquered her feelings of inferiority, knowing she has a talent that will be the focus of her life.

Background Information (cont.)

Famous People Mentioned in *Brown Girl Dreaming*

James Baldwin

Writer and playwright James Baldwin was born in 1924 in Harlem, New York. Baldwin broke new literary ground with the exploration of racial and social issues in his many works. In 1953 he published the novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, going on to publish other novels including *Giovanni's Room*, *Another Country* and *Just Above My Head* as well as books of essays such as *Notes of a Native Son* and *The Fire Next Time*. Having lived most of his adult life in France, Baldwin died in 1987 in Saint-Paul de Vence.

Ruby Bridges

Born in 1954 on the farm her parents and grandparents sharecropped in Tylertown, Mississippi, Ruby Bridges was six years old and living in New Orleans when she became the first African-American child to attend an all-white public elementary school. She had to be escorted to class by her mother and U.S. marshals due to violent mobs who threatened her. Bridges paved the way for continued Civil Rights action. She has shared her story in many educational forums.

Shirley Chisholm

Born in 1924 in Brooklyn, New York, Shirley Chisholm became the first African-American congresswoman. In 1968, she was elected to serve New York State in the U.S. House of Representatives; she went on to serve for a total of seven terms. Four years later, she became the first major-party black candidate to make a bid for the U.S. presidency. Throughout her political career, Chisholm fought for educational opportunities and social justice. Chisholm left Congress in 1983 to teach. She died in 2005.

Angela Davis

Born in 1944, in Birmingham, Alabama, Angela Davis studied at the Sorbonne. She joined the U.S. Communist Party and was jailed for charges related to a prison outbreak. She is known for books such as *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and *Women, Race and Class*. She has worked as a professor and activist advocating gender equity, prison reform, and alliances across color lines. She is currently a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she teaches courses on the history of consciousness.

Sally Hemings

Born in Virginia in 1773, Sally Hemings was an enslaved African-American woman who worked on the Monticello plantation of Thomas Jefferson. Hemings was a nursemaid to Jefferson's daughter Mary, and traveled with the family to Paris. Though it was rumored that she had several children with Jefferson, both the family and historians denied the claim. Recent DNA testing, however, has concluded that Hemings' children are connected to the Jefferson bloodline.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and the author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think the book will be about? Do you think it will be fact or fiction? Do you recognize the author's name? Have you read any other books written by Jacqueline Woodson?
2. Continue to preview the book by noticing the book awards that are shown as medals on the front cover. You will see that this book received a Newbery Honor, was a National Book Award winner, and was a winner of the Coretta Scott King Award. What do all of these awards suggest to you about the book you are about to read? Have you read any other award-winning books?
3. Look at the Woodson Family Tree and the Irby Family Tree at the beginning of the book. When did the Woodson family and the Irby family become joined by marriage? Look at the family photo album at the back of the book. You will be able to match some of the pictures to the names in the family tree. Why do you think the author placed these family trees at the beginning of the book? Try to create a family tree of your own, using the format shown in the book. You might ask an adult in your family or a family friend to help you collect the information.
4. Skim through the book, taking particular notice of the format of the text. You will see that the entire book is written in unrhymed verse. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of writing in verse as opposed to writing in straight text? Have you read any other books of fiction or plays that were written in verse?
5. Read the Langston Hughes poem that begins "Hold fast to dreams..." at the beginning of the book. What do you think the poet meant when he said that "Life [without dreams] is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly"?
6. Read the Background Information on Civil Rights [Civil War – 1963] on page 2 of this study guide and do some additional research to learn why the year 1963 was pivotal in the Civil Rights Movement. Find out what was accomplished nationwide in improving the civil rights of African-Americans. Also, discuss what was not accomplished and still remains to be done today.
7. Read the thumbnail biographies of famous people mentioned in the book that appear on page 3 of this study guide. When these people are mentioned in the text, refer to these short biographies and do some additional research to learn more about them.
8. If you were to arrange the following concepts in their order of importance in your life (with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important), how would you number them?

family

friends

school

religion

As you read the book, notice the order of importance that Jacqueline gives to each of these concepts. Does she agree with you?