

In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Adapted from Penguin Books, Grand Rapids Public Library

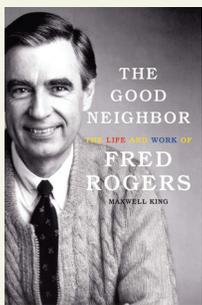


Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement.

1. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is an award-winning memoir written in verse. Do you enjoy this format for an autobiography? Even though each chapter/ verse is short, do you feel that you got a good sense of the setting or moment that Woodson was trying to convey?
2. Jacqueline shares her childhood experiences midst the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement. What role does history play in this book? What can we learn from this first-person perspective of American history?
3. In what ways does Woodson manipulate words, phrasing, and white space in her writing? How does this influence your reading of the book?
4. How does Jacqueline Woodson come to find herself, as told in *Brown Girl Dreaming*?
5. What and/or who are the strongest influences on Jacqueline's identity? How do they help her find her voice?
6. An important theme in the book is family. What does it mean to Jacqueline? What does it mean to you?
7. Jacqueline Woodson is a major voice in the campaign for more publication of diverse books. Do you feel *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a book that promotes diversity and if so, why?
8. What types of discussions do you think the author was hoping to inspire with this book? Why did she give the book this title? What does it say about her? What does it say about the world?
9. How do you think this book is relevant in today's social climate? Is it relatable for young readers today? If so, which themes from the book continue to be relevant in the lives of young children in the United States?
10. Do you think it's important for people who don't necessarily identify with Jacqueline's specific experience to read this book? Why or why not?
11. While growing up, Jacqueline lived in the American North and South at different seasons in her life. How were her relationships, her experiences, and her sense of self shaped by differences in her locations?
12. Jacqueline's mother tells her children that they will experience a "moment when you walk into a room and/no one there is like you" (14). Have you experienced this? What might this feel like?
13. Why does Woodson structure her memoir into five distinct parts? How does this choice add to the story?
14. Where does Jacqueline start to see change happening in her life? Where does she start to see it in the world in which she lives?
15. What is Jacqueline's attitude toward God and religion? How does she seem conflicted?
16. Jacqueline loves writing because it allows her to create the worlds she imagines. What world did she create through her memoir? Is there an end to her story?

NEXT MONTH



The Good Neighbor by Maxwell King

In the first full-length biography of Fred Rogers, King offers a view of the children's champion that is both a feel-good tribute and a look into Rogers' commitment to making the world a better place.