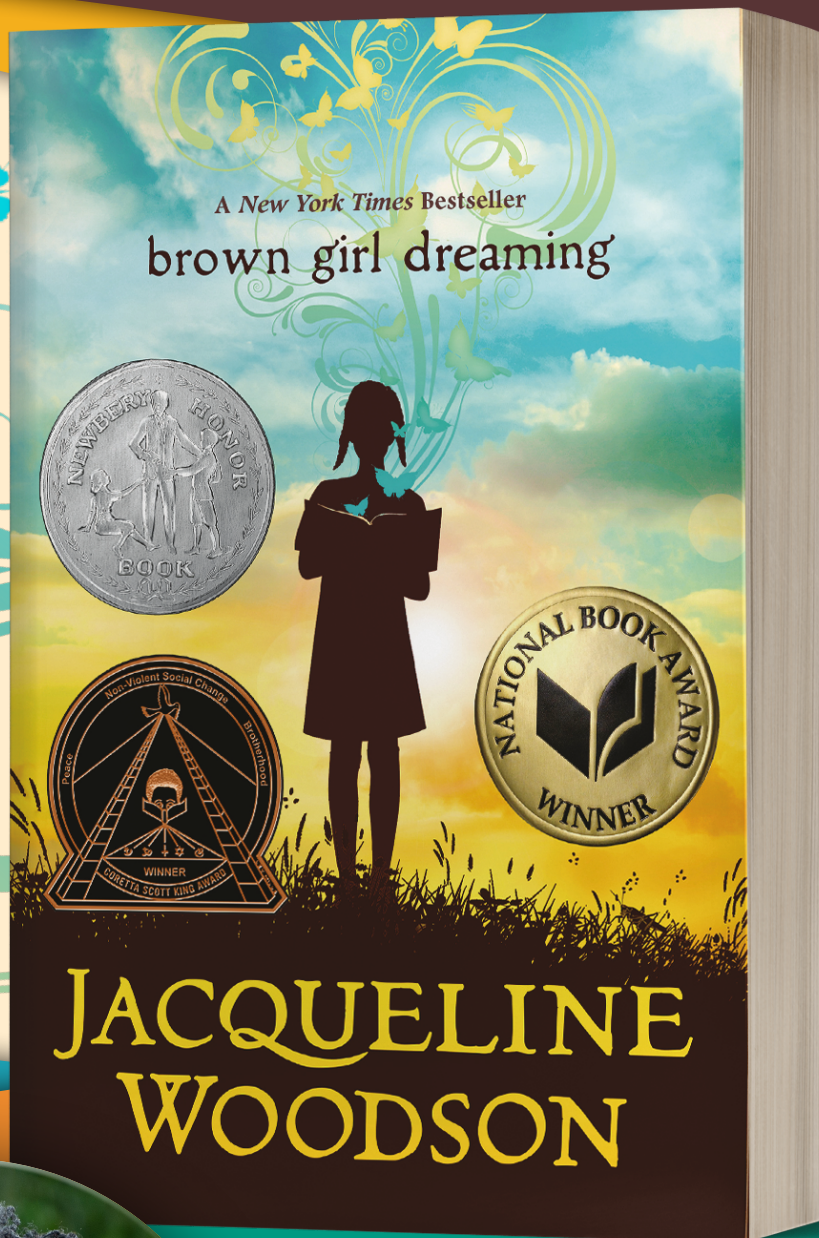


AN EDUCATOR GUIDE TO



“These are poems that will, for years to come, be stored in our bloodstream.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*





Dear Reader,

Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a lyrical exploration of what it means to live in the United States as a person of African descent—as a Black girl. Since publication, it has been read by communities spanning readers young and old and has found its place as a classroom staple. It has won twenty-seven state awards in the United States, and is a National Book Award for Young People's Literature winner. Along with being an *LA Times* Book Prize Finalist, it is one of *TIME* magazine's 100 Best YA Books of All Time. It is a Newberry Honor Book, an E.B. White Read-Aloud Award Winner, and a recipient of the Sibert Honor Award. It should come as no surprise that Woodson is also a recipient of the Coretta Scott King Author Award and was a Library of Congress National Ambassador for Young People's Literature (2018–2020) and a recipient of the MacArthur Genius Grant (2020) for her work in "redefining children's and young adult literature to encompass more complex issues and reflect the lives of Black children, teenagers, and families." Woodson is a true master of her craft, and as *Brown Girl Dreaming* shows, she is also a true talent who has left an indelible mark on the literary landscape of American authors.

As you read, consider the fact that Black history is everyone's history. The stories each poem tells are at the same time personal and universal. Though your identity may or may not differ from Jacqueline's, you will find connection in the characters, places, and feelings that will surely remind you of your own story. It may be tempting to read the book straight through, but I recommend taking your time, savoring each poem as though it is your favorite meal, or rain falling on your face on a hot summer's day. You'll be glad you did, and when you finish the book, you'll want to read it again. I know I plan to read this book every year as a reminder of what it means to be part of family, history, legacy, and tradition. I am also part of the memory of many people, as so many are a part of mine. As you read, remember that you belong, that you matter, and that your dreams create your reality.

Enjoy the journey,

Julia Torres (& Penguin Young Readers School & Library)

JULIA E. TORRES is a nationally recognized veteran language arts teacher, librarian, and teen programs administrator in Denver, Colorado. Julia facilitates teacher development workshops rooted in the areas of anti-racist education, equity and access in literacy and librarianship, and education as a practice of liberation. Julia's work has been featured on NPR, Al Jazeera's The Stream, PBS Education, KQED's MindShift, Rethinking Schools, *Learning for Justice* magazine, *School Library Journal*, *American Libraries Magazine*, and many more. She is a Book Love Foundation board member, Educolor Working Group member, a Book Ambassador for The Educator Collaborative, and a cofounder of #DisruptTexts. Her coauthored title *Live Up Your Library: Design Engaging and Inclusive Programs for Teens and Tweens* is just the first of many forthcoming publications for librarians and educators.

AWARDS AND ACCLAIM

**National Book
Award WINNER**



**Coretta Scott
King
Author Award
WINNER**



**Newbery
HONOR BOOK**



**Sibert Award
HONOR BOOK**



**E.B. White
Read-Aloud
Award WINNER**



**27 State
Awards**



***LA Times*
Book Prize
Finalist**



***TIME*'s
100 Best
YA Books of
All Time**



THEMES & ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

FAMILY & HOME

Jacqueline's family and homes are integral to her story of being a brown girl. Consider the role of home and family. What is the difference between a house and a home? How do Jacqueline's family members influence her feelings of belonging in the world?

HISTORY & MEMORY

Woodson's history is connected to North American history, as she is a descendant of African people brought to the Americas. Her lineage and photos of her loved ones in the book are integrated into her understanding of herself and our understanding of her. How do our memories of loved ones form ideas of what happened in the past? How does individual memory shape collective memory?

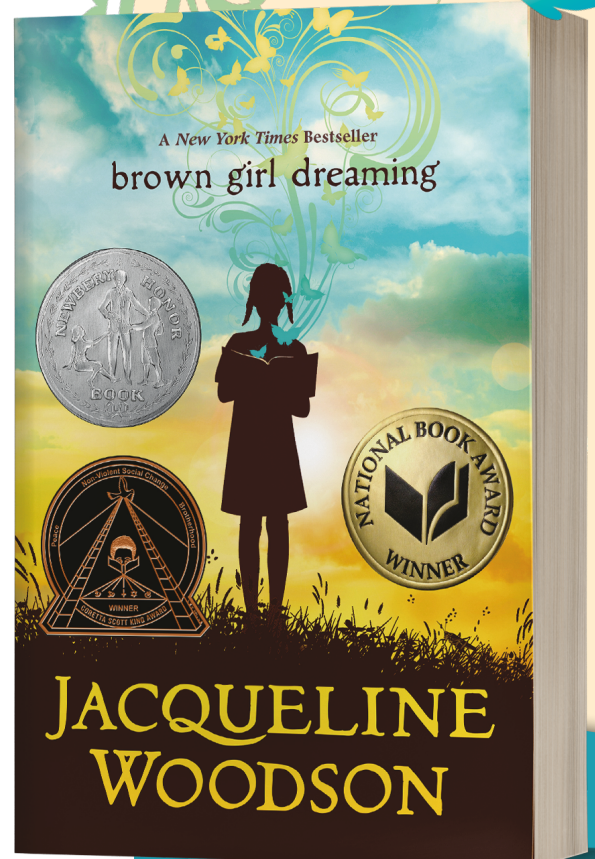
TRADITION

The traditions and rituals within the book (such as traveling to the South every summer) give readers an important understanding of how Jacqueline's family works and what they value. What traditions does your friend group or family share? What could an outside observer learn about you from exploring your customs, rituals, and traditions?

CREATIVITY

Jacqueline discovers herself as a writer slowly and through the help of several individuals in her life. She authors a book about butterflies when she's quite young and writes beside Langston Hughes. What authors or real-life figures have influenced your writing life? What is true for you about your identity as a reader and writer?

NOTE FOR EDUCATORS: All themes are in every part of the book. Multiple poems will connect to each theme. Here you will find just a few. Read closely so you can find the ones that are the most meaningful to you.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

WATCH AND LISTEN to Jacqueline Woodson in conversation with librarian and educator Julia E. Torres for NCTE's Day on Writing:

VIEW VIDEO: <https://vimeo.com/470424757/9bfe341429>

- What does Woodson say about her experience with author's craft? Make a chart with at least three important ideas you hear, then write three questions you have. Craft a letter to Jacqueline or another author you admire. What would you ask them if you could ask anything?

READ one of the following books by Jacqueline Woodson alongside, before, or after *Brown Girl Dreaming*:



Picture Books: *This Is the Rope*, with illustrations by James Ransome; *The Day You Begin*, with illustrations by Rafael López; *Each Kindness*, with illustrations by E. B. Lewis

Novels: *Harbor Me*; *Before the Ever After*; *If You Come Softly*; *Remember Us*; *Another Brooklyn*

- Create a book trailer previewing the novel's most captivating moments so that others will be curious and invited to read the book. Consider including major plot points, interesting quotes, and setting or character descriptions. Don't spoil the plot, but remember to keep the trailer brief and exciting.

INVESTIGATE Woodson's work with the Library of Congress, which was given the name Reading = HOPE x CHANGE. Using your resources, discover her project and platform.

VIEW VIDEO: <https://everychildareader.net/readinghopechange/about-rhc/>

- Then, prepare a short presentation for your school community or another group you are affiliated with to continue the work. You might consider hosting an event or connecting with those who already did in order to learn about its outcomes. Prepare a podcast or set of interview questions to ask those in your community about the state of young readers. Are they on the rise or the decline? What is the typical age of readers that come after school to the school or public library? These are some questions to get you started.

RESEARCH the Great Migration. Woodson's family plays a pivotal role in *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Her family, like millions of other African American families, migrated north near the end of the Civil War and during emancipation.

- Research some of the cities involved in the Great Migration. If you can, describe *why* people migrated, *what* they did once they moved north, *where* they went and *how* it was different from where they left, and *when* the waves of migration happened. What was the population in their new home like before they got there and how did it change after their arrival? How did those involved in the Great Migration contribute to the economic prosperity in their new towns and cities? Where did they live? **Hint:** You can access demographics through your local school or public library with a database called "Demographics Now." Using the resources available through your local library or state history museum, identify an individual or family and tell their story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

More than a hundred years, my grandfather says, and we're still fighting for the free life we're supposed to be living.

From: **south carolina at war**



PART I

Family & Home

(PP. 8-9)

What is the story of your family or your name? What do you know and what is hearsay or a story that may or may not be true? What can you learn from the stories that are told that may or may not reflect the way people want history to be, rather than what it actually was?

History & Memory

(P. 3)

What was happening in the world when you were born? What sort of culture or family were you born into? If you aren't sure, what culture(s) or family structures have you chosen? How have they shaped you?

Tradition

(P. 21)

What is something you do every day, week, month, or year? What do you think you would feel if all of a sudden that tradition stopped? Why?

Creativity

(PP. 33-34)

What was the song played the most on the radio (or streamed) the year you were born? Have you heard it? What (if any) connection do you feel to it?

PART II

Family & Home

(PP. 68-69)

How do you speak and how has that been influenced by the family, community, or geographic region you call home?

History & Memory

(PP. 72-74)

What do the people in your life remember about the Civil Rights Movement in your state or area of the United States? Consider how their memory might be shaped by their identity markers (race, class, ethnicity, gender).

Tradition

(P. 92)

What do you know about Jim Crow laws and segregation? Research the term "de facto segregation." What traditions of separation or division exist in your community?

Creativity

(PP. 114-115)

What stories were you told as a young person? What's the difference between superstition and a folktale or fairy tale? What do these forms of storytelling teach us about the people who create them?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

*Pretty children, Miss Bell says.
But God don't make them no other kinda way.*

From: **sunday afternoon on the front porch**



PART III

Family & Home

(PP. 175-176)

What does Woodson learn about the connection between memory and imagination, dreaming and believing, lying and the truth? How do her mother's perspectives differ from those of Jacqueline's uncle?

History & Memory

(PP. 181-182)

What are the memories you have of people in your family or friend group who you are no longer able to see or experience life with? How do your memories compare to the facts for which you have records (photos, letters, birth certificates, etc.)?

Tradition

(PP. 199-201)

What are the traditions Jacqueline has when she's with her grandparents? What do the descriptions of her grandparents teach readers about her relationship to them and to her life in the South?

Creativity

(P. 156)

Why is Jacqueline's name written in a composition notebook so significant? Do you see yourself as an author of stories? Why or why not?

PART IV

Family & Home

(P. 209)

How does Woodson's family and home extend to include her friend Maria? What is special and unique for Jacqueline about her friendship with Maria?

History & Memory

(P. 260)

What do you know about graffiti? What do you think Woodson means when she says, "They're just words . . . / They're not trying to hurt anybody!"

Tradition

(PP. 237-238)

Why does Jacqueline go to the back of the bus? Why was this a habit or custom of Black people long after it was no longer the law under de-facto segregation? How can traditions connect people to the best parts of themselves or the worst parts of the communities and societies in which they live?

Creativity

(P. 217)

Why does Woodson say it is "easier to make up stories than it is to write them down"?



PART V

Family & Home

(PP. 288-289)

How does Jacqueline remember "Daddy"?
What do these memories (and actions) reveal?

History & Memory

(P. 297)

What was the original name of the place you live or call home? Consider consulting Native Land Digital then trace the land occupancy all the way up to the present day. What did you learn about the land from this exercise?

Tradition

(PP. 308-309)

Revolution is a part of America's history. It is the right of every person in the United States to resist conditions that are unjust. What do you think Jacqueline means when she says, "The revolution is always going to be happening"?

Creativity

(P. 313)

What is Woodson's wish? How does she go about making it real?



JOURNAL PROMPTS

PROMPT A

What is the difference between Jacqueline's life in the North and her life in the South? Do you have two places you go that are very different from one another? Write a poem or short piece about them. Don't forget to include descriptive or sensory detail as Jacqueline does in "after greenville #1." (PP. 36-37)

PROMPT B

What impact does Woodson's family have on her sense of self-identity? Pick a poem and read it carefully. Consider the individuals it mentions and how Jacqueline describes them. Then, write a poem or a few about someone you're close to in the same (or your own) style.

PROMPT C

How does the place you live impact your identity or lived experiences? Consider Jacqueline's life in Ohio, Carolina, and New York. Draw a triple Venn diagram and fill in each circle with details you notice. Then, do the same for three places (or cities) you have visited or feel you belong (such as a place of worship, home, school).

PROMPT D

Do the pictures of Woodson's family match the way you imagined them as you read? What observations can you make about the individuals in the photographs? How does a person move dreams into their reality? Does the act of dreaming make things real? What do you think?

PROMPT E

What do you think Jacqueline is trying to teach readers with the "how to listen" poems? Why is listening so important? Examine each of the poems carefully. What commonalities or differences do they have? What do you learn about Jacqueline that is new in the poem "brown girl dreaming?" What does she long to do in this poem? **Hint:** check stanza 4

Somewhere in my brain
each laugh, tear and lullaby
becomes *memory*.

From: **how to listen #1**

ACTIVITIES



CREATE A TIMELINE

In Part IV, Woodson really gains some traction as a writer. Create a timeline and illustrate each step (and poem) that marks her path from first writing her name to creating a whole book. Then, make a timeline for yourself of your life as a writer, moving from the first writings you ever did to the writing you do now. Don't forget the illustrations and any examples if you have them.

RESEARCH THE JIM CROW SOUTH AND JIM CROW LAWS

Use your resources to research the Jim Crow South and find the Jim Crow laws that existed in any of the southern states. Then, create a short video or multimedia presentation (podcast, TikTok video or Instagram Reel) explaining the modern day consequences of Jim Crow. Jacqueline mentions what it's like to live after Jim Crow in the poem "ghosts" (P. 92). Mention the impact that seeing past evidence of Jim Crow laws might have on people living in the states where they existed.

WRITE YOUR OWN POEMS

Brown Girl Dreaming is written as a memoir in verse. Each part of the memoir has a name.

- I i am born
- II the stories of south carolina run like rivers
- III followed the sky's mirrored constellations to freedom
- IV deep in my heart. i do believe
- V ready to change the world

Create a series of five poems with each one documenting a part of your identity or lived experience. Consider matching the topics of your poems with the sections from Woodson's book, eg.:

- I (Your babyhood)
- II (Stories from a place you call home)
- III (Your cultural connections)
- IV (Your dreams)
- V (Your plans for the future)

CREATE A COLLAGE AND PLAYLIST!

Create a collage, either virtually or on paper, with images of your favorite things, places, or people. Beside each one, explain how the object relates to who you are or the dreams you might have. For example: *A dance shoe symbolizes your love for dance.*

Create a playlist for *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Make a guide for each song that explains why you chose it for the book and which poems you would match with which songs.

ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

POET RESEARCH

In the poem "Learning from Langston" (P. 245), Jacqueline takes a poem from Langston Hughes and then writes one of her own to create new meaning.

I loved my friend.

He went away from me.

There's nothing more to say.

The poem ends,

Soft as it began—

I loved my friend.

—Langston Hughes

I love my friend

and still do

when we play games

we laugh. I hope she never goes away from me

because I love my friend.

—Jackie Woodson

Research a poet you like. Create a poem in the same style as that poet. This is called a "pastiche." Copy their poem and your poem onto one page so that new meaning is created and similarities or differences are highlighted.

GET INSPIRED

Read or listen to one of the following books, then create a piece of creative writing of your own:



GRADES 6-9

Operation Sisterhood

by Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich

Eleven-year-old Bo is used to it being just her and her mom in their cozy New York apartment, but when her mom gets married, Bo must adjust to her new sisters and a music-minded blended family that is much larger, louder, and more complex than she ever imagined. (NoveList).



GRADES 6-9

Chlorine Sky

by Mahogany L. Browne

Picked on at home, criticized for talking trash while beating boys at basketball, and always seen as less than her best friend, a girl struggles to like and accept herself. (NoveList)

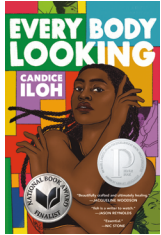


GRADES 9-12

The Chosen One

by Echo Brown

Echo Brown testifies to the disappointments and triumphs of a Black first-generation college student in this fearless exploration of the first-year experience. (NoveList)

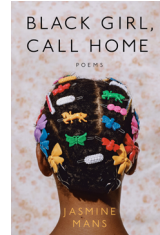


GRADES 9-12

Every Body Looking

by Candice Iloh

With complex relationship dynamics and heavy-hitting issues like rape, overbearing and neglectful parents, and addiction, this book will leave readers deeply affected. A young woman's captivating, sometimes heartbreaking, yet ultimately hopeful story about coming into her own. (NoveList)

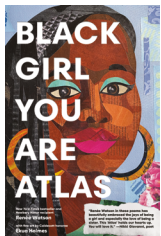


ADULT

Black Girl, Call Home

by Jasmine Mans

A literary coming-of-age poetry collection, an ode to the places we call home, and a piercingly intimate deconstruction of daughterhood, *Black Girl, Call Home* is a love letter to the wandering Black girl and a vital companion to any woman on a journey to find truth, belonging, and healing. (NoveList)



GRADES 9-12

Black Girl You Are Atlas

by Renée Watson,
illustrated by Ekuia Holmes

Using a variety of poetic forms, from haiku to free verse, Watson shares recollections of her childhood in Portland, tender odes to the Black women in her life, and urgent calls for Black girls to step into their power. (PRH catalog)

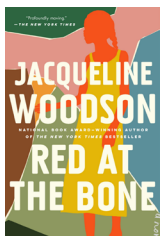


ADULT

The Breakbeat Poets Vol. 2: Black Girl Magic

Edited by Mahogany L. Browne, Idrissa Simmonds, and Jamila Woods

"The poems in the collection, influenced by the rhythms, lyricism, and expressiveness of hip-hop music and culture, speak to the many dimensions of black womanhood." (Poets & Writers)



ADULT

Red at the Bone

by Jacqueline Woodson

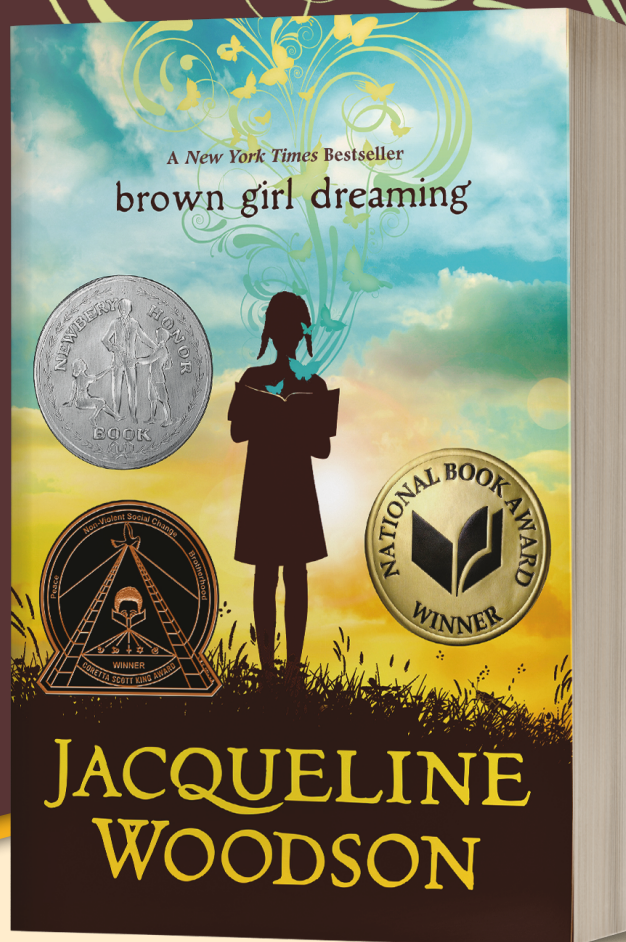
As Melody celebrates a coming-of-age ceremony at her grandparents' house in 2001 Brooklyn, her family remembers 1985, when Melody's own mother prepared for a similar party that never took place in this novel about different social classes. (NoveList)

Write down what I think
I know. The knowing will come.
Just keep listening . . .
From: **how to listen #10**

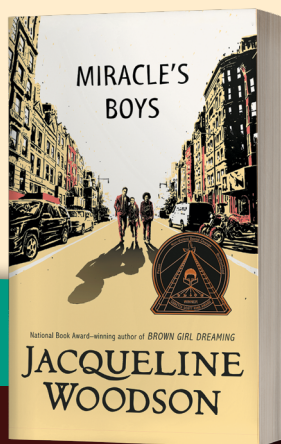
7 STARRED REVIEWS



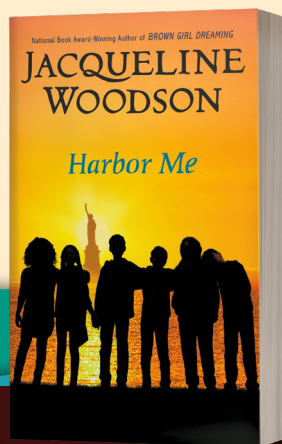
- ★ *Publishers Weekly*
- ★ *The Horn Book*
- ★ *Booklist*
- ★ *School Library Journal*
- ★ *Library Media Connection*
- ★ *Kirkus Reviews*
- ★ *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*



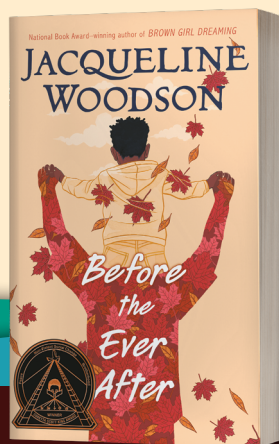
DON'T MISS THESE MIDDLE GRADE NOVELS BY JACQUELINE WOODSON!



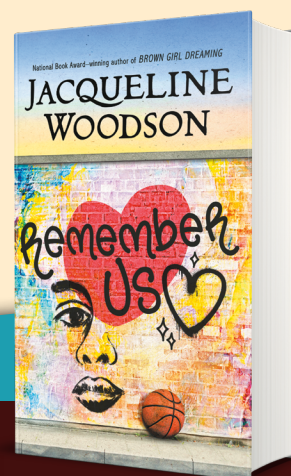
A
Coretta Scott King
Author Award
Winner!



NAACP Image
Award for
Outstanding Literary
Work Winner!



A
Coretta Scott King
Author Award
Winner!



A
Walter Award
Winner!