



*Jacqueline
Woodson*

Biographical Information

Shortly after she was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1963, Jacqueline Woodson moved with her mother and siblings to South Carolina where she spent much of her formative years in the care of her maternal grandparents who were active members of the Jehovah's Witnesses religion. She spent her early years living in Greenville, South Carolina, but at age 7 moved to Brooklyn, New York where she has since lived. She often states she is grateful that she grew up in two different parts of the United States. Life in South Carolina was slower, focused on community, whereas life in Brooklyn was vibrant and very multicultural. Nevertheless, Woodson came to love big city life.

Woodson has always loved writing and wanted to be a writer since she was seven years old. While her writing habit was not particularly encouraged at home, her mother did make sure Jacqueline and her siblings read books, spending many hours in the public library. On her website she describes her interesting evolution as a writer:

"I used to say I'd be a teacher or a lawyer or a hairdresser when I grew up but even as I said these things, I knew what made me happiest was writing.

I wrote on everything and everywhere. I remember my uncle catching me writing my name in graffiti on the side of a building. (It was not pretty for me when my mother found out.) I wrote on paper bags and my shoes and denim binders. I chalked stories across sidewalks and penciled tiny tales in notebook margins. I loved and still love watching words flower into sentences and sentences blossom into stories." (Woodson, 2019)

Teachers recognized her ability and encouraged her to keep writing. She went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree from Adelphi University (Long Island, NY) in English with a concentration in British Literature and Middle English. She also studied writing at The New School. She has since been awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Pine Manor College. Early in her career she worked as an editorial assistant and as a drama therapist for runaway children. While writing educational materials she used a passage from a manuscript she had started in college, *Last Summer with Maizon*. When the passage caught the eye of the editor she asked for the whole manuscript. Eventually after waiting, revising, and changing editors, her first book was published.

Woodson works fulltime as a writer . . . except for when she is working on all the other activities she is involved in! For ten years she worked in a summer camp for under-served communities and edited the anthology of student writing. Sadly the program was disbanded, but Jackie's dream is to recreate a similar program because of the support it gave struggling students. Those campers went on to attend and graduate from prestigious universities. She has held several positions as an associate faculty member or as a Writer-in-Residence and has received several writing fellowships. In 1997 she was part of the founding faculty of the Vermont College *Masters of Fine Arts in Writing For Children program* in which she taught and mentored writers like An Na and Lauren Myracle, authors who are now well known in children's and young adult literature.

She also spends time visiting schools, particularly underserved ones which she does at no cost. Interacting with students energizes her to go back and keep writing. She feels strongly that each person is given a task, a job in life, and hers is to write. "Audre Lorde said, "We must wake up knowing we have work to do and go to bed knowing we've done it." I believe that every day. There is so much work left to be done in the world and for me, I am hoping to make the change I can and do the work I need to do through this gift I've been given. The awards are gifts back to me, and they say, "Keep on doing what you're doing. Thank you" (Salon, 2011).

Jacqueline Woodson Dossier

To date Jacqueline Woodson has written 36 books ranging from picture books to middle grade and secondary school novels. She has also written an adult novel, has contributed to many anthologies, has edited anthologies of poetry and student's writing, and has adapted her book *Locomotion* into a play that was performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington D. C. Most recently she worked with Robert Wilson to produce an opera based on the life of African American folk artist Clementine Hunter. Her novel, *Miracle's Boys*, was turned into a six-episode mini-series for television. Her picture book *Show Way* was produced as an animated short in 2012.

Her books often feature African American characters because she feels strongly that children need to see themselves in books. Growing up she had to wait until she discovered John Steptoe's *Stevie* and the writing of James Baldwin before she could see her neighborhood on a page. This may be one of the reasons that she accepted the role of National Ambassador for Young People's Literature for the Library of Congress. "The National Ambassador for Young People's Literature raises national awareness of the importance of young people's literature as it relates to lifelong literacy, education and the development and betterment of the lives of young people" (Library of Congress, nd).

Each book she writes is a new experience, a way to learn something new or engage with a different subject that matters to her. Consequently she has tackled a wide range of subjects or issues. She does it in a way that allows the reader to get inside the character and experience the story from that person's perspective. This sets her apart from issue-driven authors - Jackie is much more interested in telling a compelling story that allows us to grapple with universal emotions. She does not always give her books easy happy endings because life is not like that, but somewhere in the story she needs to show that there is hope. She also advocates writing without fear of telling character's traits. "When I am writing flawed characters, I just think about my own flaws. Because I write realistic fiction, I generally don't think about fixing anyone - I just think about how I want to feel at the end of the book - And I try to write toward that feeling" (Salon, 2011). When she writes she does not know where the story is going. She starts with an idea in her head and then just trusts the unknowing. She rewrites her stories many times, until they are mostly memorized. They are not long novels, but each is created so the world of the character comes to life.

She shares a home in Brooklyn, New York with her long-time partner, their two children Toshi Georgiana and Jackson-Le-roi, and a dog and cat named Fred and Toffee.

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Jacqueline Woodson's Contribution to Literature

With a prolific body of writing including picture books, books for middle grade readers, and young adult literature, Jacqueline Woodson's contribution to literature, while spanning just over a decade, is extensive and profound. Her thirty-three books and thirteen short stories range in subjects from foster care to interracial relationships, from drug abuse to the witness protection program, but all share the common features of lyrical language, powerful characters, and an abiding sense of hope. Her dialogue is pitch-perfect, the stories are raw and fresh, and the endings satiate the reader. She is among the few authentic tellers of African American stories.

One of the most decorated authors in the United States, Woodson has won dozens of state awards, some of the most prestigious US awards (Newbery Honor award four times, the Margaret A Edwards Award in 2006, and the National Book Award in 2014), and some of the most prestigious international awards, including the US nomination for IBBY's Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2014 and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in 2018. Her lasting contributions to literature for young people have been recognized by the Poetry Foundation, which named her Young People's Poet Laureate in 2015, by her 2017 May Hill Arbutnot Honor Lecture for the American Library Association, by the 2018 Children's Literature Legacy Award from the American Library Association, and by her appointment as the 2018-2019 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature by the US Library of Congress. For most of her career, Woodson has worked tirelessly to promote young people's literature, and in her own writing, she strives to represent marginalized, invisible people. Her ability to write for a wide variety of young audiences in various genre has secured her a respected place in the pantheon of US writers.

One of Woodson's unique contributions to literature is the way in which her stories connect specifically to sociocultural themes and also relate to readers universally with her themes of love, death, grief, and hope. Determined to "write against stereotypes, hoping people will see that some issues know no color, class, or sexuality," her complex characters are never predictable (Woodson, 2006). For example, Ms. Marcus, Lonnie's teacher in *Locomotion* (2003), encourages him to write, "*Good Lonnie, write that. Not a whole lot of people be saying Good, Lonnie to me!*, yet even the beloved Ms. Marcus "don't understand some things even though she's my favorite teacher in the world. Things like my brown arm." Woodson uses no unnecessary words, but her characterization is far from simple, and readers can relate to the multiple layers and complex contradictions in her characters and their relationships with one another. These relationships ring true, whether Woodson is writing about a grandmother taking her granddaughter to see her incarcerated father, as in *Visiting Day* (2002), or the interracial friendship thoughtfully portrayed in *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* (1994). Taking subjects as varied as ethnicity, religion, and teenage pregnancy in *The Dear One* (1991), and the northern migration of African Americans following the Civil War in her soon-to-be-released picture book, *This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration* (2013), Jacqueline Woodson has provided stories covering an astonishing array of topics, but the topics themselves are not the center of the books. Exact precision, embedded within the characters, speaks out powerfully as they draw us into the world of story.

In an interview with best-selling author/poet/biographer and award-winning illustrator Carole Boston Weatherford, Woodson recounts her own earliest reading experiences where she had trouble finding herself in books. Looking to fill in that gap for contemporary children, Woodson's writes stories with primarily African American protagonist of varying ages, sexual orientations, socioeconomic conditions, and family structures. As such, her work serves as a mirror for these children allowing them to see themselves reflected in the work. Her work also serves as a window through which other children can glimpse into a life unlike their own. And, in doing so, they discover the humanity and universality of life. Woodson's commitment to creating characters with whom readers can relate, such as Sean in *Feathers* (2007), who is deaf, or Lafayette, Charlie, and Tyree, three mixed-race brothers in *Miracle's Boys* (2000), is evident in each story she writes. Jacqueline Woodson has tackled contemporary issues, such as the post-Katrina struggles in *Beneath the Meth Moon* (2012) about the impact of methadone use, as well as historical issues, such as the lost history of African Americans, as in *Show Way* (2005). From her website that shows readers how to research her work, cautioning them about trusting sources, to the questions she raises, even in her children's stories, Woodson asks her readers to think critically and in ways that perhaps are new, even uncomfortable. Her picture book *Each Kindness* (2012), illustrated by E. B. Lewis, disrupts readers'

typical idea of an ending because in this story a young girl who has been unkind is unable to make amends when the child who was the recipient of her cruelty does not return to school, and the chance to apologize is lost.

Ever present in all of Woodson's work, however, is the possibility of redemption. Hope appears in the strong voices of characters who find new ways of thinking about families, such as Lonnie's new-found big brother, Rodney in *Locomotion* (2003), or Aunt Gracie for Johnson and Beebee in *Our Gracie Aunt* (2002). *The Other Side* (2001) offers the possibility that the fence separating Clover and Anna may one day come down.

It is the presence of hope in all of Woodson's stories that keeps readers around the world reading her books. She captures a diversity of identities within the African American community and the United States in general. As denoted by her multiple awards, she is one of our greatest treasures.

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The World's Largest Children's Literature Award



About the laureate

Jacqueline Woodson is an American writer, born in Columbus, Ohio in 1963. She grew up partly in Greenville, South Carolina and partly in Brooklyn, her current home. Her books have won many awards and in January she was named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in the United States, a two-year appointment. Her motto as ambassador is "Reading = Hope X Change," a choice that says a great deal about this prolific and multi-faceted laureate and her message.



Woodson has written more than thirty books, including novels, books of poetry, and children's literature. Her books have been translated into more than ten languages. Her primary audience is young teens, but she also writes for children, older teens and adults. She made her authorial debut in 1990 with *Last Summer With Maizon*, the first book in a trilogy about a friendship between two girls. Here, her masterful gift for characterization and her deep understanding of the adolescent

psyche are already on display. In the same year she also published *The Dear One*, a story about teen pregnancy.

In book after book since, Jacqueline Woodson has returned to themes of racism, segregation, economic inequality, social vulnerability, prejudice and sexual identity. She writes in the first person and usually from a female point of view. Sometimes, however, her narrator is a boy: like eleven-year-old Lonnie, who tells us his story in *Locomotion*

(2002). Lonnie and his little sister Lili have lost both parents in a fire and the two siblings now live with different foster mothers. Lonnie misses his sister fiercely. At school, Lonnie's teacher encourages the children to write poems, and in the act of writing—the search for words—Lonnie discovers a way to process his grief. "Writing makes me remember," he writes in one poem. "It's like my family comes back again when I write." Like many of Woodson's characters, Lonnie uses writing as therapy. In a sequel titled *Peace, Locomotion* (2009), Lonnie writes letters to his sister to give her when they are older and can reunite. The letters give him hope and comfort, and are as lyrical as his poems.

Brown Girl Dreaming, published in 2014 and the winner of that year's National Book Award, is an autobiographical work and in many ways the centerpiece of Woodson's oeuvre. It is a story about her childhood that also illumines a chapter in African-American history from a grassroots level. Here, as in so much of Woodson's work, the individual becomes universal. The young Jacqueline grows up in the 1960s and 1970s, an era of civil rights marches, police brutality and violence. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a memoir in free verse, a lyrical scrapbook of personal memories and family stories.

Places are central to Woodson's books. In *Brown Girl Dreaming*, love and security exist in South Carolina, where her grandparents live. Its good-smelling gardens and

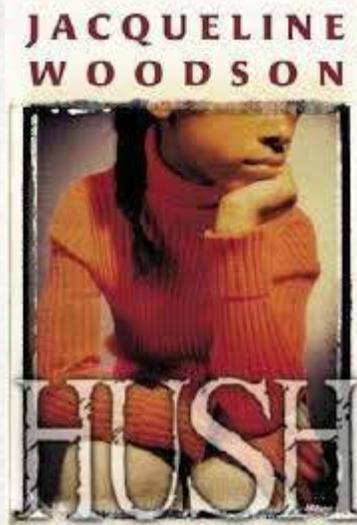
wide blue skies form a dramatic contrast to the crowded concrete streets of Brooklyn. All of her settings are fully fleshed out, her stories tightly bound to the blocks, streets and apartments that her characters inhabit. Woodson's careful descriptions illustrate social gulfs as well, recording differences between groups in minute detail. Clothing, too, serves as a social marker: for instance, when a character in an African-American neighborhood notices a friend suddenly wearing a style of shoe only white people wear.

After Tupac and D Foster (2008) is a story of lasting friendships. In it two girls who live with their mothers, without much money but in relative security, meet a new girl leading a rougher life on the margins of society. The story deals with the longing for a mother and a better life, dreams reflected in the rap lyrics of the girls' idol, Tupac Shakur. When Tupac, a world-famous star who writes about their life, their reality, is suddenly shot and killed, the news is a harsh blow for all three. Woodson dissects their grief, but also leaves them with a measure of hope for the future.

A passionate, lightning-bolt love is portrayed in *If You Come Softly* (1998). Ellie is a white middle-class girl who goes to the same school as Jeremiah, the son of a famous black film producer. One day their paths literally collide, and they fall in love at first sight. Ellie, speaking in the first person, describes their fragile relationship as it grows. Jeremiah's story is told in the third person and includes the reactions of an outside world shaped by racism and police brutality. "Thing about white people," his father tells him, "they know what everybody else is, but they don't know they're white."

The thirteen-year-old narrator of *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (1995) realizes one day that his mother is in love with another woman—a white woman. He pours his indignation and anger into the pages of his journals. We follow the path of Melanin's thoughts and emotions from rage and despair to the beginnings of understanding and ultimately to acceptance.

The fifteen-year-old protagonist in *Beneath A Meth Moon* (2012), Laurel, also keeps a diary to work through her feelings. Laurel must confront uncomfortable memories so she can put her past behind her and break free of a drug addiction. Laurel has lost both her mother and her grandmother in Hurricane Katrina, the storm that struck the southern coast of the United States in 2005. Words her grandmother told her now become her mantra: "While you are living...it's the rocks in your life that will stand by you. Your words, your friends, your family."



Descriptions of family are also a central part of Woodson's books. We often meet embattled families whose fathers are physically or emotionally absent. *Hush* (2002) is a story about loss, lives disrupted, and the difficulties faced by a family trying to start over. The father is the only African-American policeman in his district in Denver, Colorado. He becomes a witness to the fatal shooting of an unarmed, unresisting African-American

boy who is gunned down by two of his fellow policemen. When he decides to testify against them, his family must enter witness protection, change their identities, and leave Denver.

Through the eyes of his younger daughter, we watch the father sink into depression. He sits by the window, unreachable, lost in his head. Meanwhile, the mother finds sanctuary with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Each daughter finds her own way of coping with her new life. One immerses herself in schoolwork so she can get into a good college. The other throws herself into running. "I am no longer who I was in Denver, but at least and most I am," one daughter says. In other words, she refuses to be a victim of her circumstances.

Jacqueline Woodson's stories breathe compassion, solidarity, and empathy. Using varied and deceptively simple language, she imbues each of her characters with a unique voice. Through these voices, she tells a highly personal history of our times. As she urges in *Brown Girl Dreaming*: "Even the silence has a story to tell you. Just listen. Listen."

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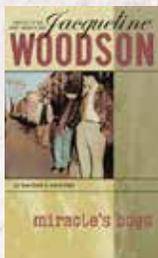
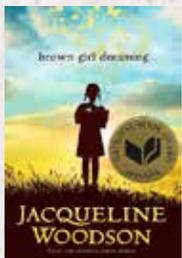
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Jacqueline Woodson On Growing Up, Coming Out And Saying Hi To Strangers

National Public Radio
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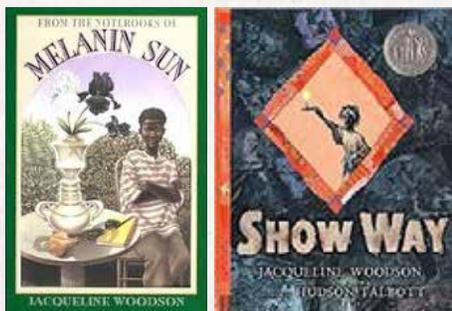
TERRY GROSS, HOST:



This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross. Although my guest Jacqueline Woodson won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature last month for her memoir in verse "Brown Girl Dreaming," it was a very good read for me as an adult. It's about

growing up in the '60s and '70s in the segregated South and in Brooklyn. Woodson won a Coretta Scott King Book Award for her young adult book "Miracle's Boys," which is narrated by a 12-year-old whose brother comes home from a juvenile detention center where he spent time for armed robbery.

Woodson's book "From The Notebooks Of Melanin Sun" is about an African-American boy whose mother falls in love with a white woman. Her picture book "Show Way" was inspired by her own family history and is about how quilts served as secret maps for freedom-seeking slaves. The Woodson family traces its family tree back to Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress, Sally Hemmings. Jacqueline Woodson, welcome to FRESH AIR, and congratulations. So I'd like you to read the opening poem from "Brown Girl Dreaming."



JACQUELINE WOODSON: (Reading) February 12, 1963. I am born on a Tuesday at University Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, USA, a country caught between black and white. I am born not long from the time or far from the place where my great-great-grandparents worked the deep, rich land unfree, dawn 'til dusk, unpaid, drank cool water from scooped-out gourds, looked up and followed the sky's myriad constellation to freedom. I am born as the South explodes - too many people, too many years, enslaved then emancipated, but not free. The people who look like me keep fighting and marching and getting killed so that today, February 12, 1963, and every day from this moment on, brown children like me can grow up free, can grow up learning and voting and walking and writing wherever we want. I am born in Ohio, but the stories of South Carolina already run like rivers through my veins.

GROSS: So, you know, your memoir is written in verse. And some people might think, oh, poetry like that's going to make it harder. They might think that's a little off-putting. It's actually, I think, easier to read than it would have been in prose in the sense that it's so not dense. There's so much space around the words. (Laughter) It's so easy to read.

WOODSON: Yeah. I mean, that was my intention. It's a book of memories. And it's how memory comes to us. It comes in these small moments with all of this white space around it, and I think that that's what you get in reading it. You get that small moment, and that moment, I'm hoping, is very, very clear on the page. And then the moments are of course linked together to tell the story.

GROSS: The North and the South are like characters in your book. You're born in Ohio. Your mother is from Greenville, South Carolina, where your maternal grandparents still lived when you were born. When your parents separated when you were very young, you, your mother and your siblings moved to South Carolina to be with your grandparents. But then later as a girl, you moved to be with your mother in Brooklyn. When you moved to the South to Greenville when you were - what? - 1 years old?

WOODSON: I was probably little bit - I was an infant.

GROSS: Oh. OK.

WOODSON: So I wasn't yet walking.

GROSS: So what was the state of segregation when you were growing up in the South?

WOODSON: The South was very segregated. I mean, all through my childhood, long after Jim Crow was supposed to not be in existence, it was still a very segregated South. And the town we lived in - Nicholtown, which was a small community within Greenville, South Carolina - was an all-black community. And people still lived very segregated lives, I think, because that was all they had always known. And there was still this kind of danger to integrating. So people kind of stayed in the places - the safe places that they had always known.

GROSS: How did your grandparents - how did your mother explain segregation to you, and what did they warn you about because it would have been dangerous?

WOODSON: You know, it's a really good question. We just knew. We knew our place. We knew our place was with our family. We knew where it was safest to be. You know, there wasn't a lot of talk about the white world and what was going on. And it didn't really have a lot to do with us, except in situations where there was the talk of resistance. You know, we're not going into - we're worse. Because of the history of it, we're not going into that department store because they follow you around because you're black. And the idea - the constant talk about how people will think of us as African-Americans or at that time my grandmother would say colored people as lesser than and that that wasn't the truth. So there was - the talk was always about resistance and really making us sure that who we were was important in the world. And so that's where the gaze was. That's what the focus was in our family.

GROSS: So there's another poem I want you to read. And this one is called "Journey." And it's about how - you know, we were talking about how the North and the South are

like characters in your book and that you grew up in both places. And apparently, this was a conflict between your parents before they separated. Your mother, you know, wanted to live in the South. Your father did not. He was from the North. He was from Ohio. And that's what this poem is about. Would you read it for us?

WOODSON: Sure. "Journey" (Reading) You can keep yourself, my father says. The way they treated us down there, I got your Mama out as quick as I could, brought her right up here to Ohio. Told her there was never going to be a Woodson that sits in the back of the bus. Never going to be a Woodson that has to yes-sir and no-sir white people. Never going to be a Woodson made to look down at the ground. All you kids are stronger than that, my father says. All you Woodson kids deserve to be as good as you already are. Yes siree, Bob, my father says. You can keep your South Carolina.
(MUSIC)

GROSS: When you were growing up, were you aware that that was, like, a point of argument between your parents?

WOODSON: Not at all, I wasn't until I was much older, I would say around 7 or 8. And I think what I knew was they were both fiercely attached to their families. And my father's family was in Ohio, and my mother's family was in South Carolina. And then, later on, I realized they were also fiercely attached to place and what they had always known. So it was interesting just investigating those two worlds and coming to understand what would pull people apart.

GROSS: Now, as an adult who's lived in the North and in the South, do you see both sides of that dispute?

WOODSON: I completely see both sides of that dispute. I think there is such a richness to the South and a lushness and a way of life. I could never live it full time. (Laughter). You know, I feel like I'm a New Yorker to the bone. But there is a lot of the South in me. I know there is a lot of the South in my mannerisms. There's a lot of the South in my expectations of other people and how people treat each other. There's a lot of the South in the way I speak, but it could never be home.

GROSS: Why not?

WOODSON: I think it's - well, aside from the fact that I'm so fiercely attached to New York and my life here, I think, you know, given the fact that I have a partner and we have a multiracial family, and I don't want - I think it wouldn't be a safe place for my kids. I don't want my kids to have to walk through a world where they have to constantly explain who they are and who their family is.

GROSS: In that context, does it make it even harder to a multiracial family - and you're a lesbian. So it's, like, something else to explain to people who might not get it.

WOODSON: Yeah, I think that is - I think I'm fine with explaining it. I think my kids - I don't want my kids to have to ever explain having two moms. Like, it just is. And if you don't understand it, then it's the work you have to do, not that my kids have to do. So I think there is - they can - in New York City, they can go to schools. And, you know, my son's school, he has four other kids who have two moms in his family. My daughter can introduce her sister, who is half-Korean, and no one bats an eye. Instead, they say, oh, yeah, you guys both have your father's dimples, you know? So I think there is this way in which there's energy I don't want them to have to put out into the world in terms of explaining who they are. You know, and I want them to know how amazingly fabulous they are. And I want the world to echo that. So I want them to know the South. I want them to visit it. I want them to know of our history connected to the South. But I don't think we could ever live there.

GROSS: What are some of the differences the North and the South brought out in you and your personality and how you talked and behaved?

WOODSON: Well, one of the differences is I still say hi to strangers. But in New York, strangers don't say hi back. And my daughter is mortified by it.

GROSS: (Laughter).

WOODSON: You know, the whole idea that I would say good morning to someone - and it's just so ingrained in who I am. I think it also - there is this way in which I'm not afraid of silence. You know, I'm not afraid to sit in a room and have the conversation drop into silence. I think that's a very southern thing. And I write about that in the book. You know, when the heat is enough to melt the mouth so southern folks knew to stay silent. And I think sometimes we're afraid of that silence. We're afraid of what it implies or what people are thinking. But I do feel like that's a cultural thing that I learned in South Carolina. I think in terms of being a New Yorker, as my friends would say, I don't take a lot of mess. I have no tolerance for people who are not thinking deeply about things. I have no tolerance for the kind of small talk that people need to fill silence. And I have no tolerance for people not - just not being a part of the world and being in it and trying to change it.

GROSS: While you were living with your grandparents in Greenville, South Carolina, your mother left for a while to go up north and eventually found a place to bring you and

your siblings back to in the North. While you were living with your grandparents, it was understood that you would take your grandmother's religion. And she was a Jehovah's Witness. And so before we talk about that period of your life, I'd like you to read the poem in your memoir called "Faith."

WOODSON: (Reading) After my mother leaves, my grandmother pulls us further into the religion she has always known. We become Jehovah's Witnesses like her. After my mother leaves, there is no one to say, the children can choose their own faith when they're old enough. In my house, my grandmother says, you will do as I do. After my mother leaves, we wake in the middle of the night calling out for her. Have faith, my grandmother says, pulling us to her in the darkness. Let the Bible, my grandmother says, become your sword and your shield. But we do not know yet who we are fighting and what we are fighting for.

GROSS: How did your mother feel about you becoming a Jehovah's Witness? Was she?

WOODSON: My mother was as a child. And she believed in the faith, but she didn't necessarily practice it. So as we were growing up, she basically sent us to the Kingdom Hall. And she would go once in a while. But she definitely believed in the actual faith of being a Jehovah's Witness.

GROSS: Is the Kingdom Hall the church, the meeting place?

WOODSON: So yes, the Kingdom Hall is the meeting place.

GROSS: So your grandfather didn't believe. What were - what are the basic beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses?

WOODSON: Well, one of the main beliefs is that we are in the world but not of the world. And it served me well as both a young person and an adult. And they believe that because we are not actually a part of the world because we are considered God's chosen people, that we shouldn't behave as worldly people do. So we don't celebrate holidays. We don't celebrate birthdays. We believe that this system of things is going to end, and there will be a better system of things, a new world. And those witnesses who have died will be resurrected in that new world and that this system will end with Armageddon and that the signs of Armageddon are constantly upon us. So the Bible is big in the religion, treating people as you want to be treated. I think there is - it's Christian. So it's a lot of the Christian principles.

GROSS: But you don't celebrate Christmas.

WOODSON: No, no. Yeah, I guess Christmas is Christian, huh?
(LAUGHTER)

WOODSON: No, no holidays. So it's a Christian sect, so there are Christians. But Jehovah's Witnesses consider themselves different from those Christians.

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Jacqueline Woodson. And she just won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature for her memoir in verse called, "Brown Girl Dreaming." Let's take a short break, then we'll talk some more. This is FRESH AIR.
(MUSIC)

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. Let's get back to our interview with Jacqueline Woodson, who won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature last month for her memoir in verse "Brown Girl Dreaming." It's about growing up in the '60s and '70s in the Jim Crow South and in Brooklyn. When we left off, we were talking about the period when she was living with her grandparents in South Carolina, and her grandmother was raising her as a Jehovah's Witness. She was taught to believe the end times were near.

So growing up with your grandmother, you know, explaining to you that Armageddon - the end of the world - was probably near, but that you would probably be saved, was that a scary thought? Like, did that weigh on you, that, like, the signs of the end were apparent?

WOODSON: You know, I think I was pretty nervous about it (laughter) as a kid. I think, you know, I did exist somewhat in that fear of the world coming to an end. I think, also, it's kind of how kids exist anyway, you know? You're always fearing change. You're always fearing the wrath of a parent. You're always fearing that something's going to go wrong somewhere.

But yeah, Armageddon was just, you know, yet another one of those fears. I think one thing that it allowed me to do was be really conscious of the moments I was living in and not take them for granted 'cause I believed, at that time, that one day, these moments wouldn't be here because of Armageddon. And now I know, at this time, that these moments won't always be here, and that's because time passes.

GROSS: When you were a child, you had to go door-to-door proselytizing. What were you supposed to say?

WOODSON: Hi, I'm Jacqueline, and I'm one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and I'm here to bring you some good news today. And that good news was the good news of Jehovah's kingdom coming. And if you accepted the faith, then you

would be spared.

GROSS: I'm thinking of how odd it must have been to be a child, knocking on the doors of strangers, explaining to adults that you knew the right way to their salvation.

WOODSON: Well, you know, it wasn't odd because I had nothing to compare it to (laughter). And I think there was - I remember knocking on my first door - and I talk about it in "Brown Girl Dreaming" - and it was this old woman. And I felt so proud to finally be able to speak, to not have to stand beside my big sister or my grandmother or my big brother and just kind of be a shadow while they spoke. I felt so proud to finally have this voice in the world and this information to depart. But I think once I was in New York City as a Witness, I was always concerned that I was going to knock on the door and it was going to be the door of a school friend. And they were going to come to school Monday and say, Jackie was begging for money at my house (laughter) over the weekend.

GROSS: So the begging for money part, was that you're - asking for money to sell the Jehovah's Witnesses' literature, "The Watchtower" and "Awake!"

WOODSON: Yeah. And it was a donation. You know, we were asking for donations. We were not asking - saying you had to pay. But basically, the more important thing was asking people to think about becoming a part of the faith, and, you know, I think, we thought - I thought I was saving lives. I mean - and there's still - I think, I have such a deep respect for the faith. And I think, anyone who has grown up in any kind of faith does have this part of their body that still - this part of their mind that still belongs in that place - of that kind of believing. And Witnesses are really, really kind people. I have never met a mean Witness. And it's part of the way they walk through their - through the world - quietly and kindly, you know. They're not up in your face proselytizing - screaming from a soapbox saying, you're going to die tomorrow if you don't do this. And everything you do is wrong. They're saying, you know, I have some good news. Do you want to hear it?

GROSS: During the period when your mother was gone, was it really helpful to have some of that gap in your life filled by faith?

WOODSON: I don't know. For me, going to the Kingdom Hall was about being allowed to imagine and dream and make up stories in my boredom. You know, of course, the faith was getting in, but think about being so young and having to sit for two hours and listen to soft-spoken people talk about stuff. And you know, it's kind of like, where else can I be? Anywhere but here. And I think it allowed me the

Jacqueline Woodson Dossier

gift of story and imagination and to kind of will myself to other places.

GROSS: And when did you leave the faith?

WOODSON: When I was 15.

GROSS: Did you replace it with a different faith?

WOODSON: I think I replaced it with all kinds of spiritual beliefs. You know, remember my uncle was also a Muslim. So I had that vision as well. And so I think my faith is very broad-based and spiritual. I definitely believe in a greater good. I definitely believe that there's a reason each of us is here and that we've been brought here to do something. And we need to get busy doing it. And I definitely believe that there is something moving us forward. That's good. (MUSIC)

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross back with Jacqueline Woodson. Last month she won the National Book Award for young people's literature for her memoir in verse, "Brown Girl Dreaming," about growing up in the Jim Crow South and in Brooklyn. She also won the Coretta Scott King Book Award and a Caldecott Medal as well as three Newbery Honor Medals. The Woodson family traces its family tree back to Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress, Sally Hemings.

You're a writer. You love stories. But when you were growing up, it was your sister who was the one that was always called, you know, like, really smart. And you had a hard time reading. You had to read things over and over for the words to make sense. So how did you fall in love with reading and writing if it was such an effort?

WOODSON: You know, I read stuff over and over, and it made deep sense. I think what happened was the language settled in me much deeper than it settled into people who just can read something once and absorb what they absorb of it. I feel like what I was absorbing was not by any means superficial, and I think I was - from a really young age, I was reading like a writer. I was reading for this deep understanding of the literature; not simply to hear the story, but to understand how the author got the story on the page. And I didn't know any of that. And my sister, you know, just kind of sailed for reading and read - consumed book after book after book. And here I was reading the same book very slowly, slowly coming to understand it. And looking back on it, I think it was part of what brought me here.

GROSS: You write that you copied lyrics to songs from records and TV commercials until the words settled into your brain - into your memory. So what are some of the records and TV commercials whose lyrics you wrote over and over

until you really got them?

WOODSON: You know, Choo Choo Charlie was an engineer (laughter), Sly and the Family Stone, which I talk about in there, Colorado Rocky Mountain High - I mean, I have so many bad commercials.

GROSS: Oh, which ones?

WOODSON: Winston taste good like... (LAUGHTER)

GROSS: Like a cigarette should.

WOODSON: Winston taste good like a cigarette should. Taste me, taste me, come on and taste me. You know, I just - I could just go through it for about an hour, and you'd be so sick of me. But I would sit there and, you know, after the commercial went off, still writing the words. And at that time with records, you'd have to take the needle off and move it back to the beginning of the record so you could hear. It was not - you know, it wasn't like you had a pause button or anything. And I would just sit there. I loved the Jackson Five. Anything they sang, I would try to memorize as many lyrics as I could to it. There were so many. Otis Redding was another big one. He was a favorite of my mom. And I love the story inside his song "Sitting On The Dock Of The Bay."

GROSS: So when you had trouble reading but were so deep into it, did people think you had some kind of learning disorder - although, I don't think we used the word back then - or did they think like, oh, she's so studious? She cares so much about this.

WOODSON: Oh goodness, no. I wish they would've thought that. It wasn't called a learning difference at that time. They wrote on my report card, Jacqueline can do better. Jacqueline should try harder. And I think they just didn't understand I was doing something differently than how one was supposed to do it at that time. But it was so interesting because they were always kind of blown away because whenever it was anything that had to do with reading comprehension, I soared. And so they were like, well, she obviously understands it. But it was confusing for people I think.

GROSS: So something you don't write about in the memoir is coming to the understanding that you are a lesbian. How old were you when you knew that?

WOODSON: You know, I probably - the first Mira I had - Maria had an Aunt Alma (ph), and we loved Alma. And Alma...

GROSS: Maria was your good friend.

WOODSON: Maria is my best friend, yeah. And she and I are still really close. And Alma was this kind of beautiful, very butch woman who always had these beautiful, very femme girlfriends. And I definitely, you know, saw something there, but I knew I wasn't Alma. I knew I wasn't - you know, I knew I didn't have this interest in wearing man's clothes and having this huge - I did want the Afro, actually. And I knew I wasn't her girlfriends who were these really high femmes.

But I knew there was something there that struck a chord in me, and it wasn't like now where you can name stuff. You know, I think when I got into college and my housemate, Beth, said to me, you know, I'm gay. And I'm like, oh, me too. (Laughter) You know, like, suddenly a light went on, and I thought, this is what it is. But I always had boyfriends as a, you know, young person and as a teenager, many of whom are really still close - we're close.

But I didn't have the language for what I was discovering yet, and I think it - obviously if I had grown up in this time, I probably would've been out by the time I was 12 years old. I mean the closest I came to it as a kid was being called a tomboy because I was kind of rough and tumble but I also still wore ribbons.

GROSS: So coming from - like, having been raised in the tradition of Jehovah's Witnesses, there's so much you weren't allowed to do. How did being gay fit into that or not?

WOODSON: Yeah. It wasn't even - I remember my mother would get upset with me 'cause she said I walked like my dad. And I always thought she was getting upset with me because it reminded her of someone she wasn't too happy with. But I think it was more like, there's something about you that's not quite ladylike and femme. And then when I got older - once I came out, I mean, my mom and grandma were horrified and just kind of like, where did we go wrong? And they actually blamed it on my sorority, which is ridiculous.

GROSS: (Laughter).

WOODSON: So - but I think it took them many, many years to kind of realize that this is who I was. But at the same time, you know, one of the things about being a Witness is you're kind of not supposed to associate with people who are not a part of the truth - who are not Witnesses. And if your family members do something and they're Witnesses, then they get kind of excommunicated. They call it disfellowshipped. But I think that was the point where my grandmother and mother - although they still believed a lot in the truth, they were not going to disown their family. You know,

the family was just so much tighter than having to make - that kind of choice was just not an option. But they were not happy at all.

GROSS: And how old were you when they found out?

WOODSON: When they found out, I was probably around 19 or 20. But when I found out, I was probably around 18.

GROSS: OK. So you don't write about that in this book. Is that because this memoir ends when you're younger than that...

WOODSON: Yeah.

GROSS: ...Or is it just something you wanted to keep out of this book?

WOODSON: No because I didn't know. You know, this book is during a time when I didn't have the language for it, and I think I thought at one point about writing about Alma, but it would have been false to the book because I was still figuring stuff out. So - but, you know, I write about my love for Maria. And I think as an adult - I was never really, like, attracted to Maria that way - I mean, Maria - but I adored this person as my friend. But there was - you know, I was starting to figure it out. And again, I think if I had been older - I mean, if I had grown up in a different time, this would have been a different book in terms of talking about being queer.

GROSS: Although you don't discuss being gay and there's no gay characters in your memoir, you have had central gay characters in other books that you've written. And I wonder if you've gotten any blowback from that from, you know conservative groups or Christian groups that think that this is just inappropriate material for children's literature or young adult literature.

WOODSON: You know, my books are challenged. And I am kind of protected from the challenge because it's not like someone calls me up and says, you know what? I'm going to challenge your book and burn it in the schoolyard (laughter). What they do is they say, Jacqueline Woodson will never come to our school. But I'm not privy to those conversations. But I definitely know - I remember getting a call from Judy Blume. She was working on an anthology called "Places That I've Never Meant To Be," and she said it was going to be an anthology of writers who've gotten challenged. And I'm like, I've never gotten challenged. She's like, oh yes, you have. (LAUGHTER)

WOODSON: And that was the first time - this was many

years ago - that I realized that the books were being challenged. Another time for my book "From The Notebooks Of Melanin Sun," it was an all-school read at a school in Brooklyn, and so they had given out - I don't know, like 150 copies to the upper grades. And then a parent challenged it so the principal said over the loudspeaker that people had to return their books. It wasn't going to be read. And they said he got two books back, so I always think that books being challenged is a good thing.

You know, on the other side of it, the books have won so many awards, and the awards bring the books into the classroom. So I was really surprised when "After Tupac And D Foster" received the Newbery Honor...

GROSS: Which is the name of one of your books, yeah.

WOODSON: Yes, which is the name of one of my books - received a Newberry Honor because of - you know, it deals with Tupac. One of the main characters is gay and ends up in prison. So aside from being challenged, there has also been a lot of love for the literature. So that's kind of kept the books in the classrooms.

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Jacqueline Woodson, and she won the National Book Award in November in the category of young people's literature for her memoir in verse called "Brown Girl Dreaming." Let's take a short break, then we'll talk some more. This is FRESH AIR. (MUSIC)

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. And if you're just joining us, my guest is Jacqueline Woodson. And last month, she won the National Book Award in the category of young people's literature for her memoir in verse, which is called "Brown Girl Dreaming."

So your name is Jacqueline Woodson, and so your father's side of the family, the Woodson side of the family, is believed to be - or believe themselves to be - descendants of Sally Hemmings and Thomas Jefferson. And Sally Hemmings was the person who was his slave and his mistress. And, you know, coincidentally, as - (laughter) - right before I read your book, I was paging through a book about genealogy that said that, you know - that actually, the Woodson family is descended from Sally Hemmings. But the father in that line wasn't Jefferson; it was somebody else. So what do you know from your aunt, who's a specialist in genealogy. What do you know about the Sally Hemmings story?

WOODSON: The story that we've been told is that the first son that was born on the plantation to Sally Hemmings and Thomas Jefferson looked so much like Thomas Jefferson, and had red hair, and very, very pale, and was sent to the Woodson plantation and just gotten off the land. And that's where the blip in the history comes in. And it's so interest-

ing 'cause I don't - you know, I wasn't there. But this has always been our story. And my Aunt Ada talks about how, you know, there's this huge Woodson reunion that happens in Ohio. And then, I think something else happens. But anyway, so this is what I've always known to be the connection to Thomas Woodson and Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings. And his name was actually Thomas Woodson.

GROSS: So whether Jefferson was actually the father or not, it seems pretty sure, from my understanding, that Sally Hemmings was the mother. When the Sally Hemmings story started getting to be an official part of history, how did you feel about that, knowing that the story that had been passed on in your family was now, like, a kind of certified historical story - or at least part of it was?

WOODSON: You know, it's interesting because I think whether or not it would have been certified, I would have still believed it and celebrated it because it's what I've always known. And then, to have that - have the kind of world say, yup, this - you know, this is true, I don't know how much that matters to me, that the rest of the world now cares, because it's about - it's about us. It's about our family and what we know and what we need to know to understand our own history. So it doesn't feel like now it's legitimized because the question is who does it need to be legitimized for? And for me, it just needs to feel right to me.

GROSS: So I have to ask you about this. When you got the award for young people's literature at the National Book Awards in November, the person introducing your category was Daniel Handler. And what he said now is kind of infamous. I'll repeat it. He said - he said, I said that if she won, I would tell all of you something I learned about her this summer. Jackie Woodson is allergic to watermelon. Just let that sink in your minds. I said, you have to put that in a book. And she said, you put that in a book. And I said, I'm only writing a book about a black girl who's allergic to watermelon if you, Cornell West, Toni Morrison and Barack Obama say, this guy's OK. He later apologized profusely and donated a lot of money to something called We Need Diverse Books. What was your reaction when he said that?

WOODSON: You know, it's so interesting 'cause we were all jumping up and cheering. And, you know, there was a standing ovation. And I had so much of my family in the audience. And it was - it was an amazing time. You know, the chair of the committee had just said it was a unanimous decision. And then, in the next moment, she said Jacqueline Woodson. And so all of that energy was forming around us. So we kind of - I kind of missed it all and was just so elevated in the moment of having won this award. And I think when - when the fury came down and when it all just started flying around us, it was just kind of like, oh, man. I

think, again, though, for me, looking back on it and really trying to take some time to process it all, it makes me sad that there's so many people who are not connected to the deep history of where that racial stereotype comes from. And I think so much of what I've been trying to do is what I've learned from my own family, is how important history is to the context of everything so that something like that doesn't become a 30 second joke. And I think, looking back on it, Daniel didn't know. He just didn't get the history. And he thought - he made the mistake of thinking we're beyond that. And we're not. And so I'm still really trying to figure it all out. And I'm really just trying to celebrate the fact that "Brown Girl Dreaming" was given this award.

GROSS: He said he learned about your allergy over the summer. Are you friends?

WOODSON: Yep.

GROSS: So are you still on good terms with each other?

WOODSON: You know, yeah. You know, friendships are complicated. And he is a friend of mine. And there are things that people don't know that they maybe can say in private and have it be a private joke that they can't say in public. And when he said it in private and I said, you write it, you know, it was a way of saying, you know, let's stop this now. And I think, unfortunately, he didn't get it. So - but no, you know, it's not going to end our friendship. I think he has a good heart. I think a lot of people who are ignorant have good hearts. And sometimes people make mistakes, and this is what that kind of racial mistake looks like.

GROSS: So in ending our conversation, I'd like you to read something from your book. And this isn't your poem. This is a poem by Langston Hughes. It's the poem that opens the book. Would you read it for us, and then tell us what this means to you and why this is an important piece of writing for you?

WOODSON: (Reading) Hold fast to dreams. For if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly. Hold fast to dreams. For when dreams go, life is a barren field, frozen with snow. Langston Hughes.

You know, I think it's so important to me because it was one of the first poems I memorized. And it was the first time a poet spoke to me, and I understood them. And that poet, obviously, was Langston Hughes. And I feel like he kind of opened the floodgates for me to understanding that inside of poems were stories and messages and language that mattered. And so since this whole book is about me growing up, dreaming of becoming a writer and all of the influences that led to making that dream a reality, I couldn't write this book without putting Langston in there some-

where.

GROSS: Well, congratulations on the book and the National Book Award. It's really been such a pleasure to talk with you, thanks.

WOODSON: Thanks so much, Terry, you too.

GROSS: Jacqueline Woodson won a National Book Award for Young People's Literature last month for her memoir in verse, "Brown Girl Dreaming." You can read an excerpt on our website, freshair.npr.org. This is FRESH AIR.

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Jacqueline Woodson on Growing Up, Coming Out and Saying Hi to Strangers. Interview with Terry Gross on National Public Radio's "Fresh Air," December 10, 2014. <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=369736205>

Jacqueline Woodson Is Named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature



Jacqueline Woodson plans to emphasize how books can drive change and instill hope in young readers. Credit Juna F. Nagle

By Alexandra Alter

Jan. 4, 2018

Like many novelists, Jacqueline Woodson relishes solitude and is a bit of an introvert. So she was somewhat daunted when she was asked to take on a

role that has “ambassador” in the title.

On Thursday, Ms. Woodson was named as the new National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, a position that was created in 2008 by the Library of Congress, the Children's Book Council and the literacy charity Every Child a Reader.

“I love being alone and writing and creating stories, and the idea of this extroverted position was a bit scary,” Ms. Woodson said. “It's a little intimidating to take on the mantle.”

As ambassador, Ms. Woodson, a best-selling children's book author, will be traveling around the country, speaking to kids in schools, libraries, juvenile detention centers and other underserved areas. She also plans to spend time in rural parts of Southern states, where authors seldom visit schools, she said.

Ms. Woodson isn't entirely unaccustomed to the spotlight. She's published more than two dozen children's books. She won the National Book Award in 2014 for her memoir in verse, “Brown Girl Dreaming,” and has received four Newbery Honors, two Coretta Scott King Awards and the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement for her contributions to young adult literature. In 2015, she was named the Young People's Poet Laureate by the Poetry Foundation.

Carla Hayden, the 14th Librarian of Congress, said she knew Ms. Woodson would be a natural fit because she had seen her interact with young readers at Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, where Ms. Hayden was chief executive.

“She respected young adults and cared about what they said,” Ms. Hayden said in a statement to The Times.

Ms. Woodson, who is publishing a new middle grade novel and a picture book this year, said she was persuaded to take on the position after talking to Gene Luen Yang, a graphic novelist who was the ambassador for Young People's Literature from 2016 to 2017. “He had to talk me into saying yes,” Ms. Woodson said.

Before Mr. Yang, the position was held by Jon Scieszka, Katherine Paterson, Walter Dean Myers and Kate DiCamillo.

An inauguration ceremony is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, Jan. 9, at the Library of Congress.

Ms. Woodson said that as she travels the country and speaks to children and teenagers in coming months, she plans to emphasize how books can drive change and instill hope in young readers.

“For young people who are very stressed about the future, who have this sense of disempowerment, who don't know what's coming next, my big quest is for them to remain hopeful,” she said. “When you come to literature, it does allow you an escape from the world if that's what you need, but it also changes you. You're different than when you started that book.”

Alexander, A. “Jacqueline Woodson is Named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature,” New York Times, January 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/04/books/jacqueline-woodson-is-named-national-ambassador-for-young-peoples-literature.html>

List of Awards and Other Distinctions

Lifetime Achievement Awards



2018-2019 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature

2018 Children's Literature Legacy Award
(formally the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award)

2018 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

2018 Children's Literature Legacy Award

2017 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecturer

2016 Charlotte Zolotow Lecturer

2015 Young People's Poet Laureate

2014 Hans Christian Andersen Award, U.S. nominee

2012 Anne V. Zarrow Award for Young Readers' Literature

2010 St. Katharine Drexel Award

2006 Margaret A Edwards Award

Book Awards and Honors

ALA Best Book for Young Adults

- 1996 From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun
- 1999 If you Come Softly
- 2001 Miracle's Boys
- 2003 Hush
- 2004 Locomotion
- 2005 Behind You
- 2012 Beneath a Meth Moon

Coretta Scott King Award winner

- 2015 Brown Girl Dreaming
- 2001 Miracle's Boys

Coretta Scott King Award honor

- 2013 Each Kindness
- 2004 Locomotion
- 1996 From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun
- 1995 I Hadn't Meant to Tell you This

Newbery Honor

- 2006 Show Way
- 2008 Feathers
- 2009 After Tupac and D Foster
- 2015 Brown Girl Dreaming

2009 Josette Frank Award for After Tupac and D Foster

2014 National Book Award in Young People's Literature for Brown Girl Dreaming

2015 Sibert Honor Book for Brown Girl Dreaming

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- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2010). *Pecan pie baby*. Illus. by Sophie Blackall. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2012). *Beneath a meth moon: An elegy*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2012). *Each kindness*. Illus. by E. B. Lewis. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2013). *This is the rope: A story from the Great Migration*. Illus. by James E. Ransome. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2014). *Brown girl dreaming*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2018). *The day you begin*. Illus. by Rafael Lopez. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2018). *Harbor me*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group.

Incomplete List of Anthologies Containing Her Work

- Woodson, Jacqueline. (1994). Slipping away. In Marion Dane Bauer (Ed.), *Am I Blue?: Coming Out from the Silence* (pp. 47-62). New York, NY: HarperTrophy
- Woodson, Jacqueline (Ed.) (1997). *A way out of no way: Writings about growing up Black in America*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (1998). Fire. In K. Forster (Ed.), *The KGB Bar Reader* (pp. 1-20). New York, NY: William Morrow & Co.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (1998). Thirteen. In C. Chase (Ed.), *Queer 13: Lesbian and Gay Writers Recall Seventh Grade* (pp. 257-262). New York, NY: Rob Weisbach Books.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (1999). The other half of me. In M. Cart (Ed.), *Tomorrowland: Stories About the Future* (pp. 143-156). New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2000). On earth. In M. Singer (Ed.), *I Believe in Water: Twelve Brushes with Religion* (pp. 101-114). New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2001). The Rialto. In J. Howe (Ed.), *The Color of Absence: 12 Stories About Loss and Hope* (pp. 185-206). New York, NY: SimonPulse.
- Woodson, Jacqueline (2002). Lorena. In C. Young (Ed.), *One Hot Second: Stories about Desire* (pp. 147-160). New York, NY: Dell Laurel-Leaf.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2004). Nebraska 99. In M. McCafferty (Ed.), *Sixteen: Stories About That Sweet and Bitter Birthday* (pp. 210-217). New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2009). Trev. In M. Cart (Ed.), *How Beautiful the Ordinary: Twelve Stories of Identity* (pp. 63-72). New York, NY: HarperTeen
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2009). The company. M. T. Anderson & K. L. Going (Eds.), *No Such Thing as the Real World: Stories about Growing Up and Getting a Life* (pp. 223). New York, NY: HarperTeen
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2014). Geechee girls dancin': 1955. In D. Levithan (Ed.), *21 Proms* (pp. 161-165). New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2017). Main street. In E. Oh (Ed.), *Flying Lessons & Other Stories* (pp. 123-134). New York, NY: Yearling.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. (2018). Kindness is a choice. In W. Hudson (Ed.), *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise our Voices* (pp. 18-19). New York, NY: Crown Books for Young Readers.

Books translated into languages other than English

Chinese

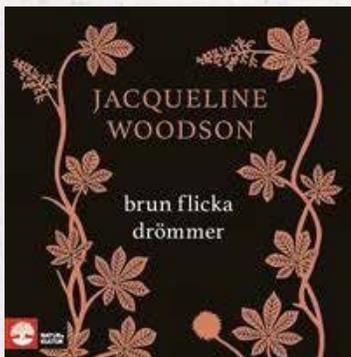


I hadn't meant to tell you this / 其實我不想說 = *Qi shi wo bu xiang shuo* (Translated by Huicong Ke). 小魯文化, Taipei Shi: Xiao lu wen hua.

Each Kindness / 每一个善举 / *Mei yi ge shan ju* (Translated by Fang Wang). 河北少年儿童出版社, Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei shao nian er tong chu ban she.



Danish



Brown Girl Dreaming / *Brun flicka drömmer* (Translated by Athena Farrokhzad). Natur Kultur Allmänlitteratur.

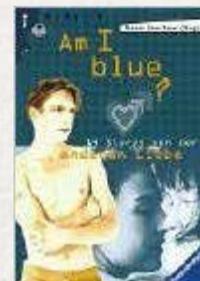
Lena / *Som at kysse himlen*. Aarhus: CDR Forlag

Last Summer with Maizon / *Sidste sommer med Maizon* (Translated by Birthe Lundsgaard). Kbh.: Høst.

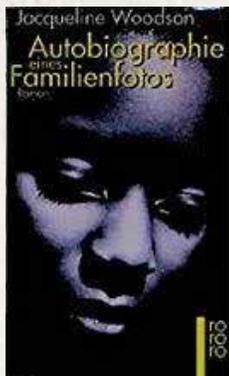


German

Slipping away in Am I Blue / *Weggleiten* (Translated by Volker Lenk). In M. D. Bauer (Ed.), *Am I blue?: 14 stors von der anderen Liebe*. Hamburg: Ravensburger Buchverlag



German (cont.)



Autobiography of a family photo / Autobiographie eines Familienfotos Roman. Reinbek bei Hamburg Rowohlt.

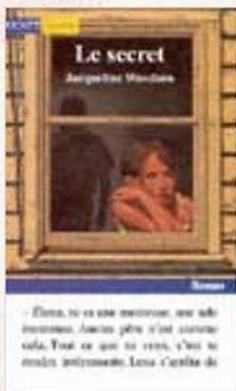


If you come softly / Wenn die Zeit stehen bleibt. München Dt. Taschenbuchverl.

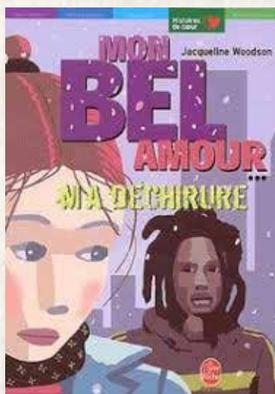
The House You Pass On the Way / Jemand wie du. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder.



French

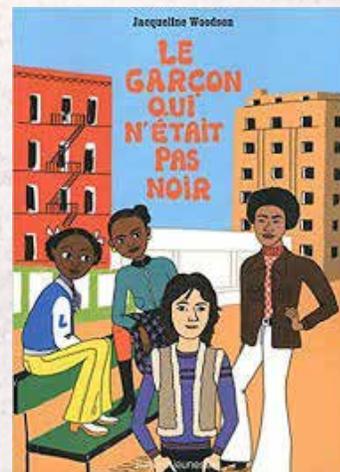


Hush / Le secret. Paris: Pocket Jeunesse.

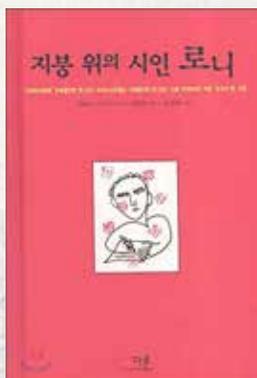


If you come softly / Mon bel amour ... ma déchirure. Paris: Hachette.

Feather / Le garçon qui n'était pas noir (Translated by Agnès Piganiol). Montrouge: Bayard jeunesse, impr.



Korean

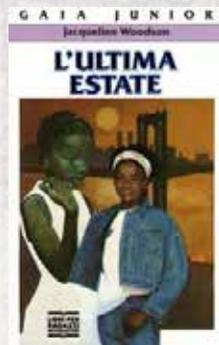


Coming on home soon / Ōmma ūi yaksok (E. B. Lewis; Translated by Ae-gyōng Sō) Sōul: Aiseum.

Locomotion / 지붕위의시인로니 / Chibung wi ūi siin Roni (Illustrated by Yur-hŭi Kim; Translated by Kyōng-hyōn Cho). 다른, Sōul-si: Tarŭn.

Italian

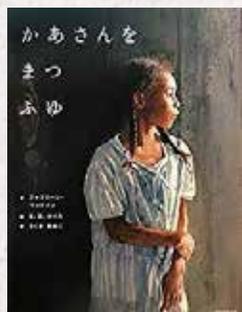
Last Summer with Maizon/L'ultima estate (Translated by Francesca Cavattoni). Milano: Mondadori.



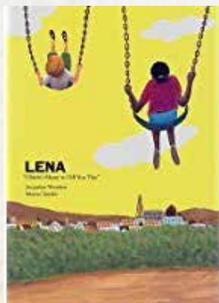
Japanese



The Other Side / わたしは、わたし / Watashi wa watashi (Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). Tōkyō : Mitsumurakyōikutoshō, 2009.



Coming on Home Soon / かあさんをまつふゆ / Kaasan o matsu fuyu (Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). Tōkyō : Mitsumurakyōikutoshō, 2009.



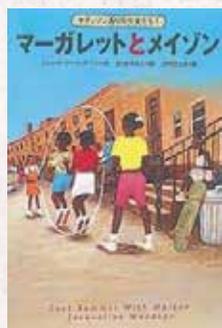
Lena / レーナ / Rēna. (Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). 理論社.



If you Come Softly / あなたはそっとやってくる / Anata wa sotto yattekuru. (Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). ōkyō : Asunaro Shobō.



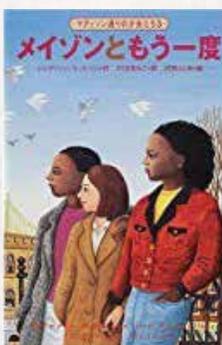
Each Kindness / かあさんをまつふゆ / Kaasan o matsu fuyu. (Illustrated by Earl B Lewis; Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). ポプラ社.



Last Summer with Maizon / マーガレットとメイゾン / Māgarretto to meizon (Illustrated by Toshiki Sawada, Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). ポプラ社.

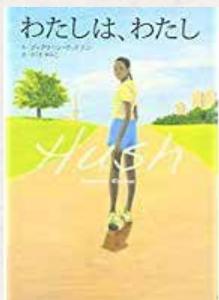


Miracle's Boys / ミラクルズボーイズ / Mirakuruzu bōizu (Illustrated by Toshiki Sawada, Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). 理論社.



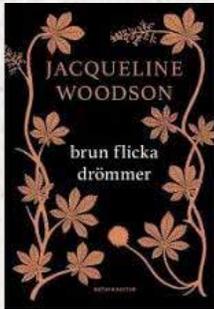
Maizon at Blue Hill / 青い丘のメイゾン / Burū hiru no meizon. (Illustrated by Toshiki Sawada, Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). ポプラ社

Between Madison and Palmetto / メイゾンともう一度 / Meizon to mō ichido. (Illustrated by Toshiki Sawada, Translated by Yumiko Sakuma). ポプラ社



Hush / わたしは、わたし (Translated by Yumiko Sakuma).

Jacqueline Woodson Dossier



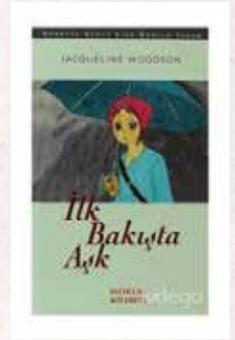
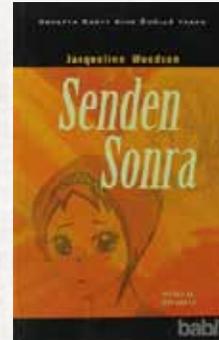
Swedish

Brown Girl Dreaming /*Brun flicka drömmer* (Translated by Athena Farrokhzad). Stockholm Natur & Kultur Allmänlitteratur

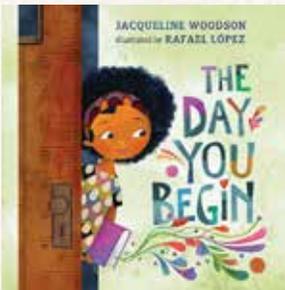
Turkish

(2006). *Senden sonra* (Translated by İstiklal Kitabevi).

If you Come Softly /*İlk bakışta aşk*: Roman. İstanbul : İstiklal Kitabevi.



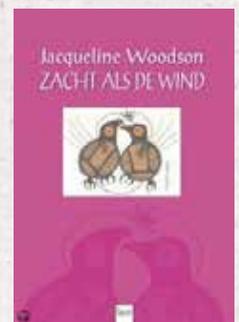
Spanish



The Day You Begin /*El día en que descubres quién eres* (Translated by Teresa Mlawer). New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books

Dutch

If you Come Softly /*Zacht als de wind* Translated by John Riedijk. Antwerpen: Facet.



Polish

Beneath a Meth Moon: An Elegy /*Crystal Moon* (Polish title) Translated by Magdalena Jatowska. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Remi, Katarzyna Portnicka-Krakowska.

Ten of the Most Important Titles

Brown Girl Dreaming

- (2014) Nancy Paulsen Books for Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2014) Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2014) Penguin Random House Audio Publishing Group
- (2014) Kindle version published by Nancy Paulsen Books for Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2014) Hardback by Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2015) Audio CD published by Listening Library
- (2015) Youth Discussion kit published by Assembled by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives
- (2016) Paperback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2016) Turtleback Books
- (2017) Hardback by Cengage Gale
- (2017) Large print published by Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, a Cengage Company
- (2018) Large print published by Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, a Cengage Company
- (2018) Audiobook published by Johanneshov: MTM

Each Kindness

- (2004) Paperback by Nancy Paulsen Books for Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2012) Hardback by Nancy Paulsen Books for Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2013) Braille book published by CNIB
- (2014) Audiobook on CD published by Scholastic Press: Weston Woods
- (2014) DVD video animation published by Scholastic Press: Weston Woods
- (2014) Kit: CD audio published by Scholastic Press: Weston Woods

Locomotion

- (2003) Hardback published by G. B. Putnam's Sons
- (2003) Downloadable audio file published by Jackson, J.D. Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2003) Audiobook published by Jackson, J.D. Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2003) Mixed media product published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2003) CD audio published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2004) E-Book published by Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2004) Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2004) Paperback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2004) Mixed media product published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2005) Multiple copy pack published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2005) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback
- (2006) Paperback published by Pearson
- (2006) Recorded Books, Inc. published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2007) Pre-recorded MP3 player published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2008) Mixed media product published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2009) Hardback-sewn published by Marco Book Company
- (2009) CD audio published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) Downloadable audio file published by Brilliance Publishing

- (2009) CD-Audio - MP3 format published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) Pre-recorded MP3 player published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) Hardback paperback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2010) Hardback published by Perfection Learning Corporation
- (2010) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback
- (2010) Paperback - Trade paperback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2011) Downloadable audio file published by Recorded Books, Inc
- (2012) CD-Audio published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2012) Downloadable audio file published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2012) Pre-recorded MP3 player published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2013) Audiobook published by Findaway World, LLC
- (2015) Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2016) CD audio MP3 format published by Brilliance Publishing

After Tupac & D Foster

- (2008) Hardback published by G. P. Putnam's Sons
- (2008) E-book published by G. P. Putnam's Sons
- (2008) Electronic book text - Reflowable published by Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2009) E-Book published by Brilliance Audio
- (2009) Downloadable audio file published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) CD-Audio - CD standard audio published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) Hardback published by Perfection Learning Corporation
- (2009) Pre-recorded MP3 player published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2010) Paperback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2010) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2011) Multiple copy pack published by BMI Educational Services
- (2011) Mixed media product - CD-Audio, paperback published by BMI Educational Services
- (2016) CD-Audio - CD standard audio published by Brilliance Publishing

Feathers

- (2007) Hardback published by G. P. Putnam's Sons
- (2008) Hardback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2008) CD-Audio - CD standard audio published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2008) Pre-recorded MP3 player published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2008) Audio cassette published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) Downloadable audio file published by Brilliance Publishing
- (2009) Electronic book text – Reflowable published by Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2009) Kindle version published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2009) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2009) Paperback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2010) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2010) Paperback published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2010) Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2010) Hardback published by Perfection Learning Corporation
- (2016) CD-Audio - MP3 format published by Brilliance Audio
- (2018) E-book published by W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library

Show Way

- (2005) Hardback published by G. P. Putnam's Sons
- (2005) Braille book published by G. P. Putnam's Sons
- (2007) Video recording distributed by GPN Educational Media
- (2012) Audiobook Weston Woods
- (2015) Video recording published by Weston Woods
- (2017) Audiobook published by Weston Woods

Miracle's Boys

- (2000) Hardback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2000) Audiobooks published by Books On Tape
- (2000) Paperback published by ECS Learning Systems
- (2001) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2001) Hardback published by Thorndike Press
- (2001) Paperback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2002) Hardback published by Book Wholesalers, Incorporated
- (2004) Audio cassette published by Random House Audio Publishing Group
- (2004) Mixed media product - Audio cassette, paperback published by Random House Audio Publishing Group
- (2006) Paperback Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2006) Kindle edition published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2006) Audiobook published by Listening Library
- (2006) Hardback published by Barrett Kendall Publishing, Limited
- (2006) Downloadable audio file published by Books On Tape
- (2009) Hardback-Reinforced binding published by Marco Book Company
- (2010) Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Group
- (2010) Library binding published by Perfection Learning
- (2010) Audiobook published by Listening Library
- (2010) Hardback published by Perfection Learning Corporation
- (2010) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2009) Multiple copy pack published by BMI Educational Services
- (2011) Multiple copy pack published by BMI Educational Services
- (2012) Multiple copy pack published by BMI Educational Services
- (2013) Multiple copy pack published by BMI Educational Services

From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun

- (1995) Paperback published by Scholastic, Incorporated
- (1997) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (1997) Paperback published by Scholastic, Incorporated
- (1997) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2003) Hardback - Unsewn/adhesive bound published by Perfection Learning
- (2009) Hardback-Reinforced binding published by Marco Book Company
- (2010) Paperback published by Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2010) Hardback-Reinforced binding published by Penguin Young Readers Group

- (2010) Hardback-Reinforced binding published by Perfection Learning Corporation
- (2010) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2011) Hardback-Reinforced binding published by Marco Book Company

I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This

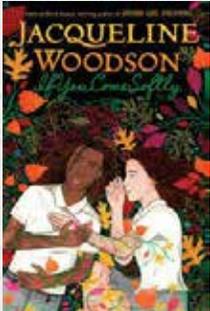
- (1994) Hardback published by Random House Children's Books
- (1994) Paperback published by Random House Children's Books
- (1995) Paperback published by Random House Children's Books
- (1995) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (1998) Downloadable audio file published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (1999) Audio cassette published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (1999) Paperback published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2002) Mixed media product published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2003) CD-Audio published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2003) Paperback published by Hsiao Lu Publishing Company, Limited
- (2004) Book published by Recorded Books, Inc.
- (2006) Hardback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2006) Paperback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2006) Hardback - Unsewn/adhesive bound published by Perfection Learning
- (2009) Hardback – Sewn published by Marco Book Company
- (2009) Hardback – Sewn published by Perfection Learning Corporation
- (2009) Hardback-Reinforced binding published by Marco Book Company
- (2010) Paperback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2011) Hardback published by Perfection Learning
- (2011) Downloadable audio file published by Recorded Books, Inc.

If You Come Softly

- (1998) Hardback published by Penguin Young Readers Group
- (2000) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2000) Paperback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2000) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2006) Hardback - Unsewn/adhesive bound published by Perfection Learning
- (2009) Hardback – Reinforced binding published by Marco Book Company
- (2010) Hardback-library binding published by Turtleback Books
- (2010) Hardback published by Perfection Learning
- (2010) Paperback published by Penguin Publishing Group
- (2014) Downloadable audio file - MP3 format published by Tantor Media, Incorporated
- (2018) CD-Audio published by Random House Audio Publishing Group
- (2018) Hardback published by Penguin Publishing Group

List Of The Five Books Sent To The Jurors

The committee has deemed the following five titles as representative of the depth, breath and quality of Ms. Woodson's work.

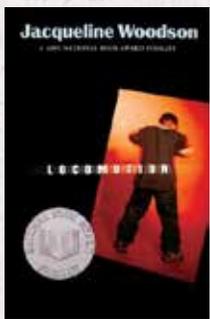


Title: **If You Come Softly**

Publisher, Date, and Country of Publication: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Penguin 2002 USA

Format, Genre, and Subject Matter: Realistic Fiction, Novel

Issues: Interracial love story Interracial relationships Racial stereotyping
First love Freedom to choose who to love

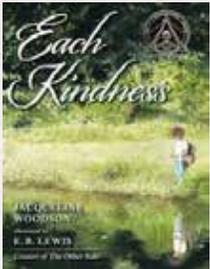


Title: **Locomotion**

Publisher, Date, and Country of Publication: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Penguin 2004 USA

Format, Genre, and Subject Matter: Realistic Fiction, Novel in verse

Issues: Foster care Death of parents Family ties & separation of siblings
Finding one's voice Poetic forms



Title: **Each Kindness** Illustrated by: **E.B. Lewis**

Format, Genre, and Subject Matter: Realistic Fiction, Picture Book

Issues: Kindness Being unkind/bulling Lost chances
Ripple effect of actions



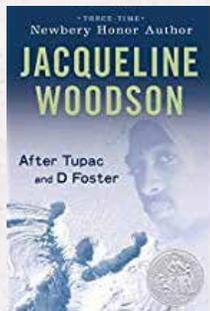
Title: **Brown Girl Dreaming**

Publisher, Date, and Country of Publication:

Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group 2014 USA

Format, Genre, and Subject Matter: Memoir, Novel in Verse

Issues: Autobiography Budding writer/Voice Identity
Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s-70s



Title: **After Tupac and D Foster**

Publisher, Date, and Country of Publication:

Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Young Readers Group 2008 USA

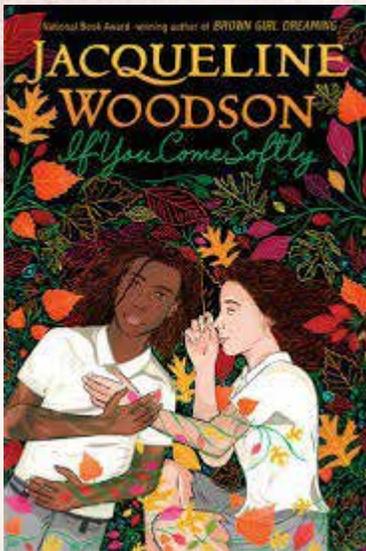
Format, Genre, and Subject Matter: Realistic Fiction, Novel

Issues: Best friends Identity Change
Social issues

Jacqueline Woodson is a skilled storyteller who is fearless in tackling a range of societal issues such as bullying, prejudice, and drug abuse. But, what sets her aside from other hard-hitting authors is the sensitivity and skill with which she draws in the reader. She invites us to experience alongside the characters what it feels like to seek one's racial, gender, or sexual identity; to struggle with issues of love for oneself and others; and to grow into one's own skin. Whether she is writing prose, poetry, a picture book, play or novel, she does so with a skill that creates emotional bonds between the characters and the readers, even when asking readers to step into life situations that are not familiar. She writes about what matters to her or what she is curious about, and in the process she leaves her readers changed.

She gives us access to stories beyond the facts. We, the readers, can understand more because of the emotional connection Woodson gives us as well as the variety of voices she shares with the reader that address social issues that are relevant to us all.

Published Professional Reviews



If You Come Softly

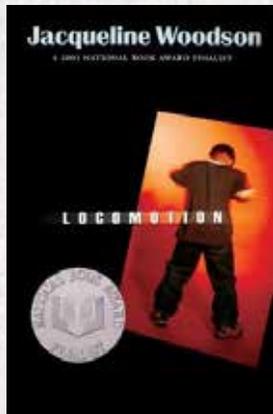
Publisher's Weekly

Once again, Woodson (*I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*) handles delicate, even explosive subject matter with exceptional clarity, surety and depth. In this contemporary story about an interracial romance, she seems to slip effortlessly into the skins of both her main characters, Ellie, an upper-middle-class white girl who has just transferred to Percy, an elite New York City prep school, and Jeremiah, one of her few African American classmates, whose parents (a movie producer and a famous writer) have just separated. A prologue intimates heartbreak to come; thereafter, sequences alternate between Ellie's first-person narration and a third-person telling that focuses on Jeremiah. Both voices convincingly describe the couple's love-at-first-sight meeting and the gradual building of their trust. The intensity of their emotions will make hearts flutter, then ache as evidence mounts that Ellie's and Jeremiah's "perfect" love exists in a deeply flawed society. Even as Woodson's lyrical prose draws the audience into the tenderness of young love, her perceptive comments about race and racism will strike a chord with black readers and open the eyes of white readers (Thing about white people," Jeremiah's father tells him, "they know what

everybody else is, but they don't know they're white"). Knowing from the beginning that tragedy lies just around the corner doesn't soften the sharp impact of this wrenching book. Ages 10-up. (Sept.)

School Library Journal

Grade 7 Up-Two 15 year olds, Jeremiah (Miah) who is black, and Elisha (Ellie) who is white, meet during their first year at an exclusive New York prep school and fall in love. Both teens are also dealing with difficult family situations. Miah's father has left his mother for another woman, and Ellie is trying to fight through her feelings about her mother, who twice abandoned her family for extended periods. The teenagers must also deal with the subtle and not-so-subtle bigotry that they are subject to as a mixed-race couple. Miah and Ellie go about working through their problems, both individually and together, and their relationship continues to blossom, giving readers a shared sense of contentment. Thus, the tragic climax will leave them stunned. Woodson's lyrical narrative tells the story through alternating voices, Ellie's in the first person and Miah's in the third. This fine author once again shows her gift for penning a novel that will ring true with young adults as it makes subtle comments on social situations. -Tom S. Hurlburt, La Crosse Public Library, WI



Locomotion

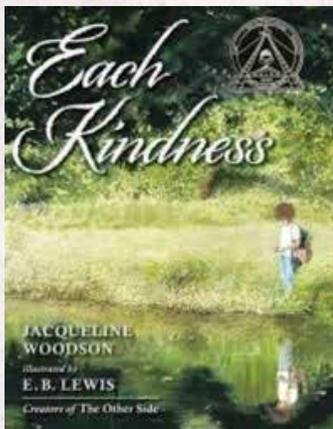
Kirkus Reviews

Count on award-winning Woodson (*Visiting Day*, p. 1403, etc.) to present readers with a moving, lyrical, and completely convincing novel in verse. Eleven-year-old Lonnie (“Locomotion”) starts his poem book for school by getting it all down fast: “This whole book’s a poem ’cause every time I try to / tell the whole story my mind goes Be quiet! / Only it’s not my mind’s voice, / it’s Miss Edna’s over and over and over / Be quiet! . . . So this whole book’s a poem because poetry’s short and / this whole book’s a poem ’cause Ms. Marcus says / write it down before it leaves your brain.” Lonnie tells readers more, little by little, about his foster mother Miss Edna, his teacher Ms. Marcus, his classmates, and the fire that killed his parents and separated him from his sister. Slowly, his gift for observing people and writing it down lets him start to love new people again, and to widen his world from the nugget of tragedy that it was. Woodson nails Lonnie’s voice

from the start, and lets him express himself through images and thoughts that vibrate in the different kinds of lines he puts down. He tends to free verse, but is sometimes assigned a certain form by Ms. Marcus. (“Today’s a bad day / Is that haiku? Do I look / like I even care?”) As in her prose novels, Woodson’s created a character whose presence you can feel like they were sitting next to you. And with this first novel-in-verse for her, Lonnie will sit by many readers and teach them to see like he does, “This day is already putting all kinds of words / in your head / and breaking them up into lines / and making the lines into pictures in your mind.” Don’t let anyone miss this. (Fiction. 9-13)

Publishers Weekly

The kinetic energy of the aptly named *Locomotion* (the nickname of Lonnie Collins Motion) permeates the 60 poems that tell his sad yet hopeful story. Lonnie’s first poem sets up a conflict familiar to anyone who has attempted creativity: despite the cheering of his teacher, Ms. Marcus (“Write it down before it leaves your brain,” she says), as he begins to write, Lonnie hears the critical voice of his foster mother (“It’s Miss Edna’s over and over/ Be quiet!”). As Lonnie explores poetry’s various forms throughout this brief yet poignant and occasionally humorous volume, he also reveals Miss Edna’s kindness toward him in the little things she says and does (“The last time Miss Edna came home and found me/ crying She said Think/ about all the stuff you love, Lonnie”). Gradually Lonnie reveals that at age seven, his parents died in a fire, leaving him and his younger sister, Lili, orphaned. Lili was adopted, yet Lonnie figures out a way to visit her regularly. The gradual unfolding of his life’s events intermingle with his discoveries about poetry as a form, from haiku to sonnets (“Ms. Marcus says “sonnet” comes from “sonnetto”/ and that sonnetto means little song or sound/ It reminds me of that guy’s name Gepetto/ the one who made Pinocchio from wood he found”) to the epistle poems he writes to his father and to God. Woodson, through Lonnie, creates (much as Sharon Creech did with the boy narrator in *Love That Dog*) a contagious appreciation for poetry while using the genre as a cathartic means for expressing the young poet’s own grief. Ages 10-up. (Jan.)



Each Kindness

Publishers Weekly

When a new and clearly impoverished girl named Maya shows up at school (“Her coat was open and the clothes beneath it looked old and ragged”), Chloe and her friends brush off any attempt to befriend her. Even when Maya valiantly—and heartbreakingly—tries to fit in and entice the girls to play with her, she is rejected. Then one day, Maya is gone, and Chloe realizes that her “chance of a kindness” is “more and more forever gone.” Combining realism with shimmering impressionistic washes of color, Lewis turns readers into witnesses as kindness hangs in the balance in the cafeteria, the classroom, and on the sun-bleached playground asphalt; readers see how the most mundane settings can become tense testing grounds for character. Woodson, who collaborated with Lewis on *The Other Side* and *Coming On Home Soon*, again brings an unsparing lyricism to a difficult topic. The question

she answers with this story is one that can haunt at any age: what if you’re cruel to someone and never get the chance to make it right? Ages 5–8.

Booklist

Starting with the title, this quiet, intense picture book is about the small actions that can haunt. As in collaborations such as *Coming on Home Soon* (2004), Woodson's spare, eloquent free verse and Lewis' Beautiful, spacious watercolor paintings tell a story for young kids that will touch all ages. In a first-person voice, Chloe speaks about how a new girl in class, Maya, gets the empty seat next to her and tries to be friends. But Chloe and her clique will have none of the poor white kids in her old ragged clothes, and their meanness intensifies after Maya asks to play with them. Then Maya's family moves away, and she is "forever gone," leaving Chloe without the chance to put things right. Chloe's teacher spells out lessons on kindness, but the story is most powerful in the scenes of malicious bullying in the multiracial classroom and in the school yard. It is rare to tell a story of cruelty from the bully's viewpoint, and both the words and pictures powerfully evoke Chloe's shame and sorrow over the kindness she has not shown, as she looks at the empty seat next to her in the classroom, and then, alone and troubled, throws a stone in the water and watches the ripples move out and away. Hazel Rochman



Brown Girl Dreaming

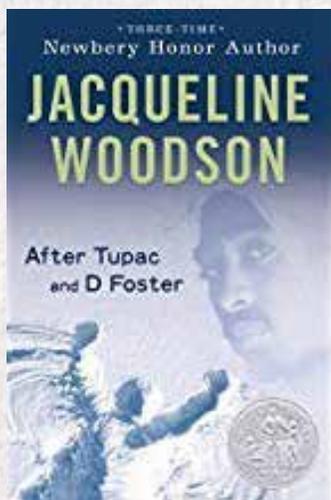
The Horn Book Magazine

Here is a memoir-in-verse so immediate that readers will feel they are experiencing the author's childhood right along with her. It starts out somewhat slowly, with Woodson relying on others' memories to relate her (1963) birth and infancy in Ohio, but that just serves to underscore the vividness of the material once she begins to share her own memories; once her family arrives in Greenville, South Carolina, where they live with her maternal grandparents. Woodson describes a South where the whites-only signs may have been removed but where her grandmother still can't get waited on in Woolworth's, where young people are sitting at lunch counters and standing up for civil rights; and Woodson expertly weaves that history into her own. However, we see young Jackie grow up not just in historical context but also—and equally—in the context of extended family, community (Greenville and, later, Brooklyn), and religion (she was raised Je-

hovah's Witness). Most notably of all, perhaps, we trace her development as a nascent writer, from her early, overarching love of stories through her struggles to learn to read through the thrill of her first blank composition book to her realization that "words are [her] brilliance." The poetry here sings: specific, lyrical, and full of imagery: "So the first time my mother goes to New York City / we don't know to be sad, the weight / of our grandparents' love like a blanket / with us beneath it, / safe and warm." An extraordinary—indeed brilliant—portrait of a writer as a young girl. martha v. parravano

School Library Journal

Gr 4–7—"I am born in Ohio but the stories of South Carolina already run like rivers through my veins" writes Woodson as she begins her mesmerizing journey through her early years. She was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1963, "as the South explodes" into a war for civil rights and was raised in South Carolina and then New York. Her perspective on the volatile era in which she grew up is thoughtfully expressed in powerfully effective verse, (Martin Luther King is ready to march on Washington; Malcom X speaks about revolution; Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat only seven years earlier and three years have passed since Ruby Bridges walks into an all-white school). She experienced firsthand the acute differences in how the "colored" were treated in the North and South. "After the night falls and it is safe for brown people to leave the South without getting stopped and sometimes beaten and always questioned; We board the Greyhound bus bound for Ohio." She related her difficulties with reading as a child and living in the shadow of her brilliant older sister, she never abandoned her dream of becoming a writer. With exquisite metaphorical verse Woodson weaves a patchwork of her life experience, from her supportive, loving maternal grandparents, her mother's insistence on good grammar, to the lifetime friend she meets in New York, that covers readers with a warmth and sensitivity no child should miss. This should be on every library shelf.—D. Maria LaRocco, Cuyahoga Public Library, Strongsville, OH



After Tupac and D Foster

School Library Journal

Gr 6-10-D Foster, Neeka, and an unnamed narrator grow from being 11 to 13 with Tupac Shakur's music, shootings, and legal troubles as the backdrop. Neeka and the narrator have lived on the same block forever and are like sisters, but foster child D shows up during the summer of 1994, while she is out "roaming." D immediately finds a place in the heart of the other girls, and

the "Three the Hard Way" bond over their love of Tupac's music. It seems especially relevant to D, who sees truth in his lyrics, having experienced the hard life herself in group homes and with multiple foster families. Woodson's spare, poetic, language and realistic Queens, NY, street vernacular reveal a time and a relationship, each chapter a vignette depicting an event in the lives of the girls and evoking mood more than telling a story. In this urban setting, there are, refreshingly, caring adults and children playing on the street instead of

drug dealers on every corner. Readers are right on the block with bossy mothers, rope-jumping girls, and chess-playing elders. With Tupac's name and picture on the cover, this slim volume will immediately appeal to teens, and the emotions and high-quality writing make it a book well worth recommending. By the end, readers realize that, along with the girls, they don't really know D at all. As she says, "I came on this street and y'all became my friends. That's the D puzzle." And readers will find it a puzzle well worth their time.

Publishers Weekly

As she did in *Feathers* with the poetry of Emily Dickinson, Woodson here invokes the music of the late rapper Tupac Shakur, whose songs address the inequalities confronting many African-Americans. In 1994, the anonymous narrator is 11, and Tupac has been shot. Everyone in her safe Queens neighborhood is listening to his music and talking about him, even though the world he sings about seems remote to her. Meanwhile D, a foster child, meets the narrator and her best friend, Neeka, while roaming around the city by herself ("She's like from another planet. The Planet of the Free," Neeka later remarks). They become close, calling themselves Three the Hard Way, and Tupac's music becomes a soundtrack for the two years they spend together. Early on, when Tupac sings, "Brenda's Got a Baby," about a girl putting her baby in a trash can, D explains, "He sings about the things that I'm living," and Neeka and the narrator become aware of all the "stuff we ain't gonna know [about D]," who never does tell them where she lives or who her mother is. The story ends in 1996 with Tupac's untimely death and the reappearance of D's mother, who takes D with her, out of roaming range. Woodson delicately unfolds issues about race and less obvious forms of oppression as the narrator becomes aware of them; occasionally, the plot feels manipulated toward that purpose. Even so, the subtlety and depth with which the author conveys the girls' relationships lend this novel exceptional vividness and staying power. Ages 12-up. (Jan.)

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