

The background is a teal-tinted photograph. In the center, the back of a person's head is visible, showing thick, dark, curly hair. The person is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, top. The background behind the person is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a horizon line under a clear sky.

# Teaching Brown Girl Dreaming

Created to accompany  
the memoir by Jacqueline Woodson



FACING  
HISTORY &  
OURSELVES

**Teaching**  
**Brown Girl**  
**Dreaming**



Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to use lessons of history to challenge teachers and their students to stand up to bigotry and hate. For more information about Facing History and Ourselves, please visit our website at [facinghistory.org](http://facinghistory.org).

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# Getting Started: Teacher Preparation

DESIGNED FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 6-7. ADAPTABLE FOR OTHER GRADES.

**Note on Edition:** This unit is based on the 2016 edition of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, published by Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

Jacqueline Woodson opens her memoir with a poem about her birth on February 12, 1963, in “a country caught / / between Black and White” (1). In this coming-of-age memoir in verse, Woodson, raised in Ohio, South Carolina, and New York by her mother and grandparents, invites readers to consider what it means to be from a place but not fully belong there, as well as the ways in which family and memory can shape our identities and beliefs. Growing up, Woodson felt different in a variety of ways that students may find relatable. As a child who split her time between the North and the South, Jacqueline found that the way she and her siblings spoke and acted set them apart in both places. As a Jehovah’s Witness, Jacqueline had different traditions and beliefs from those of the children in her neighborhood and school. As a struggling reader, she didn’t excel in school like her brilliant older sister. And as a child raised by her mother and grandparents, Jacqueline struggled to answer other children’s questions about her family.

Adolescence is a pivotal time in a young person’s development, and, like Jacqueline, the students in your classroom are deeply invested in making sense of who they are and where they belong. *Brown Girl Dreaming* invites them to reflect on their own coming-of-age experiences in light of the many complex factors that influence their identities and choices. The memoir concludes with a powerful message of hope and possibility—one that challenges students to look closely at all the facets of their identity and decide who they want to be and what unique story they want to tell.

## Navigating This Unit Guide

Because teachers take many approaches to reading and discussing a work of literature with their students, this guide does not assume that everyone will teach the memoir in the same way at the same pace. Use the resources in this guide, which are explained in greater depth on the following pages, to plan and implement

a Facing History *Brown Girl Dreaming* literature unit that is customized for your unique context. There is a sample outline for a first week of the unit on page 6. The resources in this guide include:

- **Unit essential questions** that invite students to wrestle with complexity and to engage the mind, heart, and conscience in an exploration of the memoir and a reflection on their own lived experiences
- **Guiding questions** that help students connect the poems in each section of the memoir to the more universal essential questions
- **Student learning outcomes** that are aligned with Facing History’s learning objectives
- **Activities for deeper understanding** that support students as they work toward the learning outcomes
- **Student handouts and readings** that correspond with the activities (these are located at the end of each section, and you can also find Google Doc versions in this [Google folder](#))
- Activities to support students’ preparation for three **summative assessment options**

Additionally, we have included a [Brown Girl Dreaming Discussion Questions](#) handout, which is a collection of text-based discussion questions that invite opportunities for close reading and analysis of character and thematic development. You can find them at the end of this guide and in this [Google folder](#).

## Unit Essential Questions

This unit is designed to support students’ exploration of the following essential questions. As you use the resources in this guide to plan your unit, you might decide to emphasize one or two of the essential questions rather than use all three. To help students develop their thinking about these rich open-ended questions, we recommend that you incorporate opportunities for reflection and discussion in addition to the ones provided in this guide.

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The three Facing History learning objectives at the heart of the unit address students' cognitive, emotional, and moral growth. Aligned to each learning objective are learning outcomes, which describe the observable and measurable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions students develop over the course of the unit.

### Learning Objective 1: Explore the Complexity of Identity

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Value the complexity of identity in themselves and others.
- Examine how their identity is a combination of who they say they are, who others say they are, and who they hope to be in the future.
- Describe the factors that influence their moral development, such as their personal experiences, their interactions with others, and their surroundings, and reflect on how these factors influence their sense of right and wrong.

### Learning Objective 2: Process Texts through a Critical and Ethical Lens

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Analyze the internal and external conflicts that characters face and the impact these conflicts can have on an individual's choices and actions, both in the text and in the real world.
- Practice perspective-taking in order to develop empathy and recognize the limits of any one person's point of view.
- Make real-world connections that explore historical and contemporary contexts in literature.

### Learning Objective 3: Develop a Sense of Civic Agency

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Analyze the author's representation of individual and collective agency in the text and compare and contrast it to their own beliefs and experiences in the world.
- Demonstrate an increased sense of confidence in their ability to communicate their ideas orally and in writing.
- Recognize the power that comes with telling their own story and engaging with the stories of others.

Read more about and download Facing History's ELA learning objectives and outcomes in **Section 3: Begin with the End in Mind** of our Coming of Age Unit Planning Toolkit.

## Summative Assessment Options

This unit guide offers three summative assessment options you can choose from and tailor to best meet the needs of your students. Each assessment is designed to be meaningful and relevant to students by providing opportunities for them to synthesize new knowledge and understanding, explore one or more of the essential questions, and make connections between the text and their own lives.

There are brief descriptions of each option below, and **you can find more detailed explanations in the final section of this guide**. You should develop your assessment criteria before teaching the unit and communicate it to your students, as well as identify relevant sections of the text for close reading, discussion, and reflection. For each part of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, there is a “Prepare for the Summative Assessment” section that offers activity ideas to help students revisit the text and build the necessary skills and experiences for the summative assessment that you choose.

**Final Journal Reflection:** Students respond in journals to prompts that promote reflection and synthesis at the end of each section of the memoir and then review their responses in order to engage in deeper written reflection and discussion at the end of the unit.

**Socratic Seminar Discussion:** Students facilitate a **Socratic seminar** about one of the essential questions, drawing evidence from the text, their journals, class materials, and their own experiences. Following their discussion, students produce a short written response that explores their new understanding.

**Poetry Anthology Project:** Students select one or two original poems to bring through the revision process and publish in a class print or online anthology. For each part of the memoir, there are one or more activities that support students in engaging in the poetry-writing process.

## Cultivate a Reflective Classroom Community

In a Facing History classroom, explicit rules and implicit norms protect everyone’s right to speak; members value and create space for different perspectives; and everyone takes responsibility for themselves, each other, and the group as a whole. The following resources can help you cultivate this kind of brave and reflective classroom community:

- **Build the Foundation:** Learn about the importance of engaging in your own personal reflection before teaching this unit and deepen your understanding of adolescent development by exploring the resources in **Section 1: Start with Yourself** of Facing History’s Coming-of-Age Unit Planning Toolkit. Then have students create a **classroom contract** in order to foster community and prepare them to engage in brave and reflective classroom discussions.



- **Incorporate Daily Journaling:** In addition to creating and upholding the classroom contract, **journaling** is an instrumental tool for helping students develop their ability to process what they are learning, practice perspective-taking, and make informed judgments about what they see and hear. Providing students with time and space to reflect on complex issues and questions allows them to formulate their ideas before sharing them with their peers.
- **Write Alongside Your Students:** When teachers write with their students and share their writing, no matter how messy or scattered, it sends a powerful message that writing matters, writing is hard, and even teachers don't get it right the first time. You will create a stronger community of thinkers and writers if you participate in the learning process. If you don't do so already, consider starting your own journal so you can join your students in this exploration.

# Sample Weekly Outline

This unit provides more activities than many teachers will have time to include in their lessons. Therefore, you will need to choose which activities, questions, and assessments to include and which to leave out. The following model suggests just one way a teacher might approach the first week of a Facing History *Brown Girl Dreaming* unit that culminates with the Poetry Anthology Project.

Introduce the Text and Part 1: “i am born”		
<p><b>Guiding Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What parts of Jacqueline’s identity does she choose for herself? What parts are determined by others, by society, or by chance?</li> <li>• What is the Great Migration? How does learning about the Great Migration impact your understanding of Jacqueline’s story?</li> <li>• What does it mean to be from both the North and the South and not feel fully home in either place?</li> </ul>		
Day	Activities	Homework
Monday	Activity 1: Consider What It Means to Be “From” a Place	“Where I’m From” Brainstorm handout
Tuesday	<p>Warm up: Share “Where I’m From” Brainstorm handout in pairs</p> <p>Writing Workshop: Draft “Where I’m From” poems</p> <p>Activity 2: Introduce a New Book</p> <p>Start to read aloud Part 1: “i am born”</p>	<p>(Re)read pages 1–9</p> <p>Respond to questions 1–3 on the <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> Discussion Questions handout</p>
Wednesday	<p>Warm up: Pair-share questions 1–3</p> <p>Read aloud: “a girl named jack” (6–7)</p> <p>Activity 3: Reflect on Our Names</p> <p>Draft a “My Name” poem</p>	Finish drafting “My Name” poems
Thursday	<p>Warm up: Share poems in pairs</p> <p>Read aloud: Pages 10–20</p> <p>Activity 4: Introduce the Concept of Identity</p>	<p>Read pages 20–31</p> <p>Respond to questions 4–7 on the <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> Discussion Questions handout</p>
Friday	<p>Warm up: Pair-share responses to questions and add to Jacqueline’s identity chart</p> <p>Activity 6: Learn about the Great Migration</p>	<p>Finish reading Part 1: “i am born”</p> <p>Activity 7: <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> and Me (to submit)</p>

# “i am born”

## Essential Questions

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Guiding Questions

- What parts of Jacqueline’s identity does she choose for herself? What parts are determined by others, by society, or by chance?
- What is the Great Migration? How does learning about the Great Migration impact your understanding of Jacqueline’s story?
- What does it mean to be from both the North and the South and not feel fully home in either place?

## Student Learning Outcomes

*In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .*

- Value the complexity of identity in themselves and others.
- Examine how their identity is a combination of who they say they are, who others say they are, and who they hope to be in the future.
- Analyze the internal and external conflicts that characters face and the impact these conflicts can have on an individual’s choices and actions, both in the text and in the real world.

## Core Activities

*As you make choices about which activities to teach, we suggest prioritizing the following, which are foundational to supporting students' exploration of this section's guiding questions and progression toward the learning outcomes:*

- Activity 4: Introduce the Concept of Identity
- Activity 6: Learn about the Great Migration

## Section Overview

*Brown Girl Dreaming* opens with Jacqueline Woodson's birth on February 12, 1963, in Columbus, Ohio, 60 miles from her father's family home in the small town of Nelsonville. Relying on the sometimes conflicting memories of her relatives, Woodson recounts stories of her birth and legacy on both sides of the family, the Woodsons of Ohio and the Irbys of South Carolina. As students read this section of the memoir, they will consider how a seemingly simple question like "Where are you from?" can lead to complex answers about identity, legacy, and belonging in the world.



# Activities for Deeper Understanding

Choose from the following activities and corresponding student **discussion questions** to create your daily lesson plans for this section of the text.

## Pre-Reading Activities

### 1. Consider What It Means to Be “From” a Place

George Ella Lyon’s poem **“Where I’m From”** introduces the relationship between identity, legacy, and place and provides an opportunity to familiarize students with the poetic devices they will encounter in the memoir. Lyon’s poem includes vocabulary, names, and locations that students may find unfamiliar. You can define these words before reading or have students use the context of the poem to make inferences.

#### Materials

##### Reading

“Where I’m From”

##### Handout

“Where I’m From”

Brainstorm

Get these materials in **Google Doc** format

#### Part 1: Read and Analyze “Where I’m From”

Project the sentence “I want to know when you get to be from a place” and explain that it is the first line of a poem by Jo Carson.<sup>1</sup> Carson created a collection of poems based on things that she overheard people saying as she went about her daily life. Read the line out loud and ask students to respond to the following questions in their journals. Let them know that they will be able to choose what to share and what to keep private. Then have students debrief in pairs and as a class, recording their ideas on the board.

- What does it mean to be “from” a place?
- When do you get to be from a place?
- How do you answer the question, “Where are you from?”

Next, distribute the reading **“Where I’m From.”** Explain that George Ella Lyon was inspired to write this poem after reading the first line of a poem by her friend Jo Carson, which students wrote about in their journals. Read the poem out loud two times. Invite students to read the poem to themselves and to choose one line, image, or stanza for a **Sketch to Stretch** reflection in their journals.

In small groups, have students read the poem out loud one more time and share an idea from their journals. Then have them discuss the following questions for each stanza, recording their answers alongside the poem on their handout.

- What is your favorite line, phrase, or imagery in this stanza? Why does it resonate with you?

<sup>1</sup> Jo Carson, poem number 22, in *Stories I Ain’t Told Nobody Yet* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1989), 40.

- What kinds of things does the poet describe in this stanza? How do you think these help to explain where George Ella Lyon is from?
- What questions do you have about this stanza?

Invite groups to share their questions with the class, and then facilitate a class discussion for the following questions:

- Review your journal response. How does this poem change, challenge, or confirm your thinking about what it means to be “from” a place?
- What new questions does it help raise for you?

## Part 2: Write Original “Where I’m From” Poems

Explain to students that they will write their own “Where I’m From” poems. Share your own “Where I’m From” poem to model risk-taking and to help students understand the importance of using specific images and details. Then have students complete the **“Where I’m From” Brainstorm** handout to generate ideas. They can then start drafting their poem with the sentence starter “I am from . . .” by incorporating ideas from their handout. Using your own poem as a model, prompt students to think about a unifying theme or purpose for their poem.

If this is the first time your students have written poems, consider keeping their poems short and giving students the option to write more if they care to do so. You can also create a handout with sentence starters that follow the structure of Lyon’s poem and have students draft their own poems by filling in the blanks. Here is an example of sentence starters for a first stanza:

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (a list of items in your home).

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific place in your home).

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (something outside your home).

## 2. Introduce a New Book

*This activity builds schema by inviting students to preview the memoir’s “peritext” or “paratext” (cover, table of contents, preface, foreword, afterword, etc.) and introduces them to themes, historical context, and characters.*

*Brown Girl Dreaming* has an unconventional style, thought-provoking chapter titles, a beautiful cover design, and family photographs. Teaching the **Introducing a New Book** strategy invites students to preview the text and start to build a schema for what they will read. If your students read George Ella Lyon’s poem “Where I’m From,” you can conclude the activity by asking them what ideas or imagery they think Jacqueline Woodson might include if she were to write her own “Where I’m From” poem.

## Through-Reading Activities

### 3. Reflect on Our Names

#### "a girl named jack," pages 6–7

*This activity offers opportunities for close reading, reflective writing, and poetry writing. It introduces a poetry close-reading protocol that you can incorporate into future lessons.*

#### **Part 1: Reflect on Our Names in Journals**

In their journals, have students respond to the first question below and then choose ONE additional question to explore. Let them know that they will be choosing an idea from their response to share with a partner.

- What is your full name?
- What nicknames have you given yourself or have others given you? How do they make you feel?
- How has your name been mispronounced? How does that make you feel?
- What is the story behind your name (first, middle, and/or last name)?
- Whose name(s) from your family or another source do you carry in your name? Consider your first, middle, and/or last name.
- Do you feel like your name is or isn't a good fit for your personality? Why?

To build community and model risk-taking, share something about your own name with the class. Then invite students to do the same in pairs before seeing if any volunteers would like to share with the group.

#### **Part 2: Do a Close Reading to Learn about Jacqueline's Name**

Use the following poetry reading protocol, adapted from David Perkins at Project Zero, to read "a girl named jack" on pages 6–7:

- The teacher reads the poem out loud or plays an audio version of the poet reading.
- The teacher invites a student volunteer to read the poem out loud (or student volunteers to share the reading) or reads it again themselves.
- Students read the poem silently to themselves.
- Students use the following prompt to guide a journal reflection:

*The line that stands out to me is \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .*

. . . of something about who I am. (What in particular?)

. . . it reflects human nature or how people are in the world. (What human characteristics or ways of being?)

. . . of how the poet expressed the idea. (What did they do that makes you feel this way?)<sup>2</sup>

In small groups, have students read the poem out loud one more time and share the line they chose for their journal response, as well as a brief explanation of why. Then have them discuss the following questions, which you can debrief as a class:

- How does Woodson use italics in this poem? What is the effect on the reader?
- What other authorial choices do you notice, and how do they affect the meaning and impact of the poem for you as a reader? If you feel stuck, start by looking at punctuation, capitalization, and line breaks.
- Why do you think Jacqueline’s mother chose the name she did for Jacqueline? Support your thinking with examples from the text.

Invite students to create their own “My Name” poems. If your students have access to the internet, they might start by researching the etymology of their name. Students who are struggling or who are not inspired by free verse could write a **found poem** that uses words and phrases from their journal response, or they could write and illustrate an acrostic poem. Challenge them to play with figurative language and include sensory images, a metaphor, or alliteration.

#### 4. Introduce the Concept of Identity

##### **“how to listen #1,” page 20**

*This activity helps students start to explore the complexity and fluidity of identity, both in the memoir and in their own lives. Students can add to Jacqueline’s identity chart as they read, perhaps for homework, as a warm-up, or at the end of class, to capture new understanding.*

##### **Part 1: Introduce the Concept of Identity**

Explain to students that as they read *Brown Girl Dreaming*, they will think about how the ways in which Jacqueline defines herself and the ways others define her influence her sense of who she is and where she belongs in the world. Said another way, they will be considering how Jacqueline might answer the question, “Who am I?”

To introduce the concept of identity, start by asking the class to generate a list of categories that make up our identities (family, gender, race, language, religion, values, interests, hobbies, neighborhood, etc.). Prompt students with questions that help them think about the following ideas, if these don’t come up in discussion:

2 David N. Perkins, *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 126.



- Some aspects of our identities are consistent over our lives; others change as we gain skills and take on different roles in life.
- Some aspects of our identities feel very central to who we are, no matter where we are; others might feel more like background characteristics or might depend on the situation.
- Some identities are labels that others put on us—while others see us as having that identity, we don't.

Next, as a class, start to create an **identity chart** for Jacqueline on the board while students copy it into their journals. Explain that they should devote a whole page to Jacqueline's identity chart because they will be adding to it over the course of the unit as they learn more about her. Have students complete the identity chart in small groups and then discuss the following questions, citing evidence from the text to support their thinking:

- What parts of Jacqueline's identity does she choose for herself? How does she feel about these parts of her identity?
- What parts of her identity are determined by other people or by society? How does she feel about these parts of her identity?
- What aspects of her identity can she control, and which aspects are controlled by other people or circumstances?

Debrief together and create a big identity chart for Jacqueline on a piece of paper that you hang in the classroom and add to over the course of the unit as students add to their own charts. Discuss the following questions as a class:

- At this point in the memoir, how do you think Jacqueline would answer the question, "Who am I?" What makes you say that?
- What do you think Jacqueline would say is the most important aspect of her identity? How do you know?

## **Part 2: Create Individual Identity Charts**

Model the process of creating an individual identity chart by starting your own on the board. Use the **Think Aloud** strategy as you consider the factors that make you who you are. Next, have students create individual identity charts in their journals, letting them know that they will not have to share them. Then have students respond in their journals to the three questions they discussed in small groups for Jacqueline. Consider adding the following question to their reflections: *What aspects of your identity have stayed the same, and which ones have changed, as you've gotten older?*

**Extension Activity:** Have students answer one or more of the following questions on an **exit card** to learn more about their experience of creating an identity chart:

- How did it feel to make an individual identity chart?
- In what ways do you think the chart does a good job of representing your identity?
- How do you think the chart falls short or fails to represent your identity?

## 5. Explore the Concept of “Home”

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**“my mother and grace,” pages 25–26; “each winter,” pages 27–28; “home,” page 32; and “the cousins,” pages 33–34**

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*This activity encourages close reading and analysis of poetry. Note that you will need to revise the first question for the final discussion if your students did not do Activity 1: Consider What It Means to Be “From” a Place.*

Start with a journal reflection in response to the question: *To what extent does where you are from shape who you are and who you will become in the future? What makes you say that?* Then use the **Jigsaw** strategy to read and discuss the four poems for this activity that explore the concept of home. Start by asking “expert” groups to read their poems out loud two times and then discuss the following questions, jotting down notes that they will share in their “teaching” groups:

- What is your favorite line(s), and why?
- What story does this poem tell? How do you know?
- How does this poem help to answer the question, “What is home?” Support your answer with three pieces of evidence from the poem.
- What questions does this poem raise for you?

Move students into “teaching” groups. Instruct each student to summarize the story their poem tells and share one interesting idea or question that emerged from their “expert” group discussions. Then project the following questions for groups and the whole class to discuss:

- Taken together, how do these poems help you think about the line from Jo Carson’s poem: “I want to know when you get to be from a place . . .”<sup>3</sup>
- What does it mean to be from the South and the North and not feel fully home in either place? Consider characters’ sense of who they are and where they belong in the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Jo Carson, poem number 22, in *Stories I Ain’t Told Nobody Yet* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1989), 40.

- What new, different, or deeper understanding do you have about how where we are from helps to shape who we are and who we will become in the future? Support your answer with examples from the text and your own experiences.

## 6. Learn about the Great Migration

### poems on pages 1–41

*This activity uses Isabel Wilkerson’s TED Talk to provide students with historical context to deepen their understanding of Woodson’s memoir. Before teaching this activity, preview the video and the steps of Project Zero’s **Take Note Thinking Routine**. You will need to decide how you would like students to respond during the routine (index cards, a handout, a Google Doc, a Padlet, etc.) and how they will share what they write with their peers and with you.*

### Part 1: Learn about the Great Migration

Explain to students that they will be learning about the Great Migration, the period between World War I and the 1970s when more than 6 million African Americans fled the Jim Crow South for cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and West. While the Woodson side of Jacqueline’s family left the South in the 1800s, members of the Irby family, including Jacqueline’s mother, aunt, and uncle, migrated north in the 1960s from South Carolina to New York. In this activity, students will be learning about the Great Migration from scholar and Pulitzer Prize–winning author Isabel Wilkerson.

Share the **Take Note** questions and let students know that as they watch the video, you will pause it so they can respond in writing to ONE question and can process what they are viewing with their peers. They should not take notes while they are watching the video so they can fully engage with the content. The Take Note questions are as follows:

- What is the most important point?
- What are you finding challenging, puzzling, or difficult to understand?
- What question would you most like to discuss?
- What is something that you found interesting?

Play the video **The Great Migration and the Power of a Single Decision** (17:46). Pause after each of the following sections for the Take Note routine: 00:00–03:19 / 03:20–10:20 / 10:20–17:46. After the final round, move students into small groups so they can share their notes and try to respond to any questions others may have raised.

#### Materials

##### Video

The Great Migration and the Power of a Single Decision

## Part 2: Connect the Video to the Text

Working in pairs or small groups, have students review Part 1 of *Brown Girl Dreaming* and select one poem that helps them answer the following question: *What new, different, or deeper understanding of this poem do you have after learning about the Great Migration from Isabel Wilkerson? Support your answer with specific examples from the text and your notes from the video.*

Then choose from the following questions for a class discussion. You can revisit questions 2–4 in future lessons as students learn more about the Jim Crow era and examples of civic action taking place during this time in Jacqueline’s life.

- How does learning about the Great Migration impact your understanding of the memoir so far? Consider characterization, setting, and thematic development.
- What are the historical legacies of the time period in which the book is set (1963 to about 1973), and how do these legacies play out today?
- How might fictional and real-life stories of the past help us to better understand these moments of history? How might they help us to better understand human behavior and how we make decisions today?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How can *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Wilkerson’s TED Talk, and your own experiences help you think about this question?

**Extension:** In pairs, small groups, or on their own for homework, have students draw connections between what they have read in *Brown Girl Dreaming* and Wilkerson’s TED Talk, using the **Connect, Extend, Challenge** teaching strategy and handout.

## Post-Reading Activities

### 7. *Brown Girl Dreaming* and Me

*Rereading a text is a key literacy strategy that promotes vocabulary development, comprehension, and fluency. This recurring activity prompts students to reread poems from the section of the memoir they have just completed and invites them to draw connections between the text and their own lives.*

After reading Part 1: “i am born,” ask students to choose one poem that resonates with them and that they would like to explore in greater depth. After students choose their poems, use the **Sketch to Stretch** strategy to have them draw connections between the poem, their own lived experiences, and the world. The following questions can help prompt their thinking:

- What poem did you choose, and why?
- What is the most valuable idea in your poem? What makes you say that?



- In your opinion, what is the most important word or most powerful image in your poem? What makes you say that?
- How does this poem help you answer one of the unit’s essential questions? Use evidence from the poem and your own experiences in your response.

Students can share one or more ideas from their reflections with a partner or in small groups, or you can collect and assess their work.

## 8. Prepare for the Summative Assessment

*If you haven’t already done so, share your summative assessment assignment and criteria with the class. Let students know that they will have opportunities after reading each part of the memoir to synthesize new understanding, ask questions, and practice new skills. Then choose the activity that corresponds with your summative assessment option, or create your own. You can find detailed explanations of each assessment in the final section of this guide (page 82).*

- **Final Journal Reflection:** Have students reread their journal entries and materials from Part 1: “i am born.” Then invite them to choose one of the essential questions to explore in more detail. Use the **Rapid-Fire Writing** strategy to have students respond to the essential question that most interests them, using ideas from the materials they reviewed to develop their thinking. Using the **Wraparound** strategy, have each student share a phrase or a sentence *either* from their journal or about a new idea or question that emerged.
- **Socratic Seminar Discussion:** Ask students to generate ideas for what makes a good discussion, and record their ideas on the board. Then discuss what can make it challenging to sustain a good discussion. Use the **Fishbowl** strategy to model a discussion with three volunteers from the class. Consider using part of the first guiding question as a prompt: *What parts of Jacqueline’s identity does she choose for herself?* Give students time to gather ideas with a partner. Then, with three volunteers from the class, conduct a short “fishbowl” discussion. First review the list on the board so the goals are fresh in everyone’s mind. After the discussion, debrief with the class, asking students to identify where they noticed the fishbowl participants making meaningful contributions to the discussion.

Then have students discuss the second part of the guiding question in small groups: *What parts of Jacqueline’s identity are determined by others, by society, or by chance?* Give them time to prepare ideas with a partner before they engage in their discussions. Conclude the lesson with an **exit card** on which students share one strength they brought to their discussion and one goal to improve their discussion skills.

- **Poetry Anthology Project:** If your students drafted “Where I’m From” or “My Name” poems, have them choose one to bring through a revision cycle. Let

students know that they should keep their drafts and revisions in a safe place so they have them for the final project. Start by asking students to review the **classroom contract** and establish guidelines for how they will respond to each other's work. Author Jacqueline Woodson once offered some words of advice about sharing and feedback to an audience of middle school students: "I think you show it to people you *trust*." She then defined *constructive* criticism as feedback that 'makes you go running back to your work and want to make it better,' while *destructive* criticism 'makes you just want to throw it away.'<sup>4</sup> Woodson suggested that reviewers first say something positive about the piece of writing and then ask three questions.

To apply Woodson's framework to your classroom, share her advice and ask students to brainstorm ways that they can give feedback that fits her description of constructive and not destructive criticism. Then model the workshop process using a draft of a poem you have written or the first draft of a poem you find online from a trusted source. Students can practice saying something positive about your poem and asking questions. For their own peer review, allow students to choose their partners so they are sharing with people they trust. Look for opportunities to celebrate students' work so that they come to view themselves as members of a larger community of readers, writers, and thinkers.

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4 Kaleena Black, "Who Should You Show Your Writing To? Jacqueline Woodson Has Advice!" ed. Cheryl Lederle, *Teaching with the Library of Congress* (blog), published February 1, 2018, accessed October 10, 2018.

## “Where I’m From”

By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,  
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.  
I am from the dirt under the back porch.  
(Black, glistening,  
it tasted like beets.)  
I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.

I’m from fudge and eyeglasses,  
from Imogene and Alafair.  
I’m from the know-it-alls  
and the pass-it-ons,  
from Perk up! and Pipe down!  
I’m from He restoreth my soul  
with a cottonball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.

I’m from Artemus and Billie’s Branch,  
fried corn and strong coffee.  
From the finger my grandfather lost  
to the auger,  
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box  
spilling old pictures,  
a sift of lost faces  
to drift beneath my dreams.  
I am from those moments —  
snapped before I budded —  
leaf-fall from the family tree.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> George Ella Lyon, “Where I’m From,” georgeellalyon.com. Copyright © 1999 by George Ella Lyon. Reproduced with permission.

## “Where I’m From” Brainstorm

**Directions:** First, finish the sentence stem in the box below. Then list words and phrases in the chart that help you describe where you are from. Be as specific as possible! You will be using some of these ideas to create your own “Where I’m From” poem.

I am from . . .
-----------------

People connected to this place	
Ordinary things found here	
Foods eaten here	
Traditions practiced here	
Important values and beliefs	
Images (what I see)	
Sounds	
Smells	
Emotions this place evokes	
Happy memories of this place	
Sad memories of this place	
_____ memories of this place	

Things lost in this place	
Things found in this place	
Things that grow in this place	
Words or phrases repeated in this place	
Other:	

# “the stories of south carolina run like rivers”

## Essential Questions

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Guiding Questions

- What are the legacies of the Jim Crow era, and how do they impact Jacqueline’s sense of who she is and where she belongs?
- What are the written and unwritten rules of society in *Brown Girl Dreaming*? How does the memoir’s moral universe (the setting) influence the characters’ choices?
- Do laws or do the hearts and minds of individuals play a greater role in creating a just and equal society?

## Student Learning Outcomes

*In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .*

- Value the complexity of identity in themselves and others.
- Describe the factors that influence their moral development, such as their personal experiences, their interactions with others, and their surroundings, and reflect on how these factors influence their sense of right and wrong.
- Make real-world connections that explore historical and contemporary contexts in literature.



## Core Activities

*As you make choices about which activities to teach, we suggest prioritizing the following, which are foundational to supporting students' exploration of this section's guiding questions and progression toward the learning outcomes:*

- Activity 1: Explore the Legacies of the Jim Crow Era
- Activity 2: Add Complexity to the Concept of Identity
- Activity 3: Understand Nonviolent Direct Action
- Activity 4: Explore the Moral Universe of Setting

## Section Overview

Part 2 is the longest section of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, so it may require more time and attention in class. Woodson explores the legacies of the Jim Crow era and the ways in which African Americans in the South participated in small and large acts of resistance against the dehumanization, discrimination, and violence they faced. With the children now living with their grandparents in Nicholtown, a predominantly African American community in Greenville, Jacqueline's mother makes trips to New York, searching for a home to call her own. As students read Part 2, there are opportunities to deepen their understanding of the historical context and to explore how the written and unwritten rules of a place, the "moral universe" of a setting, can help to shape or explain characters' interactions, choices, and courses of action. Applying these lenses to the text can help students understand that where and when we live can influence our sense of who we are and where we belong, as well as the choices available to us and our decision-making processes.

# Activities for Deeper Understanding

Choose from the following activities and corresponding student **discussion questions** to create your daily lesson plans for this section of the text.

## Pre-Reading Activities

### 1. Explore the Legacies of the Jim Crow Era

*The memoir explores the legacies of Jim Crow and the nonviolent protests taking place in Greenville and elsewhere in the United States. Understanding the systems of racial separation and institutionalized segregation implemented during the Jim Crow era can help students recognize the impact of its ongoing legacy on the identities and choices available to Jacqueline and her family. Before teaching this activity, familiarize yourself with the **Four Corners** and **Say Something** teaching strategies.*

Start by having students reflect on their ideas about justice, using the **Exploring Justice Anticipation Guide** handout. Use the **Four Corners** teaching strategy to engage students in a discussion about their responses. Then ask students to respond to the following question in their journals: *Do laws or do the hearts and minds of individuals play a greater role in creating a just and equal society?*

Next, explain to students that they will learn about the historical context and the lasting impact of Jim Crow laws. During the Jim Crow era, the period from roughly the 1870s to the 1960s, Southern whites succeeded in passing laws that segregated and disenfranchised African Americans in the South. While *Brown Girl Dreaming* takes place later, in the 1960s and 1970s, many of Woodson's poems highlight the lasting impact of the Jim Crow era on her family and on the hearts and minds of the Greenville community.

Distribute the **Jim Crow Laws** reading and the **Say Something Sentence Starters** handout. Model the **Say Something** teaching strategy with the first two paragraphs. Then divide the class into small groups to finish the reading, pausing at the end of each paragraph to "say something." As a class, discuss any questions that arose as groups read the article, and then discuss the following questions:

- What are specific examples of how the Jim Crow laws impacted the daily lives of people in the South?
- How did the Jim Crow laws make travel for Black individuals in the South difficult and dangerous?

#### Materials

##### Handout

Exploring Justice Anticipation Guide

##### Reading

Jim Crow Laws

##### Handout

Say Something Sentence Starters

##### Video

Growing Up Under Jim Crow

Get these materials in **Google Doc** format

- Where do you see evidence of these challenges and dangers in the article and in the first part of *Brown Girl Dreaming*? How do they impact the characters' choices and sense of belonging?

Next, explain to students that they will watch a short video in which the late congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis reflects on growing up in rural Alabama during the Jim Crow era. Show the video [Growing Up under Jim Crow](#) (01:54). Then give students time to write in their journals in response to the following questions:

- What about John Lewis's testimony is most striking to you? What does it make you think about or feel?
- What is the value of hearing this kind of firsthand account? What new, different, or deeper understanding of the Jim Crow era does it provide you with?

To help students synthesize ideas from this activity's resources and *Brown Girl Dreaming*, divide the class into small groups and explain the [Create a Headline](#) teaching strategy. To create their headline, groups should consider the materials from this activity and Part 1 of *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Assign each group one of the following questions for their headline:

- What do these sources tell us about the effects of the Jim Crow laws on the country?
- What do these sources tell us about the effects of the Jim Crow laws on individuals and groups of people?
- What do these sources tell us about the role of laws in creating a just and equal society?
- What do these sources tell us about the role of individuals in creating a just and equal society?

Students should have an opportunity to share the headlines they created. Consider using the [Wraparound](#) or [Gallery Walk](#) strategy to share their headlines.

## Through-Reading Activities

### 2. Add Complexity to the Concept of Identity

#### After reading "the candy lady," page 70

*This activity invites students to explore how our sense of who we are and where we belong is impacted by our setting, whether it be our home, community, school, or place of worship, as well as the norms, values, and people who inhabit those spaces. These factors can all contribute to whether we feel like an insider or an*

#### Materials

##### Handout

Influences on Identity

Get this handout in [Google Doc](#) format

*outsider—a heightened concern for the adolescents in your classroom. Good stopping points for adding to the graphic organizer are “changes” on page 108 and “roman” on page 138, as well as the end of Parts 3, 4, and 5 of the memoir.*

Pass out the **Influences on Identity** handout and have students write Jacqueline’s name in the center. Read the handout out loud as a class to clarify any new vocabulary terms. Move students into pairs to explore how customs, culture, and place influence Jacqueline’s sense of who she is and where she belongs. Pairs should work together to find evidence from the text that helps them answer the questions in each box of the graphic organizer. Then have pairs combine to form groups of four to discuss the following questions, which you can debrief as a class.

- Share your responses to the questions on the handout. What new information from your group members can you add?
- Where does Jacqueline get her beliefs about herself, her family, and the world around her? Where does she get her values?
- How do family stories and historical events influence how Jacqueline understands herself and the world around her?
- How does Jacqueline’s membership in different groups—her family, neighborhood, community, and church, for example—affect how other people think about her? How does her membership in these groups affect how she thinks about herself?

Finally, invite students to complete the **Influences on Identity** handout for themselves and to reflect on the discussion questions in their journals. Let them know that they will not be sharing their graphic organizers with their peers. On an **exit card**, have students respond to the following question: *What new, different, or deeper understanding do you have about the concept of identity after engaging with this activity? Your response can be about the memoir, your own identity, or both.*

### 3. Understand Nonviolent Direct Action

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**“south carolina at war,” pages 72–73; “the training,” pages 75–77; “miss bell and the marchers,” pages 80–81; “american dream,” pages 88–89; “the fabric store,” pages 90–91; and “ghosts,” page 92**

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*For this activity, students watch a clip from Episode 3: “Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960–1961)” of the documentary series *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1985*. You can access this video on Kanopy, which partners with participating public libraries, as well as on HBO Max and Amazon Prime. The clip contains the “N” word, racist statements, and instances of violence, so it is crucial that you preview the video and read *Facing History’s Strategies for Addressing Racist and Dehumanizing Language in Literature* before considering whether or not the video is appropriate for your class.*

You should also review the steps of Project Zero's **Take Note Thinking Routine**. Your students may have an emotional response to some of the interviews or scenes from the sit-ins, and you can help them use these questions, especially the second one, to process their emotions. You will need to decide how you would like students to respond during the routine (index cards, a handout, a Google Doc, a Padlet, etc.) and how they will share what they write with their peers and with you. **It is important that you take the time to prepare to teach this activity and its materials with care and intention and be attentive and responsive to your students' needs during the lesson.**

### **Part 1: Learn about the Nonviolent Protests in the South**

If your students did Activity 1: Explore the Legacies of the Jim Crow Era, start by inviting pairs to review the reading and then engage in a quick pair-share to discuss the following question: *In Part 2 of the memoir so far, how does growing up during the Jim Crow era impact Jacqueline and her family? Consider their sense of who they are, their choices, and their actions. Invite pairs to share their thoughts with the class.*

Share the **Take Note** questions and let students know that as they watch the video, you will pause it so they can respond in writing to ONE question and can process what they are viewing with their peers. They should not take notes while they are watching the video so they can fully engage with the content. The Take Note questions are as follows:

- What is the most important point?
- What are you finding challenging, puzzling, or difficult to understand?
- What question would you most like to discuss?
- What is something that you found interesting?

Show the video clip from Part 3 of *Eyes on the Prize: "Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960–1961)"* (00:00–11:25). Pause after each of the following sections for the Take Note routine: 00:00–03:50 / 03:50–7:35 / 7:35–11:25. After the final round, move students into small groups so they can share their notes and try to respond to any questions others may have raised. Circulate during their discussions in order to check in with individual students or groups as needed.

### **Part 2: Apply the Historical Context to the Memoir and Our Lives**

Divide the class into five groups for a **Jigsaw** activity with the poems listed above to help students draw connections between the nonviolent direct action they are learning about in *Brown Girl Dreaming* and the *Eyes on the Prize* video clip. Assign each group one poem, and have the groups read their poems two times and then discuss the following questions:

- What is happening in your poem?
- What choices are characters making? What factors are influencing their choices? What are the consequences of their choices?

- How does the video clip confirm, challenge, or change your understanding of the poem?

Then move into “teaching” groups. In “teaching” groups, students should share summaries of their poems and “expert” group discussions. Then have them discuss the following questions in “teaching” groups and as a class:

- How can learning about the period in history in which a book is set help you understand the characters and the choices they make?
- In your opinion, do laws or do the hearts and minds of individuals play a greater role in creating a just and equal society? How do this collection of poems, the video, and your own experiences help you answer this question?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who we are today? How can the video, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, and your own experiences help you answer these questions?

**Extension:** In their journals or on an **exit card**, ask students to respond to the question that Jacqueline poses in the poem “american dream” on page 88: “*What’s the thing . . . that would make people want to live together?*” Debrief by asking students to share one phrase or sentence from their journals in a **Wraparound**, or start the next class by synthesizing ideas from their exit cards.

#### 4. Explore the Moral Universe of Setting

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##### after reading “my mother looks back on greenville,” pages 105–106

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*This activity helps to engage students with the complexity of setting and the ways in which time and place can impact our sense of self and belonging in the world. In order to understand the moral choices that characters in literature make, we must first examine the identities of those making the moral choices, as well as the context in which those choices are made. Trying to navigate the (often unwritten) rules of a place is a complex task that characters face in the world of the text and that we ourselves face in the real world.*

##### Part 1: Introduce the Concept of Moral Universe

Introduce the concept of “moral universe” by asking the class to list spaces in the school where students congregate (cafeteria, locker rooms, certain hallways, library, school or public buses) and writing their ideas on the board. Then have each student choose one space to reflect on in a journal response that explores these questions:

- What are the written rules of the space? Who creates them?
- What are the unwritten rules of the space? Who creates them?
- How do individuals learn how to act in this space?



- How do the written and unwritten rules impact how you feel and the choices you can make in this space?

Debrief in pairs and as a class. Then explain to students that, just as in real life, the setting of a work of literature is much more than the time and place where the story happens. Setting also refers to the “moral universe” of the time and place. Write or project the definition of “moral universe” on the board: “The rules, constraints, possibilities, potential conflicts and potential consequences that affect the choices the characters make.”<sup>1</sup> In literature, characters must negotiate the written and unwritten rules of the setting in order to navigate its power hierarchies and systems of values, norms, and expectations. So, when talking about a story’s setting, in addition to information like where and when a story takes place, readers must also take into consideration its moral universe in order to fully understand characters’ identities, their sense of belonging, their choices, and their course of action.

To the extent possible, have students work in small groups to apply the definition of “moral universe” to the space they identified in their journals. The following questions can guide their discussions. Model the activity with a space students didn’t write about, such as the teacher’s lounge, in order to help explain what is meant by *norms, values, taboos, and hierarchies*.

- How would you describe the “moral universe” of this space? In other words, what are the rules, norms, values, taboos, and hierarchies that shape this space?
- What possible conflicts happen there?
- What are some potential consequences of these conflicts?

Invite each group to share one or two ideas from their discussion with the class. Encourage students to look for patterns across spaces.

## **Part 2: Explore Moral Universe in *Brown Girl Dreaming***

*Depending on time and students’ familiarity with the text, you can have groups focus on the first portion of Part 2 (pages 45–106) for their “moral universe of setting” webs, assign each group two or three poems from Part 2 to focus on, or invite groups to find evidence in any of the poems they’ve read so far.*

Consider the following three settings for this activity: grandparents’ home in Nicholtown, the Nicholtown neighborhood and community, and downtown Greenville. Divide students into groups and assign each group one of the settings. Model the activity on the board by drawing a web with six “spurs.” Write a setting that students aren’t analyzing, such as the interstate bus, in the center of the web and label the “spurs” as follows: *Rules, Norms, Values, Taboos, Hierarchies, Expectations*. Explain that you are going to find quotations and examples from the

<sup>1</sup> Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, *Fresh Takes on Literary Elements: How to Teach What Really Matters About Character, Setting, Point of View, and Theme* (Scholastic, 2010), 71.

text that help you answer the following questions: *What are the written and unwritten rules of this setting? How does the moral universe of this setting influence the characters' choices?* Invite the class to help. Then have groups create their “moral universe of setting” webs for one of the three settings listed above on large paper.

Share the posters in a **gallery walk**. You might give each student three different-colored sticky notes so they can post a *connection*, a *question*, and a *comment* as they view their classmates' work. Then have students discuss the following questions in small groups and as a class, providing specific examples from their webs and the text to support their reasoning:

- What are the written and unwritten rules of society in *Brown Girl Dreaming*?
- How does the moral universe of the text influence the characters' choices?
- What are the consequences for characters if they challenge the written and unwritten rules of society?
- How is the setting and its moral universe similar to or different from our world today? What makes you say that?

## 5. Memory and the Five Senses

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### “as a child, i smelled the air,” pages 95–96, and “changes,” pages 108–109

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*This activity invites students to consider the relationship between memory and identity and the ways in which memory and the senses are intertwined. Students will also have an opportunity in the Extension activity to write their own sensory poem.*

Arrange students in pairs and assign each pair one of the two poems. Explain that in both poems, Woodson includes rich sensory imagery to convey her ideas. Have pairs read their poem out loud and then again to themselves. Then have them discuss the following questions, recording notes that they can share with a small group:

- What sensory images does Woodson incorporate into this poem? Make a list of the sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell images.
- What feelings or emotions does this poem convey? How does Woodson use sensory images to convey these feelings and emotions?
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* is made up of snapshots of memories, each one captured in a poem. Why do you think Woodson included this poem in her memoir? In other words, why do you think this memory moment is significant to her as she reflects on her experiences growing up?

Combine pairs into groups of four so that each group has a pair with each poem. Read the two poems out loud to the class, and then have pairs share their lists

and responses to the two discussion questions before discussing the following question in groups and as a class:

- What do these poems suggest about the relationship between our senses and our memories?
- What do your own experiences suggest about the relationship between our senses and our memories?

**Extension:** Invite students to craft their own sensory poems about a powerful childhood memory. Start by having them brainstorm a list of memories in their journals and then choose one memory moment to explore in a poem. Once they have selected their memory moment, have them list as many sensory details as they can for each of the five senses that they associate with that memory. They can combine these details into a short sensory poem. Alternatively, they can write two to three sentences that use sensory images to explore the memory moment and the feelings it elicits, or they can try their hand at sensory haiku.

## Post-Reading Activities

### 6. *Brown Girl Dreaming* and Me

*This recurring activity prompts students to reread poems from the section of the memoir they have just completed and invites them to draw connections between the text and their own lives. See the Part 1: “i am born” Post-Reading Activities for details.*

Follow the instructions in Part 1: “i am born” for the written reflection portion of this activity. Then use the **Save the Last Word for Me** teaching strategy to have students share their ideas with their peers and learn how others in the class are connecting to the memoir.

### 7. Prepare for the Summative Assessment

*If you haven’t already done so, share your summative assessment assignment and criteria with the class. Let students know that they will have opportunities to pause at the end of each section of the text, synthesize new understanding, ask questions, and practice new skills. Then choose the activity that corresponds with your assessment, or create your own. You can find detailed explanations of each assessment in the final section of this guide (page 82).*

- **Final Journal Reflection:** Have students reread their journal entries and notes from Part 2: “the stories of south carolina run like rivers” and then choose one that they want to explore in more detail by recasting it into a different poetic form. Suggestions for new forms include the following: **found poem**, free-verse poem, sonnet, acrostic, or haiku.

- **Socratic Seminar Discussion:** Depending on your learning goals for Part 2 of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, choose between the following questions for a structured discussion that uses the **Learn to Listen, Listen to Learn** strategy to help students develop their listening skills:
  - What individuals and experiences are shaping Jacqueline’s beliefs about herself and the world around her at this point in the text? How do you know?
  - How do history and the legacy of past generations influence Jacqueline’s sense of who she is and her understanding of the world around her?

Instruct students to choose two or three specific moments in Part 2 of the memoir that help them answer the question and then reflect on these in their journals. Let them know that they will be sharing their ideas in a structured small-group discussion that will help prepare them to participate in a larger Socratic seminar at the end of the unit. Then invite them to set a personal goal for the discussion. Perhaps they would like to step up or step back to create space for others, or provide concrete evidence from the text, or look for opportunities to build off of someone else’s idea. Move students into groups of four and have them share their personal goals for the discussion. Then explain the strategy and briefly discuss the challenges of active listening—really staying in the moment and focusing on what someone is saying rather than your response or what else might be happening around you. After groups have had their discussions, use the **Exit Card** strategy to have students reflect on their participation.

- **Poetry Anthology Project:** If your students drafted sensory poems, have them bring these through a revision cycle. So that they can continue to practice providing constructive, rather than destructive, criticism, follow the instructions for the revision protocol described in Part 1: “i am born,” Prepare for the Summative Assessment.

## Exploring Justice Anticipation Guide

**Directions:** Read the statement in the left column. Decide if you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD) with the statement. Circle your response and provide a one- to two-sentence explanation of your opinion.

Statement	Your Opinion
1. Laws play an important role in shaping who I am.	<p><b>SA    A    D    SD</b></p> <p>Explain:</p>
2. It is possible to create a fully equal society.	<p><b>SA    A    D    SD</b></p> <p>Explain:</p>
3. People, not laws, are most responsible for creating a just society.	<p><b>SA    A    D    SD</b></p> <p>Explain:</p>
4. Culture, custom, and tradition are more powerful than laws.	<p><b>SA    A    D    SD</b></p> <p>Explain:</p>

## Jim Crow Laws

*This reading, adapted from PBS's American Experience website, provides an overview of the historical context and lasting impact of Jim Crow laws.*

The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as “Jim Crow” represented a formal, codified system of racial apartheid that dominated the American South for three-quarters of a century beginning in the 1890s. The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants. “Whites Only” and “Colored” signs were constant reminders of the enforced racial order.

In legal theory, Blacks received “separate but equal” treatment under the law—in actuality, public facilities for Blacks were nearly always inferior to those for whites, when they existed at all. In addition, Blacks were systematically denied the right to vote in most of the rural South through the selective application of literacy tests and other racially motivated criteria.

The Jim Crow system was upheld by local government officials and reinforced by acts of terror perpetrated by vigilantes. In 1896, the Supreme Court established the doctrine of separate but equal in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, after a Black man in New Orleans attempted to sit in a whites-only railway car.

In 1908, journalist Ray Stannard Baker observed that “no other point of race contact is so much and so bitterly discussed among Negroes as the Jim Crow car.” As bus travel became widespread in the South over the first half of the 20th century, it followed the same pattern.

“Travel in the segregated South for Black people was humiliating,” recalled Diane Nash in her interview for *Freedom Riders*. “The very fact that there were separate facilities was to say to Black people and white people that Blacks were so subhuman and so inferior that we could not even use the public facilities that white people used.”

Transit was a core component of segregation in the South, as the 1947 Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) pamphlet and Bayard Rustin song “You Don’t Have to Ride Jim Crow” attests. Keeping whites and Blacks from sitting together on a bus, train, or trolley car might seem insignificant, but it was one more link in a system of segregation that had to be defended at all times—lest it collapse. Thus transit was a logical point of attack for the foes of segregation, in the courtroom and on the buses themselves.

It would take several decades of legal action and months of nonviolent direct action before these efforts achieved their intended result.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from “Jim Crow Laws,” *American Experience*, WGBH, accessed October 14, 2021.



# Say Something Sentence Starters<sup>1</sup>

**Directions:** Assign roles by deciding who will start reading out loud and who will pause the reader to “say something” about the text using the prompts below: a comment, question, clarifying statement, connection, or prediction. The reader starts reading out loud. After a bit, the other student pauses the reader to “say something.” Group members can contribute to the discussion at this time. Then change roles.

<p><b>Make a Comment</b></p> <p>The most valuable idea is . . .</p> <p>My favorite part/character so far is . . .</p> <p>I think that . . .</p> <p>This is confusing because . . .</p> <p>I don't like this part because . . .</p> <p>This is similar to . . .</p> <p>This is different from . . .</p> <p>I noticed that . . .</p> <p>I'm surprised that . . .</p> <p>From this part, I can visualize . . .</p>	<p><b>Ask a Question</b></p> <p>Why did . . .</p> <p>What motivated them to . . .</p> <p>Why did they choose to . . .</p> <p>What happened when . . .</p> <p>Who is . . .</p> <p>How does _____ connect to . . .</p> <p>Do you think that . . .</p> <p>What makes you say . . .</p> <p>I wonder why the author . . .</p>
<p><b>Clarify Something</b></p> <p>This makes sense now because . . .</p> <p>It is all clear to me now because . . .</p> <p>Are you sure? I think this means . . .</p> <p>I agree with you that this suggests . . .</p> <p>I used to think . . . but now I think . . .</p> <p>I still think . . . but I would like to add . . .</p> <p>I'm not sure that . . .</p> <p>I would like to talk about . . .</p> <p>I have a different idea . . .</p>	<p><b>Make a Connection</b></p> <p>This part/character reminds me of . . .</p> <p>This is similar to . . .</p> <p>This is different from . . .</p> <p>Something like this happened to me when . . .</p> <p>I see what the text is saying, but from my experience, it's more like . . .</p> <p>This setting makes me think of . . .</p> <p>This reminds me of . . .</p> <p>I can relate to this because . . .</p>
<p><b>Make a Prediction</b></p> <p>This reminds me of . . . Based on that, I think . . . will happen next.</p> <p>This character/scene/setting is like . . . because . . .</p> <p>I wonder if . . .</p> <p>Based on what is happening here, I bet . . . will happen next because . . .</p> <p>I think that . . .</p>	<p><b>Other (Write your own ideas here!)</b></p>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Kylene Beers, *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 108.

# Influences on Identity

**Directions:** In the center, write your name. In each of the boxes, record your answers to the questions about the factors that can influence identity.

## PLACE & BELONGING

Where do you call home or feel most at home?

What do you feel like when you are in this place?

## CULTURES & CUSTOMS

What traditions or cultural practices are most important to you?

Where or from whom did you learn them?

**NAME**

What beliefs and values are most important to you?

Where or from whom did you learn them?

What 3–5 words best describe you?

What makes you a unique individual?

## BELIEFS & VALUES

## ASPECTS OF IDENTITY

# “followed the sky’s mirrored constellation to freedom”

## Essential Questions

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Guiding Questions

- How does our membership in various groups—families, religions, schools, neighborhoods—affect how others think about us? How does it affect how we think about ourselves?
- What role do stories and imagination play in Jacqueline’s life and how she comes to understand her world?
- How can the acts of writing and storytelling influence the way we make sense of the world?

## Student Learning Outcomes

*In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .*

- Examine how their identity is a combination of who they say they are, who others say they are, and who they hope to be in the future.
- Practice perspective-taking in order to develop empathy and recognize the limits of any one person’s point of view.
- Recognize the power that comes with telling their own story and engaging with the stories of others.

## Core Activities

*As you make choices about which activities to teach, we suggest prioritizing the following, which are foundational to supporting students' exploration of this section's guiding questions and progression toward the learning outcomes:*

- Activity 2: Explore the Relationship between Identity and Storytelling
- Activity 5: Map Jacqueline's Inner World

## Section Overview

This section opens in Brooklyn, which turns out to be different from the place Jacqueline imagined based on the stories she heard others tell. Jacqueline compares her new life in the city to her old one, with its rain, fresh grass, ample food, and beloved grandparents. In New York, Uncle Robert becomes an important figure in Jacqueline's life, and while some family members accuse her of lying when she spins stories out of memories, Uncle Robert encourages her to continue making them up. During the summer, Jacqueline returns to Greenville with her older siblings and, like her mother, starts to feel like she belongs to two very different places. Reflecting on the relationship between identity and storytelling—the stories we tell about ourselves and the ones others tell about us—can help students consider the role that stories and imagination play in Jacqueline's identity development as well as in their own lives and how they come to understand the world around them.

# Activities for Deeper Understanding

Choose from the following activities and corresponding student discussion questions to create your daily lesson plans for this section of the text.

## Pre-Reading Activities

### 1. Make Predictions about Part 3

Before reading Part 3, ask students to respond to the following questions in their journals in order to make predictions and build schema. You can ask students to revisit their responses after reading Part 3 to see which, if any, predictions were accurate and to discuss the significance of the section's title.

- What images come to mind when you read the section title: “followed the sky’s mirrored constellation to freedom”? Make a list in your journal.
- What do you think might happen in this part of the memoir? What makes you say that?
- What questions does the title or anything that has happened in the memoir so far raise for you?

## Through-Reading Activities

### 2. Explore the Relationship between Identity and Storytelling

“first grade,” pages 158–159; “brooklyn rain,” pages 165–166; “uncle robert,” pages 171–173; “believing,” pages 175–176

#### Materials

##### Handout

Storytelling Sketch to Stretch

Get this handout in [Google Doc](#) format

*An important part of our ability to understand ourselves and our identities is being able to create coherent stories about our lives. This activity invites students to consider the role that storytelling plays in Jacqueline’s emerging understanding of herself and the world around her, as well as in their own lives.*

Distribute the **Storytelling Sketch to Stretch** handout. Read the quotations out loud and invite students to choose one that resonates with them for a **Sketch to Stretch** journal reflection. Model the activity with your own sketch, emphasizing that a sketch is a quick visual representation and not a work of art.

Let students know that they are going to consider how the stories Jacqueline tells and hears influence her sense of who she is and the world around her as she gets older. Using the **Jigsaw** strategy, move students into expert groups and assign

each group one of this activity's four poems. Have groups read their poems out loud two times and discuss the following questions:

- What line, stanza, or image stands out to you and why?
- In your poem, what story is Jacqueline telling?
- What messages, if any, is she hearing from others? Do these messages align with what she is thinking and feeling, or are they different?
- Sometimes poems have an *epigraph*. An epigraph is a quotation from another literary work that is placed underneath the title of the poem. Imagine that Jacqueline Woodson asked you to select an epigraph for this poem and gave you the four quotations on the Storytelling Sketch to Stretch handout to choose from. Which one would you choose and why?

Move students into “teaching” groups and have them briefly summarize their poem and share their favorite line, stanza, or image. Then have them discuss the following questions in their new groups and as a class:

- What role do stories and imagination play in Jacqueline’s life and the ways she comes to understand her world?
- What do these poems suggest about the ways in which reading, writing, and storytelling influence how Jacqueline understands herself and her world?
- How can the acts of writing and storytelling influence the way we make sense of ourselves and the world around us today?

**Extension:** In their journals, on an **exit card**, or using an online tool like Padlet or Flipgrid, have students respond to the following question: *Write about a story that you read or were told that influenced you in some way. What is the story, and how did it influence the way you saw yourself, others, or your world?*

### 3. Consider What It Means to Be “Halfway Home”

**“halfway home #1,” page 104, and “halfway home #2,” pages 183–184**

*For this activity, students will do a close reading of a poem to deepen their understanding of character, conflict, and theme and then consider the ways in which the concepts of home, place, and belonging that are developed in the text can apply to their own lives.*

#### Materials

##### Handout

Read the Word,  
Read the World

Get this handout in  
**Google Doc** format



## Part 1: Read the Word

Divide the class into pairs and review the **Read the Word, Read the World** handout. Assign pairs one of the following combinations:

- “halfway home #1” on page 104 and Jacqueline’s mother
- “halfway home #2” on pages 183–184 and Jacqueline

Instruct pairs to read their poem out loud two times and then discuss the questions on the handout, recording notes as they talk. Let them know that while they should focus on their assigned poem, they can look for supporting evidence in other poems, especially for “Scene” and “Theme.” Model with an example to demonstrate how you would like them to add notes on the handout.

Then combine pairs into groups of four to learn about the poem they didn’t analyze before you facilitate a whole-class discussion of the “Read the Word” questions, focusing on the text’s theme and how Woodson develops it.

## Part 2: Read the World

Have students complete the second part of the handout on their own in class or for homework. Debrief by asking students to share one idea from their reflection, using the **Wraparound** or **Concentric Circles** strategy. Then discuss one or more of the Read the World questions as a class.

## 4. Poetry and Place

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### “home again to hall street,” pages 191–192

---

*Invite students to draw inspiration from poems about the various places where Jacqueline lives in Part 3 of the memoir to craft a sensory poem for one of these settings. You will need to revise the second discussion question if you did not teach Activity 4: Explore the Moral Universe of Setting for Part 2 of the memoir.*

As a class, review the settings where Jacqueline has lived in Part 3: Bristol Street (page 144), Herzl Street (pages 145–150), Madison Street (pages 151–190), and Hall Street (191–203). Let students know that they will be writing a sensory poem about one of these settings. Divide them into pairs or small groups, and assign a setting or let them choose. They should first review the poem(s) for setting and then discuss the following questions, recording notes to capture their thinking:

- Where is this setting? Based on what you have read, what do you know about its location and what it looks like?
- What is the “moral universe” of this setting? In other words, what are the rules, norms, values, taboos, and hierarchies that shape this space?
- How does Jacqueline feel in this setting? How do you know?

- How do members of Jacqueline’s family feel in this setting? How do you know?
- What are one or two lines or phrases from the text that best describe this setting or how Jacqueline feels there?

Debrief as a class to share ideas, and then have the pairs or groups craft a short poem that captures how Jacqueline or another character feels in this setting. They might include phrases from Woodson’s poem to make a found poem, or they might look for interesting phrases in their journals or on their handouts to incorporate. Challenge them to be intentional about line breaks and how they land their poem on the final line. Volunteers can share their poems with the class in a celebration of learning.

## 5. Map Jacqueline’s Inner World

### after reading Part 3

*This activity supports students in building empathy by asking them to examine Jacqueline’s emotions, motivations, and behaviors at this point in the memoir and then draw connections between the text and the world today. Students will create character maps, which they can add to after reading Part 4 and Part 5 to track Jacqueline’s identity development, growing sense of agency, and understanding of the world around her.*

Divide the class into small groups and give each group a large piece of paper. Let students know that they will be responding to questions in order to better understand Jacqueline’s worldview at this moment in the text. Project the questions one section at a time. Instruct students to discuss the questions in their groups, supporting their ideas with short quotations and specific examples from the text. Then have them draw that body part and label it with a few key pieces of evidence. Model the “Draw a head” step on the board, identifying examples of direct and indirect characterization if your students are familiar with these concepts.

- **Draw a head.** Discuss the questions, writing key ideas inside and around the head. Save room for the eyes, ears, and mouth.
  - What does Jacqueline think about herself?
  - What does she think about other characters in the book?
  - What does she think about her community or world around her?
- **Add the ears.** Discuss the questions, writing ideas around the ears or in speech bubbles that connect to the ears in order to capture the idea that Jacqueline is hearing others say this information.
  - What does Jacqueline hear other people saying about her?
  - What messages does she receive about herself—her identity or groups she belongs to—from her family, friends, society, or the media?

- **Add the eyes and the mouth.** Discuss the questions, writing ideas inside and around the eyes and mouth, or add a speech bubble to capture what Jacqueline says.
  - What does Jacqueline see in the world around her?
  - What does she say to her family members?
  - What does she say to her friends or other young people she interacts with?
  - What does she say to people she doesn't know well?
  
- **Now the body!** First, draw a big heart. Discuss the questions, writing ideas in and around the heart.
  - Who or what does Jacqueline care about?
  - What does she feel?
  - What does she want for herself, others, or the world?
  
- **Draw the hands.** Discuss these questions, writing ideas around the hands.
  - What does Jacqueline do or want to do to help the people or causes she cares about?
  - What skills or talents does she have that she could use (or does use) to help other people or her community?
  
- **Finally, draw the feet.** Discuss the questions, writing ideas around the feet.
  - How has Jacqueline changed over the course of the book so far?
  - Where does she want to go in life?
  
- **Group Discussion:** Have groups review their character maps and then discuss the following questions together. If time allows, form new groups so students can compare and contrast what they learned before synthesizing key ideas in a class discussion.
  - What new, different, or deeper understanding do you have about Jacqueline—her identity, feelings, or motivations—after mapping her internal world?
  - There is an old saying: “You can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes.” What does this quotation mean? What do you think it feels like to walk in Jacqueline's shoes?
  - What do you think Jacqueline wants her family to understand about her at this point in the book? What do you think she would want you, the reader, to understand about her?

- What, if any, other characters in *Brown Girl Dreaming* share Jacqueline's perspective? What characters have different perspectives in terms of what they care about, feel, or want?
- How can understanding someone else's perspective be useful when trying to negotiate with someone or solve a conflict?

**Extension:** Have students follow the same procedure to create character maps for themselves that they share in a **Concentric Circles** or **Gallery Walk** strategy format. If you would like them to write about their maps, you can adapt the discussion questions for students to choose from for a paragraph response.

## Post-Reading Activities

### 6. *Brown Girl Dreaming* and Me

*This recurring activity prompts students to reread poems from the section of the memoir they have just completed and invites them to draw connections between the text and their own lives. See Part 1: "i am born" Post-Reading Activities for details.*

This week, use the **Save the Last Word for Me** teaching strategy so students can share their ideas about their favorite poems with their peers and hear how others in the class are connecting to the memoir.

### 7. Prepare for the Summative Assessment

*If you haven't already done so, share your summative assessment assignment and criteria with the class. Let students know that they will have opportunities to pause at the end of each section of the text, synthesize new understanding, ask questions, and practice new skills. Then choose the activity that corresponds with your assessment, or create your own. You can find detailed explanations of each assessment in the final section of this guide (page 82).*

- **Final Journal Reflection:** Have students reread their journal entries from Part 3: "followed the sky's mirrored constellation to freedom" and choose one entry that they are comfortable sharing with their peers. If they don't have an entry from this section of the memoir, they can choose a reflection from Part 1 or Part 2. Let students know that they will be sharing their entries in a Journal Pass activity. To keep other entries private, students can use binder clips to secure the pages and a sheet of paper to cover entries on the facing page. Alternatively, you could give them time to rewrite their journal entry on a fresh sheet of paper for this activity.

Decide how students will comment in each other's journals (in the margins or on sticky notes, for example). Review the class contract to reiterate classroom norms and expectations, and then arrange the class in a circle. Have students pass their journal in a clockwise fashion two students to the

left. Instruct them to read the entry and respond in writing to ONE of the following prompts that they choose:

- What is the most valuable idea in this journal entry? What makes you say that?
- How does this entry connect to your own thinking or experiences?
- I used to think . . . , but now I think/wonder . . .

Repeat the process until students have had a chance to respond to four entries. Then return the journals to their owners and let them read the comments. Conclude the activity with a new reflection that responds to the following question: *What new, different, or deeper understanding do you have about the memoir, one of the unit essential questions, or your own experiences after reading your peers' ideas in the Journal Pass and reflecting on their comments?*

• **Socratic Seminar Discussion:**

The **Keep the Discussion Alive!** handout has sentence starters that help students develop the vocabulary they need to enter into discussions in meaningful ways. First, model a practice discussion using a guiding question or a question from the **Brown Girl Dreaming Discussion Questions** handout. Give students a few minutes to reflect on the question in their journals. Encourage them to gather evidence from the text and their resources from Part 3 of the memoir. Then pass out the **Keep the Discussion Alive!** handout and review it together. With a small group of students, engage in a five-minute discussion while the rest of the class listens and watches. Model entering a conversation by using the sentence starters on the handout. Debrief the practice discussion as a class to reflect on ways in which the discussion went well and how it could have been improved. Then have small groups follow the same process to discuss a different question, starting with a journal reflection to gather their thoughts and evidence.

**Materials**

**Handout**

Keep the Discussion Alive!

Get this handout in **Google Doc** format

- **Poetry Anthology Project:** *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a collection of snapshots—memory moments from Jacqueline’s childhood. This creative writing activity invites students to review Part 3 of the memoir to explore the relationship between memory and identity and then try their hand at writing a memory poem, perhaps modeled after “sunday afternoon on the front porch” (pages 199–201).

Let students know that they will be crafting memory poems on one of the topics that Woodson explores in Part 3 of *Brown Girl Dreaming*. To start, invite students to help you generate a list of memory moments in this part of the text:

- Moving to a new home
- The death of a relative

- Feeling different in school
- A classroom experience
- A story you heard or read as a child
- A rainy-day memory
- A first / the first time

Then discuss the following question: *Jacqueline Woodson chose to include these memory moments in her memoir about growing up in Greenville and Brooklyn in the 1960s and 1970s. What did she learn about herself, other people, and the world around her in these moments? How do you know?* Students can focus on specific poems or consider the section of the memoir as a whole.

Give students time to make a list of their own memory moments, perhaps building on the list you started on the board. Then have them explore one memory in a **Rapid-Fire Writing** journal response, which they can then recast into a free-verse poem. If applicable, encourage students to incorporate one or more poetic strategies that you have taught into their drafts (repetition, alliteration, imagery, metaphor, etc.).

## Storytelling Sketch to Stretch

**Directions:** Read the four quotations about identity and storytelling. Then choose one and, in the space below, create a sketch that reflects your ideas about what the quotation means.

Then write a short explanation that describes your ideas about the quotation.

1. "There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become." (Michelle Obama, *Becoming*)
2. "In our traditional way of life, we believe that I don't tell you who you are. You tell me who you are, and that is who you are." (Cherokee saying, epigraph to *Tell Me Who You Are*)
3. "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you." (Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*)
4. "Stories cannot demolish frontiers, but they can punch holes in our mental walls. And through those holes, we can get a glimpse of the other, and sometimes even like what we see." (Elif Shafak, "The Politics of Fiction" TED Talk)

Sketch:

Short explanation:



# Read the Word, Read the World

My Character: \_\_\_\_\_

## Read the Word

**Directions:** Discuss the “Read the Word” questions with your group. Record evidence from the text that supports your reasoning in the middle column. Then explain your thinking in the right-hand column. (Group members might have different ideas for the final column.)

Read the Word	Discussion Questions	Quotes and Notes	What Makes You Say That?
<b>Conflict</b>	What problems, struggles, and/or conflicts does the character face? Are the conflicts internal, external, or a combination of the two?		
<b>Perspective</b>	What does the character think, feel, and believe about what they are experiencing? Do other characters have similar or different perspectives?		
<b>Scene</b>	<p>What is a key scene in the text where the author develops a central conflict you identified? Reread the scene and then discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What emotions is the character feeling?</li> <li>• Is the character succeeding or failing? What makes you say that?</li> <li>• What is the source of conflict?</li> <li>• What is the character learning about themselves and/or their world?</li> </ul>		

**Theme**

1. What messages or big ideas are you taking away from this text? In other words, what might the author want you to think about as you read?

2. How does close-reading a scene by identifying the conflict and perspectives help you answer these questions?

## Keep the Discussion Alive!

**Directions:** Sometimes we run out of things to talk about during a discussion. Silence is okay, because it allows group members to collect their thoughts! But if you feel like you need help keeping the discussion alive, try using some of these sentence starters to get going and then build on each other's ideas.

### Ask a Question

Why did . . .  
Why did they choose to . . .  
What happened when . . .  
Wait! Who is . . .  
How does \_\_\_\_\_ connect to . . .  
Do you think that . . .  
I wonder why the author . . .

### Clarify Something

This makes sense now because . . .  
Are you sure? I think this means . . .  
I agree with you that this suggests . . .  
I used to think . . . but now I think . . .  
I'm not sure that . . .  
I would like to talk about . . .  
I have a different idea . . .

### Make a Prediction

I think the next chapter will be about . . .  
I wonder if . . .  
Based on what is happening, I bet \_\_\_\_\_  
will happen next because . . .  
I think that . . .

### Make a Comment

The most valuable idea is . . .  
My favorite part/character so far is . . .  
This is confusing because . . .  
I don't like this part because . . .  
This is similar to/different from . . .  
I'm surprised that . . .

### Make a Connection

This part/character reminds me of . . .  
I see what the book is saying, but  
from my experience, it's more like . . .  
This reminds me of . . .  
I can relate to this because . . .  
This part connects to . . .

# “deep in my heart, i do believe”

## Essential Questions

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Guiding Questions

- What makes a friendship a good friendship? What factors can complicate or destroy a good friendship?
- How do the assumptions that people make about Jacqueline and other members of her family impact their sense of who they are, where they belong, and the choices they make?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling influence the way Jacqueline sees herself and makes sense of her world?

## Student Learning Outcomes

*In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .*

- Examine how their identity is a combination of who they say they are, who others say they are, and who they hope to be in the future.
- Describe the factors that influence their moral development, such as their personal experiences, their interactions with others, and their surroundings, and reflect on how these factors shape their sense of right and wrong.
- Recognize the power that comes with telling their own story and engaging with the stories of others.

## Core Activities

*As you make choices about which activities to teach, we suggest prioritizing the following, which are foundational to supporting students' exploration of this section's guiding questions and progression toward the learning outcomes:*

- Activity 3: On Becoming a Reader and Writer
- Activity 4: Literature as “Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors”
- Activity 5: Analyze an “Aha” Moment

## Section Overview

In school, Jacqueline starts to self-identify as a reader and a writer. While she struggled to learn how to read as a young child, Jacqueline has a literacy breakthrough when she writes the lyrics to songs she hears on the radio, which she repeats back to herself until she has memorized them. In fourth grade, Jacqueline “publishes” her first collection of poems, discovers her love for Langston Hughes, and impresses her classmates by reciting Oscar Wilde’s “The Selfish Giant” from memory. During this time, she makes a new friend who teaches her Spanish and with whom she discovers a strong sense of belonging. Alongside these triumphs, Jacqueline and her family face challenges. Part 4 ends on a somber note when Uncle Robert is arrested and sent to prison, and then Jacqueline and her siblings take their first trip by airplane to reach their grandfather’s bedside before he passes away.

# Activities for Deeper Understanding

Choose from the following activities and corresponding student **discussion questions** to create your daily lesson plans for this section of the text.

## Pre-Reading Activity

### 1. Build Schema through Song

Woodson uses a phrase from the lyrics of the song “We Shall Overcome” as the title for this section of the book. As students enter the classroom, play the song, a spiritual that later became a protest song sung at civil rights and anti-war demonstrations. Then share the lyrics and the following questions with students for a journal reflection and small-group discussion. Revisit these questions after reading Part 4 to see which, if any, predictions were accurate and to discuss why Woodson chose the phrase from the song’s lyrics as the section’s title.

- What are some challenges or obstacles that Jacqueline and her family are trying to overcome?
- What are some things that Jacqueline believes? Where do her beliefs come from?
- Based on the section’s title and what you have read so far, what do you think might happen in Part 4 of the memoir?

## Through-Reading Activities

### 2. Explore the Concept of Friendship

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“maria,” page 209; “how to listen #3,” page 210; “trading places,” page 216

---

*Strong friendships are an important part of growing up and can provide adolescents with happiness, support, and a sense of belonging. This activity supports students in reflecting on the qualities they bring to a friendship as they read about Jacqueline’s new best friend, Maria. The poems for this activity lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration of friendship that students can engage in as they read the remaining poems in the memoir.*

#### Part 1: Reflect on the Concept of Friendship

Share the following prompt, one question at a time. To help students represent their ideas in different ways, invite them to first sketch their response and then explain their thinking in writing for each question.

- What makes a friendship a good friendship?
- What factors complicate or destroy a good friendship?
- How does growing up impact our friendships?



In pairs, have students share their journal responses and then create a T-chart. In the left-hand column, they should list factors that make a friendship a good one. In the right-hand column, they should list factors that can complicate or destroy a good friendship. Use the **Wraparound** strategy to report out. Record students' ideas on a T-chart that you create on the board. If time allows, students can rank the top three qualities that they feel are most important and the three that are most destructive and discuss why.

Conclude the activity with a private journal response to the following questions:

- Review the list of qualities that make a friendship a good one. What is one quality that you bring to one of your friendships that helps to make it a good one? What makes you say that?
- Review the list of factors that can complicate or destroy a friendship. What is a quality that you have that might complicate a friendship? What is one step that you can take so this quality doesn't get in the way of your friendships?

## **Part 2: Explore Jacqueline's Friendship with Maria**

As a class, read aloud the three poems about the new friendship developing between Jacqueline and Maria. Discuss the following questions in small groups:

- Based on the poems, what qualities of a good friendship do you see emerging? What makes you say that?
- What qualities does each girl bring to the friendship?
- How does this friendship with Maria impact how Jacqueline feels about herself and the world around her? How do you know?
- What is the role of friendships when we are growing up? How does *Brown Girl Dreaming* help you answer this question? How do your own experiences?

After groups have shared their ideas, have students work in pairs to draft a friendship haiku. They might follow the model of "how to listen #5" on page 210 and focus on something a good friend might say or a supportive question they might ask. Or they might try to capture the qualities of a good friendship. Invite them to share their haiku with the class.

### **Extension Activity:**

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#### **after reading "music," pages 262–263**

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Start by asking students to review Part 4 from page 207 to 263 in order to create a list of titles and page numbers of poems in this section about friendship. Working in small groups, have students discuss the following questions, supporting their ideas with evidence from the poems they identified. To scaffold the activity, give each group two or three poems from this section of Part 4 to focus on.

- What qualities does Jacqueline have that make her a good friend? Choose two qualities and provide evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- What factors make Jacqueline and Maria’s friendship a strong one? How do you know?
- What factors might complicate their friendship? What makes you say that?
- What can we learn from Jacqueline and Maria’s friendship that we can apply to our own lives in order to strengthen our friendships and be better friends?

### 3. On Becoming a Reader and Writer

#### poems on pages 217–229

*Your students may be young enough to remember learning how to read and write. For some, it might have come easily, while for others, it may be an ongoing challenge. Many students will empathize with and may seek inspiration from Jacqueline Woodson’s literacy journey, which they will learn more about in this activity. Students can complete Part 1 of this activity before or after reading the poems from page 217 to 229. Before teaching this activity, preview the video and the steps of Project Zero’s **Take Note Thinking Routine**. You will need to decide how you would like students to respond during the routine (index cards, a handout, a Google Doc, a Padlet, etc.) and how they will share what they write with their peers and with you.*

#### Materials

##### Video

What Reading Slowly Taught Me about Writing

#### Part 1: Reflect on Learning to Read and Write

Have students respond to the following prompt in their journals. Let them know that they will not have to share what they write. *Write about a memory of learning to read or write. It might be a school memory, a home memory, a memory of a friend or relative, or a memory from a different setting. Tell the story of the memory, including how you remember feeling.*

Share a story about your own experience of learning to read and/or write, and then see if any volunteers would like to share a story from their literacy journey with the class. Then explain to students that they will watch a video in which Jacqueline Woodson recalls learning to read and the role that she thinks storytelling plays in connecting humans across time and place. Share the **Take Note** questions and let students know that as they watch Woodson’s TED Talk, you will pause the video so they can reflect in writing on ONE question and can process what they are learning with their peers. They should not take notes while they are watching the video so that they can be fully present and engage with the content. The Take Note questions are as follows:

- What is the most important point?
- What are you finding challenging, puzzling, or difficult to understand?

- What question would you most like to discuss?
- What is something that you found interesting?

Play the video [What Reading Slowly Taught Me about Writing](#). Pause after each of the following sections for the Take Note routine: 00:00–03:20 / 03:21–06:19 / 06:20–09:03 / 09:04–10:45. After the final note-taking round, move students into small groups so they can share their notes and try to respond to any questions their peers may have raised. Then discuss the following questions in small groups and as a class:

- According to Jacqueline Woodson, what is the value in reading slowly?
- In her TED Talk, Woodson says, “But even as our engagement with stories changes, or the trappings around it morph from book to audio to Instagram to Snapchat, we must remember our finger beneath the words. Remember that story, regardless of the format, has always taken us to places we never thought we’d go, introduced us to people we never thought we’d meet, and shown us worlds that we might have missed.”
  - How is reading a physical book different from reading the same book on an electronic device? How is it different from listening to it in an audio format?
  - How can stories take us to new places and introduce us to new people? What is a story that you’ve read or heard or watched that transported you in some way?

## Part 2: Connect the Video to the Text

Let students know that they will follow Woodson’s advice to tune out the world and to read slowly, perhaps with a finger tracing under each line. Working individually, have students spend 10–15 minutes reading (or rereading) the poems on pages 217–229. Then ask them to choose one poem for a journal reflection. Let them know that they should choose one or more lines from their poem that resonate with them for one of the following reasons:

*The line that stands out to me is \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .*

- . . . of something about who I am. (What in particular?)
- . . . it reflects human nature or how people are in the world. (What human characteristics or ways of being?)
- . . . of how the poet expressed the idea. (What did they do that makes you feel this way?)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David N. Perkins, *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 126.

Have students discuss the following questions in small groups and then as a class:

- What poem and line did you choose and why?
- How is Jacqueline’s sense of herself as a reader and writer influenced by other people she encounters—her family, teachers, and classmates? How do you know?
- How is her sense of self as a reader and writer influenced by her own ideas about storytelling?
- If the adult Jacqueline Woodson in the video could give a piece of advice about reading and writing to the young Jacqueline in the book, what do you think she would say and why?

#### 4. Literature as “Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors”

##### “stevie and me,” pages 227–228

*This activity builds on Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s metaphor that literature can work as a “mirror” to reflect and affirm a reader’s identity, as a “window” that enables a reader to experience the perspectives and beliefs of those who may differ from them, and as a “sliding glass door” that allows readers, through their imagination, to enter into the real or fantastical world the author has created.<sup>2</sup> Not only is this approach identity affirming, it is also engaging and broadens students’ thinking about the text, themselves, and others.*

Distribute the **Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors** handout and read the quotation together. Then have students reflect on the texts that have provided them with windows, mirrors, and sliding-glass-door experiences. For this activity, students should consider all kinds of texts, not just books. Debrief in pairs or use the **Concentric Circles** teaching strategy so students can share their insights with a wider range of peers.

Next, use the following protocol, adapted from David Perkins at Project Zero, to engage students in multiple readings of the chapter “stevie and me” on pages 227–228.

- The teacher reads the poem out loud or plays an audio version of the poet reading.
- The teacher invites a student volunteer to read the poem out loud (or student volunteers to share the reading) or reads it again themselves.
- Students read the poem silently to themselves.

#### Materials

##### Handout

Windows, Mirrors,  
and Sliding Glass  
Doors

Get this handout in  
**Google Doc** format

2 Reading Rockets, “Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Doors,” YouTube video, 01:33, January 30, 2015.

- Students use the following prompt to guide a journal reflection:

*The line that stands out to me is \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .*

- . . . of something about who I am. (What in particular?)
- . . . it reflects human nature or how people are in the world. (What human characteristics or ways of being?)
- . . . of how the poet expressed the idea. (What did they do that makes you feel this way?)<sup>3</sup>

In small groups, have students read the poem out loud one more time and share the line they chose for their journal response, as well as a brief explanation of why. Then have them discuss the following questions in their groups and as a class:

- What is the most valuable idea in this poem? What makes you say that?
- How does Jacqueline feel when she discovers the small paperback book about Stevie? What does her reaction suggest about the power of stories?
- What can “stevie and me” teach us about the importance of children and young adults having access to “window” and “mirror” books?
- Think about the stories you read or heard as a child, as well as stories that you’ve read in school. Whose stories do you recall learning about? Were they mirror, window, or sliding-glass-door stories? Whose stories were missing? Where might you go to find these stories?

## 5. Analyze an “Aha” Moment

### “dannemora,” pages 270–271

*The following activity helps students to analyze a pivotal moment in the text where Jacqueline learns something important about herself, others, and her world. Engaging in reflection and discussion about “aha” moments can deepen students’ understanding of the text and invite them to draw connections between literature and life in imaginative rehearsals of their own past and future experiences. Note that the first part of this activity requires advance preparation. Students work in groups, and each group needs a copy of the poem affixed to a large piece of paper and markers or different-colored pens for a group annotation.*

#### Part 1: Analyze an “Aha” Moment in the Text

Use the following protocol, adapted from David Perkins at Project Zero, to support comprehension by incorporating multiple readings of “dannemora” on pages 270–271.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *Future Wise*, 126.

- The teacher reads the poem out loud or plays an audio version of the poet reading.
- The teacher invites a student volunteer to read the poem out loud (or student volunteers to share the reading) or reads it again themselves.
- Students read the poem silently to themselves.
- Students use the following prompt to guide a journal reflection:

*The line that stands out to me is \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .*

- . . . of something about who I am. (What in particular?)
- . . . it reflects human nature or how people are in the world. (What human characteristics or ways of being?)
- . . . of how the poet expressed the idea. (What did they do that makes you feel this way?)<sup>4</sup>

In small groups, have students read the poem out loud one more time and share the line they chose for their journal response, as well as a brief explanation of why. Then pass out the large paper with the copies of the poem and markers for a close-reading activity. Project the following close-reading tasks and questions one at a time, and model with a **Think Aloud** annotation of the first stanza before having groups work independently.

- Stanzas 1–2: What mood does Woodson establish in the first two stanzas? How does she establish this mood? Look for examples of imagery, alliteration, repetition, and questions and discuss how they contribute to the mood. Write your ideas on the big paper and draw arrows and lines to connect them to specific lines, phrases, and words.
- Stanza 3: What choices does Woodson make about capitalization and punctuation in this stanza? What is the impact of these choices on the reader? Write your ideas on the big paper and connect them to specific lines, phrases, and words.
- What “aha” moment does Jacqueline have in this poem? In other words, what realizations does she have about herself, her family, humankind in general, and/or the world around her? Record your ideas on your big paper.

If time allows, have students engage in a **gallery walk** to examine other groups’ annotations. Consider giving each student a small stack of sticky notes to add ideas, make connections to their own discussions, or pose questions. Then discuss the following questions as a whole class:

- Woodson doesn’t capitalize the titles of any poems or haiku in her memoir. “THAT!” in the third stanza of “dannemora” is the only example of a word that is in all-capitals, and it has an exclamation point. What do you think Woodson

<sup>4</sup> Perkins, *Future Wise*, 126.

is trying to convey here? How can punctuation, capitalization, and line breaks help a poet develop their ideas?

- What “aha” moment does Jacqueline have in this poem? In other words, what realizations does she have about herself, her family, humankind in general, and/or the world around her?
- What role do “aha” moments play in our lives as we are growing up and starting to become more independent? How can *Brown Girl Dreaming* help us think about this question? How about your own experiences?

## Part 2: Reflect on “Aha” Moments in Your Life

Explain to students that now they will reflect on “aha” moments in their own lives. Let them know that their “aha” moments can be small, like a conversation or something that they observed, or large, like a challenging or exhilarating experience or a difficult choice. Model the activity by listing three to five of your own “aha” moments on the board. Try to choose a few from when you were an adolescent, as well as ones that might seem small but led you to view things in new ways. Then engage in a **Think Aloud** about one moment that was significant, challenging, or confusing before using the **Color, Symbol, Image** strategy to share with students a representation of your “aha” moment. After you’ve modeled the activity, have students respond to the following prompts in their journals. Let them know that they will be sharing their color, symbol, and images in small groups.

- List three to five “aha” moments in your life, when you learned something or had a realization about yourself, other people, the human experience, or the world at large.
- Choose one “aha” moment from the list for a journal response:
  - Which of your “aha” moments stands out as most significant, challenging, or confusing?
  - What happened, and what did you learn about yourself, others, or the world around you?
- Then represent this “aha” moment with a color, symbol, and image, and explain your thinking.
  - What color represents your “aha” moment?
  - What symbol represents your “aha” moment?
  - What image represents your “aha” moment?

Invite students to share their color, symbol, image representations in small groups. Then, in a closing class discussion or on **exit cards**, have students reflect on the following question: *What new, different, or deeper understanding do you have about the significance or challenges of “aha” moments as we are growing up? How did you come to this understanding?*



## Post-Reading Activities

### 6. *Brown Girl Dreaming* and Me

*This recurring activity prompts students to reread poems from the section of the memoir they have just completed and invites them to draw connections between the text and their own lives. See Part 1: “i am born” Post-Reading Activities for details.*

Follow the instructions in Part 1: “i am born” for the written reflection portion of this activity. Use the **Concentric Circles** teaching strategy to debrief students’ responses so they can share with and hear from a number of their peers.

### 7. Prepare for the Summative Assessment

*If you haven’t already done so, share your summative assessment assignment and criteria with the class. Then choose the activity that corresponds with your assessment, or create your own. You can find detailed explanations of each assessment in the final section of this guide (page 82).*

- **Final Journal Reflection:** Use this time to explore Jacqueline’s, and your students’, understanding of the concept of home and belonging to a place. First, reread “new york city” on page 143, the first poem in Part 3, which ends with the lines: “This place is loud and strange / and nowhere I’m ever going to call / home.” Ask students to imagine that Jacqueline finds this poem after she returns to Brooklyn following her grandfather’s funeral. Give students time to review Part 4 and their journals to identify poems and entries that help them understand Jacqueline’s relationship to Brooklyn and Greenville. Then, in their journals, have students respond to the following prompt: *How would Jacqueline describe New York now? Is Brooklyn still a place she wonders who could love, a place that she would never call home? Or has it become something else?*

Then have students discuss the following question in small groups: *From what you have read so far, how does *Brown Girl Dreaming* help you answer the question: To what extent does where we are from help shape who we are and who we might become in the future?*

- **Socratic Seminar Discussion:**

Continue to provide opportunities for students to develop their listening and speaking skills with the **Keep the Discussion Alive!** handout and guided practice. Start by asking students to think about their participation in a recent whole-class or group discussion and to set a goal for how they might engage more actively in today’s discussion. They might identify a speaking, listening, or note-taking goal.

Share your own goal with the class and then model a practice discussion with a small group of students. Consider allowing them to choose the question. Give

#### Materials

##### Handout

Keep the Discussion Alive!

Get this handout in **Google Doc** format

students a few minutes to reflect on the question in their journals. Encourage them to gather evidence from *Brown Girl Dreaming* and make connections to other texts, as well as their own experiences. Then pass out the **Keep the Discussion Alive!** handout and, with the small group of students, engage in a five- to seven-minute discussion. Model entering a conversation by using one or more of the sentence starters. Debrief as a class to highlight ways in which the discussion went well and how it could have been improved. Then have small groups or the class discuss one of the Part 4 guiding questions.

- **Poetry Anthology Project:** Because haiku are so short, sometimes students can struggle to revise them. Give students an opportunity to revise their friendship haiku or another haiku from the unit that they have drafted. Project the following revision prompts one at a time for students to try:
  - Recast the haiku into a tweet with up to 280 syllables and some hashtags.
  - Break the rules of haiku by writing a new version with the following pattern of syllables: 7-5-7.
  - Circle one or more words that feel vague (*love, anger, happy*) to replace with a concrete sensory image.
  - Engage in a pair-share. Each student reads aloud their haiku. The listener points to the strongest moment in their partner’s haiku and explains why and then asks a question.

Then invite students to revise their original haiku, incorporating one or more ideas that emerged as a result of the revision activities.

# Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors

**Directions:** Read the quotation by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop. Then reflect on three texts—which could include books, films, songs, plays, poems, works of art, podcasts, or blogs—that have shown you something about yourself, others, and/or the world.

“Books are sometimes **windows**, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also **sliding glass doors**, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a **mirror**.”<sup>1</sup>



When has a text been like a **mirror**, reflecting one or more aspects of your identity or experience? How did it feel to see yourself in the story?



When has a text been like a **window**, offering you insight into someone else's experience or world? What did you learn?



When has a text been like a **sliding glass door**, allowing you to enter and engage with another world for a moment in time? What did you experience?

<sup>1</sup> From Rudine Sims Bishop, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books from the Classroom* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1990), available at Reading Is Fundamental (January 2015).

## Keep the Discussion Alive!

**Directions:** Sometimes we run out of things to talk about during a discussion. Silence is okay, because it allows group members to collect their thoughts! But if you feel like you need help keeping the discussion alive, try using some of these sentence starters to get going and then build on each other's ideas.

### Ask a Question

Why did . . .  
Why did they choose to . . .  
What happened when . . .  
Wait! Who is . . .  
How does \_\_\_\_\_ connect to . . .  
Do you think that . . .  
I wonder why the author . . .

### Clarify Something

This makes sense now because . . .  
Are you sure? I think this means . . .  
I agree with you that this suggests . . .  
I used to think . . . but now I think . . .  
I'm not sure that . . .  
I would like to talk about . . .  
I have a different idea . . .

### Make a Prediction

I think the next chapter will be about . . .  
I wonder if . . .  
Based on what is happening, I bet \_\_\_\_\_  
will happen next because . . .  
I think that . . .

### Make a Comment

The most valuable idea is . . .  
My favorite part/character so far is . . .  
This is confusing because . . .  
I don't like this part because . . .  
This is similar to/different from . . .  
I'm surprised that . . .

### Make a Connection

This part/character reminds me of . . .  
I see what the book is saying, but  
from my experience, it's more like . . .  
This reminds me of . . .  
I can relate to this because . . .  
This part connects to . . .

# “ready to change the world”

## Essential Questions

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Guiding Questions

- To what extent do we inherit or receive our identities? How can *Brown Girl Dreaming* help us answer this question?
- Why does Jacqueline believe what she believes? What factors have contributed to her emerging system of beliefs?

## Student Learning Outcomes

*In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .*

- Examine how their identity is a combination of who they say they are, who others say they are, and who they hope to be in the future.
- Analyze the author’s representation of individual and collective agency in the text and compare and contrast it to their own beliefs and experiences in the world.
- Demonstrate an increased sense of confidence in their ability to communicate their ideas orally and in writing.

## Core Activities

*As you make choices about which activities to teach, we suggest prioritizing the following, which are foundational to supporting students' exploration of this section's guiding questions and progression toward the learning outcomes:*

- Activity 2: Explore Jacqueline's Growing Sense of Agency
- Activity 3: Identify Jacqueline's Core Beliefs

## Section Overview

The opening poems in the final part of *Brown Girl Dreaming* explore the relationship between identity and legacy as the family grapples with who they are and how to be without Jacqueline's grandfather. On television and through her mother's stories, Jacqueline learns about the Black Panther Party and Angela Davis, and unlike earlier in the memoir, it is clear that Jacqueline has a growing awareness of the inequities and fights for justice that are happening in her neighborhood and across the country. As Jacqueline sings the protest songs she hears, her fifth-grade self questions why people should have to fight so hard for what they believe in. In the final poems of the memoir, Jacqueline reflects on her values and beliefs as she explores the evolution of her own complex identity—an identity formed of intersecting legacies, histories, religions, traditions, and places to call home.



# Activities for Deeper Understanding

Choose from the following activities and corresponding student **discussion questions** to create your daily lesson plans for this section of the text.

## Pre-Reading Activity

### 1. Imagine the Ending

Have students work in pairs to discuss what they think needs to happen in the final section of *Brown Girl Dreaming* in order to bring it to a satisfying close for you. Students can choose from the following questions for their discussions if they need help getting started:

- What more do you hope to learn about Jacqueline and her relationship with other characters in the text?
- What conflicts, if any, need to get resolved?
- What questions do you hope the author will explore or answer in the final section of the memoir?

## Through-Reading Activities

### 2. Explore Jacqueline’s Growing Sense of Agency

**“say it loud,” pages 304–305, and “the revolution,” pages 308–309**

*This activity supports students in considering Jacqueline’s understanding of her own agency. When we call students’ attention to the concept of agency, both in literature and in life, we can help them understand that they are not only acted upon: they themselves, in a variety of ways, are actors in their lives and their communities. Before teaching this activity, familiarize yourself with the **Four Corners** teaching strategy. You will need to make four signs—Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree—to hang in the corners of the classroom.*

#### Part 1: Introduce the Concepts of “Power” and “Agency”

Start by asking students to reflect on their ideas about power, which is closely related to agency. Pass out the **What Is Power? Anticipation Guide** handout and have students complete Steps 1 and 2. Then debrief using the **Four Corners** teaching strategy. Have students share their ideas in their corners before facilitating a class discussion across corners. Then have students complete Steps 3 and 4 on the handout. They can share their definitions in pairs or small groups, adding new ideas as they arise.

#### Materials

##### Handout

What Is Power?  
Anticipation Guide

##### Handout

Introducing Agency

Get these handouts in  
**Google Doc** format

Next, explain to students that they will be learning about the concept of individual and collective *agency*. Pass out the **Introducing Agency** handout. Students may find this text challenging, especially the definitions, so consider reading it aloud as a class. There are stopping points built into the reading where students can process what they are learning in different ways. Debrief by asking students to work in pairs or small groups to come up with one question and one comment about the reading to share with the class.<sup>1</sup> Discuss their questions as a whole group.

## Part 2: Explore Jacqueline's Growing Sense of Agency

Start as a whole class by reading aloud or listening to “say it loud” on pages 304–305. Then, in pairs or small groups, have students discuss the following questions and share their ideas with the class:

- Where do you see examples of Jacqueline having agency or a sense of agency in this poem? How do you think she feels? What makes you say that?
- Where do you see examples of Jacqueline lacking agency or a sense of agency in this poem? How do you think she feels? What makes you say that?
- What choices does Jacqueline face to take or not take certain actions? What, if any, risks are involved in these choices? What will she gain if she takes action? What will she lose if she doesn't take action?
- What do you think Jacqueline means when she says, on page 304, “I don't understand the revolution”?

Next, as a whole class, read aloud or listen to “the revolution” on pages 308–309. Use the **Sketch to Stretch** strategy to have students reflect on the following question in their journals. Encourage them to incorporate quotations into their sketches: *What is the most valuable idea in this poem?*

Then, in their small groups, have students share their journal responses and discuss the following questions:

- In the poem “say it loud,” Jacqueline says that she doesn't understand the revolution, yet in “the revolution,” she seems to be developing an understanding. What do you think she means when she compares the revolution to a merry-go-round?
- What part of history is Jacqueline experiencing as she is growing up? What part of history are you experiencing as you grow up?
- Reread the final stanza of the poem. How do you think Jacqueline is feeling at this moment? What factors might be influencing her sense of agency? Remember that you have a list of factors on your Introducing Agency handout.
- Think back on *Brown Girl Dreaming* as a whole. What are three key moments that you think contributed to Jacqueline feeling “ready for the ride”?

<sup>1</sup> From Kelly Gallagher, *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts*, 4–12 (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004), 48–49.

### Extension Activity: Agency and Action Today

Have students identify and explain an example of individual or collective agency in the world today. Remind them that having *agency*—the power and ability to make decisions and take action on their own behalf in order to reach their goals—doesn't have to include participation in movements or lead to sweeping changes. They might choose to write about a family or community member, a mentor, or a friend. Or they might have read about someone in a local or national news source. After they identify their subject, they should explain in a short piece of writing how they see the subject having the power and ability to take action, explain the factors that may influence the subject's agency, and reflect on what they can learn from this individual or group.

### 3. Identify Jacqueline's Core Beliefs

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#### "what i believe," pages 317–318

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*This activity invites students to do a close reading of a poem and then consider it in light of the memoir as a whole. As they engage with the text and this activity, invite students to revisit the identity charts they have created during the unit, both for Jacqueline and for themselves.*

#### Part 1: Examine the Factors that Shape Jacqueline's Core Beliefs

Use the following protocol, adapted from Dave Perkins at Project Zero, to engage students in a close reading of "what i believe" on pages 317–318.

- The teacher reads the poem out loud or plays an audio version of the poet reading.
- The teacher invites a student volunteer to read the poem out loud (or student volunteers to share the reading) or reads it again themselves.
- Students read the poem silently to themselves.
- Students use the following prompt to guide a journal reflection:

*The line that stands out to me is \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .*

. . . of something about who I am. (What in particular?)

. . . it reflects human nature or how people are in the world. (What human characteristics or ways of being?)

. . . of how the poet expressed the idea. (What did they do that makes you feel this way?)<sup>2</sup>

In small groups, have students read the poem out loud one more time and discuss the line they chose for their journal response. Then explain to students that

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2 David N. Perkins, *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 126.

they will explore how Jacqueline developed the beliefs she shares in this poem. Modeling the process on the board, have students create a T-chart in their notes. Label the left-hand column *Beliefs* and the right-hand column *Example from the Text* (see sample below). Use the **Think Aloud** strategy to walk through the first example, and then have students work on the second one in pairs. Have them work through the poem and add to their T-charts in small groups. If time is a factor, assign each group a section of the poem to focus on and then have them present their ideas to the class.

Beliefs	Example from the Text
God, evolution, the Bible, and the Qur'an	Jacqueline's grandmother passes down her beliefs about God and religion to Jacqueline and her siblings. Jacqueline learns about Islam, Muhammad, and Mecca from her Uncle Robert. There isn't a poem about evolution. Maybe this belief comes from her family or school.
There is good in all of us	

After groups finish their T-charts and share their ideas, discuss the following questions as a class:

- What is one belief that Jacqueline lists in this poem that you think is a central part of her identity? How do you know?
- What three factors do you think are *most important* to how Jacqueline develops her beliefs? What makes you say that?
- What can we learn from *Brown Girl Dreaming* about the factors that shape our belief systems as we grow up? Why is it important to understand these factors?

## Part 2: Reflect on Your Core Beliefs

Let students know that, like Jacqueline, they will be considering their own core beliefs. They will start by completing the following sentence starter in their journals: *I believe in . . .* Use the **Think Aloud** strategy to create your own list on the board, sharing a brief explanation of why you are including each belief in your list. Let students know that they can respond in full sentences or write a list, and that they will be sharing ideas with others in the class.

Working in pairs, ask students to share one or more of their beliefs. Then have them place a star alongside three core beliefs that they feel are central to who they are as individuals. They can add these to their individual identity charts if they

are not already listed. Invite students to reflect in their journals on the factors that have shaped their core beliefs: *What individuals and/or experiences have shaped each of your three core beliefs? Explain how with a brief story or memory.*

Finally, let students know that they will be crafting their own “What I Believe” poems. They should start by reviewing their journal responses and notes from class. Let them know that they might use Woodson’s poem as a model, starting each line with “I believe,” or they might have their own ideas for how to shape their poem.

#### 4. Create Personal Mantras

##### **“each world,” pages 319–320**

*This activity invites close reading and offers opportunities for students to craft short poetic mantras as they explore the ways in which we are connected to the past and how legacies of older generations can influence our identities as we are growing up.*

Read aloud the final poem in the memoir, “each world” on pages 319–320, two times. Discuss the following questions in small groups and as a class.

- Who or what helped shape Jacqueline’s identity over the course of her childhood? Make a list in your notes, citing evidence from the poem and the memoir as a whole to support your thinking.
- Choose one person or event from the list that you think was most influential, and explain how you think that person or event impacted Jacqueline’s sense of who she is and her understanding of the world around her.
- Reread the ending of the poem, starting with the line “where You decide” on page 320. What does the ending of the poem suggest about the power each person has to choose how they walk through the world? Do you agree or disagree? What makes you say that?

Invite the groups to share their responses and to provide evidence from the text to support their thinking. Then let students know that they will be watching a short clip of former National Youth Poet Laureate and author Amanda Gorman’s 2018 TED Talk, in which she reflects on the people who impacted her sense of self and purpose as she was growing up. Play the video [Using Your Voice Is a Political Choice](#) from 00:00 to 02:13.

Next, have students respond in their journals to the following questions:

- Whose shoulders do you stand on? Make a list of people that you think have helped shape who you are today. Then choose one of these people and/or events and write about how you think they have impacted who you are today.
- What do you stand for? In other words, who or what are you willing to speak up for and take action (large or small) for?

#### Materials

**Video**  
[Using Your Voice Is a Political Choice](#)

Write Amanda Gorman’s mantra, which she recites to herself before every performance, on the board: *I am the daughter of Black writers who are descended from Freedom Fighters who broke their chains and changed the world. They call me.*

One at a time, have three students read the mantra out loud. Then ask pairs to discuss Gorman’s authorial choices: *What structural or stylistic choices has Gorman made in developing her mantra?* Students might pick up on the slant rhyme and assonance, powerful poetic devices that Gorman uses to connect *chain* and *change*. While naming the literary devices isn’t crucial, thinking about the impact of Gorman’s deliberate choice to use vowel sounds and words that almost but don’t quite rhyme to emphasize her Freedom Fighter ancestors’ transition from chains to change invites close reading and discussion.

Invite students to create a mantra for themselves. Consider providing the following sentence stem: *I am the . . . , who is/are . . .* if they are struggling to get started. Have them share their mantras using the **Wraparound** strategy and invite volunteers to discuss their choices, in terms of both content and craft. Conclude the activity with a class discussion of the following questions:

- To what extent do we inherit or receive our identities? How do the legacies of older generations influence our identities? How can *Brown Girl Dreaming* help us understand this question? How can your own experiences?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How has history influenced who each of us is today? How can *Brown Girl Dreaming* help us understand this question? How can your own experiences?

## Post-Reading Activities

### 5. *Brown Girl Dreaming* and Me

*This recurring activity prompts students to reread poems from the section of the memoir they have just completed and invites them to draw connections between the text and their own lives. See Part 1: “i am born” Post-Reading Activities for details.*

Invite students to write a letter to Jacqueline Woodson that explains why they chose this poem from Part 5 and what it means to them. In their letter, they might share a story or a memory that connects to the poem, pose a question that the poem raises for them and explain how they would answer it based on their own experiences, or create an original poem using one of Woodson’s as a model or their own ideas.

### 6. Prepare for the Summative Assessment

*Hopefully, you have already shared your summative assessment assignment and criteria with the class. If you have time for students to synthesize new understanding, ask questions, and practice skills, choose the activity that corresponds with your*

assessment or create your own. Alternatively, have students start working on the unit summative assessment.

- **Final Journal Reflection:** Recast a journal reflection from Part 5 of the memoir into a new form. Start by asking students to review their entries and then choose one that they want to explore in greater depth. Provide students with a menu of creative options to write the entry in a new format and then to reflect on any new understanding or questions that emerge through the process. Consider the following options for recasting:
  - Poem (free verse, found poem, collection of three haiku, acrostic)
  - Collage with images and text
  - Letter to your younger self
  - Letter to your future self
  - **Alphabet Brainstorm** with key concepts and ideas from the journal

Invite students to share their work in pairs or small groups, or see if volunteers would like to share with the class.

- **Socratic Seminar Discussion:** To help students practice active listening and summarizing what they have heard in a discussion, facilitate a few rounds of “Conver-Stations.”<sup>3</sup> For this activity, groups of four engage in a small-group discussion around an open-ended question. At the end of the allotted time, two students from each group move to a different group. Each pair must summarize the key points from their previous discussion, and then the group engages in a discussion of a new question. Then pairs who didn’t move the first time rotate to form new groups and repeat the process. To help students prepare to summarize their discussion, review note-taking strategies, such as creating a bulleted list of main points, using symbols to represent or connect key ideas, and jotting down page numbers with key pieces of evidence. Consider using the guiding questions for Part 5 or the final questions from the **Brown Girl Dreaming Discussion Questions** handout.
- **Poetry Anthology Project:** Have students bring their “What I Believe” poems through a revision cycle. This activity is based on “The Lively Mess” from poet Rachel Richardson.<sup>4</sup> Students will need a single-sided copy of their poem, a pair of scissors, and some clear tape. Start by having students cut the draft of their poem into strips so that each strip has a line of the text or a small group of lines. Then invite students to physically move the strips so they are in a new order and see how the poem reads. Let them know that they can add new strips, perhaps incorporating lines from their journals or from *Brown*

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Gonzalez, “The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies,” *Cult of Pedagogy* (blog), October 15, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Richardson, “The Warmth of the Messy Page,” Poetry Foundation website, January 5, 2016.



*Girl Dreaming*. Prompt students to think about how the poem changes in different arrangements.

Once students have an arrangement that they find interesting, have them tape the new version together and reflect on one or more of the following questions in their journals:

- How did it feel to cut apart and rearrange your poem?
- What insights, questions, or observations did you have during this process?
- If you were going to revise your poem one more time, what changes would you keep? What aspects of your original version do you think were stronger?



## What Is Power? Anticipation Guide

**Step 1:** Read the statement in the left column. Decide if you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD) with the statement. Highlight your response.

Statement	Your Opinion
1. Power is physical force.	SA    A    D    SD
2. Power is wealth—having the resources that allow you to get things done.	SA    A    D    SD
3. Power is authority—having a position that allows you to tell people what to do.	SA    A    D    SD
4. Power is influence—being able to change a person's behavior.	SA    A    D    SD
5. Power is using your position to treat people with consideration and respect.	SA    A    D    SD
6. Power is the ability to accomplish your goals.	SA    A    D    SD

### Step 2: Personal Reflection

Choose one statement to reflect on in a short written response. What is your opinion about it? Why? What questions does the statement raise for you?

### Step 3: Personal Connection

Complete the following statement: *I feel like I have power when . . .*

### Step 4: Your Definition

Define *power* in your own words.

# Introducing Agency

Adolescence is a time of growth and opportunity—a time when young adults transition from childhood dependence to adult independence. From around age 10 until their early 20s, they are building the skills to make their own decisions, developing new interests, and setting goals for their future. This is an important time for students to learn about the concept of agency and the role it has in the decision-making process.

## Defining Agency

When we say that an individual or group has *agency*, we mean that **they have the power and ability to make decisions and take action on their own behalf in order to reach their goals.**

### Turn & Talk: Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like

What does it look like, sound like, and feel like when you have the **power** to make a decision that helps you reach, or get closer to reaching, one of your goals?

Sociologist Nicki Lisa Cole provides **two real-world examples** that can help us understand **individual and collective agency**:

Individual and collective agency may serve to reaffirm social order by reproducing norms and existing social relationships, or it may serve to challenge and remake social order by going against the status quo to create new norms and relationships.<sup>1</sup>

For example, a young girl with **individual agency** asks her parent to buy her a blue shirt with a cartoon robot on it instead of a pink shirt with a cartoon princess. This young girl demonstrates agency when she rejects society's gendered norms of dress.

An example of **collective agency** is the 2015 Supreme Court decision that ruled that states cannot keep same-sex couples from marrying and all 50 states must recognize same-sex unions. Over decades, individuals, activists, politicians, and the US legal system worked together to expand the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples.

<sup>1</sup> Nicki Lisa Cole, "How Sociologists Define Human Agency," ThoughtCo, January 22, 2019.

### Turn & Talk: Text-to-World

What is another example of **individual agency**, when a person makes a decision or takes an action that helps them reach one of their goals?

What is another example of **collective agency**, when a small or large group makes a decision or takes an action that helps them reach one of their goals?

### Defining a Sense of Agency

We can also talk about someone having a *sense of agency*. When an individual or a group has a *sense of agency*, it means they have **a feeling of control over their actions and the consequences**. They feel like they are in the driver's seat of their own life.

#### Sketch to Stretch

Draw a quick sketch of **agency**.

Draw a quick sketch of a **sense of agency**.

## Understanding the Factors that Influence Agency

There are many **factors** that can influence someone's agency and sense of agency in any given moment. Here are a few (but not all) of these factors:

- Ability
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Group membership (peer, religious community, sports team, club, neighborhood, etc.)
- Employment
- Race
- Religion
- Social class
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Turn & Talk: Two More Factors

What are two other factors that might impact an individual or group's agency or sense of agency? Write them in the spaces above.

# Summative Assessment Options

The following assessment options are designed to help you consider how you would like your students to communicate their learning. Memoir invites opportunities for reflective, narrative, and creative writing, as well as oral storytelling and occasions to learn about the lives and experiences of others in the classroom community. Regardless of the assessment you choose, it is important that students understand the parameters, performance criteria, and grading standards and have multiple opportunities to practice and receive feedback to support their cognitive and emotional development as they read and discuss the text. Because your context is unique, we are providing three options for you to use as inspiration in order to create your own assessment.

## Essential Questions

- What individuals and experiences have shaped my beliefs about myself and the world around me?
- How is each one of us connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence who I am today?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way I understand myself and make sense of the world around me?

## Option 1: Final Journal Reflection

For this final assessment, students revisit their journal responses from this unit in order to notice character and thematic development, as well as to make personal connections to the text and to reflect on their new understanding of the unit essential questions. This reflective writing task engages students in deep thinking about the text and welcomes opportunities for them to make personal connections to what they are learning as they consider its relevance to their own lives. Because everyone's context is different, you will need to develop your own assignment and rubric that is tailored to the needs of your students.

## Assessment Ideas

After reading the memoir, facilitate a conversation that revisits the essential questions and big ideas the class has examined: the ways in which family, legacy, and memory can shape our identities and beliefs as we grow up; how where and when we live can influence our choices and decision-making processes; and the power of stories and storytelling to shape the way we understand ourselves and the world around us.

Ask students to reread their journal entries and use sticky notes or a highlighter to identify moments that stand out to them in some way: entries where they arrived at a new insight about one or more of the essential questions or big ideas; entries that explored a question or concept the student is still grappling with; and entries they would want to revise or add to because their thinking on the topic has changed.

Let students know that they will craft a new two-paragraph journal entry that draws evidence from the text and their own lives in order to respond to one of the unit essential questions.

Choose one of the essential questions from this unit. How does the memoir help you to answer the question? How do your own lived experiences help you answer the question? Respond to each question in a paragraph. Use supporting evidence from the text for the first paragraph and examples from your own life in the second paragraph.

Invite students to share their ideas by applying a discussion strategy like **Learn to Listen, Listen to Learn**. This teaching strategy promotes active listening and provides students with an opportunity to share their ideas in small groups and with the class.

## Option 2: Socratic Seminar Discussion

For this final assessment, students facilitate a discussion in the format of the **Socratic Seminar** teaching strategy that explores one or more open-ended questions. Socratic seminars develop a sense of agency in students as they chart the course of the discussion. This discussion format promotes rereading, deep thinking, critical questioning of the text, and active listening as students engage with each other's ideas and analyses. Because everyone's context is different, you will need to develop your own assignment and rubric that is tailored to the needs of your students.

## Assessment Ideas

Choose one or more of the following questions and use the **Socratic Seminar** strategy to hold a discussion of *Brown Girl Dreaming*. During class or for homework, have students prepare by reflecting in their journals on the assessment question and gathering evidence from the text and their own lives to support their thinking.

- What individuals and experiences shape Jacqueline’s beliefs about herself and the world around her? Which ones have the strongest impact? Why do you think they are so influential?
- How is Jacqueline’s identity shaped by her time spent in the South and in the North? What is the relationship between where we live and who we become?
- How do history and the legacy of past generations influence Jacqueline’s sense of who she is and where she belongs as she is growing up? What can we learn from *Brown Girl Dreaming* about the ways in which we are connected to the past and the legacies of the generations that came before us?
- How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling impact the way Jacqueline understands herself and makes sense of the world around her? How do these literacy acts influence your sense of who you are and the world around you as you are growing up?

Before engaging in the Socratic seminar, it is important to review your **classroom contract** in order to reestablish norms and expectations for how you will treat one another. Depending on the size of your class, you might have one half of the class prepare one question and the other half prepare a different one. While the first group participates in the discussion, the second group listens, taking notes or engaging in specific jobs as observers, such as looking for behaviors like referencing the text, asking clarifying questions, or disagreeing in a respectful manner. After the allotted time, the class can debrief the first discussion and then switch roles to discuss the second question.

Provide students with an opportunity to reflect on the following questions in their journals or on an **exit card** that you collect:

- What new, different, or deeper understanding of *Brown Girl Dreaming* do you have as a result of the Socratic seminar discussion?
- What is one way that you made a positive contribution to the discussion as a speaker or listener? What would you like to do differently as a participant the next time you are in a seminar or discussion?

### Option 3: Poetry Anthology Project

In the words of former Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, “Poetry is quiet, private, meditative, and rather than summing things up in pat and predictable ways, it surprises and deepens our sense of the ordinary. Poetry tells us that the world is full of wonder, revelation, consolation, and meaning. It reminds us that our inner lives deserve time, space, and attention.”<sup>1</sup> Poetry can help students explore their own coming-of-age experiences, as well as provide inspiration for how they might use their voices to tell their own stories in creative and powerful ways. This summative

1 Eveline Chao, “Life of the Mind: Q&A: Tracy K. Smith,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, September 13, 2017.



assessment option invites students to choose one or two of their poems to revisit and bring through a revision cycle, with the ultimate goal of publishing a class anthology. Because everyone’s context is different, you will need to develop your own assignment and rubric that is tailored to the needs of your students.

*The following activities provide opportunities for students to draft original poems:*

Section	Activities for Deeper Understanding that Inspire Creative Writing
Part 1	Activity 1: Consider What It Means to Be “From” a Place (“Where I’m From” poem)  Activity 3: Reflect on Our Names (“My Name” poem)
Part 2	Activity 5: Memory and the Five Senses (sensory poem)
Part 3	Activity 4: Poetry and Place (place poem for a character in the text)  Prepare for the Summative Assessment (memory moment poem)
Part 4	Activity 2: Explore the Concept of Friendship (friendship haiku)
Part 5	Activity 3: Identify Jacqueline’s Core Beliefs (“What I Believe” poem)  Activity 4: Create Personal Mantras (personal mantra)

## Publishing Student Poetry

If you have access to the technology, each student can type their poem, write an “About the Author” blurb, and design a cover page with a title for their collection. Then they can print and staple their work together, much like Jacqueline Woodson did with her first collection of butterfly haiku. In the spirit of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, students can also include family photographs, a family tree, and a “thankfuls” page. If you don’t have access to computers or printers, students can follow these same steps but hand-write their poems on white or lined paper.

Time allowing, students can share their anthologies in a modified gallery walk where they circulate to see everyone’s work, or they can each read one of their poems in an “author’s chair” celebration. You can also have each student submit one or more poems for a digital class anthology, using Padlet, Flipgrid, or a shared Google Doc. If you are creating a printed booklet, student volunteers can support the production process in the roles of editor, interior layout designer, and cover designer.

## Assessment Ideas

After reading the memoir, have students use sticky notes to mark the pages in their journals with drafts of their poetry or gather their poems in one place if they wrote

them on loose-leaf paper. After reviewing your assessment criteria, give students time to choose one or two poems to bring through a revision cycle. Consider asking them to choose a poem that helps them answer one of the unit’s essential questions.

It is important to review your **classroom contract** in order to reestablish norms and expectations for how you will treat one another and students’ work. To strengthen your classroom community and to model risk-taking, we recommend that you engage in the revision process along with your students, using your own poems as models. Then choose from the following activities to support your students in revising their poems and preparing them for publication:

- **Constructive versus Destructive Feedback:** Author Jacqueline Woodson once offered some words of advice about sharing and feedback to an audience of middle school students: “‘I think you show it to people you *trust*.’ She then defined *constructive* criticism as feedback that ‘makes you go running back to your work and want to make it better,’ while *destructive* criticism ‘makes you just want to throw it away.’”<sup>2</sup> Woodson suggested that reviewers first say something positive about the piece of writing and then ask three questions.

To apply Woodson’s framework to your classroom, share her advice and ask students to brainstorm ways that they can give feedback that fits her description of *constructive* and not *destructive* criticism. Then model the workshop process using a draft of a poem you have written or the first draft of a poem you find online from a trusted source. Students can practice saying something positive about your poem and asking questions. For their own peer review, allow students to choose their partners. Look for opportunities to celebrate students’ work so they come to view themselves as members of a larger community of readers, writers, and thinkers.

- **The Lively Mess:** Have students bring their “What I Believe” poems (or another poem long enough to cut apart) through a revision cycle. This activity is based on “The Lively Mess” from poet Rachel Richardson.<sup>3</sup> Students will need a single-sided copy of their poem, a pair of scissors, and some clear tape. Start by having students cut the draft of their poem into strips so that each strip has a line of the text or a small group of lines. Then invite students to physically move the strips so they are in a new order and see how the poem reads. Let them know that they can add new strips, perhaps incorporating lines from their journal or from *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Prompt students to think about how the poem changes in different arrangements.

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2 Kaleena Black, “Who Should You Show Your Writing To? Jacqueline Woodson Has Advice!” ed. Cheryl Lederle, *Teaching with the Library of Congress* (blog), published February 1, 2018, accessed October 10, 2018.

3 Rachel Richardson, “The Warmth of the Messy Page,” Poetry Foundation website, January 5, 2016.

Once students have an arrangement that they find interesting, have them tape the new version together and reflect on one or more of the following questions in their journal:

- How did it feel to cut apart and rearrange your poem?
- What insights, questions, or observations did you have during this process?
- If you were going to revise your poem one more time, what changes would you keep? What aspects of your original version do you think were stronger?

- **A Fresh Start:** The first line or lines of a poem should capture the attention and imagination of the reader and make them want more. Like the opening scene in a film, this can set the tone for the entire piece. Invite students to test out four ways of starting their poems, and then have them revise their opening stanza, and perhaps the poem as a whole, based on what the exercise reveals.

- Rewrite the first line or lines so that you start with rich sensory imagery.
- Rewrite the first line or lines so that you start with an example of alliteration.
- Rewrite the first line or lines so that you start with a rhetorical question.
- Rewrite the first line or lines so that you start with a concrete memory.

When they have finished, have students share their work in pairs and then discuss the following questions: *Which one grabs your attention as a reader? Which one captures the essence of the poem as a whole?*

- **Revise in Reverse:** Sometimes when writing a draft of a poem, students write their way to their best ideas. It's as if they needed to get to the end before they could truly discover what they started out to write. When this happens, sometimes the first part of the poem does not fully express what they want to say as well as the end does. The revision activity can help students identify the purpose of their poem and carry this thread through the rest.

- Have students read the last third of their poem and jot down five key words, phrases, or ideas that they like in this section. Then have them loop back to the beginning and read the first third.
- After they review their list, have students try to incorporate one or two items from the list into their opening stanza. To avoid having them just plop a word or idea into the poem, encourage them to revise the opening stanza to fit the key word, phrase, or idea.

Working in pairs, have students read each other's poems, both the original and the revised version, before discussing the following questions: *Does the opening stanza now fit better with the final stanza? Does it set the stage for the latter part of the poem and provide coherence by incorporating key concepts into the piece at the start?*

In addition to revising their poem(s) for the anthology, students can also submit a short reflective piece of writing along with their drafts and evidence of revision that explores how their poem helps them answer one of the unit essential questions and what poetry techniques they incorporated into the final product. Consider allowing students to choose from the following questions for their reflections:

- How does your poem help to answer one of the unit's essential questions?
- What poetic techniques or literary devices did you incorporate into your poem? How do these help you convey the poem's central message?
- How did your poem change from the initial draft to the final product?
- If you could do one more revision of your poem, what would you like to change?
- What about your poem or the writing process makes you most proud? Why?

# ***Brown Girl Dreaming* Discussion Questions**

**Directions:** Respond to the following questions in the space provided. Include evidence from *Brown Girl Dreaming* and your own life experiences to support your thinking.

## **Part 1: “i am born” (1-41)**

- 1. “february 12, 1963” (1-2):** What are three details that we learn about the narrator in the first poem of the memoir?
  
- 2. “second daughter’s second day on earth” (3-5):** What historical events happened around the time Jacqueline was born? What predictions can you make about her story based on its historical setting?
  
- 3. “the woodsons of ohio” (8-9):** According to Jacqueline, what does it mean to be a descendant of the Woodsons of Ohio?
  
- 4. “it’ll be scary sometimes” (13-14):** What are three details that you learn about Jacqueline’s great-great-grandfather and his son? Why do you think Jacqueline’s mother makes sure her children know the story of these two men?

What does this poem suggest about the importance of remembering the past and knowing the stories of individuals in your family and community who came before you?

5. **“other people’s memory” (17–18):** How do different family members remember the day Jacqueline was born? What do these stories about Jacqueline’s birth suggest about the ways that people remember the past?
  
6. **“my mother and grace” (25–26):** What do you think it means for a person to be home to someone else? How are Mary Ann (Jacqueline’s mother) and Grace (Mary Ann’s mother-in-law) home to each other?
  
7. **“each winter” (27–28) and “journey” (29):** Why won’t Jacqueline’s father, Jack, live in South Carolina? What does his decision suggest about how the time and place in which you live can influence your choices and actions?
  
8. **In Part 1: “i am born,”** we learn about Jack’s family, the Woodsons of Nelsonville, Ohio, and Mary Ann’s family, the Irbys of Greenville, South Carolina. What similarities and/or differences do you notice in the descriptions of the two places and families? Draw a Venn diagram in the space below or on separate paper to help organize your ideas.

9. How is Jacqueline connected to the past? How does history and the legacy of past generations influence her sense of self and belonging in the world? How do you know?

## Part 2: “the stories of south carolina run like rivers” (43–138)

10. **“the garden” (48–49):** In “the woodsons of ohio” (8-9) and “it’ll be scary sometimes” (13–14), we learn about the Woodson side of Jacqueline’s family and that her great-great-grandfather was born a free man in Ohio in 1832. In “the garden” we learn more about her mother’s side of the family. Who were enslaved people on Jacqueline’s mother’s side of the family? Who was born free? How do these poems help you understand her family members’ relationships to the places they call home?

How might the Woodson and Irby family legacies impact the family members’ sense of who they are, the choices available to them, and how they make decisions?

11. **“at the end of the day” (53–54):** What does this poem suggest about the ways in which the South was and was not changing in the early 1960s, when Jacqueline was a child?

12. **Poems on pages 55–65:** What kinds of stories get read and told in this part of *Brown Girl Dreaming*? What do these stories teach Jacqueline about herself and her world?

What role do stories—stories you hear, read, and watch—play in your life?

- 13. “the almost friends” (66–67):** Who are the children in Jacqueline’s Greenville neighborhood? Why do you think Jacqueline describes them as “our almost friends” rather than “our friends”?

At what point does an acquaintance become a friend?

- 14. “south carolina at war” (72–74):** Why are “people marching all over the South”?

Toward the end of the poem, Jacqueline observes: “So there’s a war going on in South Carolina / and even as we play / and plant and preach and sleep, we are a part of it.” How are Jacqueline and her family a part of the war?

- 15. “the training” (75–77):** Where do the trainings take place? Why do you think people are not allowed to participate in the protests if they haven’t gone through the trainings?



**16. “miss bell and the marchers” (80–81):** What are some of the choices that people in Jacqueline’s family and community must make when they help to organize and participate in the protests? What are the possible consequences they face?

**17. “family names” (86–87):** How do the names in Jacqueline’s grandmother’s and grandfather’s families differ from one another? What do you think her grandfather means when he says, “Gave their kids names / that no master could ever take away”?

**18. “american dream” (88–89):** How does Jacqueline’s grandmother describe the dream in this poem? Based on what you have read so far, what does *Brown Girl Dreaming* suggest about the possibility of everyone achieving the American dream?

**19. “the fabric store” (90–91) and “ghosts” (92):** Make a list of five words that come to mind when you think about ghosts. How does the simile “like a ghost” help you understand how the painted-over signs make Jacqueline and members of her community feel?

What lessons about the legacy of the Jim Crow era in the Greenville community can the poems “the fabric store” and “ghosts” teach us? How does this legacy impact the identities and choices of the people in Greenville?

**20. “the leavers” (93) and “the beginning of the leaving” (94):** Why are men and women leaving Greenville, and where are they going? Where do you think they are getting their ideas about what life there will be like?

**21. “my mother leaving greenville” (103):** Identify two similes in this poem (there are more than two). What feeling or emotion does each one evoke? Taken together, how do they contribute to the overall mood of the poem?

**22. “halfway home #1” (104):** What do you think Jacqueline’s mother means when she says, “Right now, . . . / we’re only halfway home”? What’s the difference between being halfway home, fully home, and not home?

In the final stanzas, Jacqueline asks three questions. How would you answer her? Will she and her family always “have to choose / between home / / and home”? Or can a person belong to two places at the same time?

**23. “sterling high school, greenville” (110–111):** The Sterling High School fire was a real event that happened on September 15, 1967, in Greenville, South Carolina. What can this poem teach us about the legacy of Jim Crow laws and race relations in Greenville at this time? What questions does this poem raise for you?

**24. “faith” (112–113), “hall street” (116–117), and “how i learn the days of the week” (119–120):** How would you describe Jacqueline’s relationship with religion? How does our membership in various groups—families, religious institutions, schools, neighborhoods—affect how others think about us? How can it influence how we think about ourselves?

**25. “new playmates” (125–126):** How do Jacqueline and her siblings see themselves in the dolls that her mother sends them from New York? How did you see yourself or not see yourself in the toys you played with as a child?

Why is it important for children to see themselves reflected in the toys and games they play with at home and in school? How can imagination and play help children form their identities and understand the world around them?

**26.** What individuals and experiences help to shape Jacqueline’s beliefs about herself and the world around her as she is growing up? Find three examples from Part 2: “the stories of south carolina run like rivers” and rank them in order of significance.

**Part 3: “followed the sky’s mirrored constellation to freedom”  
(141–203)**

- 27. “herzl street” (145–146):** What do you think Jacqueline means when she describes the people who visit Herzl Street as “red dirt and pine trees,” “fireflies in jelly jars,” and “lemon-chiffon ice cream cones”?
- 28. “caroline but we called her aunt kay, some memories” (149–150):** What kind of memories does Jacqueline share about Aunt Kay? Look at the structure of the poem, specifically the length of each sentence. What do you notice? What is the effect on you, the reader?
- 29. “composition notebook” (154–155):** Why do you think the composition notebook brings Jacqueline so much joy? Why can’t Odella understand the significance of the notebook?

What memory do you have of a significant object in your childhood that brought you joy?

- 30. “first grade” (158–159):** Record three details about Jacqueline’s school, P.S. 106, and her first-grade teacher, Ms. Feidler. What do you think teachers can say and do to show students that they believe in them?

**31. “flag” and “because we’re witnesses” on pages 162–164:** How does religion impact Jacqueline’s sense of self and belonging now that she is living in Brooklyn? What might be challenging about practicing a religion that is different from that of your peers?

**32. “gifted” (169):** In what ways does Odella seem similar to Jacqueline? In what ways does she seem different?

What are some of the challenges that younger siblings can face when they are trying to develop their own unique identities in their families and at school?

**33. “believing” (175–176):** How do Uncle Robert and Jacqueline’s mother respond to Jacqueline’s stories? In what ways are the stories that Jacqueline tells made up? In what ways are they real?

**34. “our father, fading away” (181–182):** What is the purpose of including this poem at this point in the memoir? Why doesn’t Jacqueline fully believe Hope when he says, “Out of sight, out of mind”?

- 35. “halfway home #1” (104) and “halfway home #2” (183–184):** How does “halfway home #2” help to answer the questions Jacqueline poses at the end of “halfway home #1”? Why do you think these two poems are titled “halfway home”? What would it feel like for Jacqueline to be “all the way home”?
- 36. “mrs. hughes’s house” (193–195):** How do the children at Mrs. Hughes’s Nursery and Day School treat Hope, Odella, and Jacqueline? What factors do you think motivate their behavior?
- 37. “how to listen #4” (196):** The fourth haiku in the memoir is a response to what happens at Mrs. Hughes’s school. What advice does Dell give her siblings? What other options do they have? What do we learn about Dell’s character in this haiku?
- 38. Poems on pages 191–203:** When the children return to Greenville, in what ways do they feel like they are home? In what ways do they no longer feel at home in South Carolina?

What does it mean to be from the North and the South and not be fully at home in either place?

39. What individuals and experiences help to shape Jacqueline's beliefs about herself and the world around her as she is growing up? Find three examples from Part 3: "followed the sky's mirrored constellation to freedom" and rank them in order of significance.

#### Part 4: "deep in my heart, i do believe" (205-278)

40. "lessons" (214-215): What lessons does Jacqueline's mother try to teach her? How did Jacqueline's mother respond when her mother tried to teach her the same lessons? What are some other examples of lessons that are passed down from generation to generation in *Brown Girl Dreaming*?
41. "writing #1" (217) and "writing #2" (221-222): How does Jacqueline teach herself how to read? How can reading and writing influence how we make sense of the world around us?
42. "stevie and me" (227-228): What impact does the children's book *Stevie* have on Jacqueline's sense of identity and belonging in the world?

What might be the impact of never reading stories with characters that look like you? What might be the impact of only encountering stories with characters that look like you?

- 43. “what everybody knows now” (237–238):** What is the impact of the legacy of Jim Crow on Jacqueline and her grandmother? Consider their sense of who they are, the choices available to them, and the choices they ultimately make.
- 44. “fresh air” (242–243):** What assumptions does Maria’s summer host family in Schenectady, New York, make about her, her family, and her neighborhood? Where do you think they get these assumptions?
- 45. “learning from langston” (245):** The epigraph to *Brown Girl Dreaming* is the poem “Dreams” by Langston Hughes. How is Jacqueline inspired by the African American poet Langston Hughes?

What writer—of books, short stories, poetry, plays, screenplays for film or television, blogs, etc.—inspires you? How?



**46. “the selfish giant” (246–248):** What is the simile in the final stanza of the poem, and how does it help you understand Jacqueline’s relationship to stories and storytelling?

After Jacqueline recites “The Selfish Giant” from memory, her teacher exclaims, “Brilliant!” (248). What is Jacqueline’s brilliance? How does it feel to have one’s brilliance acknowledged and celebrated at school by teachers and peers?

**47. “john’s bargain store” (253):** How is eating out and shopping on Knickerbocker Avenue in Brooklyn similar to and/or different from eating out and shopping in Greenville? What choice does Jacqueline make about shopping at Woolworth’s in Brooklyn? What factors do you think impact her choice?

**48. “dannemora” (270–271):** Why do you think Woodson focuses attention on Hope in this poem rather than her mother, Odella, Roman, or herself?

Why do you think Woodson capitalizes “THAT!” in the final stanza, the only word in all-capitals in the memoir? What does her choice imply about the relationship between our names and our identities?

- 49. “mountain song” (273–274):** What is the mood of this poem? What are three examples that help to create this mood? Consider the imagery, repetition of words, spacing, and the length of the lines.
- 50. “daddy” (276–277):** What are two important lessons that Jacqueline’s grandfather teaches her about herself or her world? What role does family play in shaping Jacqueline’s values and beliefs about the world?
- 51.** How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling influence the way Jacqueline understands herself and makes sense of the world around her? Support your answer with two or three examples from Part 4: “deep in my heart, i do believe.”

### Part 5: “ready to change the world” (281–320)

- 52. “after greenville #1” (36–37) and “after greenville #2” (283–284):** What are some of the similarities between the two “after greenville” poems? Consider the subject of the poems as well as the structure and use of literary devices.

Reread the final stanza of “after greenville #2” (284). How have Jacqueline’s and her grandmother’s worlds changed forever? If you were to read this stanza out loud, what tone would you use and why?

**53. “bushwick history lesson” (297–298):** How does learning the history of Bushwick and New York City impact Jacqueline’s understanding of herself and her place in the world? What do you know about the history of your community? Where might you go to learn more about it?

**54. “say it loud” (304–305):** This poem is titled “say it loud,” yet Jacqueline chooses to stay silent when her elderly neighbor describes what the Bushwick neighborhood used to be like. Why do you think Jacqueline doesn’t share what she is thinking? What is the significance of the poem’s title?

**55. “the revolution” (308–309):** In the poem “say it loud” (304–305), Jacqueline admits that she doesn’t understand the revolution, yet in the poem “the revolution,” she seems to have an understanding of it. How does Jacqueline describe the revolution? How does she feel as if she is a part of it?

**56. “a writer” (311–312):** What impact does Jacqueline’s fifth-grade teacher, Ms. Vivo, have on her identity? How have other teachers impacted Jacqueline’s identity and sense of belonging?

What role can teachers play in shaping the lives of their students? Has a particular teacher, coach, or mentor played a role in shaping your life so far? If so, how?

**57. “what I believe” (317–318):** Based on this poem and what you have read in the memoir, what individuals and experiences have influenced Jacqueline’s beliefs about herself and the world around her? Which ones do you think are the strongest influences? How do you know?

What individuals and experiences have shaped your beliefs about yourself and the world around you? In what ways are your experiences similar to and different from Jacqueline’s?

**58. “each world” (319–320):** What does the final poem in the memoir suggest about how we are all connected to the past? How do history and the legacy of past generations influence who we are today?

What does this suggest about our ability to determine our own future? What makes you say that?

**59.** How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling influence the way Jacqueline understands herself and makes sense of the world around her? Support your ideas with three examples from the memoir.

How do the acts of reading, writing, and storytelling influence the way you understand yourself and make sense of the world around you? What makes you say that?

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