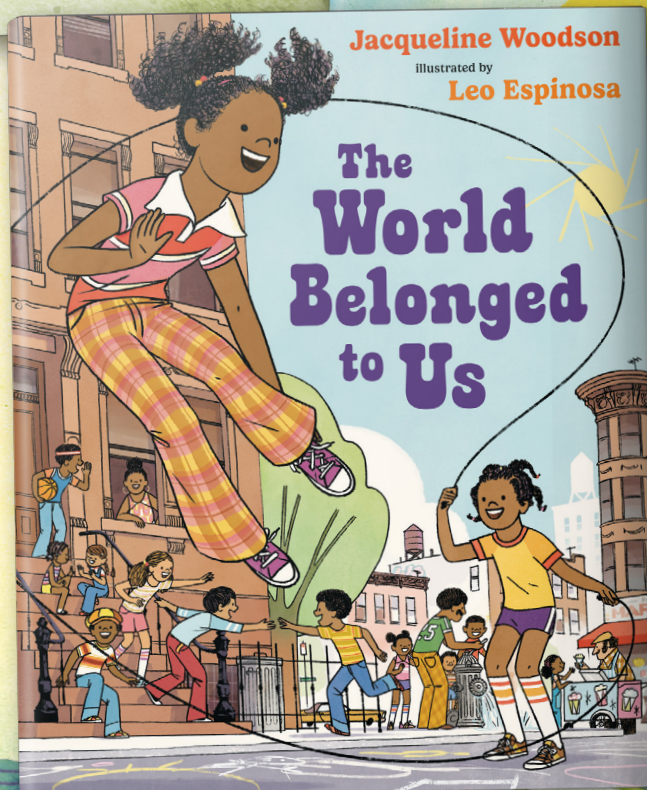
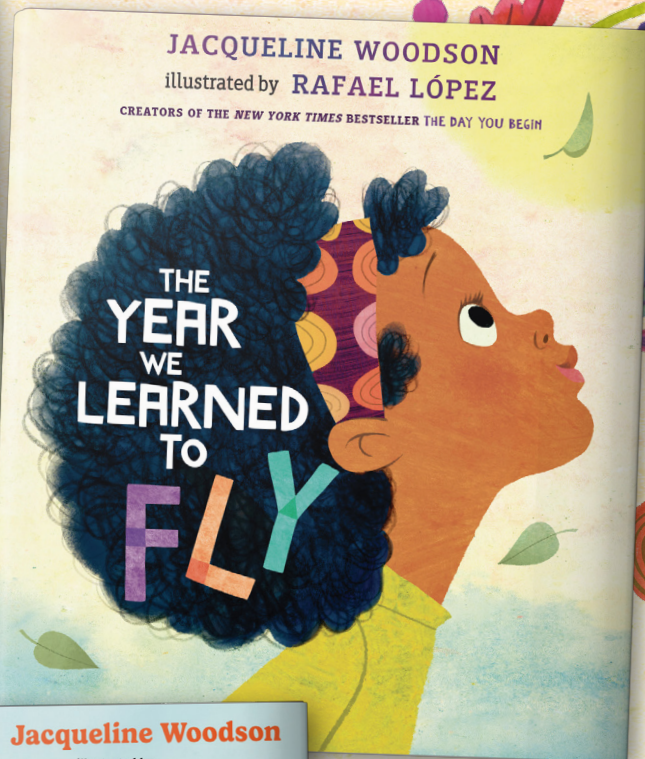


An Educator's Guide to Picture Books by JACQUELINE WOODSON





JACQUELINE WOODSON is an award-winning writer for children and adults. She is the recipient of a 2020 MacArthur Fellowship, the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award, the 2018 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, and the 2018 Children's Literature Legacy Award. She was the 2018–2019 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, and in 2015, she was named the Young People's Poet Laureate by the Poetry Foundation. She received the 2014 National Book Award for her *New York Times* bestselling memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming*, which was also a recipient of the Coretta Scott King Award, a Newbery Honor, the NAACP Image Award, and a Sibert Honor. Woodson lives in Brooklyn, NY.
www.jacquelinewoodson.com

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

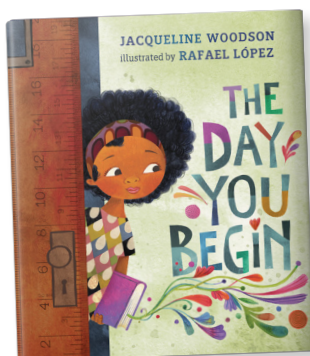
This guide accompanies the following picture books written by Jacqueline Woodson: *The Day You Begin* and *The Year We Learned to Fly*, both illustrated by Rafael López, and *The World Belonged to Us*, illustrated by Leo Espinosa. The guide is divided up, presenting each book with discussion questions and suggested activities. The guide concludes with ideas about how to incorporate all three of Woodson's books into your classroom to encourage work with broader themes and to extend young readers' reading experiences.

These layered, complex books invite multiple readings and read alouds with children to encourage a deeper appreciation and understanding of the ideas presented within them. [Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop \(2016\)](#) offers three helpful ways of focusing these successive readings, noting that teachers need not go in any particular order as they decide what works for their individual purposes. These three approaches, however, do encourage a way of gaining a robust experience with the books. They are:

1. "Engaging with the book: inviting and building on students' personal responses
2. Appreciation of the literary and artistic qualities: enhancing students' awareness of the author's—and artist's—crafts with a view to enriching the reading experience and providing a potential resource to support students' writing; and
3. Thinking about social issues: examining aspects of the text that relate to issues of social concern and that could lead to social action on the part of the student" (p. 120)

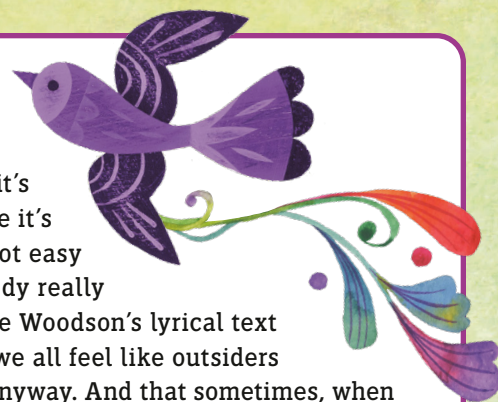
This guide incorporates opportunities to use these three modes of response to encourage active engagement with each text and to support readers' understanding of the power of Woodson's words and López's and Espinosa's art.

This guide was created by Dr. Kimberly N. Parker, Director of the Crimson Summer Academy at Harvard. She is the 2020 recipient of the NCTE Outstanding Elementary Educator Award, a co-founder of #DisruptTexts and #31DaysIBPOC, and the author of *Literacy Is Liberation: Working Toward Justice Through Culturally Relevant Teaching* (ASCD, 2022). Twitter: @TchKimpossible



The Day You Begin

There are many reasons to feel different. Maybe it's how you look or talk, or where you're from; maybe it's what you eat, or something just as random. It's not easy to take those first steps into a place where nobody really knows you yet, but somehow you do it. Jacqueline Woodson's lyrical text and Rafael López's dazzling art reminds us that we all feel like outsiders sometimes—and how brave it is that we go forth anyway. And that sometimes, when we reach out and begin to share our stories, others will be happy to meet us halfway.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Name, write, or draw about a time when you've been in an unfamiliar situation, when "no one there is quite like you," and you had to be brave. What happened? Who helped you to be brave? What did you learn about yourself?
- What words do the different narrators use to describe themselves? Collect them. What do you notice about those words? What other descriptors do you observe about the narrators: race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.? Make these same observations about other characters in the story. Focus on the different narrators. What words could you use to describe them? Who are they? What is notable about having different narrators tell parts of the story? Why do you think López decided to create different narrators?
- Describe the importance of Rigoberto's teacher saying his name "so soft and beautifully that your name and homeland sound like flowers blooming the first bright notes of a song." How does the teacher's actions make Rigoberto feel? Which words help you to understand the importance of how she pronounces his name? Which images from pages 7–8 support your thinking?
- Where does the story take place? Do you notice any similarities and differences about the various places and the people within them?
- Notice the child who sits away from her classmates who describe what they did over the summer (p. 9). What is the significance of her sitting away from her classmates? What emotions might she be feeling? What might she be thinking? What could make a person's voice grow smaller in a situation like this? What might the community do to encourage everyone to feel welcome to share their stories?
- A triumph is when someone experiences an accomplishment or a success. The narrator realizes that she has many strengths, especially when she thinks about her summer. Identify all the activities she does, the people she cares for, etc. What do these qualities tell us about her "triumphs of a journey"?
- What would cause the narrator to question why their friend Nadja "doesn't remember that rice is the most popular food in the world"? What could the children who are on the previous page be doing instead of watching? What would be a brave thing for them to do?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *continued*

- How would you define being brave? Is it always easy to be brave? The narrator makes a brave choice and shares their experience with their classmates at the end of the story. How do their classmates respond? Was being brave worth the risk?
- How has the narrator changed from the beginning of the story to the end? What details do you notice in the illustrations that let you know they've changed? What words indicate that they've changed?
- What makes you similar to and different from your friends? Why is it important to have all kinds of friends, especially ones that are different from us? How can we be sure we are being supportive of our friends? What actions do we need to practice? When might we need to be brave in situations where we might not have friends or other unfamiliar situations?

ACTIVITIES

- **Writing prompt:** Write about a time you wanted to play with a new person or group. What did you do? Invite students to compare situations based on their lives. Then, encourage them to discuss and share their writing, using this as a way to discuss problem-solving, conflict resolution, and other age-appropriate challenges that would benefit from whole-group collaborative thinking.
- **A symbol is an object or idea in a book that has several meanings:** the one in the book (literal) and other meanings beyond the book. Track the illustrations of books and reading. When do books appear? When are they open? When are they closed? What might this symbol of the book and reading be communicating to readers?
- **Role-play:** What can make us consider someone an outsider? How does leaving someone out make that person feel? Is leaving someone out fair? How can we make different choices and help someone feel included? After discussing these questions, invite readers to think of some ways they could model inviting friends to participate in an activity. Then, ask children to role-play those situations and then to practice them in real life as a way of creating a welcoming environment.
- **Developing emotional literacy:** Select a page from *The Day You Begin* that depicts the narrator in a challenging situation. Ask: What is happening? What do you notice? What is the character feeling? Help students name the emotions that correspond to the feelings. If you select a page with the narrator distanced from classmates or other children, you can also ask students what they notice about those children and how those children might be feeling. Also, ask children what they would do if they were in those situations. Encourage children to think about the impact of emotions and actions, especially for children who may be left out.





The Year We Learned to Fly

On a dreary, stuck-inside kind of day, a brother and sister heed their grandmother's advice: *"Use those beautiful and brilliant minds of yours. Lift your arms, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and believe in a thing. Somebody somewhere at some point was just as bored you are now."* And before they know it, their imaginations lift them up and out of their boredom. Then, on a day full of quarrels, it's time for a trip outside their minds again, and they are able to leave their anger behind. This precious skill, their grandmother tells them, harkens back to the days long before they were born, when their ancestors showed the world the strength and resilience of their beautiful and brilliant minds. Jacqueline Woodson's lyrical text and Rafael López's dazzling art celebrate the extraordinary ability to lift ourselves up and imagine a better world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When does the story take place? How does the narrator feel? What does she wish would happen? Where does she want to go and to be able to do? What do you do when you're bored? What do you do if you don't have access to technology? Where could your imagination take you? If you could fly anywhere you wanted, where would you go?
- The story begins with the line "That was the year we learned to fly . . ." When, exactly is "the year"? What does this first line invite us to think about? Notice the use of ellipses. What does that usage suggest is about to happen next? What feelings and questions does this line bring to mind? Why would Woodson use this particular punctuation?
- Describe the changes in the city the narrator notices once she begins to fly. What does flight allow her to change her mind about and how she is using her "beautiful and brilliant mind"? What do you observe in the illustrations that supports your thinking? During each different season, how does the narrator learn to fly? By the end of the story, how have the narrator and her brother changed?
- How do the narrator and her brother feel about each other? Do the feelings change throughout the seasons? If so, what events cause the change of their feelings? Have you ever felt similarly about a sibling or relative, and did those feelings change? Why?
- What kind of person is the grandmother? What does she want the children to understand? Explain the significance of the illustrations with the grandmother's hand on the narrator's shoulder throughout the book, and how that gesture makes the narrator feel. Is there someone in your life that provides advice and encouragement, especially when you are frustrated? What words have they said to you that helped you find your brilliance?
- Ancestors are people who have lived before us and who we are related to either by birth or by inspiration. Often, ancestors can provide us with understanding and hope for how to live in the present. Who are the people in the leaves on page 20? What is their connection to the narrator and the grandmother?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *continued*

- Think about López's illustrations of birds throughout the story. Where do birds appear? What do you think Woodson and López want us to understand through the use of this symbol?
- Find the ways flight is depicted throughout the story (i.e., words, images, etc.). Why do people in the story want to fly? What are they flying away from? What are they flying towards? How does knowing how to fly help them? What do they learn and remember about flying?
- Look closely at the illustrations on pages 18–19. Describe what is in the narrator's head. What is the grandmother's gesture communicating to the narrator? On the next page, what is the importance of the bird flying with a broken iron cuff? What does the grandmother mean when she says "nobody can ever cuff your beautiful and brilliant mind"? Please see notes about these pages and teaching enslavement with children in the next section.
- Who were "the people who came before"? How did they create a way for the narrator, her grandmother, and others to use their "beautiful and brilliant mind"? Who has encouraged your brilliance?



Note About Teaching Enslavement:

Woodson draws on the enduring folklore of the Flying African to help articulate Black people's agency and ability to self-liberate as she connects history to the present. Please use thought and care when discussing enslavement with children, and draw on the best updated scholarship in advance as you prepare to carefully discuss these issues with children.

With the right amount of preparation and care, children can and must learn the truth about enslavement and the African Americans who were, and are, foundational to our country.

Also, remember that Black people are not a monolith and that enslavement is part of what makes up African Americans' experiences, but that enslavement is not all that Black people are. Woodson's book is a fantastic way to extend narratives about enslavement while also stressing the powerful agency and collectivism of Black people. Consider sharing *Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones, Renée Watson, and Nikkolas Smith as a text pairing that can extend conversations and can connect history to the present in affirming, hopeful ways. For help using appropriate terms to describe enslavement, please see the guide, ["Writing About 'Slavery'? This Might Help" from Dr. P. Gabrielle Foreman.](#)

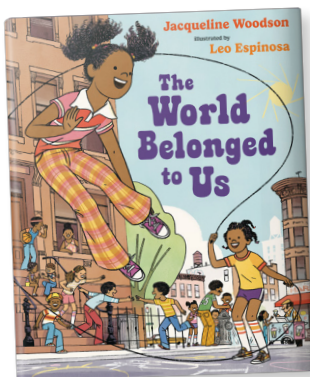


ACTIVITIES

- The motif of African Americans and flight is an important and enduring one, particularly because Black people were able to self-liberate, leaving enslavement and flying back to Africa. Explore some suggested picture books that depict flight, flying, and African Americans, such as Faith Ringold's *Tar Beach* and Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly*, illustrated by Diane and Leo Dillon, and discuss the themes depicted in the text and the importance of this recurring motif in literature. Consider building children's background knowledge of and appreciation for this motif by sharing "The Ibo Landing Story" ([The Ibo Landing Story](#)) and additional art by [Constanza Knight](#).
- **Writing prompt:** What is freedom to you? What would it take for you to figure out how to fly? What dreams would you need to have? Where would you go? What do you need to leave behind? Who would go with you? What ancestors would you remember as a source of inspiration? Encourage children to respond through art, drawing inspiration from López's illustrations.
- Listen to Nina Simone's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" and share the cover of Dr. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Invite children into a conversation about what they notice and the connections they can make about these texts and *The Year We Learned to Fly*. Facilitate an art-making session in response to their enduring understandings about a theme that resonates with them from either the picture book, song, or book cover, or a combination of all three.



Art © 2022 by Rafael Lopez



The World Belonged To Us

It's getting hot outside, hot enough to turn on the hydrants and run through the water—and that means it's finally summer in the city! Released from school and reveling in their freedom, the kids on one Brooklyn block take advantage of everything summertime has to offer. Freedom from morning till night to go out to meet their friends and make the streets their playground—jumping double Dutch, playing tag and hide-and-seek, building forts, chasing ice cream trucks, and best of all, believing anything is possible. That is, till their moms call them home for dinner. But not to worry—they know there is always tomorrow to do it all over again—because the block belongs to them and they rule their world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe how you feel on the last day of school. Then, as you read the book, which children's expressions capture similar feelings for you? What is nostalgia? Do you sense nostalgia as you read this book? Why do you think Woodson and Espinosa created the feeling of nostalgia for the reader?
- When and where does the story take place? How do you know? What kind of place is Brooklyn? How do Espinosa's illustrations make you feel about Brooklyn?
- On page 4, the narrator says: "But we *had* to run through the water, bookbags and all. Because our teachers' final words had been 'Have a good summer.'" Why do you think Woodson italicized "had"?
- Define what makes a community. Then, as you read, decide what parts of this neighborhood make a community. What details do you notice? What words stand out?
- What does the phrase "free as summer" mean? What does freedom mean to you? Which pictures resonate with your ideas of freedom?
- How would you define fun? What do children do for fun? What might limit when and why some children are unable to experience fun? What do you notice the children in the book doing for fun? What are they learning? From whom are they learning? What are they unlearning (i.e., stereotypes, etc.)?
- In what ways do you see children taking care of each other on page 12 and throughout the book? What do these ways of care tell us about how the children feel about each other?
- Woodson uses powerful verbs. Which ones stand out to you? How do these verbs work together with Espinosa's illustrations?
- Dialogue is written in different colored text throughout the book. What is the effect of this choice?
- Where are the adults? What are they doing? What does the absence of adults suggest about children and what they are able to do by themselves, working together with each other?



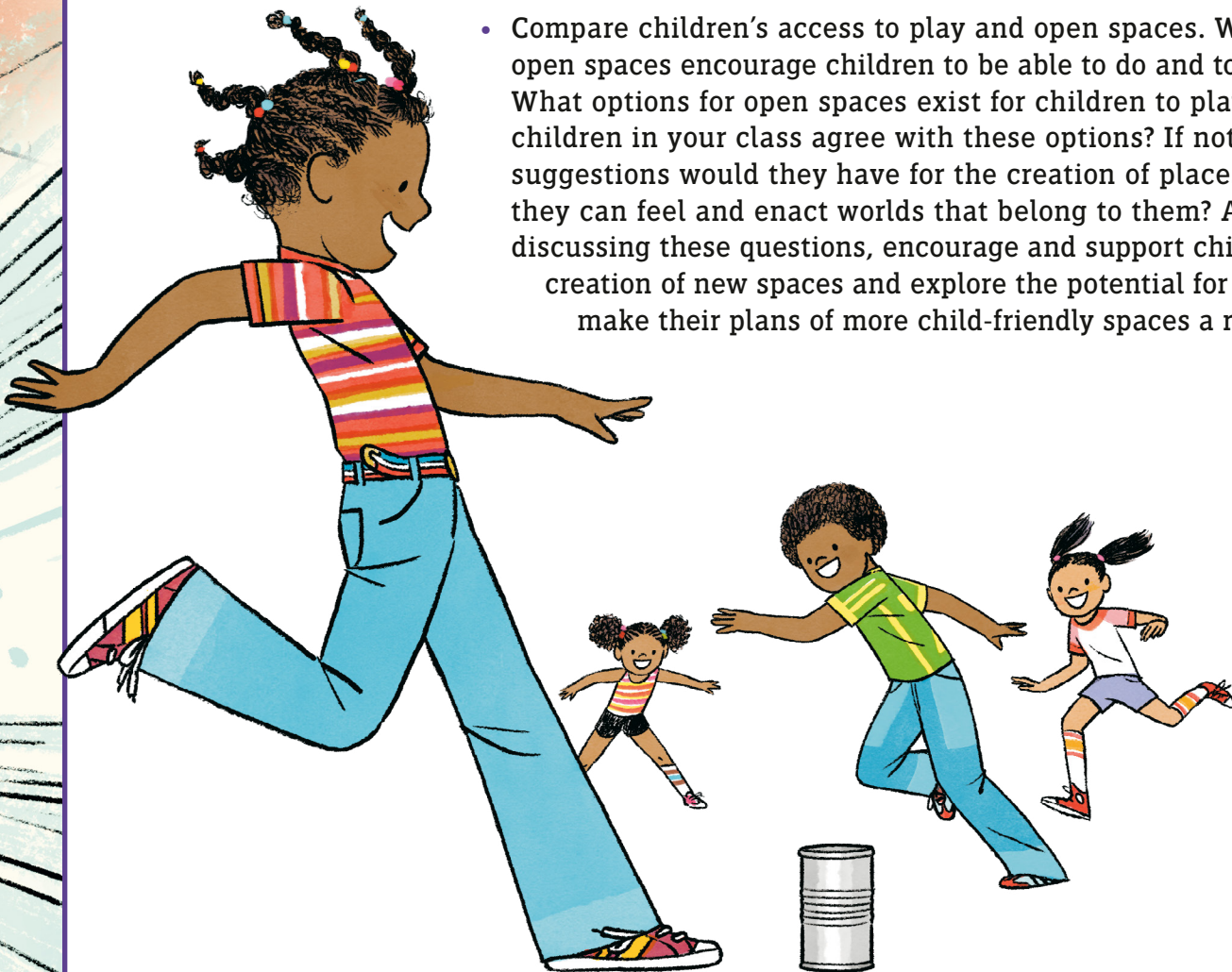
Art © 2022 by Leo Espinosa

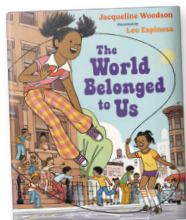
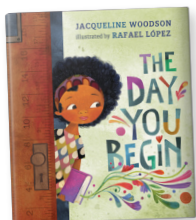
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *continued*

- Why is it important when friends share money with each other for ice cream? What does this kindness help us to understand about how the children treat and take care of each other?
- Read the last page. How do you feel when you read this page? What does it make you believe, hope for, and feel excited about? Why do you think Woodson ends the book this way?

ACTIVITIES

- Are there places in your life where you have believed “the whole wide world felt like it belonged to us”? Try making art in similar styles as Espinoza about a place where you feel you belong.
- If possible, share this book with children and their families. Then, support them as they interview someone a bit older than them about childhood experiences. Let children ask an older person, especially, about their memories of playing. Did they ever have a place in the world where they felt belonged to them? Encourage them to describe that place to the child, and for the child to share their responses with the class.
- Compare children’s access to play and open spaces. What do open spaces encourage children to be able to do and to explore? What options for open spaces exist for children to play? Do children in your class agree with these options? If not, what suggestions would they have for the creation of places where they can feel and enact worlds that belong to them? After discussing these questions, encourage and support children’s creation of new spaces and explore the potential for them to make their plans of more child-friendly spaces a reality.





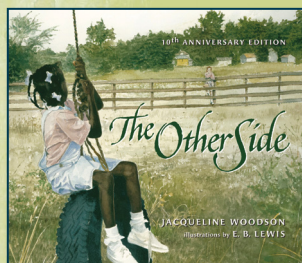
CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

for all three books

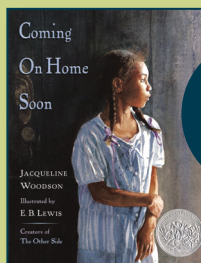


- **Author Study of Jacqueline Woodson:** Consider these three books as a text set for a classroom author study of Jacqueline Woodson. After sharing the texts with students, ask them what parts of the book they enjoyed. Woodson does an exemplary job using language and imagery effectively; helping students focus on examples can also help them generate ideas.
- **Illustrator Study:** Study Rafael López's art in *The Day You Begin* and *The Year We Learned to Fly*. What are the characteristics of López's artwork based on what you observed in these two books (i.e., how would you define his style?). What images are similar in both texts? What colors? What else? Why might López have used these similarities in both books? What does he want readers to understand and consider? How does López use perspective to highlight and extend Woodson's words? (Don't forget the inside covers!)
- **Talking About Race:** Children build their racial literacy and ability to talk about race and racism by practicing. López and Espinosa's illustrations depict a range of multicultural children. Take time to support children as they name what they notice about characters' race, gender, ability, etc., even the white characters. Normalize talking about identity in ways that encourage children to continue talking about race and developing their comfort about race.
- **Playing with Words:** Jacqueline Woodson does a masterful job with word choice, repetition, imagery, and more. With children, select words and phrases for close study. Ask the children what they notice Woodson doing and the impact of her words and language on understanding themes or other ideas. Post the words and phrases for study and inspiration, and to use as mentor writing. Then, guide students as they write their own sentences, poems, and stories in the way of Woodson and as they play with their own language and writing. Regularly let students share what they wrote and what they learned about their own craft from studying Woodson.
- **Emotional Literacy:** All three books present invitations for developing children's emotional literacy. Find images and phrases throughout that depict different emotions. Then, using The Emotion Wheel, guide children in naming the emotions and the impact of those emotions on an individual and others. Aim to develop children's range of emotions that encourage them to have expansive ways of discussing and handling their emotions.
- **Research:** Does everyone have the same rights and access to freedom? Whose freedom is limited? Within your local community, who are the people who have unrestricted freedom, and who are the people who do not? What is our responsibility to assure everyone's freedom? Conduct research with children, focusing particularly on topics that could include incarceration, LGBTQIA+ rights, Black girls and school-based discipline, and other issues that impact BIPOC children. Collaboratively, decide on what local action they can take that would impact change in one of these areas. Then, have them reflect on the process, what they came to understand about freedom, and their next steps to keep working toward social justice for everyone.

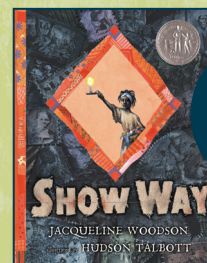
Every bookshelf needs a picture book by JACQUELINE WOODSON



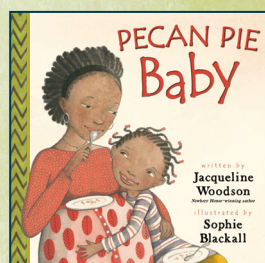
A story of friendship and compassion set in a segregated town.



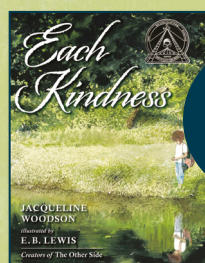
A generational story of family and longing set during World War II.



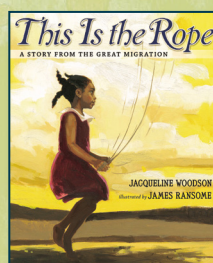
A touching tribute to women whose strength and knowledge illuminate their daughters' lives.



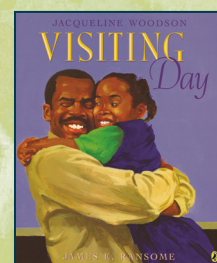
Gia is about to get a new sibling, but that won't ruin her special bond with her mom.



Small acts of kindness can change the world and spark new friendship.



Follow one little girl and her family as they journey north during the Great Migration.



A young girl and her grandmother prepare for a very special day—the one day a month they get to visit the girl's father in prison.



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER!

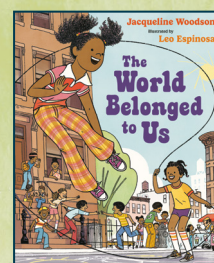


A book about finding the courage to connect, even when you feel scared and alone.
Also available in Spanish!

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER!



Your beautiful and brilliant mind will make you SOAR.
Also available in Spanish!



In Brooklyn, in the summer, not so long ago . . . the kids ruled the streets.
Also available in Spanish!