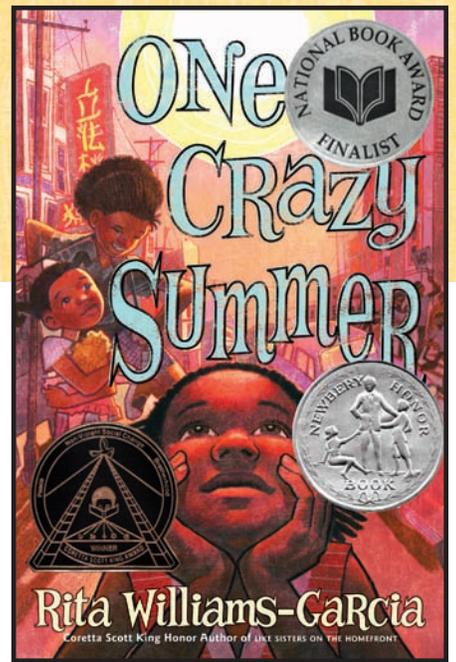


ONE CRAZY SUMMER

By Rita Williams-Garcia
Discussion Guide



About the Book

Eleven-year-old Delphine has it together. Even though her mother, Cecile, abandoned her and her younger sisters, Vonetta and Fern, seven years ago. Even though her father and Big Ma will send them from Brooklyn to Oakland, California, to stay with Cecile for the summer. And even though Delphine will have to take care of her sisters, as usual, and learn the truth about the missing pieces of the past.

When the girls arrive in Oakland in the summer of 1968, Cecile wants nothing to do with them. She makes them eat Chinese takeout dinners, forbids them to enter her kitchen, and never explains the strange visitors with Afros and black berets who knock on her door. Rather than spend time with them, Cecile sends Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern to a summer camp sponsored by a revolutionary group, the Black Panthers, where the girls get a radical new education about the world, their mother, and themselves.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe Delphine's relationship with her sisters? How is it like your relationship with your sibling(s) or like the relationships of siblings you know? How is it different? What does Delphine mean when she says she enjoys her role as Vonetta and Fern's "enemy and big sister"?
2. What does Delphine expect from Cecile? Do her expectations differ from Vonetta's and Fern's expectations? Why? What word or words would you use to describe Cecile?
3. What does Delphine decide about Oakland on her first night there? If you were in her place, would you have come to a similar conclusion? Have you ever felt similarly about a place you've visited? Did you discover anything that changed your mind?
4. Are Cecile and Delphine at all alike? How? How are they different? What does Cecile mean when she tells Delphine that it wouldn't kill her to be selfish (p. 110)?
5. What elements in the story give you clues about the characters' personalities? Some of the characters have objects that are closely associated with them, like Delphine and her Timex, Cecile and her printing press, and Hirohito and his go-kart. What do these objects say about the characters? Can you find more examples of characters with close associations to objects in the story?
6. Names play an important role in the story. How does Cecile feel about names? How does she explain the name she gave herself, Nzila? Why is Delphine upset when she finds her name in the dictionary? Why does Cecile call Fern "Little Girl" for most of the book, and what finally causes her to call Fern "Fern"? Why does Delphine tell Fern her Cecile-given name, even though Cecile hadn't planned to tell her?
7. Are the Black Panthers Delphine observes at breakfast her first few mornings in Oakland like she expected them to be? How do Sister Mukumbu and Sister Pat differ from Delphine's expectations? What do you think she means when she says that "beating eggs never makes the evening news" (p. 64)?
8. What kind of image does Crazy Kelvin project? Is it possible to judge the whole Black Panther group based on Crazy Kelvin's actions? Do you think groups can be distinguished negatively or positively by the actions of individual members?
9. What does the stool in the kitchen mean to Delphine? Does her relationship with Cecile change the evening the stool appears? How?
10. How does Delphine feel about the messages of the Black Panthers? Why does she want to stop taking her sisters to the People's Center and skip the rally? Do her beliefs about the Black Panthers and their messages change throughout the story? How would you have felt in her place?
11. *One Crazy Summer* is full of metaphors. Look up the definition of the word *metaphor* (if you don't already know what it means). Do you think Delphine's ride on the go-kart is a metaphor? What might the go-kart ride symbolize? What other metaphors can you find in the story?
12. Do you feel any sympathy for Cecile throughout the book? Does hearing Cecile's story at the end make you more sympathetic toward her? How does Delphine react to learning her mother's side of the story she's been hearing for years? How do you think you would have felt in her place?
13. Do the sisters find what they were looking for on their trip to Oakland? Why, or why not?

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Extension Activities

1. **Be a Journalist.** Have students research the Black Panther movement. What aspects of the organization were covered most prominently in the media? Does their public image match Delphine's experience with them? Ask students to write a magazine or newspaper article (or a letter to the editor) about the Black Panthers from Delphine's perspective.
2. **Living History.** Encourage students to read about what was happening in the Civil Rights Movement in 1968. Then have each of them interview someone who was old enough in 1968 to remember what was going on, to get a first-hand perspective on history.
3. **Civil Rights Today.** Prompt students to look through current newspapers and magazines or to do some online research about what civil rights issues are most prominent in the news today. In groups or individually, have students choose one issue to learn about and present to the class.
4. **Day Tripping.** Ask students to put themselves in Delphine's place and plan a day trip for two younger siblings. Have them choose a city, find a map, and then plan out all of the places they'll take their siblings and how much money they'll need for each item on the itinerary.
5. **Be a Poet.** Have students take a cue from Cecile and Fern and write a poem that sheds light on a topic or makes people see something in a different way. Collect all of the poems to create a classroom poetry anthology.

Praise for ONE CRAZY SUMMER

"This novel is just glorious."—Jacqueline Woodson, Newbery Honor Author of *After Tupac and D Foster*

"*One Crazy Summer* is a genuine rarity: a book that is both important in its contents and utterly engaging in its characters . . . with the tremendous bonus of being beautifully written."—Linda Sue Park, Newbery Medal-winning author of *A Single Shard*

About the Author

Two-time National Book Award Finalist and winner of the PEN/Norma Klein Award, **Rita Williams-Garcia** is the author of six distinguished novels for young adults: *Blue Tights*, *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*, *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, *No Laughter Here*, and *Jumped*. *Like Sisters on the Homefront* was named a Coretta Scott King Honor Book and a best book of the year by ALA Booklist, *School Library Journal*, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, and *Publishers Weekly*. *No Laughter Here* and *Jumped* are among Rita's ALA Best Books for Young Adults.

Rita Williams-Garcia is currently a faculty member at Vermont College for the MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults Program. She has two daughters, Michelle and Stephanie, and lives in Jamaica, New York.



Photo by Jason Berger



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