



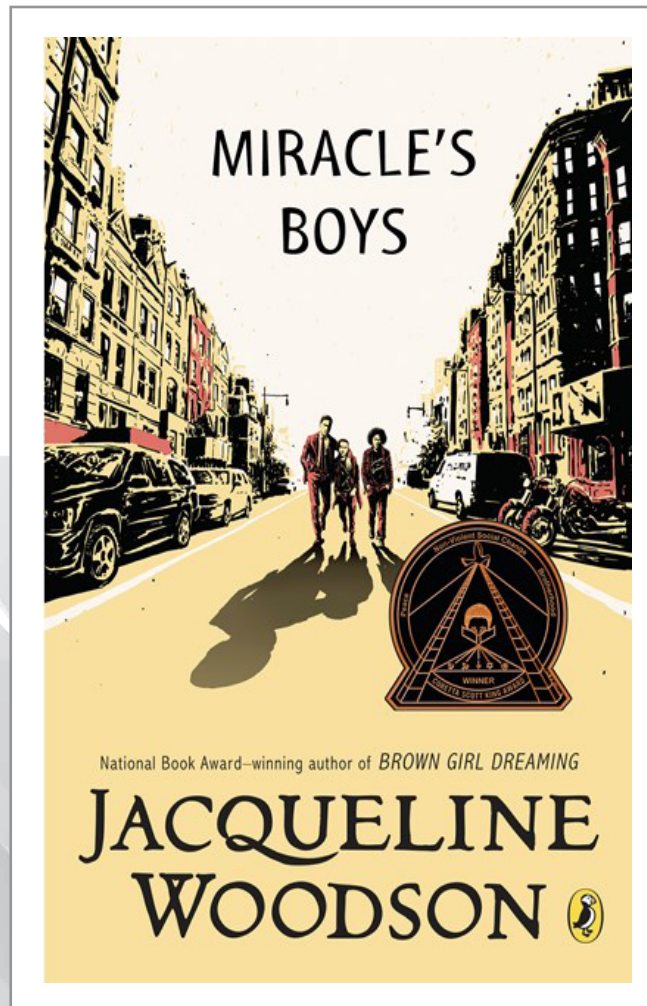
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Miracle's Boys

Jacqueline Woodson



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Miracle's Boys

Jacqueline Woodson

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analyzing, comparing/
contrasting, judging,
prioritizing

Writing

Composition, description,
dialogue, diary, journal,
article, obituary, poem,
speech

Listening/Speaking

Audiotape, discussion,
dramatizing, interviewing,
music, oral presentation,
video

Comprehension

Cause/effect, identifying,
main ideas, making
inferences, predicting,
sequencing, summarizing

Literary Elements

Author's style, repetition,
characterization, dialect,
exaggeration, similes,
foreshadowing, mood, point
of view, plot development,
symbolism, theme, tone

Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, design,
drawing, family tree, floor
plan, painting, brochure,
famous artists; Math—
budget, graphs, numerical
terms, statistics; Science—
first aid, medical conditions,
molting, plants; Social
Studies—animal rescue,
current events, families,
gangs, juvenile detention,
map skills, multiculturalism,
social welfare; Spanish
language

Genre: fiction

Main Characters: three orphan brothers—Lafayette-12 years old, Charlie-15 years old, Ty’ree-22 years old

Setting: Harlem, New York City, present day

Themes: adjusting to death of parents, dealing with anger and guilt, sibling strife, love between family members, struggling against the odds

Conflict: character vs. others, character vs. self

Style: narrative (little action, story told in dialogue and inner thoughts)

Tone: melancholy

Date of First Publication: 2000

Note to Teacher

The present day events in the story only cover a two-day period. However, the flashbacks cover a period of 12 years. The book contains a large amount of dialogue, and often slang and dialect are used. There are many examples of non-standard English usage including slang words, double negatives, verb tense, pronoun agreement, and deletion of verbs. These may serve as an opportunity for discussion. A vocabulary activity is included in this guide where students analyze the non-standard patterns. Word usage includes butt (pages 50, 94, 166), hell (102, 104) and damn (104, 106). The phrase “gave me the finger” appears on page 5 and “bottle of beer” on page 65.

Summary

Three orphan brothers, streetwise and trying to be self-sufficient, struggle with the loss of their father and, more recently, their mother. They overcome trouble and adversity within their own family unit and in their neighborhood. They lean on each other “brother to brother to brother.”

About the Author

Jacqueline Woodson was born in 1964 in Columbus, Ohio. She spent her adolescent years moving back and forth between Greenville, South Carolina and Brooklyn, New York. Writing was her passion and in fifth grade she was the literary editor of her school’s magazine. She received her B.A. in English from Adelphi University (NY). She was a faculty member at Goddard College (VT), Eugene Lang College (NYC), and Vermont College. She was a Writer-in-Residence for the National Book Foundation, and she also worked as a drama therapist in East Harlem for runaway and homeless

children. Woodson has contributed to many short story collections and periodicals and is now a full-time writer.

Woodson's young adult books include: *Last Summer with Maizon* (1990), *The Dear One* (1991), *Maizon at Blue Hill* (1992), *Between Madison and Palmetto* (1993), *Book Chase* (1994), *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* (1994), *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (1995), *The House You Pass on the Way* (1997), *Lena* (1998), *Miracle's Boys* (2000). She served as co-editor of prose and poetry from the summer writing camps of the National Book Foundation (1995, 1996) and editor of *A Way Out of No Way: Writings About Growing Up Black in America* (1996), an anthology of the writers and stories which most influenced her. She writes children's books and adult books.

She has received many awards including: the Kenyon Review Award for Literary Excellence-1992 & 1995; Best Books for Young Adults, American Library Association (ALA) for *Maizon at Blue Hill*-1993, *If You Come Softly*-1999, and *Miracle's Boys*-2001, Coretta Scott King Honor Book recognition for *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*-1995, and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*-1996; the Coretta Scott King Award for *Miracle's Boys*-2001; the ALA Top Ten Young Adult Romances for *If You Come Softly*-1999; *Granta* Fifty Best American Authors under 40 Award-1996; *Booklist* Editor's Choice Award-2001; and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for Young Adult Fiction-2001.

Woodson writes about characters from a variety of races, ethnic groups, and social classes including those individuals who are often neglected, ignored, and forgotten (minorities, girls, the poor, homosexuals, older people). Her themes include the difficult issues young adults and teens encounter—feeling awkward or out of place, low self-esteem, struggles with family, friendship across race and class lines, and struggles to find one's individuality and value. She presently lives in Brooklyn, New York and spends most of her time writing, but she does enjoy reading works of new writers, helping young adults write, political discussions with friends, and sewing scarves and quilts. She may be contacted in care of: Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency, 65 Bleeker St., 12th floor, New York, New York 10012.

Major Characters

Lafayette: the youngest Bailey brother, age 12, also called Laff, Lala; middle name is Miguel; narrator of story

Charlie: the middle Bailey brother, age 15, also called Cha, Newcharlie; middle name is Javier; was in a juvenile correctional center for 2 1/2 years and is prone to angry outbursts and strong putdowns

Ty'ree: the oldest Bailey brother, age 22, also called T, St. Ty'ree; middle name is Alfonso; is the breadwinner, works full-time as a mailroom manager; gave up a scholarship to MIT when mother died

Note: Though both parents are deceased, much of the narration recalls their characteristics.

Lafayette Bailey: father of the three boys; died from hypothermia after rescuing a woman drowning in the Central Park lake

Chapter Two, pp. 16-20

Lafayette tells the story of how their daddy died a hero after saving a woman and her dog from drowning in a lake. Later, their father died of hypothermia. Ty'ree, the older brother, is introduced. Background information on Mama is revealed, along with a past incident where Charlie and Lafayette prayed to St. Francis to help stray animals.

Vocabulary

bobbing (17) hypothermia (17) demon seed (19) stoop (19)

Discussion Questions

1. What happened to Daddy? *(It was wintertime and he was in Central Park. He heard a woman screaming and found her trying to save her dog from drowning in the lake. Daddy pulled out the lady and the dog. Later, he died of hypothermia. pp. 16-17)*
2. Why does Newcharlie think his father was stupid to be a hero? *(Answers will vary. p. 17)*
3. What does the prayer to St. Francis reveal about the two younger brothers? *(Answers will vary. pp. 17-18)*
4. Do you think Charlie is a "demon-seed" child? *(Answers will vary. p. 19)*
5. What is your first impression of Milagro/Miracle/Mama? *(Answers will vary but may include the idea that she's Puerto Rican, she spoke English and Spanish, she smiled, and she was proud of her sons. pp. 19-20)*
6. What does Aunt Cecile's saying, "...dead don't have to mean dead and gone" on page 19 mean? *(Answers will vary but should include the idea that Mama is not forgotten and her memory lives on.)*
7. **Prediction:** Does the lady remember what Daddy did for her and her dog? *(Answers will vary.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Element/Characterization: Have students add Mama, Daddy, and Ty'ree to the character chart and list their attributes and actions as revealed in this chapter.
2. Research: Find Bayamón on the island of Puerto Rico. Have students research basic facts about Puerto Rico and its relationship to the United States.
3. Language Other than English: Explain to students that "Milagro" is the Spanish word for "miracle." Have students look up or ask others the Spanish words for boys (chicos), father (padre or papá), sons (hijos), brother (hermano), prayer (oración), animals (animales), pretty (bonita/bonito), and other words that relate to the story. Ask a Spanish speaker to tape record the correct pronunciations to play to the class.
4. Writing: Have students write a newspaper article on Daddy's heroic rescue of the lady and her dog in Central Park, including the headline. If students speak Spanish, challenge them to write the article in Spanish.