



Jacqueline Woodson

TeachingBooks Original Movie Transcript

Jacqueline Woodson, interviewed in her home in Brooklyn, New York on October 24, 2006.

This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.

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When I was a kid, I got in trouble for telling stories. And my teachers said, "Be quiet and write it down, and if you write it down, it's fiction. It's not a lie anymore."

On Writing Realistic Fiction

I write realistic fiction because I want to put onto the page people who I didn't get to see on the page when I was growing up reading fiction. There weren't a lot of books at the time about growing up in Brooklyn. I didn't know a lot of writers who were writing about a girl who was African American. I never read a book where there was a deaf kid in the book, and I never read a book where even there was a single mom and a grandmother and that was family.

On African American Stories

I think the reason there is so much history, especially African American history, in so many of the books I write is because I am African American, and it's a part of me like my blood.

I know that during World War II, black women worked on the railroads. So when I was writing *Coming On Home Soon*, I already had that information.

With *Show Way*, I grew up with the expression "jumping broom," and I knew it was the ceremony by which slaves married because they weren't allowed to have actual ceremonies.

In *Locomotion*, I talk about sickle cell anemia and Eric having it. So that history ends up in the book because it's a part of my story. It's a part of the story, and by extension, becomes a part of the characters' stories when they are African American.

On Show Way

[Holding a journal entry.] This is actually the beginning of *Show Way*, which was originally called *When Soonie Was Seven*. This is the first book I've written that is based on my family history — tracing my family down the maternal line, from my great-great-great grandmother to my daughter, Toshi.

Writing *Show Way* made me remember that that's not only the blood that runs through my veins, but it's the blood that runs through my daughter's veins and it's the blood that runs through all of our veins. I mean, the fact that we as human beings have gotten this far is amazing.

On Writing

Every time I write, I write because I have all these questions and I start thinking, "What if, what if, how do I, what would that mean, who would I become?"

It's so important that I show people that they can be writers. As someone who grew up to be a writer, I feel like a lot of my characters are writers or have stories to tell. I feel like the way I learned how to tell my story was by reading a lot of poetry, and reading a lot of fiction.

In *Locomotion*, he's learning to tell the story of his life through poetry.

I wrote *Hush* because I had read an article in the *New York Times Magazine* about the Witness Protection Program, and the big question in that book became, "When someone takes your name away, who do you become?"

"The function of freedom is to free someone else."

"The function of freedom is to free someone else." That's actually a quote from Toni Morrison. I think that's what knowledge does. If you have some information and you impart it on someone else, you help someone else to be free. I think literature does that. I think once we see ourselves in the page of the book, we are allowed a certain amount of legitimacy, and that legitimacy empowers us.

Books by Jacqueline Woodson

- POTENTIAL FOR LIGHT, THE, TBA
- ROPE, THE (illustrated by James Ransome), Penguin Young Readers Group, date TBA
- AFTER TUPAC AND D FOSTER, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2008
- FEATHERS, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007
- SHOW WAY (illustrated by Hudson Talbott), Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005
- BEHIND YOU, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2004
- COMING ON HOME SOON (illustrated by E. B. Lewis), Penguin Young Readers Group, 2004
- LOCOMOTION, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2003
- HUSH, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2002
- OUR GRACIE AUNT (illustrated by Jon J. Muth), Jump at the Sun / Hyperion Books for Children, 2002
- VISITING DAY (illustrated by James Ransome), Penguin Young Readers Group, 2002
- OTHER SIDE, THE (illustrated by E. B. Lewis), Penguin Young Readers Group, 2001
- MIRACLE'S BOYS, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2000
- SWEET, SWEET MEMORY (illustrated by Floyd Cooper), Jump at the Sun / Hyperion Books for Children, 2000
- LENA, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1999
- IF YOU COME SOFTLY, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1998
- HOUSE YOU PASS ON THE WAY, THE, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1997
- WE HAD A PICNIC THIS SUNDAY PAST (illustrated by Diane Greenesid), Hyperion Books for Children, 1997

- FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF MELANIN SUN, Blue Sky Press / Scholastic Press, 1995
- I HADN'T MEANT TO TELL YOU THIS, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1994
- BETWEEN MADISON AND PALMETTO, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1993
- MAIZON AT BLUE HILL, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1992
- DEAR ONE, THE, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1991
- LAST SUMMER WITH MAIZON, Penguin Young Readers Group, 1990

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