



Vermont Reads 2017



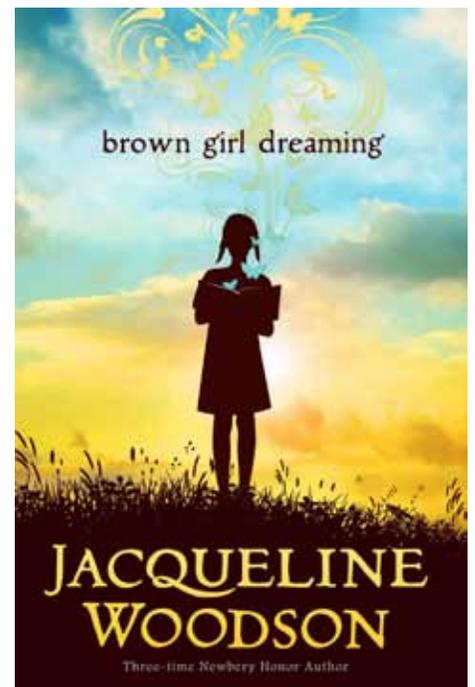
Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

A Statewide One-Book Community Reading Program

Vermont communities are invited to participate in a statewide read of Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* for Vermont Reads 2017. This beautiful memoir of the author's childhood, written in verse, tells the story of a young person finding her voice and examines the strength of family bonds.

2017 marks the fifteenth year of Vermont Reads. With *Brown Girl Dreaming*, children and adults alike will enjoy the beauty and authenticity of this memoir of growing up. The book provides many opportunities for rich and varied community events and activities, including book discussions, dramatic readings, forums on racism in the U.S. and in Vermont specifically, exploration of family history, and poetry and memoir writing workshops, to name just a few. Its universal themes and multiple points of connection will resonate with Vermonters from a variety of backgrounds.

Libraries, schools, and other nonprofit organizations may apply; collaboration among town organizations and businesses is strongly encouraged.



- **RECEIVE FREE** books and programming support for your community.
- **HOST** readings, discussions, and community events in your schools, libraries, and local businesses.
- **LISTEN** to Vermont Public Radio's Vermont Reads feature.

Apply — Applications due **December 2, 2016 or June 2, 2017**. Visit vermontreads.org or contact us at 802.262.1355 or community@vermonthumanities.org.

Vermont Humanities Council
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Underwriter



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Information and Application



Vermont Reads Supporters

The Vermont Humanities Council is grateful to the major partners that support Vermont Reads. Since 2007, Vermont Reads has been generously underwritten by [Renewable NRG Systems](#) of Hinesburg, Vermont (formerly NRG Systems). VHC is also grateful for the generous support of the [Jack & Dorothy Byrne Foundation](#). [Vermont Public Radio](#) is VHC's media partner; each year VPR presents several days of Vermont Reads programming.

Application Deadlines

December 2, 2016 and **June 2, 2017** for priority consideration. Applications will be accepted after the deadlines if books are available. We will respond to your application within two weeks of the deadline. [Apply here](#).

Program Implementation Dates

Events may be scheduled anytime in 2017. We suggest planning activities over a concentrated period of weeks or months.

Participating Communities Receive

- Up to 75 copies of the Vermont Reads titles with a Vermont Reads 2017 seal on the cover. (The number of books awarded depends on the project's size, scope, and creativity.) To purchase additional books at a discount, **contact VHC** (subject to availability).
- Program ideas, discussion guides, recommended related books for all ages, and links to web resources (all found on our [website](#))
- Vermont Reads stickers and bookmarks
- Poster templates for promoting events
- Publicity assistance through the VHC media calendar, press releases, and website
- Contact names upon request of prior Vermont Reads project directors who would be happy to share tips for how to make your project successful.

How do we get involved?

To participate, a community should have:

- An organization willing to be the primary sponsor/coordinator—a library, school, historical society, or social service organization are all possibilities. The primary sponsor will collaborate with other community partners to plan creative and diverse humanities-based activities that support community-wide reading and discussion of the book and the themes it contains, and undertake vigorous publicity in the months leading up to the activities.
- 1-2 representatives of that organization willing to act as project director(s).
- At least two other organizations to join the project team and help develop and carry out the activities. In addition to groups mentioned above, potential local partners might include bookstores, museums, church groups, local businesses, service organizations, afterschool and summer programs, teen centers, senior centers/assisted living facilities, and adult education and literacy services centers.
- Adult education centers and correctional facilities should [contact us](#) directly before applying.

A Note on Dispensing Books:

It is our intention that Vermont Reads books be shared far and wide! The strongest Vermont Reads applications will include a thoughtful plan to distribute and encourage reuse of the books.

Alternate Version of the Book:

VHC has unabridged audio CDs of *Brown Girl Dreaming* available for lending. The Vermont Department of Libraries operates a Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped for the visually impaired and print disabled. Patrons of this library service may access a wide variety of library materials. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is available in digital talking books format (the number is DB080026).

[Visit their website](#) to learn more about this service.



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Frequently Asked Questions



How can I participate in Vermont Reads?

If you represent a community organization — like a library, school, historical society, or social service organization — you are eligible to apply to host a Vermont Reads project. First, find at least two collaborating organizations to help distribute books and develop a series of programs and activities. Then fill out a [Vermont Reads Application](#). If your application is approved, we'll mail you the books and help publicize your events and activities.

If you are an individual, see our [Calendar of Events](#) for upcoming Vermont Reads programs in your area. If you don't see any, reach out to your local library or another community organization to let them know their community members want to participate in Vermont Reads.

Where do I get a book?

We count on the community organizations leading local Vermont Reads projects to loan books to their community members. But we still encourage everyone who can get their hands on a copy to read this year's title. Watch our calendar for events that may involve book loans, or check your local library for lending copies. Or buy a copy from your favorite local bookstore, and when you're done reading, loan it to a friend or neighbor.

My book group wants to read this year's Vermont Reads title. Where do we get copies?

While book groups alone are not eligible to apply for a Vermont Reads project, we're always pleased to see discussions about this year's title taking place. Contact your local library to see if they have copies to loan, and see our calendar for Vermont Reads events that your entire book group may be able to participate in.



VHC also retains a limited number of lending sets for book clubs and other non-eligible groups. Contact community@vermonthumanities.org to check on availability. Shipping charges may apply.

My organization is applying to host a project. Who should participate in our activities?

Anyone in your community may choose to take part. You may be interested in hosting programs for adults, young adults, middle-school students, or all of the above. Vermont Reads books are chosen to appeal to a wide range of people: young and old, strong and fragile readers.

Be sure you know your audience before determining the activity or activities you plan to undertake. No matter who they are, involve participants in planning your programs — in the choice of activities, the event details, and the on-site coordination. This will help everyone feel invested in the events, and increase participation dramatically.

Do participants keep the books?

We award books to the community organizations that apply, which then keep and manage those copies. We encourage hosts to distribute, collect, and re-distribute books repeatedly so that as many people as possible can read them.

Ideally, participants will come to any related program having read some or all of the book. However, with the possible exception of book discussion programs, this should not be a stringent requirement. After all, an interesting discussion may be just the thing to get the person to finish reading the book! Please make every effort to accommodate beginning readers or those needing a reading partner. Places to contact for assistance include adult basic education centers, libraries, and schools. See [this page](#) for details on audio and talking book formats.

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Frequently Asked Questions



My organization wants to plan our own events. Why do we need to apply with other organizations?

Vermont Reads projects have the strongest impact when several organizations in a community work together on programming. A collaborating organization can be one that works closely with you to develop a specific program, or simply an outside venue that helps distribute books or provides event space. Not every activity has to involve every collaborating organization, but we encourage cross-promotion whenever possible. Collaborations also lead to the maximum number of readers having access to a limited number of books.

Frequent Vermont Reads partners include libraries, schools, museums or historical societies, and senior centers. Traditional venues like these are excellent for activities, but we encourage you to think non-traditionally as well in order to increase your audience. Try reaching out to town halls and civic buildings; cafés, coffee shops, and restaurants; retirement communities; city parks and other public-use areas; town pools, beaches, and lakefronts; youth organizations such as the YMCA/YWCA and Boys-and-Girls Club; church function rooms; bookstores; and other local businesses.

Consider transportation needs when deciding on event locations and arrange for busing or carpools when necessary. For some, getting to an out-of-the-way site presents a challenge, so consider central locations with easy access (including access for those with disabilities).

How should we publicize our activities?

Submit the [Vermont Reads event form](#) at least one month before the event date(s). For each activity, include a title and description, plus the date, time, location, and contact information. VHC will use this information to spread the word through our web calendar, email newsletters, social media channels, and our biannual print newsletter (schedule and space permitting).



Use the Vermont Reads poster templates included with your book shipment, or design a custom flyer using our [downloadable graphics](#). Hang posters everywhere you can think of: libraries, schools, colleges, bookstores, churches, general stores and co-ops, restaurants, cafés, laundromats, town halls, community bulletin boards, and other gathering sites. Contact your local newspapers, radio stations, cable access

channels, and newsletters, and send out a press release before their deadlines. Make use of the social media tools used in your community, such as Front Porch Forum and local organizations' Facebook and Twitter pages. And don't forget: word-of-mouth is still one of the best ways to draw participants.

Making food available—and advertising it—almost always increases attendance. Relate food and beverage items to the books for added flair. Have participants join in the preparation of the refreshments. Local grocery stores, co-ops, restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, and other food-service businesses are often happy to donate food items in return for recognition.

How do you choose the Vermont Reads book each year?

We choose a book accessible and appealing to a broad range of readers, based on suggestions from scholars, educators, and community members around the state. We also invite nominations from the public through our [website](#).

If you represent an organization that's hosted a Vermont Reads project, your feedback is critical to our ability to select great titles and improve this program in future years. Please be sure to evaluate your project carefully using our [online Evaluation Form](#).

Other questions? [Contact us](#).



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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAM COORDINATION TIPS



Planning Your Vermont Reads Events

This year's Vermont Reads book, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, presents opportunities for numerous extension activities ranging from book discussions to poetry writing and family history workshops. The kinds of activities that promote shared reading and discussion are bounded only by the imaginations that you and your collaborators bring to the project. If you develop a new idea, please let us know so that we can share it with other communities!



Note that you must apply separately to host VHC-subsidized Reading and Discussion programs. Visit the Reading and Discussion section of our website to apply and to see the entire catalog of offerings and discussion facilitators.

Or host your own book discussion on related books; see our related books and resources section (beginning on page 8) for other potential books.

Brown Girl Dreaming Activity Ideas

Book Discussions – Ideally, a discussion group should be facilitated by a person comfortable leading conversations in which everyone feels encouraged to participate. Facilitators might be teachers, librarians, or others who are skilled and enthusiastic about leading a discussion. See the Vermont Reads 2017 discussion guide (page 18) for discussion questions and tips for a successful book discussion. Note: VHC does not fund discussion facilitators for Vermont Reads; facilitators should either be volunteers, or project coordinators must make their own honorarium arrangements with facilitators.

Discussion about Books Related to *Brown Girl Dreaming*

VHC Reading and Discussion Series – Host one of VHC's Reading and Discussion series or individual books on the following topics:

- African-American Experience
- Reporting Race
- Memorable Memoirs
- Poems to Share (part of our intergenerational series)
- American Stories Across the Generations (part of our intergenerational series)

Dramatic Readings – Host an event for participants to read aloud favorite poems from *Brown Girl Dreaming*, other favorite poems, poetry that the book inspired them to write, or related poetry mentioned in the book (such as “Dreams” by Langston Hughes, reprinted at the beginning of the book, or “Birches” by Robert Frost, referenced on page 223).

Listen to the VPR Broadcast – Gather a group around the radio — or around a computer — to listen to [Vermont Public Radio's](#) Vermont Reads program after it is made available on the web. VPR is VHC's media partner for Vermont Reads. Use the program as a lead-in to a discussion. Broadcast dates and times will be publicized when they are available.

Host a Movie Night or Series – There are a number of documentaries and movies related to the Civil Rights movement, the legacy of slavery, and the history of the 60s and 70s that may provide historical context and complement the themes of *Brown Girl Dreaming*. (See the History section in the “Related Books and Resources” page for summaries and information about public screening rights).

- *13th* (documentary; 2016; NR)
- *Crooklyn* (1994; PG-13)
- *Selma* (2014; PG-13)
- *Selma, Lord, Selma* (1999; NR) *(cont'd next page)*



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- *Freedom Song* (2000;NR)
- *Ruby Bridges* (1998; NR)
- *Eyes on the Prize* (14-hour television series; 1987)
- *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (six-part television series; 2013)

VHC Speakers Bureau – Host one of VHC’s Speakers Bureau programs that relate to some of the broad topics of Vermont Reads *Brown Girl Dreaming*:



“Daisy Turner’s Kin” by Jane Beck. Vermont folklorist Jane Beck shares the story of the Turner family, a multigenerational saga spanning two centuries, which covers the early 19th century British-African trade, shipwreck, birth of a biracial child, slave trading, enslavement, plantation life, escape, Civil War, moving north, battling racism, buying land, and settling on a hilltop in Vermont that became a family center. Daisy Turner’s own life story is a powerful and rare account of the African American experience in New England from the 1880s forward.

“A Woman, Ain’t I?” (Sojourner Truth) by Katherine Woods. Born a slave in New Paltz, New York, Isabella Baumfree walked away from slavery and in her travels evolved into Sojourner Truth: maid, laundress, evangelist, abolitionist, and suffragist. This program, presented by Kathryn Woods, tells Sojourner Truth’s story in her own words, speeches, and songs.

Note that you must apply separately to host VHC-subsidized Speakers Bureau programs. Visit [VHC's Speakers Bureau webpage](#) to apply and to see the entire catalog of Speakers Bureau offerings.

Panel Discussions or Guest Speakers – Vermont Reads *Brown Girl Dreaming* addresses issues related to:

- Poetry
- Memoir writing
- The Great Migration in American history
- The Civil Rights Movement
- Writers finding their voice
- The important of racial and ethnic diversity in books

Convene a panel of informed and interested community members to bring their perspectives to these and other issues related to *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

Writing Workshops – *Brown Girl Dreaming*, a memoir written in verse, provides wonderful inspiration for writing projects focused on poetry and memoir writing. You might invite local writers or writing teachers to host workshops for your community.

The following presenters are available to lead workshops or give presentations about poetry and memoir writing. Please contact them directly to make arrangements:

Jim Schley has edited the literary quarterly *New England Review* and the book *Writing in a Nuclear Age*, as well as more than a hundred other books on a wide variety of subjects. He is the author of a poetry chapbook, *One Another* (Chapiteau, 1999) and a full-length book of poems, *As When, In Season* (Marick, 2008), and was previously the executive director of The Frost Place, a museum and poetry center in Franconia, New Hampshire. He can be reached at jschley@sover.net.

Geof Hewitt writes and publishes poetry and nonfiction. He has been a Vermont Humanities Council speaker and discussion leader since the 1980s. An active participant in poetry slams and Vermont’s reigning slam



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poetry champion, Geof lives in Calais; he has been adjunct Faculty at Vermont College since 1991. He has published three books of poetry and three books for teachers. He can be reached at geofhewitt@gmail.com.

Writing Project/Contest – Writing contests are a popular means for younger readers and writers in particular to approach the written word. Entries can be assembled in print or on the web, and winning selections can be read at a special event. If you choose to run a contest, we suggest offering prizes in different age or grade categories. (Be sure to let us know about the contest so we can help advertise it.)

Family History Projects – *Brown Girl Dreaming* begins with a family tree, and the stories about Woodson’s family history loom large in the book. Involve your local historical society or local genealogists to about how people can conduct their own genealogy research. Create a community display documenting family trees. Arrange for exhibit space at your local library, school, or museum to show participants’ work. The family history resources page has links to specific genealogy and family history resources:

Culminating Celebrations – Communities often choose to conclude their Vermont Reads activities with a festive and fun event co-hosted with other collaborating organizations. A dinner or a themed potluck might include the African-American and Puerto Rican traditional foods that Woodson describes in the poems “lessons” (p. 214), “trading places” (p. 216), and “pasteles & pernil” (p.255). Your celebration might also include a playlist of songs and artists mentioned in the book. See the *Brown Girl Dreaming* index of themes (page 13) for specific references. These final events are also useful for showcasing student work done as part of the Vermont Reads project, recognizing contest winners, or hosting a panel discussion or presentation.



Displays – Libraries, Bookstores, Schools. Ask your public library, your school library, as well as local bookstores, to feature prominent displays of Vermont Reads *Brown Girl Dreaming* books and other related titles. See the *Brown Girl Dreaming* index of themes (page 13) for a list of books and writers referenced within the book.



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There are many resources available about or related to *Brown Girl Dreaming* and its themes. This list includes a selection of books for many reading levels, websites, and films that we believe may be useful in planning and implementing your Vermont Reads project. We'd love to hear about the resources you discover so that we can share them with other Vermont Reads communities. Please send to community@vermonthumanities.org or post them on [our Facebook page](#).



[“Jimmy Carter and Jacqueline Woodson on Race, Religion and Rights.”](#) *New York Times* writer Philip Galanes conducts a joint interview with Jimmy Carter and Jacqueline Woodson. July 24, 2015.

[“Poet to Poet: Carole Boston Weatherford and Jacqueline Woodson.”](#) September 18, 2014. In this brief interview from the “Poetry For Children” blog, poet Carole Boston Weatherford talks with Jacqueline Woodson about the poets who have influenced her.

[In this half-hour recording](#) made in 2012, before the release of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline Woodson talks about her writing process and inspirations.

About Jacqueline Woodson

Readers of *Brown Girl Dreaming* will know that Jacqueline Woodson was born in Ohio, raised in South Carolina and then Brooklyn, and found her calling as a storyteller early in life. She has since written more than thirty books, including picture books, middle grade books, and young adult titles. Her books have received wide acclaim and many awards, including four Newbery Honor Awards, two Coretta Scott King Awards, the NAACP Image Award, and the National Book Award. In 2015, Woodson was named Young People’s Poet Laureate by the Poetry Foundation. She also serves on the advisory committee for We Need Diverse Books, an organization that advocates for publication and promotion of literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people, and that enables more children to see reflections of themselves in the books they read. In 2016, she published *Another Brooklyn*, a novel for adults that has been shortlisted for the National Book Award. Woodson currently lives in Brooklyn.

[Visit Jacqueline Woodson’s official website](#)

Selected Interviews with Jacqueline Woodson

[“Jacqueline Woodson on Growing Up, Coming Out, and Saying Hi to Strangers.”](#) This interview was aired on NPR’s *Fresh Air* and *Code Switch* programs in December 2014, just after *Brown Girl Dreaming* received the National Book Award.

About *Brown Girl Dreaming*

Brown Girl Dreaming is a memoir written in verse that explores what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and a growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement. Raised in South Carolina and New York, author Jacqueline Woodson felt halfway home in each place. In this series of vivid poems, Woodson shares the joy of finding her voice through writing stories despite the fact that she struggled with reading as a child. Her love of stories inspired her and stayed with her, creating the first sparks of the gifted writer she was to become. *Brown Girl Dreaming* received the 2014 National Book Award for Young People’s Literature, a Coretta Scott King Award, an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in Young Adult Fiction, and a Newbery Honor Award.

Reflecting on her book, Ms. Woodson remarked, “Raised in South Carolina and New York, I always felt halfway home in each place. In [this book], I share what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and my growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement. It also reflects the joy of finding my voice through writing stories,



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despite the fact that I struggled with reading as a child. My love of stories inspired and stayed with me, creating the first sparks of the writer that I was to become.”

Selected Reviews of *Brown Girl Dreaming*

[“Where We Enter: Jacqueline Woodson’s ‘Brown Girl Dreaming’”](#) by Veronica Chambers, *New York Times*, Sunday Book Review, August 22, 2014.

[“Review of the Day: Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson.”](#) by Elizabeth Bird, *School Library Journal*, June 2, 2014.

Other Resources about the Book

[Jacqueline Woodson reads aloud a poem, “Bushwick History Lesson”](#) from *Brown Girl Dreaming* (p. 297).

[This episode of the *Diane Rehm Show*](#) from April 29, 2015, is an in-depth discussion of *Brown Girl Dreaming* with Jamelle Bouie, a staff writer on politics, policy, and race at Slate; David Orr, poetry columnist for the *New York Times Book Review*; and Dana Williams, professor of African American literature and chair of the English department at Howard University.

Teaching Guides

[“Exploring Perspectives on Desegregation Using *Brown Girl Dreaming*.”](#) from ReadWriteThink.org. This lesson plan contains a complete instructional plan and related resources for using *Brown Girl Dreaming* with grades 5-9.

[This teacher’s guide created by Penguin](#) has Common Core Standard-aligned classroom activities for nine of Jacqueline Woodson’s books, including *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

[This “Teachers Teaching Writing” wiki](#) has notes and classroom ideas for *Brown Girl Dreaming* compiled by five teachers.



[Jen Vincent of the “Teach Mentor Texts”](#) blog reviews the book and includes several writing prompt ideas.

Resources about History

Family History

[“Finding Your Roots”](#) is a PBS television series produced, written, and hosted by Harvard history professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. It explores the family histories

of influential people. Each of these stories “illuminates the vast patchwork of ethnicity, race and experience that make up the fabric of America.” The website includes many classroom resources for connecting family history to US history study.

For researching family history in Vermont, [the Vermont Historical Society’s “Genealogy Resources” page](#) is a good place to start.

Vermont writer Natalie Kinsey-Warnock has started an organization called [“Storykeepers in Our Schools.”](#) which conducts school visits and provides curricular materials for teaching students how to do historical research based on their family stories.

[The Family Search website](#) contains an extensive list of activities and templates for engaging children in family history research.

The Legacy of Slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Impact of Racism

[This extensive primary source set from Library of Congress](#) includes 18 primary sources, a teacher’s guide, and a primary source analysis guide for teaching about Jim Crow and segregation.

[“A Thousand Midnights: A Short Film Examines the Legacy of the Great Migration.”](#) This 12-minute short film by Carlos Javier Ortiz explores how the Great Migration created what we now consider the modern American city, particularly Chicago.



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America in the King Years (*Parting the Waters*, *Pillar of Fire*, and *At Canaan's Edge*) by Taylor Branch is an award-winning trilogy of books chronicling the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and much of the history of the American Civil Rights Movement. Taylor Branch is a keynote speaker for our 2016 Fall Conference on Leadership; his lecture will be available for viewing from our website by December 2016.



The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration (2010) by Isabel Wilkerson is a highly acclaimed history of the Great Migration and the Second Great Migration, the movement of African Americans out of the southern United States to the midwest, northeast, and west from approximately 1915 to 1970. With their move from South Carolina to Brooklyn in the late 1960s, Woodson's family was a part of this critical chapter in American history.

Films

The movies noted with an asterisk are approved for screening through the Vermont Department of Libraries (VTLIB)'s motion picture public performance license with Movie Licensing USA. [Visit their website](#) for information on registering for this service.

Crooklyn * (1994; PG-13) is a 1994 semi-autobiographical film co-written and directed by Spike Lee. The film takes place in Brooklyn, New York and the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant during the summer of 1973.

Freedom Song * (2000; NR) This made-for-TV movie focuses on the grassroots efforts of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to combat the entrenched racism of the segregated South.

Ruby Bridges * (1998; NR) A six-year-old African American girl scores very well on early scholastics tests

and is chosen by the New Orleans school district to be the first of her race to be integrated into that city's public school system.

Selma * (2014; PG-13) This film covers the three-month period in 1965 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a campaign to secure equal voting rights in the face of violent opposition. The epic march from Selma to Montgomery culminated in President Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Selma, Lord, Selma * (1999; NR) This made-for-TV movie is based on the memoirs of Sheyann Webb-Christburg and Rachel West Nelson, in which 12-year-olds Sheyann and Rachel and a white seminary student, join Martin Luther King's march from Selma to Montgomery.

Documentaries

13th is a documentary released in 2016 that explores how the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery, also came with a loophole that eventually led to the current mass incarceration of black people in America. It is currently available for streaming on Netflix.

[Eyes on the Prize](#) is an award-winning 14-hour television series produced in 1987. Through contemporary interviews and historical footage, the series covers the major events of the civil rights movement from 1954-1985.

[The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross](#) is a six-hour television series, written and hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The series encompasses five centuries of events, visits key sites, and engages in debates with historians and eyewitnesses including school integration pioneers Ruby Bridges and Charlayne Hunter-Gault, former Black Panther Kathleen Neal Cleaver, and former Secretary of State Colin Powell. Episodes 5 and 6 may be of special interest for *Brown Girl Dreaming* projects; they cover the Great Migration and the Civil Rights era.



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About Memoirs and Poetry

There are a number of high-quality memoirs and poetry that can be used to complement *Brown Girl Dreaming*. We have selected a few to serve as inspiration and we welcome your recommendations of others.



African American Memoirs

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845) by Frederick Douglass, is an influential—and very readable—memoir and treatise on abolition written by the famous orator and escaped slave.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou (1969), an autobiography about the early years of American writer and poet Maya Angelou.

Black Boy by Richard Wright (1945), a memoir of Richard Wright's childhood and young adulthood. It is split into two sections; the first covers his early childhood in the American South, and the second explores his early adult years in Chicago.

The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore (2010), is the story of two young Baltimore boys that share the same name and a similar history, but who traveled down very different paths. Both grew up fatherless with troubled pasts, but one—the author—became a Rhodes Scholar and leader, while the other was convicted of murder and is serving a life sentence.

Ordinary Light by Tracy K. Smith (2015). This memoir by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Tracy K. Smith explores her coming-of-age and finding her voice as a writer against a complex backdrop of race and faith.

A Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2008), chronicles Coates' childhood in Baltimore with his Vietnam veteran and Black Panther father during the heyday of hip-hop and the height of the War on Drugs.

Other Memoirs in Verse for Young Readers

[“Classroom Connections: Memoirs in Verse,”](#) by Sylvia M. Vardell, April 2015. This essay describes and celebrates the rise of memoirs in verse for young readers in recent years and provides an extensive list of titles, along with ideas for classroom connections.

Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir by Margarita Engle (2015). Living in Los Angeles, Margarita dreams of her summer visits to Cuba, her mother's home country. When hostility between Cuba and the United States erupts with the Bay of Pigs invasion, Margarita's worlds collide.

How I Discovered Poetry by Marilyn Nelson (2014). A Civil Rights-era memoir from one of America's celebrated poets. Looking back on her childhood in the 1950s, Nelson tells the story of her development as an artist and young woman through fifty poems.

Little Green: Growing Up During the Chinese Cultural Revolution by Chun Yu (2015), a lyrical memoir that recalls the Chinese Cultural Revolution from the perspective of a ten-year-old girl.

Other Books Written in Free Verse

Crossover by Kwame Alexander (2014). This novel in verse follows African American twin brothers who share a love for basketball but find themselves drifting apart as they head into junior high school. It was the winner of the 2015 Newbery Medal and Coretta Scott King Award Honor.

Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhà Lai (2013). This novel written in verse tells the story of a young Vietnamese refugee and her family who are forced to flee Saigon during the Vietnam War and who settled in Alabama. It won the 2011 National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

The Lightning Dreamer by Margarita Engle (2013). In this historical novel in verse, Engle evokes the voice of the Cuban feminist and abolitionist Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda.



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Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse (1997). Set in Oklahoma during the years 1934–1935, this Newbery Medal-winning novel tells the story of a family of farmers during the Dust Bowl years.

Under the Mesquite by Guadalupe Garcia McCall (2013), a novel in free verse inspired by the difficult experiences McCall's close-knit Mexican American family went through during her teen years.

Witness by Karen Hesse (2001). This novel in free verse tells the story of the Ku Klux Klan in Vermont in 1924; it was, in 2003, the Council's first Vermont Reads selection. Told through the impassioned first-person narration of 11 characters, *Witness* appeals to a wide range of readers: young and old, culturally and ethnically diverse, and those interested in history and its effects on today's social issues.

Poetry

Langston Hughes and his poetry are strong influences in *Brown Girl Dreaming*. In addition, Robert Frost's poem "Birches" is paraphrased in the "Birch Tree Poem" (p 223) and used as an example of how a good poem can transport one to a new place and new experience.

When asked about influential poets [in this interview](#), Woodson said, "There have been so many since my first encounter with Langston Hughes—Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni was huge for me, Countee Cullen's "Incident" was a poem that haunted me and made me think about living as an African American in the United States. So many poets influenced me both politically and artistically."

Selected Poetry Resources

Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry, selected and with an introduction by Billy Collins (2003). This is a poem-a-day anthology created by Billy Collins to make



poetry less daunting, an assembly of "clear, contemporary poems which any listener could basically 'get' on first hearing—poems whose injection of pleasure is immediate." This collection was the Council's Vermont Reads selection in 2013. VHC has a lending set of this book available through our Reading and Discussion program.

[The Poetry Foundation](#) is an independent literary organization committed to poetry's vigorous presence in American culture. The website includes an extensive collection of poetry, and biographies and essays by and about poets (including Langston Hughes, Robert Frost, and all of the other poets Woodson mentions above).

[Poetry Out Loud](#) – National Endowment for the Arts' and the Poetry Foundation's site for Poetry Out Loud, a contest that encourages the nation's youth to learn about great poetry through memorization and recitation.



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Civil Rights Movement

Pgs. 1-4	At birth: south explodes, King, Kennedy, Malcolm X, Freedom Singers. Forerunners: Rosa Parks (7 years before), Ruby Bridges (3 years before)
Pg. 37	Take night bus from SC to avoid suspicion of being Freedom Riders
Pgs. 72-74	Story of current Civil Rights Movement told to children by grandfather
Pgs. 75-77	Non-violence trainings
Pgs. 80-81	Miss Bell's support for marchers
Pg. 88	Marching was going on even when mother was young
Pgs. 90-91	Decent treatment in fabric store
Pg. 92	"White Only" signs painted out, but there
Pg. 93	Migration
Pgs. 110-111	Burning of mother's high school (Sterling High School in Greenville) in response to students marching (Jesse Jackson in mother's class)
Pgs. 237-38	Grandmother continues in old habits, Jacqueline wants to be like the brave ones who take a seat up front
Pg. 259	Afros
Pgs. 302-03	Angela Davis
Pg. 304	Black Panthers helping Black children
Pg. 308	Shirley Chisholm ran for president
Pg. 312	Poem about Martin

Family Stories

Pg. 17	Jacqueline's birth, differing memories of time
Pg. 33	Mother and cousins recount childhood adventures
Pgs. 214-5	Mother's cooking lessons, stealing peaches
Pg. 20	"How to Listen" poem
Pg. 58	Of sounds
Pgs. 95-96	Of smells (135)
Pg. 103	Of father (older children), of mother leaving for NY
Pgs. 149-150	Of Aunt Kay (mother's sister, in NY)

Father

Pgs. 6	Father as child
Pg. 12	Father as a child
Pg. 15	Father as football player
Pg. 18	Father always late

Friendship

Pg. 67	Siblings enough friends (grandmother protecting from 'bad' influences?)
Pg. 209	Maria (243 best friend forever, 253 dress alike, 254 fear of losing, 256 just for family)



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Family

Pg. 32	Family support/love
Pgs. 46-47	Home equals family
Pgs. 78-79	Children loved (spoiled) by grandparents
Pg. 133	News of new baby
Pg. 135	Displaced as “baby”
Pg. 148	Family trait (gap in teeth including Roman)
Pg. 151-152	Closeness of sisters (Kay & Mary Ann, Jacqueline’s mother)
Pg. 170	Absent father (stories to cover)
Pg. 171	Uncle Robert, mother’s younger brother, brings gifts, dances (174 encourages wishes, 175 encourages stories, 240-41 buys tickets, mother questions “man of word,” police seek, 260-61 catches at graffiti, 264-65 goes to jail, gifts, gold bracelet, 272 in prison; 300 Muslim; 308 Jacqueline “too old for hand holding <i>and the like.</i> ”
Pgs. 181-82	Forgotten father’s (Ohio)
Pg. 187	Each sibling searching for something beyond Brooklyn
Pgs. 68-69	Correct speech, mother’s discipline, (212-13 children in early, 257-58 polite, no bad words, 262 doesn’t allow “funk” music
Pg. 219	Jacqueline and Dell mistaken for twins
Pgs. 219-20	Following brilliant sister Dell
Pgs. 232-33	Hope is singer, hidden talent (“Maybe... there is something hidden like this, in all of us. A small gift from the universe waiting to be discovered.”)

Grandfather

Pgs. 48-49	Gardener
Pgs. 50-52	Gunnar’s Children – grandchildren now his
Pgs. 100-102	Smoker (112)
Pg. 122	Not religious (124)
Pgs. 235-36	Even in dying supports her (“you’re going to be fine, you know that.”)
Pgs. 276-77	His death, funeral parade
Pgs. 288-89	Just like him, “two peas in a pod”

Grandmother

Pg. 55	Works two jobs (teacher and domestic), not ashamed
Pg. 56	Warns children to never be domestics (do “daywork”)
Pg. 112	Jehovah’s Witness (116-117, 119, 123 fear for grandfather, 129, 160 in NYC, 162-163 not ‘true believer’, wants to join class in American songs, pledges, 164 what she isn’t allowed, holidays, etc., 197-98 children doing field service, 250-51 stifles storytelling in six minute skit
Pg. 193	Works full time (grandfather too sick to work)
Pgs. 283-84	Moves to NY after Gunnar dies



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Hunger/Poverty

Pg. 144	First apartment (unlivable)
Pg. 157	Not enough food
Pg. 149	Pica Argo starch (185 wall paint/plaster)
Pg. 183	Long distance phone call "too much money"

Music and Musicians

Pg. 4	Freedom Singers, "We Shall Overcome"
Pg. 33	Sam Cooke
Pgs. 50, 100	Frog Went a Courting (grandfather sings)
Pg. 172	James Brown
Pgs. 177-178	Off key, hears differently, sings anyway
Pg. 221	Sly and the Family Stone ("Family Affair")
Pg. 232	Tingalayo
Pg. 262	Michael Jackson, Sly, Five Stairsteps, Hollies, white stations, sneaks to Maria's to hear "funk" (10 years old)
Pg. 267	O'Jays ("Love Train")
Pg. 315	The Bog Blue Marble song

Names

Pgs. 6-7	Named after father
Pg. 23	Odella named after Uncle Odell, killed six months earlier
Pg. 45	Names in SC
Pg. 53	Men under Gunnar at printing press call him by first name rather than title, Mr. Irby
Pg. 86	Family names "that no master could ever take away."
Pg. 211	Tomboy

North vs. South (Columbus OH, NYC / Greenville SC)

Pg. 2	Born in Ohio but stories of SC "run... through my veins."
Pg. 16	"My father said no colored Buckeye in his right mind would ever want to go there." (South)
Pg. 25	South brings mother close to mother-in-law
Pg. 29-30	Father's opinion of south, family on bus to SC
Pgs. 64-65	Heat, pollen of south bad for brother Hope
Pg. 68-68	Southern speech not allowed
Pg. 165	Rain in NYC vs. SC

Parents' Relationship

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Pg. 34	Mom staying in SC
Pg. 40	Final fight (children 4, 3, 1)



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Place / Home

Pg. 25	South Carolina
Pg. 27	To Mary Ann, Ohio not home
Pgs. 53-54	Nicholtown, African-Americans only neighborhood
Pg. 104	Mother's desire for new home
Pg. 107	Children's desire to stay in Greenville
Pgs. 108-109	Visiting not the same, everything changes
Pg. 143	NYC not as promised, will never be "home" (belief changes over time)
Pgs. 145-146	In NYC people from SC equal home
Pg. 184	Missing SC, grandparents, south
Pg. 191	Home to SC, feels the same (contradicts 108-109)
Pg. 194-95	Belong to two different worlds (northern speech in SC)
Pg. 221	"Greenville and Brooklyn the two worlds my heart lives in now."

Religion

Pg. 112	Poem called "faith"
p. 116	Bible Study at the Kingdom Hall
p. 119	Each night of the week: bible study, Ministry School, knocking on doors
p.122	Grandfather doesn't believe
Pg. 250	Sisters in the Kingdom Hall
Pg. 300	Uncle Robert becomes a Muslim
Pg. 306	Turning towards Mecca with Uncle Robert
Pg. 317	"What I Believe" poem

School and learning to read

Pgs. 158-159	First day, loves building, teacher
Pg. 169	Difficulty reading
Pg. 218	Print to cursive (Jacqueline to Jackie)
Pgs. 227-28	Stevie and me (importance of books at own level, seeing own experiences reflected)
Pgs. 221-22	As way to learn to read
P. 226	Poem called "reading" difficulty in reading as compared to her sister
Pgs. 246-48	<i>Selfish Giant</i> told from memory ("words are my brilliance")

Stories

Pg. 56	Of grandmother's work day
Pgs. 59-60	Bible from grandmother (179 Adam & Eve in church)
Pg. 64	Superhero comics (Hope searches for self)
Pg. 66	Children tell their stories to neighbor child
Pgs. 83-85	Sister reads her the classics (<i>Hans Brinker, House at Pooh Corner, Swiss Family Robinson</i>)
Pg. 89	Of mother's childhood
Pgs. 98-99	Retelling "grown folks' stories"
Pg. 115	Vs. truth, Jacqueline needs to learn



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Pg. 134	Tells to grandfather when he's sick (235)
Pg. 166	Stories in head take her back to SC
Pgs. 175-176	"...each new story I'm told becomes a thing that happens/ n some other way to me..."
Pg. 207	Happy endings (classic tales)
Pg. 223-24	Frost's "Birches" poem- the class can imagine it
Pgs. 227-28	At library allowed to choose any book, prefers pictures, sees brown people in <i>Stevie</i> by John Steptoe, realizes they have stories, too
Pg. 267	"Love Train" song inspires story
Pgs. 290-91	Fabricates summer vacations (wishes come true)

Treatment of / Preparation for Life as an African-American

Pg. 82	Followed in stores
Pg. 14	When you enter a room where no one is like you, remember great grandfather William Woodson, "the only brown boy in an all-white school."
Pgs. 193-6	Meanness of other children (due to their northern ways)

Writing / Composing

Pg. 4	James Baldwin ("What will the world be when I can walk, speak, write?")
Pg. 62	First letter, desire for more
Pg. 97	Garden of words (vegetable names)
Pgs. 154-155	Composition notebook
Pg. 156	Name on paper ("Letters becoming words, words gathering meaning, becoming thoughts outside my head")
Pg. 217	Stories easy to make up, difficult to write down
Pg. 229	Tells family wants to be writer
Pg. 245	"Learning from Langston" ("I loved my friend...")
Pg. 249	Research for butterfly book (252 completes book, poetry)
Pg. 269	Makes up song Dell says is "too good," pride
Pgs. 273-74	"...if I can hold on to the memory of this song / get home and write it down, then it will happen, I'll be a writer."
Pg. 299	Listening and writing
Pgs. 311-12	Teachers says "You're a writer."
Pgs. 313-14	Every wish for dream of being a writer

Created by Vermont Humanities Council Scholar Morgan Irons



Vermont Reads

Brown Girl Dreaming

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a memoir written in verse. Do you enjoy this format? Have you read other books written in verse?
2. This memoir is broken into five distinct parts. How does this structure add to the story?
3. Interspersed throughout the book is a series of ten haiku poems, entitled “how to listen.” Why do you think that Woodson chose to do this? What do they mean?
4. The Civil Rights Movement is a backdrop for Woodson’s childhood. What role does history play in this book? What can we learn from this first-person perspective of American history?
5. What experiences does Woodson have with racial discrimination in the book? What about other members of the family? How do the different generations of her family respond to racism?
6. What and/or who are the strongest influences on Woodson’s identity? How do they help her find her voice?
7. An important theme in the book is family. What does family mean to her? What does it mean to you?
8. What is Woodson’s attitude toward God and religion? Does she seem conflicted about religion? If so, how?
9. When growing up, Woodson lived in South Carolina and Brooklyn at different times in her life. How was she shaped by differences in her locations?
10. What types of discussions do you think Woodson hopes to inspire with this book? What themes from the book do you feel continue to be relevant in the lives of young children in the United States?
11. Woodson describes the impact of finding a particular book in the library: a “... picture book filled with brown people, more/ brown people than I’d ever seen/ in a book before.” She goes on to write, “...I’d never have believed/ that someone who looked like me/ could be in the pages of the book/ that someone who looked like me/ had a story” (p.228). In what ways is it important to see oneself in the stories one reads? In what ways does *Brown Girl Dreaming* promote diverse stories?
12. Woodson’s mother tells her children that they will experience a “moment when you walk into a room and/no one there is like you” (p. 14). Have you ever experienced this? What did it feel like or what might it feel like?

13. Woodson loves writing because it allows her to create worlds that she imagines. What roles do imagination, reading, and listening play in her early development as a storyteller?
14. There are many references to other works of art in this book, including popular music, books, and poems. Were there particular references that you connected with? In what ways do these references help to set the tone for the book?
15. Veronica Chambers wrote in her *New York Times* review of this book, "...there are poems galore. Poems about sibling rivalry, poems about parents who don't take no mess, poems about grown-ups who make a mess of things and, most poignantly, poems about the friends who help see you through.... This is a book full of poems that cry out to be learned by heart. These are poems that will, for years to come, be stored in our bloodstream." Which poems from the book resonated most strongly for you?

Some questions adapted from the [Penguin Guide to Jacqueline Woodson books](#) and the Kalamazoo Public Library's [Brown Girl Dreaming book guide](#).

Additional Ideas for a Dynamic Discussion

- Use a facilitator, preferably someone who loves literature, has experience leading discussions, and has taken the time to read and research the book carefully. They should be prepared with a list of stimulating questions (the above list is a good start) and should try to include everyone in the conversation. They should also provide a brief biography of the author. Consult with VHC for trained discussion facilitators in your area.
- Make every attempt to seat people in a circle. If the group is too large for this configuration, ask people to speak loudly and clearly so that everyone can hear, or, as appropriate, ask them to stand and face the group when talking.
- Don't forget the introductions! Be creative — in addition to stating their names, people might briefly share their general impressions of the book, their reason for attending, or something about the book for discussion.
- Discussion facilitators should end the discussion with some kind of "closer." One example is asking everyone (or, if the group is large, volunteers) to share a final thought about the book or the experience they've just had discussing it. Or ask volunteers to read their favorite sentence or paragraph from the book.
- Serve refreshments!

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