

Novel Resource #5

Title: Locomotion

Author: Jacqueline Woodson

Copyright Date: 2003

Publisher: Scholastic Inc., New York, NY



About the Author

Interesting Facts, Background, Anecdotes

Jacqueline Woodson originally thought she wanted to be a lawyer or a teacher when she got older. She then realized that what she really loved was writing. Growing up in Columbus, Ohio, South Carolina, and Brooklyn, Woodson was that child that was always being told to sit still and be quiet. She was never able to sit for long periods of time unless she was reading or writing. Woodson has used that personality trait to foster a successful writing career. Another quirk to her childhood personality that benefits Woodson in her career is lying. She says she was a habitual liar, “telling stories” she calls it, as a child. The feeling of seeing someone believe her tall tales excited her. It wasn’t until later in childhood, around 5th grade, that Woodson realized that lying and telling stories on paper was ok, even encouraged. It was then that she quit her lying habit and fell in love with writing.

Woodson has written several children’s books, many of which have won numerous awards. Two of her books have been awarded Coretta Scott King honors, including Locomotion, and she’s also been recognized by Newbery and Caldecott. She says she usually works on two or three books at a time, switching back and forth between them when she gets a new idea or gets stuck. Working on her writing is a daily event. She often works in her

writing room in her house in Brooklyn, where she makes her home, in cafes, or wherever she happens to be when a great idea pops into her head.

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Author's Connection to the Book

Part of Woodson's purpose when writing Locomotion was to tell the story of a young African-American boy growing up in an inner-city setting. Many of the poems that Woodson wrote to tell Lonnie's story come from her own experiences growing up in Brooklyn, such as building rooftops, pigeons, and God.

Another, equally significant, part of Woodson's purpose in writing this novel was to make poetry understandable and interesting to children. Woodson says that when she was growing up she hated poetry. She was intimidated by it and never felt a connection to it until she began reading Langston Hughes. Her fondness for his poetry shows up in Locomotion when Hughes is mentioned several times and an African-American poet that the characters can relate to

Recommended Reads by Jacqueline Woodson

If You Come Softly, Hush, Last Summer with Maizon, I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This, Miracle's Boys

Annotation

Eleven-year-old boys should be filling their days with laughter and happiness in the home, games with siblings, and hugs from mom and dad. Fifth-grader Lonnie Motion is leading quite a different lifestyle. After his

parents' tragic death by house fire, Lonnie and his little sister, Lili, are left to bounce around from foster home to foster home. Lili finds a new mama, but life is more difficult for a foster boy. Finally Lonnie is placed with Miss Edna, a stern, but caring, older woman.

With a somewhat stable home in place, Lonnie now must begin dealing with the jumble of emotions in his head. His teacher, Ms. Marcus, teaches him how to write his emotions as poetry. "Write fast," instructs Ms. Marcus as Lonnie tries to get everything down on paper.

Through his poetry we hear Lonnie's story. We learn about living in Miss Edna's home and the way Lonnie finds peace and quiet up on the roof. We learn about Lili's new home and the connection she's made with God. We read memories of Lonnie's parents and the happy family they once were. We meet Lonnie's classmate who struggles with a genetic disease. Near the end of the novel, Lonnie is able to somewhat let go of his sadness and anger and embrace Miss Edna, his new home and family, and his renewed relationship with his sister.

Not many novels can deal with such sad and tragic issues and still leave the reader with a sense of peace and hope at the end of the story as Jacqueline Woodson's Locomotion. The heavy issues of death, foster care, and race are presented in a child-friendly, sensitive manner. Being written in poetry form, surprisingly, makes the novel easy to understand. Each poem concisely presents a different thought or feeling that Lonnie is experiencing. By the end of the story young readers can see the main character change from a jumbled-up emotional child to a happier, more peaceful, and more accepting boy.

Booktalk

Lonnie Collins Motion is an eleven-year-old boy with a rough past. He has really had to endure some hardships in his life, starting with the death of his parents in a tragic fire. But things weren't always tough. We get to hear stories of Lonnie and his parents and his little sister when life was happy and they were a normal family.

But now he's stuck alone in foster care and has so many mixed-up emotions he's trying to deal with. Thankfully his teacher shows him how to put these feelings down on paper as poetry. As he sorts through everything he feels and all that's happened to him, he begins to move forward in his life. You'll want to read this emotional story to see how Lonnie begins to rebuild his home and relationships.

Characters

Lonnie- main character. Lonnie Collins Motion is an eleven-year-old African American boy whose parents have died. He has some emotional issues. He now lives in foster care.

Miss Edna- Lonnie's foster caregiver. An older woman with a good heart and a somewhat stern demeanor.

Lili- Lonnie's eight-year-old sister. Lili lives apart from Lonnie with foster parents in a nice home. She has learned to have faith in God and wants Lonnie to do the same.

Ms. Marcus- Lonnie's 5th grade teacher. She teaches Lonnie about poetry and encourages him to write from his heart.

Eric- Lonnie's classmate. Eric has a tough exterior, but he also sings in the church choir. He has sickle-cell anemia.

Rodney- Miss Edna's older son. He comes back from upstate New York to live with Miss Edna and Lonnie. He becomes like an older brother to Lonnie.

Lamont and Angel- Two boys who are Lonnie's classmates and friends.

Clyde- A new boy in Lonnie's class. He is from the south and is very country. Lonnie finds him interesting and writes poems about him.

LaTenya- A girl in Lonnie's class that he has a crush on.

Conflict

Most of the conflict seen in this novel is an internal struggle between Lonnie and his emotions. From having both of his parents die and from being separated from his sister, Lonnie has pent-up sadness and anger that

he's not able to deal with yet and get past. His emotions take hold of him, not allowing him to be happy and feel love, both of which would help him accept his new home and being building relationships.

Conflict Resolution

From the beginning of the novel and throughout, Lonnie's teacher, Ms. Marcus, shows Lonnie how to write his emotions down as poetry. Through writing down his feelings, Lonnie is able to release some sadness and anger, allowing his heart and mind to have room for love and emotional progress. He deals with the pent-up emotion and beings the healing process of accepting his new home, new family, new friends, and God. Through finding God and happiness, Lonnie renews his bond with his sister, Lili, from whom he was separated.

Genre: Novel in Verse/ Poetry

If You Liked Locomotion You'll Love....

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech

In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall by Javaka Steptoe

Miracle's Boys by Jacqueline Woodson

Uptown by Bryan Collier

Red Kayak by Priscilla Cummings

Interest Level

Grades 3-5

Reading Level

4.7-5.2

Read Aloud Passages

How I Got My Name (page 21)

This poem is a flashback to when Lonnie and Lili were much younger. They and their mother are dancing around the room to the song Locomotion, their mom's favorite song. She explains that she loves the song

so much that she had to name her son **Lonnie Collins Motion**, or Locomotion.

Me, Eric, Lamont, and Angel (page 26)

Lonnie's friends are telling stories, trying to one-up each other with the outrageous things they've seen. Even though Lonnie is picturing the smoke and screams from the fire that killed his parents, he tells the other boys that he's never really seen anything.

Setting

The story takes place in today's world. Since the story is not told in chronological order, the scenes take place in several different locations. Many of the present-day events occur in a school setting and in foster homes. This story also makes use of flashbacks, so several events take place during the previous eight years, usually in his family's home.

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Point of View

The point of view comes in first person limited omniscient form.

Theme

Woodson's novel has a "finding yourself" theme. Lonnie is upset and sad and emotional and lost. He can't wrap his head around all the feelings he's experiencing and it's hindering him from progressing in his life. Through writing poetry, Lonnie is able to deal with these emotions and come to find himself again and find the happiness and strengths and positive parts of his life.

The title Locomotion comes from the nickname Lonnie's mother gave him after naming him Lonnie Collins Motion. It's a perfect title for the novel for two reasons: memories of his deceased mother are so important to Lonnie, and locomotion means forward movement. After sorting through his emotions and coming to terms with his anger and sadness, Lonnie is able to move forward in his life and accept his new home.

Across the Curriculum

Subject Area Connections

Science- Students could learn about various types of genetic diseases, starting with sickle-cell anemia. The teacher could show a Powerpoint created about sickle-cell anemia with various facts and graphics. Then the students could be assigned groups, each group having to research another type of genetic disease. Using Powerpoint, each group will create a brief presentation with various facts and graphics about the disease they researched.

Materials: resource books about genetic diseases (from library), Internet and computers, paper and pencil

Indiana Academic Standards Met With This Activity

Science- 3.4.9, 3.4.7, 4.4.7, 5.4.1, 5.4.9, 6.4.11

Language Arts and Art- The teacher will read aloud the poems from Locomotion about Rodney, trees, and upstate New York. Then the teacher will read The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein aloud to the class. As a whole class they will compare and contrast the feelings and attitudes about trees that are presented by Rodney in Locomotion and from The Giving Tree. Then, using fingerpaints, the students will paint a large image of the kind of tree they picture when reading the poem “Almost Summer Sky” from Locomotion.

Materials: The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein, Locomotion by Jacqueline Woodson, white paper, finger paints

Indiana Academic Standards Met With This Activity

Language Arts-3.3.4, 3.3.7, 4.3.2, 4.7.1, 4.7.6, 5.3.7, 5.7.5, 5.7.11, 6.7.8, 6.7.12

Resources

Scott, Roland B. & Althea D. Kessler, *A CHILD WITH SICKLE CELL ANEMIA IN YOUR CLASS (A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS)*, Center for Sickle Cell Disease.

-This brochure can help teachers gain more information about the disease that afflicts one of Lonnie's classmates and answer questions the students may have about the disease and how it affects Eric in the story.

Poetry Pages website <http://suzyred.com/poetry.html>

-This website has a collection of links about poetry for kids. It has everything from literary terms to examples of sonnets and haikus. This site can be used to help the students get a better understanding of the types of poems Lonnie is writing as well as aiding them in writing their own poetry.

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Activities

Timeline

Lonnie tells his story through the use of poems about his life now and flashbacks of how life used to be and events that happened in the past. As a whole class, brainstorm a list of important events and memories from Lonnie's life and write the list on the board.

Using a roll of paper for an adding machine, each student will create a timeline of these important events in chronological order. Each timeline should include at least ten events and each event should have a title and a one-sentence description. Include a small illustration to go along with each event.

Materials: adding machine tape, Locomotion by Jacqueline Woodson, pencil, colored pencils, markers

Indiana Academic Standards Met With This Activity
Social Studies- 3.1.5, 4.1.13, 5.1.19, 6.1.16

Poetry Reading

As a class, review the different forms of poetry that Lonnie wrote: haiku, free verse, sonnet, epitaph, epistle. Each day for a week read another example of one of the forms from various poetry books obtained from the local public library. Pay particular attention to using poems by Langston

Hughes, who is mentioned several times in Locomotion. Discuss what characteristics define it as that kind of poem. Discuss the meaning of each poem. Then have each student write that type of poem in class. The topic of the poem can be assigned or free choice. The poem should be typed for homework each night.

At the end of the week have each student choose their favorite poem they wrote and memorize it over the weekend.

The following week, organize a poetry reading in which each student recites their poem to the class. Invite parents to view the poetry reading, serve tea and juice, and display the students' other poems around the room!

Materials: poetry books, pencil and paper, computer, tea and juice (optional)

Indiana Academic Standards Met With This Activity

Language Arts- 3.3.1, 3.3.3, 3.5.2, 3.7.9, 3.7.13, 4.3.3, 4.3.5, 4.4.9, 4.7.9, 5.3.1, 5.3.4, 5.3.5, 5.7.6, 6.3.4, 6.3.7, 6.4.7, 6.7.7

Discussion Questions

Prereading Questions

1. Describe your home life. Who do you live with? What things does your family do together?
2. Have you or anyone you've known ever had to deal with tragedy?
3. What do you think of when you hear the word "poetry?"

During the Reading Questions

(there are no chapters in this book)

1. How would you describe the kind of mom Lonnie's mother is? (p. 5-7)
2. Why does Lonnie go to the drugstore and ask for honeysuckle talcum powder? (p.7)
3. Why do you think Lonnie says that "Ms. Marcus don't understand some things?" What does Lonnie mean by that? (p.13)
4. Who does Lonnie refer to as "monsters?" Why? (p.15)

5. Think about you've learned about line breaks. At the end of the Halloween Poem, why isn't the last sentence all on one line? (p.17)
6. What does Lonnie mean when he says, "That stupid fire couldn't take all of them?" (p.19)
7. Who is Langston Hughes? (p.24)
8. Why is the roof a special place to Lonnie? (p. 25)
9. When Eric, Lamont, and Angel are talking, why does Lonnie say, "Never seen nothing?" Why doesn't he tell them about his parents and the fire? (p. 27)
10. How would you feel if you were a new student walking into Ms. Marcus' class? (p. 29-30)
11. Why do you think Lonnie writes several poems about Clyde, the new boy in his class? Why is Lonnie interested in him?
12. Why wouldn't Lili's new mama want any foster boys? And why is she always keeping a close eye on Lonnie? (p. 44-46)
13. Why is Lonnie angry with Ms. Marcus when she asks the class to write about family? (p. 49)
14. Find an example of a simile on page 49 and write it below.
15. Have you ever written something you didn't want to share? Why didn't you want to share it? (p. 59)
16. How does Lonnie react when he hears that Eric is sick? What can we tell about the kind of person Lonnie is from this reaction? (p. 63)
17. How does Ms. Marcus feel at the end of the Lamont poem? Why? (p.67)
18. Why does Lonnie write the word "HOPE" on his hand in church? (p. 77)
19. In what ways does Rodney act like a big brother to Lonnie? How does that make Lonnie feel? (p. 82 and 87)
20. How does Lonnie's idea of home begin to change the longer he stays with Miss Edna? (p. 88)
21. Why is it important to Lili that Lonnie "find God?" Does he find God? Explain.

Postreading Questions

1. After reading the story, would you want Lonnie as a friend? Why or why not?
2. What are some things you learned about poetry from reading Locomotion?

3. Do you like novels written in poetry form? Why or why not?
4. Predict what you think Lonnie will be like five years from now. What will he be doing?

Language (Spelling/Vocabulary)

flicker (p. 3)- light up; like a light turning off and on again quickly.

honeysuckle (p. 7)- a bush-like plant that grows small, sweet-smelling flowers that contain a sugary nectar

manhole (p. 20)- a hole in the middle of a road that leads underground to pipes and sewer systems; usually covered by a metal lid.

locomotion (p. 21) -the act of moving forward, like a train or car

ashy (p. 33) -a light, grayish color of skin; usually caused by dry skin

down (p. 58)- soft, warm duck feathers used in the lining of coats and bedding

sickle (p. 63)- a farming tool used to cut tall grasses that has a long, flat, curved hook on the end.

sickle-cell anemia (p. 64)- a sickness in which the blood cells are shaped differently and can block blood vessels.

relief (p. 73) feeling relaxed because pain or difficult feelings are now gone

repent (p. 77) to feel sorry about something you've done; to ask forgiveness

sacrifice (p. 81) to give up something for someone or something else.

okra (p. 82)- a food dish made of a plant with pods

Poetry Terms

line breaks (p. 4)- the place in a poem where one line ends and a new line begins.

haiku (p. 14)- a type of 3-line Japanese poem in which the first line contains 5 syllables, the second line 7 syllables, and the third line 5 syllables.

sonnet (p. 20)- an expressive, 14-line poem; usually rhyming and often about love.

epistle (p. 24)- a formal letter

free verse (p. 67)- a type of poetry with no set pattern, such as amount of lines, syllables, or rhyme

epitaph (p. 83)- a short poem written about someone who passed away

Bibliography

www.Jacquelinewoodson.com Author's website

www.bookpage.com Interview with Woodson

Woodson, Jacqueline, Locomotion, Scholastic, Inc., 2003

www.suzyred.com/poetry.html Poetry for Kids

www.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome/html Indiana state standards

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