

Lesson Plans and Resources for *Another Brooklyn*

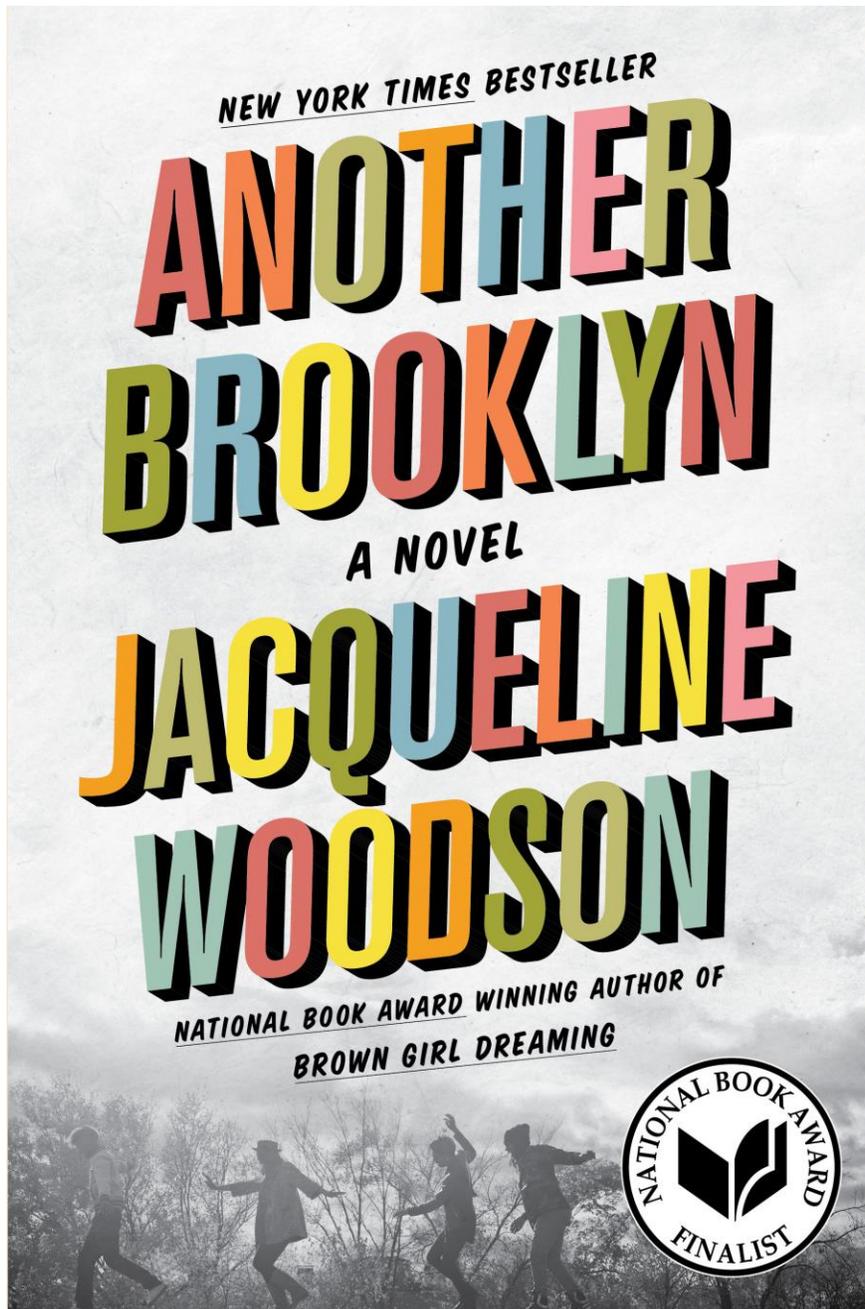


Table of Contents

1. Overview and Essential Questions
2. In-Class Introduction
3. Common Core Standards Alignment
4. Reader Response Questions
5. Vocabulary + Sample Sentences
6. Literary Log Prompts + Worksheets
7. Suggested Analytical Assessments
8. Suggested Creative Assessments
9. Online Resources
10. Songs and Television Clips
11. Print Resources
 - About the Author
 - Book Review from *The Guardian*
 - Book Review from *The Irish Times*

These resources will all be available online at the beginning of the One Book season at:
www.freelibrary.org/onebook

Please send any comments or feedback about these resources to Larissa.Pahomov@gmail.com.

OVERVIEW AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The materials in this unit plan are meant to be flexible and easy to adapt to your own classroom. Each chapter has discussion questions provided in a later section.

Through reading the book and completing any of the suggested activities, students can achieve any number of the following understandings:

- Memory is not automatic – humans make conscious and unconscious choices about how they remember the past.
- Identity is formed in contrast and reaction to other people.
- The dead are lost twice – once when they die, and once when they are forgotten.

Students should be introduced to the following key questions as they begin reading. They can be discussed both in universal terms and in relation to specific characters in the book:

Universal

- *What do you choose to remember about your past, and why?*
- *Who influenced you to become the person you are today? Who are you like, and who are you not like?*
- *What roles do deceased family members play in our current lives?*

Book-Specific

- *What does August choose to remember about her mother and their past life in Sweet Grove? Why does she make these choices?*
- *How do August's friends influence her in her path toward adulthood? How do they inspire her, and how to they repulse her?*
- *How do August's mother and uncle influence her, even after they have passed away?*

Many of the reader response questions and suggested projects relate to these essential questions, and they can be looped back to frequently.

IN-CLASS INTRODUCTION

This lesson is designed to provide students with a one-class introduction to the book. The lesson can be used to start off a class reading of the text, or to encourage them to read it independently.

As a recipient of *One Book* resources, the Free Library requires that you devote one class period to introducing *Another Brooklyn* to students, either using this lesson or your own plan.

Introduction

1. Have students take five minutes to answer the following prompt on paper:

What's your earliest memory?

2. Have students share those memories in pairs. When one person shares, the partner asks them a series of questions starting with this one:

How do you know this memory is real?

Don't accept the first answer that your partner gives, especially if it's just "because I remember it clearly." Ask them what kind of proof or corroboration they have.

3. Hand out copies of *Another Brooklyn*. Read pages 1-8 together.
4. Discuss: What issues is August dealing with? Who does she have in her life to corroborate her own stories? Do you believe her descriptions so far?
5. Finish reading the chapter (pages 8-16) individually or as a group. When August says "This is memory" (pg 16), what does she mean?

Correlation to Common Core Standards for Grades 11-12

INTRODUCTION LESSON + DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Reading Standards for Literature

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
4. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently

Speaking and Listening Standards

1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

VOCABULARY

Reading Standards for Literature

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

Language Standards

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
6. Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

ANALYTICAL + CREATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Writing Standards

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 on page 54.)
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

READER RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Chapter 1 – pages 1-16

Why does August come back to New York? Why doesn't she accept her brother's offer to stay for a while?

What is August's reaction like when she sees her old friend Sylvia? Why do you think she chooses to get off the train and not talk to her?

Why does the chapter end with a reference to death in Indonesia?

Chapter 2 – pages 17-32

Why did August's mother warn her against becoming friends with girls? Why does she long so much to become friends with Sylvia, Gigi, and Angela?

Why are August and her brother banned from playing outside? Do you think their father is making the right choice?

Chapter 3 – pages 33-40

What do August and her brother decide to do once they are free to go outside?

What is August's first impression of each of her three new friends?

Chapter 4 – pages 41-54

Do you believe August's mother's threat about sleeping with the butcher knife? Do you believe her accusation that their father has been with another woman?

What kind of a person was Clyde like? Why doesn't the plan to run SweetGrove with him work out?

Chapters 5 and 6 – pages 55 – 68

What people or things are the girls afraid of? How do they plan to fight back?

Why do you think that for Angela, mother plus dance equals sadness?

At the end of the chapter, August narrates that their childhoods were comprised of "adults promising us their own failed futures" (63). What did each girl's parent want for them? Do you think these expectations were reasonable?

Chapter 7 – pages 69 – 78

How do the girls respond to attention from boys and men? What power do they have as a group?

Why has August's brother gotten so serious? Why does she see so many people trying to discover "another Brooklyn?" (77)

Why does August keep asking about the urn?

Chapter 8 – pages 79 – 96

What is the big event of this chapter? Why does August's father forbid them from participating?

Who is Sister Loretta, and what role does she play for August and her family?

Why do you think August's father becomes a member of Nation of Islam? How does August react to the change?

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 – pages 97 – 119

What is Sylvia's room, and house, and life like? Why does it impress August?

Why does August take an interest in Jerome? And why does she choose Sylvia to confide in?

Why does Sylvia's father throw out the girls? How does Sylvia react?

Why does Angela cry and not talk about her problems? Why does she keep the girls locked out?

Chapter 12 – pages 121 – 139

Why is August fascinated by Alana, the new neighbor across the street?

How does August feel about her continuing sexual relationship with Jerome? What does she still hold back on, and why?

What does it mean to be sent "Down South?"

What happens to Angela's mother – and what does it make August remember?

Chapters 13 and 14 – pages 141 – 158

Why does August turn down Jerome? How does she feel after he rejects her? And how does she react when she sees him with Sylvia?

Why does August's father and brother stick with Nation of Islam? Why does her father take her to see that woman?

What happens to Gigi after her performance?

Why does Angela finally decide to look inside the urn?

Chapters 15 and 16 – pages 159 – 170

Why does August decide to change her name when she gets to college? What is she running from, and what might she be searching for?

Why did August keep telling her brother that their mother was coming "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow"?

Reading Group Guide Questions ([provided by the publisher](#))

1. In her narration throughout the novel, August repeats the phrase, 'This is memory'. Can August's memory be trusted? What does 'memory' mean to her?
2. How does Jacqueline Woodson portray female friendship? What difficulties do August, Sylvia, Gigi and Angela face?
3. As the novel progresses, we see August's father and brother become increasingly religious. How can August's reluctance but engagement with the family's new religion be understood?
4. Death is a recurring theme in the novel. In what ways does August deal with death, if at all? Does she ever confront the subject?
6. What role does race play in the lives of the four friends? And in the wider neighbourhood?
7. The novel sheds light on the experience of growing up. How does August describe the treatment of children in her neighbourhood, including herself and her brother?
8. August and her brother are initially very close. At what point in the narrative do they seem to grow distant, if at all? Why do you think this might be?
9. The structure of the novel is retrospective, but features flashbacks throughout. What is the effect of the overlapping recent- and distant-pasts in the novel? How does August come to understand her own past?
10. How does Jacqueline Woodson create a sense of place in the novel? What makes her portrayal of the setting 'another' Brooklyn?
11. How can gender relations be understood from the perspective of the four friends?

VOCABULARY

Chapter 1 – pages 1-16

Anthropology (9) – As a child, I had not known the word **anthropology** or that there was a thing called Ivy League.

Exhume (9) – I had watched the people of Madagascar **exhume** the muslin-wrapped bones of their ancestors, spray them with perfume, and as those who had already passed to the next place for their stories, prayers, blessings.

Solemn (11) – For so long, he had been my little brother, sweet and solemn, his eyes open wide to the world.

Chapter 2 – pages 17-32

Continuum (20) – In the meantime, I pressed my face against the hot glass, palms flat against the window, wanting to be on the inside of Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi's **continuum**.

Heartrending (21) – From that window, from July until the end of summer, we saw Brooklyn turn a **heartrending** pink at the beginning of each day and sink into a stunning gray-blue at dusk.

Impenetrable (25) – How safe and strong they looked. How **impenetrable**.

Medallion (30) – I lay in my bed, my eyes on the ceiling. A **medallion** circled the bulb.

Chapter 3 – pages 33-40

Patois (39) – Her father, who had the same reddish brown hair, thick coils of it, read Hegel and Marcel, quoting them back to Sylvia in a French **patois** she no longer understood.

Chapter 4 – pages 41-54

Raggedness (43) – We had seen the truly poor kids, the hard bones of their knees and ankles, the **raggedness** of their clothes, their eyes hungrily following the Mister Softee ice cream truck as we stood inside the front gate with our father, licking our cones.

Dappled (44) – Light **dappled** cars, our shoes, the bright gray sidewalk.

Hawking (46) – Even my father on the boardwalk at Coney Island, the music and the **hawking** and rumble of the roller coaster to the right of him, the vast ocean to the left, walked slowly, unsteadily, as though he were unsure as we were about what step to take next.

Balm (47) – If it was the autumn after Sylvia, Angela, Gigi and I became inseparable, I would have pulled them close, bending deep into the **balm** of their laughter.

Reedy (47) – She was dark and **reedy** and wore a long, black wig that stopped at the middle of her back.

Adorned (49) – Small American flags **adorned** her gate and stairs and were hung with a brown extension cord across the bright red aluminum siding that covered the front of her building.

Chapters 5 and 6 – pages 55 – 68

Mulatto (55) – She came to South Carolina by way of a Chinaman daddy and **mulatto** mama.

Chapter 7 – pages 69 – 78

Furrow (77) – I watched my brother watch the world, his sharp, too-serious brow **furrowing** down in both angst and wonder.

Chapter 8 – pages 79 – 96

Somber (94) – In New York, the cameras found Puerto Rican street gangs laughing and wrestling as a somber man warned us of their danger.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 – pages 97 – 119

Vestibule (103) – And because I wanted it so much, I told her about my secret love, how Jerome and I met in my **vestibule** some evenings, his hands everywhere, his lips on my mouth, neck, breasts.

Urn (112) – What’s in the **urn**, daddy?

Chapter 12 – pages 121 – 139

Ebb (127) – The streetlights stopped flickering from the **ebb** and flow of stolen electricity.

Chapters 13 and 14 – pages 141 – 158

Listless (146) – I stared at him, letting my shoulders rise and fall **listlessly**, the words too much trouble.

Marrow (149) – When you’re fifteen, pain skips over reason, aims right for **marrow**.

Chapters 15 and 16 – pages 159 – 170

Falter (157) – Gigi **faltered**. During the last verse of “I Don’t Know How to Love Him,” a crack in her voice echoed through the auditorium.

Dissertation (162) – Months later, as the scattered pages of my **dissertation** lay finished and approved on the floor beneath us, I kissed her slightly parted lips and left in the night.

Briny (165) – From where we had stopped, I could smell the **briny** water.

The Four Friends

Name: _____

August spends much of the book describing her friends, both idolizing and distancing herself from their personalities and appearance. Track at least one description for each girl (Sylvia, Gigi Angela) and analyze how August feels.

Description + page #

Analysis: how does August feel? How do you know?

Description + page #	Analysis: how does August feel? How do you know?

SUGGESTED ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENTS

These prompts could be used for traditional essay assignments, or for responses across a variety of mediums (live presentation, digital stories via Powerpoint or video, etc.)

1. In an [interview with PBS](#), Woodson made the following statement:

It's always been me in the context of the bigger world, in the context of the greater good, in the context of what is this story trying to say, and why is it trying to say it, and what does it mean to someone outside of this experience?

So, even as I'm creating the characters, and putting them on the page, and having them move around, I'm thinking, what does it mean? When I put four black girls on the page, what is it going to mean when it goes out into the world? How are they going to be represented? How are they going to be digested? So — and what is my responsibility in all of that?

In your essay, respond to Woodson's own question: what responsibility does she have to her characters? Do you think that they are being represented and "digested" appropriately by readers? What is the book trying to say, and does that message resonate with readers?

2. Read the two reviews included in this resource guide – one from The Guardian, and one from the Irish Times. They have differing opinions about Woodson's writing style. Where do you agree or disagree with their assessments? Include at least three quotes directly from the book to support your argument. If you have read any of the other authors mentioned in the reviews, reference them as well.
3. August peppers the book with descriptions of traditional death and burial rituals from around the world. Pick one of these descriptions and compare and contrast it with August's own evolving attitudes towards death in the book.
4. What is the book's ultimate message about the relationship between death and life? Develop a thesis statement and defend it with direct quotes from the novel.

SUGGESTED CREATIVE ASSESSMENTS

1. On page 150, Woodson writes “Linden, Palmetto, Evergreen, Decatur, Woodbine – this neighborhood began as a forest. And now the streets were named for the trees that once lived here.” What story do you have to tell about your home neighborhood? Start with what the streets are named after, and share the story you think outsiders need to hear.
2. On page 2, Woodson writes, “We didn’t have jazz to know this was who we were. We had the top 40 music of the 1970s trying to tell our story. It never quite figured us out.” Listen to the [playlist of songs](#) mentioned in the book to understand the references. Then, make your own annotated playlist. Collect five songs from the present day that don’t tell your story, and five songs that do. Write an explanation for each one – what does the song get wrong, or right?
3. Gigi and August’s mother have both passed away by the end of the novel – what would they have to say to her, years later when she returns to Brooklyn to bury her father? Write a statement from one of them to the adult August.

ONLINE RESOURCES

AUDIO

PBS Interview

Five minutes, including discussion of her home neighborhood of Bushwick, Brooklyn:

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/painting-vibrant-picture-brooklyn-tumultuous-1970s/>

Code Switch Interview

Thirty-Seven minutes, including discussion of growing up as a Jehovah's witness, coming out as gay to her family, and growing up in the segregated South before moving to New York:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/12/10/369736205/jacqueline-woodson-on-growing-up-coming-out-and-saying-hi-to-strangers>

VIDEO

"Bushwick History Lesson"

An article discussion Woodson's devotion to the neighborhood, and a video of her reading the poem of the same name from "Brown Girl Dreaming" (and the text of the poem as well).

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/poetry/a-poets-history-lesson-on-brooklyns-bushwick-neighborhood/>

Meet the Author Series

Five short videos, 3-5 minutes in length, where Woodson discusses her inspiration for writing about characters underrepresented in literature.

https://www.teachingbooks.net/author_collection.cgi?id=50&mid=90&a=1

ON BROOKLYN

Meryl Meisler: Photos of 1980's Bushwick

<http://www.brownstoner.com/neighborhood/bushwick/meryl-meisler-photos-bushwick-brooklyn-in-the-80s/>

The Death and Life of Bushwick

A scholarly article looking at how city policy has influenced Bushwick over the centuries. Includes a detailed discussion of the 1977 blackout.

<https://www.city-journal.org/html/death-and-life-bushwick-13083.html>

Bushwick Notes: from the 70's to Today

A scholarly article written in bullet-point form, focusing mostly on housing and population in Bushwick in the 70s.

http://www.brooklynhistory.org/upfromflames/uff_resources/images_resources/bushwick_notes2.pdf

NYTimes Real Estate: Bushwick

A write-up from 2011 about change in the neighborhood in recent years, including discussion of real estate prices.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/realestate/a-sprawling-neighborhood-in-transition-again-living-inbushwick-brooklyn.html>

SONGS AND TELEVISION CLIPS

Below is a partial collection of the many cultural references made in the book. They are all collected into a playlist here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLn1r2DongBbAARkwaDjdyQUF01GVvYKLI>

Page 56 –

Pam Grier in “Coffy” -- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_Pc6uUMjMo

Page 69 –

Al Green, “For the Good Times” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2lpoTKnDPw>

Tavares, “Remember What I Told You to Forget” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HuQpXx0Zo0>

Minnie Riperton, “Loving You” – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kE0pwJ5PMDg>

Sylvia Robinson, “Pillow Talk” -- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NA2X1040_gY

Page 98 –

Dorothy Moore, “Misty Blue” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMONGMDEerl>

Page 119 –

The Mary Tyler Moore Show Intro - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Zfti7b31rs>

Page 123 -

Stevie Wonder, Sir Duke -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6fPN5aQVDI>

Page 160 -

Art Ensemble of Chicago, “Theme De Yoyo” -- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=perVFDDy_xg

Carmen McRae, “No more Blues” -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vsap6349YFo>

Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit” - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mO92ll_q0k

Nina Simone – “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTGiKYqk0gY>

Page 162

Abbey Lincoln, “It’s Magic” - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzMvNYAp_vc

PRINT RESOURCES

About the Author

<http://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/all-about-me/my-biography/>

I used to say I'd be a teacher or a lawyer or a hairdresser when I grew up but even as I said these things, I knew what made me happiest was writing.

I wrote on everything and everywhere. I remember my uncle catching me writing my name in graffiti on the side of a building. (It was not pretty for me when my mother found out.) I wrote on paper bags and my shoes and denim binders. I chalked stories across sidewalks and penciled tiny tales in notebook margins. I loved and still love watching words flower into sentences and sentences blossom into stories.

I also told a lot of stories as a child. Not "Once upon a time" stories but basically, outright lies. I loved lying and getting away with it! There was something about telling the lie-story and seeing your friends' eyes grow wide with wonder. Of course I got in trouble for lying but I didn't stop until fifth grade.

That year, I wrote a story and my teacher said "This is really good." Before that I had written a poem about Martin Luther King that was, I guess, so good no one believed I wrote it. After lots of brouhaha, it was believed finally that I had indeed penned the poem which went on to win me a Scrabble game and local acclaim. So by the time the story rolled around and the words "This is really good" came out of the otherwise down-turned lips of my fifth grade teacher, I was well on my way to understanding that a lie on the page was a whole different animal — one that won you prizes and got surly teachers to smile. A lie on the page meant lots of independent time to create your stories and the freedom to sit hunched over the pages of your notebook without people thinking you were strange.

Lots and lots of books later, I am still surprised when I walk into a bookstore and see my name on a book or when the phone rings and someone on the other end is telling me I've just won an award. Sometimes, when I'm sitting at my desk for long hours and nothing's coming to me, I remember my fifth grade teacher, the way her eyes lit up when she said "This is really good." The way, I — the skinny girl in the back of the classroom who was always getting into trouble for talking or missed homework assignments — sat up a little straighter, folded my hands on the desks, smiled and began to believe in me.

Guardian Review – Dreams and Danger of the Streets of New York

Bernadine Evaristo // February 19, 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/19/another-brooklyn-jacqueline-woodson-review>

Jacqueline Woodson is America's Young People's Poet Laureate. A major voice in children's literature, she is the author of more than 30 books, including her memoir-in-verse, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, which won multiple awards, including the [2014 National Book Award](#). It's a striking recreation of an African-American childhood and family in the troubled times of the 60s and 70s. Her gorgeous poetry is easily readable, yet negotiates complex relationships, experiences and political contexts as the author's family moves between Ohio, South Carolina and New York. *Another Brooklyn*, her new novel, has a thematic and stylistic overlap. It also explores black girlhood and relocation, and while not poetry, it is beautifully lyrical.

The narrator is August, an international anthropologist specialising in death rituals, who has returned to Brooklyn to bury her father. She was eight and her brother four when their father uprooted them from the creaky old family farmhouse in the Tennessee outback, where "honeysuckle vines bloomed thick and full in our yard every summer", to a rundown apartment in drug-addled Brooklyn where a small boy ran down the street, "a bent hypodermic needle he'd just found aimed like a gun". Their mother, grieving the death of her beloved brother Clyde in Vietnam, has been left behind in the South. The children never see her again, and it's not until the end of the novel that we understand why.

August's grief at losing her mother infuses the novel with melancholy and loss. She longs for friendship, affection, to belong. Her father doesn't allow his children out to play, fearful of the dangerous city. "If anyone had looked up, they would have seen the two of us there, as always, watching the world from behind glass". Eventually he loosens up and she befriends three girls she'd previously admired from afar, Sylvia, Angela and Gigi, who walk the streets proudly linking arms. "How safe and strong they looked. How impenetrable." The girls are fired up by their individual hopes and dreams, but also weighed down by family problems, poverty and expectations. Friendship is their salvation and support. Woodson is particularly good at describing their wonderful, growing camaraderie. "We envied each other's hair, eyes, butts, noses. We traded clothes and shared sandwiches. Some days we laughed until soda sprayed from our noses and hiccups erupted in our chests."

But the New York streets are dangerous and girls, in particular, are vulnerable to sexual predators. As August reflects, "At eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, we knew we were being watched." Not only watched, it transpires. As they get older, some of them are preyed on by those predators, from the junkie who lurks under a stairwell, to the older teenage boy who seduces an impressionable girl who likes the attention.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn is subject to white flight, people are packing up and moving out. Her father finds solace and a community in the Nation of Islam. His hijab-wearing girlfriends come and go. They are perhaps surrogate mothers. For a while August, too, is a follower.

The novel successfully defies any sense of a traditional plot. There is a lot unsaid, a lot implied, which creates suspense and a curiosity, in particular, about what happened to the mother. This is, instead, a novel to be enjoyed for its visual and impressionistic prose style. Paragraphs are short and resemble prose poetry. August's memories are fragmented and questioned. What is real? What is imagined? The overall effect is a collage of experiences and reflections that intersect geographically, temporally and sexually.

Comparisons have been made between [Toni Morrison](#)'s early novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, also about young black girls. While this literary lineage is evident, [James Baldwin](#)'s seminal 1962 novel, *Another Country*, which foregrounded racial and LGBT identities in New York, also springs to mind. More recently, [Colm Toibin](#)'s 2009 novel, *Brooklyn*, foregrounded an Irish, female, immigrant experience to the borough. *Another Brooklyn* echoes both titles, but Woodson evokes a New York of the 70s seen through the prism of young black females who are least likely to be portrayed in literature or any other art form, at the centre of it. "We were four girls together, amazingly beautiful and terrifyingly alone. This is memory."

The Irish Times - Another Brooklyn by Jacqueline Woodson: More Winsome than Profound

By Eileen Battersby // February 2, 2017

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/another-brooklyn-by-jacqueline-woodson-review-more-winsome-than-profound-1.2959556>

August and her little brother move from Tennessee to New York City with their father after their mother dies. It is the 1970s and she is eight years old when she first watches the other little girls, noting their self-possession from a fascinated distance.

In time she is accepted by them and she and her three friends roam the neighbourhood together, sharing their dreams of future beauty, fame and happiness. But adult life is not that simple and August, named after the month of her birth, must confront the truth about her mother's tragedy which resulted from the loss of her brother, August's uncle.

Ohio-born Woodson, the recently appointed Young People's Poet Laureate in Chicago, has written extensively for children and young adults, often confronting race, social class, sexuality and sexual orientation. Winner of the 2014 National Book Award for her memoir, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Woodson has revisited her girlhood here. It is an engaging if slight narrative with a plot device intended as a twist which reveals itself almost immediately as it is clear it is written as a flashback.

"I know now that what is tragic isn't the moment. It is the memory." August as an adult, an anthropologist, is home from her travels studying death rituals to bury her father. Those days of school girl dreams were lived some 20 years earlier. A chance encounter on a subway sets her thinking.

Obvious comparisons with Toni Morrison's far more stylistically complex *Sula* (1973) – also just 170 pages – will make *Another Brooklyn*, even with its theme of predatory males, appear overly dependent on Woodson's breezy lightness of touch. Her prose – statements such as "One day, my body would tell the world stories beneath the fabric of my clothes" or "When she danced, her dance told stories none of us were old enough to hear" – lacks the daunting power of Morrison's sophisticated lyricism which reaches to the Bible, a rich oral tradition and beyond. Although shortlisted for last year's National Book Award which was won, as expected, by Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, an imaginative re-engagement with the horrors of slavery, *Another Brooklyn* rarely appears to be doing more than revisiting familiar territory until August recalls a visit made back to Tennessee with her father and brother when she was 16: "We rode the train....then rented a car and drove an hour to where our land had once been.....But where our house had once been, there were weeds now, taller than any of us. And thick as poles."

Memory is her mantra.

For all its poignant attempt at retrieving the past, belatedly August discovers it has been touched by betrayal. *Another Brooklyn*, more winsome than profound, may be closer to young adult than Woodson intended and fails to approach Morrison on any level.

Eileen Battersby is Literary Correspondent. Her debut novel, Teethmarks on my Tongue, was published last year.