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D Foster showed up a few months before Tupac got shot that first time and left us the summer before he died. The day D Foster enters Neeka and her best friend's lives, the world opens up for them. D comes from a world vastly different from their safe Queens neighborhood, and through her, the girls see another side of life that includes loss, foster families and an amount of freedom that makes the girls envious. Although all of them are crazy about Tupac Shakur's rap music, D is the one who truly understands the place where he's coming from, and through knowing D, Tupac's lyrics become more personal for all of them.

The girls are thirteen when D's mom swoops in to reclaim D—and as magically as she appeared, she now disappears from their lives. Tupac is gone, too, after another shooting; this time fatal. As the narrator looks back, she sees lives suspended in time, and realizes that even all-too-brief connections can touch deeply.

A Discussion Guide to After Tupac and D Foster by Jacqueline Woodson

After Tupac and D Foster Details

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Author : Jacqueline Woodson

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From Reader Review After Tupac and D Foster for online ebook

Dara says

I've been wanting to read this book for five years now and finally had the opportunity. What Woodson does so well is present *issues* naturally and matter-of-factly, thus always coming off sincere and never preachy. I especially appreciated the gay character story line. Gay characters are rare in middle grade novels, and especially POC gay characters. If I was a middle school Reading teacher, my entire curriculum would revolve almost entirely around Jacqueline Woodson's work.

Em says

Em's Review: The title for this novel is interesting, as one might assume that the majority of the story takes place after the death of Tupac Shakur and after some encounter with D Foster. In actuality, the story is about the friendship between three young women during the time period that marks their transition from kids to young adults and the impact of Tupac Shakur in his last years of life. Woodson explores how even the shortest of times spent with one another and the shortest of lives can leave a serious mark on an individual and how music can touch people's lives.

In addition to the title giveaway, we know that our title characters will not be with us forever from the opening line: "The summer before D Foster's real mama came and took her away, Tupac wasn't dead yet." Neeka and our unnamed narrator have been best friends for a long time. When D Foster, a young woman whose foster mother allows her an enviable amount of independence, "roams" into their Queens neighborhood, she becomes part of their inseparable crew. The girls jump rope, hang out on the stoop, discuss the meaning of Tupac's lyrics, and think about their Big Purpose. They feel a connection to Tupac, to his life, to his songs, and to his perspective on life. As D says one time, "when I see him on TV, I be thinking about the way his life was all crazy. And my life is all crazy. And we both all sad about it and stuff. But we ain't trying to let the sad feelings get us down. We ain't trying to give up."

The friendship formed between the three young women is beautiful and sweet. There were moments throughout the story when I saw in the characters my young stoop buddies and students from my days living/working in Poughkeepsie – especially Neeka who I felt a special connection with in great part because of this familiarity with her sweet-yet-sharp way of communicating with others. The audiobook reader Susan Spain offers a wonderful performance bringing unique voices to the various characters (and again, really adding to the familiarity of the characters – Neeka's voice is perfect!).

I really appreciate the thoughtful responses of the young women to Tupac's music throughout this novel as well. I love Hip Hop and while I don't exclusively listen to social issue Hip Hop, I do appreciate artists like Tupac Shakur who sing about more than just where the party at. I feel bad for people who can't get past thug life tattoos, curse words, and an artist's reputation (whether warranted or not). They are really missing out. Maybe if more people listened (in general – not just to Hip Hop), we would better be able to understand and connect with one another.

Brina says

One of my themes in reading this year has been to find quality books for my children. Even at a library,

books featuring either magical princesses and fairies or sports stand out. Kids fall into the trap of only reading books that mesh with their social upbringing. My quest has lead me to both classic and contemporary books. Over the summer I discovered Jacqueline Woodson. Woodson has been writing poetic prose for the last twenty years and has won multiple awards for her prose. After Tupac and D Foster won the Newberry and features memorable characters growing up in a 1990s Brooklyn neighborhood.

Our narrator measures time from before and after D came to the neighborhood and when Tupac was shot. Even though our narrator and her best friend Neeka live in wholesome environments, they could relate to Tupac's music because various lines in his songs spoke to them individually. He had been one of them once, and all the teenagers in the neighborhood listened to his music either on the radio or through Walkmans. The day he was shot, time appeared to have stopped, and the characters knew where they were when they found out about Pac.

Life went on for the narrator, Neeka, and D. They went from precocious adolescents jumping double Dutch to gangly teenagers trying to test their parents' limits. This book is not without its take on society. Woodson addresses treatment of gays in the black community as well the percentages of black males in prison. Additionally, the "be like Mike" culture has permeated black urban communities as Neeka's older brother used a basketball scholarship as a means to get out of poverty. Even though this novel is geared toward middle grade readers, Woodson includes many social issues that make the book appropriate for adult readers as well.

I enjoyed this novel as it showed girls in a warm, friendly relationship devoid of conflict and competition. Jacqueline Woodson has been writing her poetic novels for twenty years and I am glad that I unearthed her writing this year. This is the third of her books that I have read recently and each story is more poetic than the last. A poignant book that addresses many of the current social issues of its time, I rate it a solid 4 stars. Appropriate for middle grade readers and the entire family.

Jackson says

This book was so beautiful. I would definitely say that it's the best realistic fiction I've read in a long time.

Woodson beautifully weaves together several different stories into one in a way that the stories parallel each other but are each important in their own ways but they all come together as one story but she doesn't do this in a way that feels forced and she does it differently than I've ever seen another author do.

The story takes place against the backdrop of all that stuff that happened with Tupac in the 90's--his trial, his incarceration, being shot and finally his death. It plays a more prominent role in the story than just saying that it is a recurring theme, though. The characters do not know Tupac, of course, they are just teenage fans and their families, but his story frames their own. The young teen main characters are initially compelled to sit by the radio as his story unfolds because they are fans of his music and have fangirl crushes on him. They talk, though, a lot about really relating to his struggle and it becomes more than just thinking he's cute and becomes about truly seeing themselves in his struggle. The narrator's mom could not care less about Tupac's music but is glued to his story as it unfolds because she is outraged by the racism and other injustice of the situation and the narrator develops her own views about this through her mom's reaction to Tupac and through other events that happen over the course of the story. She gives a lot of biographical information about Tupac and although the characters are only fans, he comes to feel like a real character in the book.

Against this backdrop of Tupac's trial, injuries and death is the story of three best friends. The narrator and her long-time best friend have grown up together on the same block since babies and they are like sisters.

They live a sheltered life where they are not allowed to ride the bus or even leave the block and they are good kids but sort of resent this. One day, a girl just shows up on their block and they are instantly best friends. She is just kind of there in a way that they initially never really know if she's coming back and she always does but it's sort of looming in the background that some day she won't. This new friend, D Foster, lives a very different life from theirs. She has grown up in the foster care system and has spent much of her life roaming. She is allowed to take the bus on her own and go wherever she wants and the other two girls are so busy being jealous of D's freedom that they don't really realize that in D's eyes, they are the lucky ones. The three of them become best friends "the hard way" (as they always say) and have a beautiful friendship that feels like forever although the narrator says from the beginning that it will end.

While this is going on one of the girls has a beloved older brother who is a young gay man in prison. They don't share how he got in prison until later on in the story, but it is clear from the beginning that whatever he is in for he did not do and there is some suggestion woven in that the homophobia he encounters is part of what landed him there. There are beautiful discussions of the way he encounters homophobia, specifically within his urban mostly black community woven throughout the book. They talk about Tupac as someone who they would see standing up for their gay brother but at some point they also talk about instances where Tupac's own homophobia shows through. They also (and this was perhaps one of my favourite parts of the book) talk about his experiences as a gay man and a sissy in prison. The conversation happens in a way that is appropriate to the middle school aged characters the story is about so he does not go into graphic detail about what happens to him but the conversation is nevertheless hard hitting and he does go into enough detail to get the point across.

As all of this is going on, the two main characters are coming of age and figuring out who they are and what their values are and I think that's what the story is really about. This was a beautiful story. It was a quick read (I listened to the audiobook in just over a day of my regular commute to work) and anyone who loves teen fiction or the 90's or good books should read it!

Betsy says

Some authors make writing reviews easy. You pick up their book, glance at the cover, and the words pour out of you like a hard spring rain. Jacqueline Woodson is not one of those authors, and this is not a bad thing. Her books are deep little critters. Their surface concerns hint at fuller depths. Her Newbery Honor winning book *Feathers* was a novel that I made the mistake of reading, putting down for a month or two, and then picking up to review. I couldn't do it. It isn't that it wasn't a good book. More that I couldn't figure out what to say about it when the time came. Fortunately, I don't have that problem with *After Tupac & D Foster*. A title that feels more autobiographical than anything else, *After Tupac* is a lovely take on friendship, trouble, and an awe-inspiring performer whose legend only seems to grow.

He was killed on September 13, 1996, but before Tupac died there was D Foster. In a neighborhood in Queens, our narrator and her best friend Neeka meet D, a girl who is eleven-years-old like them and has seen a lot of homes in her day. The three bond almost immediately and through the course of their acquaintance try to juggle the everyday realities of family, their shared love of Tupac, and the future as it comes to them. D Foster just wants to stay in one home from here on in, but when her real mom gets her act together and wants her back, the closeness of the girls is sorely tested.

A lot has been said in professional reviews of this title about Woodson's choice to keep her heroine's name out of the book. I wish the Acknowledgments or the bookflap could have said whether or not Woodson based any of this on her own feelings about Tupac when he was killed. As far as I can tell, she was probably not the age of the girls in this book when it happened. But once in a while a celebrity death hits hard and close to

home. You certainly get that impression in this book, and in such a way that the reader isn't left wondering why all these people should care about a guy they've never even met. And if that personal touch has come into her book, then it would make sense to keep the main character's name out of it. How often on a given day do you say your own name to yourself? How often do you even hear your own name, always assuming that you're not a kid raising your hand in class? By keeping everything in the first person, we get this story through the eyes of someone who pays more attention to the people around her than she does to herself. As she herself says, "Mostly I was the quiet one in the group, The Brain. Mostly I watched and listened." Pity the person who had to write the blurb for this book, eh?

People always have their bugaboos about books, and one of mine is that there isn't a quintessential child or teen book out there about The Black Panthers. It just chaps my hide. So whenever I see a mention of the Panthers in a book I get all excited. Woodson rightly points out that Tupac's mom was a former Panther, and Woodson is one of the few authors to even acknowledge the Panther programs like those offering free breakfast and prenatal care. I've also not seen that many fictional books for kids and teens that address Tupac and his life. As one reviewer of the book pointed out, Woodson acknowledges the man's own homophobia, but for the most part he comes off looking pretty good here. Certainly you wish there was an accompanying CD or something that would let you hear the songs the girls are listening to.

The age range for this book is very very interesting to consider. I mean our heroines are eleven and maybe twelve during the course of the story. But the writing is definitely from an adult, or at the very least teen, perspective looking back at that time. The girls also have to deal with issues that your average everyday tween book isn't considering. Things like having your best friend's brother gay and in jail for a crime he never committed. Then again, nothing in this book is inappropriate for ten and eleven-year-olds either. Woodson keeps the profanities low to non-existent without sacrificing her language or dialogue.

And man, does she have an ear for dialogue and prose. It's hard to read this book without hearing the very voices of the characters that are saying them. Who else can get away with a sentence like, "brother ain't know me from a can of paint"? I don't usually read a book and find myself yearning for the audio book version as well, but *After Tupac & D Foster* may have to be the exception. If the audio book could get the rights to actual Tupac songs too, you could end up with a bloody piece of fine art on your hands, you could! Woodson's prose is top notch too, of course. I loved the moment when you saw the three girls becoming friends with the help of some double dutch. When Woodson ends her chapter with the sentence, "And the three of us had a rhythm going," there's simply nothing more to be said. Woodson doesn't go in for long self-indulgent paragraphs or heavily repeated thoughts or themes. The editing on this puppy was top notch and there's not a wasted word in the text.

A great little Woodson book, and one that I think would be perfectly acceptable in the children's section of any library. Profanity, if there is any, is negligible (and certainly not memorable) and the violence is always in the past. This is just a really good story about friends, keeping them, losing them, and how you never really know what's going on in another person's brain. An ode to the cusp of adolescence without fudging the inner details. Woodson through and through.

Ages 10-17.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Grandma Bev for TeensReadToo.com

Woodson's engrossing story contains a lot of big issues, but the main theme is about friendship, and how

unexpected changes come into our lives as we are touched by others.

AFTER TUPAC & D FOSTER is a tension-filled story of how two twelve-year-old girls meet an outsider and become friends with her. "D" is a foster child, and has adopted "Foster" as her last name. Abandoned by her mother, D Foster is searching for something that is missing in her life...perhaps a sense of belonging and permanence. The other two girls begin to explore the city with her, all of them searching for their "Big Purpose" in life. All the girls have their own set of family issues, and their own approach to solving these problems.

All three girls are great fans of the rapper, Tupac Shakur, and are dismayed when he is shot. They examine the meaning of his rap lyrics as they apply to their lives as African-Americans living in Queens, New York, and find that they have much in common with his ideas.

When D's birth mother shows up to reclaim her daughter and take her out of the lives of the other two girls, you can't help but hope that her life will be better this time -- while fearing that it will be a rerun of her past history.

Racism, homosexuality, and incarceration are touched upon in this slice-of-life story. Every teen can find something to relate to in this emotional story of how teens cope with life. There isn't a great deal of suspense, but Ms. Woodson's writing style is absorbing, and makes you wish the story was longer. It does give you cause to reflect on how your own friends and acquaintances have changed your life.

Ashlee Tominey says

Loved this depiction of the narrator's struggle to make sense of life and where she fits in it, in her friendships, in her family, and in her neighborhood. Lots of tough topics tackled in a nuanced voice.

Cathy says

Before I'd read *Brown Girl Dreaming*, I never would have picked this book up. As a new fan of Jacqueline Woodson, I picked this one off the shelf at our middle school media center. The title intrigued me. I had a student my first year at my current teaching position, probably 15 years ago, who was a huge Tupac fan. All I knew at the time was that he rapped (strike one), he'd been to prison (strike two), and he had been murdered (he's out!). I feigned interest so I could try to connect with this student, and I did find some of the lyrics my student shared with me to be compelling, but after my student moved on, I forgot all about the rapper until I saw the title of this book. It brought back memories of this student whom I've seen only once since 8th grade all those years ago, and it made me curious as to how he'd fit into the book, so on a sick day, I read it.

Being a white woman who was born and raised in the rural, middle class Midwest, in a vastly predominantly White society, I found this book to be both fascinating and enlightening. It made me think of the events in Ferguson, Missouri and all the other places that have been in the news in recent months and years because of racial profiling and violence between police and Blacks. And it gave me a glimpse of what it might mean to be Black in today's urban areas, a glimpse of what it might take to move up and out of a bad situation, and most importantly, a realization that some people, no matter what race, are victims of circumstances that may be dauntingly difficult to rise above.

I think this book could give a glimmer of hope to young people who need to be encouraged to persevere, and

I think it could offer others an opportunity to understand a way of life that many of us are unfamiliar with.

Elaine says

What is your "big purpose?" And how can you figure it out when the world keeps getting in the way.

Richard says

Not so good, even for teens. Woodson tries to sell us the Tupac part, without the Tupac. The reader is duped here. There are none of his rhymes, and nothing to really grab onto here. If she came back with a new addition, adding some character, plot, and setting "meat," I believe we may have a winner. As it stands, the book simply fails to live up to its cover.

Claire says

My favorite of Jacqueline Woodson's chapter books, by far. Beautifully written, thoughtful, and -- what really makes me prefer this to her other books -- swimming in complicated real-life situations without becoming too issue-driven.

My favorite thing about this book is that it feels very much written for a younger audience despite topics that are normally reserved for didactic picture books or teen readers: it addresses injustice, prison, homophobia, racism, the foster care system, and other issues that touch families and affect many of my urban kids, but maintains a voice and perspective that's warm, loving, righteous, and utterly age-appropriate for 9-11 year old readers. It's beautifully written and avoids overly lyrical phrasing, something that I think often gets mistaken for good writing for children. I wouldn't recommend this as an insightful or gritty read for a teen, and I think even older middle-schoolers wouldn't really identify with the girls' lack of rebellion... the main characters are young, sheltered, mostly observing rather than acting, and not yet arguing with their protective mothers. (The exception of course is D, whose hard-knock life has resulted in an impressive, if unrealistic, level of maturity that allows her to offer timely insights.)

I'd love to see this in 5th grade book clubs, as a classroom read-aloud, and *absolutely* as a book on tape, maybe with some actual Tupac thrown in. I'd also be happy to see it win the Newbery... I think it's a much, much stronger offering than last year's Newbery Honor Feathers, and many of the Newbery speculations I've heard so far this year. A must-purchase for my K-5 library.

Shu Xiao says

This book is a window, a mirror, and a door. It's everything you need in a multicultural literature.

Debbie says

This is a small, simple, huge story that says so much in so few pages.

When it comes down to it, Jacqueline Woodson has packed a lot of tough topics into this airtight little story: throwaway kids, jail visits, homosexuality, Tupac's art, fatherlessness, and the hope some kids cling to that they might one day play professional sports. With so many big issues in the mix, it's amazing how smooth the story flows. Of course the strongest thread is friendship.

Favorite quote:

"D Foster showed up a few months before Tupac got shot that first time and left us the summer before he died. By the time her mama came and got her and she took one last walk on out of our lives, I felt like we'd grown up and grown old and lived a hundred lives in those few years that we knew her. But we hadn't really. We'd just gone from being eleven to being thirteen. Three girls. Three the Hard Way. In the end, it was just me and Neeka again" (p. 2).

This would be a good book to show how a writer can say a lot with a few seemingly simple descriptions.

Sicko Mobb says

Most of this book is mainly about three bestfriends, D Foster, Neeka, narrator. When D Foster enters Neeka's and her bestfriend's lives, their world opens up. D's the kind of girl that's been places and attracts attention. Before long the three are inseparable, bonded by a passion for the music of Tupac Shakur. Then, all too soon, D's mom swoops in to reclaim her D and as magically as she appeared, she disappears from their lives. Tupac is gone, too, after another shooting, this time fatal. And the girls are left to ponder how even the briefest connection can touch so deeply.

I think that D Foster was Tupac's relative or something because of the way she saw him or listen to him she felt like she was connected to him in some type of way. I can picture Neeka and her family and the narrator sitting in the jail house visiting their son/brother. This help me to better understand the text because now I understand why Tash was in jail. "Never judge a book by its cover" (104-105).

Yes, I really like this book and the way it was written is wonderful. My favorite character was D Foster because we are very similar in many ways she's smart bold real and a girl who wanted to get out of the foster care system to find her mother.

I Give this book three stars and yes I will recommend that anyone should read this book its a good book. As I read the book I made a text to self connect that me and D Foster are former foster care children and I realize that just because i'm a former foster care child doesn't mean i wont make it no where in life. Its just mean that I've been through alot of changes. And the next book I will read is my favorite kind of books with all the drama in it.

Jess says

How does Jacqueline Woodson manage to fit so much into such a slim book? It's not that it has a big plot, but more than there's so much life in so few pages. Each character - even the younger kids who only appear for a few moments on the page - is distinct and full of character. The descriptions of food make you hungry,

the sense of the neighborhood is palpable, even though the description is sparse, and most of all - the sense of being eleven, twelve, thirteen. My childhood doesn't bear any outward resemblance to these girls, but I recognized the narrator as a sort of kindred spirit in an unexpected way. I don't know quite who I'd recommend this to, because it's hard to describe and it doesn't have a lot of obvious hooks. But I think it definitely speaks to what girls go through at that age, in terms of awareness of the bigger world and friendships and family. And it also deals with how much music, or a single musician, can matter to someone, so that might be a good hook there.
