

LOCOMOTION
BY JAQUELINE WOODSON

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 3-5

Submitted by Mary Jo Kelly, School Librarian
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Title: Locomotion
Author/Illustrator: Jaqueline Woodson
Publisher: Grossett and Dunlop, 2003
Pages: 128

Summary

Lonnie Collins Motion, or "Locomotion" as he is better known, is a New York City fifth grader, whose teacher assigns her students the task of using different forms of poetry in their journals. In his poems, Lonnie describes the house fire that killed his parents when he was seven years old, as well as the events during the four years since their deaths. Gradually, Lonnie reveals how he has come to grips with his sorrow and loss. Now that he is eleven, some of Lonnie's emotional wounds have healed, but he still misses his parents. And he misses Lili, his little sister, who has been adopted by a woman who does not seem to like Lonnie. Still he finds ways to visit Lili regularly. Lonnie has been put into a foster home because "not a lot of people want boys – not foster boys that ain't babies." Lonnie hasn't given up on finding a way to reunite with his sister. His foster mother, Miss Edna, has two sons and relates well with boys. Lonnie is beginning to feel more at home with her. And now his teacher, Ms. Marcus, is teaching him about the various forms of poetry thus, giving him a way to put his feelings of loss, frustration, and confusion on paper.

Quality of the Text and Illustration

The sixty poems tell the story of a young boy experiencing inner turmoil as he relates his thoughts and feelings to others. Woodson, on her web page, says she wrote the book because she could hear the voice of the main character in her head. She says that the poems seemed to write themselves. Lonnie tells the story of what has happened to him and to the people in his life. He also lets the reader see the process of writing from the inside as he experiments with poetry - from haiku to sonnets. Like Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust*, Woodson's book shows poetry as a means of expressing strong emotions. She provides a male protagonist with whom male readers can easily identify, much as Sharon Creech did in *Love that Dog*. This alone makes the book a worthwhile addition to elementary and middle school library reading lists.

Awards

National Book Award Finalist
Coretta Scott King Honor
2003 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award (Fiction Honor)
Horn Book Fanfare List
SLJ Best Book
IRA-CBC Children's Choice for 2004
2004 Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts (sponsored by the
Children's Literature Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English)

Author/Illustrator's Biography

Born in Ohio, Jacqueline Woodson grew up in South Carolina and in Brooklyn, New York, where she still lives. The people in her neighborhood in Brooklyn were mostly Hispanic and African American. This is why the characters in her fiction are from a variety of ethnic groups and social classes. Woodson writes about characters that feel out of place and includes issues that young people face. Her message to readers is that "no matter who you are in the world, it's okay to be who you are."

Related Titles: Novels in Verse

Aleutian Sparrow by Karen Hesse
The Battle of Jericho (Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book) by Sharon M. Draper
Blues Journey (BCCB Blue Ribbon Nonfiction Book Award) by Walter Dean Myers
Days Of Jubilee by Patricia McKissack
Girl Coming in for a Landing by April Halprin Wayland
Keesha's House (Michael L Printz Honor Book Award) by Helen Frost
Love that Dog by Sharon Creech
Miracle's Boys by Jacqueline Woodson
Maizon at Blue Hill by Jacqueline Woodson
Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse
Shakespeare Bats Cleanup by Ronald Koertge
Under the Pear Tree by Brenda Seabrooke

Other Related Titles

Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis
Falling into Place by Stephanie Greene
Love to Langston by Tony Medina
My Man, Blue: Poems by Nikki Grimes
Rodzina by Karen Cushman

Specific Features

The book provides a section at the end of the poems called “Literature Circles” which gives discussion questions (keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy) and activities that can be done in conjunction with reading the book. The section also includes a list of some of Woodson’s other books and her web site.

Classroom Connections

- The discussion questions at the end of the book provide great starters for group discussion and individual writing assignments. The activities listed are likewise great extensions of the novel. Teachers wishing to incorporate technology could do the activity about putting the story events into chronological order might use Time Liner to create a visual representation of the events.
- In addition to the ideas listed in the book, teachers could assign small groups of students to read other stories in poetry from classic epics and ballads to Shakespeare, and on to modern authors. Discussion groups could discuss whether the tale told would have been better in a prose version. Students could then try their hands at retelling an event from their stories in prose form. They might then try writing a narrative poem about an event either from their lives or from a story written in prose.
- Teachers could download photos of the Bronx and have students use these photos in developing a Power Point presentation to retell Lonnie’s story.
- Students, as a class, could be asked to create a “Web of Possibilities” of what might happen to Lonnie and Lili in the future using Inspiration software. Afterward, individually, they might take one of the branches of the class web and write that story in poetry or prose.
- Teachers could explain that artists put their emotions into their works much as Lonnie lets the poems come from his. Then students could try their hands at working with modeling clay while classical or other instrumental music is played.
- Several topics that are brought up in the book such as fire safety, foster homes, adoption and sickle cell anemia might be researched, depending on the age of the students.
- Students may select one of the poems that Lonnie has written and write a similar one of their own.

Web Sites

Nancy Keane’s Booktalks

www.nancykeane.com/booktalks

Includes a booktalk of *Locomotion*

Suzy Red Poetry

<http://www.suzyred.com/poetry.html>

This site has many links to pages dedicated to poetry on many topics.

Author Jacqueline Woodson's Web Site

<http://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/>

Includes bibliographies for different reading levels, biography, and lists of awards for each book.

Sparky the Fire Dog

<http://www.nfpa.org/sparky/>

Fun site with activities for kids to learn about fire safety.

U.S. Fire Administration for Kids

<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/kids/flash.shtm>

Site dedicated to teaching kids about fire safety; includes computer-animated activities and puzzles for kids.

Teens Health: Sickle Cell Anemia

http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/diseases_conditions/blood/sickle_cell_anemia.html

Site includes information about sickle cell anemia.

National Book Foundation

http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2003_jwoodson.html

Includes book excerpt and the author's biography.

Houghton Mifflin Reading: Meet the Author

<http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/woodson.html>

Includes a brief interview with the author.

Forms of Poetry for Children

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/poeform.htm>

Site contains many different types of sample poems.