

P.S. Be Eleven

By Rita Williams-Garcia

TEACHING GUIDE

SEQUEL TO THE NEWBERY HONOR BOOK
ONE CRAZY SUMMER

P.S. Be Eleven

The illustration depicts a vibrant, multi-story tenement building in a city. In the foreground, three children are playing jump rope on a sidewalk. A boy in a white shirt and blue pants is on the left, a girl in a green shirt and blue pants is in the middle jumping, and another girl in a pink shirt and blue pants is on the right. The scene is set against a backdrop of colorful buildings and a bright, warm sky. The title 'P.S. Be Eleven' is overlaid in large, stylized white letters with a drop shadow.

Aligns with
Common Core
State Standards
for Grades 4-7

Rita Williams-Garcia
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

About the Book

Eleven-year-old Delphine and her sisters from the Newbery Honor book *One Crazy Summer* are back in Brooklyn, which feels different after a summer at Black Panther camp in Oakland, CA. Delphine now finds her grandmother's old-fashioned views on race oppressive. She's shocked to learn her father is in love and bewildered when her uncle returns from Vietnam so changed. Even the sisters she's always looked after are getting more independent. With her first dance and a Jackson Five concert on the horizon, Delphine is on her way to growing up, ready or not, in this vivid novel steeped in the music and politics of the late 1960s.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Delphine's mother ends letters to her, "P.S. Be Eleven," even after Delphine turns twelve. Discuss what Cecile means. Why is the phrase used as the title? In what ways do Big Ma and Pa expect Delphine to act older than she is? How do they treat her as if she's younger? In what ways would Delphine like to grow up sooner? *CCSS 4-7.RL.2, CCSS 4.RL.3*
2. Change is at the heart of this book. How does Delphine change at home? What are the big changes in her family? Find examples and discuss how Delphine also changes at school and how her friends there change. *CCSS 4-7.RL.2, CCSS 4.RL.3, CCSS 6-7.RL.3*
3. Society was changing rapidly in 1968, as shown in the book's many references to music, popular culture, and politics. How does Shirley Chisholm symbolize change? What do the Jackson Five and their concert represent that's new in society? Consider the phrase "black infinity" (p. 68) when answering this question. What role does the Jackson Five play in Delphine's life? *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 4-7.RL.2*
4. The first chapter is titled "A Grand Negro Spectacle," a phrase Big Ma uses. The term is also used on pages 10, 21, 63, 233, and 270. What does it mean? Why does Big Ma worry about how the girls act in public? What examples of racial prejudice can you find in the first two chapters? *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 4-7.RL.4, CCSS 7.RL.6*
5. At the book's end, Delphine listens to Michael Jackson sing "Who's Lovin' You" and thinks, "What did Michael Jackson know about life without the ones you loved the most, when each of them moved farther and farther away until they were voices you heard and pictures that flashed before you" (p. 272). Discuss the theme of loss in the girls' lives, using specific examples. What has Delphine learned about dealing with loss? *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 4-7.RL.2*
6. Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern must save half of \$24.00 for Jackson Five concert tickets, public transportation, and refreshments. What do the prices say about the times the characters live in? Calculate how much money is needed for concert tickets, transportation, and refreshments to see your favorite group perform. *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS.Math.4.MD.A.2*
7. Compare Vonetta and Fern. How are they alike? How are they different? How are their relationships with Delphine similar and different? Why does Cecile write to Delphine, "Look after Vonetta. Fern can take care of herself" (p.266)? *CCSS 5.RL.3*

8. Delphine reacts differently than her sisters do to the news that Pa is dating, and then to meeting Marva. Give details that show Delphine's attitude and that of her sisters. Why are Vonetta and Fern more welcoming to Marva? What does Marva do to change Delphine's view of her? *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 4-7.RL.3., CCSS 7.RL.6*
9. Cecile is far away but her letters reveal her point of view about the girls and what's happening to them. Quote from the letters to explain Cecile's views. *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 7.RL.6*
10. What role does Darnell play in the plot? Find examples of foreshadowing that hint at his problem. How do different people—Delphine, Vonetta, Pa, Big Ma—react to Darnell and his actions? What does the package from Walter Reed, described on pages 267–268, tell you about Darnell? *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 4.RL.3, CCSS 6.RL.3, CCSS 7.RL.6*
11. Delphine uses a lot of similes and metaphors in her narration. As you read this book, keep a list of such language with page numbers. How does each example of figurative language add another dimension to what she's saying? For example, she uses the metaphor of spinning straw into gold (pp. 80–81). What does that refer to and why do you think she used it? *CCSS 4-7.RL.4, CCSS 5.RL.6*
12. Mr. Mwila has a formal style of speaking, using words like *decorum* and *redemption*. As you read the book, write down unfamiliar words that he and other characters use. Try to figure out their meaning from the context. If the meaning is still unclear, look up the words in a dictionary and jot down their meaning. *CCSS 4-7.RL.4*

Classroom Activities

1. **Dear Big Ma.** Write three letters to Big Ma, one from each sister's point of view at the close of the book. For inspiration, see Vonetta and Fern's letters to Cecile on pages 54–55 and Delphine's letters throughout the book. The letters can discuss what has happened since Big Ma left and how each girl feels about it. Use formal letter format with a date, salutation, and closing. *CCSS 4-7.RL.1, CCSS 4.RL.6, CCSS 7.RL.6*
2. **The Great Debate.** Delphine and her classmates have a debate in which the two sides take turns of two minutes per speaker. Each speaker has notes and uses the two minutes to make their strongest points. Have students come up with two-sided topics related to their lives such as whether a school should sell sodas and candy or whether ads should be banned on children's television. Have them prepare notes and then hold short debates. *CCSS 4-7.SL.4*
3. **Women in Power.** In 1968, women held few political offices. Have students research how things stand now. Assign states to students to find out if the state has or has had a female governor. Have some students find out how many women are in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the Senate. Have students discuss why women don't hold more offices and what steps could be taken to improve the numbers. *CCSS 4-7.W.7, CCSS 4-7.SL.1*



About the Author

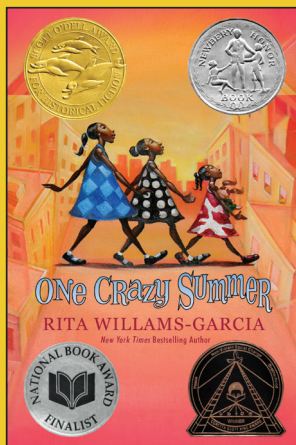
Twice a National Book Award Finalist, Rita Williams-Garcia is the author of eight distinguished novels. *One Crazy Summer* and *P.S. Be Eleven* are for middle-graders; her novels for teens are *Blue Tights*, *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*, *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, *No Laughter Here*, and *Jumped*. *Like Sisters on the Homefront* was named a Coretta Scott King Honor Book and a best book of the year by ALA Booklist,

School Library Journal, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, and *Publishers Weekly*. *No Laughter Here* and *Jumped* are among Rita's ALA Best Books for Young Adults. *Jumped* and *One Crazy Summer* were both National Book Award finalists. Additionally, *One Crazy Summer* was a Newbery Honor Book, a Coretta Scott King Award winner, the recipient of the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, and a *New York Times* bestseller.

Rita Williams-Garcia is currently a faculty member at Vermont College for the MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults Program. She has two daughters, Michelle and Stephanie, and lives in Jamaica, New York. You can visit her online at www.ritawg.com.

Accolades for *One Crazy Summer*

- A Newbery Honor Book
- A Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner
- A National Book Award finalist
- A Scott O'Dell Award Winner
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- A *Horn Book* Fanfare Selection
- A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Children's Book
- A *Publishers Weekly* Best Children's Book
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book
- A *Boston Globe* Top Ten Children's Books of the Year selection
- A *New York Times* Editor's Choice
- A New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing selection
- A Chicago Public Library Best of the Best selection



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