

Another Brooklyn

Amistad

By Jacqueline Woodson
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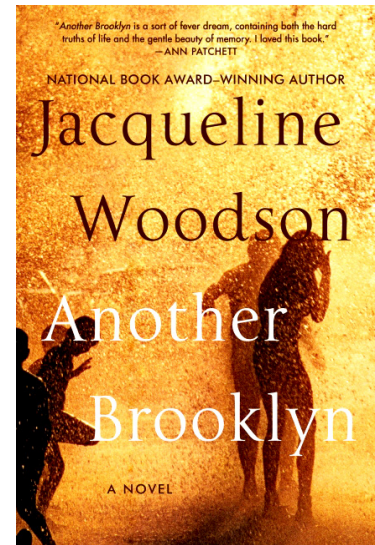
Introduction

The acclaimed *New York Times* bestselling and National Book Award–winning author of *Brown Girl Dreaming* delivers her first adult novel in twenty years.

Running into a long-ago friend sets memory from the 1970s in motion for August, transporting her to a time and a place where friendship was everything—until it wasn't. For August and her girls, sharing confidences as they ambled through neighborhood streets, Brooklyn was a place where they believed that they were beautiful, talented, brilliant—a part of a future that belonged to them.

But beneath the hopeful veneer, there was another Brooklyn, a dangerous place where grown men reached for innocent girls in dark hallways, where ghosts haunted the night, where mothers disappeared. A world where madness was just a sunset away and fathers found hope in religion.

Like Louise Meriwether's *Daddy Was a Number Runner* and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Jacqueline Woodson's *Another Brooklyn* heartbreakingly illuminates the formative time when childhood gives way to adulthood—the promise and peril of growing up—and exquisitely renders a powerful, indelible, and fleeting friendship that united four young lives.



Questions for Discussion

1. Consider the epigraph from Richard Wright that begins the novel. In what ways are the images and ideas relevant to the story that follows?
2. How are each of the girls—Sylvia, Angela, Gigi, and the narrator August—similar or different?
3. What does it mean that the girls “came together like a jazz improv”? In what ways is jazz music about relationships?
4. When she is 15, August “was barely speaking” anymore. What were the reasons for this? Why might ceasing to speak be a response to difficulty?
5. What did the four girlfriends provide each other at different stages of their lives and struggles?

6. What is added to our understanding of August's experience and life in the city by the fact that she went on to study anthropology? What does such a discipline help her understand about her life?
 7. While August had her girlfriends, her brother had his faith. How are these two support systems similar or different?
 8. What are the many and varied effects on August of her mother's death?
 9. For much of her childhood and adolescence, August believes that her mother will return. Why is this? What does it take and mean to accept such tragedy? Can denial ever be valuable?
 10. What's the effect of Woodson weaving into the novel details of how other cultures throughout history have responded to the death of loved ones? Which of these rituals seems most powerful or effective?
 11. In what ways is August's father helpful or not as she struggles with her mother's death?
 12. Throughout the novel, Woodson writes, "This is memory." What does this mean in the context of the story? What is the nature of memory? In what ways is memory valuable or burdensome?
 13. August's mother had taught her that girls and women do not make good friends. What did she mean by this? How does August's experience with her girlfriends support or contradict this idea?
 14. After moving to the neighborhood, August and her brother could not go outside but watched other children through the window. Why did their father believe the world wasn't a safe place? In what ways might the image of watching through the window be symbolic?
 15. What does it mean for the girls to have shared "the weight of growing up *Girl* in Brooklyn?" What were the particular threats or challenges for them growing up in the neighborhood? How did each affect them? How did they respond?
 16. August and her brother notice the profound way that many people in the neighborhood try "to dream themselves out...as though there was another Brooklyn." What does this mean? In what ways is dreaming helpful or harmful during difficult or oppressive times?
 17. August's brother comes to love learning math. Why does it appeal to him? What role does education play for each of them as they grow into adulthood? Why didn't each of the other girls pursue further education?
 18. To what extent is Sister Loretta a valuable person for August? What changed for better or worse with "the woman who was not Sister Mama Loretta"?
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19. What complex forces drew the four girls apart as they grew older?
 20. Eventually August accepts that Brooklyn, not Tennessee where they had all lived with her mother, was home. Why? What qualities determine a place as home? How might a feeling of home exist separate from any particular place?
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