

Visiting Day

 by Jacqueline Woodson illustrated by James E. Ransome

Identities & Themes

- Black/African American
- Families separated: incarceration
- Grief/Loss
- Multigenerational relationships

Teacher Reflection Questions

1. What experiences do you have with loved ones being incarcerated? How does having a direct experience versus not affect your empathy and understanding the experience?
2. What messages do you think your students receive about incarceration? What can you do to support students experiencing similar situations? How can you become a trusted adult who they can talk to?

Background Information for Teacher

Although incarceration affects many families, it is often not openly discussed, and children may feel ashamed of having a loved one in jail. Acknowledging the importance of this person and their bond to the child increases their ability to cope with the changes they experience including grief and loss. With support, children can adapt. Sharing stories and having conversations about incarceration can help remove the stigma and allow children to understand that people are more than the mistakes they make. Reading this book provides the opportunity to build empathy and understanding and find the similarities between families that are separated for any reason.

A note on stereotypes: This book focuses on a Black/African American family's experience with incarceration, which could inadvertently serve to reinforce negative stereotypes children may already have about the criminality of Black/African Americans.

We have chosen to include this book for several reasons. First of all, there are very few well-written children's books about incarceration that are written from an authentic voice. All of these books are written by Black/African American authors and include Black/African American characters. While we are cautious of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the criminality of Black/African Americans, we also believe this is an important lived experience that must be talked about with children of all ages because of the stigma, bias, and prejudice that children with incarcerated family members face in their schools and communities. Given the high rates of Black/African American incarceration, largely due to systems of oppression and an unjust criminal justice system, we also believe this book is an important mirror for black and brown children with incarcerated family members to have their lived experiences affirmed and destigmatized.

When sharing this story, be sure to reinforce that all of us humans, adults and children, make mistakes, regardless of the color of our skin. Also, point out that though this book focuses on a Black/African American family, children of all races, ethnicities, and colors experience the incarceration of a family member, and this book should help us be more empathetic and understanding. Ask: How can we support all of our friends and peers who might be dealing with the separation from a loved one, whether through incarceration or other reasons, like military deployment, divorce, moving away, illness, etc.?

Another possible point for discussion is to help students imagine a culture of restorative justice, caring, and accountability for people who caused harm in our communities instead of an unjust criminal justice system that does disproportionate harm to black and brown communities of color. See also the **Racial Identity/Racial Bias Primer**.

Discussion Hint: If you have a child in your classroom with a loved one in prison, it is important to collaborate with team members, caregivers, and the child about when it is appropriate to share this book about incarceration. We suggest you read the **Author's and Illustrator's Notes** in the back of the book before beginning your discussion.

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- ☑ Empathy & Understanding
- ☑ Healthy Complex Identities
- ☑ Respect Across Differences
- ☐ Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- ☐ Responsiveness & Action

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- ☑ Self-Awareness
- ☑ Self-Management
- ☑ Social Awareness
- ☑ Responsible Decision-Making
- ☑ Relationship Skills

Read this to the students before reading the book:

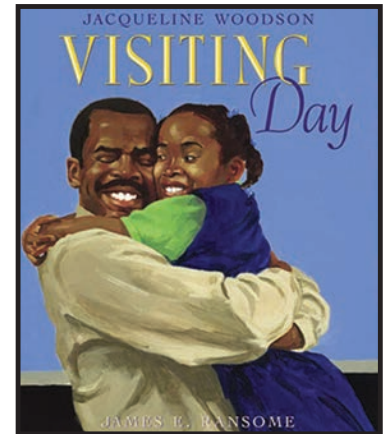
A young girl and her grandmother excitedly get ready for the one day each month they get to visit the girl's father in prison. Her father also eagerly awaits their visit. Although the girl is sad when she has to leave her father, she and her grandmother know that one day her father will be at home with them again.

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

- 1. There are lots of reasons why families are separated from each other. In this book it was due to incarceration. What are some of the other reasons families are separated?**
- 2. Based on the illustrations, how would you describe the family in the story?**
- 3. How does the family stay connected even though they are apart?**
4. What experiences do you have staying close to a loved one you don't often get to see?
5. Visiting day was bittersweet for the girl, her grandmother, and her father. They were excited to see each other but then missed each other even more when the day ended. Do any of you have examples of bittersweet experiences like this you'd like to share?
6. How can you be a good friend to someone who is separated from someone they love?

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. In the story, the girl and her grandmother had routines that helped them cope with missing the father. What are some routines and activities you have done that helped you through difficult times?
2. The illustrator shared his feeling that the right stories often find you. When has a story touched you because it was similar to something significant in your life? Give an example of when the right story found you.
3. The illustrator shared that his brother's incarceration was a family secret, but he knew it was an experience many children all over the country shared. Why is it important to share stories like this with children whose families have experienced incarceration and with children whose families have not?



Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast events
- Compare and contrast settings
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe setting
- Describe characters/
Character development
- Character point of view
- Use illustrations/pictures/
photos to gain information
- Make predictions
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to
self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events
- Sequence events
- Vocabulary in context