



THE BOOK AND BEYOND:

An educator's guide for exploring children's and YA literature



Title: Piecing Me Together

Author(s): Renée Watson

Illustrator(s):

The aim of the The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is for your thoughts, questions and notes about different aspects of the book and to consider how you might frame discussion with students.

The book

Physical object

The book is hardback with a dust jacket and a glossy slip cover. The cover and spine creaks or crackles when it's opened and closed. Standard A5 size, portrait orientation – typical for this format or type of book. The pages are standard novel paper stock; soft, vanilla, velvety, slightly translucent – you can see the bold text underneath.

Design & cover

Cover – intense, colourful cityscape with mixed-media collage/paint. A black, teenage girl – the dominant image. The title/author overlay the skyline top third (the rule of thirds on the cover creates balance). The collage technique ties in with the main character's art and reflects the theme. Snippets of book reviews on the back cover.

Illustration

No illustrations within the text. Interesting – each chapter is titled with a Spanish word or phrase and translation linking to the plot. A neat framework that signposts and emphasises what is about to happen in the plot/theme and what the characters experience. Longer chapters covering plot events create an interesting rhythm.

Characters

Jade, the main character identifies as female, African American, plus-size and low income – identities she becomes proud of and learns to express positively. Determined, smart, creative, conscientious she is a contrast/challenge to Maxine, who is 'flaky' and inconsistent. We warm to Maxine as we learn more about her. They both change due to their relationship.

Plot

The plot follows Jade's progress through a school year. Her challenge is feeling like an outsider/oppressed in a dominant, white, privileged class culture at her private school. She navigates the obstacles and an 'opportunity' challenges her thinking, provokes her to act, she finds meaning and expression – and ways of working for and with others.

Setting

Set in present day, Portland, U.S. The city is constraining, segmented, in pieces and this impacts on how Jade acts and feels. Her home is full of music, cooking smells, and comfort – where she feels anything is possible. The other side of the city – school, at events – limit and frustrate her. At home she's free.

Theme & message

Being visible and invisible in society according to class, gender, race. The experience of being marginalised can leave you fragmented. The power of art/activism in self-expression and identity/healing. Provokes thoughts and discussion around: marginalisation vs privilege in the U.S. and elsewhere, race/gender/class profiling and unconscious bias.

Language

Jade narrates the novel, in the first person, present tense which helps us feel closer to her experience. Imagery and word choice evokes character, feelings and setting – "Mom's scent hugs me as soon as I get in the door". Her hair loose or tied up becomes a metaphor for her feeling. Realistic and at times hard conversations drive the plot.

Mood & feeling

The mood is bittersweet. An underlying simmering frustration is shown in the way Jade carries herself, and in what she encounters daily that impacts her confidence. Eventually the mood/feeling is more triumphant, redemptive.

Genre & format

A 'coming of age' novel and/or 'high-school misfits' novel. It fits this genre as the main character navigates, grapples and questions aspects of the adult world and is searching for own identity/meaning and place in the world.

The inquiry

Rich question(s)

This section is for creating and exploring questions that might guide an overall inquiry for a particular book. These questions might be inspired by ideas in the book section and/or personal responses and/or the NZ Curriculum and/or available resources.

How do people express their identities?

Can we belong to more than one culture?

How does the way media portray people, groups or cultures affect them in real life?

How and why is making and seeing art important?

How do the arts influence social change?

What creates prejudice and what can an individual do to overcome it?

Why are mentors important?

Who do you know that is like Jade? How?

What does it mean to be invisible?



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Make connections

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is designed to help students use the book as inspiration to share, wonder, question, and explore ideas, possibilities, connections, feelings, experiences and other viewpoints — either alone or together.

Personal

Write – List quotes

“By the time I get home I feel like my soul is shattered in a million pieces.. Mom’s love repairs me...
I wonder if there’ ever a way for a girl like me to feel whole.” pg 85

“I am learning to speak. To give myself a way out. A way in” pg 1

Explore – Find out about the writer

Check out Renee talk about her writing, activism and about diversity in literature: www.reneewatson.net.

One of her passions is using the arts to help young people deal with hurt and to discuss social issues. She writes to help kids/YA feel seen. She works to further the social justice and the role of art in social justice.

She also shares photography showing Harlem – her New York neighbourhood.

Read more

○ Read the next in the series

[Empty box for reading next in series]

● Read another book by the same author

A Place Where Hurricanes Happen, Harlem’s Little Blackbird and This Side of Home

Watch Us Rise Renee Watson and Ellen Hagan

● Read another book with the same idea/topic/ genre

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jaqueline Woodson

● Listen to an audio version of the book

There is an audio version of the book available read by the author.

Social (Share your experience)

Read aloud

Prompt students to read/read aloud LeeLee’s poem ‘*Black Girl Rising*’ chapter 75, pg 258

or the Toni Morrison quote in the acknowledgements section.

Talk

Suggest that students find someone to discuss the book with: Talk about what you liked/loved/didn’t like/ found unexpected. Talk about ways you express yourself – dance, music, writing, drama, sport, art/drawing, singing.

Use the discussion notes for the book at: www.reneewatson.net or www.curiouscity.com to explore ideas of social justice and identities. ‘Piecing Me Together: A YA Discussion Guide about Race, Class, Gender and Intersectionality.’

What connections can you make to yourself, other texts, the world?

Text to self

Parts of this book are about typical teen experiences:

Finding an identity, a way of fitting in or standing

The experience of differences between home and school.

Father/daughter relationships and being separated/abandoned.

Having a single mother/father or carer/whānau member working hard for your future.

Text to text

The Hate you Give, by Angie Thomas – neighbourhood identity vs private school identity and social justice/systemic racism.

Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo – self expression through art/slam poetry
Like lots of ‘Coming of age’ novels there is a motif of ‘disappearing’ or feeling invisible.

Still I Rise by Maya Angelou – poem

2Pac’s lyrics – black/social activism

Text to world

The book provides everyday examples of what girls, African Americans, or people who are different, experience or face.

NZ Curriculum

This section is intended as a prompt for thinking about how the book might relate to the NZ Curriculum. For example, is it a story about cultural diversity? What language, symbols and text tell the story?

Learning areas		Principles		Values		Key Competencies	
● English	○ Maths & Statistics	● High expectations	○ Future focus	● Excellence	● Community & participation	● Thinking	● Relating to others
● The Arts	○ Science	○ Treaty of Waitangi	● Learning to learn	○ Innovation, inquiry, curiosity	○ Ecological sustainability	● Using language, symbols & text	○ Participating & contributing
○ Health & PE	● Social Sciences	● Cultural diversity	● Community engagement	● Diversity	● Integrity	○ Managing self	
● Languages	○ Technology	○ Inclusion		● Equity			