

Grade 7: Unit 6

Brown Girl Dreaming: Introduction

Purpose: Why This Unit?

Brown Girl Dreaming is a memoir in verse similar in narrative style to Jacqueline Woodson's *Locomotion*, which scholars read as fifth graders. This story is told through the childhood eyes of the author herself. Over the next few weeks, you and your scholars will explore this wonderful poetic narrative together!

Your job, though, is first and foremost that of a reading teacher. You must ensure that your scholars enlist the basic tools of great readers — envisioning, reading with fluency, engaging in word attack, and of course, using plot, setting, and character development — to understand the book's provocative ideas. You must know your scholars' Fountas & Pinnell levels and ensure that they are swiftly growing as readers. You must ensure that your scholars are reading and writing at home and that your scholars' parents are invested in their learning.

You are also a teacher of writing. You must ensure that your scholars are deeply invested in improving their writing and that they give you their best work. Always set sky-high expectations and settle only for scholars' best efforts. It is your responsibility to dramatically improve your scholars' writing capacities. You will need to study the Top 5 Writing Tactics and ensure that scholars know how to be critics of their own writing.

In particular, you are responsible for the following outcomes:

- First and foremost, you must get 100% of your scholars independently reading at least four books per month.
- You are responsible for 100% of your scholars completing nightly literacy homework that will develop them as readers and writers.

- You are responsible for getting any of your scholars who are still reading below grade level, as measured by the Fountas & Pinnell Reading Assessment, to Level Z.

You will not achieve 100% without setting clear expectations for your scholars and their parents, and driving relentlessly toward these goals. If you hold scholars and parents accountable and are an absolute stickler at the beginning, you will make it easier for yourself and frankly for your scholars and their parents. The worst thing you can do as a teacher is let scholars slide and then get tough. You will breed resentment and distrust, whereas clear expectations and utter consistency breed trust and respect.

Themes in *Brown Girl Dreaming*

In order to successfully teach this unit, you must be intellectually prepared at the highest level. This means reading and studying the entire book before launching the unit, and understanding the major themes that Woodson communicates through the book. By the time your scholars finish reading *Brown Girl Dreaming*, they should be able to articulate and explain these themes.

The table below outlines the major topics and themes highlighted in *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Note that you should not review these with scholars before they begin reading the book. Rather, scholars will uncover the themes organically through their reading. As a teacher of reading, you need to facilitate rich conversations about the meaning of each chapter. You will do this by posing the discussion questions provided in each seminar. As scholars read the text, you will press them to analyze how the author uses events in the book to communicate the major themes.

While there is not one correct thematic statement for each major topic discussed in the book, there are accurate (evidence-based) and inaccurate (not evidence-based) interpretations of what the author is arguing. Therefore, we have provided exemplar thematic statements in the table below.

Topic	Theme
Identity	One's identity is shaped by many different factors and is not defined by belonging to one group, but rather by belonging to many groups.
The Meaning of Home	Home is not only the place where one was born but is also the place(s) where one feels a sense of belonging.
The Complexity of Family and Friendship	Relationships with family and friends affect our identity, sense of self, and choices in positive and negative ways.
The Purpose of Reading, Writing, and Storytelling	Reading, writing, and storytelling give an outlet to inner hopes and dreams, enabling individuals to better understand themselves and the world around them.
Memory	Memory is part of our collective existence; it is part of a shared process that is not always accurate or whole, but its collected bits and pieces help shape our history and future.
Colliding Cultures	When two worlds clash, the result is a balancing act — individuals must choose between the two or navigate with an internal crisis of belonging.