



Register for the NCTE Annual Convention in St. Louis and hear Woodson in person! Visit [convention.ncte.org](http://convention.ncte.org)

# JACQUELINE WOODSON:

## Learning from Every Book

Jacqueline Woodson is the bestselling author of more than two dozen award-winning books for adults, young adults, and children, including the *New York Times* bestselling memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming* which won the 2014 National Book Award, the Coretta Scott King Award, and a Newbery Honor Award. Her most recent novel, *Another Brooklyn*, illuminates the formative time when childhood gives way to adulthood and renders a powerful and fleeting friendship that unites four young lives. *Another Brooklyn* is a *New York Times* bestseller and National Book Award finalist.

**Jacqueline Woodson**, bestselling author of more than two dozen award-winning books for adults, young adults, and children, will be a keynote speaker at NCTE's Annual Convention in St. Louis, Nov. 16–19, 2017. Woodson spoke recently with C.C. Chapman for NCTE's *Why I Write* podcast ([whyiwrite.us](http://whyiwrite.us)).

**Chapman:** I'm excited because you're going to be speaking at the NCTE Annual Convention. What advice do you give teachers on the importance of writing and literacy?

**Woodson:** I think it's really important that young people have access to literature. I always quote Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop and what she said about the importance of young people having both mirrors and windows in their literature—and sliding glass doors. So, books that reflect their experiences, books that allow them to see into other people's experiences and books that allow them to walk into worlds they might not have otherwise imagined. . . .

I think for teachers it's so important to be the vehicle by which young people can access those worlds and [to] create diverse libraries and have conversations with their young people. . . . [B]ooks are the first step toward them going out into the world without fear because they have some sense of other.

**Chapman:** [You are quoted as saying] you wrote *The Other Side* because you wanted to write about how powerful kids can be. Do you think writing makes kids more powerful?

**Woodson:** I do. I think when you think about the power of the pen and how it has been used to change the

world . . . the pen in their hands and their ability to tell their own stories and to have their stories be relevant and important in the world is really empowering.

**Chapman:** So what do you tell a young writer when they say, “I get that you’re saying this is powerful, but it’s hard.”

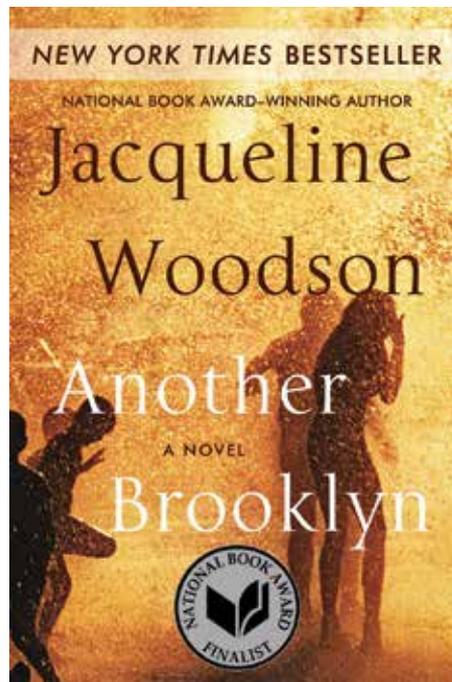
**Woodson:** Everything’s hard. . . . I think it’s ridiculous to think that you’re going to walk through the world easily, and if you think that’s the truth then you’re going to have a very ordinary life. And yes, it is hard, and the thing about something being hard is it’s deeply rewarding when you’ve done it, because you’ve . . . got through it, and lived to tell the story.

**Chapman:** In your book *Each Kindness*, Mrs. Albert says, “Everything we do goes out like a ripple into the world.” What are the ripples that are most important to you to send out into the world?

**Woodson:** Kindness. I think with kindness comes everything else. As a writer, I have to send hope out into the world and I have to be hopeful, because if I’m not, what’s the point of continuing? Continuing writing, continuing trying to be an activist, continuing trying to create change. . . .

**Chapman:** When you talk about activism, what does that mean to you?

**Woodson:** I know it means different things to different people. For me it’s using the tools I have, right? I have



my pen; I have my voice to thank the world. . . . It means holding up a sign or writing an article, an essay. Writing a book, or stepping in front of 30 students and saying something that is important and relevant. It’s all kinds of things.

**Chapman:** Do you think there’s a value in book awards/ programs?

**Woodson:** Yeah. . . . They inform people. When you look at an award like the Pura Belpré Award, that lets you know it’s written by someone of Latinx descent. You can pick it up and know that’s a book that is going to help your students understand a different culture, or different cultures. [I]t is a way of bringing

light to those books that might otherwise disappear without people knowing they’re out there.

**Chapman:** One quote I found on your website that I especially liked was, “They can feel free to imitate me in any way they want.” So who do you steal from, or get inspired by?

**Woodson:** Everyone from Mimi Carver to James Baldwin, to Alice Walker, to Virginia Hamilton, to Mildred Taylor, Edgar Allan Poe, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni. My list can go on and on. Marie Howe, Nick Flynn, Michael Cunningham. It’s everybody. Every book that I read, that I love, I’m learning from.

## HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF NCTE

NCTE is looking for organized, energetic teachers, supervisors, and curriculum specialists at all levels of education who have shown interest in the profession and NCTE by participating in the work of affiliates and Council activities to stand for election to its major offices and Section committee posts in 2018.

The 2018 ballots will include candidates for vice president (from the NCTE Middle Level Section); a representative-at-large (secondary); trustees of the NCTE Research Foundation; members of the NCTE Nominating Committee; steering and nominating committee members for the Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary, and College Sections of NCTE; and offices within the Conference on English Education.

See the NCTE website ([ncte.org/volunteer/elections](http://ncte.org/volunteer/elections)) for information on nominating colleagues or yourself. **November 1, 2017, is the deadline** to send nominations to NCTE; nominations will also be accepted during the NCTE Annual Convention in St. Louis.