



If You Come Softly Discussion Guide

By Jacqueline Woodson

Book Summary

Jeremiah feels good inside his own skin. That is, when he's in his own Brooklyn neighborhood. But now he's going to be attending a fancy prep school in Manhattan, and black teenage boys exactly fit in there. So, it's a surprise when he meets Ellie the first week of school. In one frozen moment their eyes lock, and after that they know they fit together – even though she's Jewish and he's black. Their worlds are so different, but to them that's not what matters. Too bad the rest of the world has to get in their way.

Themes

Race and Religion, Family Dynamics, Multi-racial relationships, Police Brutality

Reader Discussion Questions

1. How are Jeremiah and Ellie alike? How are they different?
2. What are the different reactions they get from people when they find out about their relationship (i.e., Jeremiah's mother, Anne, the ladies in the park)? This book was written over 20 years ago, do you think the reactions would be the same today? Why or why not?
3. What major events have shaped Jeremiah and Ellie's lives? Do you think these events affect the relationships they make? Why or why not?
4. Why does Jeremiah's father tell him not to run in Central Park? How did you feel during this scene?
5. What literary device is Woodson using when Jeremiah's father tells him not to run in Central Park? How does her use of this technique affect the reader?
6. Jeremiah's mother asks, "did anyone ask you if you're on a scholarship?" why does she ask this question?
7. Describe Ellie's relationship with her mother and father. How have her relationships been influenced by things that happened in the past? How is Ellie's life different from her older siblings?

8. Ellie expected Anne to understand about Miah. Describe their relationship when they were younger. Why did Anne react the way she did? What change did this cause between Ellie and Anne?
9. Why does Ellie fear her parents' reactions to Jeremiah?
10. How do Jeremiah's famous parents affect his life? How does he handle the reactions of his peers when they learn about his father? What happens when Ellie learns about them?
11. How do teachers and students try to stereotype Jeremiah? How does he handle it?
12. Ellie doesn't have any close girlfriends from her old school or at Percy Academy. What do you think a girlfriend would have said about her relationship with Jeremiah? What advice would you have given Ellie and why?
13. Jeremiah has a friend Carlton who is mixed racially but considers himself African-American. What issues do biracial and mixed racial people face?
14. How do you think this book is relevant today? Is it still relatable? If so, which themes from the book connect the most with you?
15. Will you read more books by this author, if yes why, if no why not? Will you recommend this to others to read? Would you reread it?

JCLS Discussions of *If You Come Softly*

Do you want to share your thoughts with others reading *If You Come Softly*? Join us in one of these online discussions.

***If You Come Softly* Teen Online Book Club** Tuesday, February 16 | 4 PM

Author Talk with Jaqueline Woodson Sunday, February 21 | 4 PM

More Rogue Reads *If You Come Softly* Programs

These programs delve deeper into certain themes or topics in *If You Come Softly*.

Diverse Reads Challenge Kick-off Party Wednesday, December 2 | 4 PM

Diverse Reads Challenge Wrap-Up Wednesday, March 3 | 4 PM

Love is Love: Variations on the Romeo and Juliet Tale | Date and Time TBD