

The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson



There will be times when you walk
into a room and no one there is
quite like you.

Maybe it will be your skin,
your clothes, or the curl
of your hair.

There will be times when no one understands the way
words curl from your mouth,
the beautiful language of the country you left behind.
My name is Rigoberto. We just moved here from Venezuela.

And because they don't understand, the classroom will fill
with laughter until the teacher quiets everyone.

Rigoberto. From Venezuela, your teacher says
so soft and beautifully that
your name and homeland sound like
flowers blooming the first bright notes
of a song.

There will be times when the words don't come.
Your own voice, once huge, now smaller
when the teacher asks *What did you do last summer?*
Tell the class your story.

We went to France, Chayla says.

These shells came from a beach in Maine.
A boy named Jonathan holds out a jar
filled with tiny shells so fragile,
they look like they'll turn to dust
in your own untraveled hands.

My whole family went to India.
Spain!
South Carolina!
Each souvenir a small triumph
of a journey.



Their travels going on and on.

And as you stand in front of that room,
you can only remember how the heat
waved as it lifted off the curb,
and your days spent at home caring
for your little sister, who made you
laugh out loud and hugged you hard
at naptime.

You can only remember the books
you kept on reading long after she
had fallen to sleep.

And in that room, where no one else
is quite like you, you'll look down
at your own empty hands and wonder
What good is this
when other students were flying
and sailing and going somewhere.

There will be times when the lunch your mother
packed for you is too strange or
too unfamiliar for others to love as you do.

When even your own friend Nadja
will wrinkle her nose and say
What's in there, anyway?
And you'll wonder how she doesn't see
the rice beneath the meat and kimchi.

You'll wonder why she doesn't
remember that rice is the most
popular food in the world.

There will be times when the climbing
bars are too high,
the run is too fast and far,
the game isn't one you can ever
really play.

*I don't want him on our team.
You can watch.
Maybe you can have a turn later.*

There will be times when the world feels
like a place
that you're standing all the way outside of..

And all that stand beside you *is*
your own brave self –
steady as steel and ready
even though you don't yet know
what you're ready for.

There will be times when you walk into a room
and no one there is quite like you until the day you begin
to share your stories.

*My name is Angelina and
I spent my whole summer with my little sister,
you tell the class, your voice stronger than it was a minute ago,
reading books, telling stories*

*and even though we were right on our block
it was like we got to go EVERYWHERE.*



*Your name is like my sister's, Rigoberto says.
Her name is Angelina, too.*

And all at once, in the room where no one else

is quite like you,
the world opens itself up a little wider
to make some space for you.

This is the day you begin
to find the places inside
your laughter and your lunches,
your books, your travel and your stories.

Where every new friend has something
a little like you –
and something else so fabulously quite not like you
at all.

Name: _____

Date: _____



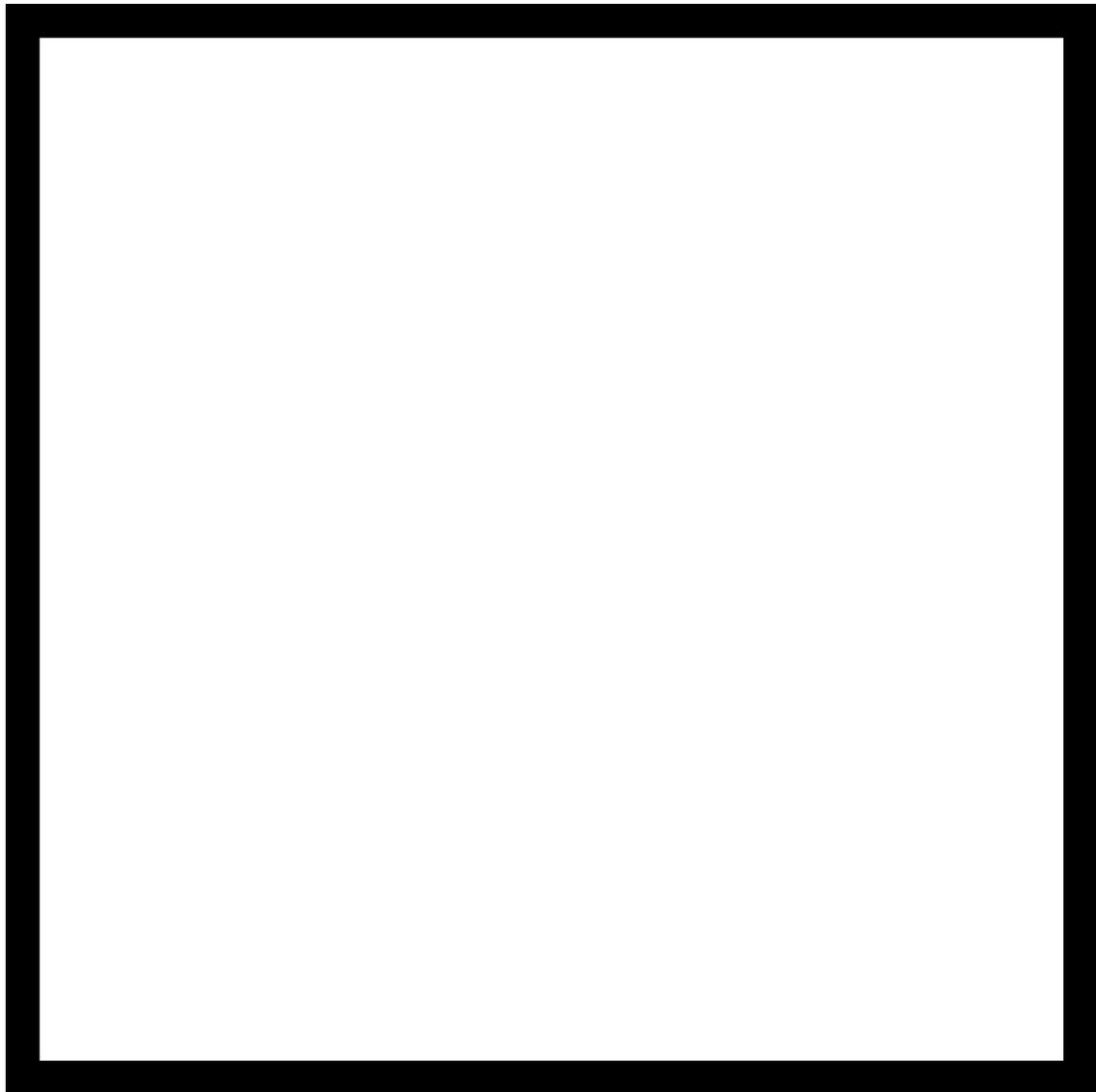
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Angelina felt _____

because _____

My name is, _____

I am different because _____



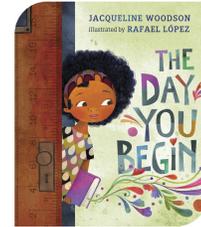
Vocabulary

- brave
- journey
- souvenir
- unfamiliar
- fabulously
- kimchi
- steady
- unique
- fragile
- language
- stronger
- untraveled
- homeland
- popular
- travels
- wider

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask these pre-reading questions:

- What is the title of the book?
- How do you think the girl on the front cover is feeling?
- What do you think the book might be about?



After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What is the book about?
- Why does Angelina feel like no one is like her? Can you tell by Angelina's face how she feels about that?
- In what ways do the other children (Rigoberto and the other children) feel like no one is like them?
- When the children talk about their travels over the summer, how does Angelina feel? How do you know?
- Have you ever felt like that? How so?
- How does the girl with the lunchbox feel when the other children stare at her? Why do you think she feels that way?
- Have you ever felt that way about lunch and the food you bring to school?
- Why does the boy with the book not play with the other children?
- Have you ever felt that sometimes "the world feels like a place that you're standing all the way outside of?"
- How does Angelina feel when she shares her story about her summer?
- What happens after she shares her story?
- How do the children feel at the end?
- Why do you think the book is called *The Day You Begin*?
- What do you think is the overall message of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Telling Our Stories

Read aloud this line from the book (on page 26), “There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you until the day you begin to share your stories.” Ask students: *What do you think that means? How does telling stories help you know there are others like you?* Explain that because Angelina and the other children shared their stories about themselves and aspects of their identities, they could find the places where others are like them. Ask: *What aspects of identity or experiences in the story make each of the children unique (e.g., curly hair, skin color, language(s) spoken, country of origin, places to travel, culture and what food you bring to lunch, not athletic)?* Then, ask: *What is something that makes you unique? What aspects of your identity make you different than others? What is your story?* As you ask these questions aloud, give children drawing paper and markers/crayons and have them draw or jot down words and ideas that come to mind, ideas about what makes them different or unique from others. Then have students use those words/drawings to write a short essay or [acrostic poem](#) (using the letters of their name) that reflects their story and what makes them unique. Consider inviting parents/family members in to class and have the students share their essays and/or poems aloud.

2. Similarities and Differences

Discuss and explore similarities and differences, a major theme of the book. Ask students: *What are some of the identity groups or unique experiences of the characters in the story?* Brainstorm a list of identity groups/characteristics, starting with some discussed in the book such as: how people look, the language(s) they speak, the food they eat, where they are from, places they have traveled. Then branch out beyond the book by adding other groups/characteristics (including those of students in the class) until you have a long list; record those on the board/smart board. Use a concentric circles activity (where there is an inside circle and an outside circle with the same number of students, facing each other) or have students informally “mingle” around the classroom, talking to different students in pairs. Each time they have a new partner to talk with, students should identify something that is different and something that is similar about each other. This can include identity groups such as race, ethnicity, gender, language spoken, religion, etc. or can include hobbies and interests, but push students to not just focus on hobbies and interests. As they are talking in pairs, have them record on a sheet the similarities and differences like “we are both Latina” or “I am Muslim and she is Catholic.” After doing this activity, engage students in a discussion about what they discovered and learned.

3. Act Out or Draw Your Favorite Scene

Have students select a favorite scene from the book and act it out or draw it. First, brainstorm the different parts of the book or scenes that students like (e.g., when Angelina tells the other children about her summer, when the teacher says Rigoberto’s name, when the children share their summer travel stories, when Nadja and her friend eat lunch, when the boy watches as children play and he