Table of Contents

Summary .............................................................................. 3
About the Author .......................................................... 3
Characters ........................................................................... 4
Background Information .............................................. 5
Initiating Activities ........................................................ 6
Vocabulary Activities .................................................... 6
Eight Sections ..................................................................... 7
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary,
Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities
Post-reading Discussion Questions ............................ 23
Post-reading Extension Activities ............................... 26
Assessment ......................................................................... 27
Scoring Rubric ............................................................... 36

Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking
Analysis, research, evaluation, interpretation, compare/contrast, drawing conclusions

Comprehension
Inferring, sequencing, predicting, supporting judgments

Literary Elements
Point of view, setting, theme, genre, figurative language, character analysis

Vocabulary
Definitions, word maps, target words, parts of speech

Listening/Speaking
Discussion, report, interview, recitation

Writing
Interview, letter, poetry, essay, short description, personal narrative

Across the Curriculum
Social Studies—Oakland, Black Panther Party, Civil Rights Movement, COINTELPRO,
Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali), Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, Afros, Bobby Hutton,
Gwendolyn Brooks, resistance movement publications;
Geography—maps; Art—illustration, scrapbook
Genre: historical fiction
Setting: the summer of 1968 in Oakland, California
Point of View: first person
Themes: family, sisterhood, motherhood, civil rights, dignity, personal freedom, integration, prejudice, injustice, responsibility
Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. society
Style: narrative
Tone: conversational, informative
Date of First Publication: 2010

Summary
Eleven-year-old Delphine narrates the story of her and her two younger sisters’ month-long visit to Oakland, California to visit their mother, Cecile. They have been estranged from Cecile since she left the family seven years prior, just after Fern, the youngest daughter, was born. Cecile is a poet and greatly resents the intrusion of the children into her life, so she sends them to the People’s Center, a Black Panther organization for young people. Initially, the girls are upset because of their mother’s negligence, as they must navigate through the unfamiliar environment by themselves. However, as they make friends and contribute to the Black Panthers’ pursuit of justice and equality, they begin to enjoy themselves. As the girls learn more about their mother, they gradually form a bond with her.

About the Author
Rita Williams-Garcia was born in Queens, New York in 1957. She and her two siblings grew up in Seaside, California, where her father served in the army. She began to read at an early age and displayed an interest in writing throughout her childhood. Her family moved back to New York when Williams-Garcia was in high school. She attended Hofstra University and obtained a job at a marketing company after college, which allowed her to type, print, and send her manuscripts to publishing companies. Williams-Garcia published her first novel, Blue Tights, in 1988. Other novels include Every Time a Rainbow Dies, Fast Talk on a Slow Track, Like Sisters on the Homefront, and No Laughter Here, all of which were chosen as ALA Best Books for Young Adults. She received a 2011 Newbery Honor, Coretta Scott King Award, and Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction for One Crazy Summer. She has also won the PEN/Norma Klein Award and was a National Book Award Finalist. Williams-Garcia currently lives in Jamaica, New York and is on the faculty at the Vermont College of Fine Arts in the Writing for Children & Young Adults Program.
Characters

Delphine Gaither: 11-year-old girl who is responsible for her two younger sisters; mature and caring; narrates the story

Vonetta Gaither: nine-year-old girl; outgoing and attention-seeking; loves to perform; often bullies Fern and allows others to also

Fern (Afua) Gaither: seven-year-old girl; attached to her white baby doll, Miss Patty Cake; courageous and outspoken

Louis Gaither (“Pa”): Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern’s father; sends the girls to Oakland, California to meet their mother for the first time

Big Ma: Louis’s mother; an old-fashioned, Southern black woman who was frequently at odds with Cecile; has taken care of the girls since their mother left

Darnell Gaither: Louis’s younger brother who is away fighting in Vietnam; used to recount memories of Cecile with Delphine

Cecile (Nzila): Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern’s mother; abandoned her daughters; moved to California to be a poet; inattentive to the girls when they visit; supports the Black Panthers

“Mean Lady” Ming: owner of the Chinese restaurant the girls frequent in California

“Crazy” Kelvin: militant member of the Black Panthers; teases the girls with his strong opinions and his criticism of Fern’s white baby doll; police informant

Sister Mukumbu: teacher at the People’s Center; involves the Gaither girls in Black Panther activities; warm and welcoming

Sister Pat: young woman who works at the People’s Center

Eunice, Janice, and Beatrice Ankton: three sisters who go to the People’s Center; become close friends with Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern

Hirohito Woods: both African-American and Japanese; loves to ride his go-kart; His father was arrested for being a “freedom fighter.”

Mrs. Woods: Hirohito’s mother; cares for the girls after Cecile is arrested
Background Information

1. Oakland, California—Oakland is where the Black Panther Party originated. The relationship between the Gaither girls and their mother is the main focus of the novel, but Williams-Garcia surrounds that story with an exploration of the Civil Rights Movement and the themes of injustice, prejudice, and black pride, as reflected through Black Panther ideals.

2. 1968—As the Vietnam War raged on, protests and disturbances occurred on a number of campuses, including the University of Wisconsin, the University of North Carolina, and Howard University. In April, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, followed by Robert F. Kennedy in June. Also, unrest arose in Cleveland with a shootout between police officers and a number of African-American men. In Oakland, young Black Panther Bobby Hutton was killed by the police. The Democratic National Convention also resulted in clashes between police and protestors.

3. Black Panther Party—The Black Panther Party was founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California in 1966. Black Panthers wore blue shirts, black pants, black leather jackets, and black berets. The group's primary purpose was to protect African-American neighborhoods from police brutality. They instituted a program called “Free Breakfast for Children” and advanced a political agenda concerned with employment, housing, and education. However, the organization became infamous both nationally and internationally for its aggressiveness against police officers. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover supervised a program called “COINTELPRO” to weaken the party’s threat and influence in the United States. The program used tactics such as perjury, infiltration, surveillance, and police harassment to achieve its goals. In 1967, Huey Newton was jailed for killing an Oakland police officer, which led to the “Free Huey” campaign, during which people painted posters to show their support, just as the girls do in the novel. Bobby Hutton, a 17-year-old Black Panther, was memorialized after he was killed in an ambush against the police. Although he had surrendered and proved he was unarmed, Hutton was shot to death by officers. In 1969, Black Panther membership reached a peak of 10,000 but began to decline throughout the 1970s and 1980s.
Initiating Activities

Use one or more of the following to introduce the novel.

1. Writing: Have students respond to the following writing prompt: If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be? Explain your choice.

2. Research: Have students complete the I Have Heard of... activity on page 28 of this guide.

3. Locate Information: Preview the novel with students, discussing the author, the title’s meaning, and the cover illustration.

4. Brainstorming/Art: Have students define a mother’s role in a child’s life and draw a picture portraying their definition. Then, have students explain their drawings.

5. Predictions: Have students complete the I Predict... activity on page 29 of this guide.

Vocabulary Activities

1. Bingo: Give each student a 5×5 grid and a set of 24 vocabulary words. Have them place the words randomly on their grids, leaving the center space as a “free” spot. A caller chooses definition cards from a pile, and students place markers on the words the definitions match. The first student to get five words in a row—horizontally, vertically, or diagonally—calls out “Bingo!” The winner can call the next game.

2. Word Maps: Have students complete a Word Map (see page 30 of this guide) for six vocabulary words from this guide.

3. Target Word Story: Instruct students to write an original short story using the following vocabulary words from the lists in this guide: pry, fugitive, refrained, documenting, defiant, gesturing, clumsy. Students should highlight the vocabulary words they use in their stories.

4. Vocabulary Memory: Using 3×5 index cards, have students work in pairs to write words on one set of cards and definitions on another set. Lay all of the cards face down on a desk. Students should then play the Memory Game, turning over cards and trying to match words with their correct definitions. If a student finds a match, he or she should pick up those cards and take another turn. If there is no match, the turn goes to the next player. Play continues until all the cards have been matched, and the player with the most matches wins.

5. Glossary: Ask students to keep a list of any unfamiliar or difficult words they encounter as they read the novel. Have students create a glossary from their lists. Glossaries should include each word’s pronunciation, part of speech, and definition as it is used in the novel.
Cassius Clay Clouds–Green Stucco House

Three sisters—Delphine Vonetta, and Fern—travel on an airplane from Brooklyn, New York to Oakland, California to see their mother Cecile for the first time since she abandoned them seven years ago. Delphine, the eldest daughter and the novel’s narrator, takes responsibility for her younger sisters on their journey. Cecile is late arriving at the airport and shows little interest in the girls. She walks ahead of them, makes them hold their luggage in the taxi, and unceremoniously brings them to her green stucco house.

### Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>whimpers</th>
<th>pry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>surging</td>
<td>warbled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uppity</td>
<td>gawk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unfurled</td>
<td>scrutiny</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Discussion Questions

1. How do the three sisters compare to one another? What role does each play in the family? (As the eldest, Delphine takes care of her sisters. She often puts her desires and fears aside so she can give her sisters what they want or need. On the airplane, Vonetta and Fern are afraid, so Delphine tries to ease their fears. She says, “That’s mainly what I do. Keep Vonetta and Fern in line” [p. 2]. Delphine also shows her maturity when she gives up the window seat on the plane to prevent fighting between Vonetta and Fern, refuses money from a lady at the airport, accompanies her sisters through the airport while Cecile walks ahead, and resolves the sleeping arrangements at Cecile’s house. Vonetta is the middle child and loves attention. Delphine calls her “showy” and knows Vonetta plans to charm their mother with her cuteness. Fern is the youngest. She mixes fantasy with reality and thinks literally, telling Cecile, “We need night-beds. We sleep at night” [p. 26] after Cecile shows them the daybed they will be sleeping on. She often mimics and agrees with Delphine, which indicates that she looks up to her sister.)

2. What can you tell about the relationship between African Americans and Caucasians during this time period from the girls’ trip to Oakland? Why is Delphine offended by the white woman who admires the girls at the airport? (Answers will vary. Throughout their journey, Delphine is keenly aware that their behavior is being watched and judged by the white people they encounter. She is afraid they will make a “Negro spectacle” of themselves on the plane, and when she causes a commotion trying to see out the window she feels she “had managed to disgrace the entire Negro race, judging by the head shaking and tsk-tsking going on around [them]” [p. 11]. Delphine feels the white woman is being condescending when she comments on how adorable and well-behaved she and her sisters are, “like [they] were on display at the Bronx Zoo” [p. 15].)

3. Describe Big Ma. Based on the author’s descriptions of Cecile, do you think Big Ma and Cecile would’ve gotten along if Cecile hadn’t left? (Big Ma moved from Alabama to live with the family after Cecile left. She is old-fashioned and doesn’t acknowledge change [e.g., She refuses to refer to the airport as “JFK,” its new, official name.]. It seems that she does not want to challenge the current situation between white and black people. Big Ma emphasizes to Delphine the need to be on her best behavior around white people, and Delphine thinks Big Ma would have been glad that the lady at the airport wanted to give the girls money for being cute. Big Ma greatly resents Cecile and “hadn’t considered forgiveness where Cecile was concerned” [p. 4]. Delphine says Cecile would not be welcome by Big Ma in Brooklyn and that is why Pa sent them to Oakland. Answers will vary. When Cecile is introduced, she is disguised well. She wears a scarf around her head, big black sunglasses, a big hat, and men’s pants—“like a colored movie star” [p. 20]. Cecile is rude and unpleasant when the girls meet her. Because Big Ma is old-fashioned and teaches good manners, it seems that she and Cecile wouldn’t get along even if Cecile had stayed.)
Post-reading Discussion Questions

1. Even though the Gaither girls did not grow up with their mother, they exhibit some of her qualities. Tell which qualities each of the girls shares with Cecile. (Fern shares her mother’s poetic nature. Through the incident with Kelvin, Fern illustrates the ability to keenly observe people and situations. In a letter that Cecile later writes to Delphine, she tells her that on the day of the rally “a poet had been born” [p. 199]. Like Cecile, Fern is tough and gets angry when people mistreat her. Her trademark sign of frustration is ball fists by her side. Vonetta shares Cecile’s self-centeredness. Delphine uses a hypothetical situation to prove that Vonetta is just like Cecile. In this situation, Vonetta chooses to miss her daughter’s performance at school so she can perform on TV. Like Cecile, Vonetta does not see herself giving up her dreams in the interest of her children. Delphine shares Cecile’s intelligence and strength. As a poet, Cecile often thinks about events taking place in the world. She seems to be a smart, insightful person. Delphine’s intelligence is evident throughout the story, since she is constantly taking care of Vonetta and Fern and making decisions in their best interest. Given Cecile’s past, she has learned to be strong and provide for herself. This same trait is seen in Delphine, since she not only takes care of her sisters’ physical needs but also defends them when needed.)

2. Compare Big Ma’s view of how a black woman should behave to Cecile’s. Which of these views has the most influence on the girls? (Big Ma’s approach is to get along and be peaceful. She makes sure that the girls are polite and well-behaved around white people to make a good impression. Delphine keeps this in mind as she navigates the Oakland airport with her sisters: “I did as Big Ma had told me in our many talks on how to act around white people” [p. 16]. When Delphine declines the money from the white woman, she does so in a tone “polite enough to suit Big Ma but strong enough to suit Papa” [p. 16]. Cecile has an opposite view and believes that Big Ma is old-fashioned and a relic of old Southern black attitudes. Once, when Delphine says “Yes, ma’am” to her mother, Cecile replies, “That’s the problem right there. His mammy. You sound just like her. Like a country mule” [p. 136]. Cecile is not concerned with making a good impression or getting along. She asserts herself as an individual, making her own way—thus the poet name she chooses, Nzila, meaning “the path.” At the beginning of the story, Big Ma’s influence on the girls is most evident. Delphine constantly watches her sisters’ and her own behavior, making sure it meets Big Ma’s expectations. But after some time in Oakland, they begin to be more assertive. These contrasting attitudes surface in the gift shop in San Francisco. Delphine decides to defend herself and her sisters and walk out of the store, but as she does she thinks, “But I was sure Big Ma would have wanted us to say ‘Yes, sir’ and ‘Please, sir’ to show him we were just as civilized as everyone else” [p. 165].

3. Recall the many places in the story where the idea of names comes up. What does the author try to convey about the meaning and importance of names? (Cecile renames herself Nzila. Delphine recalls the time when she was upset to learn that her name isn’t original. Cecile ultimately leaves when she is unable to name Fern [although there is more to Cecile’s decision]. It is very important to Fern that Cecile calls her by name. Answers will vary. Williams-Garcia is exploring the importance of names to a person’s identity. To Cecile, a unique name becomes symbolic of her mother, Cecile ultimately leaves when she is unable to name Fern [although there is more to Cecile’s decision]. It is very important to Fern that Cecile calls her by name. Answers will vary. Williams-Garcia is exploring the importance of names to a person’s identity. To Cecile, a unique name becomes symbolic of a person, which is a belief Delphine shares, as seen in her disappointment at finding her name in the dictionary. It’s often considered disrespectful not to acknowledge a person by name. People speak in terms of “guarding their good name,” which is another indication of how our names and our dignity are connected. This is why Fern gets so frustrated that her mother calls her “Little Girl” instead of Fern. When Cecile doesn’t use her name, Fern feels as if she doesn’t matter to her mother. Another example is when the policeman in Alabama refused to call Pa by name, which was greatly disrespectful toward Pa.)
I Have Heard of...

A. Directions: Tell whether you are familiar with each of the following people, events, or cultural trends of the 1960s by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Panthers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huey Newton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby Hutton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hippies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flower children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwendolyn Brooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyndon B. Johnson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Vietnam War</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afros</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassius Clay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Directions: Now, choose one of the topics above that you have heard of. On the lines below, write what you know about the chosen topic. Share your knowledge with the class.

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
I Predict…

Directions: Spend a few minutes looking at the cover of the novel and flipping through its pages. What can you predict about the characters, the setting, and the problem in the novel? Write your predictions in the spaces below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Characters</th>
<th>The Setting</th>
<th>The Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the information you gathered above, do you think you will enjoy reading this novel? Circle your response on the scale below.

0 —— 1 —— 2 —— 3 —— 4 —— 5 —— 6 —— 7 —— 8 —— 9 —— 10

I will not like this novel. I will really like this novel.

Explain your prediction on the lines below.

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

© Novel Units, Inc.
Word Map

Synonyms

Magazine cut-out, drawing, or symbol that shows what the word means

Word

Definition in your own words

Word used in a sentence