

## PIECING ME TOGETHER

### A Discussion Guide About Race, Class, Gender, and Intersectionality

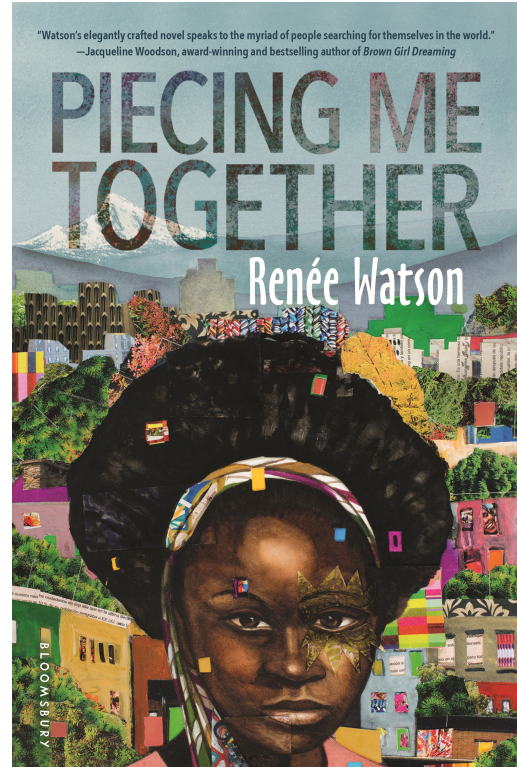
*Sometimes it feels like I leave home a whole person, sent off with kisses from Mom, who is hanging her every hope on my future. By the time I get home I feel like my soul has been shattered into a million pieces.*

*Mom's love repairs me...*

*Listening to these mentors, I feel like I can prove the negative stereotypes about girls like me wrong. That I can and will do more, be more.*

*But when I leave? It happens again. The shattering.*

*And this makes me wonder if a black girl's life is only about being stitched together and coming undone, being stitched together and coming undone. I wonder if there's ever a way for a girl like me to feel whole.*  
—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 85)



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide seeks to explore how Jade in **PIECING ME TOGETHER** by Renée Watson (Bloomsbury) is “shattered into a million pieces” and how she and her community stitch her back together each day. Jade asks, “I wonder if there’s ever a way for a girl like me to feel whole.” That is a question readers should be asking about themselves and asking about their fellow students. This guide will explore identity, intersectionality (more on that term later), and the challenges and strengths of “piecing” oneself together.

Exploring identity and intersectionality means talking about class, race, and gender. Whatever your comfort level with those conversations, this guide offers preparation, sample dialogue, and book passages to guide that conversation. The guide also offers several “out of the box” teaching suggestions for hands-on engagement. It is not our intention to script your experience. We are trying just as hard as you are to have this conversation in a way that strengthens us all.

To learn more about “us,” the authors of this guide, turn to the very last page. The guide was created in partnership with the astounding author, artist, and educator Renée Watson.

## PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION

You are here, we suspect, because you have been moved by reading **PIECING ME TOGETHER** and want to explore it with your students or fellow readers. Through the character of Jade, Renée Watson has created an in-depth meditation on how race, class, and gender all intersect in the body, mind, and story of one girl and her community.

## PIECING ME TOGETHER: A Discussion Guide About Race, Class, Gender, and Intersectionality

While you may have explored race, class, and gender identity through other novels, **PIECING ME TOGETHER** allows us to have a unique and in-depth conversation about intersectionality.

This term may be familiar to you, or it may be new. You may already include it in your teaching and have much to teach us all. We hope you'll find something useful in our breakdown of the novel and how it invites readers to see how Jade's identities overlap, interconnect, complicate, and strengthen her.

### A. IDENTITY

Each of us assembles our identity like a unique puzzle from many pieces: race, class, gender, gender identity, body size, dis/abilities, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, interests, age, family structure, etc.

**For example:** Jade says, “girls like me, with coal skin and hula-hoop hips, whose mommas barely make enough money to keep food in the house, have to take opportunities every chance we get.” (p. 6-7)

Jade is naming her identities. She is female, African American, plus-sized, and low-income. (We like the way Jade says that so much better!)

### B. IDENTITY SIGNIFICANCE & PRIVILEGE

Different group identities are more or less significant depending on both how the larger society labels us and our individual life experiences. Within each group (race, class, etc), some people have access to more power and privilege (usually the majority but not always, i.e. women). This is the dominant group. The non-dominant group with less access to power and privilege is often called marginalized. The marginalized can have less access to jobs, visibility in media, and fewer leadership positions.

(Depending on the level of your readers' awareness, you might want to do a brainstorming activity to gather some foundational agreements about power and privilege as the basis for the book discussion. You could build a chart like the one below.)

| GROUP                              | WHO'S DOMINANT                   | WHO'S MARGINALIZED  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Gender</b>                      | male                             | female, non-conforming  |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>              | white                            | people of color, Native Americans                                       |
| <b>Economic Class</b>              | high income                      | low-income, poor, working class   |
| <b>Sexual Orientation</b>          | straight                         | LGBTQ   |
| <b>Gender Identity</b>             | cis                              | trans, non-binary, non-conforming                                       |
| <b>Religion</b>                    | Christian, esp. Protestant       | everyone else, esp. Muslim, Sikh  |
| <b>Age</b>                         | adult                            | young, elderly  |
| <b>Body Type &amp; Dis/ability</b> | slim, neuro-typical, able-bodied | everyone else including “too” big or small, disabled, atypical anything |

Our experiences of being in majority/dominant or minority/marginalized groups have a powerful impact in shaping our identities. Majority experience is normative — you're like everyone else, you blend in — so it gets taken for granted and often becomes invisible. But if you're in the minority, you have a spotlight on you — you're one of a few, you're different, you stand out — so it often becomes central to a person's understanding of themselves. Also, minority group members tend to also be very aware of majority people — because their survival depends on it.

**For example:** Imagine yourself as a boy on the boys' soccer team. Do you or does anyone else think much about your maleness? No, it's taken for granted. Now imagine that you are the only girl on the boys' soccer team. You and everyone else sees everything you do in the context of your difference as a girl.

The result is that those with majority experience may rarely think about that piece of their identity (class, race, etc.), and consider it only when it comes up in relation to people who are different from them. They have, essentially, been systematically trained (socially) to not see, think, or talk about their majority position and its privilege and power. They are likely to just think of themselves as individuals.

In contrast, those with minority experience, like Jade, are often quite conscious of this piece of identity (class, race, etc.), and skilled at identifying and navigating it.

### C. IDENTITY SOLIDARITY

It is inevitable that we create connections and feel solidarity with people within our identity groups.

**For example:** Consider Jade's friends. Jade and Lee Lee are both African American and grew up together in the same neighborhood. Jade and her white friend Sam connect at St. Francis High School because they are both scholarship students. (Yes, we are oversimplifying. Bear with us.)

### D. COMPLICATIONS TO CONNECTIONS

Connections/solidarity that may exist between members of one group — say, being African American — may be complicated or disrupted by membership in other groups — say, belonging to different economic classes.

**For example:** Consider where Jade has complicated or incomplete relationships. She does not connect with Kennedy at St. Francis because Kennedy's family wealth overpowers the possible connection they would have as African Americans. Recall when Jade says in reference to Kennedy and other girls in her class, "because their mothers are the kind of people who hire housekeepers, and my mother is the kind of person who works as one." (p. 5)

While Jade and Sam become friends because they can roll their eyes about the privileged behavior of the rich kids, their friendship is disrupted when Sam refuses to see that the two friends are treated differently in school and in public because of race. Disruption occurs where they do not share a racial group.

### E. IDENTITY & INTERSECTIONALITY

Okay, we have reached intersectionality at last. Legal scholar and law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989 to explain a series of discrimination cases. In the defining case, a group of black women were told by the court that they were not discriminated against

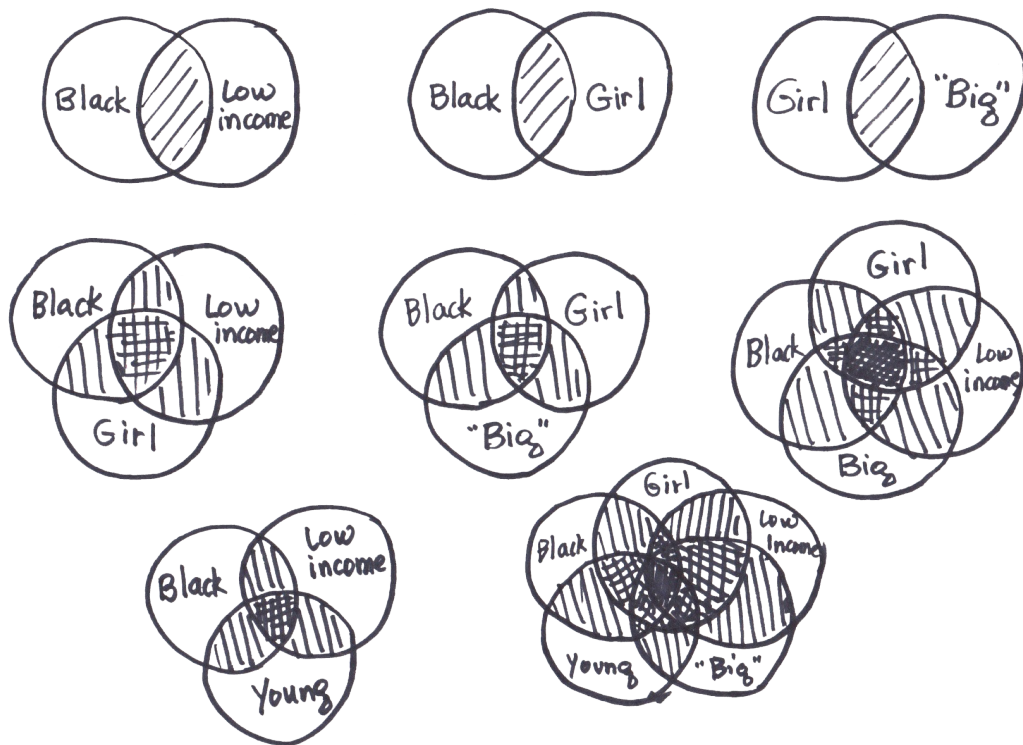
## PIECING ME TOGETHER: A Discussion Guide About Race, Class, Gender, and Intersectionality

because there was no evidence that African American men were mistreated nor that women were mistreated at the same job location. Kimberlé Crenshaw realized the courts could not see that it was where race and gender intersected that the discrimination was present and acute. The plaintiffs were not either black or women, they were both. And because they were both, they suffered from negative labels placed on both identities.

**Intersectionality refers to the social, economic and political ways in which identity-based systems of oppression and privilege connect, overlap and influence one another.** —*Teaching Tolerance*

Jade is not a list of identities but an overlapping blend of identities. Jade’s “shattering into a million pieces” comes from the intersectionality of all her identities and the fact that all of them are socially, economically and politically oppressed. (Depending on what identity you hold and what exploration you’ve done or who you are talking to about these issues, this statement on oppression could cause anything from a nod of recognition to a concern that the word “oppression” goes too far. If you or your audience feel that “oppression” is too strong of a word to describe how our culture treats African American, plus-sized, low-income teenage girls, there is some more information in the next section marked “oppression.”)

Throughout this guide we will be asking readers to recognize not only the challenges and strengths of Jade’s identities, but also the complexity of her relationships and day-to-day by mapping intersectionality. One way to “map” intersectionality is by creating overlapping circles of identity. Explore overlapping Jade’s identities and creating a pattern of lines where the circles intersect. Notice the intensity of the intersections as more identities come into play. That intensity is where Jade might be “shattering into a million pieces” and needing to be pieced together.



**Resources on Intersectionality:**

*Video:* “The Urgency of Intersectionality” (18:49)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>

A TED Talk by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who originated the term ‘intersectionality,’ on the impact and the origins of the concept of intersectional identities. Crenshaw’s powerful profile of African American women killed by police violence provides context for why, in the novel, news of the assault on Natasha Ramsay has such an impact on Jade. Graphic violence in the clips may mean this is not a video to share with students.

*Video:* “The Identity Puzzle: Understanding Intersectionality Through Sustained Dialogue” (5:57)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBenttZUT7A>

This video from a national campus training organization features young adult voices and offers a useful metaphor and graphic of various identities as puzzle pieces.

*Article:* “What Is Intersectionality and Why Is It Important?” <http://www.care2.com/causes/what-is-intersectionality-and-why-is-it-important.html>

Explores the sociological theory that an individual can face multiple threats of discrimination when they have minority identities in a number of groups, such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, health, and other characteristics.

*Article:* “Teaching at the Intersections” <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-53-summer-2016/feature/teaching-intersections>

A *Teaching Tolerance* article about the importance of educators recognizing the possible impact of their students’ multiple identities.

**F. OPPRESSION**

Oppression is a sociological term referring to the structure of society. It acknowledges that people are divided into categories by perceived identity and that those groups have access to more or less power and privilege depending on their dominant (often majority) or marginalized (often minority) position. These resources might help you or your audience experience the oppression that girls like Jade face.

**Resources on Oppression:**

*Article:* “Definition of Social Oppression: An Overview of the Concept and Its Components”

<https://www.thoughtco.com/social-oppression-3026593>

*Video:* “What is Privilege?” (3:59)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD5f8GuNuGQ>

Watch where the young woman who looks most like Jade ends up in this exercise.

*Article:* “17 Outrageous Structural Realities Black Girls and Women Face in America Today” by Jamilah King

<https://mic.com/articles/122870/17-structural-realities-black-girls-and-women-face-in-america#.7Wq8GeVou>

*Article:* “Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected”

by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw with Priscilla Ocen and Jyoti Nanda

[http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4bob80451158d8c/t/54dcc1ece4b001c03e323448/1423753708557/AAPF\\_BlackGirlsMatterReport.pdf](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4bob80451158d8c/t/54dcc1ece4b001c03e323448/1423753708557/AAPF_BlackGirlsMatterReport.pdf)

## G. ASSUMPTIONS

Talking about identities can feel like slapping labels on people. We are all far more complex than our identities. Even seeing a person's intersectionality does not express the complexity of that person.

Labels can lead to assumptions (esp. by majority/dominant group members) of people's needs, potential, and value (less than/more than), based on indicators and markers.

**For example:** People are constantly making assumptions about Jade because of her identities. Remember that painful conversation Jade had with her guidance counselor: "No, no. That's not what I said." Mrs. Parker clears her throat. "We want to be as proactive as possible, and you know, well, statistics tell us that young people with your set of circumstances are, well, at risk for certain things, and we'd like to help you navigate through those circumstances." (p. 18)

Thank goodness for fiction. In the hands of a brilliant, empathic writer like Renée Watson, we are not Mrs. Parker or Jade's mentors or the boys at the Dairy Queen, seeing and judging her individual identities. As readers we get to know Jade all pieced together, one whole amazing girl. So, let's see what this amazing girl and novel can teach us...

## EXPLORING JADE'S GROUP IDENTITIES

Below we have pulled out some quotes/scenes from the novel that we think point to Jade's class, race, and gender identities. Consider asking readers the questions outlined in A, B, and C. Have them recall scenes from the book that profile her identity. Use these quotes to prompt them toward deeper and broader discussion. See if your students can see both the strengths and the challenges of those identities.

### A. CLASS IDENTITY: How do we know that Jade is considered poor or "low income?"

#### 1. Strengths & Challenges: Jade knows what things cost and does not take them for granted.

*There's nothing in the fridge but baking soda in the way back and half-empty bottles of ketchup, barbecue sauce, and mustard on the door. I drink a glass of water, take a shower, get dressed, and leave by six thirty so I can get to the bus.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 9)

*Josiah stops me in the hallway. "Hey, a group of us are going to Zack's Burgers at lunch. You in?"*

*"Sorry, can't," I tell him. "I have a meeting with Mrs. Parker." He doesn't have to know I can't afford to eat out for lunch.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 12)

## CLASS IDENTITY (cont.)

*I walk over to the table and put five cookies in a napkin, looking around to make sure no one is watching. I fold the napkin and go back to my seat, where I slip the cookies into my backpack. I do this two more times, taking chips, grapes, strawberries, and more cookies, and sneak them into my bag. This is something I learned this from Mom. Whenever we go out to eat, we usually have dinner at an all-you-can-eat place, like Izzy's or Old Country Buffet. Once we're full and ready to go, Mom takes foil out of her bag and discreetly wraps up food for us to take. On my last trip to the table, I make a plate to eat for now.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 31-32)

*Maxine is full of ideas. "There are a lot of free things too. I mean, even taking a drive to Multnomah Falls or going to Bonneville Dam."*

*"Yeah, well, my mom doesn't have a car, so there goes that idea," I say. "And if she did, I'm sure she'd need to be conservative on where to drive in order to keep gas in the car."*

*Maxine shakes her head at me. "Always the pessimist," she says, laughing.*

*Always the realist, I think. Always the poorest.*

*Maxine goes on talking, not even realizing she's so oblivious.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 112)

*"But you don't understand," I tell Lee Lee. "I don't want to go to all these expensive restaurants and be reminded that my family can't afford to eat in them. I don't want to be taken all over the city of Portland just so I can see how everyone else lives in bigger and better houses, in neighborhoods. I wanted to be in Woman to Woman because I thought I'd actually learn something about being a woman. About how to be a successful woman. So far all I've learned is how to make sure there are low-fat, vegan-friendly snacks at girl talk sessions. It's got me thinking, is that all mentorship is? Taking someone younger than you to places they can't afford?"*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 173)

## Discussion

1. What feelings does Jade have about her economic situation and why?

**Possible Responses:** Shame, anger, pride, desire, etc.

2. There are instances when Jade's lack of money causes her to keep secrets from people in her life. Why does she choose to do this? What might be the impact on her relationships when she's unable to be honest about her reality?

3. Are there certain people with whom Jade can be transparent about money? If she chose to reveal the truth of her situation with others, how might she share it? What might be the impact of her honesty on those relationships?

4. Jade thinks, "Always the realist, I think. Always the poorest." What skills does Jade have that perhaps her wealthy classmate Kennedy or her mentor Maxine may not have?

5. Have you ever hidden something about your family reality from others?



## CLASS IDENTITY (cont.)

### 2. Strengths & Challenges: Jade sees things most of the other students do not.

*...at St. Francis, I don't have anyone to share that look with. Most things that seem ridiculous to me are normal there. Like when my humanities teacher asked, "Who are the invisible people in our community? Who are the people we, as a society, take for granted?"*

*Some girl in my class said her housekeeper.*

*It wasn't that I didn't think she took her housekeeper for granted; it was that I couldn't believe she had one. And then so many of my classmates nodded, like they could all relate. I actually looked across the room at the only other black girl in the class, and she was raising her hand, saying, "She took my answer," and so I knew we'd probably never make eye contact about anything. And I realized how different I am from everyone else at St. Francis. Not only because I'm black and almost everyone else is white, but because their mothers are the kind of people who hire housekeepers, and my mother is the kind of person who works as one.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p.5)

### Discussion

1. How does the gap between Jade's experience and that of more affluent people distance her from them?

2. How does it make it possible for her to be aware of things they can't see?

**Consider:** You could use this as an opportunity to teach about minority/non-dominant identity and how marginalization gives people the ability to "see," while privilege can be blinding. Refer back to Identity Significance & Privilege on pages 2-3.

3. Are there things you see about your classmates' privileges that others might not see?

### 3. Strengths & Challenges: Jade instantly recognizes that Sam sees what she sees.

*Sam tucks her hair behind her right ear and clears her throat.*

*"Any tips about lunch?" she asks.*

*"I eat in the cafeteria," I answer. I don't tell her that my meals are free and part of my scholarship package.*

*"I have to eat in the cafeteria too," Sam says. "I mean, well, I don't have to, but, well—"*

*She doesn't finish her sentence. She doesn't have to. "Meet me at the sandwich bar for lunch. We can eat together," I say.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 28)

*"It's weird, huh?"*

*"What?"*

*"Being stuck in the middle. Like, sometimes I hold back at school, you know? Like I don't ever join in on those what-are-you-doing-this-weekend? conversations, because I know nothing I will say can compare to the weekend excursions those girls at St. Francis go on," Sam says.*



## CLASS IDENTITY (cont.)

*“But I also don’t talk much about what I do at school with my family or with my friends who don’t go to St. Francis.”*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 58)

*The other girl talks so bad about Northeast Portland, not knowing she is talking about Sam’s neighborhood. Not knowing you shouldn’t ever talk about a place like it’s unlivable when you know someone, somewhere lives there. She goes on and on about how dangerous it used to be, how the houses are small, how it’s supposed to be the new cool place, but in her opinion, “it’s just a polished ghetto.” She says, “God, I’d be so depressed if I lived there.”*

*Kennedy and the other girls agree.*

*“That would be the worst thing ever,” the white girl says. “I so don’t understand how anyone could be happy there.”*

*“Me either. I’d be so depressed.” ...*

*Sam swallows a mouthful of her burger and then whispers, “I’d be so depressed if I lived over here.”*

*“Me too.”*

*“I don’t care that Kennedy has a car. I never want to do this again,” Sam says.*

*“Me neither.” I eat a handful of fries.*

*“But we have to go back to Zack’s,” Sam says.*

*And then we jinx each other. “This burger is so good,” we say.*

*We laugh, our mouths full. Kennedy and her friends look over at us. They don’t know why we’re laughing so hard. Don’t understand our joy.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 90-91)

### Discussion

1. How does Jade feel when she recognizes her shared identity with Sam? How does this recognition affect their relationship?

**Possible Responses:** safety, connection, ease

2. Have you ever found an unexpected or unspoken connection with a fellow student around what you can and cannot afford?

## CLASS IDENTITY (cont.)

### 4. Strengths & Challenges: Adults make assumptions about what Jades needs and offer her "opportunities."

*Mrs. Parker always has some kind of opportunity to tell me about...but sometimes I wish I could say, Oh, no, thank you, Mrs. Parker. I have enough opportunities. My life is full of opportunities. Give an opportunity to someone else. But girls like me, with coal skin and hula-hoop hips, whose mommas barely make enough money to keep food in the house, have to take opportunities every chance we get.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 6-7)

*"I want something more from Woman to Woman," I tell her. "I don't want to sound ungrateful. I mean, I do like going on all those trips, but sometimes you make me feel like you've come to fix me; only, I don't feel broken. Not until I'm around you."*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 174)

*"Why was I chosen for this?"*

*Mrs. Parker clears her throat. "Well, uh, selection was based on, uh, gender, grade, and, well, several other things."*

*"Like?"*

*"Well, uh, several things. Teacher nominations . . . uh, need."*

*"Mrs. Parker, I don't need a mentor," I tell her.*

*"Every young person could use a caring adult in her life."*

*"I have my mother." And my uncle, and my dad. "You think I don't have anyone who cares about me?"*

*"No, no. That's not what I said." Mrs. Parker clears her throat. "We want to be as proactive as possible, and you know, well, statistics tell us that young people with your set of circumstances are, well, at risk for certain things, and we'd like to help you navigate through those circumstances." Mrs. Parker takes a candy out of her jar and pops it into her mouth. "I'd like you to thoroughly look over the information and consider it. This is a good opportunity for you."*

*That word shadows me. Follows me like a stray cat.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 18)

### Discussion

1. How does Mrs. Parker try to help Jade, but also ends up stereotyping her?
2. Author Jason Reynolds said that this book "somehow gets the toxicity of sympathy." What do you think he means? How are sympathy and empathy different?
3. Are there ways that Mrs. Parker or Maxine could offer Jade opportunities that would make her feel more empowered?

**Possible Responses:** drop assumptions, discuss options with her, listen!, let her make her own choices, trust her judgment

## CLASS IDENTITY (cont.)

4. Mrs. Parker does ask Jade, “What do you want?” Why isn’t this effective?

**Possible Responses:** She’s been in the pattern of helping; she doesn’t listen long enough; she already holds assumptions about Jade’s situation; she only asks once; she does too much for Jade and not enough with her

**5. Strengths and Challenges: Jade hears her neighborhood stereotyped as poor and undesirable, but she knows that her neighborhood is also connected and beautiful.**

*When I learned the Spanish word for succeed, I thought it was kind of ironic that the word exit is embedded in it. Like the universe was telling me that in order for me to make something of this life, I’d have to leave home, my neighborhood, my friends.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 2)

*I ride the 35 through the maze of houses that all look like one another, like sisters who are not twins but everyone thinks they are. Living here means when people ask, “Where do you live?” and you say, “The New Columbia,” they say, “You mean the Villa?” and remind you...how really, they were just the projects with a different name.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 9-10)

*Lots of people can’t find beauty in my neighborhood, but I can. Ever since elementary school, I’ve been making beauty out of everyday things—candy wrappers, pages of a newspaper, receipts, rip-outs from magazines. I cut and tear, arrange and rearrange, and glue them down, morphing them into something no one else thought they could be. Like me.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 10)

*We go downtown and volunteer at the Portland Rescue Mission. “We don’t have much, but we have more than a lot of other people,” Mom says.*

*I hope one day my family gets to a place where we can be thankful just to be thankful and not because we’ve compared ourselves to someone who has less than we do.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 104)

## Discussion

1. Describe Jade’s bus trip from her neighborhood to St. Francis High School. How does the distance make her feel more disconnected?
2. Explain why Jade is troubled by the fact that the word “exit” is included in the Spanish word “succeed.”
3. Jade’s mother seems thankful that her family is not worse off. Does this show her strength or the challenge of the family’s economic position or both?
4. Jade collages with everyday things she finds in her neighborhood. What does that say about how she views her neighborhood?
5. What assumptions do people make about your neighborhood? What don’t they know?

## B. RACIAL IDENTITY: What is Jade's experience of being African American?

### 1. Strengths & Challenges: Jade feels like she has to censor her feelings and her blackness to be more "acceptable."

*Sometimes I just want to be comfortable in this skin, this body. Want to cock my head back and laugh loud and free, all my teeth showing, and not be told I'm too rowdy, too ghetto. Sometimes I just want to go to school, wearing my hair big like cumulous clouds without getting any special attention, without having to explain why it looks different from the day before. Why it might look different tomorrow. Sometimes I just want to let my tongue speak the way it pleases, let it be untamed and not bound by rules. Want to talk without watchful ears listening to judge me. At school I turn on a switch, make sure nothing about me is too black. All day I am on. And that's why sometimes after school, I don't want to talk to Sam or go to her house, because her house is a reminder of how black I am.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 201)

*"Sometimes, in class, if something about race came up, I was looked at to give an answer as if I could speak on behalf of all black people," Maxine says. "It was exhausting..."*

*"And to be honest, not all of the negative messages were from white people... I guess it made me feel like blackness needed to be hidden, toned down, and that whiteness was good, more acceptable," Maxine says...*

*"I remember being so embarrassed about having friends over to my house... it's, you know—black..."*

*I grew up feeling tremendous pride in our culture, what we as a people overcame and accomplished, but at the same time there was this message from my parents telling me not to be too black. At school, with my white friends and teachers, there were all these stereotypes I felt I had to dispel, and, with a lot of my black friends, I had to prove that I was black enough—whatever that means. It was complicated."*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 215-216)

*[Sam's grandfather] "So, what do you think of the Natasha Ramsey incident?" he asks.*

*I am not sure how to answer his question, because nothing but pain will pour out. I tell him, "I'm really sad about it." I tell him sad because I think white people can handle black sadness better than black anger. I feel both. But sadness gets sympathy, so I stick with that.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 202)

### Discussion

1. When does Jade experience herself as "too black" or check her behavior so she won't be seen that way?
2. Why do Maxine's parents coach her not to be too black? What are they afraid of? What might be the consequences of being too black?
3. Are there times Jade might experience herself as "not black enough"? How might that impact her relationships and her feelings about herself?
4. Do you agree that "white people can handle black sadness better than black anger"? Why?
5. What part of yourself, what identity, do you repress to fit in?

## RACIAL IDENTITY (cont.)

### 2. Strengths & Challenges: Jade sees how she is treated differently than white girls.

*“I wouldn’t call that racist,” Sam says.*

*“So what would you call it?”*

*“I don’t know. Maybe you seemed up to something because you weren’t buying any clothes.”  
“So big girls can’t go into stores for skinny girls and look at the accessories? That’s a problem too?”*

*Sam slows down. “That’s not what I’m saying. I don’t think it had anything to do with your race or your size. I think maybe she was just trying to do her job. That’s all.”*

*I don’t know what’s worse. Being mistreated because of the color of your skin, your size, or having to prove that it really happened.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 136-137)

*“Well, you know why Hannah didn’t get in trouble,” Sam says.*

*“Because she’s white.”*

*I can’t see Sam, but I’m pretty sure she just rolled her eyes. “Uh, no. Because she’s rich. Her parents donate a bunch of money to the school every year. She can say and do whatever she wants,” Sam says. “That had nothing to do with her being white and your being black.”*

*“You know that’s what people are going to say about Natasha Ramsey. That it had nothing to do with her being black.”*

*“Who?” Sam asks.*

*There is silence between us.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 189-190)

*“Sometimes, Sam, I just want you to listen. Anytime I bring up feeling like I’m being treated unfairly because I’m a black girl, you downplay it or make excuses. You never admit it’s about race.”*

*“I—I don’t think it always is,” Sam says.*

*“Of course you don’t,” I say. “You know nothing about being nominated into programs that want to fix you...”*

*“I just want to be normal. I just want a teacher to look at me and think I’m worth a trip to Costa Rica. Not just that I need help but that I can help someone else. You keep saying we’re not that different, but have you ever wondered why you don’t get the same opportunities I get?”*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 205)

## RACIAL IDENTITY (cont.)

### Discussion

1. Why is it so hard for Sam and other white people in Jade's life (school staff) to see the ways in which Jade experiences mistreatment as a black girl?

**Consider:** You might use this as an opportunity to talk about majority/minority identity. Look for it in the Identity Significance & Privilege section on pages 2-3.

2. Break down Jade's experience at the mall store. What does it feel like for Jade to see that she's being mistreated and to be sure that it's because of race, but to have Sam and the other shoppers ignore, deny, or explain it away, to tell her she didn't actually experience what she experienced? How could everyone have acted differently?

**Consider:** An improv exercise like the one below.

3. Why does Sam not knowing about Natasha Ramsey hurt Jade? Why would the news reach Jade, but not Sam? What could that say about the frequency of violence against black women and its impact on Jade?

**Consider:** You might use this as an opportunity to talk about Identity Solidarity and Complications to Connection on page 3.

4. What's the difference between the opportunities Jade is offered and the opportunities Sam is offered? How is race playing a role?

### Out of the Box: Improv on Race & Privilege

Consider engaging in conversations about race and privilege through improv. Create a pair of related cards that will be "drawn" by two selected readers. The cards will tell the readers who they represent and what is happening. Each will read their card aloud, and "A" will go first with invented dialogue. **For example:**

#### Card 1A:

*Who Are You?*

You are a 22-year-old white girl working in a clothing store at the mall. The store has a bag policy. The policy states that if a bag looks big enough to be used for shoplifting, you need to ask the customer to check that bag at the counter. The store has a few white women shopping (several holding large bags) and one African American teenage girl (with a backpack). You approach the girl and ask her to check her bag.

*What Do You Say?*

Start the conversation.

#### Card 1B:

*Who Are You?*

You are an African American teenage girl. You are killing time in the mall and want to check out the sale rack in the back of a clothing store. A white store employee follows you and asks you to check your bag. You look around. The rest of the customers are white. Some of them have bags just as big as yours.

*What Do You Say?*

Wait for the employee to ask for your bag and then respond.

#### Follow-up reflection could include:

Would you say this in real life?

What would go unsaid?

What do you wish you knew or knew how to say?

## RACIAL IDENTITY (cont.)

**3. Strengths & Challenges: Jade is aware that more police violence is directed at people who look like her and that no one is surprised when violence happens to girls who look like her.**

*All day long I've been whispering prayers. Natasha's name haunts me. No one speaks her name or mentions what happened. It's as if no one in this school knows or cares that an unarmed black girl was assaulted by the police last night just across the river. My stomach hurts. And all I want to do is talk to my mom and Lee Lee and Maxine. Every time something like this happens, I go to accounting for every person I know who also fits the description, who it could've been.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 184)

*"I don't know why this is making me so, so . . . I don't know. I mean, we hear about this stuff all the time—and she didn't even die. It's not even as bad as it could be. But for some reason I just. . . I don't know. I feel, it just feels—"*

*"Too close?"*

*"Yeah, I guess."*

*"And like it could have been you or me?"*

*There are no words from Lee Lee, only the sound of her breathing.*

*We sit there, not talking, just listening to each other's breath. Just thankful.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 192)

### Discussion

1. Why are Jade and Lee Lee so distressed to hear about the assault on a girl they do not know?
2. Why are so few other people aware of the incident, or disturbed by it?
3. If Jade feels Natasha's attack deeply, how do you think that affects her feeling of safety? How do you think that changes her behavior?
4. What do you know about the #BlackLivesMatter movement? How does Jade, Sam, and Lee Lee's experience of the Natasha Ramsey incident connect with the meaning of that movement? Thinking about intersectionality or simply about Jade's life, what are your responses to the insistence of some whites that #AllLivesMatter?
5. More police interactions with black men and women end in police committing violence than with white men and women. How does that make you feel?

**4. Strengths & Challenges: Jade acknowledges a past that includes enslavement.**

*...Did [York] ever think about what his life was like before the expedition? Before he was a slave? How far back could he remember? Did he remember existing in a world where no one thought him strange, thought him a beast?*

*Did he remember being human?*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 194)



## RACIAL IDENTITY (cont.)

*Clark eventually gave York his freedom.*

*1816. I wonder what it would have been like if York had received that land and that money, and his freedom. What would he have built? Would he have left it to his children? Would they have done something with it and passed it on, and then their children's children would have passed it on? And isn't this what the man in the Money Matters workshop was telling us when he was explaining how it is that some are rich and some are poor?*

*Isn't that how it works? You pass on what you were given.*

*But York, what could he give?*  
—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 246)

### Discussion

1. Lewis and Clark are seen as great American explorers in our history books. Why is it important to also understand that Clark was a slave owner?
2. Why is Jade drawn to York's role in the story?
3. Jade asks what it would have been like if York had received land and freedom. She wonders what would have happened if he could have built something and passed on that strength and accomplishment to other generations. How might York's ancestors have been changed? What does this help you see about being the descendants of a slave?
4. What do you think is the most important story from your ancestry?

### 5. Strengths & Challenges: Jade can see the oppression of other groups.

*Then she picks up a framed photo of her and her grandsons at a Winterhawks hockey game. They are all dressed in Winterhawks jerseys, and the logo in the center of their shirts is a Native American with four feathers in his hair and paint on his face. I wonder how a people's culture, a people's history, becomes a mascot. I wonder how this school counselor and her three grandsons can wear a stereotype on their shirts and hats and not care.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 16)

*"When they needed to decide on where to go next or how to handle a challenge, York got to vote. Sacagawea, too. The first time a black man and a woman were ever given that privilege."*

*Lee Lee tells me that Lewis and Clark came with gifts and that it was a ritual to have a meeting ceremony. At that meeting, Lewis and Clark told the tribal leaders that their land was now the property of the United States, and that a man in the east was their new great father.*

*They did not tell them York was Clark's slave.*

*They did not tell them that their new great father owned slaves.*

*I give the worksheet back to Lee Lee. "I wonder if the native people saw it coming," I say. "Did they know that the meeting ceremony ritual was not so innocent, that it wasn't just an exchange of goods?"*

*Lee Lee looks at me. "I'm sure they didn't. How could they know this was the beginning of their displacement?"*

## RACIAL IDENTITY (cont.)

*“But York and Sacagawea—they knew?” I ask.*

*“I don’t know,” Lee Lee says. “But even if they did, what could they do about it?”*

*... The whole time Lee Lee is talking, I am thinking about York and Sacagawea, wondering how they must have felt having a form of freedom but no real power.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 23-24)

*[Thanksgiving Day] E.J. answers, “Basically, we’re sitting here feasting and celebrating that our nation was stolen from indigenous people. Columbus didn’t discover nothing.” ...*

*I feel so embarrassed that I’ve never even thought about any of this.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 105)

### Discussion

1. Jade is embarrassed that she has never thought about Thanksgiving as “celebrating that our nation was stolen from indigenous people.” Can we be thankful on a national holiday while at the same time acknowledging the reality of what our nation did to native people?
2. Sports team logos are long-term symbols of our pride in our community’s teams. When that logo is offensive to marginalized people, should it be changed? How does the school counselor not see that she is participating in casual racism by giving her family Winterhawks team shirts? Why is her choice all the more problematic for her biracial grandsons?
3. Is there a reason the author includes Sacagawea and York’s story within Jade’s story? Are there any parallels in their stories?  
**Consider:** Sacagawea and York provide such a potent metaphor for Jade’s situation. Jade is selected out of and removed from her community for special treatment, but what actual power does she have? Is she a token? Are certain things expected of her — gratitude, achievement — and in exchange for what? Is there a way she is being used or exploited; say to make privileged people feel better? Is she being elevated while her community is sacrificed?
4. When talking with Lee Lee about Sacagawea and York, Jade is “wondering how they must have felt having a form of freedom but no real power”? Does that statement also apply to Jade? To you? Why or why not?
5. Are there moments in the classroom when you are learning about marginalized and/or oppressed people that make you feel uncomfortable? What in particular do you notice stirs up the most discomfort?

## C. GENDER IDENTITY: What messages does Jade get about being a girl with “hula-hoop hips” and about making herself a priority?

**1) Strengths & Challenges: Jade is a plus-size girl who believes she doesn't need to lose weight to be physically beautiful.**

*They all agree that the next girl is a seven, and just when my order is ready, I hear one of them say, “What about her?”*

*I know he is pointing to me, which means they are all looking at me—from behind. Not good. The man at the counter calls my number and gives me my food.*

*The boys behind me assess me. One of them says, “I give her a five.”*

## GENDER IDENTITY (cont.)

*The other: "A five? Man, she so big, she breaks the scale."*

*Another voice: "Man, thick girls are fine. I don't know what's wrong with you."...*

*"Hey, hold up. My boy wants to talk to you," Green Hat says. He follows me, yelling into the dark night.*

*I keep walking. Don't look back.*

*"Aw, so it's like that? Forget you then. Don't nobody want your fat ass anyway. Don't know why you up in a Dairy Queen. Need to be on a diet." He calls me every derogatory name a girl could ever be called...*

*When I get on the bus, it is fuller than I expected it to be. I want to eat, but I decide to wait.*

*Who wants to see a big girl eating fries and a burger on a bus?*  
—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 93-94)

*"...you two are looking real nice." E.J. says.*

*"Thanks, E.J.," I say. "But I think it's ridiculous that you think I could only be getting dressed up for a guy."*

*"Well, you look beautiful, whoever it's for."*

*I think for a moment and then tell him, "It's for me."*  
—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 237)

### Discussion

1. Do the Dairy Queen boys know Jade? Why do the boys feel they can rank girls and comment on their bodies? How do their comments affect Jade's belief that she is both plus sized and beautiful?
2. Do girls comment on boys' bodies and looks? Is it different? If so, how?
3. What do you wish Jade had said to those boys? Would you have said that?
4. Why can Jade speak up for herself with E.J. and celebrate her beauty? How is it different from her silence with the Dairy Queen boys?
5. Do you publicly rank people by appearance? Have you been ranked?

### 2. Strengths & Challenges: Jade grows her relationship with Maxine from "my mentor has stood me up because of some drama with her boyfriend" (p. 46) to "bearing witness" with Maxine (p. 217)

*For all the things about Maxine that I respect and admire, there are things like this that make me feel like she can't really tell me anything about loving myself and taking care of myself because here she is, doing the opposite...*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 107)

*I want to tell her that I think she should have called Jon back later. That I think I should be important too.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 109)

## GENDER IDENTITY (cont.)

*Maxine smiles as tears fall. She wipes them quickly. “Oh, Jade, you have me in here, getting all emotional. You’re not supposed to be giving me the advice,” she says.*

*Now that I’ve spoken honestly with Maxine and she’s really listened, I feel like I can tell her anything.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 180)

*“But I think what my grandmother was saying is that it feels good to know someone knows your story, that someone took you in,” Maxine says. “She’d tell me, it’s how we heal.”*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 218)

### Discussion

1. Maxine is not taking her own advice to put love of self before love of boyfriends. Jade sees this clearly. How does that show Jade’s belief in her own value?
2. Jade eventually tells Maxine that her inattention to Jade and attention to her ex-boyfriend is hurtful. How does this conversation help both of them?
3. Should a phone call or text always be immediately answered? Are there times when the person in front of you deserves your full attention?
4. Refer back to pages 214-218. How do Maxine and Jade “heal each other?” Based on their conversation in this chapter, what do they need healing from?
5. When have your “role models” or mentors disappointed you? Can you share that disappointment? What happened? What might happen?

### 3. Strengths & Challenges: Lee Lee’s poem *Black Girls Rising*, written at Jade’s kitchen table, says, “Our bodies no longer disregarded, objectified, scrutinized.”

*Something happens when people tell me I have a pretty face, ignoring me from the neck down. When I watch the news and see unarmed black men and women shot dead over and over, it’s kind of hard to believe this world is mine.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 85)

*Our black bodies, sacred.*

*Our black bodies, holy.*

...

*Our bodies, our own.*

*Every smile a protest.*

*Each laugh a miracle.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 258-259)

### Discussion

1. What are people saying when they tell Jade she has a pretty face, when they pick out just one part of her body to compliment?
2. Why does Jade talk about black women being shot in the same breath as talking about her own body?
3. Reread Lee Lee’s poem (p. 258-259). What do you think speaks to Jade in that poem? What speaks to you?
4. What do think Lee Lee means by, “Every smile a protest”?
5. Who do you compare your body to? What do you think that says about your self-perception?

## GENDER IDENTITY (cont.)

### **Out of the Box: React, Respond, Repeat, Read**

Consider getting readers on their feet to react and respond to situations that Jade faced or similar to what Jade faced. Envision sheets hung throughout the room, each with a different scenario and a space for readers to write responses. For example:

*Who Are You?*

You are a teenage girl who stopped into the Dairy Queen alone to grab a hamburger.

*What Happens?*

There is a whole table of guys talking about girls, and one looks at you and says, "Nobody's gonna want your fat ass. You need to be on a diet."

*What do you want to say?*

*What do you actually say?*

*What do you wish you knew?*

Have enough sheets for each person in the class and invite readers to approach a sheet. Using a timer, have readers write quick anonymous responses. When the timer dings, readers could move to another sheet. The last shuffle of readers would put them in front of a sheet they did not fill out. They would read that sheet aloud to the others and the group could reflect.

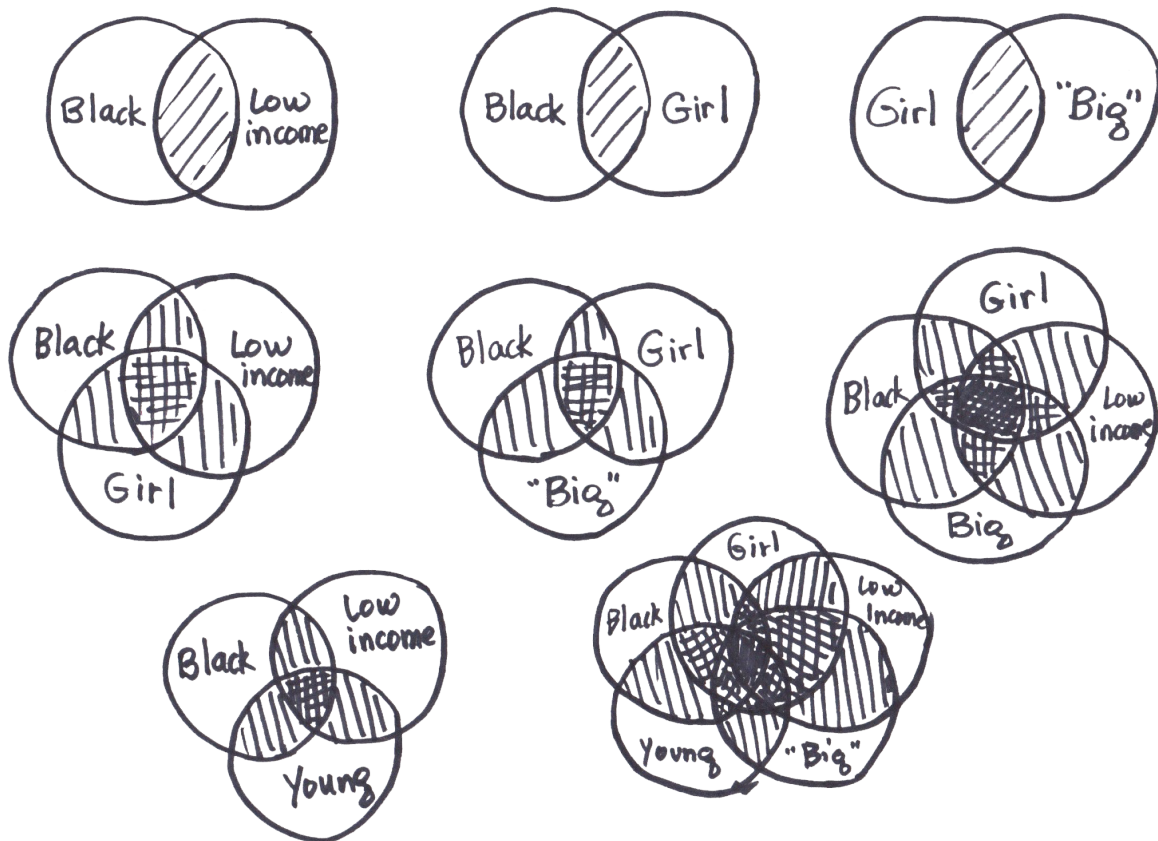
## NOTES:

## EXPLORING JADE'S GROUP INTERSECTIONALITY

Now that you have explored Jade's most significant identities, consider introducing the concept of intersectionality to your readers. Refer back to pages 3-5.

**Consider:**

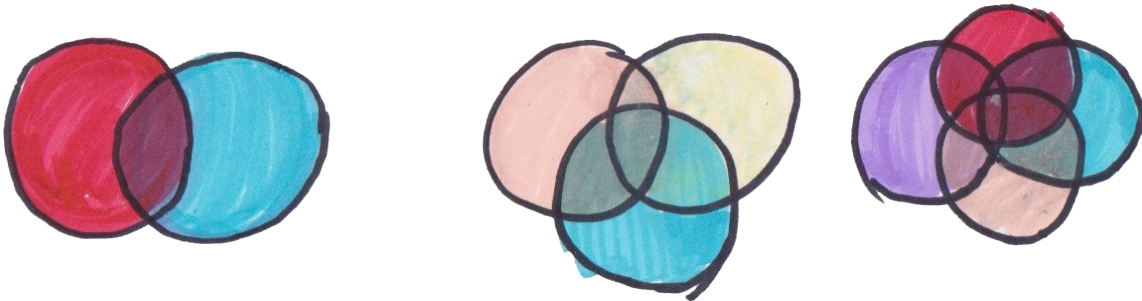
1. Lead with the quote, "But girls like me, with coal skin and hula-hoop hips, whose mommas barely make enough money to keep food in the house, have to take opportunities every chance we get." (p. 7)
2. List all of Jade's identities that you explored previously: black, low-income, and female. Consider adding "big" and young or teen.
3. Work with your readers to diagram the eight intersectionality combinations shared below while recognizing the growing intensity where identities intersect.



## JADE'S GROUP INTERSECTIONALITY (cont.)

### Out of the Box: Exploring Readers' Intersectionality

This is an opportunity for your readers to explore their own complexity. They could simply map their intersectionality as we did with Jade. Consider, though, bringing in Jade's influence to expand the mapping into a collage art project. Overlapping circles of different colors of tissue paper could create a compelling visual. Imagine those intersecting circles appearing over a B&W photograph(s) of the reader or over clippings from local newspapers. Readers could be asked to bring in random paper items from their homes and neighborhoods to build a portrait of their own beautiful complexity.



## EXPLORING JADE'S INTERSECTIONALITY & MARGINALIZATION (AKA SHATTERING)

Jade's intersectionality is not just brewing inside herself. It is bumping up against the complexity of other people's identities and intersectionality. Where other people have identities that have more privilege than Jade's, Jade can experience alienation and even oppression. Where Jade has more privilege than those in her neighborhood, Jade can experience stress and splintering.

Revisit the quote that leads this guide where Jade confesses, "by the time I get home I feel like my soul has been shattered into a million pieces." Explore some of the scenarios below and identify what intersectionality of Jade's is in play and how privilege is playing a role in the conflict.

### A. RACE & CLASS: Jade and her Wealthy Classmates

*And I realized how different I am from everyone else at St. Francis. Not only because I'm black and almost everyone else is white, but because their mothers are the kind of people who hire housekeepers, and my mother is the kind of person who works as one.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 5)

#### Discussion

1. How would the wealth and race of the other students keep Jade from sharing her family situation, sharing herself?
2. Is this statement from Jade about race or class or where they intersect?



## JADE'S INTERSECTIONALITY & MARGINALIZATION (cont.)

### B. RACE, CLASS, BODY TYPE: Jade and Kennedy

*Glamour Girl is one of the few black girls in my grade. But she doesn't exchange smiles with me in the hallway. Her real name is Kennedy, but I call her Glamour Girl because every time I see her, she is applying lip gloss or fixing her hair.*

*Right now her head is buried in her designer book bag. I look at all the things Glamour Girl is taking out of her bag and tossing onto the desk: a cell phone, a makeup carrier, a coin purse the same color as her bag, a small bottle of lotion, two kinds of lip gloss—one with a pink tint, the other clear—a debit card, and a small tin of peppermints.*

*I stare at the mints, and my stomach growls. Loud. I wish I could silence it. Big girls can't have growling stomachs.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 14-15)

#### Discussion

1. Unpack Kennedy's book bag. What does her bag say about her?
2. Why can't Jade share with Kennedy that she did not have breakfast? Why can "big girls" not confess to being hungry?

### C. RACE, CLASS, AGE: Mentees and Mentors

*Maxine whispers to Carla, "Can you believe that woman? Talking to us like we're some poor black heathens who don't know anything worth knowing."*

*Carla says, "I know, right? First of all, I don't even listen to hip-hop."*

*Listening to Maxine and Carla, I think maybe they aren't only offended at that woman's stereotypes, but maybe they are upset at the idea of being put in the same category as me and the other girls.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 148-149)

#### Discussion

1. How would you react to an adult calling hip hop listeners, "poor black heathens"?
2. How can the mentors not see that they are stereotyping and dismissing the culture of their teen mentees just as the white woman is stereotyping them? What is standing in the mentors way?

### D. CLASS, OPPORTUNITY: Jade and Girls in Her Neighborhood

*Maxine is right and wrong.*

*Wrong because I am like those girls. I am the Kool-Aid-drinking, fast food-eating unhealthy girl she wants to give nutrition classes to. I know all about food stamps and dollar menus and layaway. Know how to hold my purse tight at night when walking down dark streets, know how to duck at the sound of a shooting gun...*

*So Maxine is wrong—so wrong—about me.*

## JADE'S INTERSECTIONALITY & MARGINALIZATION (cont.)

*But she is also right, because I know more than that, want more than that. Right because I am the girl who spends her summers reading books and working, tutoring at the rec, when a lot of her friends are at the rec, playing their summers away. I am the girl who knows when to stop talking back to a teacher because I know my mother will be waiting for me when I get home, asking me if I forgot who raised me. I am the girl who dreams of going places: to college, to grad school, all around the world, if I can.*

*Maxine is right and wrong. Those girls are not the opposite of me. We are perpendicular. We may be on different paths, yes. But there's a place where we touch, where we connect and are just the same.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 131-132)

### Discussion

1. Where do Jade and the girls in her neighborhood “connect and are just the same”?
2. How has Jade’s scholarship and mentor situation put her on another path? How does this divide Jade from her peers? How does it create a divide within herself?

## E. CLASS, AGE, OPPORTUNITY: Jade, her mother, and Maxine

*“...You liked my cooking until you started going out with Maxine—”*

*“Mom, I love your cooking. I was just telling you about the event.”*

*“You hanging around all those uppity black women who done forgot where they come from. Maxine know she knows about fried fish. I don’t know one black person who hasn’t been to a fish fry at least once in their life. Where she from?”*

*Mom won’t stop talking. She goes on and on about Maxine and Sabrina and how they are a different type of black, how she knows she’s going to get tired of dealing with them for the next two years.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 141-142)

### Discussion

1. If Jade’s mother supports her attending St. Francis and being in the mentor program, why is her mother feeling left behind?
2. How are Maxine and Sabrina a “different type of black”? How does this split Jade in two?

## F. CLASS, RACE: Jade, Sam, and White Privilege

*“Why can’t we talk about how unfair it is that at St. Francis, people who look like you get signed up for programs that take them to Costa Rica, and people who look like me get signed up for programs that take them downtown?”...*

*“That study abroad program—the one I should be part of—isn’t about giving a man a fish or teaching a man to fish. And there’s no talk of a contaminated river, because people like you own the river and the fish—”*

*“What are you talking about? I don’t own anything!” Sam’s eyes well up with tears. “I don’t like what you’re saying, Jade. I’ve been nothing but a friend to you. Why can’t you be happy*

## JADE'S INTERSECTIONALITY & MARGINALIZATION (cont.)

*for me? Just this once. All the times you've come to me bragging about everything you get to do with Maxine? I've always been happy for you."*

*"Bragging? You think I was bragging? I was just doing what friends do: sharing about my day, sharing my life with you—"*

*"And I want to be able to share this with you, but how can I when you're moping around and making me feel guilty? I'm sorry you're not going, Jade. I want you to be there, but I can't change that. What do you want from me?"*

*Before I even answer, Sam's tears are falling, like she already knows she won't be able to give me whatever it is I'm about to ask for, and so now tears are tangled in my throat. "Sometimes, Sam, I just want you to listen. Anytime I bring up feeling like I'm being treated unfairly because I'm a black girl, you downplay it or make excuses. You never admit it's about race."*

*"I—I don't think it always is," Sam says.*

*"Of course you don't," I say. "You know nothing about being nominated into programs that want to fix you."*

*Sam's face contorts into confusion. "What do you mean?"*

*I can't control my breath. My chest heaves and words escape between shallow gasps. "I just want to be normal. I just want a teacher to look at me and think I'm worth a trip to Costa Rica. Not just that I need help but that I can help someone else. You keep saying we're not that different, but have you ever wondered why you don't get the same opportunities I get?"*

**—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 204-205)**

### Discussion

1. This conversation drives both Jade and Sam to tears. What do each of them want from the other? Why can't they each give it?
  2. Jade says, "people who look like you get signed up for programs that take them to Costa Rica, and people who look like me get signed up for programs that take them downtown." Both Sam and Jade are offered "opportunities" because they are low income. When Jade says "people like you" is she saying that Sam has privileges because she is white? Does she?
  3. What is the difference between opportunities that want to "fix you" and opportunities that celebrate your unique talents? Is this what author Jason Reynolds means when he says this book "somehow gets the toxicity of sympathy"?
  4. Can you think of any advantages that Sam has as a white girl that Jade doesn't have as a black girl? Why can't Sam see her own privilege? Does Sam think a lot about being white? Why or why not? In what ways is her white identity invisible to her?
- Consider:** This is a good opportunity to revisit Identity Significance & Privilege on pages 2-3.
5. Do you tend to be aware of yourself more as just an individual, or as part of a group? Why is that?

## G. RACE, GENDER: Jade, Sam, and Violence Against Women

*Sam is not on the first bus, and for one moment—just one—I think, What if something happened to her? The whole story plays out in my mind—she will be on the news every day*

## JADE'S INTERSECTIONALITY & MARGINALIZATION (cont.)

*because she is a white girl and white girls who go missing always make the news. I will volunteer and join the other searchers. We will search all the many places a body could be.*

*Cathedral Park. Some hidden bush under the St. John's bridge. For months people will tell girls and women to be careful and walk in pairs, but no one will tell boys and men not to rape women, not to kidnap us and toss us into rivers. And it will be a tragedy only because Sam died in a place she didn't really belong to. No one will speak of the black and Latina girls who die here, who are from here.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 98)

### Discussion

1. Is it true that we tell girls to be safe more than we tell boys not to assault girls? What do you think of that?
2. How hard is it for Jade to know that the city would care more about Sam's disappearance than hers? Is this oppression? How?

## PIECING IT TOGETHER

We have explored Jade's marginalized identities, the complexity of her intersectionality, and how all of those factors complicate her relationships. We can understand her saying, "I wonder if there's ever a way for a girl like me to feel whole."

But despite all these things, she does remake that wholeness every day by questioning, caring, building relationships, making art, negotiating the divides, and by other amazing survival strategies.

Explore with readers the strategies Jade consciously and unconsciously uses to piece herself together. Have readers reflect on what strategies they employ or could employ. You can use these passages to prompt responses.

### Discussion

1. Of Jade's strategies listed above, which ones do you/can you use when piecing your life together?
2. In the book, how does art (collage, poetry) help Jade and her friends piece their lives together? What art (music, literature, films, visual, etc.) do you create or take in to help you get through difficult times?

## JADE'S RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES / ACTION PLAN

### A. LOOK FOR ANSWERS

*¿Dónde está la partida? Where is the departure?*

*¿Dónde está la salida? Where is the exit?*

*¿Cuánto cuesta? How much does it cost?*

## PIECING IT TOGETHER (cont.)

*¿Tiene un mapa que indique las paradas? Do you have a map showing the stops?*

*I know Mr. Flores thinks he's preparing us for surviving travel abroad, but these are questions my purpose is asking. I am finding a way to know these answers right here, right now.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 49)

## B. BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

*In the image, Lee Lee is standing, her hands on her hips, wearing that serious look she always has. The one that says, I can handle anything. Nothing's going to stop me. I made the collage the day after her grandmother was buried.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 41)

## C. GIVE OTHERS VOICE

*I see York traveling west again, knowing which way to go this time. ... This time he is no one's servant or slave. This time he tells them the whole story, tells how he is the first of his kind.*

*This time he speaks for himself.*

*Of the art I've been making lately, this is the only one where I've included myself. I am with York, both of us with maps in our hands. Both of us black and traveling. Black and exploring. Both of us discovering what we are really capable of.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 260-61)

## D. MAKE BEAUTY & MAKE YOURSELF FEEL BEAUTIFUL

*I don't throw the bag away. I'm going to use it tonight. Tear it up and make it into something. Maybe a dress for a girl more confident than I am, who doesn't feel insecure about eating whatever she wants in public. Maybe I'll morph it into a crown for the queen Dad says I am. The crown is in the center. It is not a princess crown. Not dainty and sweet. In the background, the names he could have called me emerge:*

*Hija*

*Amiga*

*Erudita*

*Artista*

*Soñador*

*...*

*Daughter*

*Friend*

*Scholar*

*Artist*

*Dreamer*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 96)

## PIECING IT TOGETHER (cont.)

*Today's collage is made up of words and cutouts from magazines.*

*Things That Are Black and Beautiful:*

*A Starless night Sky*

*Storm Clouds*

*Onyx*

*Clarinets*

*Ink*

*Panthers*

*Black Swans*

*Afro Puffs*

*Michelle Obama*

*Me*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 138)

## E. KNOW DREAMS CANNOT ALL COME TRUE

*Sabrina ends the night with a talk about following our dreams and believing in ourselves. "You have to believe you are worthy of love, of happiness. That you are worthy of your wildest dreams coming true."*

*When she says this, so many thoughts rush through my mind. I am thinking about how Mom had plenty of dreams, and E.J. is not short on self-confidence, and Lee Lee has known she wants to be a poet since we were in middle school, so it can't be just about believing and dreaming. My neighborhood is full of big dreamers. But I know that doesn't mean those dreams will come true.*

*I know something happens between the time our mothers and fathers and teachers and mentors send us out into the world telling us, "The world is yours," and "You are beautiful," and "You can be anything," and the time we return to them.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 84-85)

## F. WORK HARD

*"It's kind of not fair for us to feel guilty for getting what we deserve. We work hard." It takes a minute for Sam's words to sink in.*

*I have never thought about my deserving the good things that have happened in my life. Maybe because I know so many people who work hard but still don't get the things they deserve, sometimes not even the things they need.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 57)

## G. FIND POWER

*"I love my Spanish class... It makes me feel like I'm learning a secret code or something. I don't know. It's powerful."*

*"Powerful? Really?" [her father asked.]*

## PIECING IT TOGETHER (cont.)

*“Yes, all language is. That’s what you used to tell me....When it was story time and I didn’t want to stop playing to go read and you would tell me I ought to take every chance I get to open a book because it was once illegal to teach a black person how to read,” I remind him. ...*

*And ever since then I’ve wanted to be a black girl who could read and write in many languages, because I know there was a time when that seemed impossible.”*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 74)

## H. GIVE

*I can’t wait to find out what country we’re going to, what the service learning project will be. Of everything Mrs. Parker has signed me up for, this one means the most. This time it’s not a program offering something I need, but it’s about what I can give.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 13)

## I. SPEAK UP

*Here I am, so focused on learning to speak another language, and I barely use the words I already know.*

*I need to speak up for myself. For what I need, for what I want.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 174)

*“Poor people are the ones who pray. People who don’t have what they need, who can’t pay their rent, who can’t buy healthy food, who can’t save any of their paycheck because every dollar is already accounted for. Those are the people who pray. They pray for miracles, they pray for signs, they pray for good health. Rich people don’t do that,” he tells me. “Plus, God isn’t the one we need to be talking to. We need to talk to the chief of police, the mayor, and the governor. They’re the ones with the power to make change.”*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 182-183)

## J. FIGURE IT OUT

*“You’re too smart to be acting so stupid, Jade. You see how hard I’m working, trying to save every extra penny I get so you can have some kind of life, and you just going to throw away an opportunity that’ll get you into college? So what, Maxine isn’t perfect? This girl graduated from St. Francis as valedictorian. She learned how to navigate this white world, and she is trying to show you how to do the same. You telling me she has nothing to teach you? You better learn how to get from this opportunity what you can and let the rest fall off your back,” Mom says. “You understand what I’m saying, Jade?”*

*I sit still and listen. I know better than to talk back and start an argument.*

*“You better figure out a way to stay in this program and finish strong. You hear me? Figure it out.”*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 169)



## PIECING IT TOGETHER (cont.)

[Maxine] “Now we have to keep working on your learning how not to quit on everything and everyone because they disappoint you or hurt you or make a mistake.”

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 196)

### K. BE

*Be bold.*

*Be brave.*

*Be beautiful.*

*Be brilliant.*

*Be (your) best.*

—PIECING ME TOGETHER (p. 123)

## CLOSING

As Jade and her friends do in the novel, consider ending this discussion or extended lesson with a poem. Lee Lee’s poem (p. 256-258) blends all of the themes of the novel and offers the invitation to RISE.

If you have produced work with readers around this discussion, consider sharing it with your community with an exhibit, open mike, social media, teach-in, or other action.

## CONNECTING

Author Renée Watson would love to hear about your experience with this novel, this guide, and/or to see any artwork or writing that comes from the experience. You can find her on Twitter @reneewatson or online at [www.reneewatson.net](http://www.reneewatson.net).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Renée Watson** writes for children and teens. Her books include young adult novels, **Piecing Me Together** and **This Side of Home**, which was nominated for the Best Fiction for Young Adults by the American Library Association. Her picture book, **Harlem’s Little Blackbird: The Story of Florence Mills** (Random House 2012), received several honors including an NAACP Image Award nomination in children’s literature.



Her novel, **What Momma Left Me**, (Bloomsbury 2010) debuted as the New Voice for 2010 in middle grade fiction. Her one woman show, **Roses are Red Women are Blue**, debuted at the Lincoln Center at a showcase for emerging artists.

## PIECING ME TOGETHER: A Discussion Guide About Race, Class, Gender, and Intersectionality

One of Renée's passions is using the arts to help youth cope with trauma and discuss social issues. Her picture book, **A Place Where Hurricanes Happen** (Random House, 2010), is based on poetry workshops she facilitated with children in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and was featured on NBC Nightly News.

Renée has worked as a writer in residence for several years teaching creative writing and theater in public schools and community centers throughout the nation. Her articles on teaching and arts education have been published in *Rethinking Schools* and *Oregon English Journal*. She is on the Council of Writers for the National Writing Project and is a team member of We Need Diverse Books. She currently teaches courses on writing for children for the Solstice MFA program at Pine Manor College.

Renée has given readings and lectures at many renowned places, including the United Nations Headquarters and the Library of Congress. In 2015 she was honored with the STEAM award for her work in arts education by Inner City Foundation of New York, Inc.

In the summer of 2016 Renée launched I, Too, Arts Collective, a nonprofit committed to nurturing underrepresented voices in the creative arts. She launched the #LangstonsLegacy Campaign to raise funds to lease the Harlem brownstone where Langston Hughes lived and created during the last twenty years of his life. Her hope is to preserve the legacy of Langston Hughes and build on it by providing programming for emerging writers.

Renée grew up in Portland, Oregon, and currently lives in New York City.

## GUIDE AUTHORS

**Kirsten Cappy** is the owner of Curious City, a company that creates tools that invite readers to engage more deeply with the books they read through play, conversation, and social action. Those tools are available free to literacy professionals at [CuriousCityDPW.com](http://CuriousCityDPW.com). Using her degree in Anthropology and her 25-year career of sharing books in early childhood, library, bookstore, and school settings, Kirsten believes deeply in using children's literature to create a more curious and empathetic culture. She is also the co-founder of I'm Your Neighbor, a website ([www.ImYourNeighborBooks.org](http://www.ImYourNeighborBooks.org)) and movement to connect long-term citizens with the immigrant community through immigrant fiction, and The Empathy Drive ([www.EmpathyDrive.org](http://www.EmpathyDrive.org)), a project to draw attention to the power of diverse children's books and to fundraise for diverse book collections in national schools.

**Anne Sibley O'Brien**, is the author and/or illustrator of thirty-six children's books, whose work has received the Author-Illustrator Human & Civil Rights Award from the National Education Association; the Africana Award; two Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature; an Aesop Award; the Global Korea Award, and the Katahdin Award for lifetime achievement from the Maine Library Association. Raised bilingual and bicultural in South Korea as the daughter of medical missionaries, she has spent nearly four decades involved in various forms of diversity education, including exploring and developing models for talking about race in the white community. She is also the co-founder of two projects: I'm Your Neighbor, with Kirsten Cappy, and the Diversity BookFinder (website to be launched in Fall '17), a Bates College collection of picture books featuring people of color, analyzed for theme and content. More information at [www.AnneSibleyOBrien.com](http://www.AnneSibleyOBrien.com).