

THIS IS THE ROPE

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Written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by James Ransome

Ages: 5-8

Themes: African American history, family

Runtime: 9 minutes

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

SUMMARY

A rope found by a little girl under a tree in South Carolina becomes the object that links together generations of a family as it travels north with them to a new life in Brooklyn. The rope is used for tying down suitcases, jump rope, boys' games, and hanging flowers and diapers to dry. The rope follows the path of the girl from South Carolina during the time of the Great Migration, when millions of African American families relocated from the South, seeking better opportunities. Through the story of this family's journey, students will learn about the ties that bind families together and the things that remain amidst life's changes.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify the theme of the story.
- Students will investigate their own family histories and write a short story based on that history.
- Students will conduct an author study of Jacqueline Woodson.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Activate students' thinking. Ask:

- Has anyone ever moved to a new house? A new city? A new state or country?
- How did you feel when you moved?
- What did you bring with you from where you used to live? Why were those things important to your family?

- Is there anything that you, or someone in your family owns, that has been with your family for a very long time? What is it? Why is it important?

Tell students that they are going to watch a movie about a rope that becomes an important piece of a family's history as it travels with them from South Carolina to New York City. Encourage students to watch and listen for ways that the rope is used and to think about why it is important to the characters.

Introduce, or review, finding the theme of a story. Tell students that one way to think about theme is that it is **the message** of the story. Explain that the theme isn't just stated in a story, but that the reader has to pay attention to details throughout the story to figure out the theme. Differentiate between "theme" and "topic or subject." The topic is the main idea of the story, or what it's mostly about, and the theme is a message about people, life, and the world we live in. Provide students examples of themes from familiar stories, movies, or songs. For example, the topic of *Charlotte's Web* is that a talking spider helps save a pig's life. The themes of the story are self-sacrifice, true friendship, and perseverance. Finally, give students a T-chart with "Theme" on one side and "Prove It" (details) on the other. Encourage students to pay attention to details that may connect to a larger message. Revisit this chart after watching the movie to determine the themes of the story.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Common Core Connection Activities:

Revisit the lesson on theme. Ask students to share the ideas that they wrote on their T-charts. If students struggled to identify a theme, provide them with a list of common themes often found in stories, which may include:

- Family relationships
- Friendship
- Death is a natural part of life
- Generosity and kindness bring good things
- Honesty pays off

Guide students towards identifying a theme or themes for *This Is the Rope*. Replay parts of the movie that demonstrate the theme. Fill in the T-chart with the class as a shared writing exercise. It may look like this:

Theme (THE MESSAGE)	Prove It!
<i>Families are tied together through a shared history.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- the narrator's grandmother finds a rope under the tree and uses it as a jump rope- the grandmother and grandfather use the rope to tie their suitcases to the roof of the car when they move north, away from their families- the rope is used as a jump rope by the narrator's mother- the rope is used to tie up the mother's boxes when she goes to college- the rope is used as a jump rope by the narrator- the grandmother gives the narrator a new jump rope and takes the old rope as a reminder of her home

Conduct an author study of Jacqueline Woodson with the class. Show the Weston Woods movies, or read aloud, some of her other books: *The Other Side*, *Show Way*, and *Each Kindness*. Extend the theme lesson to include determining the themes of these other stories and looking for similarities in Woodson's work. Also, explore Jacqueline Woodson's website at www.jacquelinewoodson.com. This website contains a wealth of information about Woodson, her inspiration for ideas, and resources for further research on the topics she writes about.

Have students interview parents, grandparents, and other relatives about their family history. Provide students with guiding questions and a template on which to record their notes. Then, have each student write and illustrate a short story based on part of their family's history. The story can center around an important object, as *This Is the Rope* does, or it can center around a person or significant event. Suggested lessons include:

- Focusing on a small moment, or seed idea
- Writing details that show, not tell
- Stretching out the important parts
- Writing strong leads
- Writing strong endings

After students have published their stories, have a "book release party," in which they share their stories with other students and parents.

OTHER THEME-RELATED TITLES FROM WESTON WOODS

- **Ellington Was Not A Street** by Ntozake Shange, ill. by Kadir Nelson
- **Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad** by Ellen Levine, ill. by Kadir Nelson
- **The Other Side** by Jacqueline Woodson, ill. by E.B. Lewis
- **Show Way** by Jacqueline Woodson, ill. by Hudson Talbott

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