



# BOOK RESUME: IF YOU COME SOFTLY

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

A lyrical story of star-crossed love perfect for readers of *The Hate U Give*, by National Ambassador for Children's Literature Jacqueline Woodson.

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

## REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★"Once again, Woodson handles delicate, even explosive subject matter with exceptional clarity, surety and depth. In this contemporary story about an interracial romance, she seems to slip effortlessly into the skins of both her main characters. . . . Both voices convincingly describe the couple's love-at-first-sight meeting and the gradual building of their trust. The intensity of their emotions will make hearts flutter, then ache as evidence mounts that Ellie's and Jeremiah's 'perfect' love exists in a deeply flawed society. Even as Woodson's lyrical prose draws the audience into the tenderness of young love, her perceptive comments about race and racism will strike a chord with black readers and open the eyes of white readers."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Woodson perceptively explores varieties of love, trust, and friendship, as she develops well-articulated histories for both families. . . . A tale as rich in social and personal insight as any of Woodson's previous books."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Lyrical narrative. . . . This fine author once again shows her gift for penning a novel that will ring true with young adults as it makes subtle comments on social situations."—*School Library Journal*

"Woodson offers readers a poetically conceived novel of young love, permeated with complications of family dynamics, racism, and violence. . . . Woodson unerringly limns the delicate intensity and passionate innocence of first love. . . . The two points of view effectively communicate the loneliness of the two sensitive teenagers and their breathless delight in discovering one another. Characterization is solid and well-developed as both parents and friends focus into reality through the eyes of Miah and Ellie. Their conversations ever so gently open up issues of racism, self-awareness, and moral consciousness."—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

**Title:** If You Come Softly

**Author:** Jacqueline Woodson

**Imprint:** Nancy Paulsen Books

**Publisher:** Penguin Young Readers

**On sale date:** September 28, 1998

**ISBN:** 9780399231124 and 9780142415221

**Format:** Hardcover and Paperback

**Age Range\*:** 12 Up

**Grade Range:** Gr 7 Up  
(Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

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\*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

"A quiet, beautifully etched portrait of a first love that is shattered by the racism, *If You Come Softly* traces the relationship of two teens whose lives intertwine for a short but life-changing time. Ellie is Jewish and white. Jeremiah is black. Both are from well-to-do families where it's sometimes hard to be yourself, and both are new students at Percy Academy. It was Jeremiah's father, a well-known African American filmmaker, who wanted Jeremiah to attend a private school. Jeremiah doesn't let anyone know who his father is, though, or his mother, an accomplished novelist. It's too hard being yourself--being accepted for yourself, if your parents' fame precedes you. For Ellie, Percy was her own choice--made because she liked the sound of the name. "I knew it was a stupid reason to choose a school, but they all seemed exactly alike." Ellie lives with her parents in a large apartment that still echoes with the emptiness of her mother's leaving. It happened twice, and twice her mother returned, but the feeling of abandonment still haunts Ellie, even when she sits in the very same room as her mother harboring the secrets of her heart. One of those secrets is Jeremiah. They meet on the first day of school, and each makes the other feel right. But Ellie isn't sure how her parents would react to Jeremiah, and her heart can't risk finding out. For his part, Jeremiah takes Ellie home to meet his mother, who sees and understands her son's feelings. In his neighborhood, too, he has support, from a best friend whose mother is white and father is black. But he is hesitant to tell his father. "Thing about white people," his father tells him, "they don't know they're white. They know what everybody else is, but they don't know *they're* white." Jeremiah stays silent. Ultimately, however, it is not secrets and silence that separate Jeremiah and Ellie, it is the racism of our society, racism that makes a black teenage boy running with a basketball in a white neighborhood too quickly assumed as suspect, too quickly mistaken for a "tall, dark man" being pursued by the police."—CCBC

"Woodson infuses their romance with the emotional urgency that defines her work and a prescient sense of social justice."—*TIME MAGAZINE*

#### **AWARDS AND ACCOLADES**

- A Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner
- A CCBC Choices Selection
- A Children's Literature & Reading Special Interest Group Notable Books for a Global Society Selection
- A TIME MAGAZINE's 100 Best YA Books of All Time Selection
- On Your Mark, Get Set, Read! Summer Reading, Tween (New York)

#### **MEDIA AND RESOURCES**

- [Penguin Classroom Jacqueline Woodson Educator Guide](#)
- [ALAN Review Author Interview](#)
- [NCTE Author Interview](#)
- [Library of Congress Author Interview](#)
- [San Francisco Public Library Author Interview](#)
- [Mackin Community Author Interview](#)
- [Kids Ask Authors Author Interview](#)

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