



Miracle's Boys

by Jacqueline Woodson

Teacher's Guide

Written By Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

PERMA-BOUND
THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY

CLASSROOM
FAVORITES

A Perma-Bound Production

This guide was prepared using the Penguin edition, ©2000. Other editions may differ.

Synopsis

Chapter 1

Thirteen-year-old Lafayette Bailey is listening to his tough brother Charlie and Charlie's friend Aaron talk about which ethnic group is the "baddest." Lafayette calls his older brother "Newcharlie" because he has become cruel and hostile since his recent return from the Rahway Home for Boys, a juvenile-detention facility where he served a three-year sentence for the armed robbery of a candy store. Charlie is no longer the gentle boy who once cried at the sight of a sick or injured animal. Charlie directs some of his hatred at Lafayette, blaming him for the death of their mother Milagro ("Miracle") from diabetes two years earlier. Lafayette had discovered her body and blames himself for not being able to save her. Lafayette has to share his bedroom with Charlie.

Chapter 2

The boys' father died an heroic death from hypothermia after rescuing a drowning woman and her dog from the frigid Central Park Lake. With both parents dead, the three boys — Ty'ree, Charlie, and Lafayette — are raising themselves. Twenty-two year old Ty'ree has given up hope of college and a career in science so that he can work and raise Lafayette and Charlie. Ty'ree is mature and responsible. He works full-time in the mailroom of a publishing company. Lafayette remembers that one Saturday, Charlie burned up nearly all the pictures of their beloved mother Milagro, who was born in Puerto Rico.

Chapter 3

Charlie says that he wants to be a rapper, but he has done nothing to make his dream come true. Instead,

Charlie is slipping into a life of crime. Being able to stay in their New York City apartment with Ty'ree hinges on whether or not Charlie can stay out of trouble. If Charlie gets into trouble again, the boys will be sent to foster care or to live with their great-aunt Cecile in South Carolina.

Chapter 4

Charlie was twelve-and-a-half when he held up Poncho's candy store three years ago. Ty'ree and Lafayette discuss their mother's death. Lafayette feels very guilty about his inability to have saved her, although there was nothing he could have done.

Chapter 5

In this flashback, we learn that after their mother died, the boys' great-aunt Cecile came from South Carolina to take Ty'ree and Lafayette back with her. She is a kind lady, but the boys want to stay in their home. Charlie is released for the day for his mother's funeral, and blames Lafayette for her death. Lafayette is crushed at the unfair accusation.

Chapter 6

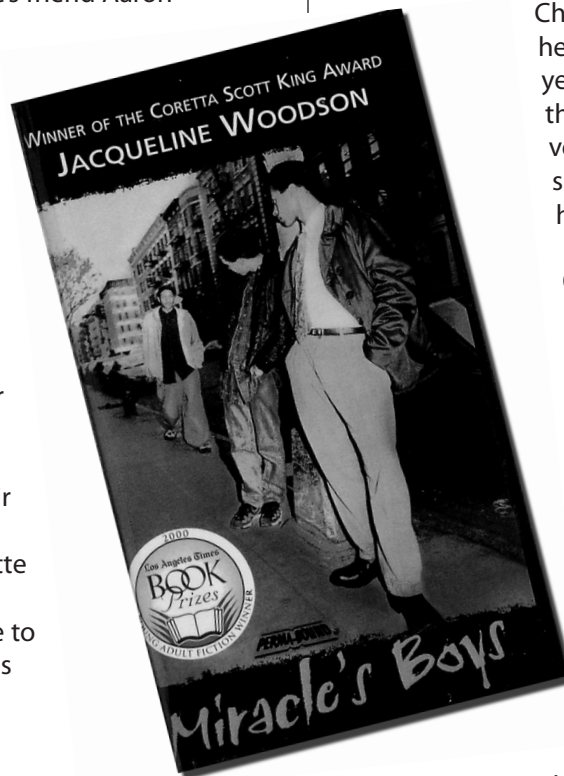
This chapter explains that Ty'ree had gone to a special high school for gifted children and had been accepted to M.I.T. He had turned down the offer, however, to stay home, work, and raise his brothers.

Chapter 7

Ty'ree wants to take Lafayette to the movies as a treat. Ty'ree favors art films and foreign films, while Lafayette likes action movies. Ty'ree discusses how Lafayette has retreated inward since his mother's death, avoiding his friends and blaming himself for the tragedy.

Chapter 8

Lafayette thinks about how poor they are. He remembers how his mother turned down the offer to send him to the Fresh Air Fund. The boys discuss Mama's death.



Ty'ree says "B to B," which means "brother to brother." It is their short-hand for "I love you and will take care of you."

Chapter 9

In a flashback, readers learn how the boys' father died. For the first time, Ty'ree tells Lafayette that he witnessed their father rescue a drowning woman and later dying of hypothermia. This took place before Lafayette was born.

Chapter 10

Although there was nothing he could do, Ty'ree continues to feel guilty for not being able to help his father. This parallels Lafayette's guilt over his mother's death. Ty'ree explains that Charlie is feeling mad, bitter, and helpless because he wasn't present for the death of either parent. Ty'ree says that Charlie has the biggest monkey on his back as a result.

Chapter 11

In another flashback, we learn that Lafayette saw a psychologist for a year after his mother's death. The elderly man, Dr. Vernon, helped him deal with his guilt and loneliness.

Chapter 12

Ty'ree and Lafayette return to the apartment. Lafayette has a bad dream.

Chapter 13

Ty'ree wakes Lafayette because Charlie has been arrested.

Chapter 14

At the police station, Ty'ree and Lafayette see that Charlie has been beaten. The police officer believes Charlie's pleas that he is innocent and releases him. Charlie is innocent: he inadvertently ended up at a gang initiation, where he was attacked. Charlie explains the allure of gangs—they make members feel important and part of a powerful group. We see that Ty'ree is correct that Charlie is suffering deeply from the loss of his parents and his feelings of impotence.

Chapter 15

In a flashback, Mama and Lafayette talk about freedom.

Chapter 16

Lafayette goes outside to play with his friends Smitty and PJ. This shows that he has recovered from the worst of his guilt and grief, because he once again has an interest in others.

Chapter 17

Charlie's "friend" Aaron walks up to the boys. Aaron has joined the gang. He represents what Charlie could have become without his brothers' love and support.

Chapter 18

Lafayette reveals that his mother did wake up the morning she died. The paramedics shocked her twice but she did not live. Lafayette takes out some pictures of his mother that he has saved. Charlie reveals that he robbed a store to get money to take his family to Puerto Rico, his mother's lifelong dream. The boys say "B to B to B," showing they are united in their love and concern.

Timeline of Harlem Events

- Feb. 17, 1919** 369th Regiment marches up Fifth Avenue to Harlem.
- February** First Pan African Congress organized by W.E.B. Du Bois in Paris.
- June to Sept.** Race riots in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Charleston, Knoxville, Omaha, and elsewhere.
- September** Race Relations Commission founded.
- 1920** August Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) Convention held at Madison Square Garden. James Weldon Johnson, first black officer (secretary) of NAACP appointed.
- May 22, 1921** *Shuffle Along* by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake opens. It is the first musical revue written and performed by African Americans. Cast members include Josephine Baker and Florence Mills.
- September** Marcus Garvey founds African Orthodox Church. Second Pan African Congress held. Colored Players Guild of New York founded.
- 1922** First Anti-Lynching legislation approved by House of Representatives.
- Fall** The Cotton Club opens. Marcus Garvey arrested for mail fraud and sentenced to five years in prison. Third Pan African Congress.

- Mar. 21, 1924** Civic Club Dinner, sponsored by *Opportunity*, bringing black writers and white publishers together. This event is considered the formal launching of the New Negro movement.
- Oct. 1925** American Negro Labor Congress held in Chicago.
- May 1927** *In Abraham's Bosom* by Paul Green, with an all-black cast, wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.
 Marcus Garvey deported.
 Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington begin their careers.
 Harlem Globetrotters established.
- Feb. 1929** Negro Experimental Theatre founded.
- October 29** Black Thursday Stock Exchange crash.
- 1933** Cicely Tyson born.
- 1937** Zora Neale Hurston publishes *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Author Sketch

Jacqueline Woodson was born in 1964, in Columbus, Ohio, but during her adolescence, she moved back and forth between South Carolina and New York City, and "never quite felt a part of either place," according to a *Ms.* article by Diane R. Paylor. From her childhood, Woodson felt drawn to a career as a writer. In elementary school, she was the literary editor of her school's magazine. "I used to write on everything," she commented for a Bantam Doubleday Dell Web site. "It was the thing I liked to do the most. I never thought I could have a career as a writer—I always thought it was something I would have to do on the side."



Woodson's seventh-grade teacher convinced her that she should pursue whatever career she felt would make her happiest. Woodson decided to follow the advice and write about communities that were familiar to her. She noted in an interview: "I wanted to write about communities of color. I wanted to write about girls. I wanted to write about friendship and all of these things that I felt

like were missing in a lot of the books that I read as a child."

She earned her BA from Adelphi University on Long Island, New York, in 1985. She makes her home in Brooklyn, New York.

After a brief career teaching at various colleges including Eugene Lang College and Vermont College, Woodson turned to a career as a writer. She has been a freelance writer since 1997.

"I feel compelled to write against stereotypes," Woodson further remarked, "hoping people will see that some issues know no color, class, sexuality." In her *Horn Book* article, Woodson grouped her books into two categories: her "good" books, which deal with relationships between family members and friends, and her more controversial books, which skirt the delicate problem of what is "appropriate" for children to read.

Critic's Corner

Woodson was awarded a MacDowell Colony fellowship, 1990 and 1994 and a Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, MA, 1991-92. She received the Kenyon Review Award for literary excellence in fiction, 1992 and 1995. The following year, *Granta* named her to their Fifty Best American Authors under 40 list. She won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the Coretta Scott King Award for *Miracle's Boys*. Reviews were laudatory.

"Jacqueline Woodson writes with a sure hand and true understanding of the complexity and depth of young people's lives," Emilie Coulter wrote in the Amazon.com review. Woodson "tells a captivating, honest story," she concluded.

Publishers Weekly was equally positive: "Viewing household tensions through Lafayette's eyes, readers will come to realize each character's internal conflicts and recognize their desperate need to cling together as a family." *School Library Journal* said that *Miracle's Boys* is a "compelling novel about three streetwise New York City brothers trying to help one another confront their personal demons. As usual, Woodson's characterizations and dialogue are right on. The dynamics among the brothers are beautifully rendered. The narrative is told through dialogue and Lafayette's introspections so there is not a lot of action, but readers should find this story of tough, self-sufficient young men to be powerful and engaging."

The *Kirkus Reviews* critic noted: "Readers will be caught up in this searing and gritty story of their struggle; Woodson composes a plot without easy answers, and creates characters for whom predictable behavior is all but impossible. A decent, involving novel about a family struggling to remain intact in spite of tremendous obstacles."

Other Books by Jacqueline Woodson

Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Birthday (1990)
Last Summer with Maizon (1990)
The Dear One (1991)
Maizon at Blue Hill (1992)
Between Madison and Palmetto (1993)
Book Chase (1994)
I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This (1994)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun (1995)
We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past (1997)
The House You Pass on the Way (1997)
If You Come Softly (1998)
Lena (1998)
Sweet, Sweet Memory (2000)
The Other Side (2001)
Our Gracie Aunt (2002)
Visiting Day (2002)
Hush (2002)
Locomotion (2003)
Behind You (2004)
Coming on Home Soon (2004)
Show Way (2005)
Feathers (2007)

Bibliography

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Volume 21, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1997.
Children's Literature Review, Volume 49, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1998.
Kirkus Reviews, November 15, 2000, review of *Miracle's Boys*, p. 1704.
Ms., November-December, 1994, Diane R. Paylor, "Bold Type: Jacqueline Woodson's 'Girl Stories,'" p. 77; July, 1995, p. 75.
Publishers Weekly, November 25, 2002, review of *Miracle's Boys*, pp. 68-69.
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 2nd edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1999.
Twentieth-Century Children's Writers, 4th edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1995.
Writers for Young Adults, Scribner (New York, NY), 2000.

General Objectives

1. To analyze the family's difficult situation
2. To understand the novel's title
3. To recognize the importance of setting
4. To assess each character's personality
5. To recognize the novel's theme and lessons that it teaches
6. To understand guilt
7. To explore the ways selflessness can be shown
8. To find examples of courage
9. To sympathize with each character's plight
10. To describe how each character comes to grips with the family's tragedy

Specific Objectives

1. To understand why Mrs. Bailey died
2. To analyze Lafayette's guilt over his mother's death
3. To grasp why Charlie has been incarcerated in a juvenile center for three years
4. To understand how Mr. Bailey died and to appreciate his heroism
5. To analyze Ty'ree's guilt over his father's death
6. To appreciate Ty'ree's sacrifice for his brothers
7. To probe the strong bond among the boys and their love for each other
8. To appreciate how deeply the boys loved their mother
9. To recognize the relationship between gang membership and low self-esteem
10. To compare and contrast Lafayette and Charlie

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Jacqueline Woodson's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

flashback: a scene that breaks into the story to show an earlier part of the action. Flashbacks help fill in missing information, explain the characters' actions, and advance the plot. Significant portions of *Miracle's Boys* are related as a flashback, as the author takes readers from the present to the past to tell the story. The flashbacks include the death of Mr. Bailey twelve years ago and the death of Mrs. Bailey three years ago. The flashbacks allow readers to understand the forces that shaped each of the three boys and the guilt they each carry.

point of view: the position from which a story is told. In *Miracle's Boys*, Woodson uses the first-person point of view. As a result, we see all events through Lafayette's eyes, which gives the events a personal and immediate slant. This has the advantage of giving the novel great immediacy and power. It helps readers identify with Lafayette's emotions and appreciate how he struggles to deal with his grief, guilt, and loss.

conflict in literature: a struggle or fight. Conflict makes a story interesting because readers want to find out the outcome. There are two kinds of conflict. In an external conflict, characters struggle against a force outside themselves. In an internal conflict, characters battle a force within themselves. Novels often contain both external and internal conflicts to advance the plot. For example, Lafayette has an external conflict with his brother Charlie over their mother's death. Both Lafayette and Ty'ree have an external conflict with Charlie over his criminal behavior. Most of all, all three boys have internal conflicts: Lafayette over not being able to prevent his mother's death, Ty'ree at not being able to prevent his father's death, and Charlie over his absence for both deaths.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

William Armstrong, *Souder*
 Sharon Draper, *Tears of a Tiger* and *Forged by Fire*
 Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham and Bud, Not Buddy*
 Sharon G. Flake, *The Skin I'm In*
 Jack Ezra Keats, *The Snowy Day*
 Robert Lipsyte, *The Contender*
 Jeanette Winter, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

Nonfiction

Chrisanne Beckner, *100 African Americans Who Shaped History*
 Louis Haber, *Black Pioneers of Science and Invention*
 Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*
 Cal Massey, *Famous African American Women*
 Diane Patrick, *The New York Public Library Amazing African-American History: A Book of Answers for Kids*
 Nancy I. Sanders, *A Kid's Guide to African American History*
 Jeffrey Stewart, *1001 Things Kids Should Know About African American History*
 Otha Richard Sullivan, *African American Inventors*

DVDs, Videos

African Americans (1993)
Big (1988)
Dealing with Racism and Hate (2002)
Images & Realities: African-American Children (1996)
The Journey of the African-American Athlete (1997)
Landmarks of Faith: The Heritage of African-American Worship (1999)
A Legacy of Patriotism and Valor: African Americans in WW II (1998)
O (2001)
Story of a People: Black Youth (1998)
Story of a People: Roots of Racism (1998)

Audio

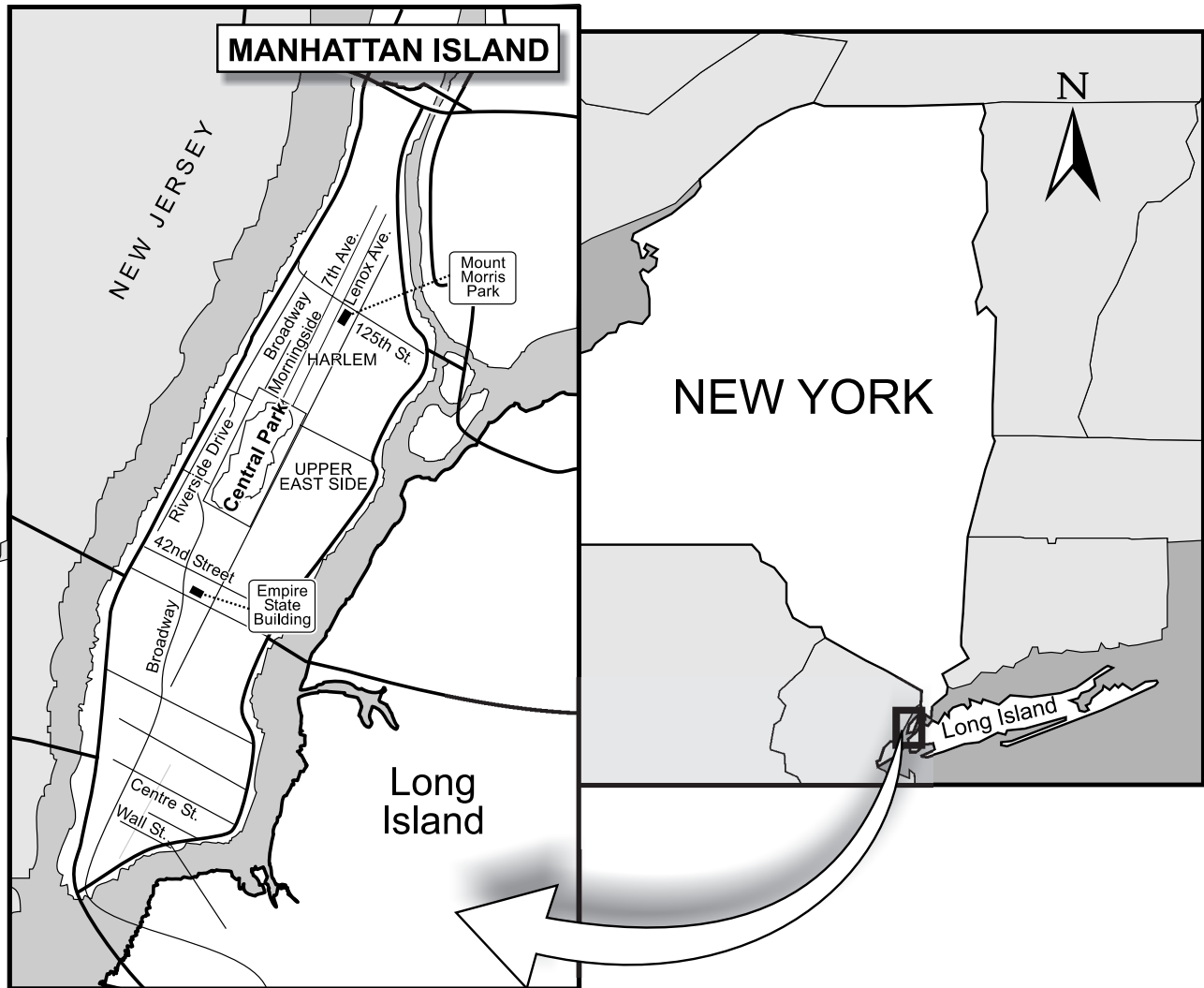
Miracle's Boys (Audiofile)

Internet

Official Jacqueline Woodson Web site
<http://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/>
 Bantam Doubleday Dell, "Jacqueline Woodson."
<http://www.bdd.com/>
 BookPage, Heidi Henneman, "Poetry in Motion."
<http://www.bookpage.com/>

The Importance of Setting

The action takes place in a lower-income part of New York City, in a multiracial ghetto similar to Manhattan's Harlem. The gangs, urban decay, and the characters' poverty shape their lives. This is evident from the first chapter, when Charlie and his friend Aaron rank the different ethnic groups on the basis of their "badness." They decide that African-Americans are the "baddest," followed by Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in gangs, then the Puerto Ricans not in gangs, and then Chinese in gangs. Because of the setting, Charlie is tempted to join a gang but resists; Aaron does indeed join.



The Bailey family grapples with the problems brought about by lack of money, lack of support, and lack of parenting. They are all-too-familiar with lives cut tragically short by violence and drugs, an integral part of their setting. They struggle against seemingly overwhelming odds and succeed. In so doing, they reestablish their family unity and maintain their fragile grip on financial solvency.

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Jacqueline Woodson's *Miracle's Boys* should include these aspects:

Themes

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • death | • poverty |
| • education | • rebellion |
| • family love | • sacrifice |
| • gangs | • survival |
| • maturity | • tragedy |

Motifs

- setting aside your own dreams and goals to help your family
- dealing with guilt over the death of a parent
- being sentenced to a juvenile detention center for robbery
- changing drastically as a result of your experiences
- resisting the pressure to join a gang
- using someone else as a scapegoat for your own guilt
- learning how to survive in a difficult situation
- living in poverty
- making a new family unit
- being part of a mixed-race family

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. Somebody had done that to Charlie: scooped out his heart and sent the empty rind of him on home. (Chap.1, p. 6)
(As a result of his experiences at Rahway Home for Boys, Charlie has become bitter, tough, and cruel. Before this, he had been a sweet boy who cherished and nurtured animals. Charlie has changed so much that Lafayette now calls him "Newcharlie.")
2. "This is all, huh, T?" I whispered. "This is all we got left of Mama." (Chap. 6, p. 47)
(Looking at the curtains in his mother's room, Lafayette says that so little is left of her. Ty'ree reassures him that they have more, but Lafayette does not understand what he means. Ty'ree is referring to the legacy of love, kindness, and responsibility that she has instilled in them.)
3. "And I want him not to think I...I was the reason Mama died. I wasn't the reason." (Chap. 7, p. 56)
(Lafayette was not the cause of his mother's death. She died of diabetes and Lafayette could not have prevented it. Nonetheless, Charlie blames him for her death and Lafayette feels responsible.)
4. "B to B." (Chap. 8, p. 70)
(This means "brother to brother." It is the shorthand that Ty'ree and Lafayette use to mean that they love each other. It shows the very strong bond between the boys and foreshadows their success in rebuilding their family after tragedy.)
5. Nobody had told me he was right there watching our daddy slip into that frozen pond. (Chap. 10, p. 76)
(Lafayette is shocked to learn that Ty'ree watched their father die. The death occurred before Lafayette was born. Lafayette is amazed to learn that Ty'ree understands his feelings of guilt and had a similar experience.)
6. "Daddy said, 'It's all right, T. I'm warm now. I'm warm now.'" (Chap. 10, p. 79)
(In this poignant scene, Mr. Bailey reassures Ty'ree that he is fine, even though he has just emerged from a plunge into the frigid Central Park Lake to save a woman and her dog. This shows what a good father he was, concerned about his son above all else. He dies shortly after this reassurance.)

7. "Charlie got the biggest monkey on his back." (Chap. 10, p. 81)
(Ty'ree is wise enough to realize that even though he and Lafayette feel guilty for the death of their father and mother respectively, at least they were able to be present at their death. Charlie does not have that. As a result, he feels the most tortured of all three boys because he was denied the opportunity to try to prevent a death.)
8. The pain always goes away, Laf. You just hold on, you hear me? (Chap. 14, p. 99)
(Lafayette remembers how Charlie reassured him that the pain of being hurt goes away. This memory foreshadows how the pain each boy feels will indeed be resolved by the end of the story.)
9. "It makes you somebody." (Chap. 14, p. 105)
(Charlie explains the allure of a gang: it gives the members an identity. As part of a gang, you belong to a new kind of family. Charlie shows tremendous strength in resisting the gang.)
10. B to B to B. (Chap. 18, p. 130)
(At the end of the book, "B to B" has become "B to B to B," showing that all three brothers are united in their determination to be a family.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Why was Charlie sent to Rahway Home for Boys?
(Charlie robbed a neighborhood candy store. He was armed with a gun.)
2. How did Charlie change as a result of his experiences at Rahway?
(Prior to being sent to the juvenile facility, Charlie had been a kind boy. He cared for all living things, especially animals and plants. He was kind to his brothers, too. Now, however, he is cruel, tough, and nasty.)
3. How did Mrs. Bailey die?
(She died from diabetes. She fell into a coma and her heart failed.)
4. How did Mr. Bailey die?
(He died of hypothermia after jumping into the frigid Central Park Lake in the winter to save a drowning woman and her dog.)

5. Why did Ty'ree give up the opportunity to go to college?
(He wanted to stay home and take care of his brothers. He decided to make a home for them so they did not have to go to foster care or to be uprooted from their friends and school to live with their great-aunt Cecile in South Carolina.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why does Lafayette feel guilty?
(He feels that he should have been able to save his mother's life. He should have come into her room sooner and called 911 faster.)
7. What does Ty'ree mean when he says that Charlie has "a monkey on his back"?
(He means that Charlie is carrying around far more guilt than even he and Lafayette. Charlie is feeling guilty because he was not present when either of his parents died. This guilt is eating him up.)
8. What does the title mean? Explain its symbolism.
(The boys' mother was named "Milagros." The name means "miracle" in English. On a literal level, the three boys are "Miracle's Boys" because they are their mother's sons. On another level, however, they are "Miracle's Boys" because they carry her kindness and love within them. This enables them to stay together and overcome their guilt and grief. This is a miracle, given the depth of their tragedy.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Why do you think Charlie thinks about joining a gang? Why do you think he finally resists?
(Charlie wants to be tough and fearsome so he does not have to feel any emotion. He wants to be part of something larger than himself so he can overcome the powerlessness he feels.)
10. Do the flashbacks improve the novel or detract from it? Why?
(The flashbacks improve the novel by filling in missing details, especially key events such as the mother's death and the father's death. By presenting this information in a flashback, the author maintains suspense and builds interest.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Write a journal that describes Lafayette's life 10 years in the future.
12. Role-play a scene between Lafayette and his psychologist, Dr. Vernon, while Lafayette is in therapy.

Across the Curriculum

Drama/Speech

1. Ty'ree turned down college to take care of his brothers. In a speech, argue that he did or did not make the correct decision. Consider the long-term effects as well as the short-term ones.
2. Mama tells Lafayette: "Being free means you help someone else get free." With some classmates, debate this issue. Start by defining "freedom."
3. Working with some classmates, act out the scene where Great Aunt Cecile comes to be with the boys after their mother's death.
4. Role-play a scene five years in the future. Show what has happened to each of the three young men in the novel.
5. Debate whether or not the boys should have gone to live with Great Aunt Cecile after they were orphaned.

Art/Music

1. Create a medal and a citation to honor Mr. Bailey for his heroism in saving the woman and her dog.
2. Watch a Jackie Chan movie and explain why Lafayette likes these movies so much.
3. Mama comes from Puerto Rico and very much wants to take her boys there. Make a travel brochure to convince other people to visit the island.
4. Make a totem pole about the characters in this novel. Arrange them from top to bottom, least to most important, as Lafayette understands the figures on a totem pole are arranged.
5. Create a three-dimensional diorama of the boys' apartment.
6. Create a collage of newspaper headlines about Mr. Bailey's death.

Language Arts

1. Interpret Lafayette's dream on page 53. Explain what you think it means and why.
2. Lafayette wonders what would happen if the whole world woke up having to tell the truth. In an essay, explain what you think would happen if this came to pass.
3. Write a poem celebrating this family for their ability to survive and stay together.
4. Choose any movie and write a review of it, as Lafayette reviews the movies that he and Ty'ree see together.
5. Mama and Lafayette used to play a game where he would name a book and she would provide the author. Play this game with a classmate. Make a set of cards, with a book title on the front and the author on the back of each one. See how many titles and authors you and your friends can match.

History/Social Studies

1. Ty'ree has been admitted to M.I.T., the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Find out more about this college by visiting their web site. What can you infer about Ty'ree's goals and achievements from the fact that he was admitted to M.I.T.?
2. Report on the history of gangs in your area. What gangs are powerful? When did they move into the area?
3. Mr. Bailey dies after saving a woman and dog in New York's Central Park. Make a map or model of this historic park.
4. Explain how the foster care system works in your state.
5. Lafayette's teacher wants him to spend a week or two in a camp sponsored by the Fresh Air Fund. What is this organization? Visit their website and report your findings to your classmates.
6. Report on juvenile detention facilities in your state. When were they established? Under what conditions are teenagers sent to these facilities?

Math/Science

1. Ty'ree had worked with Mama to pay their bills every month. Make a budget for the Bailey family or for yourself.
2. Calculate how much money a family of three needs to enjoy a middle-class life in New York City today. Based on your calculations, how much money does Ty'ree have to earn to support himself and his two brothers without just scraping by?
3. Mama died of diabetes. Report on the causes and treatments for this disease. Make a poster so everyone can learn the warning signs of diabetes.
4. Mr. Bailey, the boys' father, died of hypothermia. Explain how this condition is treated. Could treatment have prevented his death? Why or why not?
5. Charlie talks to his plants to get them to grow. Conduct an experiment to see if this really works or not.

Alternate Assessment

1. Watch a foreign movie, the type of movie that Ty'ree enjoys so much. Choose one that has received many awards and an excellent review, such as *My Life as a Dog* or *Cinema Paradiso*. Write a review of the movie, explaining how it did or did not live up to its reputation for you.
2. Working with a small group, role-play the scene in which Ty'ree and Lafayette go to the police station to get Charlie.
3. In your own words, state the novel's theme or message.
4. Write a critical review of the novel for the school newspaper.

Vocabulary

Complete the chart by writing synonyms and antonyms on the lines provided. Write as many as you can.

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. incarnate	_____	_____
2. assembly	_____	_____
3. stiff	_____	_____
4. glassy	_____	_____
5. pure	_____	_____
6. emergency	_____	_____
7. huddled	_____	_____
8. reappear	_____	_____
9. whisper	_____	_____
10. crinkle	_____	_____

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each and explain why it is important in *Miracle's Boys*.

1. honeysuckle oil
2. monkey on his back
3. Newcharlie
4. shoehorn
5. the Fresh Air Fund

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Charles Javier Bailey | F. Lafayette Miguel Bailey |
| B. Ty'ree Alfonso Bailey | G. Dr. Vernon |
| C. Cecile | H. Aaron |
| D. Milagro | I. Smitty |
| E. Jacqueline Woodson | J. LaLa |

- ___ 1. The woman who dies of diabetes
- ___ 2. Lafayette's friend
- ___ 3. The psychologist who treats Lafayette after his mother's death
- ___ 4. The author of *Miracle's Boys*
- ___ 5. The young man who is sent to a detention home for committing a crime
- ___ 6. Charlie's derisive name for his brother Lafayette
- ___ 7. Charlie's mean, nasty friend who joins a gang
- ___ 8. The young man who gave up college to care for his brothers
- ___ 9. The novel's narrator
- ___ 10. The relative who offers to take the boys to her home in South Carolina

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements T if they are true or F if they are false.

- ___ 1. When the novel opens, Lafayette is thirteen years old.
- ___ 2. Ty'ree blames Charlie for the death of their mother.
- ___ 3. Ty'ree is angry and bitter because Charlie had discovered her body and not called 911 in time to save her.
- ___ 4. The boys' father died of hypothermia, the result of rescuing a drowning woman and her dog from the frigid Central Park Lake.
- ___ 5. Charlie burned up nearly all the pictures of their mother, who was born in Puerto Rico.
- ___ 6. Ty'ree wants to be a rapper and he already had one demo record made.
- ___ 7. Ty'ree takes Lafayette to the movies sometimes as a special treat.
- ___ 8. The boys are struggling to maintain their middle-class existence.
- ___ 9. Charlie is beaten during a gang initiation, but he did not want to join the gang.
- ___ 10. Charlie reveals that he robbed a store to get money to take his family to Puerto Rico, his mother's lifelong dream.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Explain why Ty'ree is heroic. What traits make him the most admirable? Why?
- 2. Analyze the title. What does it mean? How does it relate to the novel's theme?
- 3. Argue that the boys would or would not have been better off in foster care or with their great aunt than on their own.
- 4. Compare and contrast Ty'ree and Charlie. Explain how they are similar and different from each other.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Circle the term or phrase to complete each of the following statements.

1. Charlie spent (**three, ten**) years in a juvenile-detention facility.
2. The facility is called the (**Rahway, Cleveland**) Home for Boys.
3. Charlie served his sentence for the armed robbery of a (**man, candy store**).
4. Charlie blames his brother Lafayette for the death of their (**father, mother**).
5. Their mother was born in (**New York City, Puerto Rico**).
6. Ty'ree attended a special high school for gifted children and was accepted at a college called (**Harvard, M.I.T**).
7. Ty'ree likes to watch (**foreign, action**) films, but Lafayette does not like these movies.
8. The boys' father died before (**Ty'ree, Lafayette**) was born.
9. Before he went away, Charlie was very gentle with (**elderly people, dogs**).
10. Lafayette has a bad dream about Charlie and (**ghosts, fish**).

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of speakers from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| ___ 1. The man who helps Lafayette cope with his grief | A. P.J. |
| ___ 2. Charlie's friend who joins a gang | B. Lafayette Miguel Bailey |
| ___ 3. The middle brother | C. Dr. Vernon |
| ___ 4. The boys' beloved mother | D. Newcharlie |
| ___ 5. Lafayette's nickname for his brother | E. Ty'ree |
| ___ 6. Lafayette's friend in the neighborhood | F. Cecile |
| ___ 7. The boys' great aunt | G. Aaron |
| ___ 8. Charlie's nickname for Lafayette | H. Milagro |
| ___ 9. The novel's narrator | I. LaLa |
| ___ 10. The oldest brother; he is mature and kind | J. Charles Javier Bailey |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each and explain why it is important in the story.

1. B to B to B
2. gangs
3. NASA
4. diabetes
5. "Me and Bobby McGee"

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why each boy feels guilty. Give them some advice to help them recover from their guilt.
2. Critics have claimed that the boys' mother seems too good to be true. Argue that she is or is not portrayed realistically, given the way the boys have grown up.
3. Describe the novel's setting and explain its importance to the story.
4. Trace the novel's plot. Including the exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Possible answers

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. incarnate	in human form	abstract
2. assembly	gathering	alone
3. stiff	rigid	limp
4. glassy	glazed	clear
5. pure	clean	unsanitary
6. emergency	crisis	routine
7. huddled	crowded together	spread apart
8. reappear	return	disappear
9. whisper	murmur	shout
10. crinkle	scrunch	straighten out

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

- Honeysuckle oil is one of the beauty products that Mama used. The smell lingers after her death and reminds Lafayette of his mother. It causes him pangs of sadness.
- "Monkey on his back" is Ty'ree's term for the guilt that crushes Charlie. Ty'ree correctly realizes that Charlie is crippled by guilt for not having been present at the death of either of his parents. Thus, he was denied the opportunity to help them.
- "Newcharlie" is the term that Lafayette uses for his brother Charlie. It describes how Charlie has lost his kindness and become bitter and cruel after his return from Rahway Home for Boys.
- Charlie and Aaron talk about how one of the inmates at Rahway made a shoehorn into a weapon. This story shows how the boys are trying to act tough.
- The Fresh Air Fund is the camp for underprivileged kids. It is not fictional. Lafayette's teacher gives him an application. Mama refuses to entertain the idea because she does not want to admit that they are poor enough to qualify for this assistance.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. J |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. G | 8. B |
| 4. E | 9. F |
| 5. A | 10. C |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| 1. three | 6. M.I.T |
| 2. Rahway | 7. foreign |
| 3. candy store | 8. Lafayette |
| 4. mother | 9. dogs |
| 5. Puerto Rico | 10. fish |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

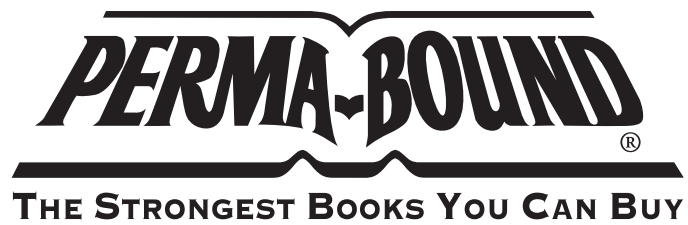
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A |
| 2. G | 7. F |
| 3. J | 8. I |
| 4. H | 9. B |
| 5. D | 10. E |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

- "B to B to B" is the boys' abbreviation for "brother to brother to brother." It is their code way of saying "I love you" and shows they will stick together and help each other.
- Gangs are a major part of the novel, since they permeate the neighborhood. Charlie is drawn to gang membership after he is released from the juvenile detention center because he is looking for a place to belong.
- Ty'ree's dream is to work for NASA. He loves science and math and excels in these subjects at school. He sets aside his dream to take care of his brothers after the death of their mother.
- Diabetes is the disease that kills Milagro, the boys' mother.
- "Me and Bobby McGee" is the song that Milagro always sang. Lafayette yearns to hear her sing it again.

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



Perma-Bound

617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650
Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169
E-Mail: books@perma-bound.com

Perma-Bound Canada

Box 868, Station Main • Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7A2
Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811
E-Mail: perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca

Visit us online at www.perma-bound.com