

# Piecing Me Together



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RENÉE WATSON

Watson was born in Patterson, New Jersey—the youngest of five kids—but she grew up in Portland, Oregon after her parents' divorce. She discovered the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes in school and fell in love with poetry and writing, a passion that her parents and teachers encouraged. As a senior in high school, Watson helped teach poetry to younger students, something that she went on to do professionally for 20 years before becoming a novelist and that she has continued to do since publishing her first books. Watson's first book, a picture book to help explain hurricanes to children, was published during Watson's final term at the New School, where she was studying creative writing and art therapy. She has since written another picture book and several middle grade and young adult novels, though *Piecing Me Together* is her most well-known and critically-acclaimed work. The novel was inspired in part by Watson's experiences as a mentor and as a mentee. She had several wonderful mentors as a child and as a teen, but while acting as a mentor for high school students from her high school, she was angry about the way the organizers spoke about the community in the introductory mentor meeting. Watson reminded them that they needed to respect the neighborhood (Watson and the mentees' home) and ask the kids what *they* needed, rather than just focusing on what the organizers thought needed to change. Today, Watson lives in New York City. In addition to writing, she continues to teach writing and theater to children.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though *Piecing Me Together* doesn't mention the Black Lives Matter movement specifically, it nevertheless looms large over the novel. The movement rose up in response to the 2014 killing of Michael Brown, a black teen, by a white police officer in Mississippi, and it campaigns against violence and systemic racism against black people in the U.S. In the book, the incident in which a young girl, Natasha Ramsey, is beaten by police at a party is reminiscent of the kind of police brutality that Black Lives Matter seeks to eradicate. Jade also points to the rise of recording acts of violence or discrimination against minority individuals via cellphone videos, something that E.J. suggests is necessary for these racist incidents to make the news at all. Oregon's specific history with race also plays a huge role in what Jade experiences: when Oregon entered the union in 1859, it did so with a state constitution that banned African Americans from living in the state. This law wasn't repealed until the 1920s, but Oregon remains one of the whitest states

in the country. Though there were and still are some predominately black neighborhoods in Portland, where Jade lives, the city's booming population and rising popularity are leading to gentrification—that is, historically black and/or low-income neighborhoods are becoming trendy, desirable, and white—something that Mr. Franklin eludes to when he mentions how much his neighborhood has changed in the 40 years he's been there.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a young child, Watson fell in love with the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. She credits his work, as well as Sandra Cisneros's short story sequence [The House on Mango Street](#), as early inspiration for her writing. Watson's middle grade and young adult novels (several of which also take place in Portland, Oregon) also deal with similar themes of friendship, race, and identity that she tackles in *Piecing Me Together*. Her other novels include *What Momma Left Me* and *Watch Us Rise*, which she co-wrote with Ellen Hagan. Watson joins a growing number of black novelists writing books about young black characters, specifically so that young black readers can read about and identify with characters who look like them. Other authors doing this include Kwame Alexander ([The Crossover](#)), Jason Reynolds ([Long Way Down](#)), and Tomi Adeyemi (the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy). Within the novel itself, Maxine and her friends mention *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, a 1974 dramatic prose poem by Ntozake Shange.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Piecing Me Together*
- **When Written:** 2016
- **Where Written:** New York, New York
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** Portland, Oregon
- **Climax:** Lee Lee gives Jade a pep talk encouraging her to give people a second chance, as well as to use her voice and ask for what she needs.
- **Antagonist:** Racism; Poverty
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Harlem Renaissance Revival.** When Watson first moved to Harlem, she expected to find the home of Langston Hughes

designated as a museum. When she discovered that it was just an empty brownstone, she led a community effort to lease the space, renovate it, and turn it into the I, Too Arts Collective. Though it closed at the end of 2019, the collective's digital archives are still available online.

**Early Greatness.** In the second grade, Watson wrote a 21-page story. She credits her teacher at the time both for reading the entire thing despite Watson's hard-to-read handwriting, and for getting Watson notebooks and encouraging her to write afterwards.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In some ways, Jade feels like she must leave her neighborhood in order to succeed: she buses out of her North **Portland** neighborhood every day to attend St. Francis, a private high school on the other side of town where she has a full scholarship. Most people don't think Jade's neighborhood is beautiful, but Jade does her best to see its beauty by picking up littered paper scraps and turning them into collages. The night before Jade starts her junior year, Mom asks Jade to make a friend this year. This hasn't been easy in the past—most students at St. Francis are wealthy, even the black kids. Jade feels like she can only really understand her best friend, Lee Lee. The next morning, Jade notices a young white girl getting off the bus at the same stop. At lunch, Jade goes to a meeting with Mrs. Parker, her guidance counselor. She believes the meeting is about the service learning study abroad trip, which Jade has wanted to go on since she started at St. Francis. Instead, Mrs. Parker gives Jade a folder for the Woman to Woman mentorship program. Awkwardly, Mrs. Parker explains that Jade is at risk for “certain things” because of her circumstances, but she makes it clear that Jade will get a scholarship to college if she completes the program. Jade doesn't want to say yes but she knows she has to. One question on the form asks what Jade wants out of the program, but she leaves it blank.

After school, Lee Lee comes over. Lee Lee tells Jade about **York**, the black slave who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition. Jade has never heard of York and she is struck by his story. The next day, Jade invites the white girl on the bus to sit next to her. Her name is Sam, and the girls bond quickly when they realize that they both get free lunch thanks to their scholarships. By October, they've become close friends. Around this time, Jade attends the first meeting for Woman to Woman. The meeting is awful: Jade's mentor, Maxine, doesn't show up, and the organizer, Sabrina, tries to get everyone to play a name game. Upset, Jade heads home. She brushes off Mom's advice to stand up for herself and she ignores her uncle E.J. A bit later, however, Maxine shows up at Jade's house with a gift. She gives Jade art supplies, which Jade appreciates, but Maxine accepts a

phone call from her boyfriend while she's there. After Maxine leaves, E.J. shares that he knows Maxine—she was dating his friend Jon, but they just broke up. Jade wonders if Maxine stood her up for a boy.

A few days later, Jade goes to Sam's house. Sam's grandmother, Mrs. Franklin, has Alzheimer's and she spews racist rhetoric, but Sam's grandfather, Mr. Franklin, seems kind and calm. The girls talk about what it's like to attend St. Francis. Sam feels guilty for her good fortune but she suggests they shouldn't feel bad for getting what they deserve. This mindset shocks Jade; she knows that people deserve all sorts of things they don't get. However, the girls decide that this year will be better now that they're friends.

Maxine and Jade make plans to go out for brunch for Jade's birthday, but Mom insists that Maxine can't take Jade out without her permission. Mom makes it very clear that even if she's not home much, she's still an involved parent. On Jade's actual birthday, both Lee Lee and Sam cancel their plans. Dad doesn't show up either, but E.J. brings Jade cheesecake—and on Monday, Sam surprises Jade by decorating her locker. After school, Jade visits Dad and she accepts his gift of a digital camera and printer. A few days later, Maxine buys Jade books about black collage artists. Maxine's generosity makes Jade feel warmer about Woman to Woman. She attends a meeting at Sabrina's house about dating, though what Jade really wants to learn about is how to afford a nice house like Sabrina's. Sabrina tells the girls that they must all believe that they're worthy of love and of achieving their dreams, which makes Jade think that people have lots of dreams, but that doesn't mean they'll come true. She feels like the mentors and Mom make her feel whole, while leaving the house makes her feel shattered. Not long after, Kennedy and Josiah invite Jade and Sam to come with them and some friends to get lunch. Jade feels humiliated when one girl makes Jade sit in the front seat, insisting that Jade won't fit in the back, and she feels even worse when another girl talks disparagingly about Northeast Portland. That night, Mom leaves Jade money for dinner and Jade goes to Dairy Queen. There, boys there harass and catcall her, making her feel awful about her weight. She creates a collage about her experience.

At a Woman to Woman outing right after Thanksgiving, Jade and Maxine go to the art museum. Maxine condescendingly reminds Jade of the rules but then she takes a call from Jon, leaving Jade to go through the museum herself. After the museum, Maxine takes Jade out for dinner and she insists that people in North Portland never leave their bubble. Even when Jade points out the economic reasons why her neighbors might not get out much, Maxine doesn't listen and she accuses Jade of being a pessimist. When Jade finally calls Maxine out on her rude behavior, Maxine asks for another chance, and for a while she makes more of an effort to spend time with Jade. In January, she invites Jade to her apartment to hang out with her

friends, Bailey and Kira. When Kira quietly offers to talk to Jade about sex if she ever needs it, Maxine insists that Jade isn't like "those girls." Jade is offended—she knows that Maxine is referring to other girls from Jade's neighborhood—and she also knows that she's not so different from those girls.

One day, Jade and Sam go to the mall after school. While Sam is allowed to take her backpack into a dressing room, a clerk gives Jade the choice of either leaving her bag at the counter or leaving the store. Jade knows that the clerk is racially profiling her, but Sam insists that the clerk just did her job and wasn't racist. Because of this incident, Jade is in a bad mood as she tries to do homework later. Jade's attempt to ask Mom about going to Woman to Woman's healthy eating seminar doesn't go over well, as Mom takes it as an insult to her cooking. Mom is even more upset when, a few days later, she and Jade discuss Jade's upcoming trip to the symphony. At the symphony, the volunteer is prejudiced and rude. Meanwhile, Jade continues to mull over what to do about Sam and she feels horrendous when she learns that their Spanish teacher, Mr. Flores, nominated Sam to go to Costa Rica on the service learning trip and not Jade. Jade tries to be happy for Sam, but she can't.

Maxine invites Jade to her parents' house for Soul Food Sunday. Maxine's siblings, Nathan and Mia, are very nice, as is Nathan's wife, Abby—but Maxine won't let Jade speak for herself. Jade meets Mr. and Mrs. Winters and they sit down for dinner. Mrs. Winters asks for everyone's updates, but after Abby announces that she's pregnant, Mrs. Winters doesn't bother to ask Maxine for news. After dinner, Mrs. Winters insists on packing bags of food for Jade and she scolds Maxine for being unemployed. Jade feels like Maxine's charity case and as though Maxine is ashamed of her. When Jade shares with Mom that she's thinking of quitting Woman to Woman because of Maxine's behavior, Mom loses her temper. She tells Jade to learn as much as she can from Maxine. Mom goes as far as to ask Lee Lee to talk to Jade, and Lee Lee encourages Jade to speak to the Woman to Woman organizers. Jade realizes that she's been so focused on Spanish that she hasn't realized she can speak up for herself in English. A few days later, Jade asks to meet up with Maxine. She tells Maxine that Maxine's behavior makes her feel bad. Maxine apologizes, promises to do better, and even promises to drop Jon—but she also makes Jade promise to give people and experiences second chances.

On Monday, Jade is distraught to learn that police officers in Vancouver beat a young black teen named Natasha Ramsey. At lunch that day, Jade joins a white girl named Hannah in talking rudely to a lunch monitor, Ms. Weber. Although Hannah instigates this and she is much crueler, Mrs. Weber sends Jade instead of Hannah to Mrs. Parker's office. Mrs. Parker sends Jade home. On the phone later, Sam insists that Hannah's lack of punishment had nothing to do with her being white. Exasperated, Jade calls Lee Lee. Jade stays up all night working on a collage about York, and a few days later she talks to

Maxine about what happened with Sam. Maxine encourages Jade to talk to Sam about what she feels and to remember that Sam's friendship offers Jade different but meaningful things.

Taking Maxine and Lee Lee's advice to heart, Jade approaches Mr. Flores and asks why he didn't nominate her for the study abroad trip. He insists he has to be fair to his students, and Jade already receives lots of help. Jade points out that she tutored half the kids going—this is about him seeing her as black instead of as a star student. As the trip approaches, Jade visits Sam. The girls argue: Sam thinks it's unfair that Jade gets to go to the museum and the symphony, while Jade tries to make Sam see that because she's white, people think she deserves to go to Costa Rica. Jade decides it's easier to walk away and she leaves Sam's house. Over spring break, Jade makes collages and she and her friends witness a terrifying but nonviolent police stop. When she returns to school, Sam acknowledges her but they don't speak.

Things with Maxine continue to improve. Maxine and Jade are able to connect over their shared experiences of racism, and Woman to Woman puts on a very useful money management workshop at Jade's request. Jade also looks forward to visiting Mia's art gallery and she even allows Maxine to help her take out her braids one night. Mom is initially displeased, but she begins to warm to Maxine when Maxine admits she doesn't know how to cook. Under Mom's guidance, she starts to learn. The trip to Mia's gallery is wonderful, not least because Jade works up the courage to ask for an internship application. At the next meeting Sabrina asks Jade if she'd submit a collage for the Woman to Woman benefit auction. Jade is thrilled to get her work out there. At the event, Jade speaks to several people who offer to help her and several who make racist assumptions about her. She focuses on all the people who barely know her but who want to help her succeed, such as Andrew, a man who purchases her collage. The next night, Jade and Lee Lee decide to organize a benefit event in honor of Natasha Ramsey. They decide to hold a poetry reading and an art show—and they have the whole thing planned before Jade remembers that she should ask Mia if she'd be willing to host. Fortunately, Mia is, and the event grows as more and more people get involved.

One day in Spanish class, Sam and Jade finally talk to each other. Sam apologizes and she admits she doesn't know how to talk about race. After class, Mr. Flores also apologizes to Jade and he shares that he's put her name down preemptively for the trip next year. After this, Jade and Sam's friendship returns to normal, and Sam throws herself into helping plan the benefit. On the night of the event, Jade looks around in appreciation at her community, and Lee Lee reads a poem about the power of black girls. Jade makes one final collage about York, but it includes a picture of her too. Both she and York hold maps and they are traveling to discover themselves.



## CHARACTERS

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Jade Butler** – The protagonist of the novel. Jade is a high school junior who loves Spanish. She's black and overweight and she lives in a part of **Portland** that's historically black and low-income. However, unlike other kids in Jade's neighborhood, she buses across town to attend a predominantly-white private school called St. Francis. Since Jade is extremely smart and academic, she attends on a full scholarship. More than anything, Jade wants to go on the school's study abroad service trip and help others, rather than always being the recipient of well-intentioned opportunities. She's disappointed when Mrs. Parker nominates Jade for a mentorship program called Woman to Woman, seemingly *instead* of the study abroad program. When things happen to Jade that she doesn't like or agree with, she often keeps what she wants to say inside. Because of this, she doesn't alert the Woman to Woman organizers when her mentor, Maxine, doesn't show up to the first meeting, and she never tells the organizers what she'd like out of the program. The program itself makes Jade feel broken and as though the program wants to fix her, something that Maxine exacerbates through her classist treatment. Jade does experience the bright spot of making a new friend at St. Francis, Sam. Sam is low income like Jade, which helps the girls to bond. However, since Sam is white, she struggles to empathize with Jade about instances of racism. Thanks to Jade's friend Lee Lee, Jade begins to realize that if she doesn't speak up for herself, she'll never get what she wants. As Jade confronts Maxine, the Woman to Woman leaders, her Spanish teacher Mr. Flores, and finally Sam, she learns that it's not that scary to ask for what she wants. She uses this lesson to organize a benefit event for Natasha Ramsey, a black teenager in a nearby city who was a victim of police brutality. Through this, Jade is able to find a sense of dignity and purpose and feel as though she can finally give back to her community. As a collage artist, Jade also learns to do this through her art, which she uses in a diaristic manner to process her emotions as well as to communicate her ideas to others.

**Sam** – A white teen who begins attending St. Francis with Jade. Like Jade, Sam stands out at St. Francis because she buses in from Northeast **Portland**, a neighborhood that many at St. Francis think of as a "polished ghetto" and as "depressing." Sam and Jade bond quickly thanks to their shared bus ride and their realization that they're both at St. Francis on a scholarship—both girls eat free lunch in the cafeteria. Sam lives with her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Franklin, because her mom effectively abandoned her, something that bothers her despite knowing that living with her grandparents is the best place to be. As the girls get closer, Sam shows herself to be a kind and devoted friend. Though she has to cancel on Jade's birthday plans, she surprises Jade at school the next day by decorating

Jade's locker with balloons, allowing Jade to experience what it's like to have a friend at St. Francis for the first time. Sam is also a great listener and she seems to spend much of her time with Jade listening. However, there are clues that Sam isn't entirely okay and she needs someone to listen to *her* more often—she acts briefly jealous before Jade's first Woman to Woman meeting and she implies that she wishes someone could tell that she needed a mentor. Things begin to go downhill in the girls' friendship at the mall one day, when Sam tries to downplay a salesclerk's racist treatment of Jade. To Jade, this feels like Sam telling her that her experiences aren't real and don't matter. Additionally, Sam is nominated to go on the Costa Rica service trip that Jade desperately wants to go on. Sam's relative privilege means that she struggles to see how people give Jade different opportunities simply because Jade is black. Though it takes a few weeks for the girls to discuss openly, Sam eventually admits that she's uncomfortable talking about race. She apologizes for not listening well and she agrees to listen and do better in the future.

**Maxine** – Jade's mentor in the Woman to Woman program. Maxine is a recent graduate from the local **Portland** State University and she attended St. Francis as a teen. Because of this, and because Maxine is also black, Mrs. Parker believes that Maxine and Jade will hit it off immediately. Despite these shared experiences, however, Jade doesn't think very highly of Maxine at first. Maxine is flaky, stands Jade up on several occasions, and often takes phone calls from Jon, her ex-boyfriend, while she's supposed to be spending time with Jade. When Maxine is focused on Jade, she often does things that Jade finds genuinely helpful and kind. For instance, she gives Jade art supplies and buys her books about black collagists, and she's the primary adult in Jade's life who supports her art practice. But for everything good that Maxine does, Jade notices that Maxine inevitably says or does something that makes Jade feel awful. Much of this has to do with Maxine's affluent upbringing: her mother is a surgeon and her father is a real estate agent, so Maxine grew up in a big house in the rich part of town. She attended St. Francis because her parents could pay for her to go, and so she doesn't have any conception of what it's like to be poor or to live in Jade's neighborhood. Maxine also makes rude assumptions about Mom, such as that Mom is an uncaring and uninvolved parent just because she works long hours. Things come to a head after Maxine invites Jade to join her family for dinner. Here, Jade meets Maxine's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Winters, as well as her siblings Mia and Nathan. Jade feels out of place in the family's mansion and she's crushed when Maxine says in front of Jade that she wants her mom to see that she's doing something meaningful. Jade takes this to mean that Maxine is participating in Woman to Woman to make herself feel better, not to actually help Jade. However, once Jade speaks up for herself and asks Maxine to treat her more respectfully, Maxine takes Jade's request to heart. She shows that with a little guidance, she is more than willing—and

able—to provide help that makes Jade feel dignified and cared for.

**Mom** – Jade’s mother. Mom had Jade when she was 16 and so she didn’t finish school or attend college. Because of this, it’s her dream to see Jade succeed academically, and she’s one of Jade’s biggest supporters and cheerleaders as Jade attends St. Francis. Mom works as home help for an elderly lady named Ms. Louise; though she used to work as a maid in a hospital, she was fired for stealing blankets and toiletries. Mom works long hours and she has worked for Ms. Louise for several years, but she still struggles to keep food in the house. Even though Mom isn’t around much, she’s still a major influence on Jade. Jade knows that if she talks back or gets into trouble, Mom will punish her—and she also knows that she has to keep working hard and taking every opportunity so that she can make Mom proud. Though Mom is initially excited about the Woman to Woman program since the organization will give Jade a college scholarship for participating, she struggles throughout the first few months. She sees Jade’s mentor, Maxine, as a threat, especially since Maxine doesn’t seem to think that Mom a caring, involved parent. Because of this, Mom lashes out unfairly at Jade on occasion when Jade uses upper-class language or suggests they cook food differently. Mom only comes around to Maxine when she discovers that Maxine doesn’t know how to cook and she begins giving Maxine lessons. When Mom feels like she has something to give, she feels better about accepting Maxine’s help with Jade. With this understanding, Mom is then able to be a better parent to Jade and be more supportive of her artwork, her academics, and her involvement with Woman to Woman.

**Mrs. Parker** – Jade’s guidance counselor at St. Francis. Mrs. Parker is an older white woman and she has a black son-in-law, so she sees herself as uniquely positioned to help black kids like Jade navigate St. Francis and the world of college. Despite Mrs. Parker’s good intentions, however, she often comes off as tone-deaf. Jade can only shake her head at Mrs. Parker’s love for the Winterhawks, the local hockey team that has a Native American mascot. To Jade, this reveals that Mrs. Parker isn’t willing to interrogate why things might be racist or inappropriate, and this unwillingness to think critically about racism bleeds over into the way that Mrs. Parker deals with Jade as well. Though Jade desperately wants to go on the study abroad trip, Mrs. Parker seemingly nominates Jade for the Woman to Woman program instead. This comes after two years of other opportunities that Jade believes were intended to bring her up to the level of her white peers, such as essay writing classes and free SAT prep. While most of Mrs. Parker’s racism comes off as offensive but more or less benign, on the day that Jade finds out about police brutality inflicted against a nearby teenage girl named Natasha Ramsey, Mrs. Parker’s inability to connect well with her black students begins to look far more sinister. She has no idea that Jade is experiencing

normal and expected emotional turmoil to a traumatic event, and so she treats Jade sharply and as though Jade is acting out of malice or spite. The novel offers no redemption for Mrs. Parker, though she does seemingly agree to allow Jade to go on the study abroad trip next year when Mr. Flores nominates Jade preemptively.

**E.J.** – Jade’s uncle; E.J. is Mom’s much younger brother. Since E.J. is only 20, Jade feels as though he is more of a sibling than an uncle. E.J. is an aspiring deejay, but in Jade’s opinion, he has been in a tough spot since his best friend, Alan, was murdered sometime before the novel begins. In the last year, E.J. dropped out of college and lost his job, and he now sleeps on Mom’s couch. He deejays gigs and says that he’s looking for another job, but Jade doesn’t believe this—and she also doesn’t believe that E.J. is fine, even though E.J. insists he is. Jade finds E.J.’s current crop of friends troubling, especially since E.J. assures her and Mom that he doesn’t join his friends in activities that Mom and Jade wouldn’t approve of. Despite E.J.’s faults and difficult circumstances, he’s still an involved, supportive, and loving uncle to Jade. He’s goofy and he teases her, but he also gives his real, unfiltered opinions about things such as the police brutality that Natasha Ramsey experiences. He insists that praying is silly and for poor people who have no other way to make a difference; instead of praying, he suggests, the black community needs to protest and contact their police chiefs and other elected officials. E.J. is also fiercely loyal to his sister and so he speaks poorly about Dad whenever he has the opportunity. He sleeps on the couch in the living room, which is both a source of shame for Jade and a source of humor throughout the novel—he can and does sleep through everything going on in their tiny house.

**Lee Lee** – Jade’s best friend in her North **Portland** neighborhood. Lee Lee is an aspiring poet and she attends Northside, the local high school. She and Jade see each other and they talk often when they’re not at school. Because of their years of shared experiences (and the fact that both girls are black), Lee Lee and Jade don’t have to work very hard to connect and understand each other. For instance, Lee Lee understands exactly why Jade is so upset about Natasha Ramsey, a young black girl who experiences police brutality. After a long day spent at St. Francis, Jade doesn’t have to temper her blackness around Lee Lee. Lee Lee is the one to introduce Jade to the story of **York**, the black slave who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition to find the Pacific Ocean. Much of Lee Lee’s homework suggests that Northside isn’t as bad of a school as people in Portland might think; Lee Lee’s projects are engaging and they ask her to think about the structures of racism and prejudice that exist in the world. As an aspiring poet, Lee Lee has a firm grasp of how to use language to get what she wants. Because of this, Lee Lee is the first one who’s able to get through to Jade that she’ll never get what she wants if she never asks for it. Later, the girls put

this idea to work when they begin to plan a benefit (which features an open mic poetry reading and an art show) in honor of Natasha Ramsey.

**Dad** – Jade’s dad. Jade sees that while her birth condemned Mom to a life of poverty, it helped give Dad the kick he needed to get his life together, albeit through questionable means: he began dating a white woman when Jade was a little girl (and while he was still dating Mom), and he’s now engaged to her. His fiancée never appears in person in the novel, and Jade never gives her name, but Jade likes her and she doesn’t seem to hold Dad’s questionable behavior against him. Dad insists that Jade is his queen but he sometimes struggles to follow through on his promises, such as when he fails to show up for her birthday. Because of this, E.J. hates Dad, and Mom never speaks well of him either. In E.J.’s opinion, Dad is doing the bare minimum—and for that matter, he’s inappropriately taking advantage of his college-educated, professional fiancée, whom he’s been engaged to for three years. In E.J.’s understanding, this means that Dad has no intention of following through and marrying her. The one time that Jade visits Dad in the novel, Dad seems caring but somewhat disaffected and forgetful. He is a thoughtful gift-giver, however: he gives Jade a digital camera and a printer for her birthday so that she can use her own photos in her collages.

**Mr. Flores** – Jade and Sam’s Spanish teacher at St. Francis. Jade likes and looks up to Mr. Flores, as he seems kind and Spanish is Jade’s favorite subject. However, after Mr. Flores nominates Sam for the study abroad program and not Jade, Jade’s views on Mr. Flores begin to change. Though Mr. Flores shows himself to be interested in issues of race and social justice—he keeps up with developments in Natasha Ramsey’s case—he also doesn’t offer a satisfying answer when Jade works up the courage to ask why he didn’t nominate her. When Mr. Flores says he didn’t nominate Jade out of fairness (citing all the other help and opportunities Jade gets), Jade gently calls him out for seeing her as a black girl in need of help, not as a star student who deserves to be honored for her academic achievements. Unlike others at St. Francis, Mr. Flores takes action to make amends for overlooking Jade. He nominates her preemptively for the study abroad trip next year and he apologizes, something Jade has never experienced from a teacher before.

**Mia** – Maxine’s sister. Mia owns a gallery in **Portland** and she makes a point to show local and emerging artists, especially artists of color. She’s kind, generous, and interested in getting to know Jade on a more personal level, though she does go along with Maxine’s attempts to change the subject and not “interrogate” Jade. Mia intrigues and inspires Jade both because she works in the arts and because she developed her gallery from a rundown building into a thriving part of the community. When Jade works up the courage to ask Mia about internships, Mia’s calm and no-nonsense reaction helps Jade to understand that asking for help and opportunities isn’t so scary

or difficult. Mia also throws herself into hosting and organizing the benefit event for Natasha Ramsey, driving home that through Woman to Woman, Jade is making connections that will allow her to give back to her community in meaningful ways.

**Mrs. Winters** – Maxine, Mia, and Nathan’s mother and Mr. Winters’s wife. She’s very concerned about appearances and keeps an impeccable, expensive-looking home. Mrs. Winters also loves collecting art by black artists. She’s obviously proud of Nathan and Mia, who are both young professionals and entrepreneurs, but she’s very dismissive and disapproving of Maxine. She takes special offense to the Woman to Woman program, though Jade senses that Maxine chose to do the program in the first place to try to impress Mrs. Winters and show her that she could do something meaningful. Though Mrs. Winters isn’t purposefully or openly rude to Jade, Jade still feels uncomfortable at the Winters’s house. Jade thinks that Mrs. Winters is sympathetic to the point of being rude, as she sends bags and bags of leftovers home with Jade which, in Jade’s mind, just draws attention to her poverty.

**Sabrina** – The founder and executive director of the Woman to Woman mentorship program. She’s tall and thin, with very dark skin, thin braids, and a high-pitched voice. Though Sabrina’s intentions are good, Jade finds her a bit trying at first, as the program itself seems to want to just fix the mentees and take them to cultural events rather than provide useful programming. However, when Jade finally does choose to speak up and ask for what she wants, Sabrina shows that she’s very receptive to input and she honestly wants to serve the mentees. After this, she organizes several seminars that all the mentees love and find useful, and she’s more than happy to step in and help plan the benefit event for Natasha Ramsey.

**Jon** – Maxine’s ex-boyfriend and a friend of E.J.’s. He never appears in person in the novel, but both Maxine and E.J. talk about him. Given Jon’s connection to E.J., Jade can ascertain that Jon is probably a troublemaker and not a great guy to date. Maxine’s friends Bailey and Kira back this up: they share that in their opinion, Jon abused Maxine’s generosity and he didn’t contribute at all to the couple’s finances, as he lost his job right when they moved in together and he never got another one. After Jade calls Maxine out on her bad behavior during their Woman to Woman outings, Maxine promises to stop taking Jon’s calls, in which he presumably tries to convince her that they should back together.

**Natasha Ramsey** – A 15-year-old black girl who lives across the river in Vancouver, Washington. Jade doesn’t know Natasha, but it still hits her hard when she learns that when police raided a house party, they beat Natasha, putting Natasha in intensive care with fractured ribs and a broken jaw. What happened to Natasha traumatizes Jade and all of her black friends and family members, as Natasha looks like she could easily have been a resident of their neighborhood. Eventually, Jade figures

out how to channel her fear, grief, and desire to help others by organizing a benefit art show and poetry reading, with the proceeds going to Natasha's family.

**Mrs. Baker** – Lee Lee's English teacher. Though Mrs. Baker teaches at a public high school with an awful reputation, Jade sees that Mrs. Baker is, in many ways, giving her students a more interesting and nuanced education than any of the teachers at St. Francis. She's also very sensitive to current events that might influence her students' ability to perform well in school, such as the police's beating of Natasha Ramsey. Her assignment to write a poem about what happened to Natasha is the jumping-off point for Jade, Lee Lee, and Sam to plan the benefit event for Natasha's family.

**Bailey** – One of Maxine's best friends. She wears her hair braided into thick cords and pinned into a bun. Bailey grills Maxine about Jon and she shows that she cares deeply for her friend and she wants Maxine to date someone who's worthy of her. She also gives Jade helpful advice about college. Bailey attended the University of San Diego and she says that once she found the essentials—a place to get hair care products and a black church—she was fine. She also leads a seminar on money management during college for Woman to Woman's mentees.

**Kennedy/Glamour Girl** – One of the only other black students at St. Francis. Though Jade thought at first that this meant that she and Kennedy might be able to connect and be friends, she soon discovered that Kennedy's family is in a much higher income bracket. Because of this, and because of Kennedy's love of makeup and fancy purses, Jade often refers to her as Glamour Girl. Kennedy doesn't seem especially scholarly (she often can't find a pen in her purse) and she speaks rudely about Sam's neighborhood.

**Josiah** – One of the only other black students at St. Francis. Josiah is nice and fun to be around when Jade tutors him one-on-one in Spanish, but he turns into an entirely different person when he's around his white friends at school. Though Jade writes him off for most of the novel because of this, she does ask him to help with social media for the benefit event for Natasha Ramsey, as she knows that Josiah is interested in computers and technology. Josiah also sets up a livestream for people who can't be there for the open mic.

**Gina** – One of Woman to Woman's board members. Gina is a short white woman with spiky black hair. A former painter herself, Gina speaks at length with Jade at the benefit event and she offers to help Jade network in the future. She also stands up for Jade when a young man acts surprised that Jade is so "articulate" and "well spoken," calling the man out on his racist assumptions.

**Kira** – One of Maxine's best friends. She has straight, light brown hair. Along with Bailey, she tells Maxine that she deserves better than someone like Jon. Kira's advice about

college is helpful for Jade, as she attended the local **Portland** State University and lived on campus. She's in her final year when Jade meets her in January.

**Alan** – E.J.'s best friend. He was murdered in a shootout sometime before the novel begins. The event was traumatizing for E.J.—Jade suggests that E.J.'s trauma and grief is what caused him to drop out of school and fall in with the crowd of guys he hangs out with in the present.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mr. Franklin** – Sam's grandfather and her primary caregiver, and Mrs. Franklin's husband. Though at first Mr. Franklin seems to Jade to be a typical unthinking white man, he is surprisingly sensitive and well-read on race issues. He's one of the few white adults who says anything to Jade about Natasha Ramsey.

**Mrs. Franklin** – Sam's elderly grandmother and Mr. Franklin's wife. Mrs. Franklin suffers from Alzheimer's disease and so she behaves erratically and unpredictably. Mrs. Franklin fears intruders, and if she doesn't ignore Sam when Sam gets home from school in the afternoons, she spews racist rhetoric unprovoked.

**Mr. Winters** – Maxine, Mia, and Nathan's father and Mrs. Winters's husband. He's a very successful real estate agent, so he raised his family in a big house in an expensive part of **Portland**. The house is filled with modern art by prominent African American artists.

**Hannah** – A white girl who, along with Jade, talks back to Ms. Weber one day at lunch. Because Hannah is white and because her parents give lots of money to St. Francis, Hannah doesn't get in trouble but Jade does.

**Andrea** – Lee Lee's cousin. Andrea is about the same age as Lee Lee and Jade, and the girls all spend much of their free time together.

**Kobe** – Lee Lee and Andrea's cousin. Though Kobe doesn't live with Andrea and Lee Lee, he spends much of his time at their house.

**Nathan** – Maxine's brother and Abby's husband. He's kind to Jade and jokes with everyone, and he's clearly a point of pride for Mrs. Winters.

**Abby** – Nathan's wife. On the day that Jade joins the family for dinner, she announces that she's pregnant.

**Ms. Weber** – A rude and racist lunch monitor who sends Jade to Mrs. Parker for punishment when both Jade and Hannah talk back to her during lunch one day.

**Andrew** – A kind, wealthy white man who buys Jade's collage piece at the Woman to Woman gala and silent auction.

**Rose** – One of the only other black girls at St. Francis. Rose is nice, but she's a year older than Jade, so they don't talk much.

**Frank** – The kind and generous owner of a convenience store in

Jade's neighborhood.

**Ms. Louise** – The wealthy elderly lady whom Mom cares for.

**Jasmine** – One of Jade's fellow mentees in the Woman to Woman program.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND DISCRIMINATION

*Piecing Me Together* follows high school student Jade throughout her junior year. Jade is an anomaly in her neighborhood, but the pride of it: rather than attend the neighborhood's public high school, she buses to a private school called St. Francis, where she attends on a scholarship. At St. Francis, however, Jade is also an anomaly—she's one of only a handful of black students, in addition to being poor and overweight. As Jade navigates her neighborhood, school, and a mentorship program called Woman to Woman that seeks to elevate black girls like Jade through sometimes questionable means, she has to constantly figure out how to navigate the intersections of her many identities—and indeed, the varied and overlapping identities of her friends and mentors. Through this, *Piecing Me Together* makes it clear that it's impossible to boil down a person's identity to a single defining characteristic, or even a handful of characteristics. People identify in myriad ways, which means not only that they contain multitudes—it also means that people whose identities are marginalized, like Jade, can experience discrimination for a variety of different but connected reasons.

*Piecing Me Together* makes it clear that it's universally offensive—and even dangerous—to look at someone and see only their various identity markers. Jade introduces herself by talking about her dreams and wants to do most: learn Spanish, which will give her the opportunity to get out of **Portland** and help others by going on the school's yearly service learning trip. Though Jade is forthcoming about being black and poor, she also makes sure that the reader is aware that she's proud of her roles beyond these markers: daughter, niece, and scholar. Jade's pride in who she is and what she can do contrasts greatly with her guidance counselor, Mrs. Parker's, reasoning behind nominating Jade for the Woman to Woman mentorship program. Awkwardly and uncomfortably, Mrs. Parker says she nominated Jade because "young people with [her] set of circumstances are, well, at risk for certain things." That is, Mrs. Parker distills Jade down to the circumstances and parts of her

that, statistically speaking, are going to make her life more difficult (such as being poor, black, and female), rather than looking at Jade as a whole person who is *already* on a path to success despite her difficult circumstances.

Though this kind of discrimination is emotionally taxing for Jade, she and her black friends are aware that because they're black, female, and poor, they're not just at risk of having well-meaning white people talk down to them—they're also at risk of experiencing police brutality. This becomes especially clear to them when they hear that police officers broke the jaw of Natasha Ramsey, a young black girl from across the river—supposedly for resisting arrest and talking back when the officers showed up at a house party. Jade and her best friend, Lee Lee, are well aware that what happened to Natasha could easily happen to them or their loved ones, simply because of their sex and the color of their skin.

Jade also pays close attention to the ways in which her various identity markers either allow her to connect with her classmates or make her feel as though she lives worlds away from them. To illustrate how poverty alienates her from her classmates, Jade recounts a time when one of her teachers asked the class to think about "invisible people" in their communities, and one white classmate mentioned her housekeeper. Jade shares that she looked to the one other black student in the class, Kennedy, hoping that they could bond over what seemed like the speaker's ridiculous wealth, but Kennedy instead accused the girl of stealing her answer. Because Kennedy is in such a wildly different income bracket from Jade, the two are never able to connect over being black. This works in the opposite direction when Jade befriends Sam, a white girl who also rides the bus to school. Like Jade, Sam is extremely poor and attends St. Francis on a scholarship. The girls bond quickly over the many things this means that they share, such as busing in from neighborhoods that their classmates refer to as "depressing" or "ghettos" and having to navigate the school cafeteria every day for their free lunches.

Of course, this isn't to say that the girls don't experience major differences in how others treat them due to their skin color. Their Spanish teacher, Mr. Flores, nominates Sam to go on the service learning trip to Costa Rica over spring break, something that Jade has worked toward since she was a freshman—while Jade, as part of the Woman to Woman program, sits through questionably useful seminars about "loving yourself," dating, and how to host a "girls' night" with vegan-friendly snacks. Jade recognizes that because Sam is white, her teachers see her as deserving of opportunities like going to Costa Rica, while Jade, because she's black, is offered opportunities that seek to (in theory) bring her up to the level of her white peers. However, given Jade's hard work and academic ability, her teachers are actually diminishing her talents and patronizing her rather than truly helping her. Since Jade tutors most of the classmates who go on the trip, she understands that she's not passed over

because she's not a good enough student: rather, it's because her teachers see her merely as a poor black girl who should be treated differently than her white peers.

Though the novel offers no real remedies for the discrimination Jade experiences, it does suggest that it's important to talk about how people's intersecting identities color how they see the world and how the world sees them. By telling Jade's story, the novel humanizes marginalized people like Jade, simply by showing that she is so much more than just poor and black—she's a multifaceted human being deserving of respect and kindness.



### THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Jade, a high school student, loves language. She's dedicated to learning Spanish and wants to go on her school's yearly service learning trip to Costa

Rica for the language experience, as well as for the opportunity to help others. Further, Jade characterizes language—and a foreign language like Spanish in particular—as something freeing: she believes that as a bilingual person, she'll have many more opportunities at success later in life. However, as the novel progresses, Jade comes to realize that while her characterization of Spanish as freeing may be correct, it nevertheless represents a somewhat narrow view of the power of language and what it can do. Ultimately, Jade learns that all forms of language—English and Spanish, spoken and written, as well as creative and poetic—can be freeing, if only she's willing to use them to express herself and speak up for what she wants. On the other hand, remaining silent is a surefire way to feel isolated, unheard, and unmoored.

As the novel is written from Jade's perspective, readers get a close look at Jade's inner monologue. On Jade's first day of school, it quickly becomes clear that she wants to say lots of things but chooses not to: she doesn't catch her new classmate Sam's attention on the bus and she doesn't ask the questions she'd like to when her counselor, Mrs. Parker, tells her about the Woman to Woman mentorship program. Because of her own silence, Jade ends her first day annoyed, beaten down, and alone. This, however, stands in sharp contrast to the way Jade thinks of Spanish: she opens her story by telling the reader, "I am learning to speak. To give myself a way out. A way in." Jade is speaking specifically about Spanish, which she positions as a skill that will allow her to escape her hometown of **Portland** and go somewhere better. This includes going to Costa Rica on the service learning trip, but it also includes college and beyond—bilingual people, Jade explains, have more "ways in" than people who only speak one language. The differences in the way Jade thinks about Spanish and English suggests that she's thinking about language in a very particular way—it may give her power in the future but it doesn't necessarily give her the power or agency she craves in the present.

However, as the novel progresses, Jade gradually expands the

ways in which she's "learning to speak." In addition to being a talented academic, Jade is also an avid collage artist. Collage gives Jade a way to take ordinary things—gum wrappers, bus schedules, newspapers, photographs of her friends—and turn them into works of art that illustrate her experience of being black as well as her friends' emotional pain. As Jade becomes fascinated by **York**, the black slave who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition throughout the Western U.S., collage also becomes a way of pursuing her interest about his journey and relate to York as a fellow person of color. At first, collage is a private thing for Jade, not least because her mom makes it very clear that Jade is a good student first and an artist second. When the Woman to Woman organization asks Jade if she'd be willing to create a piece to donate to the organization's gala and silent auction, Jade suddenly discovers that collage is more than just a healthy way to connect with herself and voice her pain in a diaristic manner—other people are also interested in hearing what she has to say. Collage, then, becomes a jumping-off point as Jade begins to find her voice and use it confidently. As she learns to more effectively communicate through her art as well as speak about it to buyers (many of whom are very impressed and offer to help Jade network in the future), Jade makes an important discovery: when she expresses herself, even just visually, people will listen.

Jade's artwork helps her develop the confidence she needs to raise her voice in other settings, like when her white friend Sam behaves in unwittingly racist ways. Jade is also able to talk to her mentor, Maxine, about Woman to Woman's questionable programming, as well as confront Mr. Flores, Jade's Spanish teacher who didn't nominate her for the Costa Rica trip. In all three cases, Jade discovers that raising her voice isn't actually as difficult or as scary as she thought it would be. Sam is more than willing to apologize and do better, and Maxine is genuinely interested in hearing what Jade has to say and what she wants out of her mentorship experience. And because Jade has the courage to speak up about what she wants to learn, everyone in the program gets the opportunity to attend workshops that are genuinely useful and interesting, such as ones about money management. Most cathartically for Jade, her conversation with Mr. Flores, in which she expresses her hurt and confusion at his choice to not nominate her, culminates weeks later in his proactively nominating Jade for the service learning trip next year. As questions regarding being passed over are ones that Jade has avoided asking for months by this point, Jade learns that it doesn't hurt to ask—others will never know how badly she wants something if she doesn't speak up. Through this, the novel makes the point that people cannot go through life hoping that others will know what they want and need intuitively. Rather, people have a much better chance of getting what they need when they speak up and speak out, no matter the language or the medium.



## MENTORSHIP, OPPORTUNITY, AND DIGNITY

Because Jade is a poor young black woman who's extremely focused on doing well in school, she is the recipient of many opportunities meant to help her succeed or expose her to things she wouldn't otherwise get the chance to experience. While Jade fully understands how important and beneficial these opportunities are, she also resents them. She tells the reader that, "girls like [her], 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 [they] get." Essentially, Jade suggests that if she wants to do well and eventually get out of **Portland**, she has to smile and accept every offer of help that comes her way, no matter how demeaning, racist, or silly those offers might seem. As Jade navigates the Woman to Woman mentorship program and engages with other mentor figures in her life, the novel shows clearly that if these programs and other types of opportunities targeted at young people like Jade are to have the desired effect, they must honor the dignity of the recipients. For this to happen, mentors must view their mentees as full people with thoughts and desires of their own—not as broken people in need of fixing, or as status symbols that allow mentors to prove their sympathetic and generous natures.

Jade is extremely offended when Mrs. Parker, her guidance counselor, calls her in to tell her about the Woman to Woman mentorship program. From the moment Jade learns about the meeting, she hopes that Mrs. Parker is going to tell her that she's been nominated to go on the service learning trip to Costa Rica. Importantly, Jade wants to go on the Costa Rica trip because it's a *service* trip—that is, a chance for her to help others. More than anything, Jade wants to be seen as a person who has something to give and a choice in what she accepts from others. The Costa Rica trip would give her a rare chance to give back and feel normal—while the Woman to Woman program makes Jade feel as though she was only nominated because she's black and poor. In describing the program, however, Mrs. Parker notes that if Jade completes the program, she'll earn a scholarship to any Oregon college. Because of this, Jade feels like she has no choice but to accept—she knows (and her mom notes at several points) that Jade has few other options when it comes to affording college. However, this doesn't change the fact that Jade still feels demeaned by the program, as well as by the fact that she has so few opportunities that *don't* feel demeaning. To Jade, the program seems designed to make people like Mrs. Parker and like Jade's Woman to Woman mentor, Maxine, feel good about themselves by lifting up young women they see as broken and disadvantaged.

This all becomes increasingly difficult for Jade to bear as she wades into the program and gets to know Maxine. Mrs. Parker chose Maxine as Jade's mentor because Maxine is also black,

attended St. Francis, and has since graduated from college. Though everyone involved seems to think that this means Maxine and Jade will get along well, Maxine makes Jade feel small and unimportant from the start by constantly taking calls from her ex-boyfriend and regularly skipping scheduled outings and activities. These choices make Jade feel disrespected—and in some ways, as though she has more to teach Maxine about "loving herself" (which is the topic of one of the Woman to Woman program's seminars) than Maxine has to teach Jade. Unwittingly or not, Maxine and the program at large impose what they think their mentees need on the mentees, rather than asking the mentees what they want out of the program. This results in a questionably useful seminar on self-love, as well as outings to local Portland cultural events and attractions that, while fun and interesting, Jade doesn't find especially useful. What she hoped to get out of the program were practical lessons, such as how to make a budget and succeed as a young black woman in college, not just meals out and trips to the symphony.

Because of Maxine and Woman to Woman's disregard for the mentees, Jade comes away from most Woman to Woman events feeling as though the organization—and Maxine in particular—think that she's broken. This begins to change when Jade finally begins to speak up for herself and ask for what she wants out of the program—and has the opportunity to give back to others in a way that empowers Jade and her peers. Jade eventually works up the courage to tell Maxine how hurtful her behavior is and to share with Maxine what she'd like out of the program. Maxine not only agrees to change her behavior to be more respectful of Jade, but she also takes Jade's concerns about the program to the people in charge, something that leads to programming that's far more useful and meaningful to the mentees than what the organization had planned without their input. In short, Maxine finally begins to listen to what Jade wants rather than forcing Jade to sit through what Maxine and the program think 17-year-old girls need.

Even more meaningful, however, is the way that Maxine and Woman to Woman rally to help Jade and her friends Sam and Lee Lee organize a benefit art show and poetry reading for the family of Natasha Ramsey, a young black girl who suffered police brutality. The girls plan the whole thing themselves before even asking for help, and this event gives all three of them a sense of dignity, purpose, and confidence. Through the turnaround in Maxine's behavior and the benefit event in particular, *Piecing Me Together* suggests that help for young people like Jade is only productive and effective when it gives them agency, control, and dignity—if help doesn't actually empower those it's supposed to, or it makes them feel inferior, it isn't help at all.



## FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is a difficult subject for Jade: since starting at St. Francis, a private high school, two years ago, she hasn't made any close friends at school. Though Jade isn't bullied, she feels as though she's incompatible with the majority of her classmates, and instead spends most of her free time with kids she grew up with, such as her best friend Lee Lee and Lee Lee's cousins. This all begins to change when a girl named Sam starts at St. Francis, as she, like Jade, takes the bus to school from the opposite side of the city. As the girls' friendship develops—and, for a time, falls apart—Jade begins to discover that friendship isn't just about having things in common. The book demonstrates that although similarities may be a precursor to friendship, true friendships only grow when people demonstrate that they're open, curious, empathetic, and willing to stand up for their friends as needed.

Sam and Jade bond immediately over their shared experience of poverty. In a school where most students' families pay thousands of dollars in tuition, most students drive themselves to school, and many go out to lunch every day in addition to extravagant excursions every weekend, it's a relief for Sam and Jade that they'll both be eating free lunch in the cafeteria. And it's not just the companionship that makes this attractive: it's the fact that both girls understand what it's like to get a full meal at school after what was probably a minimal (at best) breakfast at home and possibly some midmorning candy out of a teacher's candy dish. Especially when considered alongside Jade's friendship with Lee Lee, this suggests clearly that friendships arise when people share important, defining experiences or qualities. Sam and Jade share their poverty, while Jade and Lee Lee share being black and growing up in a neighborhood that many people consider to be a "ghetto."

Things begin to go downhill between Sam and Jade thanks to two events: an incident of racism directed at Jade that happens while the girls are at the mall together, and Sam's nomination for the Costa Rica service trip at school. While at a store at the mall, a clerk asks Jade—who can't fit into any of the clothes or afford to buy anything—to check her backpack at the counter and then orders Jade to leave when she refuses. Jade is one of several women at the store with a large bag, but she's the only black person, and Jade recognizes that this is the only reason the clerk treats her this way. However, Sam, who is white, suggests that the clerk was just doing her job, thereby invalidating Jade's experience and making Jade feel as though Sam will never be able to empathize with her. This begins to poison Jade's thoughts about Sam and makes it even more hurtful when Sam is nominated to go to Costa Rica and Jade isn't—especially since Jade has worked so hard with the goal of going on the trip. The girls stop talking to each other once Sam leaves for Costa Rica, and for a time, Jade believes that their friendship is over. However, Lee Lee points out to Jade that she

doesn't usually give people many chances to do better—and that Sam won't know what "better" means if Jade doesn't say anything. While this certainly doesn't excuse Sam's dismissal of the racism Jade experienced, it does suggest that friends have a responsibility to speak up for what they need in their friendships. Indeed, when Jade finally does talk to Sam in Spanish class one day, Sam admits that she doesn't know how to talk about racism like what Jade experienced. Sam clearly didn't behave the way she did with the express purpose of hurting Jade—and when Jade points out where Sam went wrong, Sam apologizes without making excuses and she promises to do better in the future. This, the novel suggests, is a best-case scenario, as it's one that gives the girls practice in resolving conflict and helps them develop empathy, two things that the novel insists are necessary to a successful friendship.

Though a much more formal relationship in many ways, Jade's relationship with Maxine (her mentor at the Woman to Woman program) also becomes a friendship as the two young women gradually open up, reaffirm their commitments, and start to listen more carefully to each other. At first, Maxine doesn't seem to take the program seriously. She blows Jade off on several occasions, spends her time on her phone dealing with a messy breakup, and is uninterested in actually listening to what Jade wants and needs from their relationship—that is, a person who relates to her and can show her how to navigate the world as a successful black woman. Like Jade's conflict with Sam, Jade writes Maxine off at several points. However, after Lee Lee's pep talk, Jade works up the courage to call Maxine out on her bad behavior and asks for what she needs out of their relationship—and doing this allows Maxine and Jade to form an understanding with the potential to blossom into a real, supportive friendship over the course of the two-year program.

Through the trajectories of Jade's friendships with both Sam and Maxine, the novel makes it clear that it's easy to begin friendships with people who share important similarities, but that's not what keeps friendships strong. Rather, friendships continue and thrive when friends are able to forgive each other for their mistakes, ask for what they need, and develop empathy for and understanding of each other's situations.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## YORK

York—the black slave who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition throughout the Western U.S.—is a symbol for Jade's own experience with navigating the discrimination she faces as person of color. At first, York's story speaks to how out of place Jade feels at St. Francis, as in the

two years she's been there, none of her history teachers have ever mentioned York. Jade finds out about York from Lee Lee, her best friend who attends the local public high school in their predominately black and low-income neighborhood. As Jade does more research into York's biography, she draws a number of important parallels that help her identify with York. For instance, York was the only black person on Lewis and Clark's expedition, and during the expedition, he was allowed to carry a gun and got a vote in matters pertaining to the journey. However, as a black person in the first few years of the 19th century, Jade recognizes that these privileges were symbolic more than anything else—York may have had power briefly during the expedition, as Clark didn't free York until years after their return east.

Jade sees that at St. Francis, she occupies a similar position: as one of the only black students at school, she's a curiosity and she doesn't feel like she can actually speak out or advocate for herself, given her understanding that she'll be seen as nothing more than black and angry. Similarly, the opportunities she's awarded (such as a place in the Woman to Woman mentorship program) seem contrived and patronizing rather than genuine—in Jade's mind, efforts like this are a way for white people to feel good about themselves for helping her, rather than genuinely beneficial experiences for her. Like York's false sense of temporary freedom, then, Jade remains disempowered in her environment despite the opportunities awarded to her by white authority figures.



## PORTLAND

As Jade describes the city of Portland and its various neighborhoods, the city comes to symbolize Jade's multiple identities. Just Portland is wildly different depending on whether one is in Jade's neighborhood in North Portland, Sam's neighborhood in Northeast Portland, or downtown at St. Francis, Jade becomes a different person depending on where she is in the city and who she's with. Though this does, at times, make Jade feel broken and fractured, by the end of the novel she's far more comfortable and sees herself as a more cohesive whole made up of many different parts, just like the city she inhabits.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 1

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade begins the story by telling the reader that she's learning to speak, which will provide her with a way out—presumably out of Portland—and a way in, which presumably refers to her desire to make connections with others. Importantly, when Jade says she's learning to speak at this early point, she's talking specifically about learning to speak Spanish. When the novel begins, Jade conceptualizes learning a foreign language as something that's going to give her the freedom and the tools to attend college and then leave Portland for a job elsewhere. She doesn't understand yet that it'll be equally valuable to learn how to better express herself in English, her first language, as she can use it to ask for things she needs. Despite not grasping this yet, it's still worth noting that as Jade learns to speak up for herself over the course of the novel, even more “ways out” and “ways in” open up for her. She discovers that Portland doesn't have to feel like such a prison to her; she can make a number of discoveries and do a lot of good at home. In this sense, speaking up for herself allows Jade to find new opportunities both in and beyond the city.

●● 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.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Sam, Mom

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 5

### Explanation and Analysis

As Jade explains why she doesn't have any real friends at St.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bloomsbury edition of *Piecing Me Together* published in 2018.

### Chapters 1 - 2 Quotes

●● I am learning to speak.  
To give myself a way out. A way in.

Francis, she recounts an experience in which she realized she was the only person in a class whose family doesn't have a housekeeper. To Jade, this makes the economic differences between herself and her classmates extremely obvious and uncomfortable, especially since Jade's mother actually works as a housekeeper.

That Jade believes she can't connect with any of her classmates because of these economic differences shows that in her mind, there are certain things that people must have in common in order to be friends. A shared socioeconomic background is, at this point, one of those necessary things. This is later why she's able to connect with Sam—Sam knows what it's like to be poor and to attend school on a scholarship, so it's not something that Jade ever has to explain or justify. For Jade, being understood is deeply important—whereas she believes she'd have to explain and justify everything about herself if she tried to befriend with any of these well-off classmates, Sam effortlessly understands and appreciates Jade for who she is.

☝ 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.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Mrs. Parker, Mom

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 7

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade explains how her guidance counselor, Mrs. Parker, always offers Jade opportunities—and though Jade appreciates what those opportunities do for her, she wishes she could turn some of them down. However, because Jade is black and poor, she doesn't feel as though she has the luxury of refusing any help. This speaks to the difficult spot Jade is in as a poor, minority individual at a prestigious school: she understands that she needs others to help her make it through high school and get into college, but she knows there's a fine line she has to walk so as to not make any of her mentors feel as though she's ungrateful. This makes Jade feel as though she has to accept whatever help comes her way, no matter how misguided or racist it is—and even worse, it makes her feel like she can't advocate for the kind of help she actually needs. In essence, because of Jade's poverty and her skin color, she feels as though she cannot advocate for herself or push back at all on what

others think she needs.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Mrs. Parker

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 13

### Explanation and Analysis

In describing the service learning study abroad trip, Jade explains that she's so interested in going abroad because it's a service trip—that is, it is, by design, a trip that will allow Jade to give back to others. Jade recognizes that what makes her feel different and lesser than her classmates is that people look at her as though she's just a person in need of help; no one looks at Jade and thinks about what she might have to offer others. In Jade's mind, she'd feel more normal and at home at St. Francis if people were willing to see that she *does* have something to give others.

This introduces the idea that in order for programs to be helpful to people, they must allow the people being helped to feel dignified and respected, not just as if they're statistics that need to be fixed. Plenty of people, including Jade's counselor, Mrs. Parker, look at Jade and they see only that she's black and poor. Even if Mrs. Parker might be aware that Jade wants to go on the study abroad trip, it's unlikely that she understands exactly *why* Jade wants to go—though it's possible that if she did, she'd be open to helping Jade achieve her goals rather than offering her misguided help in a condescending manner.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ “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.”

**Related Characters:** Mrs. Parker (speaker), Jade Butler

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 18

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Jade asks her guidance counselor, Mrs. Parker, about her reasoning for nominating Jade for the Woman to Woman program, Mrs. Parker gives this awkward response. This quote reveals that although Mrs. Parker is trying to be kind and help Jade, she's limiting her view of Jade to the aspects of Jade's identity that put her at risk—that is, being black, being female, and being poor—and overlooking all the things about Jade that suggest that she's already on the path to success. It's important to keep in mind that Jade is at St. Francis on an academic scholarship; she's already doing quite well for herself despite not having reliable meals or a parent at home who can help her with homework.

Mrs. Parker's stilted delivery implies that she's uncomfortable talking about this with Jade. This suggests that Mrs. Parker isn't prepared to effectively serve black or low-income students at St. Francis, especially since this explanation goes over so poorly. It makes Jade feel as though Mrs. Parker doesn't see her as a full person—she's simply a statistic.

“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.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler, Mrs. Parker (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 18-19

**Explanation and Analysis**

Mrs. Parker makes her final plea for Jade to consider the Woman to Woman program, not knowing that Jade has already made up her mind to participate because the organization will give her a full-ride scholarship to college. However, it's important to make note of Jade's reaction to being nominated for Woman to Woman, and specifically how she reacts to Mrs. Parker's use of the word “opportunity.” In Jade's experience, “opportunity” has become something of a dirty word. It's a way for Mrs. Parker to feel like she's helping Jade and doing a good thing, but there's little indication that she ever asks Jade for her thoughts on these opportunities before nominating her for them. Even though some of Mrs. Parker's ideas may actually help Jade, this doesn't change the fact that these offers of help feel demeaning and condescending. Opportunities don't feel like something wonderful that Jade should jump at—they feel dirty and like they're haunting her, which has

to do entirely with the way that Mrs. Parker frames them.

**Chapter 13 Quotes**

“Oh, it's a last-minute thing. Maxine called and asked if I wanted to do brunch with her to celebrate my birthday.”

“Do brunch? You mean go to brunch?” Mom laughs. “How does one *do* brunch?” Mom pours milk into her mug, then opens a pack of sweetener and sprinkles it in. She stirs. “That woman has you talking like her already, huh?”

**Related Characters:** Mom, Jade Butler (speaker), Maxine

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 60

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Jade explains to Mom that Maxine is going to take her out to “do brunch” for her birthday, Mom laughs but she becomes immediately suspicious of Maxine's role in Jade's life. Mom's reaction illustrates how difficult the Woman to Woman program can be for someone in Mom's position. Though Mom is well aware that Woman to Woman will give Jade a scholarship and the tools to navigate the predominantly-white world, it also is going to introduce Jade to people who speak differently—that is, who use language associated with a higher social class—and that's distinctly scary for Mom. It drives home to Mom that Jade's participation in Woman to Woman is going to gradually change Jade into a different person who is comfortable running in these circles of upper-class people. At this point, it makes Mom feel like she doesn't have anything to give Jade anymore, which is why Mom then forbids Jade from going with Maxine.

**Chapters 17 - 18 Quotes**

“It makes me feel like I'm learning a secret code or something. I don't know. It's powerful.”

“Powerful? Really?”

“Yes, all language is. That's what you used to tell me.”

Dad puts his fork down. Leans back in his chair. “Me? I told you that?”

“Yes, when I was little. 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.

**Related Characters:** Dad, Jade Butler (speaker), Maxine, Sam, Mrs. Parker

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

After Jade's birthday, she goes to visit Dad and they talk about why Spanish is her favorite class. She explains to him that he's the one responsible for instilling a love of language in her, even if he doesn't remember doing so. Jade's outright statement that all language is powerful is noteworthy—at this point, Jade may be able to tell Dad this, but she doesn't behave as though she truly believes it herself. At this point, Jade doesn't yet feel able to call out people who are rude or disrespectful to her, such as Mrs. Parker, Sam, or Maxine. (It's likely she only calls Dad out on standing her up on her birthday because she feels safer and more comfortable with Dad; she knows he's not going to drop her if she gets mad at him). In effect, this shows that Jade already has all the information she needs—she's just not yet in a place where she knows that she can help herself and advocate on her own behalf.

## Chapters 20 - 21 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Sabrina, Maxine

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 86

### Explanation and Analysis

At one of the Woman to Woman meetings, Jade shares that being around these mentors makes her feel whole and hopeful—but when she's not around people like this who lift her up, she feels herself “shattering” again. Jade struggles to feel whole in part because of her race. As a young black woman, Jade must constantly deal with the unfair assumptions people make about her. Those experiences of

racism and discrimination take a toll; specifically, they make Jade feel shattered. Her project, then, is to come to some understanding of herself and how to carry herself through the world that will help her feel more whole all the time, not just when she's around people who believe in her.

At the same time, the sense of hope that Jade feels right now speaks to the power of programs like Woman to Woman to make young women like her feel powerful and whole. When they're done right, they can provide young people with the mentorship opportunities and the support to craft identities that are better able to withstand the challenges of adult life.

## Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ And 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.”

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Josiah, Kennedy/Glamour Girl, Sam

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 90

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade and Sam join their fellow classmates, Kennedy and Josiah, on a lunch trip to a burger place. During the meal, one of Kennedy's friends talks horribly about Northeast Portland, not knowing that Sam lives there. The fact that this girl talks like this in front of Jade and Sam speaks to their success in hiding the fact that they bus in from across town every day; it's unlikely that this girl would feel comfortable speaking like this in front of someone who she knows lives there. This explains some of Jade's exhaustion at the end of every day, something that Sam likely also experiences to some degree: she spends every school day hiding important parts of herself so she can fit in, and often, this sort of thing happens that makes it even harder to bear.

This passage also gives the reader an opportunity to experience some of the preconceptions about Portland's neighborhoods. Sam lives in Northeast; she's likely well

aware of its reputation, but that doesn't make it an awful place to live—and indeed, though she doesn't talk much about her house, her home in Northeast seems like one of the safest and most comfortable places for her. This speaks to the prejudice of many of the students Jade and Sam attend school with, as it's unfathomable to them that people would want to live in these neighborhoods and might actually love their lives there.

## Chapter 26 Quotes

☝☝ She will be on the news every day because she is a white girl and white girls who go missing always make the news. [...] 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 Latino girls who die here, who are from here.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Sam

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 98

### Explanation and Analysis

When Jade goes to pick Sam up from the bus stop, she briefly runs through what she knows would happen if Sam went missing in North Portland, a predominantly-black part of town. Jade understands that simply because Sam is white, her disappearance would garner far more support and media buzz than that of a black or Latinx woman—even though women of color are killed by violence like Jade describes at higher rates than white women are.

Jade also recognizes that this is a gendered issue as well. In her experience, no one tells men to respect women and not kill them; the onus is on the women to avoid or escape men's advances. This helps Jade to place herself and Sam on different intersections and see how although they both experience the same threat of violence from men because they're female, the threat is also somewhat different because of their different races.

## Chapter 28 Quotes

☝☝ Maxine is full of ideas. "There are lots 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.*

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler, Maxine (speaker), Mom

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 112

### Explanation and Analysis

After Maxine implies that people in North Portland never leave the neighborhood by choice, she offers up all sorts of rebuttals to Jade's insistence that people don't leave the neighborhood because they can't afford to or don't have the resources to do so. The very fact that Maxine continues to come up with these solutions suggests that she's a poor listener and, at this point, a poor mentor. If she wants Jade to trust her and believe that she has Jade's best interests at heart, she has to understand that Jade is the expert on her own life—and that Maxine, who grew up wealthy, doesn't understand what it's like to live in poverty. A poor person like Jade understands that a drive to go sightseeing isn't actually free—it requires the cost of gas and possibly paying for parking. For Maxine, "free" seems to mean simply that there's no admission fee, but she doesn't understand that affording the admission fee is only half the battle.

## Chapters 31 - 32 Quotes

☝☝ "Kira—please leave Jade alone. She is not like that. She's smart. She's on scholarship at St. Francis and has a four-point-oh GPA. This girl right here is going places. She's not going to mess things up by betting caught up with some guy," she says. "I'm going to see to it she doesn't end up like one of *those girls*."

I know when Maxine says *those girls*, she is talking about the girls who go to Northside.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler, Maxine (speaker), Mom, Bailey, Kira

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 130

### Explanation and Analysis

When Maxine's friend Kira quietly offers to talk to Jade about sex if Maxine won't, Maxine unwittingly insults Jade. Maxine doesn't realize that saying that Jade isn't like "those girls" isn't a compliment, as "those girls" are Jade's friends—and indeed, Mom, who had Jade at 16, is probably also someone whom Maxine would consider to be one of "those girls." Because Jade is Mom's daughter and she still has so many friends who attend Northside (the local school in Jade's neighborhood), she's able to see that Maxine is being extremely classist here by insisting that Jade is better than her friends.

Maxine also makes it seem as though Jade is too good to be interested in sex or boys. While Jade never expresses much interest throughout the novel, it's worth noting that being interested in romance doesn't mean that someone can't also be academically successful. Maxine essentially tries to whittle down all the things that Jade can be as she says this, as she insists that Jade can't be like the girls from her neighborhood and can't experience interest in boys or sex if she also wants to succeed in life.

## Chapters 35 - 36 Quotes

☝☝ "You hanging around all those uppity black women who done forgot where they came 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 [...]

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler, Mom (speaker), Sabrina, Maxine

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 142

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade's query as to whether Mom is going to come to a Woman to Woman seminar on healthy eating doesn't go over well—Mom takes it as an insult to her cooking, as she's frying fish for dinner. However, the perceived insult to her cooking is only the tip of the iceberg. What Mom is really getting at is that in her perception, Maxine and Sabrina are trying to impose different standards of living on Jade and

her family—and in the process, they are insulting Mom for cooking in a way that they associate with poverty and blackness. This isn't just an issue of food, then—it's an issue of class.

Jade is caught in the middle of this because Mom says outright at several points that Jade needs this mentorship program if she wants to be successful and go to college. However, Mom's anger shows the consequences of Jade moving up into a different social class: she might "forget where she came from" and wind up insulting Mom in the process.

## Chapter 40 Quotes

☝☝ I haven't spent much time with Sam. Partly because I usually have something to do after school, but mostly because I don't know how to be around her when I know she doesn't think that salesclerk treated me wrong. I don't even think she feels the tension between us. She has moved on and acts like everything is fine, but me? I'm stuck wondering if I can truly be friends with someone who doesn't understand what I go through, how I feel.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Lee Lee, Sam

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 151

### Explanation and Analysis

In the weeks after a salesclerk asks Jade to leave a store for racist reasons, Jade mulls over whether she can still be friends with Sam if Sam doesn't understand that what the salesclerk did was wrong. Sam is white while Jade is black, and the girls' respective skin colors mean that they each experience the world in a distinctly different way—while Jade perceives certain incidents as racist because she experiences racism on a daily basis, Sam doesn't always see things the same way or take Jade's concerns seriously, even if a racist incident happens right in front of her.

By contrast, in Jade's friendship with Lee Lee, this kind of misunderstanding wouldn't happen—as another black girl, Lee Lee would know that what happened was wrong and she'd be able to say something that would make Jade feel supported. Because Sam doesn't have this shared experience (or for that matter, the skills to talk about race in a way that doesn't hurt Jade even more), she makes Jade feel alone and unmoored in their friendship.

## Chapter 41 Quotes

☞☞ Everyone is so excited about Nathan’s announcement that the family check-in stops, and all Mrs. Winters can do is make plans for the baby shower. No one asks Maxine if she has any news. I can tell Maxine is hurt by this. Because when Mia says, “We should paint a mural in the baby’s nursery. That would be so much fun, wouldn’t it, Maxine?” Maxine says, “Yeah, sure. That would be awesome,” but her voice is flat and without emotion.

**Related Characters:** Maxine, Mia, Jade Butler (speaker), Mrs. Winters, Abby, Nathan

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 163

### Explanation and Analysis

After Maxine’s brother Nathan and his wife Abby announce that they’re expecting a baby during dinner at the Winterses’ house, Mrs. Winters stops asking other family members for their updates—and Maxine is the only family member who hasn’t gotten to share any news yet. This begins to show that within her family, Maxine is a bit of an outsider: she’s not successful in the same way that her siblings Nathan and Mia are, and so she doesn’t get as much of her parents’ praise and attention as her siblings do.

Jade’s ability to recognize how hurt Maxine is shows that she’s developing a sense of empathy for Maxine, and she’s starting to see Maxine as more human. This incident makes Maxine look like a normal woman with flaws and problems, one whose family doesn’t necessarily agree with her choices and favors her siblings. Even though Jade begins to lose her respect for Maxine in the hour after this, this is nevertheless a turning point in how Jade thinks about Maxine. It makes Maxine more relatable and sympathetic, and it encourages Jade to give Maxine more of a chance.

## Chapters 42 - 43 Quotes

☞☞ “But I don’t look up to Maxine,” I tell her. “She’s using me to feel better about herself. And her mother gave us all this food because she feels sorry for us. If that’s how you act when you have money, I’d rather stay poor.”

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Mrs. Winters, Maxine, Mom

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 168

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade finally admits to Mom that she’s thinking about quitting the Woman to Woman program, mostly because Maxine seems to be using Jade to feel better about herself and she’s treated Jade like a cause rather than a person. For Jade, this is the last straw—she wants to be able to help people (something she associates with fitting in and being of a slightly higher socioeconomic class), but Maxine makes helping people look like a selfish endeavor.

Though Jade certainly has a point—Maxine hasn’t behaved well and she’s been very disrespectful to both Jade and to Mom—it’s important to keep in mind that as Jade moves forward in her life and hopefully gains some financial security, she has choices about how to use her money to help others. She doesn’t have to take on mentoring others in the same way that Maxine does if she doesn’t want to, and she could also use what she’s learning from her experiences with Woman to Woman to do entirely different things. In short, Jade exposes some of her own prejudices here: she implies that all people with money are rude and they can’t help others properly, when in reality those people have choices about how they treat others, just like Jade does.

## Chapter 44 Quotes

☞☞ “You need to talk to whoever is in charge. Have you said anything to anyone?”

I don’t answer.

“They can’t read your mind. I mean, I get what you’re saying—some of that stuff is a little corny, and a lot of it is offensive. But I don’t know; what’s the better option? Stay silent, leave the program, and they never have a chance to do better?”

**Related Characters:** Lee Lee (speaker), Sabrina, Maxine, Jade Butler

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 173

### Explanation and Analysis

When Lee Lee and Jade speak about Jade’s desire to quit Woman to Woman, Lee Lee doesn’t take Jade’s side—instead, she insists that Jade has to talk to someone in charge and try to make things better. Though Lee Lee’s suggestion may seem a bit obvious, it hasn’t occurred to Jade because Jade places so little faith in what might happen if she asks for something. Throughout the novel,

Jade has shared with the reader all the questions she'd like to ask and all the things she wants to ask for, but she voices few of them, if any—mostly because she doesn't believe she has the standing to ask, or because she fears someone is going to tell her no. Lee Lee insists, however, that it's far better for someone at Woman to Woman to turn her down than it is to not try. If Jade asks for different things and succeeds, she'll be able to make the program better for herself as well as for others. In this sense, speaking up and advocating for herself is one way that Jade can give back, without even leaving her community.

☝ “All right, all right. I'll think about it,” I tell Lee Lee. I don't know why I never considered it before. Here I am, so focused on learning to speak another language, and I barely use the word I already know.

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

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Sabrina, Maxine, Lee Lee

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 174

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade finally agrees to talk to someone about what she'd like to get out of Woman to Woman and she realizes that her focus has been misplaced. For most of her high school career, Jade has been focused on learning Spanish. In her mind, Spanish was going to give her the way out so that she could go on the study abroad trip and help others. It was going to get her a good job after college, as a second language will make her look better to hiring managers. By focusing so much on Spanish, however, Jade also discounted the fact that she already knows lots of words that she can use to make a difference her life and in the lives of others. Without even having to learn a new language, Jade can work up the courage to advocate for things that she needs and wants, something that will benefit others in addition to herself. This becomes one of Jade's most important realizations of the novel: that it's not such a big deal to stand up for herself and ask for what she needs.

## Chapter 45 Quotes

☝☝ This conversation isn't as intense as I thought it would be. Maxine asks, “So what are some things Woman to Woman can do better?”

[...] “Well, I'd like to learn about real-life things—I mean, like you know, how to create a budget and balance a checkbook so I'll know how much money I can spend and how much to put aside so the lights don't get turned off,” I tell her.

**Related Characters:** Maxine, Jade Butler (speaker), Sabrina

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 177

### Explanation and Analysis

When Jade finally works up the courage to talk to Maxine about Maxine's disrespectful behavior and about what Jade wants out of the Woman to Woman program, Jade makes the somewhat surprising realization that advocating for herself isn't as scary as she thought it'd be. Importantly, this is partially because Maxine does a great job of listening to Jade, taking her seriously, and asking for her opinions, as when she asks what Woman to Woman can do better. This moment might not have happened had Maxine not responded so positively, so it's important to not ignore the fact that it takes experiences like this—where Jade gets what she wants and gets to see that it's not so scary—in order to learn how to effectively advocate for herself. By practicing in situations like this, in which Jade more or less already trusts Maxine, Jade will have the confidence to go on and advocate for herself in more stressful situations later in life, such as in a job or in a relationship where there may be more of a power imbalance.

## Chapter 47 Quotes

☝☝ I stare at the picture, can't stop looking at her face, at how she looks like someone who lives in my neighborhood. Maybe she used to?

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Natasha Ramsey, E.J.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 183

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade stares at the photo of Natasha Ramsey, a young black teenager, that accompanies the article about how Natasha

was beaten by police at a house party. Jade is struck by the fact that that Natasha looks like someone who could live in Jade's own neighborhood. For Jade, this makes her uncomfortably aware that she and Natasha aren't all that different—and it could've easily been Jade, or someone else who looks like Jade and Natasha, who was beaten. Because they're young black women, they're in a uniquely vulnerable place in society. In addition to having to deal with the stereotypes surrounding "angry black women" or preconceived notions about where they live and how much money their families make, black people in general are also at an increased risk of experiencing violence at the hands of police. Looking at Natasha, Jade cannot ignore how vulnerable she is, and how lucky she is that it wasn't her this time.

## Chapter 51 Quotes

☝☝ When the star-filled sky blanketed him, did he 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?

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Mom

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 194

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade ponders the story of York, the black slave who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their famed journey across the Western U.S. Jade recounts how Native people thought that York was a monster or a mythical creature because of his skin color—and in some cases, York chose (or possibly had no choice but) to play along. Jade recognizes that this was probably an extremely dehumanizing experience for York, as he was dehumanized and thought of as lesser by both the white people he served and the Native people he encountered.

As York is a symbol for Jade herself, this suggests that Jade is grappling with the fact that to some people out in the world, she looks "strange" or like a "beast." Her blackness makes her an other to people who don't see her as entirely human, which is why she experiences racist treatment at school and out in public. At home, however, Jade is able to

feel whole and human thanks to Mom's love and the fact that Jade's blackness isn't viewed as a bad thing among the people she loves.

## Chapter 54 Quotes

☝☝ Sometimes I just want to be comfortable in this skin, this body. Want to cock my head back and laugh [...] and not be told I'm too rowdy, too ghetto. Sometimes I want to go to school, wearing my hair big like cumulous clouds without getting any special attention [...] 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.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Sam

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 201

### Explanation and Analysis

Jade explains how she'd like to be confident in her black identity and appearance by laughing and wearing her hair big. However, at St. Francis, Jade must hide her blackness so that she fits in—and unfortunately, she must do the same thing at her white friend Sam's house. This begins to speak to some of the exhaustion that Jade feels, as she must constantly think about how she appears to others in order to make them not think of her *just* as a black girl.

Jade is doing the best she can in a world that isn't set up to make things easy for her, which is why it's so comforting for her to go home to her own house, where her blackness isn't a problem or a liability like it is at school. However, the fact that Jade singles out that she doesn't want to go to Sam's house suggests that Sam is doing a poor job of being a considerate friend. While it's normal to not always want to go to a friend's house, it's telling that it's so uncomfortable for Jade to go to Sam's—and it suggests that Sam has a long way to go as she interrogates her own racist actions and preconceptions.

☝☝ "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."

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler (speaker), Sam

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 205

### Explanation and Analysis

Through tears, Jade tells Sam that she'd like their teachers to think of her as someone with something to give, not just a black girl in need. This encapsulates Jade's goal throughout the novel: she wants to be normal, and she defines "normal" as being a person who has something to give others. She doesn't want people to think that she's just someone who deserves scholarships and mentorship programs designed to distract her from boys—she'd rather be thought of as someone capable of providing those services or that mentorship to others who really need it. Jade thinks this way because in her experience, the help she receives makes her feel as though she has to accept it or risk looking rude or ungrateful. She never has a choice in whether or not to accept the help, which she finds demoralizing. For Jade, part of being successful and normal means being able to refuse help that doesn't feel good and helpful, and instead provide actual, needed help to others.

### Chapter 58 Quotes

●● "When I went to St. Francis, most people assumed that because I was black, I must be on scholarship."

"I'm on scholarship," I remind her.

"I know. But you were awarded a scholarship because you are smart, not because you are black," Maxine says. "I got tired of people assuming things about me without getting to know me. [...] Sometimes, in class, if something about race came up, I was looked on to give an answer as if I could speak on behalf of all black people," Maxine says.

**Related Characters:** Jade Butler, Maxine (speaker), Josiah,

Kennedy/Glamour Girl

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 215

### Explanation and Analysis

During a walk, Maxine opens up about the racism and prejudice she experienced as a teenager at St. Francis. This helps Jade to see that even though Maxine grew up in a much higher socioeconomic class than Jade is in, she still experienced a great deal of racism as a young black woman. Importantly, Maxine confirms that many people at St. Francis automatically link blackness with poverty in their mind. To them, it's unthinkable that a black person would be able to afford tuition at St. Francis rather than attending on a scholarship. This appears even odder and more misguided given that as far as Jade can tell, the other black students at St. Francis right now aren't on scholarship. Kennedy is clearly wealthy enough to own a car and drive herself to school, and though Josiah seems uncomfortable when others talk down about Northeast Portland, Jade implies that she'd know if he took the bus in from across the city like she does.

Together, all of this impresses upon Jade that she and Maxine aren't all that different—and for that matter, it's likely that Kennedy and Josiah experience some of the same racist things that both Jade and Maxine do. They are all black in a predominately-white setting, and if they're willing and able to talk to one another about what they experience (as Jade and Maxine do here), they can begin to see that their experiences aren't all that different.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTERS 1 - 2

Jade says that she's learning to speak. This will give her "a way out" and "a way in." Jade introduces the reader to the Spanish word for succeed, *tener éxito*. She says she thinks it's ironic that the word "exit" is in it. It seems like the universe is telling her that she has to leave home in order to make something of her life. To a degree, Jade is already doing this: she's been attending St. Francis High School on the other side of town for the last two years, though she begged Mom to let her attend Northside, the neighborhood high school. Mom refused, insisting that St. Francis is a "good opportunity." Jade knows that this means the high school is white and expensive. Fortunately, Jade received a full scholarship.

The night before Jade starts her junior year, she tries to pick out an outfit. She bought some new clothes with money she earned over the summer tutoring at the rec center and saved what she didn't use; Mom refused to take it for groceries. Mom comes into Jade's room and sadly says that she won't be able to see Jade off in the morning. Jade explains that Mom used to work as a housekeeper at a local hospital, but she was fired when someone reported her for stealing blankets and small bottles of shampoo. Now, Mom takes care of a rich old lady named Ms. Louise. Jade knows what's coming: the talk about Jade's lack of friends at school. Mom is concerned that Jade is only friends with Lee Lee.

Jade can't tell Mom that she and Lee Lee think the same things are funny. Jade can't share knowing looks with anyone at St. Francis—most things she finds ridiculous are normal there. Once, her humanities teacher asked the class to name "invisible people" in their community. One girl mentioned her housekeeper, and Jade couldn't believe the girl had one. Even stranger was when everyone else nodded along, including the only other black student in class. Jade goes to school with kids whose mothers hire housekeepers, while Mom is a housekeeper—Lee Lee would get it. Mom, however, says she'd like Jade to make one close friend at school this year and then she reminds Jade that she has an appointment with Mrs. Parker tomorrow. She thinks it must be about the study abroad program.

*Jade's tone when she describes St. Francis indicates that she isn't as excited about so-called opportunities as one might think, since those opportunities may come with unforeseen and potentially uncomfortable consequences. The idea that Jade has to leave her neighborhood and commute to the other side of town in order to attend St. Francis opens up the possibility that it's very different from what school might be like at Northside.*



*Everything that Jade says about working to buy her clothes and Mom's last job signals that her family doesn't make a lot of money. In this sense, Jade is on her own to get some of the items she needs to be successful at St. Francis. This shows that even opportunities that might come free to Jade have hidden costs—even if it's just the cost of clothes that allow her to fit in. The fact that Jade is expecting Mom to lecture her about friendship likely means that this is an ongoing issue for Jade, suggesting that she has trouble fitting in with the other students at St. Francis.*



*This experience in class made Jade uncomfortably aware that she's the only person at St. Francis who doesn't come from a family that can afford to hire domestic help—or, at the very least, other students in Jade's situation are trying just as hard as Jade is to hide it. The fact that Jade doesn't feel like she can connect with any of her classmates because of their socioeconomic disparities suggests that in her mind, there are some differences that are insurmountable when it comes to friendship.*



For the first time ever, Jade is excited to talk to Mrs. Parker, her guidance counselor. The study abroad program is a service learning program in a foreign country and it's what made Jade agree to go to St. Francis. Jade explains that Mrs. Parker always offers her opportunities, such as essay writing classes, free SAT prep, or speaking engagements downtown. Jade knows that Mrs. Parker is looking out for her, though she sometimes wishes she could turn down the opportunities. But because Jade is black and poor, she has to take every opportunity. Mom leaves Jade's room and she asks if Jade needs anything at the store. Jade mentions that she put ice cream on the list. Mom laughs that she thought that was E.J., Jade's 20-year-old uncle and she promises to try if she has enough money.

*Jade is aware that while Mrs. Parker may think she's doing nice things for Jade, these kindnesses still make Jade uncomfortably aware that she is poor and black while her classmates are wealthy and (presumably) predominantly white. In other words, these opportunities look at Jade only as a poor black girl, not as someone who's also a dreamer, who wants to go abroad, and who's already doing very well for herself, regardless of her circumstances. Jade demonstrates her discomfort in part through her tone, which conveys that speaking to Mrs. Parker is often a trying and demeaning experience.*



## CHAPTER 3

Jade wakes up early the next morning. There's nothing to eat for breakfast, so she drinks a glass of water and catches the 35 bus that will take her out of her neighborhood. Jade lives in the New Columbia, and no one lets her forget that it used to be public housing for shipyard workers in World War II, and that the units were all rundown by the 1980s. Though many people can't find beauty in Jade's neighborhood, Jade can. Since elementary school, she's been picking up magazines, candy wrappers, and receipts to make beautiful, unexpected collages. Jade says the collages are like her: ordinary. But Jade is going to make something of her life, both for herself and for Mom. Mom had Jade when she was 16 and so she couldn't go to college. Jade's Dad, however, turned his life around after Jade's birth. He now has a rich white fiancée.

*Again, not having anything in the house for breakfast drives home Jade's poverty. However, it's significant that Jade clearly loves her neighborhood: she sees it as beautiful and she wants to help others see it the same way by making collages about it. Though Jade hasn't quite made the connection yet, her collages are another way in which she can communicate with people and express her point of view. However, she hasn't gotten there yet because at this point, she's focused on learning Spanish and going on the study abroad trip.*



On the bus, Jade thinks about how she's the answer to Dad's prayers and she is also Mom's deferred dream. The bus moves through the transition blocks between North **Portland** and Northeast. At one stop, a thin white girl gets on. She looks young and Jade wonders if she's going to St. Francis. They get off at the same stop and Jade thinks that she would've noticed this girl before, since Jade is one of the few students at St. Francis who buses in. There are only a few other black students: Rose is nice but a year older, and Josiah is a cool, popular tech nerd. He's nice when Jade tutors him but he uses a lot of slang around his white friends. Josiah invites Jade to join friends for lunch out, but Jade refuses—she wants to say yes but she can't miss this meeting with Mrs. Parker.

*Jade's reference to herself as Mom's "deferred dream" is a reference to Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem," which opens by asking what happens to a dream deferred. Tapping into Hughes's poetry shows again that Jade has a firm grasp of language and she understands how to use all different sorts of language to get her ideas across. At this point, though, Jade isn't sharing any of this language, which means that no one but the reader is privy to her thoughts and desires.*



## CHAPTER 4

The girl from the bus is in Mr. Flores's Spanish class too. The class divides up into pairs and Jade ends up with Kennedy, whom she calls "Glamour Girl" because she's always fixing her hair or makeup. Glamour Girl digs in her purse looking for a pen and she pulls out lots of things, including a tin of peppermints. Jade's stomach growls, embarrassing her since "big girls" can't have stomachs that growl. Glamour Girl passes the mints around and the tin finally reaches Jade. There are only fragments left, but Jade takes two halves. She wishes she was Glamour Girl's friend, as then she might've gotten a whole mint.

After class, Jade goes straight to Mrs. Parker's office and she takes a Jolly Rancher. They briefly smile over the photos of Mrs. Parker's grandsons in her office, but when Jade sees a photo of them wearing Winterhawks gear with the Native American mascot, she wonders how Mrs. Parker can manage to not care about wearing a stereotype like that. She offers Jade some of her free tickets and Jade silently wonders why people who can afford things get so many free things. Then, Mrs. Parker turns to business: she asks Jade what she wants. Jade doesn't respond but she thinks that she wants to go on the study abroad program and to speak Spanish everywhere, especially in job interviews where knowing a second language is an asset. Mrs. Parker tells Jade that she doesn't have to answer now and she hands Jade a folder.

The photo on the folder depicts a group of adult and teenage black women, and the title reads, "Woman to Woman: A Mentorship Program for African American Girls." Jade feels shattered, though Mrs. Parker looks thrilled as she describes what the program entails. She points to the list of planned excursions, which includes museum visits and a trip to the symphony. When Mrs. Parker asks Jade if she has questions, Jade wants to ask about the study abroad program. Instead, she asks why she was chosen. Mrs. Parker awkwardly cites several reasons, including "need." Jade insists that she already has adults who care about her.

*Jade introduces another aspect of her identity here when she describes her shame and embarrassment about being an overweight person who's hungry. Because Jade is bigger than others around her, she feels like she has to conduct herself in a certain way—which in turn implies that people look at Jade and they believe she must think or act in certain ways because of her weight. Even if Jade brushed off Mom's desire that she make a friend, she shows here that she does want to make more friends at St. Francis.*



*Because Jade is the narrator, the reader gets a front row seat to all the things that Jade thinks but doesn't say. This makes it clear that even though Jade loves language (especially Spanish), she doesn't make a habit of using her first language to ask for things she wants. Because Jade doesn't speak up, it's understandable that no one knows what she wants—it's not even clear whether Jade has ever expressed to Mrs. Parker that the study abroad program is the reason Jade decided to attend to St. Francis. This lack of communication sets Jade up to experience disappointment when others don't give her what she wants.*



*Though Jade has every right to ask about why she wasn't chosen for the study abroad program, it's likely that she thinks this question might be rude and it would therefore hurt her chances of receiving any other opportunities. Mrs. Parker's answer to Jade's other question, however, shows that Mrs. Parker sees Jade only as a person in need of help and opportunities, and she likely doesn't see Mom as an appropriately involved parent either.*



Mrs. Parker responds that people in Jade’s circumstances are statistically at risk for “certain things” and she reiterates that this is a good opportunity. Jade feels like opportunities are stalking her and she asks what happens if she doesn’t participate. Mrs. Parker says that if Jade *does* complete the program, she’ll receive a scholarship to any Oregon college. Mrs. Parker quietly shares that her son-in-law grew up in Jade’s neighborhood and that he now is still trying to adjust to life in predominately white and wealthy Lake Oswego. She also tells Jade that the woman who will be her mentor went to St. Francis and she just graduated from **Portland** State University. Grudgingly, Jade accepts and she fills out an information form. One question asks what she wants out of the program, but Jade leaves it blank.

*Learning about the scholarship might make the choice to participate in Woman to Woman obvious for Jade, but this doesn’t mean that Jade won’t be upset about how this is playing out. It looks to her like Mrs. Parker is nominating her for Woman to Woman instead of helping her go on the study abroad trip, something that makes Jade feel like Mrs. Parker is only considering “certain things” about her—namely, her race and socioeconomic status. However, Jade still feels uncomfortable using her voice to raise concerns about this or advocate for herself, further evidenced by the fact that she doesn’t write what she wants out of the program.*



## CHAPTERS 5 - 6

When Jade gets home, Mom is asleep but she is still wearing her nylons and shoes. Jade turns off the TV and she looks through the cupboards and the fridge: both are full of food. In the freezer, she finds ice cream. Later, Lee Lee arrives and the girls talk about their day over bowls of ice cream. E.J. interrupts and he tries to steal Jade’s ice cream. When he leaves, Lee Lee says she loves her history teacher. She taught them today about **York**, the black slave who traveled with Lewis and Clark. Jade is shocked that a black person was on the expedition at all.

*While Jade is supposedly getting a “better” education at her private school, Lee Lee seems to be the one learning about things that actually matter to her and that are relevant to her experience as an African American. In this sense, Northside may be better at serving its student population than St. Francis, as it teaches them about a more diverse variety of people.*



Lee Lee pulls out her worksheet, which has a picture of **York**, and she tells Jade that both York and Sacagawea helped on the expedition. York was a good hunter, and both he and Sacagawea got to vote when the party had to vote on what to do. It was the first time a black man and a woman got to vote. Lee Lee says that Lewis and Clark told tribal leaders that their new “great father” was in the east and that he owned all their land now. They didn’t mention that York was a slave or that their great father owned slaves too. The girls wonder if the Native people saw their displacement coming and if York and Sacagawea knew it was coming, too. Jade allows Lee Lee to change the subject but she continues to think about York and Sacagawea, and how they had a sort of freedom but no power.

*Jade sees herself in York: like York, Jade is granted opportunities but she still feels powerless. Jade has a degree of freedom at St. Francis—she’ll be able to go to a good college, she has access to scholarships and programs like Woman to Woman, and she seems to be on her way up in the world. Despite this, Jade also recognizes that she doesn’t have much power to advocate for herself or dictate how her classmates and teachers see her. It makes her feel powerless when Mrs. Parker tries to foist opportunities like Woman to Woman on her without considering how Jade might feel about it.*



## CHAPTER 7

A few hours later, Jade sits at the kitchen table wearing headphones, working on a collage. She’s still thinking about **York** and about all the signs in North **Portland** that mark Lewis and Clark’s journey. None of the signs include York, Sacagawea, or native people. Jade thinks of Mrs. Parker’s black son-in-law and her desire to give Jade opportunities and a mentor. It’s almost like she’s trying to tell Jade that she comes in peace.

*Jade understands that on the surface, Portland—and the U.S. at large—is predominantly white and it tends to diminish the accomplishments of its nonwhite residents. However, Jade also knows that she and other black kids like her have a lot to say and contribute.*



## CHAPTER 8

The white girl on the bus again the next morning. A few stops later, a man gets on the bus blaring music out of his cellphone. He sings along badly. Jade and the girl exchange a look, and then the man stands right in front of the girl and starts to sing to her. Jade motions to the girl to come sit with her. They burst into laughter when the man gets off the bus and then they introduce themselves. The girl's name is Sam and she lives in Northeast **Portland**. Jade shares tips about school and teachers, and Sam asks for tips about lunch. Jade says that she eats in the cafeteria but she leaves out that it's part of her scholarship. Sam starts to say that she eats in the cafeteria too, but Jade cuts her off before she can finish. She invites Sam to join her for lunch today.

*Jade understands right away that when Sam mentions the cafeteria, it's because she gets free lunch too. This means that although the girls may live in different parts of the city and have different skin colors, they still share something important: their poverty. This is the factor that jumpstarts their friendship, which suggests that having something like this in common is what brings people together to begin with. However, it remains to be seen whether this will be enough to keep the girls together as friends.*



## CHAPTER 9

By October, Jade has her routine down: she rides the bus and she eats lunch with Sam, and they often ride home together. Today, Jade is taking a different bus to go to the first Woman to Woman meeting in Northeast **Portland**. She meets Sam at her locker after school and Sam jokes about the woman who's going to change Jade's life. They laugh. Outside, Sam says that at least people notice that Jade needs to talk to someone; nobody thinks Sam needs anything. Sam walks away before Jade can ask her what she needs.

*Sam's cry for help implies that there may be something serious going on with her. However, it's impossible to tell whether Jade honestly doesn't think Sam needs anything or if she's genuinely curious. If the first option is true, then Jade likely sees Sam with some degree of prejudice: she might think that because Sam is white, she doesn't need as much help as Jade does.*



Jade arrives at the appointed library. She accepts her nametag and packet and she finds a seat where she can wait for her mentor, Maxine, to arrive. Then, Jade discreetly takes refreshments and she sneaks them into her backpack. When Jade finally makes a plate to eat, she returns to her seat. A girl named Jasmine is sitting next to Jade—her mentor isn't here yet either. Then, a woman calls everyone to attention. She introduces herself as Sabrina, the founder and director of Woman to Woman, and she explains that she started the program to promote sisterhood and attend to the needs of girls. As she speaks, a regal-looking woman arrives, gets a nametag, and sits down next to Jasmine. Jade feels awful.

*Jade's habit of taking food for later is likely a result of her poverty. This shows that she's developed coping mechanisms that help her mitigate the fact that she doesn't have much food at home—and though she may be annoyed about Woman to Woman, the fact remains that the program is at least helping her get the food she needs. Despite this, Maxine's absence still makes Jade feel awful and alone, and as though this isn't really an opportunity worth taking.*



Sabrina continues. She recites the adage that teaching a man to fish feeds him for a lifetime, but she says this doesn't go far enough. Rather, people need to teach the man why the river is polluted so they can organize and clean it up to serve the whole community. She smiles and she says that this is what the program is about: they'll discuss barriers to success and figure out how to overcome them. Sabrina then asks everyone to make a circle so they can play a name game. Jade thinks this is stupid, especially since Maxine isn't here, so she sneaks out. At the bus stop, a drunk man asks Jade for her number by name. Jade realizes she's still wearing her nametag, rips it off, and walks to the next stop when the man tries to kiss her.

*Though Sabrina may have good intentions with her metaphor, it also concerningly puts the onus on the people represented by the man learning to fish—that is, the mentees—to do the work of cleaning the proverbial river. It doesn't say anything about who's polluting the river, and in a situation like this, that would likely be the systems of racism and prejudice that put young people like Jade in positions where a program like Woman to Woman is the only way to get ahead and "learn to fish."*



At home, E.J. is already folding down the sofa for bed. Mom is on her way out to Ms. Louise, but she can tell that Jade is upset. Jade explains that Mom seems to read minds and have premonitions, like she did on the night E.J.'s best friend, Alan, was killed. Nothing has been the same since then. E.J. isn't fine, but Mom seems to believe E.J. when he says he is. Jade says her mentor didn't come and that she left. Mom points out that Jade should've said something, but Jade insists that she didn't want to interrupt. Mom grouches that Jade needs to stand up for herself, but Jade cuts Mom off and shoos her out the door. Jade tries to do homework, but she thinks about what Mom said. She doesn't think she's shy; she just has a hard time saying things like this.

*Jade seems to be afraid of speaking up for herself because of the possible embarrassment or retaliation. In some situations, this probably isn't a bad fear to have—she does, after all, need some of these opportunities in order to get into college and move forward in the world, so she can't jeopardize her chances in good conscience. However, this also drives home how little power Jade has to advocate for herself given her status as a marginalized person.*



## CHAPTER 10

On the phone, Jade tells Lee Lee everything about the Woman to Woman meeting. After they get off the phone, Jade hears a knock at the door. Jade doesn't recognize the woman outside. When she opens the door, the woman introduces herself as Maxine. Jade is flabbergasted: she can't fathom why Maxine is here late at night yet she couldn't come to the meeting earlier. Jade doesn't want to let Maxine in—she doesn't want her to see that E.J. sleeps on the couch—but she shuts the door to prep the house. E.J. tells Jade that Maxine dates his friend Jon and he goes to Jade's room. Jade quickly fixes the living room and then she lets Maxine in. Maxine offers Jade a gift bag, and Jade reminds herself to be appreciative that she's finally getting what she wanted. The gift bag contains all sorts of art supplies. Jade decides to forgive Maxine.

*The way Jade reminds herself to appreciate Maxine's gift illustrates how Jade has to suppress her true feelings in order to please authority figures. Jade again shows that she's ashamed of her poverty when she worries about Maxine finding out that E.J. sleeps on the couch; hiding the evidence is a way for Jade to try to make herself not look quite so poor. Though this is a rather formal relationship in many regards, it's important to note the shared qualities that bring Jade and Maxine together: they're both black, female, and involved with Woman to Woman.*



Maxine asks about Jade's art. Jade hands over a sketchbook and Maxine flips through, awed by the collages. Maxine says she'll tell her sister, Mia, about Jade, since Mia owns a gallery. Maxine's phone rings and Jade says it's okay for her to answer. It's Jon. Maxine says she can't talk since she's with her mentee, which offends Jade—she wants to be referred to as *Jade*, not as Maxine's mentee. Jade thinks that Maxine seems nervous as she hangs up, sits on the sofa, and then gets up to admire Jade's bookshelf. They talk about St. Francis and Maxine's high school experience. She didn't participate in *Woman to Woman*, which Jade takes to mean that Maxine has never been at risk. Maxine says she's doing this because she wants to give back and she likes Mrs. Parker. Mrs. Parker convinced her to go on the study abroad program.

Jade tells Maxine about her confusion over whether she's going to study abroad or not, but she doesn't mention that Mrs. Parker seemingly nominated her for *Woman to Woman* instead of the study abroad trip. Maxine says that traveling changes people and it makes them appreciate home, but Jade says she thinks it'd just make her want to leave Oregon. Jade thinks Maxine's beliefs come from never having lived in a tiny house with a leaky roof. E.J. enters the living room, greets Maxine, and says that she and Jon will definitely get back together. As Maxine leaves, Jade wonders if Maxine stood her up because of boyfriend drama. Jade asks E.J. to tell her everything about Maxine. He says he doesn't know her well, but that she and Jon just broke up. Jade thinks that all of E.J.'s friends are boys whom Dad says to avoid. She wonders what Maxine can possibly teach her.

## CHAPTER 11

The next morning, Jade and Mom discuss Maxine's visit and Jade's busy schedule for the week. Mom asks when she gets to meet Maxine—she's very strict about who Jade hangs out with—and she asks for Maxine's phone number. When Mom leaves for work, she lets the door slam. Jade then heads for the bus stop. A confused looking woman approaches, holding a boy's hand. She mimes a question and Jade asks if she speaks Spanish. Jade gives the woman directions in Spanish to the correct bus stop and then she thinks of how proud Mr. Flores would be. He's taught Jade and the other students lots of Spanish phrases to help them abroad, but Jade thinks that she's figuring out how to use them right here.

*When Maxine refers to Jade just as her mentee, this is another identity that Jade would rather not assume. Even if, technically speaking, she is Maxine's mentee, she'd rather Maxine saw her as an individual named Jade who has dreams, desires, and passions. Even as Maxine makes these assumptions, however, Jade makes assumptions of her own: she assumes that Maxine has never been at risk based only on the fact that Maxine has never participated in a mentorship program like this. Jade is forgetting that lots of different people (like Sam) need help—but not everyone gets a mentor.*



*Jade continues to make assumptions about Maxine as they chat and as E.J. shares what he knows. In particular, her curiosity regarding what Maxine could teach her shows how little Jade thinks of people who make poor decisions due to a messy breakup. In this sense, Jade is distilling Maxine down into a person who makes bad choices, and this cuts Jade off from seeing what else Maxine might have to offer. They might not be compatible in the same way that Jade is with her other friends, but this doesn't mean that there aren't other aspects to Maxine that might pique Jade's interest and earn her respect.*



*Given that Jade is Mom's "deferred dream" (Mom essentially sacrificed her young adulthood and college experience to raise Jade), it's understandable that Mom might be a bit touchy about someone else stepping in to guide Jade. From a strictly practical point of view, Mom should want Jade to have all the help she can get so they can both achieve their dreams—but Maxine doesn't seem like an ideal mentor at this point and so her influence on Jade is questionable.*



## CHAPTER 12

After school, Jade goes to Sam's house for the first time. As soon as they get off the bus, Sam starts issuing warnings about her grandparents' eccentricities, especially those of her grandmother, Mrs. Franklin, who has Alzheimer's. Jade doesn't ask why Sam lives with her grandparents and she's happy to eat at Sam's since she knows there won't be much at home later. Sam leads Jade to a small house, opens the door, and then shouts that she's home so they don't scare Mrs. Franklin. Mrs. Franklin doesn't look away from the TV, so the girls head into the kitchen. Mr. Franklin greets Jade, and when Jade shares that she lives in North **Portland**, Mrs. Franklin shouts that there are only "hillbillies, blacks, and Mexicans" live there and that it's a good thing there are so many shootouts—they'll all kill each other. Sam is enraged.

Mr. Franklin calms Sam down and he shares that he's lived here for 40 years, and their neighbors have been here for 20. Mrs. Franklin shouts that the neighbors are black as Jade tries to imagine what it's like to live somewhere that long. Mr. Franklin talks about all the changes in Northeast **Portland** and he says it's part of life, but Jade knows people who had to move out of the area. They either couldn't afford the taxes or didn't own their homes, and according to Mom, people who don't own have no power. Sam leads Jade to her bedroom. Jade is shocked that Sam has a bed, a futon, a TV, and her own bathroom. They start working through Jade's Spanish vocabulary flashcards.

A bit later, Mr. Franklin knocks and he gives Sam the phone. It's Sam's mom. Jade tries to ignore Mr. Franklin as Sam talks briefly and then hands the phone back to Mr. Franklin. He frowns and tells Sam's mom that Sam is a teenager and she doesn't know how to show her emotions. Sam apologizes to Jade and assures Jade that there's nothing else to say to her mom; her mom will call in a month for Sam's birthday. Jade is shocked, but Sam says that her mom didn't want to be a mom anymore and so she left Sam with her grandparents. Sam says it's better here anyway. Instead of studying, the girls talk about their fathers and about how difficult it is to be at St. Francis.

*Jade's desire to eat at Sam's house again shows how she's learned to alleviate her food scarcity every chance she gets. Though Jade seems to think it's respectful to not ask why Sam lives with her grandparents, it's also worth considering that sharing these things about each other would help the girls deepen their bond and strengthen their friendship. Such strengthening might be necessary, given Mrs. Franklin's racist outburst. This situation can't be comfortable for Jade, even if she sees that Sam doesn't think the same way her grandmother does.*



*What both Mr. Franklin and Jade are thinking about is gentrification, the process of wealthier people moving into a lower-income neighborhood and driving up the cost of living. This is something that it seems like Mr. Franklin has been able to weather for the most part. Jade's peers, however, weren't able to sit it out because they didn't own their homes and therefore they didn't have much power over what happened to their neighborhoods. Mom draws a clear link between home ownership and power, which tells Jade that if she wants to be able to live like Mr. Franklin one day, she needs to amass as much wealth as she can.*



*Jade is so shocked by the revelation about Sam's mother because, in her experience, Mom is one of the people who will always be there for her. That it's so hard for her to wrap her head around Sam's experience shows that Jade is battling some of her own prejudices that keep her from being an entirely empathetic friend. Despite this, the conversation the girls have does help them deepen their relationship and get to know each other better.*



Sam shares that her older brother seems happy for her that she's attending St. Francis, but he's also sad and jealous. Jade says she gets it—she sometimes feels bad about how many opportunities she now has and she feels like she can't let her friends and neighbors down. Sam points out that it's not fair for them to feel guilty for getting what they deserve, which shocks Jade. She's never considered that she deserves good things, mostly because she knows lots of people who work hard and get nothing. Sam says it's weird being stuck in the middle. She doesn't talk to St. Francis kids about her life and she doesn't talk to her friends about school. Jade suggests that now that they're friends, it won't be so bad.

*Though Jade doesn't openly think of this conversation in terms of race, Sam's belief that she deserves good things is likely a product of being white—while Jade's belief that getting good things has more to do with luck reflects the particular struggles of being black and poor. In this sense, even though Jade and Sam connect through their poverty, they still think of their lives in very different ways. Further, those differences color how the girls deal with the opportunities they do get.*



## CHAPTER 13

Last Friday, Maxine was supposed to take Jade out for dinner but she canceled at the last minute. Jade suspects it was about Jon. This morning, Maxine is going to try to make it up to Jade by taking her out for her birthday. Jade greets Mom and tells her that she's dressed up because Maxine is taking her out to “do brunch” for her birthday. Mom is incredulous that Jade is speaking like this—she says that Jade has chores and that Maxine should've asked her first. She tells Jade she can't go. Maxine rings the doorbell and Mom answers it. She doesn't let Maxine in and she declares that Jade isn't leaving the house—Jade is a child with a mother. Maxine apologizes and she says she knows Mom isn't home much. Mom replies that when she's not home, she's working. Jade is mortified.

*To Mom, Jade saying that they're going to “do brunch” sounds rather upscale, which makes it seem as though Maxine is corrupting Jade and turning her into someone Mom doesn't recognize. In this instance, then, language is threatening. Jade is mortified in part because Maxine implies that she doesn't expect Mom to be involved in Jade's life if she's not home. Again, it's understandable that this would feel threatening to Mom, since she is as involved as she can be and she is undeniably caring. Mom and Maxine are both coming up against their assumptions about each other, which makes it even harder to trust the other and to help Jade succeed.*



Maxine apologizes again and Mom lets her in, saying that Maxine can stay for a while if she wants. Mom grouches about Jade's art supplies everywhere and then she locks herself in her room. Maxine apologizes to Jade and she says that Mom is right: in the future, she'll check their plans with Mom first. Jade invites Maxine to her room to see her latest collage: it's about **York** and Lewis and Clark. Maxine is impressed. She stays for an hour and they talk about movies and music. Jade is surprised that they have a lot in common, but Maxine assures Jade that she knows black culture even if she went to St. Francis. Then, she asks Mom's permission to take Jade to a bookstore to buy her art books. Mom agrees but she reminds Maxine that Jade is a scholar too.

*When Jade is surprised that she and Maxine have so much in common, it again shows that Jade is dealing with her own preconceptions about Maxine—and that those preconceptions are probably keeping her from truly connecting with her mentor. Though Jade doesn't seem bothered by Mom's insistence that she's a scholar first and an artist second, Maxine can step in here and help support a part of Jade's identity that Mom doesn't support as much. Through this mentoring experience, Jade can receive support in more areas of her life, thereby giving her more options.*



## CHAPTER 14

On her birthday, Jade wakes up to pancakes and bacon. Over breakfast, Jade shares that she's going to go out to eat with Sam and Lee Lee. Later, Dad is going to stop by and drop off his gift. E.J. asks if Dad is buying things with wishes or with "that white lady's money," and Jade shouts back that E.J. is living off of Mom in the same way he thinks Dad is living off of his fiancée. Jade locks herself in her room until after E.J. and Mom leave. Both Sam and Lee Lee call and cancel because of illness and punishment, so Jade spends the day sleeping. E.J. gets home around dusk and by 11 p.m., Dad still hasn't come. Jade goes to her room, but E.J. calls her back out for cheesecake and to say he loves her.

*No one in the novel is free of prejudice—though E.J. seems to have no reason to think kindly of Dad, attacking the fact that Dad is unemployed by talking about his fiancée suggests that E.J. has more issues with the white fiancée than with the unemployment, since E.J. is also unemployed. Despite this spat, E.J.'s cheesecake offering shows that Jade does indeed have a robust network to support and love her—Mrs. Parker's assumptions that Jade is alone are clearly incorrect.*



## CHAPTERS 15 - 16

On Sunday, Jade takes her braids out and she lets her hair hover like a cloud. Mom smiles when she gets home and she jokingly accuses Jade of stealing her scarf, but she tells Jade she can keep it. It rains heavily on Monday. Sam isn't on the bus, so the ride is quiet and lonely. Josiah wishes Jade a happy birthday, as does Mrs. Parker. Then, Jade gets to her locker. Sam is there, and there are balloons and a card taped to it. She apologizes for missing Jade's birthday lunch, and for the rest of the day Jade enjoys everyone wishing her a happy birthday.

*Mom's smiles and jokes help Jade feel proud of her natural, unbraided hair. At home, it seems as though Mom is able to make Jade feel okay about her black features in a way that Jade doesn't necessarily feel at school. However, Sam's friendship nevertheless makes school easier and more pleasant.*



## CHAPTERS 17 - 18

After school, Jade goes to visit Dad. He gives Jade a digital camera and a mini photo printer. He apologizes for not visiting and he says his cell phone died. When Jade asks why he canceled, he says that he doesn't have a good reason and he apologizes again. Jade puts batteries in her camera and then she starts taking pictures. Dad warms up leftover Chinese food and then he asks Jade about her Spanish class. Jade says she loves it because it feels like learning a secret code. She says that when she was little, Dad taught her that language is powerful. On the way home, Jade takes pictures of everything she can, including herself.

*It's clear that even if Jade isn't entirely sold on the idea that she should speak up for herself, she does fully believe that language is power. Further, this notion came from her family, which is further evidence of her robust support network. With Jade's camera and the collages she'll make with her photos, Jade can also continue to develop her fluency in the language of art. Through this, Jade can learn more ways to communicate effectively.*



## CHAPTER 19

Maxine takes Jade to Powell's, a bookstore so huge that it requires a map. In the room of art books, a clerk helps them find books on black collagists. The clerk asks Jade what she makes art about and then she pulls out books about Romare Bearden and Mickalene Thomas. Jade has never seen art like Mickalene's: her collages are of pieced-together women of color. Jade tries to decide which book she wants, but at the register, Maxine pays for both of them. On the way home, Jade studies the books.

*Maxine does Jade a huge service by introducing her to successful artists who look like her. This shows Jade that if she chooses to become a professional artist, she won't be the first black, female artist out there—and therefore, she already has peers and a community waiting for her. This gives Jade more options to consider as she looks to her future, and it helps her develop trust for Maxine.*



## CHAPTERS 20 - 21

There are 12 girls in the Woman to Woman program. Jade thinks that they're 12 seeds, prayers, histories, questions, smiles, and tomorrows. Being part of the program is like having 12 new aunts. Tonight, Jade is at a "girl talk night" at Sabrina's house, which has shiny hardwood floors and it doesn't feel crowded with 25 people. Jade hopes they're going to talk about how to get a house like Sabrina's, but the topic tonight is dating. Sabrina asks each mentee to write down questions, but Jade writes nothing. Several girls seem experienced enough to lead the session, Jade and a few others are too busy with school to worry about boys, three are excited, and Jasmine is saving herself for marriage.

Sabrina asks the oldest mentor to start by sharing what she wishes someone had told her about dating when she was a teen. She says that her mom told her to worry about herself and love herself first. The mentors all nod and others add that the girls will keep growing and changing, and that relationships should be fun. Jade notices that Maxine is silent and she is acting like she doesn't want to talk. Then, Sabrina turns to the box of the mentees' question. One question is about how to get over someone. Jade looks at Maxine but she looks away quickly. She wonders what it feels like to have the same questions the mentees do, but to supposedly be in charge. To end, Sabrina says that they all must believe that they're worthy of love and of achieving their dreams.

Jade's mind suddenly fills up. Mom had lots of dreams, E.J. is extremely confident, and Lee Lee wants to be a poet—but having dreams doesn't mean they'll come true. Jade knows that something happens during the day while she's out of her mom's house. Jade thinks that something happens when people tell her she's pretty, and when she sees black men and women shot down on TV. She feels like she leaves home whole and comes home in pieces, but Mom's love seems to repair her. Jade feels secure at home and as though her skin color isn't a curse, and listening to the mentors, she believes she can prove negative stereotypes wrong. But she knows that she'll shatter again and she wonders if that's just what life is like for a black girl. Jade wonders if she can ever feel whole.

*Though Jade shares with the reader that she'd like to learn how to purchase a home like Sabrina's, she doesn't share this with anyone else. Jade's tone seems a bit offhand, which suggests that she might think this desire is silly—but it isn't, especially considering the clear link Mom drew between home ownership, security, and power. Though it's impossible to come up with topics that please everyone (and some girls are clearly interested in talking about dating), Jade isn't getting what she needs out of Woman to Woman right now because she isn't asking for it.*



*As Jade considers how Maxine might be feeling, she develops empathy for Maxine. When Jade recognizes that Maxine is a mentor and not a mentee just because she's a little bit older, it begins to impress upon Jade that not even adults have everything figured out—even those adults who are, in theory, in charge. This empathy and understanding will help Jade see Maxine as more of a friend and less of an authority figure, though it's worth keeping in mind that Maxine will also need to show Jade the respect that Jade craves.*



*At home (and at Woman to Woman meetings), surrounded by people who love her, none of Jade's various identities are bad or damaging. Instead, it's the prejudiced outside world that causes problems for Jade. This makes it clear that people shouldn't have to change their identities in order to fit in or feel more whole; rather, in an ideal situation, the world should instead become more accepting of diversity and difference. The idea of shattering, however, suggests that putting her identity together is a difficult process, in part because the world is prejudiced and discriminatory.*



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## CHAPTER 22

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On Monday morning, Sam asks Jade if she'll be able to hang out over the weekend. Jade is busy and she feels bad for not spending much time with Sam. Kennedy waves to them outside. Inside, Josiah tells everyone in the hallway that they're going out to lunch at Zack's Burgers. He tells Jade she has to come, but Jade only accepts because E.J. gave her some money. Kennedy greets Jade and she says that since Jade walks to school, she could give Jade a ride. Jade explains that she takes the bus from North **Portland**. Kennedy's eyes go wide as she says that it makes sense now. Jade isn't sure she wants to go to lunch with Kennedy and Josiah now.

*Kennedy's surprise when she learns that Jade lives in North Portland speaks to Jade's success at hiding important parts of her identity at school. At least in the eyes of Jade's classmates, she fits in more than she thinks she does. This, however, doesn't mean that Jade has real friends—she's still lonely, even if she might put on a good show of fitting in. Kennedy's surprise also suggests that she holds distinct ideas about what Jade's life might be like, something that Jade already finds offensive.*



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## CHAPTER 23

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There are six people to fit into Kennedy's small car. One girl suggests that Jade sit in the front, and Jade knows it's because she won't fit in the back. At Zack's, the other students are short with the cashier and Kennedy throws a fit when she gets the wrong fries. On the way back to school, another girl talks on and on about how awful Northeast **Portland** is. She says it's a "polished ghetto" and she'd be depressed if she lived there. Kennedy and the other girls concur. Sam, Josiah, and Jade are silent. Back at school, Josiah excuses himself and Jade and Sam sit quietly across the hallway from Kennedy and her friends. Sam whispers that she'd be depressed if she lived *here* and she never wants to eat with Kennedy again, but she does want to go back to Zack's. The girls burst into joyful laughter.

*On the ride to Zack's Burgers, Jade is also reminded of the fact that she's bigger than other kids her age—and that they're going to treat her differently because of her size. Because of this, she feels like she has to act a certain way in order to earn their approval. The other girl's choice to talk badly about Northeast Portland shows again that people at Jade's school make a lot of assumptions about their city and the people who inhabit it. They live in a bubble, and so it likely doesn't even occur to them that they could be hurting someone's feelings.*



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## CHAPTERS 24 - 25

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At home, Jade finds a \$20 bill and a note from Mom, telling Jade to buy herself dinner. Jade decides to go to Dairy Queen. Lee Lee isn't home, so Jade hops on the bus by herself. The restaurant is packed. Jade orders and steps to the side. She can hear a group of boys at a table, talking about which of their friends they'd date. Then, they turn to women in the restaurant. They assess Jade. One says she's a five, another says that Jade is big enough to break the scale, and other says he likes big girls.

*Even more than trying to fit in Kennedy's car did, these boys force Jade to confront her size—as well as the fact that because she's female, she's vulnerable and she'd potentially be putting herself in danger if she talked back to these boys. Language, in this case, has the power to make Jade feel small, insignificant, and vulnerable, and Jade doesn't feel comfortable using her own voice to protect herself.*



Jade gets her food and leaves, deciding not to eat at Dairy Queen. She wonders who teaches boys to reduce girls to parts and catcall them. One boy yells for Jade to stop, but she ignores him. He calls her names and he says she should be on a diet. The bus is packed and Jade waits until she gets home to eat since she thinks nobody wants to see a big girl eat a burger. She saves her bag to make into a dress or a crown for a confident girl in one of her collages. Jade decides on a huge, imposing crown. In the background of the collage, in Spanish, she writes the things the boy could've called her: daughter, friend, artist, scholar.

*Jade's collage is a way for her to transform an awful experience into something that reminds her of who she wants to be. In this situation, she can use language to put these identities front and center and ignore the awful things the boys said to her. That Jade does this after the boys harass her shows just how hard she has to work to piece her identity together. She constantly has to deal with others' assumptions about who she is—and she must constantly work to think of herself in a positive way.*



## CHAPTER 26

Jade repeats the bus directions to her house to Sam and she agrees to meet her at the stop, though she wants to tell Sam to not come if she doesn't feel safe. Sam isn't on the first bus that arrives, and for a moment, Jade assumes the worst: Sam will make the news for going missing and for months, and people will tell girls to be careful. No one will tell men not to rape and kidnap women. Sam's death would be a tragedy, but no one will talk about the black and Latinx girls who die here. But Sam gets off of the next bus and Jade takes her to a shop. The owner, Frank, gives Jade extra JoJos and chicken, asks after Mom, and then gives her the food on the house. Lee Lee walks in, greets and hugs Jade, and then greets Sam.

*In this situation, Jade is very aware of how the difference in skin color between her and Sam would change what happens if one of them goes missing. Though they're both female—and therefore, they're both at a greater risk of violence like she describes—Sam's skin color means that people will feel sympathetic toward her, while Jade's disappearance might not even make the news. This sort of thing is one of the reasons why Jade feels so defeated at times: it's exhausting to know that society sees girls like Sam as inherently more important.*



After Lee Lee buys some food, the girls all walk back to Lee Lee's house, where she lives with her cousin Andrea. Their cousin Kobe is there too, and both Andrea and Kobe treat Jade like a celebrity. They all eat Jade's chicken and JoJos and then they talk about their different schools. They tease Jade about her love of language and then Lee Lee says the only thing worth mentioning at Northside is the poetry club. It's not official, but their English teacher, Mrs. Baker, lets them use her room. Sam says it sounds cool, but Lee Lee brushes this off. Sam points out that no teacher at St. Francis would allow that—they'd want it to be a formal thing with no freedom.

*When Jade compliments Lee Lee's poetry, it shows again that she already understands the power of language to express ideas and change how people think. That Lee Lee is clearly getting an education in how to use her voice from Mrs. Baker speaks to the positive aspects of Northside. While Northside is making an effort to teach students like Lee Lee to use their voices, Jade recognizes that St. Francis is making her feel as though she must be silent and take what's given to her.*



After an afternoon of listening to music, Sam calls Mr. Franklin to let him know she's on her way. Lee Lee and Jade walk Sam to the bus stop and Lee Lee struggles to hide her surprise when she learns that Sam was born in **Portland** and that she lives in Northeast. After Sam gets on the bus, Jade shares with Lee Lee what Mrs. Franklin said about North Portland. Lee Lee laughs and she says that white people are crazy—Northeast is still sketchy, and North Portland is getting whiter by the minute. They laugh.

*What Lee Lee describes here is casual racism—Mr. Franklin (possibly unwittingly) seems to believe that because North Portland is historically black, it's therefore less safe than Northeast Portland. Though it's unclear if Sam shares her grandfather's views or if she's just calling to appease him, this leaves open the possibility that Sam, too, holds racist beliefs.*



## CHAPTER 27

For Thanksgiving, E.J. and Lee Lee join Mom and Jade for their traditional volunteer shift at the Portland Rescue Mission. Jade hopes that one day, they can just be thankful and not have to compare themselves to others who have even less. After volunteering, they go home and eat all their favorite dishes. Lee Lee shares that one of her teachers doesn't celebrate Thanksgiving. E.J. remembers this teacher and he reminisces that she said Thanksgiving should be a national day of mourning. He explains to Mom that they're basically celebrating that white people stole land from indigenous people. Jade's dinner suddenly doesn't taste as good, and Mom says that she thinks of it as a personal day of thanks but that the teacher has a point.

Lee Lee continues that this teacher always asks them to think about other perspectives; next week, they're meeting up with teens from a program at the Native American Youth and Family Center. E.J. remembers doing that exchange too. Jade is embarrassed—she didn't even know there was a Native American community center in **Portland**. E.J. and Lee Lee debate for a long time, and finally Mom asks Jade for her opinion. Jade carefully says that the U.S. has lots to apologize for and lots to be thankful for. The mood doesn't lighten up until Mom pulls out the peach cobbler that Lee Lee and Jade made. It tastes awful, but they all laugh.

*Jade's shock suggests that she hasn't thought about Thanksgiving's implications before—which is another way in which the novel suggests that Northside is giving its students more to think about, if not a better and more useful educational experience than St. Francis offers. Given Jade's interest in York, this is also a time where she has to confront the possibility that York was complicit in displacing indigenous people. Just like everyone else, York is a morally complex individual, but because he's symbolic of Jade's own struggles, he helps her think through where she stands on these issues.*



*This Northside teacher appears to be teaching her students about intersectionality and diversity in a very purposeful way. Introducing her students to different people around the city shows the students that Portland is more diverse than they may have thought, something that helps them develop empathy for others. Hearing about these experiences also help Jade develop empathy and realize that just as she's a multifaceted person, her home is a multifaceted place.*



## CHAPTER 28

On the first weekend in December, Maxine drives Jade downtown to go to the art museum. Maxine tells Jade that she can't touch the art, can't take photos, and that they'll have to talk quietly. Jade thinks that Maxine is acting like Jade doesn't know how to behave in public. A few minutes into their time at the museum, Maxine's phone rings: it's Jon. Maxine steps outside to answer. Jade waits for 10 minutes and then Maxine tells Jade to go in alone. Jade wonders what Maxine and Jon have to talk about and why they have to talk whenever Maxine is with her. It makes Jade think that Maxine has nothing to teach her about loving herself and taking care of herself.

*Maxine's behavior does read as distinctly odd, which suggests that Maxine might be worried that Jade is going to embarrass her or make her look bad. This, in turn, means that Maxine might be participating in Woman to Woman to boost her own self esteem; she might not be involved because she's passionate about actually helping Jade. This is an example of poor mentorship, as it makes Jade feel inferior and as though Maxine doesn't respect her.*



Jade sees another mentor-mentee pair taking photographs and she joins them when they invite her. Jade strays to look at the photographs and thinks that Maxine is being really rude. When Sabrina finds Jade and she says they're going to do a reflection activity, Jade hides in the bathroom. She finds Maxine on a bench when she comes out. Maxine apologizes, says she had to have the conversation, and offers to take Jade to dinner. As they walk, Maxine asks Jade what she thought about the museum. Jade knows that Maxine wants to hear that it was a great time and not that Jade thinks Maxine is rude, so she says it was awesome. Maxine asks if any of Jade's friends have been to the museum and she says that most people in North **Portland** stay in a bubble. At the restaurant, Jade wants to avoid a lecture on healthy eating so she orders salmon and arugula like Maxine.

After their food comes, Jade asks what Maxine meant that people in North **Portland** live in a bubble. Maxine explains that lots of people never leave their neighborhoods, and it upsets Jade that Maxine is talking about her friends like she knows them. Jade points out economic reasons why her friends might not get out much, but Maxine has lots of solutions: admission discounts, free days, and trips to Multnomah Falls. When Jade points out that if Mom had a car they'd have to be careful where they went so they could keep gas in it, Maxine laughs and she calls Jade a pessimist. Jade thinks that she's poor and a realist. Maxine asks about Mom. Jade shares that Mom is working for Ms. Louise and another woman on the weekends, and Maxine looks at Jade with pity. Maxine suggests that Mom is lucky, but Jade doesn't think so.

Jade asks what Maxine's mom does, and Maxine shares that her mom is a surgeon and so she wasn't home much when Maxine was a kid. Jade then asks for the real reason Maxine wanted to participate in Woman to Woman. Maxine says that she wants to help and that she could've used someone to talk to when she was a teen. She asks Jade if she needs someone to talk to, but Jade doesn't want to answer. She doesn't want Maxine to think that Mom is a bad mother or that Jade is broken. Maxine chats on and she says that they're going to grow and learn, but Jade asks how they'll do that if Maxine keeps flaking out. Maxine apologizes and she asks for another chance.

*The reader again gets to see what Jade would justifiably like to bring up. Avoiding this, however, shows that Jade still feels like there's a power imbalance between her and Maxine. Jade doesn't want to risk offending Maxine or looking ungrateful, and so she doesn't think she can voice any of her hurt or concerns. The novel magnifies this by showing how Jade avoids an unwanted conversation about her food choices by ordering the same thing as Maxine.*



*Maxine seems to imply that people in North Portland live in a bubble by choice—when in Jade's experience, they live in a bubble because they don't have the money to get out. Maxine's unwillingness to listen to what Jade is saying is another example of her being a poor mentor. She doesn't trust that Jade is the expert on her own life and she acts as though she can fix Jade and others in Jade's community with ideas that seem fine on the surface—but as Jade points out, these ideas won't work in practice. This also reveals Maxine's privileged upbringing. If Maxine had any firsthand experience, she'd know that her ideas aren't helpful.*



*Even if Maxine did grow up relatively privileged, she shows here that even well-off young people need someone to talk to and look up to. Mentorship is, in this sense, something that can help everyone, but this doesn't mean that Maxine is an effective mentor yet. Jade doesn't trust Maxine to actually be there for her or to understand that Mom loves and cares for Jade even if she has to work all the time. Because of Maxine's own experiences, she doesn't seem to understand how people can be good parents in different ways.*



## CHAPTER 29

Jade takes the bus downtown to take pictures. A woman wearing sandals, dirty jeans, and a thin shirt gets on the bus not long after Jade does. The woman asks the driver if she can ride without a fare and the driver lets her on. She sits across from Jade and she mumbles and cries. Jade wonders who loves this woman and who's worried about her. She wonders, if when the woman was Jade's age, she thought she'd be drenched on a bus. When the woman gets off, she calls, "Jesus loves you." Jade gets off downtown and takes pictures of things downtown. At the historical society, she notices a mural of Lewis and Clark. It includes Sacagawea, her baby, and **York**. She takes several photos of York's face.

*Discovering this mural that includes York and Sacagawea helps Jade see that Portland can be her home if she chooses to stay and make the best of it. There are opportunities to elevate the experiences of black individuals if Jade knows where to look. Jade also gets to practice her empathy when the crying woman gets on the bus. She looks at the woman with compassion and she recognizes that someone, somewhere, must love this woman—a reflection of the fact that Jade knows that people love her.*



## CHAPTER 30

Lee Lee and Sam come over to make holiday cards. Lee Lee frets that she's not a good artist, but Jade reminds her that they're just making collages using old cards from years past. Lee Lee laughs that Jade must have forgotten sixth grade, and Jade tells the story for Sam: their class drew self-portraits for parent night, but their teacher thought Lee Lee's was awful and didn't put it up. Lee Lee assures Sam it didn't hurt her feelings; up until that point, Jade did Lee Lee's art homework and Lee Lee wrote things for Jade. Sam laughs.

*This story of Lee Lee's horrendous art project continues to bring up all the events that have helped Lee Lee and Jade become close friends over the years. Even if Jade and Sam don't have memories like this yet, this doesn't mean that they're not good friends—the experience of making cards and sharing stories together is one that will continue to cement their friendship.*



A few hours in, Lee Lee asks Sam what she's good at. Sam thinks and says she's not really good at anything. She says she'd rather read or look at art than write or make things herself. Jade suggests this means that Sam is a good listener and a good friend. Lee Lee pipes up that that's a great skill and then she talks about an old friend who betrayed her. Sam smiles thankfully and she whispers to Jade that she's a good friend too.

*In Jade's experience thus far, Sam is a good listener and a good friend—the reader learns far more about Jade than they do about Sam from the girls' conversations. However, this might also mean that Jade isn't as good of a friend as Sam implies here, as Jade doesn't ask her as many questions in return.*



## CHAPTERS 31 - 32

Jade writes her New Year's resolutions in black on top of a background of scripture, newspaper headlines, and calendars. She wants to be the best possible version of herself: bold, brave, beautiful, and brilliant.

*The words Jade uses to define herself show again how she's working hard to piece together an identity that doesn't insist she's just black, female, and poor.*



Ever since Jade's chat with Maxine, Maxine has made more of an effort to spend time with Jade. Tonight, they're hanging out at Maxine's apartment with a few of Maxine's friends. Jade loves Maxine's apartment, which is open-concept and has lots of black and white architectural photos and matching furniture. Bailey and Kira arrive, greet Jade, and then immediately ask what's up with Jon. As they grill Maxine, Jade stuffs her mouth with pretzels and she learns that Jon recently cheated on Maxine and that he spent their entire two-year relationship asking for money and using Maxine's car. Kira and Bailey also point out that Jon didn't just *lose* his job: he was fired for regularly showing up late and high. With a sigh, Maxine tells Jade to find friends who will keep her from making mistakes. Jade says that none of her friends or Mom would've let her date a guy like Jon.

Maxine seems both offended and surprised and she insists that she's trying to move on. Jade asks Bailey and Kira about their college experiences. They talk until after dark, and then Maxine orders pizza. Jade is sure it's going to taste bad when Maxine suggests tofu instead of chicken. The conversation turns to **Portland** State's performance of *The Vagina Monologues*. Kira laments that they'll never do *for colored girls* and Jade asks what *The Vagina Monologues* is about.

Maxine's eyes get wide, and she, Kira, and Bailey argue if Jade is old enough to talk about sex. The pizza arrives and as Jade eats (the pizza isn't as bad as she feared), she wonders if this is what it'd be like to have older sisters. Quietly, Kira tells Jade that she'll talk to her about sex if she wants, but Maxine says Jade isn't like "those girls." Jade knows Maxine is talking about girls from Jade's neighborhood, and she hates how Maxine makes her feel like she needs to be saved.

## CHAPTER 33

Jade finishes her first collage about **York**, Lewis, and Clark. She tells Mom that she's interested in the fact that a black man found the Pacific Northwest, but all *she* wants to do is leave. That night, Jade makes a collage about her own journey to escape. It makes her feel like a traitor, since Maxine is kind of right: Jade is like "those girls." She eats fast food, uses food stamps, and knows to duck from gunshots. Jade wants boys to notice her—but the boys at St. Francis don't because she doesn't look like their mothers, and the boys at home only see Jade as a tutor and friend. However, Jade knows she wants more. She wants to go to college and grad school. Jade thinks that "those girls" aren't her opposite. They're on different paths, but there's a place where they connect.

*Jade's interest in Maxine's trim and organized apartment makes it clear that Jade really wants to learn how to reach a point in her life where she can afford to rent something like this—something that *Woman to Woman* doesn't seem like it's going to teach her how to do. While this is a shortcoming of the program, it's also worth remembering that Jade chose not to fill in what she'd like out of the program on the initial form. This may be as much a matter of Jade not advocating for herself as it is of *Woman to Woman* offering questionable programming.*



*Bailey and Kira get to act as extra mentors to Jade, as they bring slightly different experiences to the table. In this sense, introducing Jade to her friends is one of the best things Maxine can do for Jade, as she's helping Jade create a community of caring adults who can and will look out for her in the future.*



*It's worth keeping in mind that Maxine's "those girls" comment is even more offensive because Mom was one of "those girls," since she had Jade at age 16. This doesn't make Mom a bad or lesser person, however, something that Maxine seems to not understand. Maxine is, in this case, looking at teens who have sex and get pregnant as wholly bad, rather than seeing them as multifaceted individuals—a judgment that's particularly hypocritical given Maxine's own questionable romantic choices.*



*The place where Jade connects with "those girls" is in North Portland, where she lives. They all come from the same place, and in broad strokes, they all want the same things—but Jade just has more opportunities to be successful than the other young women in her neighborhood. This is another instance in which the connection between Jade and her home city shines through, as Jade contains multitudes and layers just like Portland does—and just as she wants to leave Portland, there are parts of her identity that Jade also wants to leave behind.*



## CHAPTER 34

Jade has been so busy that Sam starts to feel ignored, but today, Jade has nothing to do. The girls decide to go to the mall so Sam can shop. Jade is glad she doesn't have money since she can't fit any of the clothes anyway. She's shocked that Sam can pick up clothes, hold them up, and see if they're going to fit. Sam picks up so many clothes that a clerk takes Sam's things to start a dressing room. The clerk turns to Jade and asks if she needs help, but she doesn't find Jade's joke that she can't fit into anything funny. Instead, the clerk tells Jade not to loiter. Jade walks to the back of the store to look at purses but she gets distracted by a jewelry display.

The clerk finds Jade again and she asks to put her bag behind the counter or leave. Other white women around have purses with them, so Jade refuses to check her bag. As she leaves the store, most of the white women look away. One woman stops by Jade on her way out of the store, says that what the clerk did was wrong, and suggests that Jade write to the manager. Sam emerges a while later and she is shocked to hear what happened. She holds up her backpack, which she got to take into the dressing room, and she points out that it is a little smaller than Jade's bag. Jade is shocked and hurt as Sam continues to defend the clerk for doing her job. Jade can't decide if the mistreatment is worse than having to prove to her friend that it happened.

*Keep in mind that Jade and Sam are in a similar socioeconomic bracket; the only thing differentiating them here is their size and their skin color (though Sam seemingly has more money than Jade, seeing as she can afford an afternoon of shopping). The clerk, however, seems to hold a racist view of Jade as inherently suspicious because she's black; the clerk unwilling to consider that Jade is here to be a good friend to Sam and that she has no interest in stealing.*



*If Sam had come out of the store and been just as hurt and incensed as Jade, it would've softened the blow of this racist incident. Instead, Sam compounds Jade's hurt and trauma by essentially insisting that it wasn't racist, or that Jade is making things up. Though Sam later admits that she's extremely uncomfortable and she doesn't know what to say here, she's being an awful friend by not even listening to Jade, acting sympathetic, or taking Jade's concerns seriously.*



## CHAPTERS 35 - 36

Jade creates a collage of things that are black and beautiful. She lists things like onyx, clarinets, panthers, Afro puffs, and Michelle Obama. When Jade gets home, Mom is blasting gospel music and frying fish. Jade settles in with her math homework, but she's frustrated and she closes her book. Mom comes to look, admits that she knows nothing about algebra, and apologizes that she can't help. Jade says she'll ask Maxine, which seems to offend Mom; she slams cabinets as she finishes cooking. When they both sit to eat, Jade compliments the fish and then she asks if Mom is going to come to the Healthy Eating, Healthy Living seminar.

Mom insists that she doesn't have time for the seminar, and when Jade gives a quick overview on what they'll talk about (such as grilling food instead of frying it) Mom huffs that she's going to cook how she wants unless Sabrina or Maxine are going to cook for them or buy them a grill. She says that Jade liked her cooking until she started going out with Maxine and she insists that the "uppity" black women have forgotten where they come from. Jade lets Mom talk on and she makes sure to eat every bit of food on her plate.

*Mom's behavior when Jade brings up asking Maxine for help indicates that she's having a hard time letting go and allowing Maxine to play a role in Jade's life. Even if Mom is entirely on board with Jade getting the scholarship from the program, Woman to Woman is still pulling Jade away from her and highlighting all the ways in which Mom can't help Jade. This likely has as much to do with Mom's insecurities as anything else—it may drive home that she didn't receive a full education.*



*Here, Mom makes it clear that being black doesn't mean that all black people share the same ideas about food, culture, and language—women like Sabrina and Maxine have more money and are more integrated into white culture, something that Mom finds threatening. Jade is walking a fine line: Woman to Woman will help her succeed, but at the cost of potentially alienating Mom.*



## CHAPTERS 37 - 38

Jade spreads out photocopied photos of Mom. The earliest are from when Mom was a baby. Later, Mom and Jade stare at their calendar. Mom confirms that Jade is able to keep up with her homework even with all the Woman to Woman activities and then she comments on the upcoming trip to the symphony. She asks what Jade is going to wear, since people dress up to go. Mom suggests that Jade ask Maxine and she walks away, mumbling that she's never been to the symphony. Jade tries to find something to wear in her closet, but nothing is right. She thinks of the money she saved from the summer.

*Mom may be experiencing some jealousy—maybe if she'd had something like Woman to Woman when she was Jade's age, she would've finished school and she'd be in a better place financially now. This anxiety about Jade moving up in the world and spending time with people of a much higher economic class shows just how anxious and ashamed Mom is her family's poverty—even if change for Jade might make things better, it doesn't make it easy or comfortable.*



## CHAPTER 39

A symphony volunteer takes the Woman to Woman group on a tour backstage. Jade can tell that the volunteer's spiel is memorized but she still looks passionate. When the group doesn't look very excited, the volunteer says that despite what people might think, all sorts of people love the symphony. She says that she knows they're into hip-hop, but she tells them that one of their music directors was one of the first African American conductors on the world stage. When she mentions this man's connections to a famous black contralto, Maxine venomously replies that they know about this woman's history.

*When the volunteer brings up hip-hop, it indicates that she thinks the only way to reach the teens is to appeal to what she believes is the lowest common denominator. Putting aside the racist undertones of this—hip-hop is "real" music, just like classical music—the volunteer is wildly underestimating the maturity level and the interest of the Woman to Woman group.*



At their seats, Jade hears Maxine whisper to another mentor that the volunteer thinks they're uneducated "poor black heathens." The mentor whispers that she doesn't listen to hip-hop. Jade thinks that they aren't just offended by the volunteer's stereotypes—they're offended that the volunteer grouped them in with the mentees. Jade fixates on the volunteer's prejudice. She feels as though no matter how dressed up she and the other girls are, people still see what they want to see. Finally, Jade closes her eyes and tries to focus on the music. It sounds like a collage. She feels herself dancing with the black music director and the contralto in her head.

*Jade again picks up on class anxiety here: the other mentor's assertion that she doesn't listen to hip-hop seems to imply that she thinks it's for a lower class, and so she resents that the volunteer made assumptions about how much money she has and how "cultured" she is. This makes Jade feel even worse, as it heightens her sense that Maxine is ashamed of her or embarrassed by her because of Jade's poverty. In this situation, Jade has no choice but to confront that even the mentors see her as lesser.*



## CHAPTER 40

Life has been slow and quiet. Mom is working extra shifts to save for a car and E.J. has spent a lot of time at the studio, so Jade spends time home alone. She hasn't spent much time with Sam, both because she's busy and because Jade wonders if she can be friends with someone who doesn't understand how she feels. Today, though, Jade can't avoid Sam and she accompanies her to Mrs. Parker's office after school. Sam goes into the office alone and Jade sits in the waiting area, looking at the photos of graduates from last year and where they're attending college. Sam comes out of the office smiling and says she's going on the study abroad trip to Costa Rica. Jade's chest hurts. Jade wants to ask Mrs. Parker why Jade isn't going, but she congratulates Sam nonetheless.

Sam says that Mr. Flores nominated her, and Jade purposefully looks away so that Sam doesn't have to see how upset she is. Jade can't concentrate on what Sam says. When Sam asks what's wrong, Jade insists that nothing is bothering her. The girls get on the bus and Sam suggests that Jade come to the information session too, but Jade snaps that no one nominated her. After a long silence, Sam asks if Jade is mad at her. Jade says she isn't. Right before Sam's stop, she invites Jade to spend the night and make pizza over the weekend. The bus takes Jade through the transition blocks to North **Portland**, where the river is polluted. Jade wonders how people decide who gets what and how much they get.

## CHAPTER 41

Jade has been brushing off Maxine's requests to hang out since the symphony outing, but today, Jade is joining Maxine's family for "Soul Food Sunday." They stop at a bakery first so they can pick up dessert, and Maxine lets Jade choose the cake. Then, Maxine drives into the rich part of **Portland** up on a winding road. She points out the view of Portland to Jade's left and then she takes a right, down into a cul-de-sac of mansions. She stops at a house with three garage doors, a balcony, and a yard so green that it looks fake. Maxine introduces Jade to her sister, Mia, and then they go inside. Jade meets Maxine's brother Nathan and his wife, Abby, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Winters.

*After the racist incident at the mall, Jade has to think about how to make a friendship work with someone who's very different from her for the first time since Sam clearly didn't understand where Jade was coming from. Jade doesn't have this issue with Lee Lee, as Lee Lee is also black and so she understands the pain Jade feels about what happened. Jade's discomfort is heightened when Sam learns she's going to Costa Rica: to Jade, it feels as though Sam is award respect and privilege merely because she's white.*



*The implication here is that Mr. Flores would've been the teacher to nominate Jade, which makes this news sting even more. When Jade thinks again about the metaphor of the polluted river, she's still thinking about the structures that keep her from going on trips like this. There are people in charge who make choices about how to deal with the proverbial river and how to allocate the river's resources—like the study abroad trip—and Jade sees now that she's at a disadvantage.*



*Getting the chance to see Portland from above allows Jade to experiment with another facet of her identity. Spending the afternoon with the Winterses will give Jade a taste of how wealthy people live, which will help Jade decide if this kind of a lifestyle is something she'd like to work toward or if she's more interested in living like Sabrina and Maxine in a smaller apartment or house. It's also worth noting that it's not just about the size of the house—there are differences in culture that Jade knows must exist, but that she isn't entirely aware of yet.*



The walls are covered in art that looks like it belongs in a museum. In the kitchen, Jade offers to help, but Mia and Abby tell her to sit down and they ask her questions. Jade shares that she's an artist and Maxine promises to take Jade to Mia's gallery sometime. Maxine brags about how scholarly and focused Jade is, and Mia asks how early Jade has to get up to get to school from North **Portland**. Maxine cuts Jade off before she can speak, and Nathan calls Maxine out on it. Jade feels like Maxine is worried she'll embarrass her. Mia changes the subject to deciding on where to go for their summer vacation. As they discuss, Jade wonders what it would be like to go on a family vacation. Someday, she wants to take Mom somewhere on a plane.

Mr. and Mrs. Winters come downstairs and everyone sits down in the dining room. Jade follows Maxine in putting her napkin on her lap, and after the prayer she picks up a fork. Maxine quietly tells Jade she chose the wrong fork. Jade freezes, unsure of what to do, but Nathan says it's okay, winks, and picks up the wrong fork too. The food is so good that Jade almost moans, as is the custom in her house, but she senses that she shouldn't do that here. Mrs. Winters asks everyone for their updates. Mr. Winters and Mia give their updates, and then Abby shares that she's pregnant. Everyone but Maxine congratulates them; Maxine only gets up when she catches Jade staring at her. After this, the updates stop. Mrs. Winters talks about a baby shower.

Mrs. Winters brings out dessert. There's still some food on Jade's plate, but when she notices that there's still food on everyone's plate, she decides to leave it. After dessert, Mrs. Winters asks Jade if she'll take food home. Jade tries to refuse, but Mrs. Winters leads her into the kitchen and she fills a bag with food. When Maxine joins them, Mrs. Winters's voice is less generous as she offers to make Maxine a bag, since Maxine is currently unemployed. Uncomfortable, Jade sits down. Mrs. Winters says it's nice what Maxine is doing for Jade, and Maxine whispers loudly that she hoped that bringing Jade here would show Mrs. Winters that she's doing something that matters. Loudly, Mrs. Winters says she doesn't care about Jade's sob story; Maxine needs a real job.

When Nathan and Abby enter the kitchen to load the dishwasher, Mrs. Winters and Maxine stop talking. Jade is glad. She wants to go home and eat at a table where there are no rules and where she can eat all she wants without feeling greedy. She doesn't want to be Maxine's charity case or rebellion against her mother. In the car on the way home, Maxine tries to talk to Jade, but Jade asks that they not. She tries not to cry, but she feels words bubbling inside of her.

*Maxine's siblings seem warmer and more interested in Jade than Maxine does, which again suggests that Maxine isn't doing a great job of being a mentor. In particular, Mia asks honest questions about what Jade's life is like, something that Maxine hasn't really done. It's implied that Mia is older, so this could have to do with Mia having more experience in the world. Mia's line of questioning also shows how someone can use language to show others they care—while Maxine cutting Jade off, on the other hand, shows how silencing people makes them feel small and insignificant.*



*Even if Maxine is trying to help Jade by correcting her choice of fork, this just has the effect of making Jade feel even less welcome. It throws Jade's lower class standing into sharp relief, whereas if Maxine had stayed silent, everyone else probably would've ignored Jade's mistake. Ultimately, this reflects badly on Maxine rather than on Jade.*



*Mrs. Winters's choice to have this conversation in front of Jade is extremely rude. It drives home that Maxine and Woman to Woman aren't doing what they set out to do: elevate and help Jade. Instead, they're distilling her rich life history down into a "sob story," and Maxine is using Jade to try to show her parents that she's doing something useful with her life. It's also worth noting that Mrs. Winters's willingness to say these things in front of Jade likely reflects her class status—she feels she has the power to say things like this without suffering consequences.*



*Once again, Jade has every right to lose her cool with Maxine and let her know that Maxine's behavior (and that of Mrs. Winters) was rude and unacceptable—but Jade still feels as though she doesn't have the power to speak up for herself. Suppressing her words, however, means that Jade will never get what she wants and she will continue to feel bad.*



## CHAPTERS 42 - 43

Mom knows that the food in the fridge is from Mrs. Winters and she knows that Jade isn't telling her everything about what's going on with Woman to Woman. Mom asks if things are going well and if Jade loves hanging out with Maxine. Jade says she's thinking of quitting the program—she feels like Maxine's charity case. Mom refuses to let Jade quit, reminding her of the scholarship. She also notes that not everyone has someone like Maxine to look up to. Jade says that she doesn't look up to Maxine—Maxine is using Jade to feel better about herself and Mrs. Winters sent home the food because she feels bad. Jade insists that if people with money act like this, she'd rather stay poor.

This is the first time Jade has ever called her family poor. Mom tells Jade this is foolish, goes to her bedroom, and returns with a jar of coins. Jade can tell Mom is furious as Mom asks if Jade wants to grow up to save money in a jar. Mom says that Maxine isn't perfect, but Jade is acting stupid. She says that Maxine learned to navigate the white world and now she's trying to teach Jade to do the same. Mom tells Jade to figure out a way to make this program work. In Spanish class the next week, Mr. Flores teaches phrases pertaining to going to doctor, like "I don't feel well" and "I have pain."

## CHAPTER 44

Jade lies to both Mom and Maxine so she can skip the next two outings. She misses going places and the free food, but she doesn't miss the lectures about how to be someone she isn't. Jade lies on her bed thinking and listening to a storm outside. She hears Lee Lee coming and she lets Lee Lee into her room. Lee Lee asks why Mom wants them to talk. Jade tries to evade this but she admits she's thinking about quitting Woman to Woman. When Lee Lee insists that Jade is too smart to give up on herself, Jade tells her that Woman to Woman makes her feel bad and it doesn't teach her anything useful. Lee Lee's expression, however, makes Jade think that Lee Lee believes all of the indignity is worth it, so Jade mentions that Maxine always tries to make Jade feel superior to her friends from her neighborhood.

*Jade believes that in Maxine's eyes, she's nothing but a broken person to fix. Since Jade doesn't necessarily feel broken until Maxine makes her feel that way, this shows that Maxine is way off base in how she's thinking about the program. Even if Jade is justified in insisting she'd rather stay poor, she doesn't entirely recognize that she's coming from a place of privilege when she says this since she has many more opportunities than others in her neighborhood. Jade may be justifiably upset, but it's still the case that more money would make her life better and easier.*



*The phrases that Mr. Flores teaches mirror Jade's internal pain as she navigates the aftermath of Mom's anger. Mom essentially says that Jade doesn't have choices when it comes to opportunities—she must put up with the casual racism and classism because that'll get her to a better place in the future. While Mom may have a point, it's important to keep in mind that Woman to Woman is taking a toll on Jade because it constantly makes her feel broken and lesser.*



*Staying home from the Woman to Woman meetings allows Jade to hold onto some of her dignity and feel more whole. She's noted she feels better and more of a whole person when she's at home, where being black, female, or overweight aren't seen as problems. Unlike Mom or Maxine, Lee Lee is a peer and so she has more in common with Jade than anyone else. This means that it's easier for Lee Lee to relate to what Jade says and then provide a reality check that Jade might take seriously.*



Instead of taking Jade's side, Lee Lee says that Jade needs to talk to someone in charge. She says that they can't read Jade's mind—though she agrees that some of this is offensive, she points out that if Jade doesn't say anything, the organization will never be able to do better. Jade insists that they might not take her seriously and that she shouldn't have to tell adults how to run their program. Lee Lee notes that regardless, the program is *for* Jade, so she has nothing to lose by speaking up. Jade promises to think about it and she muses that she's been so focused on learning Spanish that she's forgotten to use words she already knows.

*Lee Lee essentially insists that Jade is thinking about her situation in the wrong way. While Jade focuses on all the ways Woman to Woman victimizes her, Lee Lee insists that Jade has far more power than she knows. If she uses her voice, she can advocate for change and potentially create a better experience for herself and for the other mentees. When Jade makes the connection, it shows that up to this point she's been thinking of language in a very narrow way. Now, she sees that learning Spanish isn't the only way she can become empowered.*



## CHAPTER 45

The next day, Jade makes plans to meet up with Maxine on Saturday. On Saturday, Maxine envelops Jade in a hug that seems to be an apology and a promise all in one. They get in Maxine's car and Jade shares that she wants more from Woman to Woman. She says that she's grateful but that it often feels like Maxine wants to just fix her, which makes Jade feel broken. Maxine listens attentively. Jade says that the program takes them outside their neighborhood, which makes her feel like her neighborhood isn't good enough. She adds that she was excited to meet Maxine's family until she saw that Maxine just wanted to use her to prove something to Mrs. Winters, and Maxine never let her speak for herself. Sometimes, Jade says, it seems like Maxine is ashamed of her.

*For the first time, Maxine sits quietly and listens to everything Jade has to say, which will help Maxine move forward and be a better friend and mentor to Jade. It also gives Jade the experience of having someone in charge listen to her and take her seriously. As Jade practices speaking up and advocating for herself, it's important that she have experiences where people whom she trusts (more or less) listen to her and take her seriously. This will help her understand that even if people won't listen all the time, it's still worth it to give it a try.*



Maxine pulls into a parking lot and apologizes. She sounds ready to cry as she validates everything Jade said. Jade thinks that this conversation isn't as intense or scary as she thought it would be as Maxine asks what Jade wants out of Woman to Woman. Jade says she'd like to learn how to create a budget and balance a checkbook but she reiterates that she doesn't want to seem unappreciative. Maxine insists that it's great that Jade is bringing this up, and she thinks it's a great idea when Jade suggests they all visit Mia's gallery. When Maxine asks if there's anything else Jade wants to talk about, Jade surprises herself and says, "Jon." Maxine says they can talk about him over dinner.

*Given Jade's fear of coming across as unappreciative, it seems as though she believes she can't ask for what she wants and appreciate what Woman to Woman already does at the same time. However, what she's asking for is perfectly reasonable—and Jade will be able to appreciate the program even more if it actually teaches her useful, meaningful things.*



## CHAPTER 46

That night at dinner, Maxine shows Jade around the restaurant, which is a renovated school. Once they're seated, Maxine points out that Jade isn't the only one who hates Jon. Jade suggests that she, Bailey, and Kira don't hate Jon; they just support Maxine. Maxine smiles and cries, and Jade says that for what it's worth, Jon doesn't deserve her time or attention. Maxine says she needs to be better about setting boundaries, and they make a deal: Maxine will drop Jon if Jade promises not to quit Woman to Woman.

*Reframing Maxine's comment about people hating Jon shows again that Jade has a firm grasp of how to use language to make people feel a certain way. In this situation, it helps Jade and Maxine understand each other better and begin to trust each other. This, in turn, will help them become better friends and it'll help Maxine be a better mentor too.*



## CHAPTER 47

Jade is running late for school. She walks past E.J. still lying on the couch on his phone, and he asks if she heard what happened over the weekend: police “manhandled” a black teen at a house party in Vancouver, just across the river from **Portland**. The girl’s name is Natasha Ramsey and she’s 15. Jade doesn’t recognize her, but she looks like a girl Jade would be friends with. E.J. reads out details: Natasha is in critical condition in the hospital because even though the police say they didn’t use excessive force, they broke Natasha’s ribs and jaw. E.J. points out that they probably only know the truth because people recorded what happened on their phones.

Jade suggests they say a prayer, but E.J. snaps that prayer is for poor people and that God won’t help them—they need to talk to their elected officials. Jade races out the door, late, and E.J. warns her to be careful. Jade gets to school as the tardy bell rings. Sam is waiting at her locker, but Jade doesn’t ask if Sam heard about Natasha Ramsey. She says a prayer as she walks to class.

## CHAPTER 48

Jade’s stomach hurts. Nobody at school says anything about Natasha Ramsey, and all Jade wants to do is talk to Mom, Lee Lee, and Maxine. Jade’s thoughts are interrupted by Ms. Weber’s voice telling her to keep moving through the lunch line. Ms. Weber tells a white girl behind Jade named Hannah to move along, too, and Hannah tells Ms. Weber not to have a heart attack. Jade joins in Hannah’s sarcastic backtalk, but when Hannah asks Ms. Weber if she’s in such a bad mood because of PMS, Ms. Weber says to go see Mrs. Parker. Jade assumes Ms. Weber is talking to Hannah, but Ms. Weber throws Jade’s lunch away and escorts her out of the cafeteria.

Ms. Weber makes Jade stand outside Mrs. Parker’s open office door while she exaggerates what happened. Jade interjects that Hannah was rude too, but Mrs. Parker asks everyone to calm down. Jade goes silent, and finally Mrs. Parker calls her into the office. Mrs. Parker asks if Jade wants to go home or stay at school and she warns Jade that she needs to drop her attitude if she stays. Incensed, Jade says she wants to go home. Mrs. Parker says that she’s sure both Ms. Weber and Jade took things too far. Jade thinks of how she should use her voice, but she can’t. Before going home, Jade stops in Mr. Flores’s classroom to get her homework. He asks if she’s okay, talks her through the lesson, and invites her to come back with questions tomorrow. Jade notices that his laptop is open to an article about Natasha Ramsey.

*This instance of police brutality so close to home drives home for Jade how vulnerable she is as a young black woman. Because Natasha looks so much like someone Jade would know, Jade has to confront the fact that this could’ve happened to anyone in her neighborhood—including herself. This makes Jade feel even more unsafe at St. Francis, where most of her peers are white and they might not know or care about what happened to Natasha.*



*Though Jade of course doesn’t have to let Sam in on anything if she doesn’t want to, not bringing up Natasha Ramsey means that Sam has no way of helping Jade feel better or safer. Jade’s silence may be understandable, but it doesn’t help Sam be a better friend.*



*Though Jade may be a somewhat unreliable narrator—she’s sharing her filtered experience, after all—it’s fairly clear from her description that Hannah should be the one in trouble. Ms. Weber’s choice to send Jade to Mrs. Parker, then, reads as racist and discriminatory. While to the reader, it’s understandable that Jade feels touchy and on edge because of what happened to Natasha Ramsey, Ms. Weber’s lack of empathy suggests that she has no idea what happened or that the news might be affecting some of St. Francis’s students.*



*Mrs. Parker’s insistence that Jade just has an attitude today again suggests that much of the school’s staff is unaware of what happened to Natasha Ramsey or that the incident may be affecting some of the students. This illustrates how ill-equipped St. Francis is to serve its nonwhite students who need compassion and support in times like this. The school apparently expects all students to behave impeccably no matter what traumatizing or scary things might be going on in the world—and given the unique challenges that communities of color face, minority students might need additional help to make it through the day.*



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## CHAPTER 49

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That evening, Jade and Sam talk on the phone. At first Sam seems sympathetic, but she insists that they didn't send Hannah home because Hannah is rich, not because Hannah is white. She says it has nothing to do with race. Jade snaps that people are going to say the same thing about Natasha Ramsey, but Sam doesn't know who Natasha is. After a minute of silence, Jade makes an excuse, hangs up, and calls Lee Lee.

*When Sam again invalidates Jade's experience, it shows that Sam has no idea how to talk about race or to be a good listener, which makes her a poor friend to Jade. While Jade is not obligated to educate Sam or go into detail about Natasha Ramsey, Jade's unwillingness to tell Sam how much this hurts means that Jade will never get what she wants out of this relationship.*



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## CHAPTER 50

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Lee Lee shares that Northside held a meeting for students about Natasha Ramsey, but it was the usual pointless “there are adults to talk to” sort of thing. Lee Lee says she wants to do something. Mrs. Baker assigned her students to write a poem in Natasha's honor or in honor of another victim of police brutality, but Lee Lee says it doesn't feel like enough. Lee Lee starts to cry and she says she's not sure why she's so upset since this happens all the time, but this incident feels too close to home. Jade points out that it could've been either one of them. They sit and listen to each other breathe, feeling thankful.

*Even though Northside may be considered a poor neighborhood public school, it's still miles ahead of St. Francis in terms of relating to its students. Though the meeting may have been pointless in Lee Lee's opinion, the administration still clearly shows they understand that students might need some extra help and compassion right now. The girls are able to provide comfort to each other because they don't have to explain how exactly they feel, which is one of the reasons their friendship is still so strong.*



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## CHAPTER 51

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It's almost morning, and Jade hasn't slept. She decides to make another collage about **York** based off of what Clark wrote in his journals: that many Native Americans were fascinated by York's skin color, hair, and size. Some tribes thought he was magic, and some didn't believe him when he said that he was just a black man. York joked with children and told stories about how he was a scary, evil being. Jade wonders how York felt at night. She wonders if he could remember existing in a place where nobody thought he was strange—if he remembered feeling human.

*The way that Jade talks about how York was turned into a legendary monster offers clues as to how she feels at St. Francis. At St. Francis, people (like Ms. Weber) seem to think of Jade as scary and evil, too, and Mrs. Parker doesn't always treat Jade as though Jade is a real person with thoughts and feelings. This all makes Jade feel less human. But at night, at home, she can remember that she is human and that there are people who love her.*



## CHAPTER 52

Maxine and Jade take a walk through a park in Jade's neighborhood. Jade tells Maxine about Natasha Ramsey and about how Sam makes excuses for racist people and incidents. Maxine says that Jade needs to tell Sam how she feels, but Jade admits she doesn't know how. She's never had to have conversations about race with friends, and she points out that the purpose of friendship is to be oneself. When she adds that this never happens with Lee Lee, Maxine says that's different: both Lee Lee and Sam are Jade's friends, but they offer different things. She suggests that some friends are worth fighting for and she asks if Jade has spoken to Mrs. Parker about the study abroad program. Maxine then shares that she ended things with Jon for good, and now, they need to help Jade follow through and not give up on people who disappoint her.

*Just as Lee Lee did earlier, Maxine now makes the case to Jade that if she never speaks up for herself, nobody is going to listen—including her friends. Jade's own biases come up here, as she understandably doesn't want to have to work too hard in order to maintain friendships with people. Educating Sam and asking for what she wants is way more work than Jade has probably had to ever put into her friendships, but this doesn't make her bond with Sam less meaningful. However, it will take work on the part of both girls—Sam has to listen and take Jade seriously, in order for their conversation to be effective.*



## CHAPTER 53

Jade enters Mr. Flores's classroom at lunch and she finds him watching a video on his laptop. She catches it saying that Natasha Ramsey has been released from the hospital. Mr. Flores apologizes and he pauses the video, but Jade asks if they can watch it together. When it's over, Mr. Flores says that he's happy that Natasha is going to be okay physically and he asks what Jade wanted to talk about. Jade looks away but she says she wants to talk about why he didn't nominate her for the study abroad program. She gives her reasons why she should go, including that this is probably her only opportunity to travel internationally. Mr. Flores blushes and goes pale, but he says he needs to be fair to his other students. He points out that Jade has lots of support through other programs.

*This is a major moment for Jade, as it's one in which she finally works up the courage to ask for what she wants: information. Asking for information is, importantly, far less consequential than asking for action or change—she's not asking Mr. Flores to change his mind or nominate her now, something that would probably require a lot of work on his part. However, asking for information is far more emotional, as Jade has to be prepared to hear things she'd rather not hear from a teacher she looks up to and admires.*



Jade clarifies that she doesn't think the other students *shouldn't* go, she just thinks she should go *too*. She asks why people only see her as needy and not as someone with something to give. Mr. Flores doesn't answer and he walks Jade to the door, insisting that it's his job to be fair. Jade takes a breath, checks her tone, and then asks how it's fair that she doesn't get to go when she tutors half the kids who are going. She realizes that she's sad and angry but she thanks Mr. Flores for his time and leaves the room. Jade cries in the bathroom. She doubts talking to Mr. Flores will do anything, but she's proud of herself for speaking up.

*In Jade's mind, if people saw her as someone with something to give, she'd feel normal. This illustrates just how much of a shackle Jade's poverty is for her—it's the thing that makes her feel needy and abnormal at St. Francis. When Jade does experience pride that she spoke up for herself, it shows how far she's come. Even if this experience didn't do anything but make her uncomfortable, she recognizes that it was good practice and it makes her feel better about herself in the long run.*



## CHAPTER 54

Jade tells the reader that sometimes, she just wants to be comfortable in her skin. She wants to laugh without being told she's rowdy and to wear her hair big without attracting special attention. She wants to talk how she wants to without people judging her. At school, Jade makes sure that she doesn't look or act "too black." This is why she doesn't always want to hang out with Sam after school, as it just reminds Jade of how black she is.

The weekend before spring break, Jade goes over and hangs out with Sam before she leaves for Costa Rica. In the living room, Mr. Franklin asks Jade what she thinks about the Natasha Ramsey incident. Believing that white people can handle black people's sadness better than their anger, Jade says she's sad. Mr. Franklin says it's a shame—Natasha shouldn't have been beaten for just being a teenager, and all cops should be trained on race relations. Jade's tension dissolves, and Mr. Franklin says he doesn't know what it's going to take for the U.S. to live up to its promise. Sam returns with her suitcase and she leads Jade into her room.

Sam laments that she doesn't have any cute summer clothes as Jade tries to be mature and not take her disappointment out on Sam. She asks Sam to tell her about the trip. Sam says they'll volunteer at a school, but she admits that they will get to zip line and hike. She tries to make it sound boring, which Jade appreciates. Sam asks Jade what she'll do with her break, and Jade says simply that she's not going to Costa Rica. She insists she's not mad about staying home, and Sam reminds Jade that she gets to do fun things all the time, citing the symphony. Jade says that it's unfair that people who look like Sam get to go to Costa Rica, while people who look like Jade get signed up for programs that take them downtown.

Jade wants to end the conversation but she thinks of Maxine telling her to not give up and to try to help Sam understand. Jade says that the study abroad program isn't about a contaminated river because people like Sam own the river. At this, Sam starts to cry and she accuses Jade of bragging about the things she does with Maxine. She says she wants to be able to share this with Jade and she can't change that Jade isn't going.

*What Jade wants is to not have all the things that mark her as black stand out as abnormal. At the overwhelmingly white St. Francis, almost everything Jade says and does marks her as different—and having to constantly remember that she must act less black in order to fit in is exhausting.*



*Jade's choice to express her sadness rather than her anger makes sense, especially given the stereotypes surrounding "angry black women." Mr. Franklin's response, however, suggests that he could possibly handle Jade's anger and see it as a normal part of being human, not something that makes Jade fundamentally different. Even if Mr. Franklin may struggle to say the right things sometimes, he still recognizes that no teen, no matter their skin color, deserves to be beaten.*



*Jade tries to get at the idea that because Sam is white, people don't see her as someone who needs to be in a program like Woman to Woman. Put another way, Sam's poverty doesn't define her, while Jade lives in a world where people link blackness and poverty all the time. Because people focus on Jade's poverty, they see her as someone who needs programs like Woman to Woman which, in theory, bring her up to the level of her white peers and level the playing field—but they never let Jade achieve anything meaningful or give back.*



*When Jade talks about "people like Sam," she's talking about white people at large—she's essentially saying that people don't look at Sam and see only her poverty. Though Jade may be correct, saying this also makes Sam feel as though Jade isn't being a good friend either—Jade seems not to understand how hard Sam has to work to achieve things, even if she is white.*



Jade starts to cry too and she tells Sam that she just doesn't want her to downplay racist incidents—she says that Sam doesn't know what it's like to be nominated for programs that want to fix her. Jade sobs that she wants to be normal and have teachers see her as someone who can give, not just as someone in need of help. She asks Sam to think about why she doesn't get the same opportunities Jade gets. Jade gets up to leave, thinking that although Maxine might say friends are worth fighting for, sometimes it's easier to walk away.

*Saying all of this takes a lot of courage, and thus it exemplifies just how far Jade has come over the course of the novel. It's difficult and painful to do it, but it gives Sam the information she needs to figure out how to do better—something she'll have to do if she and Jade are going to stay friends. When Jade thinks of Maxine's advice and then discards it, it also points to her newfound confidence. Now, she knows she's not being ungrateful by deciding Maxine's advice doesn't work for her.*



## CHAPTER 55

Jade, Lee Lee, and Andrea spend their break going to the shopping center, but they soon get tired of running around Target trying to avoid Lee Lee's ex. They decide to walk to Columbia Park, where Jade and Lee Lee tease Andrea about running into her crush. Jade pulls out her camera as soon as they get outside, which seems to annoy Andrea. They stop and buy wings and JoJos and eat them as they walk, but they stop dead when they turn the corner. Several white cops have pulled over a black woman. All three girls tense up. Jade starts taking photos as the cop calmly gives the woman a slip of paper and everyone drives away. Lee Lee starts to shake. Jade assures her that they and the woman are fine and she leads Lee Lee down the street.

*This moment is so terrifying for the girls because they all recognize that as witnesses, they may be the ones tasked with telling people what really happens if this traffic stop goes south and becomes violent. Being in this situation also puts the girls at risk for future violence or discrimination if something were to happen. Because all three girls recognize the gravity and the danger of the situation, they're able to support one another without question.*



## CHAPTER 56

Jade prints off the photos she took earlier, leaving all of them whole except for the ones of the officers. She cries for Mom's swollen ankles and her jar of coins. She cries for what happened with Ms. Weber, the boys at Dairy Queen, and the incident at the mall. She cries for every black person assaulted or murdered by police. Jade writes their names on top of a background of "black sadness."

*Jade cries because her race—like that of so many other black victims of harassment or violence—puts her at a higher risk of experiencing violence or discrimination like this. She wants to celebrate it and think of it as something beautiful, but it's also an aspect of her identity that puts her in danger.*



## CHAPTER 57

On the first day of school after spring break, Jade's stomach turns as the bus approaches Sam's stop. Jade knows she needs to say something but she doesn't know what to say. Sam isn't at her stop, so Jade's stomach settles a little. When Jade gets to school, she sees that Sam is already there—she must've gotten a ride. The girls wave, but Sam doesn't smile or wait for Jade. Jade knows that Sam didn't ride the bus because she didn't want to hang out with her.

*Though it seems at this point as though Jade and Sam's friendship is over, it's also worth considering that during this time apart, both Sam and Jade will have the opportunity to think about how they've behaved and what they've done right or wrong. If they can work up the courage to talk, they might be in a better place to fix things.*



## CHAPTER 58

Maxine takes Jade to the Esplanade, a pedestrian path that runs along the river. Jade takes photos as they walk and they sit down on a bench. Jade tells Maxine that she's been thinking about being stitched together and coming undone. She asks Maxine if she ever feels that way too. Jade is surprised when Maxine says that when she went to St. Francis, most kids thought she was on scholarship just because she was black. She says she got tired of people assuming things, and of people expecting her to have all the answers when something about race came up. She says that she loved St. Francis but that it wasn't perfect.

Maxine says that when she was in elementary school, she heard Mr. Winters tell his black real estate clients to take down their art and photos. He never said that to white families, and it taught her to hide her blackness. She admits that she was always embarrassed to have friends over because her house is so black. Maxine says she grew up proud of black people, but she was also told all the time that she should hide her blackness—and sometimes, she had to prove that she was “black enough.” Jade thinks that she's wrongly assumed Maxine had it easy.

Jade asks Maxine what she's thinking about, and Maxine replies that she's remembering how her grandmother used to say it's good to talk. She always called it “bearing witness,” and she'd spend hours with her friends talking and talking. Maxine says that as a kid, she didn't get it since the women never solved anything—but now, she thinks it's valuable to talk simply so that someone else knows your story. According to her grandmother, that's how people heal.

## CHAPTER 59

Jade sees Maxine next at a Woman to Woman workshop about money. The workshop takes place at a local church, and Jade is thrilled that she doesn't need to travel far to get to it. She's even happier when Sabrina announces that this was Jade's idea. Sabrina also tells everyone that she welcomes their feedback and then she introduces the guests. The first is Maxine's friend Bailey, who says she's going to talk to them about how to make and manage money in college. By the end of the session, Jade's fingers are cramped from taking notes. She didn't write on the handouts so that she can more easily share them with Lee Lee, E.J., and Mom.

*This conversation helps Jade see that Maxine has to deal with some of the same racist assumptions that she does. This continues to humanize Maxine in Jade's eyes, and it also makes Maxine into a more relatable and powerful mentor. Because Jade now knows that they share these important experiences, she's more likely to look to Maxine for ways to get around or deal with these instances of racism.*



*The implication here is that even though Maxine learned to hide her blackness from a young age, she, like Jade, wants to celebrate it. This is a major turning point for Jade, as she has to confront the fact that she made assumptions about Maxine, just like Maxine made assumptions about her. Now, they can both practice listening and being open and curious with each other, which will make them better friends.*



*Just as Maxine suggests that talking is an effective way to share one's story, the novel itself does much the same thing on a larger scale. Readers have the opportunity to bear witness to Jade's pain and struggles, and they can see that she's not just a poor black girl. It does her a disservice to see only her race or her poverty.*



*This workshop gives Jade a taste of what can happen when she speaks up for herself. Her excitement and hopefulness is palpable, and for the first time, Woman to Woman is giving Jade exactly what she wants. Further, Jade also recognizes that information about money management is something that's easier for her to take home and share with others. It likely won't make Mom feel attacked, as the healthy eating seminar did.*



## CHAPTER 60

Jade posts her schedule on the fridge: Saturday—the day that Woman to Woman is touring Mia’s gallery—is circled. Mia is also going to talk to them about being an entrepreneur. Mom teases Jade about being so excited, but Jade is actually counting down the days until the visit.

*Again, Jade’s excitement stems in part from the fact that she advocated to make this visit happen—and now, it’s coming to fruition. She’s learning that she has the power to use her voice and make a difference, both for herself and for others.*



## CHAPTER 61

E.J. has started deejaying at a restaurant on Thursdays and Fridays, so Jade is home alone. Maxine calls, and when she learns that Jade is home alone and she is planning to take out her braids, Maxine offers to come help. Mom gives Jade permission for Maxine to visit. Jade thinks she really needs help since her braids are so small. She realizes that this is the first time Maxine will have spent any length of time in her house and she starts to feel anxious about how the place looks. Maxine arrives and Jade fetches the supplies. She sits between Maxine’s legs as Maxine cuts the bands, unbraids Jade’s hair, and combs it. Jade ties her hair up in a scarf when Maxine is done.

*The intimacy of Maxine helping with Jade’s hair helps to cement their bond and trust each other even more. It even seems as though Jade forgets (or at least decides to ignore) her shame about the way her home reflects her poverty. This suggests that Jade is getting to the point where she can be herself around Maxine—she’s not trying as hard to hide important parts of herself. Being authentic in this way will also allow Maxine to get to know Jade better and be a better mentor as well.*



Mom gets home as Maxine is on her way out. Mom notices Jade’s scarf and she suggests they get going on taking her braids out, but Jade shows Mom her combed hair and she says that Maxine helped her. Mom says it’s nice that Maxine helped, but she doesn’t sound happy. She asks if Maxine fed Jade too and then says she’ll start dinner. Maxine tries to excuse herself, but Mom asks Maxine to stay. From the kitchen, Mom calls that she’s going to try out some of the recipes Jade brought home. Maxine asks for Mom to share how it goes; she’s still learning how to cook. Mom laughs and she waves Maxine into the kitchen for a lesson while Jade sits at the table and practices her Spanish. Maxine learns to cook, and Mom learns a little Spanish and shares advice on how to move on from heartache.

*Mom still seems anxious and angry about the fact that other people are now helping her raise Jade. However, she’s getting to the point where she recognizes that Maxine’s presence doesn’t invalidate her role in Jade’s life. Mom can still be a loving presence in Jade’s life—and furthermore, she clearly has lots of things to teach Maxine. Being in the position of teaching and mentoring Maxine allows Mom to feel a little more in control of the situation and see that Maxine isn’t a threat—she’s a young woman who also needs a mentor.*



## CHAPTER 62

In the car on the way to Mia’s gallery, Jade and Maxine sing along loudly to the radio. They arrive just in time for Sabrina’s introduction. Mia talks about her journey to becoming a business owner and she shows slides of her gallery when it was just an abandoned building. She says she thinks of her gallery as the people’s gallery, since she tries to curate work about current events or by artists from minority groups. The current show is paintings by Kehinde Wiley. They’re portraits of women from New York City, but based off of work by historical painters. Jade takes her time to inspect all the paintings and when Maxine finds her, she says this is the best outing they’ve had.

*Kehinde Wiley’s work seeks to do much the same thing as Jade tries to do through her collages of York. Just as Jade wants to humanize York and give him power in her images, Wiley’s paintings place black subjects in empowering poses and situations. Seeing another artist working with similar ideas helps Jade continue to understand that there are successful black people in the art world if she chooses to enter it. Mia also shows Jade that it’s possible to be a successful black entrepreneur, given what she did to get her gallery off the ground.*



Maxine admits that she was concerned, since Jade hasn't said anything. Jade says she has a question but didn't feel comfortable sharing it with the group: she wants to know if Mia offers internships. Maxine tells Jade to go ask. Jade insists she can't, but Maxine insists she can. Jade steels herself, approaches Mia, and asks if she could bring a few of her pieces by and if Mia offers internships. Mia gives Jade an application and Jade joins the group for their final exercise. Sabrina asks the mentees to think of one word that describes their experience. Jade chooses "inspired."

*Now that Maxine and Jade have an understanding and more of a rapport, Maxine can give Jade the real talk she needs to work up the confidence and ask Mia about internships. And again, when Jade does ask, it's very anticlimactic—Mia doesn't try to make Jade feel bad, she just hands over the application. This shows Jade that it's not scary to ask for what she wants and that she's more likely to get it if she does.*



## CHAPTERS 63 - 64

Jade says she knows that Sam isn't her friend anymore because they don't ride the bus together, Sam doesn't choose Jade as her partner in Spanish, and Sam holds in her laughter rather than sharing it with Jade.

*Now that Jade has spent several months with a friend at St. Francis, it's devastating to lose that connection. Jade is back to being the lone black girl, with no one to relate to for much of her day.*



After the next Woman to Woman workshop, Sabrina calls Jade aside and she asks if Jade would like to contribute an art piece for their benefit auction. Jade is thrilled. Maxine walks Jade home and she comes inside. Jade tells Mom about the auction and Mom is immediately suspicious. Jade points out that this will give her exposure and it'll help her give back to the organization. Mom turns to Maxine and asks her opinion, saying she doesn't want Jade to feel like a zoo animal. Maxine assures Mom that it'll be fine and she points out that it'll be good for Jade to talk about her work. Mom smiles and says that "our" artist is doing big things. Mom returns to the kitchen and she asks if Maxine has been practicing her cooking. Maxine starts to make excuses and Mom calls her back to the kitchen for another lesson. They talk about the fundraiser.

*By contributing a piece for the benefit auction, Jade finally gets her wish: she can be someone with something to offer others. This opportunity is especially appealing to Jade because it allows her to help herself, as well as other young women like her who will now be able to benefit from the program. Mom's concerns are valid, however, and they reflect the fact that some attendees may see Jade as an anomaly and a point of interest, just because of the color of Jade's skin and her poverty. In other words, they may see her as a poor black girl in need of help, not as an artist giving back to her community.*



## CHAPTER 65

Jade feels extremely dressed up, but she's concerned about her tall heels. Maxine helps Jade with her makeup and then she does her own. Jade is in the living room when E.J. gets home, and he asks if Jade has a date. When Maxine comes out of Jade's bedroom dressed up, E.J. asks if this is a double date. Jade points out that it's silly that she'd only get dressed up for a guy and she tells him that she dressed up for herself. At the fundraiser, Jade is thrilled that she doesn't feel so out of place—she feels like a celebrity since everyone wants to talk about her work. She talks for a while with Gina, one of the Woman to Woman board members. A former painter, Gina gives Jade a business card and she offers to talk about college with Jade in the future.

*As Jade's confidence grows, she's able to call E.J. out and make him see that she's taking care of herself by dressing up. When he suggests that women only dress up for men, he shows that he thinks of women as existing for men or in relation to men—but, as Jade points out, there are plenty of reasons why women dress up that have nothing to do with men. That Jade doesn't feel out of place at the event is testament to Maxine's hard work of getting to know Jade. Because they trust each other, Maxine was able to effectively prep Jade for the event.*



An expensive-looking couple walks up. They ask Jade several questions about *Woman to Woman*, and Jade feels a bit like the zoo animal Mom was talking about. She tries to use it to her advantage, mentioning that she's already learned she can make her own opportunities and use her voice to ask for what she wants. The man starts to say that Jade is impressively articulate and well-spoken, but Gina angrily interrupts him. Gina notes that all the *Woman to Woman* mentees are talented and smart. Maxine steps up and backs Gina up, and a server offers everyone stuffed mushrooms. The awkward moment dissolves when Sabrina makes a short speech.

*The couple is subtly racist toward Jade, implying that it's unusual for a young black woman to be talented and well-spoken. In response, Gina is an example of what the book suggests white people (like her and like Sam) should do when they witness acts of racism: call it out as unacceptable. Gina's defense enables Jade to feel as though this is a successful night rather than a demeaning experience of being a "zoo animal." With this, the novel shows how gatekeepers and people in power—like Gina—must do the work of welcoming minority individuals like Jade and making sure that environments are safe and comfortable for them.*



At the end of the event, the winner of the silent auction approaches Jade. His watch makes Jade think that he's extremely wealthy. He introduces himself as Andrew, says he loves Jade's piece, and asks if she has more pieces like it. Jade says that she made this one especially for the event, but when Maxine shoots her a look, Jade tells Andrew about a series she's working on about police brutality as well as about her pieces concerning **York**. Andrew gives Jade a business card and he instructs Jade to email him if she ever needs help with anything. Other guests also give Jade business cards, and Maxine tells Jade to follow up on all of them tomorrow. When Sabrina calls Maxine away, Jade thinks about all the people who don't know her but who want to support her. She feels seen and heard.

*This event gives Jade an opportunity that she never dreamed of. Now, she understands that there are plenty of people out there, like Andrew and Gina, who are willing to see her as an artist with something to say—not just as a poor black girl. She's finally being recognized for all the things she'd like others to see, which is an extremely validating experience for her. This also shows Jade what can happen when she speaks up for herself. Because she's willing to communicate with Andrew, he offers his help—and Jade can call on him in the future.*



## CHAPTER 66

The next afternoon, Lee Lee comes over to do homework. Her homework is more interesting than Jade's: she's writing an essay about how social movements use media. She's writing specifically about Emmett Till and the civil rights movement. After they work for a while, Lee Lee reads Jade her poem for Natasha Ramsey. It's really good. Lee Lee says she wants to do something more with it—all her classmates' poems were good, and it seems sad for no one else to hear them. The girls spend all night planning an open mic and art show in honor of Natasha. Jade thinks of all the people who offered to help her and suggests they sell the art. She hopes that Mia will host the event and that Mia really meant what she said when she told everyone that her gallery was for the people.

*Because of what Jade has learned through *Woman to Woman* (the importance of speaking up, the value of helping others, and how willing people like Andrew are to help), Jade now has the skills to successfully organize a benefit event for a cause that means a lot to her. When she remembers all the people who offered to help her, Jade also starts to recognize how extensive her community can be if she continues to feed it and make connections. She can no longer stay silent if she wishes to make this kind of impact on the world.*



## CHAPTERS 67 - 68

Jade creates collages combining important figures from history. She puts Emmett Till with Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and Rosa Parks with Sandra Bland. Their faces sit on top of headlines that Jade rearranges to make new titles that allow these people to live and love.

Jade shares more of **York's** story. Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific Ocean in November of 1805. They returned to St. Louis the following spring. The others were considered heroes and they got land and double pay. After being trusted to carry a gun and make decisions, York didn't even get his freedom: he asked for it, but Clark said no. York just wanted to be close to his wife in Kentucky and he wanted to feel human. Clark finally gave York his freedom in 1816. Jade wonders what it would've been like if York had gotten land, money, and freedom. She wonders if York would've done something with it and passed it onto his children. She remembers that a man in one of her workshops explained that this is how wealth works—but York had nothing to give.

## CHAPTER 69

Mia immediately calls her friends when Jade tells her about the event. Three professional artists agree to donate work, and they put out a call to student artists as well. Jade decides to create a collage based on Lee Lee's poem. She and Lee Lee sit together in the kitchen, working on their collage and poem.

## CHAPTER 70

Mr. Flores divides the class up into pairs and puts Sam and Jade together. He gives them cards with conversations on them. Sam and Jade go through the first conversation as directed, but on the second conversation, Jade instead says that Maxine has been talking to her about not giving up on things and people too easily. Sam responds that Mr. Franklin says she has lots to learn about listening. Sam slouches and Jade thinks that they can continue this conversation later, but Sam continues. She admits quietly that she's uncomfortable talking about race and she doesn't know what to say to Jade when racist incidents happen. She says she felt horrible at the mall but she didn't know what to do. Jade says that it just feels like Sam doesn't care when she makes it seem like Jade is making things up.

*Through these collages, Jade is able to empower these historical figures and help viewers of her work see them in a new light. In this way, she's using images in much the same way she uses language: she's gaining power and sharing it with others.*



*What happened to York after Lewis and Clark returned east drives home how little power black slaves had. However, after Jade's money management workshops, she also recognizes that freedom was just one of many things that York should've gotten that would've helped him better himself. If he'd received money and land, he would've had something to pass onto his children, but black people have historically been denied access to both of those things, even long after slavery ended.*



*Asking for help isn't so scary anymore—and when Jade asks, people are more than willing to deliver. Through this, Jade learns that if she chooses to use her words, she has the power to help herself in addition to helping others.*



*Finally, Sam and Jade come together and Sam admits where she went wrong. Importantly, Sam's explanations don't come off as excuses—she doesn't try to convince Jade that what she did isn't bad, she simply explains that she doesn't have the tools to talk about race in the way she knows she should. Both girls are able to admit where they went wrong: Sam is too dismissive of Jade's experiences, and Jade isn't open or forgiving enough. By acknowledging all of this, the girls will be able to come to a better understanding, move forward, and enjoy a stronger friendship.*



## CHAPTER 71

At the end of class, Mr. Flores asks Jade to stay behind. He says that he's proud of what she's doing for Natasha Ramsey and that he's giving extra credit to students who go to the benefit. When everyone else is gone, Mr. Flores apologizes for overlooking Jade. Hearing this from a teacher sounds strange. He continues that he spoke with Mrs. Parker, shared Jade's concerns with her, and asked to secure Jade's spot in the program for next year. Mr. Flores says that as long as Jade continues to meet the requirements, she's going. Jade thanks him, but Mr. Flores says that Jade is the one who made this happen.

*Here, Jade discovers that speaking up for herself can have consequences she never even considered—in this case, her courage in speaking up means that she not only gets to go on the trip next year, but that she also gets an apology from a teacher she admires. Mr. Flores's choice to apologize and do this for Jade also situates him as a solid and trustworthy mentor. This experience will teach him to recognize that all of his have something to offer others.*



## CHAPTERS 72 - 73

Jade lists the reasons she knows Sam is her friend: they ride the bus together, Mr. Flores has forbidden them from partnering with each other in Spanish class, they laugh, they don't hide their tears, and they listen when they misunderstand each other. Mom comes home and she smiles hugely when she sees Jade at the table with Sam and Lee Lee. Fortunately, she goes into her room without embarrassing Jade. The girls continue planning the benefit. E.J. has agreed to deejay, while Maxine and Mia are working on promoting the event. Josiah has even agreed to set up a livestream. Sam suggests they come up with something for audience members to do, and Jade has the idea of printing out poems for people to read if they want. Lee Lee pulls out a folder of sample poems from Mrs. Baker. Sam reads through them and chooses one she'd like to read.

*Thanks to the lessons Jade has learned about speaking up and about mentorship, the event for Natasha Ramsey is coming together. Since Jade is now acutely aware of the fact that everyone has something to give—and that giving back helps people feel a sense of purpose and dignity—she chooses to draw on all sorts of people from her community. She's also learning that if she asks for help, people will be more than willing to provide it. This again gives Jade the experience of asking and experiencing success, which will make it easier to recover when she inevitably doesn't get what she asks for.*



## CHAPTERS 74 - 75

The gallery is full of Jade's family, friends, and community, including everyone from Woman to Woman. Mr. Flores and Hannah agree to read poems, as do Maxine, Gina, Bailey, and Kira. Jade doesn't realize how many people are there until she stands at the front of the room. She looks out at her parents, Andrew, and Mrs. Parker. Lee Lee points as the Ramseys arrive, and Jade takes a photo of the crowd. She decides she's going to leave it whole.

*In addition to Jade's sense of being supported and cared for, this event also shows her that lots of people in her community care about what happens to individuals like Natasha Ramsey. Some of the attendees may be a bit of a surprise for her, but this just encourages Jade to challenge her own preconceptions and remember that people are willing to help if she asks.*



Lee Lee's poem is called "Black Girls Rising." She writes that black girls' bodies are sacred; they piece themselves together after being shot, dragged around, and pulled over. Their bodies tell stories of the middle passage and they are mosaics of forgotten languages and prayers. Their bodies are no longer objectified and disregarded, as their smiles are protests. Their bodies are beautiful, black, and rising.

*Lee Lee is able to express her voice through her poem, just like Jade does, which empowers her and others who look like her. Her poem allows Lee Lee to remind herself and others that black women certainly suffer, but this doesn't make them less beautiful, worthy, or strong.*



## CHAPTER 76

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Jade shares more of **York**'s story. In 1832, York supposedly returned to St. Louis to be with Clark. According to Clark, York didn't enjoy his freedom and he died of cholera during the journey. However, many believe that after he got his freedom, York went west again. In her mind, Jade sees York confidently traveling west on his own. This time, he tells the Native Americans the whole story and he speaks for himself. In this collage, Jade includes herself next to York. They both hold maps. They're both black, traveling, and discovering what they're capable of.

*Now that Jade has the skills to ask for what she needs—and a more robust network to support her—she's able to conceptualize living in Portland as a journey. She no longer sees the city as something that's going to crush or divide her. Instead, it's something for her to explore, just as she explores York's story and her own multifaceted, changing identity.*





## HOW TO CITE

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