

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO

EVERY BODY LOOKING

**CANDICE
ILOH**

"Beautifully crafted and ultimately healing."

—JACQUELINE WOODSON

"Iloh is a writer to watch."

—JASON REYNOLDS

ABOUT THE BOOK

WHEN ADA LEAVES HOME for her freshman year at a Historically Black College, it's the first time she's ever been so far from her family—and the first time that she's been able to make her own choices and to seek her place in this new world. As she stumbles deeper into the world of dance and explores her sexuality, she also begins to wrestle with her past—her mother's struggle with addiction, her Nigerian father's attempts to make a home for her. Ultimately, Ada discovers she needs to brush off the destiny others have chosen for her and claim full ownership of her body and her future.



CANDICE ILOH is a first generation Nigerian-American writer, teaching artist, and youth educator. She has performed her work around the country, most notably at Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City, the Women in Poetry & Hip Hop celebration at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore (where she performed as Nikki Giovanni), and as part of the Africa In Motion performing arts series at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, DC. She is a graduate of Howard University and holds an MFA in writing from Lesley University. Her work has earned fellowships from Lambda Literary and VONA among many others. *Every Body Looking* is her first novel. www.becomher.com

This guide was written by Lacresha Berry. Lacresha Berry is a culturally responsive educator, performance artist, and a multi-subject curriculum consultant. She specializes her training and teaching in providing culturally responsive pedagogy with arts based, hands-on activities within multi-subject disciplines to increase student engagement, strengthen classroom management, and foster fun and creativity in classrooms across the country. Lacresha is devoted and committed to creating compassionate leaders who celebrate their own legacies and has been designing educational experiences and safe spaces for teachers, parents, students, and school personnel. Her research interests include work in cultural responsive pedagogy, gender equity, social justice in education, diversity and inclusion, arts in education, and anti-racist education. Her arts education lesson work and editing skills were recently published and featured in the new curriculum guide by Fresh Education, entitled, *Fresh Ed: A Field Guide to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*.

Questions to think about before you read (for Teachers and Students):

- What impact might telling a story using short lines/verse have on the reader?
- How can we remind students to practice understanding and empathy?
- How will your perspective aid in the understanding of these poems with your students?
- How can you help your students discover the connections between themselves and the characters in the book?
- How can you foster the love of language and storytelling within your students?
- How will your students use this story to create their own narratives?

A Pre-Reading To-Do List for Teachers:

- Read all the poems in the book and familiarize yourself with themes.
- Also, be sure to familiarize your class with the ideas and devices in poetry so they can delve deeply into each poem featured in the activities.
- This is merely a guide to foster discussion and analysis in your ELA and/or humanities classroom. Feel free to choose the activities in which you feel most comfortable.
- Be sure to use poems and subject matter appropriate for your class.
- Find articles and videos that could engage your students even further and could add to their understanding(s) of the themes/topics in this book.

THEMES EXPLORED IN THIS BOOK:

THEMES	CHAPTERS FEATURING EXAMPLES OF THESE THEMES
COMING OF AGE	COLLEGE
CHANGE VERSUS TRADITION	GRADUATION DAY
EMPOWERMENT	COLLEGE
FACING REALITY	COLLEGE
GROWING UP	FIRST GRADE SECOND GRADE
OVERCOMING FEAR AND MISCONCEPTIONS	COLLEGE
SELF-AWARENESS	SIXTH GRADE
UNDERSTANDING	COLLEGE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

STRUCTURE, TECHNIQUE, AND PLOT

1. This novel is written in verse; going back and forth between the various grades and ages of Ada. How does this structure help us to understand Ada's story?
2. What is the point of view of Ada's storytelling and how does her point of view help us to understand the challenges presented in her life?
3. In the novel's opening, Ada is graduating from high school. How does this contrast with the ending, when she is about to call her father?
4. The author uses flashbacks to help us understand her relationship between her father, aunt, and mother. What do those flashbacks reveal to the reader?
5. In what ways does Ada's leaving affect her and her family?

CHARACTER AND CONFLICT

1. On page 25, Ada says, "There's no way I can tell him how much I really have." Why would she say this in relation to her father?
2. Describe actions that show how Ada is becoming more independent and confident in college.
3. How does the behavior of Ada's mother differ from the behavior of her father? How are their behaviors the same?
4. Describe the moment when Ada meets Sophia, her roommate. What were Ada's first impressions of her?
5. Describe the relationship between Ada and Derek.
6. Who is Kendra and what role does she play in Ada's life?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, CONT.

IMAGERY AND LANGUAGE

1. The author uses bolded words to begin each poem in a chapter. Why would they choose to do this?
2. Dancing is a recurring image in this novel. In addition to Ada's drawing "Magic" (pg. 293) as a young girl, what are other images of dancing and how do they contribute to the overall message the author is trying to convey?
3. The author uses italics to indicate dialogue. Why did they use italicized font instead of quotation marks?
4. Read the first five lines of the first poem on page three and compare them with the last six lines of the last poem on page 403. What do these lines tell us about who Ada has become?
5. Think about the title of this book, *Every Body Looking*. Think about the challenges and triumph of Ada throughout the story. How does this phrase parallel with her life and the overall theme?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. In *Every Body Looking*, Ada discovers new things about herself from first grade all the way to freshmen year of college. She constantly finds new ways and new ideas to solve her problems. For this first writing activity, you will find words to create a new piece of text called a found poem. A found poem is a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases, and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them into something new. You will take words from *Every Body Looking* to create a new poem.
 - a. First, choose a poem or chapter that stood out to you.
 - b. Then, find 15-20 words from that poem or chapter. They could be words, ideas, or images you found inspiring or interesting.
 - c. Create a new poem with your chosen words. Look at the author's poem structure to guide your writing.

POST-READING ACTIVITIES, CONT.

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING MINI-MOVIES

2. Ada's story is full of interesting twists and turns—from graduating high school to discovering her passion for dance in college. She's curated this story for herself and we, as the readers, read with imagery and descriptive language forming in our minds. In this activity, you will curate, or create, an interactive social media story using images through video, music, pictures and voice-over to create your own "movie" or slideshow.
 - a. First, decide what you're passionate about. It can be more than one thing. For example, Ada's passion is dance. What are you passionate about? Let that be the main focus of your storytelling.
 - b. Think about all the twists and turns that happened while following your passion. Did you have any challenges along the way? Did you experience anything you're proud of?
 - c. Then, take 4-5 pictures and videos that show your story clearly. You can find your older photos or videos to help with the storytelling. Put them in an order that makes sense to you. If you can't find photos, you can make an interactive story with just text and/or music.
 - d. Once you have all your photos, videos, and text, use a moviemaking app to tell your interactive story. Be sure to use fun filters, photo effects and relevant music to make your passion pop onscreen.

POWERFUL PERSONA CHARACTER POEMS

3. The author introduces us to many characters in Ada's life, from her parents and aunt to her college roommate to her first boyfriend and finally her dancer friend, Kendra. They all make a tremendous impact in her life. In this activity, you will write a persona poem as if you are one of the important characters from *Every Body Looking*. A persona poem is a type of poem that is written from a different perspective than the writer of the poem. It is usually written in first person and uses powerful word choices and moving metaphors to describe a character in verse like the author.
 - a. First, choose a character from *Every Body Looking* and reread a chapter that demonstrates their personality.
 - b. Think about how they might respond to Ada's life changes throughout the book.
 - c. Start writing a 10-15 line poem as if you were that character. Remember, you are speaking in the first person point of view.
 - d. Be creative and thoughtful with your choices.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

READING LITERATURE

Key Ideas and Details:

GRADE 8	GRADE 12
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Craft and Structure:

GRADE 8	GRADE 12
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6 Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader create such effects as suspense or humor.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

PRAISE FOR **EVERY BODY LOOKING**

"This is a story about the sometimes toxic and heavy expectations set on the backs of first-generation children, the pressures woven into the family dynamic, culturally and socially. About childhood secrets with sharp teeth. And ultimately, about a liberation that taunts every young person."

— **JASON REYNOLDS**, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF *LONG WAY DOWN*

"An essential—and emotionally gripping and masterfully written and compulsively readable—addition to the coming-of-age canon."

— **NIC STONE**, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF *DEAR MARTIN*

"Candice Iloh's beautifully crafted narrative about family, belonging, sexuality, and telling our deepest truths in order to be whole is at once immensely readable and ultimately healing."

— **JACQUELINE WOODSON**, NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *BROWN GIRL DREAMING*

Longlisted for the National Book Award

★ "This book is a testament to the beauty of Black girls, their circumstances, bodies, and cultures."

— **BOOKLIST**, STARRED REVIEW

★ "Iloh uses verse beautifully...[A] captivating, sometimes heartbreaking, yet ultimately hopeful story."

— **KIRKUS**, STARRED REVIEW

