

# ONE CRAZY SUMMER



## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE





## ABOUT THE BOOK

1968—one of the most turbulent years in United States history. With war raging in Vietnam and civil rights protests happening across the country, three sisters from Brooklyn travel to Oakland, California, to spend one month with the mother who abandoned them. After a chilly reception from their mother, Cecile, sisters Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern are sent off by day to the People’s Center. But soon they realize it is organized by the Black Panthers, a political organization whose “members confronted politicians, challenged the police, and protected black citizens from brutality.”<sup>1</sup> While embraced at the center, they struggle to connect with their cold and distant mother, a renowned poet. As their time in Oakland comes to an end, the sisters begin to understand why they were abandoned and also make sense of their own place in the making of history.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Rita Williams-Garcia’s** Newbery Honor Book, *One Crazy Summer*, was a winner of the Coretta Scott King Author Award, a National Book Award finalist, the recipient of the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction, and a *New York Times* bestseller. The two sequels, *P.S. Be Eleven* and *Gone Crazy in Alabama*, were both Coretta Scott King Author Award winners and ALA Notable Children’s Books. She is also the author of the NAACP Image Award–winning and National Book Award finalist *Clayton Byrd Goes Underground*; *A Sitting in St. James*, a *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award* winner and *Los Angeles Times Book Award* winner; *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, a Coretta Scott King Honor Book; *Blue Tights*; and four ALA Best Books for Young Adults: *Jumped*, a National Book Award finalist; *No Laughter Here*; *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*, a *Publishers Weekly Best Children’s Book*; and *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*. Rita Williams-Garcia lives in Jamaica, New York, with her husband and has two adult daughters. You can visit her online at [ritawg.com](http://ritawg.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



**Sharee Miller** is the bestselling illustrator and author of *Curlfriends: New in Town*. She is also known for her acclaimed picture book *Don’t Touch My Hair*. Her other picture books include *Princess Hair* and *Michelle’s Garden: How the First Lady Planted Seeds of Change*. She is also the illustrator of *Sam’s Super Seats* by Keah Brown and the *Shai & Emmie* series by Quvenzhané Wallis. Sharee grew up in Saint Thomas, where she was inspired by the bright colors and sunshine of the Caribbean. She is known for her fresh and cheerful characters. Sharee loves creating picture books, graphic novels, and illustrations that depict Black joy.

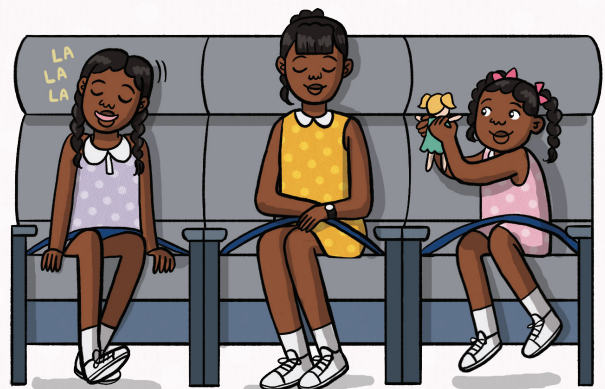
This graphic novel is adapted from the beloved Newbery Honor Book, National Book Award finalist, and Coretta Scott King Award–winning novel, *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia (2010). See the last two pages of this guide for tips on how to use graphic novel adaptations alongside existing novels!

<sup>1</sup>National Museum of African American History & Culture ([nmaahc.si.edu](http://nmaahc.si.edu))



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When we first meet Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern, they are on a plane heading for Oakland. As the plane is buffeted by turbulence, Delphine soothes her younger sisters' fears while also worrying about how they will be perceived by the mostly white passengers in the cabin. Discuss how and why Delphine takes on the role of mother. On the plane, Delphine notes, "I anchored my sisters and braced us for whatever comes next" (p. 2). How does this line foreshadow what the girls experience in Oakland and Delphine's role as a protector? What does Cecile mean when she tells Delphine, "Be eleven, Delphine. Be eleven while you can" (p. 288)?
2. Review page 10. Discuss how you felt when you realized that Cecile, the girls' mother, abandoned them. Do you think there is ever a valid reason for a parent to leave their children? Explain. How do you think this traumatic event in their lives affects the way Delphine behaves?
3. In describing Big Ma, the girls' grandmother, Delphine explains that "Cecile wasn't what the Bible meant when it spoke of love and forgiveness." How are love and forgiveness important themes in this story? Do you think that Cecile deserved her daughters' forgiveness? Why or why not?
4. Discuss how the girls are treated by the white tourists and the souvenir shop owner during their excursion to San Francisco. How does Delphine respond? What does she mean by "I had that Black Panther stuff in me, and it was pouring out at every turn" (p. 221)?
5. Describe your first impressions of Cecile. Why do you think she dressed like a "secret agent"? How does Cecile's behavior at the airport and over the next few weeks both confirm and challenge Delphine's expectations? Why do you think Cecile was so cruel to her own children by saying, "I didn't send for you. I didn't want you in the first place" (p. 42)?
6. In the airport, Big Ma perceives the well-dressed Black woman as someone who will look out for the girls. Delphine perceives the man in the phone booth to be a "fugitive from justice" (p. 60). Lady Ming perceives the girls to be "beggars" (p. 61). How do perceptions play a role in the story? Discuss examples of when perceptions changed. How do the characters move beyond their initial perceptions?
7. While Delphine is cleaning the kitchen, Cecile says to her, "We're trying to break yokes. You're trying to make one for yourself. If you know what I know, seen what I've seen, you wouldn't be so quick to pull the plow." A yoke is a wooden bar that is fastened over the necks of two animals that are attached to a plow or cart. Knowing the word's meaning, what do you think Cecile is trying to tell Delphine?
8. Discuss Delphine's fears after she learns how Bobby Hutton was killed. How does the responsibility she feels for her sisters make her fearful of the rally?
9. Unity is one of the most important themes in the book. What does Delphine learn about unity at the rally?
10. Discuss Nzila's poem "Movable Type" (p. 197). Movable type refers to the metal letters that are used to print text in a printing press. Pica, Elite, Courier, and Sans Serif are all styles of type. How does this poem reflect Cecile's feelings about herself, and how does it relate to her abandonment of her children?





## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Cassius Clay Clouds.** Throughout the story, you read examples of figurative language. Figurative language is a literary device that writers use to create imagery, evoke feelings, or make writing more vivid. Review common examples of figurative language, such as alliteration, simile, metaphor, and personification, and then discuss the figurative meanings of the following examples from *One Crazy Summer*:

- “Those clouds dealt another Cassius Clay left-and-a-right jab to the body of our Boeing 727” (p. 3)
- “When we push our way up in the clouds, the clouds get mad and push back. Like you two fighting over crayons” (p. 4)
- “With ‘Cassius Clay,’ you hear the clash of fists, like the plane getting jabbed and punched. With ‘Muhammad Ali,’ you see a mighty mountain, greater than Everest, and can’t no one knock down a mountain” (p. 6)
- “The clouds had made their peace with our Boeing 727” (p. 18)

How are these examples especially brought to life in the graphic novel format?

**Black History Hall of Fame.** Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern learn about many important figures in the Civil Rights Movement, particularly those associated with the Black Panthers. Choose one person featured in the text. Conduct research into the life of your chosen figure, keeping in mind how they were perceived in 1968 and how they are considered today, through the lens of history. Present your research to the class in written form or in a visual presentation.

**A Golden State of Mind.** *One Crazy Summer* takes place in Oakland, California. Participate in a class research project on the history of the Golden State, focusing on major events in history that are referenced in the story: the building of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Gold Rush, Chinese immigration, the Central Railroad, and the agricultural industry. Working in pairs or small groups, create exhibits presenting your findings.

**Miss Merriam Webster.** The power of words and language is a strong theme in *One Crazy Summer*. Taking inspiration from the story, write a simple poem that reflects the story’s main ideas. The poem can take the form of a quatrain, haiku, or free verse. Organize a class poetry slam to showcase each student’s creation.



Guide created by Colleen Carroll, literacy educator, content creator, and author of the *How Artists See* series (Abbeville Kids). Learn more about Colleen at [www.colleencarroll.us](http://www.colleencarroll.us).

# DIFFERENTIATING WITH GRAPHIC NOVELS

**Using graphic novel adaptations alongside existing novels is a powerful opportunity to invest in and support readers.**

## BUILDING BACKGROUND

Graphic novel adaptations are an important tool for preparing readers before they begin a novel study.

- Spark curiosity by having readers engage in a “Gallery Walk” with images from the graphic novel. Have students walk around the room observing the artwork, asking questions, and making predictions about the graphic novel.
- Use the graphic novel to provide exposure to different cultures and communities. Have students match the images in the graphic novel to real-world locations, items of cultural significance, and historical context. Invite students to ask questions and research new topics as a class.
- Set the stage for students to understand sensitive topics by examining images through an empathetic lens. Ask students to imagine experiencing what the characters experience.
- Images can help students feel more comfortable beginning conversations about themes and conflicts outside of their personal experiences. Choose several images from the graphic novel and have students discuss their observations, emotions, and questions regarding these images.
- Use images to provide concrete examples of vocabulary, and invite students to apply new vocabulary by writing vocabulary words on sticky notes and labeling them within the graphic novel.



## ENHANCING CURRICULUM

Using graphic novel adaptations alongside existing novels provides readers with multiple opportunities to practice analyzing content and develop their skills.

- Invite readers to examine a section of traditional text while viewing the illustrations in the graphic novel. Have readers highlight the author's word choice, imagery, and figurative language. Discuss how the writing style impacted the details of the graphic novel.
- Identify symbolism and themes in the novel and then examine how these appear in the graphic novel adaptation.
- Students can develop analytical skills by generating a "T" chart comparing how an author describes a character, event, and/or setting in the novel form versus the graphic novel form. Students can answer inferential or open-ended questions such as:
  - In your opinion, did the illustrator of the graphic novel use the correct colors based on the written description?
  - Did the artist make any changes? Which version impacted you more as a reader?
  - If you were the artist, how would you have designed the scene?
  - Compare and contrast a character's actions and emotional responses in the existing novel to the facial expressions and body language chosen by the illustrator of the graphic novel.
  - Which version of the story helped you understand the characters better?

## READING READINESS OPPORTUNITIES & ENRICHMENT

Graphic novels can support readers at all readiness levels with hands-on activities and visual tools.

- Use the images from the graphic novel adaptation to help students recall events in the novel, engage in sequencing, and identify cause-and-effect relationships.
- Support reading comprehension of the novel by having students read paired sections of the graphic novel first.
- Have students use visuals to locate textual evidence in the graphic novel and match quotes from the novel to the graphic novel.
- Use images from the graphic novel as an entry point for writing about the text.
- Have students show their understanding of the novel by writing their own labels, captions, and dialogue for the graphic novel adaptations.
- Use images from the novel for authentic practice for multilingual students. Invite students to label the images with vocabulary words, match images to words and phrases, or engage in speaking practice with the dialogue in the graphic novel.
- Invite readers to create their own graphic novel adaptation of a favorite scene. Challenge them to rewrite a scene from a different character's perspective or create the prequel or sequel.