

Jazmin's Notebook Study Guide

Jazmin's Notebook by Nikki Grimes

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Plot Summary

Jazmin's Notebook, by Nikki Grimes, is the story of a fourteen-year-old African American girl who lives with her sister CeCe, who is six years older than she is. Jazmin's parents divorced when she was very young. Her mother became depressed, spiraled into alcoholism and eventually suffered from a mental disorder that required extensive hospitalization. Their father could only take them in on a short-term basis. As a result, the girls were sent to live with relatives or were placed in foster homes at various times. There was other tragedy in the girls' young lives. Their father died in a car accident after lingering in a coma for several days.

When Jazmin was thirteen, she was living with her mother. Although her condition had improved for a brief time, she had another bad spell and Jazmin jumped at the chance to move out and live with her sister who left home when she was sixteen. The girls had a strong bond and CeCe was always very protective of her younger sister. They struggled to make ends meet and had many worries about their safety because of the crime-ridden area of the Washington Heights section of New York City where they lived. They literally had to dodge bullets from a drive-by shooting and always had to be wary of the drug addicts and other shady characters who lived in the area.

Jazmin regretted that she didn't have a normal childhood like many of her friends. There were no baby pictures of her and no memories of birthday parties. She decided to keep a notebook, similar to a log or diary, of the events she experienced and the people she met. The writing came easy to her and she was quite a poet and had aspirations to become a writer. She was a straight A student and planned to go to college and escape her past and the seedy neighborhood in which she lived. A narrow-minded school counselor signed Jazmin up for classes that were technical in nature because "a person like" Jazmin would do better if she learned a skill. Jazmin was not shy about straightening the counselor out. She was planning to go to college and she wasn't going to let anything or anyone crush that dream.

In the end, the girls moved to a nicer and safer neighborhood. But Jazmin refused to give up her school and her friends and planned to commute everyday to school. After moving more times than she could recall, she had finally established some roots and wasn't about to leave them. Jazmin left the last page of her notebook blank. It represented her future which was finally hopeful and was yet to be written.



Chapter 1: April 7

Chapter 1: April 7 Summary

Jazmin's sister CeCe tells her that on the night in the late 1950s when she was born her parents stayed up all night timing her mother's contractions and arguing about how to spell her name. CeCe was only six and normally would have been asleep but the thin walls of the tenement they lived in carried the sounds of her parents' voices to her room, keeping her awake.

The dispute over Jazmin's name centered over her father's wish to connect it to jazz music. Her father was an insurance salesman and a frustrated jazz saxophonist. Since he couldn't play in a jazz band, he wanted to pay tribute to "American's only original art form" (4) by making it part of his daughter's name. Her mother finally agreed to name their daughter Jazmin Shelby. Jazmin learned through the years that people would always have a hard time spelling her name correctly. But Jazmin feels her name suits her. Besides, everyone will learn to spell it once it's splashed across the cover of a best seller.

Chapter 1: April 7 Analysis

Jazmin had very humble beginnings but has aspirations for great successes in the literary world. Her father had unrealized dreams to be part of the artistic world even naming his daughter in honor of the music he loved. Perhaps pursuing her dreams for success in the literary world will pay homage to her father who could not follow his passion because he had to work hard to support his family.



Chapter 2: The Garden of Eden

Chapter 2: The Garden of Eden Summary

April 15th

Jazmin's apartment building is wedged between a laundromat and the Garden of Eden Bar & Grill on Amsterdam Avenue. The grill plays loud rhythm and blues music on the jukebox during all hours of the day and night. Lots goes on in the grill besides music—cocaine is bought and sold there, pool-sharks beat men out of a whole week's wages. Jazmin thinks about the singing and dancing going on inside the bar. With her Coke-bottle glasses and skinny legs, no one is going to be asking her to dance any time soon.

CeCe doesn't like Jazmin putting herself down, insisting that she's actually beautiful. But Jazmin doesn't buy it because CeCe probably thinks it's her job to boost her confidence. Jazmin is hoping to get contact lenses. It's the '60s and everyone's wearing them. Once in a while Jazmin comes downstairs without her glasses and she does seem to get more attention from the males—but she's blind as a bat and can't see exactly who she's attracting. Jazmin hopes that her vain years end after high school.

Chapter 2: The Garden of Eden Analysis

Jazmin is exposed to the seedier side of life in her neighborhood in New York City. At a very tender age, she is aware of cocaine dealing in the bar that is located next to her apartment building. Jazmin is going through her awkward teen years. She's feeling unattractive because she's skinny and wears thick glasses. She wants to be attractive to the opposite sex and dreams of getting contacts instead of having to wear glasses. CeCe is the protective older sister who tells her younger sister that she's beautiful.



Chapter 3: Amsterdam Avenue

Chapter 3: Amsterdam Avenue Summary

April 23

Jazmin, on the front stoop again, watches J.D., a numbers runner, dash down the street in the rain. According to CeCe, Jazmin spends way too much time on the stoop. But Jazmin likes to sprawl out in the outdoors on the wide steps. She's had many years of being cramped into small rooming houses, sometimes sleeping three in a bed. The current one and one-half bedroom apartment they have lacks space even though her mother's not there—she's back in the hospital. Looking down wide Amsterdam Avenue there in Washington Heights, she takes in the bustling, crowded street. Restaurants, stores, storefront churches and beauty salons are all jammed together. There is a lack of bookstores and libraries. Jazmin figures she will one day have to fight for the space for them.

Chapter 3: Amsterdam Avenue Analysis

Jazmin is in the midst of a crime-ridden area. She watches a numbers runner as he does his work—numbers is illegal and is a form of gambling that is common in poor neighborhoods. Jazmin feels the need to spread her wings, watching the world as she knows it go by from her stoop. Perhaps she is trying to distract herself from her mother's health. Her mother has returned to the hospital for a yet unspecified condition. CeCe tells Jazmin she sits outside on the stoop too much. CeCe may be worried that Jazmin will be in danger in the crime-ridden area.



Chapter 4: 42nd Street Library

Chapter 4: 42nd Street Library Summary

May 8th

Aunt Sarah returns from her job as a nursing assistant at Columbia Presbyterian. She greets Jazmin, who is perched on the steps, warmly. She asks how her writing is coming along and encourages her to send some of her poetry to her mother in the hospital. Jazmin doesn't tell Aunt Sarah, but she knows her mother would not be interested in her poetry. The doctors are thinking about giving her shock treatment. She wishes Aunt Sarah was her real aunt instead of just a neighbor. She's good to the family. When CeCe is low on cash, Aunt Sarah always comes up with a heaping bowl of greens for them.

Jazmin is happy to have lasted a year on Amsterdam. Over the past fourteen years, she's lived with a variety of different relatives and in many different foster homes; she's lived in practically every borough in New York City. She keeps an on-going notebook so she can record descriptions and encounters with all the many people she has met during her young life so she doesn't forget them. Aunt Sarah is one person she won't forget.

May 20th

Every time Jazmin sees a man wearing a black beret, she thinks it might be her father. Then she gets upset with herself; he died over a year ago in a car crash. She remembers him proudly driving his black MG down Amsterdam. He wouldn't ride a bus if his life depended on it. CeCe thinks Jazmin has developed a sense of irony.

Chapter 4: 42nd Street Library Analysis

More is revealed about Jazmin's day-to-day life and the tragedy and anguish she has faced in her young life. She is fourteen and has lived with many relatives and in foster homes over the years. She feels close to a kind neighbor and has dreams that she will stay in the apartment with her sister where they have lived for the last year. Her father died in a tragic accident and her mother is suffering from a mental illness. Jazmin probably feels her time on Amsterdam Street is limited. Her sister is having a difficult time supporting them. Jazmin has fears that she will be sent away to live elsewhere again.



Chapter 5: For Sale

Chapter 5: For Sale Summary

May 28th

Jazmin has a friend named, Jabari, with whom she plays one-on-one basketball at school sometimes. Jazmin spots Jabari's grandmother coming down the street. When she nears Jazmin, she pulls out an 8 x 10 glossy of Jabari from the school prom. She's going to have it framed in silver. She acts like Jabari graduated from Harvard instead of junior high. Just as his grandmother pulls a naked baby picture of Jabari out of her wallet, he walks up. The tears of laughter are trickling down Jazmin's face as Jabari quickly snatches the picture away from his grandmother. But Jabari should feel blessed. There are no baby pictures of Jazmin or pictures of kid birthday parties for her. Even though CeCe is taking a lot of pictures of her now, she can't be sure how long that will last. If CeCe moves, those pictures could be lost. That's another reason Jazmin keeps up her notebook; the descriptions in it will be her photograph album.

May 29th

A neighbor whom Jazmin calls Sister Church because she always sees her coming from church passes by while Jazmin and her friend Shawna are sitting on the stoop. Sister Church greets the girls with the message of the Lord. Shawna tells the lady she's not even sure there is a God as she strokes her swollen stomach which is growing new life.

Jazmin is a spiritual person and CeCe is gifted with prophetic vision. Jazmin has had encounters with angels but doesn't talk about it because she doesn't want to be ridiculed. But angels are very much a part of her and her sister's lives. Even when the sisters have been separated, they would get stomach aches at the same time. When they were at the same foster home, they ran away together because the woman beat them. Jazmin was only three but she remembers that they wound up at their mother's apartment. No one, not even their mother, knew how they got there. It upset their mother who told them never to speak of the incident.

Chapter 5: For Sale Analysis

Jazmin's notebook takes the place of a family photo album which is an element that is missing from her life. She regrets that there are no memories of her life captured in photos. Jazmin and her sister have had a tumultuous life. They were abused and moved from one foster home to another. It is still unclear what happened between their parents that caused them to become foster kids. A friend of Jazmin's is pregnant and has a cynical outlook on life. Jazmin has thus far refrained from becoming bitter despite her unhappy and uncertain childhood. She holds to her belief that angels are part of her life and has hopes that they will be there for her since her parents were not there for her.



Chapter 6: Central Park Lesson

Chapter 6: Central Park Lesson Summary

June 10

Walking through Central Park, a great idea for a poem hits Jazmin. She has a pencil but no paper. She asks several white women who pass by for a piece of paper. They look frightened at the frantic looking black teenager and ignore her. Jazmin is desperate, afraid that her poem will dissolve like a dream. She hunts through a trash can and finds a candy wrapper that should be sufficient. She pays no attention to the passersby who look at her with pity—thinking she's scrounging for food. She writes the poem down but on the way home loses it either on the subway or when she runs up the stairs to her apartment. Although she cannot recollect the words, she vividly recalls the excitement and inspiration she felt when she wrote them. She vows to never lose another poem. She will make sure she always carries a pad and pen with her.

Chapter 6: Central Park Lesson Analysis

Since Jazmin has no record of her childhood, she is adamant that she will not lose any memories from her present or future. Although she recalls the process of writing a poem, she lost the words. Just like her encounters with the people she meets, she vows that she will record every inspiring word that she writes. Jazmin encounters racial bias and misunderstanding when she asks passersby for a piece of paper. They did not realize that they had encountered a young poet who was trying to create a piece of art for the world.



Chapter 7: Night Noise

Chapter 7: Night Noise Summary

July 17

Jazmin is concerned about her neighborhood . "Death walks the streets around here by invitation." (28) She keeps up her hopes that miracles will keep her from danger.

Timothy, a friend of CeCe's, had turned to drugs when he came back from Vietnam. He tries to hide his dirty syringe when he sees Jazmin nearing but she's not fooled. His suicide is just a matter of time. Jazmin and CeCe often must dodge bullets. One day when she is getting the mail, bullets come flying into the small vestibule. Had she been standing in the door, she would have been shot multiple times.

Jazmin and CeCe hold a poker game in their apartment to raise money to help them make it. The usual participants are there: Clyde from the record store; Goldy, who got his name from all the gold on his teeth; Paulette from the beauty shop; Jolene, the barmaid from The Garden of Eden; a new guy with beautiful gray eyes named T.C. and, Crew, a professional poker player who has a crush on CeCe. Crew doesn't mind dropping a few dollars because it gives him an excuse to spend time with CeCe. Jazmin spends most of her time frying chicken wings in the kitchen. The players buy plates of food for a couple of dollars. It's a good deal for them plus it gives the girls more money.

Everything is quiet until T.C. pulls his gun, accusing Crew of cheating. Amazingly, petite little CeCe keeps her cool and stares down T.C., ordering him to put his gun away. Everything calms down but the terror Jazmin felt follows her to bed. She feels that Death is stalking her and CeCe but until it catches her she's going to live for tomorrow.

Chapter 7: Night Noise Analysis

Death is part of Jazmin's life. Her sister's friend is a heroin addict and exists only for more drugs. Although she's only fourteen, Jazmin has seen more human strife than most adults. She has faced violence and her life has been in danger, even in her own building and apartment. Due to her experiences, Jazmin is wise beyond her years. Unlike many adolescents, she is very aware of death and the possibility that she may die young. She has decided that the only way to survive emotionally and mentally is to look forward to tomorrow and live life at its fullest.



Chapter 8: August

Chapter 8: August Summary

September 7th

Jazmin begins the new school year wearing last year's clothes, praying that no one notices. She resents girls like Chavonne Honeywood who has the latest styles and gets all the cute boys. When she had been in Alexander's Department Store recently to buy tights, she had made the mistake of walking over to the teen's fashion department. It was as though someone else had taken over her body. She had tried a red dress on that fit perfectly. While in the dressing room, she had turned away from the security cameras, folded up the dress and stuck it in her purse. Goodness didn't return to her but fear did. She imagined herself in prison and put the dress back. Chavonne irritates Jazmin but she knows that she's smarter than Chavonne. She doesn't want to trade places with Chavonne—just clothes.

September 13th

Jazmin learns that her guidance counselor, Lillian Wise, has picked out all tech school type courses for her. Ms. Wise has placed her in Home Economics, general science and sewing for beginners—no foreign language and no chemistry. She has not been placed in classes that would qualify her for college. She meets with Ms. Wise who tells her that from her experience a person like Jazmin is better entering the business world or doing something with her hands. Jazmin has to count to ten to control her temper and mouth. She sees her dreams of escaping Amsterdam Street crumbling before her. Being an A-student, Jazmin is not being treated appropriately. Jazmin insists that Miss Wise change her schedule immediately because she plans on going to college.

Jazmin gets great encouragement and support from her English teacher, Mrs. Vogel, who sneaks copies of Shakespeare's works and novels by James Baldwin into her book bag. She stops by to see Mrs. Vogel who asks about her mother. She encourages to go see her because, "No matter what she's done, she's your mother." (41). She knows Mrs. Vogel is right but that doesn't remove the sting of being shipped off to foster homes at a young age.

September 17th

Today is Jazmin's birthday. No card arrives from her mother but she hadn't really expected one. She wishes she would have had a mother who gave her birthday parties where everyone would sing "Happy Birthday" to her. CeCe gives her a miniature radio that Jazmin had eyed one day when they were shopping.



Chapter 8: August Analysis

Jazmin faces discrimination at school. Her counselor considers a person like Jazmin—translation poor and black—as not college material. Rather, she is suited for more menial work. Jazmin shows her spirit and the strong goals she has by standing up to the counselor, insisting that she be placed in college prep courses. Jazmin is tempted to steal because she's ashamed of her clothes. But she decides against it which indicates her seriousness in doing well in life. She's not going to take the easy way out; she's going to endure second-hand clothes and an inability to get the "cute guys" because she has a vision of what she wants her future life to be and is not going to sabotage herself and her dreams by going down the wrong path for frivolous and passing temptations.

Jazmin is suffering from anger and hurt over her abandonment by her mother. There is yet to be an explanation of why her mother—and presumably her father as well—sent her off to foster care at a very young age. Perhaps an explanation of her early life will be forthcoming in subsequent chapters.



Chapter 9: Daydreaming

Chapter 9: Daydreaming Summary

September 21

Miss Warren, the art teacher, thinks Jazmin's profile has character. Some people say that Jazmin would be cute without glasses but she doesn't agree. She's got her mother's hooked nose. She has a theory of how she got that nose. She tells her Jewish friend, Sophie, that she thinks she's a descendant of one of the Jewish Lost Tribes. Sophie tells her she could get a nose job if she doesn't like her nose. Jazmin insists that she's Jewish because she sings "Hava Nagila;" she's guilty about almost everything; and, she likes to eat knish! Jazmin does see things that the black community has in common with Jews—discrimination, pain and struggle to survive to name a few.

Sophie calls her "chicken" when Jazmin admits she hasn't visited her mother. Jazmin wonders to herself how she would react if she saw her mother. Would she burst into tears? Would her mother be angry that she had come to see her? Sophie invites Jazmin to go to lunch with her and some friends but she has to decline because she has brought her lunch. There had been a sale on eggs and CeCe had made every type of egg dish she could think of that week.

October 7th

Jazmin and her friend Destinee skip school. It is the first day that Jazmin has ever played hooky. They take a bus and head to the projects downtown. A twenty-year-old guy named Carlton lives there and is usually home. His apartment is a mess; pizza boxes and dirty dishes all around and the distinct smells of incense, hashish and marijuana are impossible to miss. Carlton himself is tall and handsome. He seems to be attracted to Destinee who is tall and sexy.

Jazmin and Destinee join the circle of kids sitting on the floor. Some kids are drinking alcoholic drinks. Jazmin notices a small group of kids across the way who are snorting cocaine off squares of aluminum foil. Carlton pops a few pills and swallows them quickly. Jazmin tries her first joint, breathing it in like the other kids do. She becomes very dizzy and tipsy, lies down in one of the bedrooms and passes out. She wakes to feel Carlton's hands groping her where they don't belong. Even though she's only half alert, she pushes him away. But he's persistent. Finally, she tricks him, telling him she has to go to the bathroom. She assures him she'll be right back. She quickly walks to the living room and wakes the sleeping Destinee. They rush out of the apartment. Jazmin tells Destinee to remind her to never do that again.



Chapter 9: Daydreaming Analysis

Jazmin relates the plight of the black people to that of the Jews. She sees parallels between their struggles and therefore is able to relate and feel close to Sophia, a Jewish peer. Jazmin's thoughts about her mother betray her bravado about not wanting to have anything to do with her. She has all the natural fears of rejection and uncertainty that anyone who feels abandoned would have.

Curiosity, more than temptation, lures Jazmin to the seedier side of her neighborhood. The very first joint she has in her entire life makes her pass out. She is lucky to get away with just a slight marijuana hangover. She could have been molested and raped by Carlton and she could have been egged on or forced to try cocaine. Even in a stupor, Jazmin is able to get in touch with her better instincts and thoroughly reject the life of alcohol and drugs. She reminds herself that she wants to get away from that life, not become part of it.



Chapter 10: Untitled

Chapter 10: Untitled Summary

October 20

Jazmin receives a letter from her mother but it is practically illegible. Shawna is about ready to give birth to her baby. She is way too young to be a parent and so is the boy who got her that way but he has conveniently left town. But age doesn't make a good parent. Jazmin had watched Lisann's two-year-old daughter walk off the curb toward the traffic while her mother flirted with J.D. in front of The Garden. Jazmin picked her up just in time. Lisann snatched her back, gave Jazmin a dirty look and continued batting her eyes at J.D. Destinee's mother is very loving, always giving Jazmin a big, warm hug.

Not everyone is cut out to be a mother, including Jazmin's own mother. She had always pulled away from her and CeCe when they tried to hug her. When they lived together, her mother preferred to work overtime rather than come home. Jazmin and CeCe usually ate and did their homework alone. Things would get worse when her mother would bring men home. They'd usually wind up drinking and that's when things would really spiral downward. Her mother would go on alcoholic binges and take off work for days. The alcoholism eventually led to an emotional breakdown. She started hearing voices and seeing things.

Jazmin's parents were separated and when her mother would be hospitalized, sometimes for three months at a time, her father would only take Jazmin and CeCe for a week or two at a time. After that, they'd be shipped off to relatives or to foster homes. CeCe moved out when she was sixteen. She got her own place and told Jazmin she was welcome to live with her. The next nervous breakdown compelled Jazmin to take CeCe up on her offer. CeCe mothers Jazmin and is very protective of her. It's embarrassing when CeCe calls her "baby" and other pet names in front of her friends. But, not being loved would be worse. Jazmin is not anxious to become a mother.

October 25

Jazmin tries to think of something to write to her mother but she doesn't know what to say. She'll wait a few days and maybe she'll think of something.

Chapter 10: Untitled Analysis

At the same time Jazmin receives a letter from her mother, which is a rare event, Jazmin's friend Shawna is ready to give birth. Shawna is only fourteen but Jazmin makes the point that age does not a good mother make. She recalls how her own mother had failed her. She ignored her need for affection and totally abandoned her by placing her into foster care. Another woman on the street allowed her toddler to run off in the street while she was flirting with one of the area's derelicts.



Just because Shawna was becoming a mother at a very young age, in Jazmin's mind that alone did not mean that she would be a bad mother. Even though her mother had mental problems and was an alcoholic, a young child like Jazmin did not have the skills to rationalize and understand that it was her mother's personal demons that kept her from being a good parent. A young child sees life in only black and white; the only thing a young child who is neglected and abandoned can be certain about is that her parent is not there for her.



Chapter 11: Yardbird Suite

Chapter 11: Yardbird Suite Summary

November 7

CeCe sends Jazmin out at night to The Garden to get her a pack of cigarettes. She calls ahead to the bartender to tell him to look out for her little sister. On her way back, a well-dressed man who reeks of alcohol grabs Jazmin. Just as she's trying to pull away, a voice in the dark tells the man to let go of her. The drunk immediately releases Jazmin but she is still frightened because she doesn't know who belongs to the voice. Suddenly, Crew steps out of the dark. It had been he who had come to her rescue.

November 9

A big, black rat runs through Jazmin's bedroom that night. She wakes CeCe who goes into immediate action. She breaks a Coke bottle up and puts the shards down in a hole by the register. She figures that's where the rodent is getting in. Jazmin can hardly sleep that night. She imagines herself packing all her belongings and moving downtown to a luxury apartment with a doorman. Then she pictures herself walking along the Champs Elysees and tossing coins in Rome's Fontana di Trevi. She finally falls asleep. The next morning, CeCe announces that they should think about getting a cat.

November 11

Brenda, a girl at school, is always pushing Jazmin around. Finally, Jazmin has had enough and confronts her. She tells her to lay off or she would punch her lights out. Jazmin is afraid. Brenda is bigger than she is and might come after her. Jazmin runs to the girls' room where she takes out her notebook and pen and writes a poem about how much she hates Brenda. She avoids profanity and has a couple false starts. Finally she characterizes Brenda as a pesky bird that pecks away at her but fails to leave a mark because she's as strong as a tree. When she finishes the poem, she feels the anger leave her.

Chapter 11: Yardbird Suite Analysis

The reader learns just how dangerous Jazmin's neighborhood is when she is almost accosted by a man on the street. It probably isn't the best idea for a fourteen-year-old to go out late at night in that area. If Crew hadn't interceded, Jazmin would have been in real danger. Jazmin distances herself from the rat in her apartment by escaping in her fantasies to other places that are safe and secure. Her creative mind is showcased by her fantasies about living in faraway places. Jazmin has become a strong person who does not put up with abuse. She confronts the bully at school and, even though the girl is bigger than she is, warns her to leave her alone. She is able to vent her anger through her poetry writing.



Chapter 12: Laughing in the Dark

Chapter 12: Laughing in the Dark Summary

It is almost Thanksgiving and CeCe plans a big feast. It's good to splurge once in a while. Jazmin and CeCe have tough times making it on their own. One time the register freezes over in the winter because they haven't paid their gas bill. Another time, someone steals the welfare check for which they had been waiting from the mail box. In some of these times, rather than cry out of frustration they would laugh. Jazmin's mom doesn't laugh often. She gets upset over the simplest things like burnt toast or an over-salted meal. A long time ago, her mother used to laugh but she has forgotten how and has wound up broken and defeated.

Chapter 12: Laughing in the Dark Analysis

CeCe and Jazmin have learned to laugh in the face of disaster unlike their mother who has forgotten how to laugh. Jazmin does not want to be like her mother who was destroyed by life and an inability to face adversity. She has rejected her mother's approach to life because she sees where it could lead her.



Chapter 13: It's Just A Question

Chapter 13: It's Just A Question Summary

December 25

Jazmin and CeCe's apartment is decorated for Christmas. A large pine tree is the focus of the holiday decorations. Destinee eats dinner with the sisters on Christmas Eve. A big box with Destinee's name on it is under the tree. The only thing that spoils the day is Jazmin's guilty feelings about refusing to go with CeCe to visit their mother. When she returns from the hospital, CeCe tells Jazmin that their mother had asked for her. Destinee is thrilled with the pearl and gold necklace that Jazmin gives her but not as thrilled as Jazmin is for giving it to her.

December 31

CeCe is surprised when Jazmin announces that she will go visit their mother. She and her sister have had too much experience with hospitals in their young lives. She recalls when her father was in the car accident, how frightened she had been as she stood in the hall outside intensive care trembling. Oddly, even though they had been divorced for years and she had had two other husbands since, Jazmin's mother had sobbed over his broken body. She had told him that maybe they could get back together. Her father had been in a coma, the doctors told the family that he was brain dead, but still tears had flowed down his cheeks as his ex-wife spoke. He had died three days later.

Jazmin is surprised how small and young her mother seems. Her mother's vacant eyes light up for a moment when she sees Jazmin. They embrace and Jazmin kisses her on the cheek. She steps away from her, not wanting to hug her too long. On their way to the lounge, several people stop and say hello to the girls, calling Jazmin by name. Her mother explains that they are members in her group therapy and she had told them about Jazmin. Jazmin is astounded; in all the years she had suffered from mental disorders, her mother had never agreed to enter into group therapy. Later, Jazmin asks her mother about her group therapy. She can see from her response that the therapy is having positive effects on her.

Jazmin recalls how after her father's death that her mother, who had been recovering from alcoholism, began drinking again. That's when Jazmin moved in permanently with CeCe. Several months later, her mother had been found wandering the streets and Jazmin's grandmother had had her committed. When they leave, Jazmin hugs her mother tight. She tells her mother that she loves her and she means it.

Chapter 13: It's Just A Question Analysis

Jazmin is thrilled that she could scrape enough money together to buy her best friend a nice present. She has the true spirit of the season and shows herself to be selfless and



giving. Finally, Jazmin decides to see her mother for the first time in months or perhaps even years. She recalls the misery the family suffered, including her mother, when her father was in the accident from which he ultimately died. She and her sister have had enough tragedy for a lifetime in their young years.

Jazmin comes to some resolution about her mother who has taken a brave step by entering into group therapy. Jazmin realizes that her mother really cares for her because she had told others in the group about her. Her mother's eyes light up when she sees her youngest daughter. They reach out to each other and the love between them that existed years before begins to emerge anew.



Chapter 14: Moving Day

Chapter 14: Moving Day Summary

January 29

Jazmin's mother is beginning to show some signs of a renewed life. The sisters are moving to a better place, further uptown. Jazmin hates the thought of saying good-bye to her friends, Sophie and Destinee. But she will continue to see them because she refuses to change schools and will commute everyday. Aunt Sarah gives her a big hug on moving day. She ends her notebook, leaving one blank page at the end. The blank page gives her a special tingle. It's waiting for her to fill it up.

Chapter 14: Moving Day Analysis

Jazmin and CeCe are leaving the Amsterdam neighborhood for a better place. Jazmin is happy to move to a better place but insists on staying in her school and not leaving her friends. She has made true friends in the neighborhood and feels she has roots that she never had before and wants to maintain them. She feels good because her mother is doing better. Things are looking up in the family. She leaves the last page in her notebook blank, representing the future which is unknown but is more hopeful than it has ever been.



Characters

Jazmin

Jazmin is the main character of Jazmin's Notebook. She is a fourteen-year-old African American girl who lives with her elder sister in an apartment in a rough area of the Washington Heights section of New York City. Jazmin is a bright girl and a straight A student. She is a natural writer who loves to write poetry and keeps a log of her daily encounters and the people she meets in her notebook. She has aspirations to have a career in writing.

As a very young child, Jazmin and her sister, CeCe, had been placed in a foster home where they had been neglected and abused. Her parents had divorced and her mother suffered from bouts of depression and alcoholism which eventually devolved into a mental disorder requiring extensive hospitalization. At these times, the girls had had to live with relatives or be placed in foster homes. Their father had a small place and could only keep them on a short-term basis. The girls had both been close to their father, but it was especially the case with Jazmin. They had been crushed when their father died from the injuries he sustained in an automobile accident.

Jazmin makes friends in the neighborhood but learns that there are many people with whom she does not want to associate, especially if she wants to make something of herself and escape the blighted neighborhood where she lives. Although Jazmin is hurt and bitter by her mother's abandonment, in the end she makes peace with her mother and can envision the possibility of building a new relationship with her.

CeCe

CeCe is Jazmin's older sister. She had been six years old when Jazmin was born. She tells Jazmin that on the night before she was born, her parents were monitoring her mother's contractions and arguing not about what to name Jazmin but how to spell it. Her father had gotten his way since he wanted to pay homage to his favorite type of music by inserting a "z" in her name. CeCe and Jazmin both spent time in their young years with other relatives and in foster homes. Their parents are divorced and their mother has problems with alcoholism and eventually suffers a mental breakdown.

CeCe leaves home at sixteen and moves in with a boyfriend. After she gets on her feet, she is able to get her own apartment and gives Jazmin an open invitation to move in with her when things get unbearable with their very fragile mother. When their mother suffers another breakdown, Jazmin jumps at the chance to move in with her sister.

CeCe is very protective of her younger sister. She understands the dangers and perils of their neighborhood and reacts like a mother hen if Jazmin is late coming home from school. Although CeCe has to struggle to make ends meet, she makes sure that Jazmin gets a nice gift for her birthday. She also splurges on "feasts" for Thanksgiving and



Christmas. Jazmin is somewhat embarrassed when CeCe calls her "baby" in front of her friends. But Jazmin enjoys the comfort of knowing that her sister really loves her and is there for her.

Jazmin's Mother

Jazmin's mother suffers from depression, alcoholism and eventually a mental breakdown. When she is unable to care for her daughters, she sends them to live with relatives or places them in foster homes.

Jazmin's Father

Jazmin's father loved jazz music and named his youngest daughter Jazmin with a "z" to honor that passion. He died in the hospital after lingering a few days following a car accident.

Aunt Sarah

Aunt Sarah lives in the same apartment building as Jazmin and CeCe. She's not really Jazmin's aunt but Jazmin wishes she was. The warm embrace she always gives Jazmin gives her great comfort.

Sophie

Sophie is Jazmin's Jewish friend. Jazmin sees a connection between the struggles of the blacks and those of the Jews. Jazmin tells Sophie that she thinks that she is a descendant of one of the Jewish Lost Tribes.

Destinee

Destinee is one of Sophie's best friends. Jazmin and Destinee play hooky one day and find themselves in a dangerous situation where kids are snorting cocaine and drinking alcohol. They vow to not repeat the same mistake again.

Crew

Crew is a professional poker player who has a crush on CeCe. He plays at CeCe's poker parties as an excuse to spend time with her. Jazmin is a little frightened of him until the night he saves her from an alcoholic who is trying to molest her.

Mrs. Vogel

Mrs. Vogel is Jazmin's English teacher and a big advocate of the young girl. She knows how bright she is and sneaks works by Shakespeare and James Baldwin into her backpack.

Lillian Wise

Lillian Wise is one of Jazmin's counselors. She has a narrow view of the black teenager. She enrolls Jazmin in technical courses, telling her that a "person like" Jazmin will have a career using her hands. Jazmin, a straight-A student, sets her straight and insists that she change her schedule and place in her college prep courses because she plans on attending college.



Objects/Places

The Apartment Building Stoop

Jazmin would often sit on the front stoop of her apartment building watching the bustling neighborhood. By sitting on the stoop, she feels she is able to spread her wings and enjoy some space compared to the suffocation of her cramped apartment.

Jazmin's Notebook

Jazmin has no baby pictures or memories of birthday parties. At fourteen, she decides to keep a notebook of all the people she meets and things she does. The notebook would be her "photo album" from that point on.

Amsterdam Avenue

The apartment building in which CeCe and Jazmin live is located on Amsterdam Avenue. It is a busy and crowded street with stores and shops of every type and description.

The Garden of Eden Bar & Grill

Jazmin and CeCe's apartment building is wedged between a laundromat and The Garden of Eden Bar & Grill. Rhythm and blues music can be heard blaring from the bar during all hours of the day and night.

Washington Heights

Jazmin and CeCe live in a crime ridden area called the Washington Heights neighborhood. The area is run-down and holds many perils. By the story's conclusion, the girls are moving to a nicer uptown area.

New York City

New York City is the backdrop of the story of Jazmin's Notebook. Jazmin and CeCe live in the Washington Heights neighborhood of the city. Jazmin comments that she has lived with so many different relatives and foster families that she is sure she has lived in every borough in New York City.



Central Park

Jazmin is in Central Park one day when she is inspired to write a poem. She has a pen but no paper. After asking several people for a piece of paper with no success, she digs in a trash can in the park for a piece of paper. Passersby think she is digging for food.

Jazmin and CeCe's Apartment

Jazmin and CeCe live in a one and one-half bedroom apartment. Jazmin being the youngest, has the one-half bedroom. They are both happy to move out of the apartment for a better place after living there two years.

Alexander's Department Store

One day when Jazmin goes to Alexander's Department Store for a pair of tights, she is tempted to steal a red dress she tries on. She has it folded up in her purse but weighs the wisdom of her actions. unfolds the dress and puts it back on the hanger.

CeCe's Poker Party

The sisters have a hard time making it financially. CeCe holds poker parties and sells the players dinners which together with poker winnings gives them a little extra money.



Themes

Abandonment

Jazmin and CeCe are sent off to live with relatives or placed into foster care when their mother is unable to care for them. Their parents are divorced and her mother suffers from alcoholism, depression and ultimately a mental breakdown. Their father lives in a small place and could only keep them for short periods. The girls feel the sting of abandonment for years after they wind up living together in their own apartment.

The story unfolds when Jazmin is fourteen. At that tender age, she deals with hurt and anger over her lost childhood. There are no baby pictures of her—a normal part of life that most people take for granted. Never in her young days did she have a kids party to celebrate her birthday. After being moved around so much, she has learned to protect her fragile feelings by never becoming attached to any place or person.

Although CeCe visits her mother in the hospital, Jazmin refuses because she claims that she doesn't want to have anything to do with the woman who failed her as a mother. In reality, as is the case with all children who have experienced an unhappy childhood and abandonment, Jazmin feels enormous and inexplicable guilt and fears that her mother doesn't want to see her and would reject her.

Survival

The two young sisters, Jazmin and CeCe, are forced to learn at very young ages that life would not be easy for them. For these sisters, life is a fight to survive. After Jazmin's mother is hospitalized again, Jazmin does not want to be placed in foster care again so she jumps at the chance to live with her sister and have what resembles a normal life. The sisters have rough times making ends meet. CeCe, who at twenty is six years older than Jazmin, could barely make ends meet. Their apartment is in a poor, high-crime area which presents dangers and many obstacles. They literally have to avoid the bullets from drive-by shooters, have to deal with a large oily black rat that finds its way into their apartment and have to deal with various derelicts who live in the area, including drunks, drug dealers and criminals.

But the girls manage to stay afloat by sacrifice and ingenuity. CeCe holds poker parties and sells the players dinners for a couple of dollars which, in addition to their winnings from cards, gives them some extra money. CeCe is a good shopper and buys whatever food is on sale each week in bulk. Jazmin comments to a classmate that her sister has thought of every way there is to cook eggs that week. For Jazmin's part, she learned she has to resist the natural desire for new school clothes. She often feels ashamed of her second-hand clothing. Although it bothers her to do without the things that other kids have and take for granted, she knows that to scrape by she cannot put additional



pressure on her sister by wanting things that are not essential and that they cannot afford.

Hopes & Dreams

Although Jazmin has seen an inordinate amount of tragedy in her fourteen years and experiences abuse and abandonment as a very young child, she somehow keeps the aspirations for her future intact. Through the trauma of divorced parents, an alcoholic and mentally disturbed mother, a father who died young and placement in foster care, Jazmin stays focused on her dreams of a college education and of ultimately becoming a writer. Even though a short-sighted counselor thinks that the black teenager is destined for menial work, Jazmin has no thought of abandoning her dreams or wavering from her goals just because someone in a position of authority gives her no chance of succeeding. Jazmin knows who she is and what she can become.

An unhappy childhood can often result in an unhappy and unsuccessful person who is scarred for a lifetime. In Jazmin's case, she has an inner strength that sees her through. She is able to use the lives of the adults who have failed her as examples of people she refuses to become. This inner strength lifts her spirit after enduring tragedy and disappointment; her intelligence guides her in avoiding toxic situations and her dreams of succeeding and becoming a productive adult make her resist the lures of the type of behavior that would lead her down the wrong path.



Style

Point of View

Jazmin's Notebook is told in the first-person narrative by Jazmin. The reader is privy to the original poems that are written by the fourteen-year-old and her private thoughts about her wishes, hopes and dreams—and on the darker side, her anguish over her mother's condition and her pain from being abandoned by her parents. Writing the book from the protagonist's point of view is an effective way of illustrating the internal struggles of a young girl who experiences adult-size problems and the growth and character development that can be gained despite the abuse and neglect she endures.

Although in reality, Jazmin and CeCe are abandoned by both parents, the author places the major blame for their tragic childhood on their mother. There seems to be a slight bias against the mother figure because when a child winds up in foster care, both parents must take a share of the responsibility. The father seems to be idolized by the girls and given a free pass for his part in parental failure. This aspect of the story may reveal the personal feelings of the author. On the other hand, by portraying the father as loving and faultless, the author may be pointing to the unfairness that exists within some cultures, perhaps particularly in the African American community where men are often missing and the job of raising children falls squarely on the shoulders of the women.

Setting

Jazmin's Notebook is told against a rich and interesting backdrop. The reader visits the world of the fourteen-year-old Jazmin through the eyes of the young aspiring writer who maintains a diary, or notebook, of the colorful people of the community and the interesting aspects of that world.

Jazmin and her older sister, CeCe, live in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City. They live on Amsterdam Avenue in a high-crime section of the area that is blighted and rundown. The apartment building the sisters live in is described as being wedged between a laundromat and The Garden of Eden Bar & Grill which blasts rhythm & blues music all hours of the day and night. Cocaine deals are made in The Garden and working men are known to lose an entire week's pay to pool sharks who inhabit the bar.

Jazmin is in the habit of sitting on the stoop in front of her apartment building; she likes the feeling of space and freedom there as opposed to the cramped quarters of her apartment. From her perch on the stoop, Jazmin has an overview of the bustling, crowded street. Restaurants, stores, storefront churches and beauty salons are all jammed together, but there are no bookstores or libraries, something Jazmin plans to change some day.



Jazmin and her sister struggle to survive in their small apartment. The heat is turned off at times because they can't pay the gas bill. A large rat gains access to the apartment through a hole in the floor making the girls think they should get a cat. Jazmin has a close-call one day while getting the mail; a drive-by shooter blasts the building's front door just a few steps away from the youngster. A friend of CeCe's who is a Vietnam veteran lives in the apartment building. He is usually stoned and hides his hypodermic needle when he sees Jazmin heading his way. Jazmin is accosted by a drunk one evening when she is out on an errand.

Jazmin lives in a dangerous neighborhood and her dreams of leaving it behind begin to be realized when, at the conclusion of the story, she and her sister move uptown to a better region.

Language and Meaning

The majority of the chapters in Jazmin's Notebook begin with an original poem by the author. The subject of the poems have relevance to the chapters which they precede. For example, in "Daydreaming," Jazmin, an aspiring writer, writes of the day that she'll be a famous writer and that her "arm'll be worn out from signing autographs everywhere I go." (43) In "Laughing in the Dark" Jazmin refers to laughter as "the one and only spark luminous enough to pierce the dark." (79)

The author uses rhetorical flourishes to add interest and a lyrical quality to the story. For example, when Jazmin encounters her warm and friendly neighbor, her voice is characterized as "warm as a cuddle." (12) In the chapter that begins in Central Park, Jazmin comments that ideas are like gossamer that disappear as quickly as a forgotten dream. There is the hint of African American ethnicity when Jazmin compares her fear bouncing off the wall like a "b-ball slamming a backboard."

The reader is given insight into the true feelings of the protagonist, Jazmin, from the notebook she is keeping about her daily experiences and the people she encounters. Her brave facade, especially the bitterness about her mother, is belied by her private thoughts and the words she writes which depict her real feelings and fears that her mother doesn't love her and will reject her.

Structure

Jazmin's Notebook by author Nikki Grimes, is comprised of fourteen short to medium-length chapters. With the exception of the very first chapter, each chapter begins with a titled poem that is portrayed to be written by the main character, Jazmin. These poems have relevance to the chapter into which they lead. The chapters themselves cover specific days which are noted throughout the chapter. The first chapter is dated April 7th and the last chapter has the date of January 29th which provides a time frame for the story. The content of the chapters and the poems come from the notebook, which is similar to a diary, that Jazmin keeps on a regular basis.

The chapters provide rich descriptions of the New York City neighborhood in which Jazmin and her sister live. The crowded street is depicted as jammed with small stores, bars and storefront churches. The book reads at a satisfactory pace and is not bogged down with an overabundance of detail or repetitive information. Certain elements of the story are hinted at, or foreshadowed, and remain a mystery well into the book. The story of Jazmin's past and younger years are revealed through her thoughts and by flashback descriptions of the events and people that are part of the episode.

The story is told largely through exposition although there is a smattering of effective and relevant dialog that serves to crystallize the story. The reader is privy to the private thoughts of Jazmin which help to complete an in-depth description of the protagonist.



Quotes

"The Garden of Eden has its share of snakes, so you might say it's an angel or two shy of heaven." (Chapter 2, page 6)

"CeCe hates it when I denigrate myself out loud that way. She swears I'm beautiful, mainly because she's my big sister and imagines that's her job. I don't have the heart to tell her otherwise." (Chapter 2, page 7)

"Aunt Sarah is a name that spells kindness, and when I leave this place, hers is one name I plan on taking with me." (Chapter 4, page 14)

"Be patient with people. We all believe what we know, or what we can, or what we want to." (Chapter 5, page 20)

"It seems to me that ideas are like gossamer, or mist, fragile as a dream forgotten as soon as you awake." (Chapter 6, page 24)

"He pockets his dirty syringe when he hears me coming, as if his slow suicide were a secret. . . anyone can see that he's itching for a burial." (Chapter 7, page 29)

"The Grim Reaper's gonna find me soon enough and, until he does, the only thing I'm chasing is tomorrow." (Chapter 7, page 33)

"I'm betting it [Crew's name] comes from 'crew,' as in wrecking. Now there's a name to inspire fear, and fear's something I know about. It finds me in the dark." (Chapter 11, page 66)

"If there was one thing I could give my mother, I'd help her find her smile again. I'd give her laughter." (Chapter 12, page 83)

"The phrase 'It's better to give than to receive' usually sticks in my throat. I've been on the receiving end too few times for the novelty to wear off, I suppose." (Chapter 13, page 85)

"Something inside made me wish I had more to give. And not once did it cross my mind to ask, or even care, whether she had any gift for me." (Chapter 13, page 89)

"The smell escaping from his room seemed lethal, a mix of rubbing alcohol and antiseptic designed to fight off disease, though Death himself might squeeze past the sentries at any time." (Chapter 13, page 91)



Topics for Discussion

How did Jazmin get her name? What career would Jazmin's father have pursued if he could have? What artistic career does Jazmin want to pursue?

What type of neighborhood do Jazmin and CeCe live in? What city? What are some of the dangers in the community? How does Jazmin hope to escape the life on Amsterdam Avenue?

Why are Jazmin and CeCe sent into foster care when they are young? What compels Jazmin to leave her mother's apartment and move in with CeCe? Why is Jazmin reluctant to visit her mother?

What struggles do CeCe and Jazmin face in their daily lives? How do they raise money to help them make it? What problems are caused by their financial hardships?

How is Jazmin tempted when she goes shopping on one occasion? What makes her resist that temptation? Why does Jazmin feel embarrassed about the clothes she wears to school? What does she feel is more important than the clothes she wears?

What problems does Jazmin's mother have? What happens to her parent's relationship? What happens to her father? Why is Jazmin's mother often hospitalized?

Why does Jazmin keep a notebook? What does Jazmin's notebook replace in her life? As the story concludes what significance does the "blank page" at the end of Jazmin's notebook have?