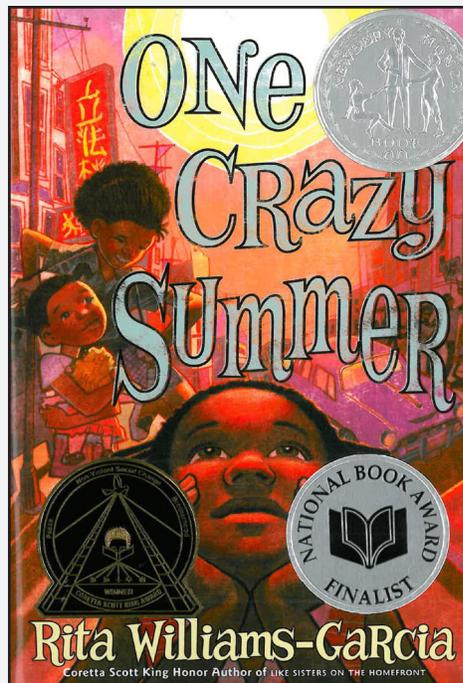


## Second Reaction: A Refreshing, Yet Crazy Summer

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *One Crazy Summer*. New York: Amistad, 2010.

Shaylyn Barrie Marks



Within *One Crazy Summer*, Rita Williams-Garcia weaves a tale of three sisters embarking on a journey to reconnect with a mother who previously abandoned them. It is the summer of 1968 when Delphine's father decides to send his girls to Oakland, California so they can get to know and understand their mother. Confused by the lack of excitement and affection from their mother, Delphine, the oldest child, quickly takes charge and learns how to order Chinese take-out, takes her sisters to a community center run by the Black Panthers, and stays out of their mother's way. Through these new responsibilities and exposures to ideas different from her own, Delphine is challenged to reexamine and question the events around her. Delphine's growing awareness of injustice, on both personal and universal levels, demonstrates her coming-of-age throughout "the crazy summer."

*One Crazy Summer* is, refreshingly, not your ordinary story about African American characters in the 1960s. Williams-Garcia chooses events from the time period that are not as frequently depicted in literature, especially literature written for young adolescents. Choosing the beginning of the Black Panther movement definitely strengthens the set-

ting of the story. Set in a pivotal time in African American history, Williams-Garcia does a wonderful job of weaving and balancing social commentary throughout the everyday events depicted in her story. This unique setting, combined with the innocent voice of the main character, helps create an appeal to a young adolescent audience.

As a middle school teacher, I can see many uses for this novel in the classroom. *One Crazy Summer* could potentially be used in classrooms ranging from fifth to seventh grades. With younger students, I would definitely read aloud chapters prior to student discussions of the events depicted. If I were using this book with the older grades, I would put students into literature circles of four or five and have them work semi-independently of the class. The literature circle atmosphere creates a more intimate space for students to read and question the text with one another. Regardless of how the story was read, I think that the focus on discussing and questioning the various events in the story is crucial.

Although I immensely enjoyed this book, I was left with a yearning to know a little more about the Black Panther movement and some of the events that were mentioned within the story. If I were to use this with students, I definitely think that this story could be used as a springboard for further investigation of the time period and events mentioned within the novel. Using this novel as a point of discussion could raise many interesting questions among students that could easily lead to independent- or group-inquiry-based projects, in which students could investigate lurking questions they may have after reading *One Crazy Summer*. An inquiry-based learning project could be the start of a much larger unit with students helping and teaching one another about things they became curious about while reading the novel. Overall, I really enjoyed the book and would love to see how students react to it in a classroom setting.

### About the Author

**Shaylyn Barrie Marks** currently teaches seventh grade language arts at Westfield Middle School. She is working on her doctorate degree within the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Purdue University, specializing in English Education.