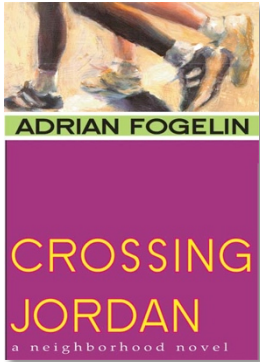


# TEACHER'S GUIDE

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## Crossing Jordan

Written by Adrian Fogelin

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Ages 8–12 | Realistic Fiction | Neighborhood Novels

AR • RC • Lexile • F&P • GRL X; Gr 6

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### ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Cassie narrates the dramatic events that unfold when Jemmie, an African American girl, and her family, move in next door. Despite their parents' deeply held prejudices, the girls find that they share more similarities than differences. Mutual interests in running and reading draw the girls together. But when their parents find out about the friendship, the girls are forbidden to see each other. A family crisis and celebration provide opportunities for the families to reach an understanding.

### THEMES

- Racial bigotry and tolerance
- Friendship and loyalty
- Value of literature
- Running

### A NOTE FROM THE PREPARER

*Crossing Jordan* is a thoughtful, quietly understated novel of great potential. Spiced with humor and alive with realistic dialogue, this upper-level, critical-thinking book can be used as a centerpiece of class study or a focus for Black History Month. It is also a great read-aloud. Since the main characters are middle school age, it is best suited to grades 5–7. However, many issues would be better dealt with by older students for both curriculum and maturity reasons. Therefore adapting this guide for students in grades 8–12 is also recommended.

One of the strengths of this novel is that it provides no easy, simple answer or a pat, happy ending. Only a beginning is apparent, with much more to overcome.

This leaves many questions unanswered and many issues unresolved which can be the basis for in-depth class discussions.

Students should be encouraged to speak their minds about being on either side of the fence because it is obvious that none of the black or white adults would be neighbors were they given the choice. It is left for Cass and Jemmie to begin what may become a sound foundation for friendship or at least neighborliness between the two families.

### BEFORE YOU READ

To understand the background to this story, students should have some basic knowledge of Southern life before, during, and after the Civil Rights era. Don't put so much emphasis on the information that it becomes overwhelming, but enough to give a tone and a frame for the existing situation at the story's onset.

- Briefly discuss the aftermath of the Civil War in the South. Discuss how the newly freed blacks had to struggle to support themselves and the upheaval of an agrarian economy based on slave labor.
- Outline the route to a still-resentful population who were all forced to integrate with the very same people many felt were the cause of their social and economic troubles. So many aspects and issues are involved that you will need to simplify them considerably. But you must get to the currency of the book: families of the same economic status living in close proximity to each other with neither black nor white willing to see beyond what they have been raised to believe is the "true" past and the current situation. Neither family

is more powerful because neither has more money than the other. Both are very proud and have different beliefs, backgrounds, and long-held convictions.

- Discuss how most human beings, at their worst, seem to need to find some other group that can be seen as “less” so they can feel more in control of their own lives. Rarely do these groups recognize similarities. This novel starts to break through the fences between people when the first tentative, difficult steps are taken toward recognition of the sameness of each family in both the economic and social hierarchy of the town where they live.
- Discuss contemporary fiction as a genre: current problems, issues, and situations that are affecting students today. Note that most of these problem situations are not new; they existed in the past and are now still unresolved. Examples of contemporary fiction topics such as divorce, drug use, school problems, or socially outcast students are useful to illustrate the genre. Authors who consistently write on these topics include Richard Peck, Walter Dean Myers, Judy Blume, and Paula Danziger.

### AS YOU READ

Discuss existing groups of students, people, immigrants, etc., in your school and community. Try to define the problems that individuals may encounter when they are trying to relate to each other, as these are probably similar to those encountered in this story.

- How are these groups perceived?
- Where do they live, work, shop, and play?
- Are they the rich, poor, or middle class economically?
- Are some people thought of as the best athletes, the smartest, the slowest, or the most “nerdy”?
- Are these ideas based on previous assumptions rather than on actual personal contacts?

### AFTER YOU READ

The following issues pose difficult moral and philosophical questions. At this age it is enough to open the discussion and try to achieve thoughtful responses. There are no pat answers, and don't accept them. But neither should the (possibly) tried and true responses be automatically negated. The purpose is to create an openness similar to what Cass and Jemmie are creating, since neither was willing to let the situation remain as it was.

- “Good fences make good neighbors” (Robert Frost): What are the positive and the negative aspects of this saying?

- Where does the title of the book originate? Crossing to a better place, freedom, fleeing from a terrible life? *Crossing Jordan* can be a springboard to any number of issues.
- After Miss Liz's death, her family takes all the “valuables” and leaves behind the 14 cats and the rocking chair. Why were these remaining items considered so much less valuable?
- The whole idea of “chocolate milk” is blending. Is this the best solution or even a possible solution to black and white people getting together? It seems to work best with the youngest people, but what about when they grow older? How much importance might be placed on later differences rather than on early friendships?
- What lesson did Cass teach to everyone when she went back and helped Jemmie over the finish line?
- What about doubts? Even when you want to trust and believe a friend, what happens inside you if you have just that little bit of doubt? What could happen to your friendship? This issue has nothing to do with being black or white but with how well you feel you know a person and how much you are willing to stake on that trust. How well can you ever know another person? How far should you take loyalty? What are your options?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### LANGUAGE ARTS

- Practice dictionary usage using these words from the book *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Look them up and use them in everyday conversation as Cass and Jemmie did.
  - antipathy
  - disposed
  - eviscerated
  - fortnight
  - gregarious
  - importune
  - perambulate
  - preternatural
  - salubrious
  - traverse
- Have the students list words that are new to them that they came across when reading books, newspapers, magazines, watching movies, or from any other source. Look up their definitions and use them in everyday language.

- Write a human-interest or local news story about the race: who won, who lost, why, etc.

### SOCIAL SCIENCE

Review the topics and questions from the “Before You Read” section. Now that the students have read the book, how differently do they see some of the issues, and would they change any of their opinions or answers to the questions raised?

### HEALTH / SCIENCE / NUTRITION

Running as a sport is fraught with conflicting beliefs. Depending on whether you are a sprint runner, a part of a relay team, or a long distance and/or marathon runner, your training and nutrition must take the type of running into account.

- What is recommended for those who want to run or jog just to keep fit, not to compete?
- **Nutrition:** What types of food/drink should be eaten before, during and after a particular race?
- **Shoes:** What types of shoes are recommended for which types of running? What type of shoe is best for your particular foot?
- **Training:** What kind of initial training is best for each type of race?
- **Warm-up:** What stretching exercises do runners do to prepare for a regular workout, for the race?
- **Cool-down:** What are good practices for after the race?
- **During the race:** What, if any, drinks or nourishment do runners need?
- **Body types:** Why are certain body types more suited to particular distances?
- **Mental attitude:** Believing you can do it, bouncing back from failure, and evaluating and respecting your opponents are all part of a positive mindset for a race. If you don't win, how do you adjust to a loss? What is the “zone” as referred to in the magazines that Cass read?

### RELATED READING

These and other fiction and nonfiction titles can extend a student's understanding of the issues and topics addressed in this book.

#### Prejudice (Fiction)

**Mayfield Crossing** and **Beyond Mayfield**,  
Vaunda Micheaux Nelson

**Music from a Place Called Half-Moon**,  
Jerrie Oughton

**Follow the Leader**, Vicki Winslow

**World of Daughter McGuire**, Sharon Dennis  
Wyeth

#### Running (Nonfiction)

**Runner's World: Complete Book of  
Running** Amby Burfoot, Editor

**Runner's Handbook: The Classic Fitness  
Guide for Beginner Runners**, Bob Glover

**Higdon's How to Train: The Best  
Programs, Workouts, and Schedules for...**,  
Hal Higdon

**Smart Running: Expert Advice on  
Training, Motivation...**, Hal Higdon

**Complete Idiot's Guide to Jogging and  
Running**, Bill Rodgers

**Runner's World** magazine

**Running Time** magazine

### REVIEWS

“In this sensitive portrait of black-white relations in a changing neighborhood, Fogelin offers a tactful, evenhanded look at prejudice.” —**USA Today**

“Fogelin creates Cass and Jemmie as complex characters with the same differences of approach and personality that mark the interactions of other best friends, whatever their skin color. Cass' straightforward voice never falters, even when she questions her father's belief and her own decisions. Readers will appreciate the honest of Fogelin's approach and applaud the two girls in their fast friendship.”

—**The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books**

**REVIEWS (continued)**

"...Jemmie and Cass are likable, lively characters, and readers will enjoy the repartee between them." —*School Library Journal*

**AWARDS**

- YALSA/Best Books for Young Adults
- IRA/Notable Books for a Global Society (Honor Book)
- VOYA (Voices of Youth Advocates) Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers
- Georgia Children's Book Award Nominee (Children's Choice)
- Rebecca Caudill (Illinois) Young Readers' Book Award (Masterlist)
- Sequoyah Young Adult Book Award/Oklahoma Library Association (Masterlist)
- South Carolina Junior Book Award/SC Association of School Librarians (nominee)
- Sunshine State (Florida) Young Readers' Award (Master List)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Adrian Fogelin is the author of nine titles for middle grade and young adult readers. Open one of her books, and you'll meet the kids in her home neighborhood in Tallahassee, Florida, where she and a band of trusty volunteers maintain the Front Porch Library—where local patrons usually arrive by bike or on foot. Adrian is also a songwriter and half of the musical duo "Hot Tamale."

[adrianfogelin.com](http://adrianfogelin.com)

### Adrian Fogelin's Neighborhood Novels:

*Anna Casey's Place in the World*  
*The Big Nothing*  
*Crossing Jordan*  
*My Brother's Hero*  
*Some Kind of Magic*  
*The Sorta Sisters*

### Also available from Adrian Fogelin:

*The Real Question*  
*Sister Spider Knows All*  
*Summer on the Moon*

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for

### **CROSSING JORDAN**

prepared by Christine Allen, Librarian, Riverside Unified  
 School District, Riverside, CA

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