



CHLORINE

SKY

A NOVEL

MAHOGANY L. BROWNE

"A story about heart and backbone, and one only Mahogany L. Browne could bring forth." — **JASON REYNOLDS**, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *LONG WAY DOWN*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

## About the Book

**A novel-in-verse about a young girl coming of age and stepping out of the shadow of her former best friend.**

SHE LOOKS ME HARD IN MY EYES  
& my knees lock into tree trunks  
My eyes don't dance like my heartbeat racing  
They stare straight back hot daggers.  
I remember things will never be the same.  
I remember things.

With gritty, heartbreaking honesty, Mahogany L. Browne delivers a novel-in-verse about broken promises, fast rumors, and when growing up means growing apart from your best friend.



Mahogany L. Browne

HC: 978-0-593-17639-9

GLB: 978-0-593-17640-5

EL: 978-0-593-17641-2

Ages: 14 and up

## About the Author



Mahogany L. Browne is a California-born, Brooklyn-based writer, educator, activist, mentor, and curator. She has published several books of poetry, and she is an Urban Word NYC artistic director (as seen on HBO's *Brave New Voices*), a founder of Women Writers of Color Reading Room, and director of BLM@Pratt programming. Mahogany facilitates performance poetry and writing workshops throughout the country. Her poetry picture books include *Black Girl Magic* and *Woke Baby*. Learn more about Mahogany Browne at [mobrowne.com](http://mobrowne.com) or on Twitter at [@mobrowne](https://twitter.com/mobrowne).

# Chlorine Sky Pre-Reading Questions

1. Consider the cover. What do you imagine the young woman could be thinking, feeling, doing, or gazing at? What feelings or thoughts do the colors—orange, yellow, black, purple, and blue—evoke in you? Consider the title. What images, ideas, feelings, memories, and thoughts do you associate with the word *chlorine*? What images, ideas, feelings, memories, and thoughts do you associate with the word *sky*?
2. Values are a person's standards of acceptable behavior and their judgment of what is important in life. What are two or three of your most important values? How or from whom did you learn each value? How do you practice each value (give a real example for each from your own life)? When has it been difficult or complicated to live by your values? How do your values compare and contrast to the values you see exhibited by your family and your friends?
3. Write a letter to your younger self that begins with "You deserve, you deserve, you deserve . . ." You can write to yourself at any age—five years or five weeks ago. What positive moments does your younger self deserve? What do you hope for your younger self to learn or realize?
4. A theme is an idea that appears over and over in a book. In *Chlorine Sky*, one major theme is friendship. What do you think makes a friendship strong? When, if ever, is it okay to let go of a friend? What qualities do you bring to your friendships? What qualities do you seek in others?
5. What different communities are you part of? Pick one that is important to you and describe your role within it. How are you different from and similar to other people within this community?

# Chlorine Sky Discussion and Writing Questions

1. Writers use repetition to emphasize important ideas. In the first poem, "ME & LAY LI AIN'T TALKING," Sky explains that she and Lay Li are having friendship trouble "cause she think she cute / cause she think I ain't." (p. 1) In the second poem, "& THIS IS WHY I THINK," Sky says, "She must think she cute! / Must think I ain't!" (p. 2) and in the third poem, "& LAY LI STRILL GRINNING," she says, "She must think she cute / But she ain't just cute / Lay Li pretty." (p. 4) What do you learn about Sky over these three poems? What were her most dominant feelings when *Chlorine Sky* begins? What and who is important to her?
2. We meet Curtis, who is cruel to Sky. How does Sky respond to Curtis in her poems? Do you believe that Lay Li has a responsibility to defend Sky? Colorism is the unjust and damaging practice of favoring lighter brown skin (and lighter brown-skinned people) and denigrating browner skin (and browner-skinned people). It has its roots in white supremacy. Lateral violence is a type of violence that is misdirected at one's peers instead of one's adversaries, and it arises from deeply rooted forms of oppression. Please explain what roles colorism and lateral violence play in *Chlorine Sky*'s opening poems.
3. In "HAVE YOU EVER STARTED A RUMOR?" (p. 74) Sky describes what it feels like to be on either side of a rumor: what it feels like to talk about someone and what it feels like to be talked about by other people. What images does Sky use to describe how both of these experiences feel? What sensory (sight, smell, touch, taste, sound) details could you add from your own experiences of rumors?

4. In "THE ASPHALT IS HOT ON MY SNEAKERS," (p. 82) Sky says, "with all my tough talk, I still don't talk about nobody's mama / Cause Tyrone's mama reminds me of my uncle / Sick on that stuff / & I don't talk about his daddy neither / Cause his daddy gone just like mines. / Instead / I say "Your handles is trash!" / & really, that's only a fact." (p. 83) What value does Sky demonstrate here? Why do you believe this is important to her? What are Sky's other values? At what moments in the book do you see her values challenged by other characters?
5. Reflect on and respond to the following quotes. You may choose to analyze the quote (What is its context? What is its purpose? What do you notice about this quote—what does it make you think or feel? What other specific quotes in the book does this quote connect to, and why?), or use it as a creative writing prompt (either by using it as a line in a story or a poem you write or as a theme or topic to explore in your own poem or story).
  - "& the argument has grown teeth / Buried its fangs into our friendship / & won't let go." (p. 30)
  - "I bop across the grass & / As soon as my ten toes touch asphalt / all the boys groan" (p. 79)
  - "Don't write about it Don't write about it? / Nah, don't leave evidence of the sads. / & never ever let it take you somewhere you can't come back from." (p. 94)
  - "Shoot, stories can change your whole world." (p. 101)
  - "Because here I am with a chance to do different / & instead of being loyal to myself / I rather be loyal to Lay Li." (p. 109)
  - "Everybody wants to be a hero, but most of us / are just misunderstood villains." (p. 144)
  - "She can't be crying for me . . ." (p. 161)
6. "Once you figure out what you gaming for / Then you can play honest & with integrity / If you show up & show the world your real self / You don't have to wait for others to claim you / You don't have to wait for others to pick you / You pick yourself, I mean / Really choose yourself every day" (p. 172)
7. In "THE RULES ARE EASY," (p. 47) Sky lists all the rules in her home. Indented and in parentheses, we are told the questions Sky's mother asks when she does not follow the rules. Write a poem about the rules of your home, using the same structure as this poem: rules of your home up against the margin, and then an adult's voice in parentheses asking questions of you when those rules aren't followed. What does Sky communicate about her home life that is similar to or different from yours? What does Sky think about the rules? Are they easy for her to follow? Why or why not? Are your rules easy for you? Why or why not?
8. "Now I realize being a girl is heavy business," Sky says. (p. 152) What is heavy about the business of being a girl, according to Sky? How does Sky's statement reflect a new understanding of her relationship with Lay Li? How does Sky's new understanding of being a girl relate to her experiences with Clifton, Tyrone, and Curtis? In *Chlorine Sky*, how is being a girl "heavy business"? Do you think being a girl is "heavy business"? Why or why not?
9. Every poem in *Chlorine Sky* tells a story. Every poem is connected to the one that came before and the one that comes after. The titles of the poems are also the first lines. Why do you think the author made the decision to write her book this way? What value does the interconnection between poems add to the book for you? Write three poems that detail three connected events in your life. Follow the same format as *Chlorine Sky*: the title of each poem is also its first line, and the last line connects to the next poem.
10. Sky has important relationships with Essa, Lay Li, Inga, and Kiyana. How does she feel about each of these characters throughout the book? Does it change? What lessons does each person teach her? What do you imagine she might teach each of them? How does Sky grow in each of these relationships?

11. Inga instructs Sky in "INGA SAYS": "Being a Black girl & a Black girl baller is a whole set of rules / you never see coming / Know the rules / So you know which ones you need to break" (p. 172). Contrast this with Coach Willie's earlier instruction to Sky: "He say I ain't supposed to say them things. / Not with my girl mouth / & I was almost surprised / Cause I ain't said nothing that they haven't already said to me." (p. 83) By the end of *Chlorine Sky*, what rules has Sky decided to break? What advice from others, including Inga and Coach Willie, does she accept? What advice does she reject?
12. We learn Sky's name in the last two lines of the book. Reflect on Sky's feelings about herself over the course of the novel. What parts of herself has Sky learned to accept by the end of *Chlorine Sky*, that she did not in the beginning?

## Praise for *Chlorine Sky*

★ "Celebrated poet Browne brings serious poetry chops to her writing but keeps it pared down and immediate for teen readers; HER OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE INTENSITY OF PEER SCRUTINY AND THE ABILITY OF A RUMOR TO WRECK A YOUNG LIFE ARE PENETRATING."

—*The Bulletin*,  
starred review

"Readers will find the changing friendships relatable. . . . A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT CHANGING TEENAGE FRIENDSHIPS AND FINDING WAYS TO ACCEPT YOURSELF."

—*School Library Journal*

"A PROFOUND REMINDER THAT SOMETIMES THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY THING A GIRL CAN BE IS HERSELF."

—Nic Stone,  
*New York Times* bestselling author of *Dear Martin*

"Writing in free verse, Browne explores concepts that will resonate with readers navigating toxic friendships and budding relationships and growing into themselves. . . . A COMING-OF-AGE NOVEL FOR BLACK GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN TOLD THEY'RE TOO MUCH AND YET NEVER ENOUGH."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"A STORY ABOUT HEART AND BACKBONE, AND ONE ONLY MAHOGANY L. BROWNE COULD BRING FORTH."

—Jason Reynolds,  
*New York Times* bestselling author of *Long Way Down*

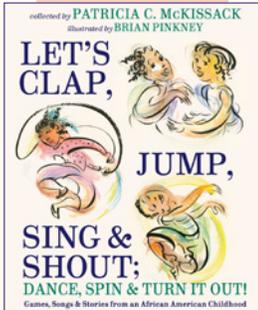
"BROWNE'S POIGNANT WRITING WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BRING READERS BACK TO HER STORIES AGAIN AND AGAIN."

—Renée Watson,  
*New York Times* bestselling author

# Further Reading

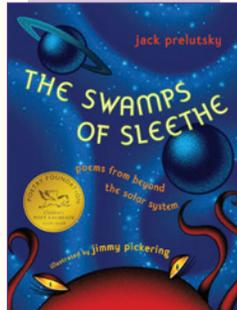
More poetry, novels-in-verse, and books featuring elements of poetry.

## ELEMENTS OF POETRY



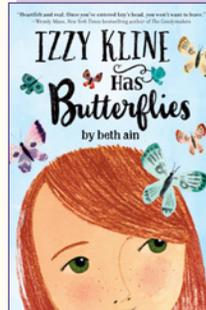
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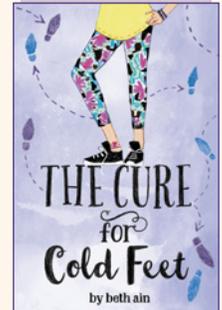
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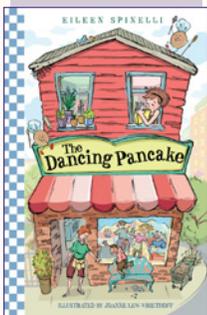
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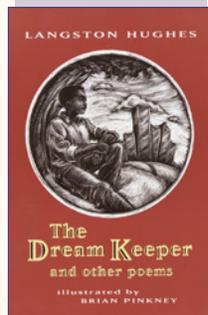
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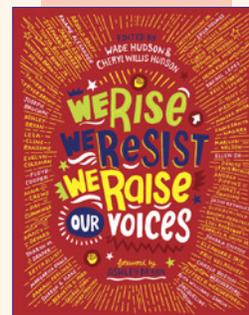
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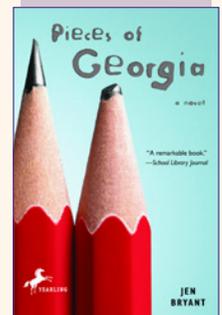
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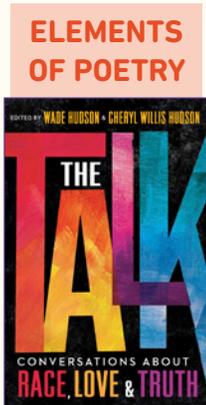
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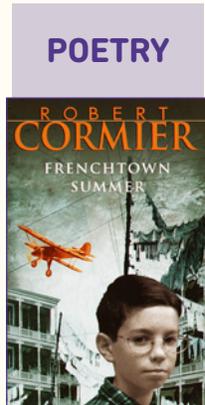
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# Further Reading

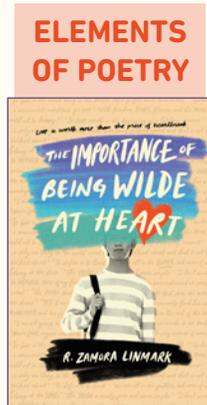
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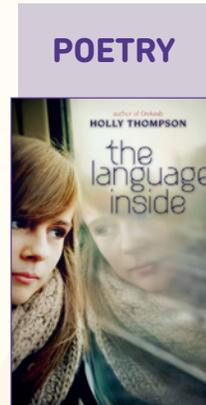
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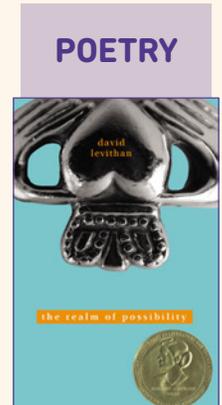
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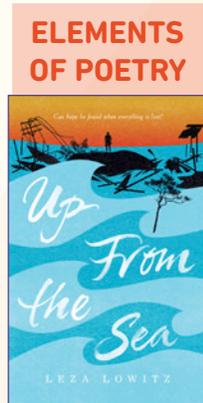
**The Language Inside**  
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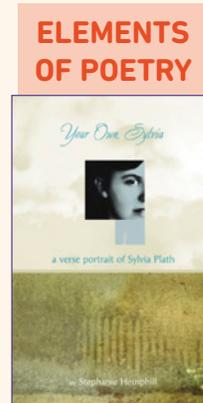
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