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### Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

## BEAUTY MARK:

### A VERSE NOVEL OF MARILYN MONROE

#### About the Book

Before she was Marilyn Monroe—Hollywood icon, blond bombshell, and easily one of the most recognizable faces of the twentieth century—she was Norma Jeane, a young woman whose early life was filled with traumatic experiences: foster homes, loneliness, sexual abuse, and teen marriage. Despite all she overcame, her hard-won, meteoric rise to stardom was besieged by exploitation, pill dependency, and depression, eventually culminating in her tragic death at the age of thirty-six. In a story at once riveting, moving, and unflinching, Carole Boston Weatherford tells a tale of extraordinary pain and moments of unexpected grace, of gumption and perseverance, and of the inexorable power of pursuing one's dreams.

#### About the Author

Carole Boston Weatherford is a *New York Times* best-selling author and poet who was selected as the Children's Book Guild 2019 Nonfiction Award Winner. Her numerous books for children include the Coretta Scott King Author Award Honor Book *Becoming Billie Holiday*, illustrated by Floyd Cooper, and the Caldecott Honor Books *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*, illustrated by Kadir Nelson, and *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement*, illustrated by Ekua Holmes. Carole Boston Weatherford is a professor at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading this book, what did you know about Marilyn Monroe?
2. The author often speaks about Norma Jeane and Marilyn Monroe as if they were two different people. What does she mean by that?
3. The poem “Mom Never Smiled” says, “After I was born, June 1, my mother / first held me with her eyes closed, / not gazing at my face / but plunging into darkness” (page 4). What can you surmise about her mother from this? Does it give you an idea about what Marilyn’s life would be like?
4. How did not having a father impact Norma Jeane’s life?
5. Aunt Grace is a complicated character. How did she influence Norma Jeane’s life? What do you think about the decisions she made about Norma Jeane’s life—encouraging her to work at becoming a star, placing her with a British family while her mother figured out how to buy a house, putting her in an orphanage, and sending her to her aunt Olive, among other things?
6. When Norma Jeane was only twelve, she learned the power of having “the body of a seventeen-year-old” (page 54). What did you think about the way she behaved?
7. Norma Jeane agreed to get married so she wouldn’t have to go back to the orphanage. She left high school in the middle of her sophomore year “to learn to be a wife” even though she “had never seen a marriage that worked” (page 60). Do you think she expected her marriage to be successful? What do you think she wanted out of the marriage, aside from avoiding being sent back to the orphanage?
8. Even though Norma Jeane and Aunt Grace had dreamed of Norma Jeane’s becoming a star, it was totally by chance that she caught the eye of a photographer when she was working in the Radioplane factory while her husband Jim was in the army. Do you think she would have become a star if that photographer hadn’t spotted her?
9. After Norma Jeane started modeling, she became self-confident and was no longer the child bride whom Jim had married. In fact, she was not his idea of a wife at all. What, exactly, did he want in a wife? Do women still have problems juggling careers and families? Is it better now, or about the same?
10. Norma Jeane had “always aimed to please but eventually gave up hope / of being loved,” but when she found success modeling, “for the first time [she] realized where [she] belonged / and who [she] belonged to: the public” (page 73). What does this mean? How do you feel about this idea?



11. Like her mother and grandmother, Norma Jeane suffered from depression. The poem used to describe her depression, "The Doldrums Passed Down from Della and Gladys" (pages 82 and 83), is like no other in the book. Read the poem aloud. What do you think about it? Is it effective?
12. Natasha Lytess was Marilyn's first drama coach, and they worked together for seven years, even living together for two of them. In the poem "*Ladies of the Chorus: Natasha, My First Acting Coach*," Marilyn says, "In a way, I owe Natasha everything. / She not only shaped me; she set me free" (page 90). What does she mean by this?
13. Marilyn was hardly the only young woman who found she had to use sex to advance in Hollywood. Do you think that these days things have changed?
14. In the poem "*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: Lorelei, My Die Is Cast*," Marilyn declares, "Knowledge is a girl's best friend" (page 109). Do you agree? What does she mean by that?
15. A lot of Marilyn's life centered around appearance versus reality. Marilyn Monroe was a manufactured personality, and even her body was changed by cosmetic surgery to fit the image. Few people knew the real Marilyn, or knew how she suffered from Ménière's disease, colitis, and depression. Does this book make you realize that what you can see of a person may be very different from who they really are?
16. When Marilyn was married to Arthur Miller, she desperately wanted a baby, but her only pregnancy ended in a miscarriage. What kind of a mother do you think she would have been?
17. No one is just one thing, but Marilyn was even more than most. The poem "Who Is Marilyn Monroe?" on page 178 enumerates many of her descriptions and personalities. Do you think it is possible to know anyone totally? Can you name several ways that you think of yourself?
18. Think about the title *Beauty Mark*. Is there more than one meaning for that?
19. Do you think the fame and money that Marilyn Monroe attained made up for the horrible things in her life? If becoming rich and famous meant being unhappy, would you still want those things? What about the meaning of success? Was Marilyn Monroe a success?

These questions were prepared by Grace Worcester, former youth services consultant for the Vermont Department of Libraries. Having spent her entire professional life working with books and children, she has served on the Newbery, Caldecott, *Boston Globe-Horn Book*, and National Book Award committees.

