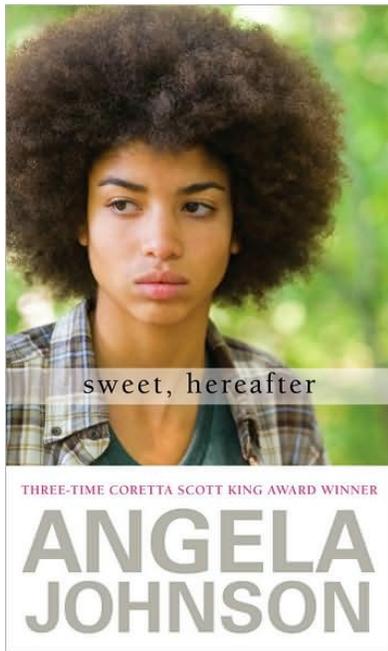


# Sweet, Hereafter

by Angela Johnson

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



## About the Book

Coretta Scott King Award-winner Angela Johnson concludes her *Heaven* trilogy with a poignant tale of discovering where—and with whom—you belong.

Shoogy doesn't know where she belongs. Since she moved to Heaven, she can count on one hand the number of people she can depend on. Her family doesn't understand, and school isn't working out. In Curtis she finds someone with a similar habit of wanting to be alone - and so they spend time alone together. As their relationship matures, Curtis has to deal with the real demons of his experience in Iraq, and Shoogy must come to terms with what it means to truly care about - and lose - someone.

*Sweet, Hereafter* by Angela Johnson, published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing. Permission to use book jacket image and book description granted by Simon & Schuster.

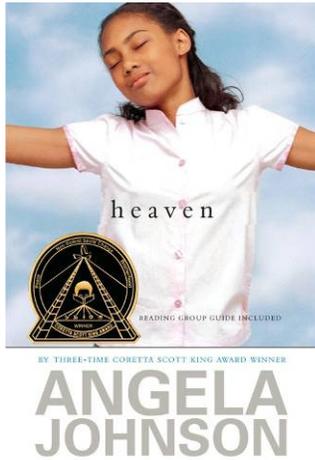
Book details:

**Sweet, Hereafter** by Angela Johnson.

Simon & Schuster, 2010, ISBN 978-0-689-87385-0. Grades 7 up.

<http://books.simonandschuster.com/Sweet-Hereafter>

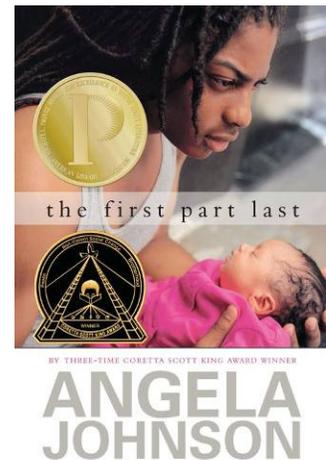
**Sweet, Hereafter** is the third book in Angela Johnson's *Heaven* trilogy, which centers on three young people who become friends in a small Ohio town called Heaven. Each book in the trilogy is under 160 pages long. They may be read independently, but reading them together enhances the experience of each.



The trilogy starts with **Heaven**. Narrator Marley has lived in Heaven since she was two years old, when her mother found a postcard postmarked HEAVEN, OH on a park bench and decided that was where she wanted to raise her family. And for twelve years, Marley's hometown has lived up to its name. She lives in a house by the river, has loving parents, a funny younger brother, good friends, and receives frequent letters from her mysterious Uncle Jack. Then one day a letter arrives from Alabama, and Marley's life is turned upside down. Marley doesn't even know who she is anymore -- but where can she go for answers, when she's been deceived by the very people she should be able to trust the most?

**Heaven** won the Coretta Scott King Author Award in 1999 and was named to the ALA Best Books for Young Adults list.

The second book is **The First Part Last**. Bobby's a classic urban teenager. He's restless. He's impulsive. But the thing that makes him different is this: He's going to be a father. His girlfriend, Nia, is pregnant, and their lives are about to change forever. Instead of spending time with friends, they'll be spending time with doctors, and next, diapers. They have options: keeping the baby, adoption. They want to do the right thing.



If only it was clear what the right thing was.

**The First Part Last** was the 2004 winner of the Coretta Scott King Author Award and of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, and was named to the ALA Best Books for Young Adults list.

**Heaven** and **The First Part Last** by Angela Johnson, published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing. Permission to use book jacket images and book descriptions granted by Simon & Schuster.



## About the Author

Angela Johnson is the author of the Coretta Scott King Honor picture book ***When I Am Old with You***; as well as ***A Sweet Smell of Roses***, illustrated by Eric Velasquez; ***Just Like Josh Gibson***, illustrated by Beth Peck; and ***I Dream of Trains***, illustrated by Loren Long. She has won three Coretta Scott King Awards, one each for her novels ***Heaven***, ***Toning the Sweep***, and ***The First Part Last***. Her latest novel, ***Sweet, Hereafter***,

completed the *Heaven* trilogy. In recognition of her outstanding talent, Angela was named a 2003 MacArthur Fellow. She lives in Kent, Ohio.

Author biography courtesy Simon & Schuster (<http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Angela-Johnson/1263944/biography>); used with permission. Photograph used with permission from Simon & Schuster.

## Author Resources:

### Ohioana Authors: Angela Johnson

<http://www.ohioana-authors.org/johnson>

Includes audio of a radio feature on WOSU, plus a biography and list of Johnson's works and awards

### Author page on Simon & Schuster site

<http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Angela-Johnson>

### Angela Johnson Biography from Visiting Authors

[http://www.visitingauthors.com/authors/johnson\\_angela/johnson\\_angela\\_bio.html](http://www.visitingauthors.com/authors/johnson_angela/johnson_angela_bio.html)

### Angela Johnson Biography from Answers.com

<http://www.answers.com/topic/angela-johnson>

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## Talk About it!

*(Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you don't want to find out what happens.)*

- What causes Shoogy to feel isolated and out of place? What strategies does she use to address her situation? What is the significance of the cabin in the woods to Shoogy? To Curtis?
- Shoogy compiles a list of "a few things about Curtis" (p. 39). What does the list reveal, and what does it leave out? What do you learn about Curtis that is not included on this list? What would a similar list about Shoogy include?
- What do we learn about Shoogy's family? Why does Shoogy feel distanced from them? If you have read **Heaven**, how does your understanding of Shoogy's family from that book influence your impressions?
- Consider Shoogy's fleeting but profound encounters with Curtis' sister Sadie and brother Jules. What do these brief interactions with his family mean for her?
- Shoogy reflects on how she and Brodie became friends in spite of their differences (p. 14). Discuss the relationship between Shoogy and Brodie. What reasons do you think Brodie would give for his friendship with Shoogy?
- How is Shoogy's "little civil disobedience" (p.105) significant to Brodie? To Shoogy? To Curtis?
- What does it mean for a soldier to go AWOL? Imagine what Curtis' experiences in Iraq might have been like. How did his tour of duty affect him? How might he have been different had he and Shoogy met before he went to war?
- What do you think happened from the time Curtis read the letter from the army to the time Jos and Brodie found him?
- What roles do Shoogy's friends Marley and Bobby, the main characters in **Heaven** and **The First Part Last**, play in **Sweet, Hereafter**? If you have read all three, discuss how your knowledge of the first two books affected your reading of **Sweet, Hereafter**. Why do you think Angela Johnson chose these three characters and told their stories in the ways she did?
- In **Heaven**, Marley says "'The past doesn't always make sense of the present.'" Discuss the order of events in the three novels. How might the experience of reading the trilogy be different if read in chronological order of the stories?



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohcintro>

**Continue the conversation!** Read the *Heaven* trilogy and consider these questions.

### **Heaven**

- What mood does the author establish by choosing Heaven as the name for Marley's hometown and as the title for this novel?
- Explore the character of Jack, the man Marley thought was her uncle. Why do you think he drifts around the country? Why does he always name his dogs "Boy"? What are his hopes? What are his fears?
- Unlike Jack, Bobby is raising his child by himself. Do you think he made a more responsible decision than Jack? Why or why not?
- Discuss the importance of dreams in **Heaven**. What do they reveal about the dreamers? How do they shape the tone of this novel?
- Marley is furious at Momma and Pops for waiting until she was fourteen years old to tell her the truth about her birth. Is her anger justified? Should she have been told earlier? Why or why not?
- What makes a real family? Marley struggles with this question throughout the novel. Does she find an answer for herself?

Discussion questions for **Heaven** courtesy of Simon & Schuster; used with permission. See the *Heaven Reading Guide* at <http://bit.ly/bhuvKk> (opens Simon & Schuster site).

### **The First Part Last**

- Angela Johnson tells the story in a non-linear fashion. Why do you think she chose this literary device to reveal the story?
- How would you cope under the extraordinary circumstances that Bobby finds himself in? Would you make the same choices?
- If Bobby had Nia's help raising Feather, would he be a different father? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with Mary and Fred's approach to grandparenthood? Why or why not?
- Predict what happens to this family ten years into the future. Explain why.

Discussion questions for **The First Part Last** from *Wild Geese Guides* (<http://wildgeeseguides.blogspot.com/2010/01/first-part-last.html>); used with permission of Tracie Vaughn Zimmer.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohcintro>

## Learn & have fun!

**Educators:** These activities align to Ohio Academic Content Standards as indicated in parentheses after each activity. These are examples. Other content standards may also apply.

**Teens, parents, and others:** These ideas are useful for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Academic content standards define what students in K-12 should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information on the Ohio Academic Content Standards, see the Ohio Department of Education website at <http://www.ode.state.oh.us> and click on "Academic Content Standards" in the Educators section.

- Several passages in **Sweet, Hereafter** can be read as list poems, including "I left home..." (p. 9-10), "It's okay..." (p. 33-34), and "A few things about Curtis..." (p. 39-40). Inspired by Shoogy's narration, compose a list poem on a similar theme: recall an important day, or catalog your feelings when anticipating an event, or describe a person who is important to you. How are you telling a story in this way? What literary techniques make this more than simply a list? (ELA Writing Applications 8-10, 11-12)
- Create an original piece of music to accompany the story, or find at least three songs for the soundtrack of a movie version of **Sweet, Hereafter**. Explain why you chose these songs (and include a copy of the lyrics) in a journal. This activity may be done with **Heaven** and **The First Part Last** as well. Compare your soundtracks and discuss ways music would reflect and influence the mood of each story. (FA-Music Connections, Relationships, and Applications 9-12 Benchmark A; FA-Music Valuing Music/Aesthetic Reflection 9-12)
- "It's like that six degrees of separation thing," Marley reflects in **Heaven**, when a letter from Alabama arrives just after she sees news reports of church burnings in the state, "everybody is closer than they think to everybody else." Test the theory of six degrees of separation. Use email and social networking to try to get a message to a specific person with whom you have no connection. How many people handle the message, and how are they are connected? Chart these connections and deliver a presentation describing them to your group. (T Technology and Society Interaction 9-12 Benchmarks A, E; ELA Communication: Oral and Visual 9-10, 11-12)
- As a group, discuss what you know about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Take a poll to determine whether your group believes Curtis suffers from PTSD. Talk about what happens in war that might have a profound psychological effect on a person. Then work in pairs to research PTSD using online library resources available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>) . Talk with your partner about what you learn, and write an essay together discussing the impact of PTSD and suggesting ways to support and help people with PTSD. (S Scientific Ways of Knowing 11-12; SS Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities 9-10, 11-12; ELA Communication: Oral and Visual 9-10, 11-12)

Music activity adapted from Teacher's Guide to **The First Part Last** from Wild Geese Guides (<http://wildgeeseguides.blogspot.com/2010/01/first-part-last.html>).



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

## Explore more!

### Interview with Angela Johnson from the Ohio Channel

[http://www.ohiochannel.org/multimedia/media.cfm?file\\_id=126267](http://www.ohiochannel.org/multimedia/media.cfm?file_id=126267)

Video of an interview with Angela Johnson conducted at the 2010 Ohioana Book Festival.

### Interview with Angela Johnson from The Brown Bookshelf

<http://thebrownbookshelf.com/2009/02/08/angela-johnson/>

Angela Johnson discusses her career as an author of children's and young adult books.

### The Coretta Scott King Awards

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/cskbookawards/index.cfm>

These annual awards are given to African American authors and illustrators for outstanding inspirational and educational contributions. Angela Johnson has received this award three times, including for both *Heaven* and *The First Part Last*.

### The Michael L. Printz Award

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/printz/>

The Michael L. Printz Award is given annually for a book that exemplifies literary excellence in young adult literature. Angela Johnson received this award for *The First Part Last*.

### Kids Literature About Iraq

<http://www.nhpr.org/node/32400>

A radio story from New Hampshire Public Radio's *Word of Mouth* program. Includes audio.

### Gateway to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Information

<http://www.ptsdinfo.org/>

### Information about PTSD from the National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>

## About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.