Literary Essay for *The Other Side*

Have you ever done something even though you were told not to? If you’re like most of us, you probably have. Maybe you took a piece of yummy, mouthwatering cake, perhaps you stole a perfectly ripe orange off of your neighbor’s tree, or maybe you even took a little money from an annoying sibling. Although those actions probably aren’t the best choices, doing something forbidden is not always a bad thing. Believe it or not, doing something you’re not supposed to do can actually turn out to be something good. In the story *The Other Side*, Jacqueline Woodson shows us that sometimes it takes bravery to act against the status quo (that’s just a fancy way of saying acting against the way things have always been). This simple, yet incredibly powerful story takes place in a segregated, small-town American neighborhood in the 1950s. Two girls, Clover who is African American and Annie who is White, live on opposite sides of a fence that separate people by race. One day, Clover, motivated by her curiosity and bravery, decides to approach and finally touch the fence. Over time, she and Annie become friends, something that everyone around them learns to accept. This story reveals that if you are brave and stand up against the status quo, especially during times of racism, it can result in something good.

At the commencement of the story, Jacqueline Woodson presented racism and curiosity as critical concepts. Racism first emerged when we were introduced to the fence that divided Whites from African Americans. This is an instance of racism, because people were treated differently because the color of their skin. The main character, Clover, revealed that she lived "on one side of it" while White people inhabited the other. Clover was warned to stay away from the fence because "it wasn't safe." That made Clover fearful to approach the fence. Racism also surfaced when Clover's friends prohibited Annie, a White girl, from playing with them. Clover's curiosity about her surroundings and situation grew, prompting her to ask her mom why it was like this. In response, her mom said explained, "Because that's the way things have always been." As a result, Clover grew increasingly curious. She'd observe Annie splashing around on rainy days. Clearly, the division that resulted from racism caused curiosity to grow in Clover.

Later, Clover's curiosity motivated bravery and independence. One day, after all the rain had cleared, Clover felt brave as she stood outside in the sun: "I stood there with my hands up in the air. I felt brave that day. I felt free." As such, she finally went up to the fence that divided White people from African Americans. The girls introduced themselves to one another, as Clover sat on the fence, and Annie stood beside her on the ground. Clover demonstrated independence by being a free-thinker, getting closer to and eventually "running [her] hand along the fence." Shortly after, Clover's brave and independent actions resulted in a friendship between her and Annie. That summer, the girls "sat together on that fence." Clover was such an independent girl that she didn't care what Sandra and the other girls thought. As you can see, Clover's curiosity about Annie drove her to be brave and led to her complete independence and freedom from racism.
In the end, friendship and acceptance emerged as significant concepts. For example, Clover's mom saw the girls sitting together on the fence, an illustration of their true friendship, but Clover's mom didn't get angry at her. Instead, she said, "I see you made a new friend." Clover's mother accepted her daughter’s newfound bravery and independence. The girls' friendship continued to develop as they sat on the fence all summer long and "watched the whole wide world around [them]." Even Sandra, who had been skeptical and disapproving, finally accepted Annie and let her play with them. In the end, all of the girls sat atop the fence "in a long line." Thus, Clover's bravery and independence resulted in a deep friendship with Annie and inspired acceptance in those around her.

As you've read, *The Other Side* is a simple, yet important story that is really about how important it is to act with bravery and stand up for what's right. This is especially critical in times of racism and injustice, when people are discriminated against and mistreated because of things outside of their control, such as the color of their skin, their religion, or their culture. The status quo will only change because of individuals’ brave actions. Because Clover was curious about the world around her, she developed an awareness that things weren't right. She used her naturally curious nature to motivate her bravery, allowing her to break away from oppressive rules and regulations. In doing so, Clover stood up against the injustice in her world. Her brave act inspired others to do so, as well. *The Other Side* teaches us just how critical it is to be brave and stand up for what's right. Because stories are there to teach us how to live more smartly, in my life I must always be aware of my surroundings, consider whether it's right, and think about Clover to inspire my own bravery. What can you do to rise up against injustices in your world?