

Title: *Before the Ever After*
Author: Jacqueline Woodson
Genre: Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Alex P., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: April 1, 2021

Before the Ever After is a fiction book that takes place in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Maplewood. This book is about a boy named Zachariah Johnson, Jr., known as ZJ, his dad, mom, and friends Ollie, Darry, and Daniel. ZJ loves music. ZJ's dad plays a very big role in ZJ's life. ZJ's dad was a professional football player that even won the Super Bowl. ZJ loves doing things with his dad. He remembers things like writing songs with his dad. ZJ's dad is the neighborhood hero and ZJ's friends all look up to him. He was a professional football tight end and after years of getting hit he has suffered a brain injury. His dad starts getting very grumpy and starts getting mad very easily and starts forgetting things. In one part of the story, his dad's hands start shaking and he asks ZJ what his name is. He also forgets ZJ's friends. As the conditions get worse, ZJ worries for his father's health and wonders if his dad will ever be the same. ZJ also thinks that his friends will not come over anymore now that his dad is sick and can not play pro football anymore in his current condition. ZJ's father needs to go to see a special doctor in Philadelphia for treatment.

This book presents how scary it is to have a family member with such a big role in one's life have a brain injury. It is even scarier that doctors don't have many answers for ZJ's family. ZJ will have to overcome and adapt to this new world where his dad even has trouble remembering his own son's name. ZJ wishes that everything will go back to normal and he does not know if anything will still be the same for him.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

This story was fiction but it could be possible that this story could happen in real life. The problem of football related brain injury is a very real and serious thing. The plot kept me interested since the story was about a boy and his friends and his dad and I was interested in how football was involved in the story since I like sports. While the story wasn't mainly about football, it was an important factor since it is the cause of ZJ's dad's problems.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was just right. The book covered everything that it needed to in 170 pages and the book didn't feel rushed. The sections or chapters of the book were short, interestingly written, and easy to read quickly.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book would be good for kids in middle school grades 6 - 8th. The book's main problem revolves around a heavy topic of brain injury and younger kids would not really grasp how serious the problem is in this book and how it affects peoples lives.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I recommend this book to people that like to read realistic fiction about real world problems that are very serious.

4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading.

I liked how the book approached the topic of football-related brain damage and showed how it affected a kid. I also liked the use of football in the story and how it played such a big part in ZJ's life.

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Benjamin W., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: September 7, 2021

ZJ has only ever known one version of his father: Zachariah 44, everyone's great football hero. Everywhere he goes, he is in the spotlight with his dad, waving and living under the legacy of Zachariah 44. While that seems awesome, it also leads people to see him only as Zachariah's son. Lucky for him, ZJ has three friends, Ollie, Daniel, and Darry, who see him as ZJ and nothing else. That is until his dad begins missing his games, shaking uncontrollably in his hands, yelling, crying, complaining that his head hurts, and forgetting things. During this time, ZJ sees a new version of his dad pop up. The loving dad he once knew that would sing songs with him gets replaced by a dad who gets headaches all the time and is in no mood to do anything. This new dad scares ZJ a little, but he is confident that the doctors can fix him up just like how they fixed him up any other time he got injured. But when his dad goes to see the doctors, none of them seem to have an answer for his problem. All they do is offer him new drugs that maybe could help and add to the list of things he is not allowed to do anymore. As his father's state worsens and worsens, a new doctor offers an explanation for what is wrong. This doctor believes that Zachariah's brain got damaged from all the hits and concussions he obtained while playing football. He gives Zachariah an experimental drug to use, but gives no promises that it will work. Now, ZJ and his mom wait, as only time can show if there are any improvements in their beloved Zachariah.

Now, I will answer some questions about the book:

Did the plot keep you interested? - This plot definitely kept me interested. There was a lot of suspense that constantly made me want to know what happened next. The plot was simple but very emotional.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right? - I think the pace of this book was just right. I like how the author just went on with the plot without wasting time on unnecessary details. It made the book much shorter and more enjoyable to read.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for? - I think this book is appropriate for kids in grades 5-12. There is nothing inappropriate in this book but it would be hard to understand for kids younger than 5th grade.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to? - I would recommend this book to kids, especially boys, going into middle school or junior high. This book really opens your eyes to a hidden aspect of football and it is around this time where you can decide whether to play for your school team or not.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book? - This book is written as many, many poems.

I would rate this book *4 stars*. This book has a strong message that is delivered in an absolutely beautiful way. Each poem captures the voice and emotion of ZJ in a way where you begin to feel for him. The only thing is that this plot was kind of simple and not very exciting at certain parts.

Reviewer Name: and Grade: Yujay A., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: October 31, 2021

Before the Ever After takes place in the 1990s or early 2000s. ZJ is the son of star football player Zachariah Johnson Sr. who wears the number 44. ZJ's dad is his hero and they spend a lot of time together. ZJ has a loving family and three close friends who do not just like him for his dad: Daniel, Ollie, and Darry. They have been friends since second grade and are very close. ZJ is talented in music, Ollie is good at math, Darry can dance well, and Daniel loves doing tricks on his bicycle. However, ZJ's dad is a professional tight end who gets hit a lot on the field and he suffered the most concussions ever during his time in the NFL. ZJ's dad begins to have memory loss. While it is minor at first, ZJ's dad begins to forget major things, such as not knowing who ZJ's friends are, even though he has known them for many years. Zachariah's dad begins to suffer from major migraines and fits of anger, and is taken to the hospital for tests. The doctors say he has brain damage, but do not know how to treat him. ZJ's dad is sidelined and is not allowed to play, due to his brain damage. ZJ's dad even forgets what ZJ's name is. ZJ feels scared and lost due to his father's condition, and hopes that his dad can be normal again. The doctors do not have any answers for ZJ's dad's condition, and he is taken to many specialists as far as Philadelphia. ZJ's friends try to support him through this time and take his mind off of things, but ZJ constantly worries and thinks about the good old days. ZJ's dad's condition worsens more and more and he is unable to act in commercials as he forgets all the lines. ZJ and his mom wait constantly to see if the next treatment or test works and hope that his dad will return to normal once again.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot definitely kept me interested as I was waiting to see what would happen to ZJ's dad and see if his condition improved.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of this book was a bit too slow, as there was barely any action and the book felt a bit repetitive.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grade levels 4 and up, as it is not too complicated and does not contain any complex vocabulary.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this novel to all people, as it is important to raise awareness about the dangers of brain injuries and contact sports. I would especially recommend this novel to kids or parents of kids who want to play football.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Before the Ever After is written from ZJ's perspective and contains many flashbacks to the past. The book is written in verse.

I would rate *Before the Ever After* 4 stars, as it was a very well written novel with a lot of emotion and suspense. I believe this novel is very important, as it raises awareness for brain injuries from football, boxing, and other contact sports. However, the plot was too basic and a bit slow, and there were no extreme cliffhangers or plot twists. All in all, I believe *Before the Ever After* is a very important book for kids to read, especially those who want to play football, as it brings awareness to the dangers of football and other contact sports.