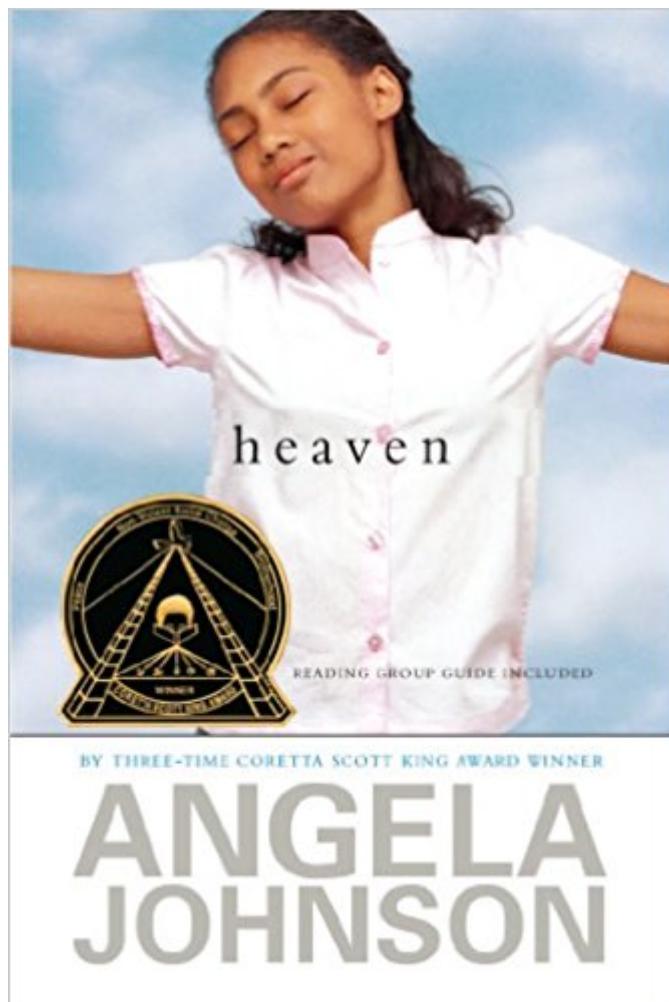


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# Heaven (Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner)



## **Synopsis**

You never know what's gonna come down -- in Heaven. At fourteen, Marley knows she has Momma's hands and Pops's love for ice cream, that her brother doesn't get on her nerves too much, and that Uncle Jack is a big mystery. But Marley doesn't know all she thinks she does, because she doesn't know the truth. And when the truth comes down with the rain one stormy summer afternoon, it changes everything. It turns Momma and Pops into liars. It makes her brother a stranger and Uncle Jack an even bigger mystery. All of a sudden, Marley doesn't know who she is anymore and can only turn to the family she no longer trusts to find out. Truth often brings change. Sometimes that change is for the good. Sometimes it isn't. Coretta Scott King award-winning author Angela Johnson writes a poignant novel of deception and self-discovery -- about finding the truth and knowing what to do when truth is at hand.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: 790L (What's this?)

Series: Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner

Hardcover: 144 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers; 1st edition (September 1, 1998)

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Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 35 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,025,016 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #55 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Adoption #655 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Parents #1411 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American

Age Range: 12 - 15 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

As in her *Gone from Home* (reviewed above), Johnson here explores the themes of what makes a place home and which people family. Fourteen-year-old Marley's tranquil life in Heaven, Ohio, turns hellish the day her family receives a letter from Alabama. The note (from the pastor of a church that

was destroyed by arson) requests a replacement for Marley's baptismal record, and reveals that "Momma" and "Pops" are really Marley's aunt and uncle, and mysterious Jack (an alleged "uncle" with whom Marley has corresponded but doesn't remember) is her true father. In this montage of Marley's changing perceptions, Johnson presents fragments of the whole picture a little at a time: images of people, places (the Western Union building "1637" steps away from Marley's house) and artifacts (a box filled with love letters between her birth parents) gain significance as Marley begins to make sense of the past and integrate her perceptions into her new identity. The author's poetic metaphors describe a child grasping desperately for a hold on her reality ("It was one of those nights that started to go down before the sun did," she says of the evening the fateful letter arrives). The melding of flashbacks and present-day story line may be confusing initially, but readers who follow Marley's winding path toward revelation will be well rewarded. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 6-9-What makes a person who she is? Is it her name, the people she lives with, or is blood the only link to identity? Marley, 14, suddenly plunges head first into these complex questions when she discovers that the people she's been living with her entire life aren't her real parents. Butchy is not her real brother, and her mysterious Uncle Jack, who has been writing her short but beautiful letters for as long as she can remember, turns out to be her real, very absent father. In spare, often poetic prose reminiscent of Patricia MacLachlan's work, Johnson relates Marley's insightful quest into what makes a family. Her extreme anger with her supposed parents, who turn out to be her aunt and uncle, for not telling her the truth, for not being the perfect family that she'd always thought them to be, wars with her knowledge that not even her friend Shoogy Maple's model family is as perfect and beautiful as it seems. The various examples of "family" Marley encounters make her question what's real, what's true, what makes sense, and if any of that really matters as much as the love she continues to feel for her parents in spite of their seeming betrayal. Johnson exhibits admirable stylistic control over Marley's struggle to understand a concept that is often impossible to understand or even to define. Linda Bindner, formerly at Athens Clarke County Library, GA  
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Daughter loved this book

Wonderful every one should read

Can you handle the Truth? Heaven: The Coretta Award given to this book was indeed well deserved. It is refreshing to see the main character as a person, who happens to be an African American, instead of the traditional books with plots that stem from the fact that they are black. What an underlining, yet powerful message Angela Johnson is sending. The simplicity of this book tells a greater story; Marley the fourteen year old is seemingly apart of a perfect family, in a perfect small town, with perfect neighbors. Does it really matter that there is one small blunder amongst the family? Does blood trump experience? Does holding off a secret ALWAYS mean deceit? These are all questions Marley spends ample time pondering once she finds out her parents aren't her blood parents. We are rewarded to share this back and forth reasoning, resentment, acceptance time period with Marley. This book may be of someone else's account, but it makes you think of your thoughts that would roam in your mind if you were to find out you were adopted. Read it, and develop the characters through the sense of yourself. Hmmmm... would I declare this town, Heaven, a living Hell? Or is life in Heaven, OH, truth and all-- heaven-like

Marley is a fourteen year old girl who lives with her parents in Heaven, Ohio. The book discusses on an average day what she does. She sometimes go to the ma suprette to wire money to her uncle, she spends time with her friends Shoggy and Bobby (this character later comes in Johnson book called first part last). Marley narration through out the book let you realize her family is not a bad one. Her world comes tumbling down when she finds out that the people she has called mom and pops all her life are really her aunt and uncle and the uncle that she has been wiring money too is her real father. The book has many little chapters with different headings that focus on the specific title in each. It shows Marley emotions going up and down on the reality of her world and how she eventually deals with seeing her real dad coming to visit. A great read!

Have you ever read a fiction book that made you wonder if it was really fiction? Have they ever seemed so real that it could be non-fiction? Well if you read Heaven by Angela Johnson than you will probably find out what I am talking about. This is a wonderful story of a young girl who discovers the truth after knowing so many lies. She had to learn that she can love her "family" even though she was not born into it and she can love her true father even though he left her with his brother when her real mother died. This book takes you on a journey of the pain some people go through and their triumphs.

Heaven is a very well written book; it has a great moral and is a lovable story. This book is told in

first person so you really feel the ups and downs that the main character, Marley is facing. Marley lives in Heaven, Ohio, and lives what she believes to be the perfect life, she soon finds out that her family has kept a big secret from her and it shows how she deals with the truth. It is very good if you have a student in your classroom or know a child with the same problem as Marley faces in the book, she tries to figure out who she really is when she thinks that she was lied to her whole life. The book shows really well what some children feel in this certain situation and how they cope with, and in Marley's case the outcome is great. I thought that Heaven was really uplifting and although it does have some sad parts the overall story was very rewarding to read.

HEAVEN, the 1999 Coretta Scott King Award book, is a first-person narrative centered on the idea or theme that just as some truths in life may bring a sense of sorrow and loss, they can also turn those painful feelings and emotion into real joy, hope, and acceptance. When main character, Marley, discovers that she's adopted, knowing what to do with that truth becomes the real issue of the story. For 12 years, Marley has lived in Heaven, OH with two doting parents, a quirky but lovable brother, good friends and neighbors that she adores. Now, it seems that her life up to this point has been one big fat lie! Even though she lacks trust in her adoptive family now that she knows the truth, it will be their continued love and support which wins her over and helps her to finally find the answers she so desperately needs to know about her life. I believe what makes this book so interesting to read is that it presents Marley's family, filled with deception and lies, as paradise. While the most troubled family in the story is "picture perfect" and free of deceit. The plot is idyllic and often dreamy with punches of reality mixed in as everyone's deceptions unravel. Even though this story is not as compelling as Ms. Johnson's 1994 Coretta Scott Award winning book, TONING THE SWEEP, it is still a moving story that handles the topic of adoption with graceful sensitivity.

I believe this Coretta Scott King Award winning book is a refreshing departure from most books about African Americans. It shows no drug use, nor violence and no one is living in an urban ghetto. Instead it shows a loving nuclear family who has normal ups and downs, and it even shows a very RESPONSIBLE single father! Written in first person, it feels as if you are really experiencing life through the eyes of a 14 year old. And even though I have not been adopted, I can certainly relate to Marley's dismay at the traumatic revelation - when everything you once thought true suddenly changes. My only problem with the book is with the storyline about Marley's girl friend. What was the real reason behind Shoogy's hurting herself and why did she dislike her family so much? Johnson seemed to let the storyline about the girl drop rather then bringing it to some sort of

conclusion. But in all, I found "Heaven" to be satisfying and unique. There is almost no references to race in this book, letting the fact that she is Black just to be a given, and making Marley's struggle for self-discovery a universal story that would cross all color lines as an issue that any teenage girl (or boy?) could identify with.

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