

# A reader's guide to *Meet Cécile* and *Meet Marie-Grace*

Set in the racially diverse city of New Orleans in 1853, two very different girls form a unique friendship. Cécile Rey is a free person of color who has grown up in a wealthy, multigenerational family. Marie-Grace Gardner is a White girl who was born in New Orleans. After her mother and young brother died, Marie-Grace and her father moved around the North for many years before returning to New Orleans. Cécile's and Marie-Grace's books take turns describing the year that changes both their lives, exploring the same events from each girl's point of view.

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1. When Cécile and Marie-Grace first meet, each is unsure about the other. Cécile is hesitant because Marie-Grace is White. Marie-Grace is hesitant because Cécile is wealthy. How do their prejudices shape their first conversation? How do those prejudices change as they get to know each other?
  2. Although the girls have very different backgrounds, they discover they are more alike than they are different. For example, Marie-Grace likes to help her father in his medical office and Cécile enjoys visiting older people at *La Maison*, a type of nursing home in the neighborhood. In what other ways are the two girls alike?
  3. Cécile does not consider herself American. Why not? Which of her behaviors and beliefs support her claim that “people from New Orleans are different from people anywhere else”?
  4. While many Black people in New Orleans were free, there were still slaves in the city. Cécile and her grandfather encounter men who assume they are slaves (*Meet Cécile*, p.25). Marie-Grace witnesses a boy who is accused of being a runaway slave (*Meet Marie-Grace*, p.13). How are Cécile's and Marie-Grace's reactions to the events the same? How are they different? What were your reactions to the events?
  5. Although Marie-Grace is White, she experiences prejudice in New Orleans because she is not wealthy. In what ways do Lavinia Halthorn and other girls at school make it clear to Marie-Grace that she is not “the best in society”? Why does Marie-Grace try to befriend these girls even when they are unkind to her?
  6. Cécile is also judged by girls in her social circle. Agnès Metoyer makes remarks about Cécile's appearance (p.8, p. 60). How are Cécile's reactions to being teased different from Marie-Grace's reactions to Lavinia? What do these differences tell you about Cécile and Marie-Grace?
  7. What was your reaction to learning that the Reys have a White maid? What is Cécile's relationship with Ellen? How is it different from Marie-Grace's relationship with the Gardners' housekeeper, Mrs. Curtis?

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8. When Cécile suggests they trade places at the Mardi Gras ball, Marie-Grace is surprised. *Cécile thinks I'm bold enough to join her*, Marie-Grace realizes. Why doesn't Marie-Grace think she's bold? Why does Cécile think she is?
9. Why do you think Marie-Grace is able to stand up to Lavinia after she trades places with Cécile at the ball (p. 81)? How does her friendship with Cécile change Marie-Grace?
10. How would Cécile and Marie-Grace's story be different if it took place today instead of in 1853?