



# ON AIR WITH ZOE WASHINGTON

by Janae Marks



Zoe Washington has a new dream. Two years ago she helped her birth father, Marcus, get out of prison—he'd been wrongfully convicted of a crime years earlier. Now she and Marcus are brainstorming about opening a restaurant together in Boston. But obstacles keep mounting up. Zoe needs all her determination and planning skills as they move forward. Meanwhile, her two best friends start crushing on each other. Is Zoe about to become a third wheel? Making a new friend in Hannah, whose mother's in prison, broadens Zoe's views on giving people a second chance. At a breathless pace, the fourteen-year-old pursues her dreams with help from Marcus, her friends, her parents, and her enthusiastic grandmother. Even as Zoe learns that she can't control everything, she still succeeds in starting a podcast, planning a fundraising event, and—most enjoyable of all—creating the signature dessert for their future food venture.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**DETERMINATION.** Discuss the concept of determination, what it is, and why it matters. Relate the concept to Marcus's statement to Zoe, "You can do anything you put your mind to." (p. 226) How had Zoe, when she was twelve, used her determination to help Marcus? Now that she's fourteen and working in a bakery with him, how does Zoe turn her determination to pursuing their joint dream? What else shows how determined Zoe is? What other characters show determination in the present or the past?

**CREATIVITY.** Sometimes people limit their concept of creativity to areas like art, music, or writing. Where else can creativity occur? What is the relationship between problem solving and creativity? Give examples of how Zoe shows creativity in her baking and especially in devising recipes. How is she creative in approaching problems like starting a podcast, raising money, and putting on an event? What role does teamwork play in solving her problems? How does seeking advice or feedback help her creative endeavors?

**SECOND CHANCES.** Early in the novel, Marcus introduces his goal of giving former prisoners a second chance by employing them. Zoe realizes he's talking about "a chance to start over and build a better life." (p. 16) Discuss his statement much later that "there's a big misconception that people cannot change." (p. 238) Why does he believe people can change? Why does the goal to help them matter so much to Marcus? Why does Zoe agree it's a good goal? Why is she nevertheless hesitant at first? What helps her change her point of view?

**FLEXIBILITY.** Pinpoint times that Zoe faces setbacks. Analyze how she reacts to them. When does it prove important to be flexible in her goals? How do she and Marcus change the goal of opening a restaurant soon? What do they do when banks turn them down for a loan? How does Zoe change her approach when Boston Public Radio declines to interview more exonerates? Talk about the advice Zoe's mother gives her not to dwell on things she can't control, like the weather, and instead—as Zoe reminds herself—to "focus on what you can control." (p. 266)

**FOOD AS CONNECTION.** Baking, cooking, and eating serve as ways that Zoe connects with people who matter to her as well as new people. How has baking expanded her world? How does it connect her with her friends and family? How does she see her baking as a connection with Marcus in the future? How did the Sunday dinners come about? Describe the first dinner, and discuss the importance of that Sunday dinner and those that followed. How do you see food as connecting the people around you? Why is it a central component in many societies?

