



# FROM THE DESK OF ZOE WASHINGTON

by *Janae Marks*

## Booktalk

Zoe Washington has a lot going on in her life this summer. She is an enthusiastic baker who wants to compete on the Food Network show *Kids Bake Challenge!* She's not speaking to Trevor, her best friend and next-door neighbor. She receives a letter from her father, who she's never met, from prison. This summer Zoe has to manage all of that and somehow fix it all. Will she be able to apply for the television show? Will she and Trevor repair their friendship? Will she be able to prove her father's innocence and get him out of prison? Zoe Washington has a summer packed with delicious sweet treats and detective work!

## Questions for Group Discussion

**Secrets.** When is it appropriate to keep secrets? Who do secrets help or hurt? A secret is uncovered when Zoe receives a letter from Marcus Johnson, her biological father. Why does Zoe hide her only picture of Marcus? As Zoe reads Marcus's letter, what does she discover? What is the secret that her mother has been keeping from Zoe? Why does Zoe (and eventually her grandma) keep her correspondence with Marcus a secret? Is it appropriate to keep this secret from Zoe's mom? Reflect on Zoe's thoughts: "All of the lying was wrong. I knew that. But maybe it was okay to do something wrong if you were doing it for the right reason" (p. 180).

**Music.** Zoe and Marcus exchange letters. In them, Marcus shares song titles that remind him of her and other songs that tell her more about him. What can someone's music choices tell us about that person? If you were making a playlist for one of your family members, what songs would you choose? How would those song choices differ if you were making a playlist for a friend? What songs would you choose for a playlist that reminds you of key moments in your own life? Why did you select those songs?

**Goals.** Consider Zoe's statement: "I never saw many Black pastry chefs on the shows I watched, or in the cookbook section of the library, but I was still determined to be one when I grew up" (pg. 35). How does seeing people who look like you in media and books affect the kind of goals you set for yourself? What does this say about the importance of representation?

**Friendship.** Zoe was mad at Trevor for a long time. What finally makes Zoe decide to tell him why? What does their conversation reveal about the ways different people can interpret the same events? What does communication have to do with friendship? Have you had an experience when a friend was angry with you, and you didn't know why? How did you patch up the friendship?

**Advocacy.** What does Zoe begin to discover as she reads *The Wrongfully Convicted* at the library? How does this change her perspective on justice and the prison system? What do many of the innocent people in prison have in common? Why do you think this happens? What is the Innocence Project?

*Guide prepared by Shanetia P. Clark, Associate Professor of Literacy, Salisbury University.*



THE FARAWAY TRUTH  
is the UK edition of *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*

# #ZoeWashingtonCupcakes

## Froot Loop Cereal Milk Cupcakes

Adapted from [sweetestmenu.com](http://sweetestmenu.com)

### INGREDIENTS:

#### Cupcakes:

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup Fruit Loops
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 3 large eggs
- 2 and 1/2 cups plain flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder

#### Frosting:

- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup Fruit Loops
- 1 stick unsalted butter, room temperature
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 3 and 1/2 cups icing or powdered sugar

#### Optional:

- Gel food coloring to color the cake batter and/or icing

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a small bowl, add the milk and the Fruit Loops, give it a stir and set aside. (The longer the cereal soaks, the stronger the flavor will be in the cake.) Preheat the oven to 320 degrees.
2. In a large mixing bowl, add the butter, sugar and vanilla and beat with an electric mixer until smooth and creamy. Add in the eggs, one at a time, and beat after each addition. Sift in the flour and baking powder.
3. Gently strain the milk from the Fruit Loops and discard the soggy Fruit Loops. Then add milk to the cake batter and gently stir to combine. The batter will be thick - this is ok.

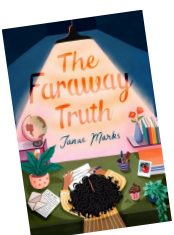


4. Optional Step: if you'd like to color your batter, add a few drops of food coloring and mix well. You can even divide the batter into separate bowls and use two or three colors.
5. Pour batter into prepared cupcake liners and bake in the oven for approximately 15-20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out dry. Carefully remove the cupcakes from the pan and set on a wire rack to cool completely.
6. To make the icing, place the milk and 1/2 cup of Fruit Loops in a small bowl and set aside for around 20-30 minutes. In the meantime, beat the butter with an electric mixer until creamy. Add the vanilla and beat again.
7. Gently strain the milk from the Fruit Loops and discard the soggy Fruit Loops. Add one cup of icing sugar, along with one tablespoon of cereal milk, then beat with the electric mixer. Add remaining icing sugar and another tablespoon of milk. You can add more or less milk depending on how thick you would like your icing.
8. Optional Step: if you'd like, you can add a few drops of food gel to the icing and mix well.
9. Once the cupcakes are cool, spread frosting over the top and then decorate with the remaining Fruit Loops.



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