



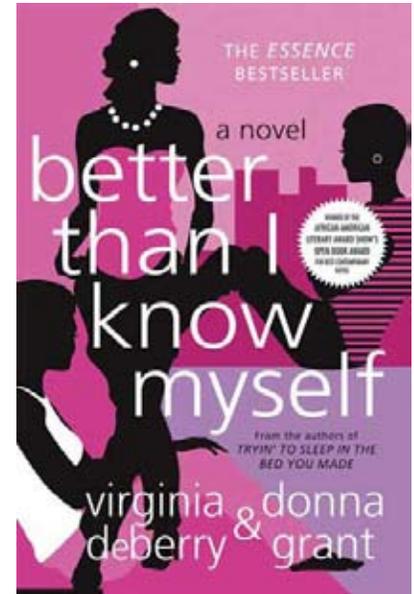
Reading Group Gold

Better Than I Know Myself

by Virginia DeBerry & Donna Grant

Introduction to *Better Than I Know Myself*

The beloved #1 *Essence* bestselling authors of *Tryin' to Sleep in the Bed You Made* now deliver a novel in which you'll meet their most unforgettable characters yet. Carmen, Jewel, and Regina could not be more different. When they meet as freshmen at Columbia University, they're pretty confident that a friendship among them isn't in the cards.



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Jewel is Hollywood royalty: as the teenage star of the TV show “Daddy’s Girl,” her face is instantly recognizable all across America. Now, though, she wants two things—to get a serious education, and to leave her controlling stage mother behind. Regina is the definitive upper-middle-class African-American girl. Her picture-perfect parents are what she calls “black Ward and June Cleavers” and their goals for her are like a stranglehold. No one can see, though, how far Regina’s rebellious side will take her (or how treacherous it will become). Carmen is just trying to get by. A child of the projects whose father is dead and whose mother has vanished, Carmen has been raised by her abusive brother. Columbia is the way for her to get a better life—if she can hold down two jobs and keep her GPA up.

When the three of them meet, their lives are at a crossroad. And as the years progress, from the 1980s to the present day, they are challenged by drug addiction, fame, secrets from the past, sickness, betrayal, and the darkest things women can face. One of them won’t survive. But what will be the lasting legacy of their friendship? *Better Than I Know Myself* is a novel of heartache, triumph, tears, and the unshakeable bonds among women.

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Which character do you believe grows and changes the most through the course of the novel? Which character has it the “easiest?” The hardest?
2. Carmen, Jewell, and Regina come from such different backgrounds and have markedly different personalities. In real life, do you find this enhances friendships or makes them harder? Why or why not?
3. When did you first realize that Regina was in trouble with substance abuse? Did you feel her friends helped her early enough? Why or why not?



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4. In DeBerry and Grant's work, the themes of sisterhood and friendship are constantly explored. As two friends writing together, their previous books, *Far From The Tree* and *Tryin To Sleep In the Bed You Made* delve into the lives of women who've known each other since childhood. In *Better Than I Know Myself*, the women meet in college. Do you find college friendships richer and more rewarding than childhood friendships? Why or why not?
5. It's clear that one character dies when you read the prologue. Was the outcome different than you expected when you finished the novel?
6. Which character do you think made the most foolish choices and what were they? Which character made the most intelligent choices and what were they?
7. Which moment (or moments) in the book was the most moving depiction of friends sticking together, through sickness, health, fame, fortune (or lack of it), and tragedy?
8. In the end, did you feel each character became fulfilled? Did you feel they found happiness? And do you think they learned the lessons they were supposed to learn on this earth?

About the Author

Virginia DeBerry and Donna Grant are the bestselling authors of *Far From the Tree* and *Tryin' to Sleep in the Bed You Made*, which won the Merit Award for fiction from the black caucus of the American Library Association, the Book of the Year award from Blackboard, and the New Author of the Year Award from the Go On Girl Book Club. Virginia and Donna first met while working as models, and what should have been a rivalry ended up a decades-long friendship. Virginia lives in New Jersey, and Donna lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband.



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