



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE BY GLORIA NAYLOR

1. Throughout the novel, Brewster Place is personified as a character itself. Is the street a protagonist or an antagonist? What effect does this have on the impact of the story and on its outcome?
2. What experiences and characteristics do the seven women characters of Brewster Place have in common? How are they different from one another? In what specific and general ways do the women support and comfort one another?
3. When Mattie was young, was Butch responsible for seducing her, or did she want to be seduced?
4. How solid is the logic in Butch's philosophy that life is like eating sugar cane: "You gotta know when to stop chewing..."? What are the advantages of that philosophy? What are the weaknesses of it?
5. Mattie's son Basil doesn't stay long enough to go on trial. If he had, what do you expect would have been the outcome of that trial?
6. Why is it so difficult for some people to accept lesbians? How might Lorraine and Theresa be treated in your home town?
7. Dreams and memories contribute much to the substance of this book as well as to its structure. Go back through the book, starting with the second page about Mattie Michael, and locate all the places where information about past events is presented as the dreams or memories of the characters. In what ways is this a useful writing device? How might it confuse some readers? What is the significance of Mattie's dream at the end of the book?
8. Most of the women in this novel are mistreated by men, both emotionally and physically. Why do you suppose these men treat these women this way? In what ways do women mistreat men in this novel? Are there any positive relationships between men and women in the book? In the most violent chapter of the book, Lorraine is raped repeatedly. Why, then, does she kill poor old Ben?
9. What do you think will become of Lorraine? Will she be tried for murdering Ben? Where will she live? How will she view the world in the future? Has she gone completely insane?



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10. At the end of the book, Kiswana and some of the others hope that their block party will be successful and that their Block Association will benefit from some significant changes. What do you expect are their chances for success? On what evidence do you base your opinion?
11. Using the Langston Hughes poem at the front of the book, discuss which (if any) characters in the novel exhibit the characteristics he describes. Who dries up? Who festers? Who becomes syrupy sweet? Who sags? Who explodes? A Teacher's Guide to Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* 4
12. Some readers feel that this novel, like many novels about the experiences of poor black people, is depressing and demoralizing. Others feel that its effect is uplifting and inspiring. What do you think? Cite incidents from the novel that lead you to your position.
13. As the book begins, we are told how Brewster Place had been born. Throughout the story, the street lives through the existence of its residents. In the end it is dying. What causes its demise? In what ways will it never die? Would it be better off dead?



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