

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT JESMYN WARD



Jesmyn Ward, born April 1, 1977, in Oakland, CA, is an acclaimed 21st-century writer whose work explores human–animal relationships, environmental crisis, capitalism, Black life in the American South, and the legacies of segregation and slavery. She is the first Black American and woman to win the National Book Award twice (2011, 2017).

Her memoir, *Men We Reaped*, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and won the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize. In 2022, she received the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction. Her notable works include *Let Us Descend*; *Sing, Unburied, Sing*; *The Fire This Time*; *Mother Swamp*; and *Where the Line Bleeds*. She lives in Mississippi with her three children and teaches English at Tulane University.



## BOOK CLUB KIT

### QUESTIONS: SALVAGE THE BONES (2011)

- Throughout the book, what does China, the pit bull, represent? In what ways does her path as a mother resemble Esch's?
- The story makes extensive use of clairvoyance and prediction. How does clairvoyance change and/or develop throughout the book for different characters?
- What role do interactions with white neighbors have?
- What effects does the novel's discussion of tradition, hardship, and narrative have on the fragility of human memory?
- Examine how violence is portrayed in the novel. What do violent episodes like China's slaughter of her puppy, Daddy losing his fingers, and China and Kilo fighting bring to the book? In this unstable environment, how can compassion and violence coexist?
- What can be learned about the boys' community from their collective response during the dog fight?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

- How does the environment of Bois Sauvage, MS, affect the choices and experiences of the characters? In what ways does the approaching hurricane represent their difficulties?
- Examine how Katrina was portrayed in *Salvage the Bones* and how the hurricane was reported in the media. What features of the destruction caused by the hurricane does this book vividly depict? How does Esch's perspective and viewpoint improve your comprehension of Katrina's effects?
- In what ways does the book refute common misconceptions about poverty and family life? Beyond depicting their hardships, how does it further humanize the characters?
- How does Esch's relationship with Manny parallel the Jason and Medea myth, and does she, like Medea, turn against her family for love?
- This book engages in a profound conversation with other Southern Gothic novels. How does it contribute to this tradition or deviate from it?

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)
- [Every Mother Counts](#)
- [National Hurricane Center](#)
- [NAACP](#)
- [NSVRC](#)
- [Humane World for Animals](#)
- [Global Citizen](#)
- [Black History Month](#)
- [NACG](#)

### LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- In the novel, how do opinions about women shape Esch's actions and self-perception during her pregnancy? Are there parallels in your community? Could these conceptions be changed, and where can young mothers find support?
- How does the hurricane shape the storyline and characters' experiences? Whether on the coast or inland, how might you help hurricane survivors—through volunteering, donations, or community efforts?
- Each year, over 300,000 women are raped or sexually assaulted, with more than 60% unreported. For girls like Esch, how can your community support survivors and prevent sexual violence? Are there local SAAM events or online actions you can take to raise awareness?

### ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Essie Chambers, *Swift River* (2024)
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)
- Shelton Johnson, *Gloryland* (2009)
- Kaie Kellough, *Dominoes at the Crossroads* (2020)
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982)
- Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle* (2005)
- Jesmyn Ward, *Men We Reaped* (2013)