



KEEPER *of* LOST CHILDREN

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. The quote, “When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.”, from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* serves as the epigraph for part one. How does this quote set the tone for part one? What do you think Ellison meant when he said “free”? What does being “free” mean to you?
2. Ethel, Ozzie, and Sophia all make pivotal decisions that change the course of their lives. What role do you think fate and chance play in their lives? In your opinion, is life ruled by fate or by chance?
3. When Sophia arrives at West Oak Forest Academy, Willa tells her they are the first Black girls to attend the school. Consider what you know about the efforts for school desegregation in 1965. How is Sophia’s experience with school integration similar to your previous knowledge? How is it different?
4. The novel is divided into 3 POVs with 3 separate timelines. How does this structure impact the direction of the story? How would the story be different if the narrative were structured differently?
5. Ethel Gathers is inspired by the largely untold story of Mabel Grammer, an African American journalist who founded the Children Worldwide Organization to place Afro-German children with Black families. The novel also features Ozzie, who represents another group of unsung heroes: African American soldiers who participated in the Double V campaign post-World War II. Why do you think the author chose to introduce the perspective of an African American soldier? What did you learn about these soldiers’ experiences that you did not already know?
6. Reflect on Ethel Gathers’ Brown Baby Plan. What does Ethel’s devotion say about motherhood in the 1950s?
7. Throughout the novel, ambitious women pave the way for themselves and women to come. Discuss the similarities and differences between Rita, Ethel, and Sophia. How do you think they’ve helped pave the way for the next generation of women?
8. Ozzie represents the experience of African American soldiers returning home post-World War II to Jim Crow, race-based violence, and the systemic denial of government benefits like the G.I. Bill. What do you think impacted Ozzie’s life more: the lack of opportunities he faced at home or the secrets he left behind in Germany?
9. An overarching theme of the book is love. How would you describe the different types of love portrayed in the book?
10. How does secrecy function in the story? When do you think secrecy protects individuals? When does it cause harm?
11. In the epilogue of the novel, Ethel Gathers is honored with an award from the Pope and is referred to as a “Keeper of Lost Children”. What does the epilogue say about self-determination? Consider Ethel’s journey throughout the novel. What do you think is the next chapter in Ethel’s story?



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