



ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide

April 24th, 2025 at 6 PM CT

***James* by Percival Everett**

How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *James*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why is it important to revisit this story through James' perspective? What does this book reveal about the importance of literacy in James being able to tell his own story? How does this relate to the name of the novel? See pages 48, 69, 73, 89, 91, 154, 203, 287, 288, and 302.
2. Have you read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? In what ways does the story of Huck's quest for adventure change with James as the protagonist? See pages 68 and 72.
3. What is the significance of James' imaginary debates with philosophers throughout the book? Who does he talk to and what about? See pages 49, 102, 247, and 277.
4. Throughout the book, James and other enslaved people switch up their language/diction depending on who is around. Why is this necessary for their survival? See pages 15, 21, 52, 99, 143, 165, and 262.

5. What does this book reveal about childhood during this time, in general? About Huck's childhood? About the childhoods of the enslaved? See pages 32, 38, 126, and 139.
6. How does this book complicate our view of "slave" versus "free" state during this time? Does James' status really change as he travels from one state to another? See pages 41, 65, 79, 85, 136, and 219.
7. A central theme in this book is refuting the idea of a "good" or "benevolent" enslaver. Where is this myth addressed? What characters help us understand slavery's cruelty regardless of if and how a white person was an enslaver? See pages 27, 89, 106, 149, 157, 161, 167, 176, 197, 282, and 290.
8. Why do you think Everett included the plot about the minstrel performers? What does this act reveal about how race is "performed"? See pages 157, 166, 170, 189, 195, and 200.
9. Near the end of the book, we learn that the Civil War is starting to unfold. Why is James ambivalent about the war? How do James and Huck view the forthcoming war differently and why? See pages 243, 263, 267, 268, and 286.
10. In this retelling, we learn who is the real father of Huck. Why do you think Everett made this choice? Does it change your understanding of the story fundamentally? If so, why? See pages 25, 46, 95, 150, 253, 257, and 264.