



ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide

April 20th, 2023

Kindred by Octavia E. Butler

How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler (1979). 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. What was the ultimate purpose for Dana's travels across time and space? Why does Octavia not spend any time trying to explain *how* she travels in favor of focusing on *why*?
2. Dana is not only compelled to save Rufus' life every time she returns, but also his character/morality within the brutal system of American slavery. Do you think Dana succeeded? If not, where did it go wrong? Was it ever really possible for her to change him? See pages 68, 81, 123, 186, 214, 223, 260.
3. How would this story have been told differently if Dana was traveling from our time rather than the 1970s when the book was originally written? How does her own decade and historical knowledge influence the choices she makes when she travels back in time? See pages 48, 63, 114, 140, 177*.
4. What did you make of the various characters Dana meets on the plantation? How did the enslaved people survive and what different choices did they make to survive? Do you think Octavia succeeded in transcending stereotypes of enslaved people? See pages 145, 168, 275.

5. Throughout the novel, why do you think Octavia focuses so often on children? What was it like for the children, white and Black, growing up on the plantation? How did their relationships evolve with one another as they grew up and why? See pages 76, 83, 99-101, 207, 231.
6. A main theme throughout the novel is literacy and the pursuit of knowledge. Why was it so important for Dana to teach both Rufus and some of the enslaved children how to read? How was she treated when white people learned she could read? See pages 74, 80, 87, 97, 105, 141, 218, 236.
7. How is Kevin's experience as a white man time traveling different from Dana's? Why did Octavia decide that Kevin should stay in the past so much longer than Dana? How has he changed upon his return and why? How do you think their relationship changed? See pages 59, 77, 97, 184, 196.
8. As the title implies, the novel focuses heavily on relationships, and Octavia writes on page 229, "slavery of any kind fostered strange relationships." What different relationships were developed on the Weylin plantation? How does the relationship between Dana and Rufus develop in this context? See pages 93, 100, 117, 124, 163, 176, 211, 242.
9. Upon their return, both Dana and Kevin are confused about the notion of "home" and feel out of place in their own time. Why would the 20th century seem less vivid and real than the 19th century to them? See page 190.
10. Why is it significant that Dana lost her arm on her last trip back to her present? See page 267.