

Discussion Questions for 'MURDER AND THE MASQUERADE'

A Book Club or Reader's Discussion Guide

1. How do you think Renee and Veda's childhood traumas shaped their destinies? What effect, if any, did their childhood experiences have on their self-esteem as women?
2. What do Veda and Renee think they want at the start of the novel? What do they really want?
3. Why does Renee stay with her husband, Bill Hayes? As a relationship therapist, why can't Renee communicate her needs to Bill?
4. What attracts Renee to Deek? What does Deek see in her?
5. What type of man is Deek? Why does Deek take on the responsibility for a troubled teenager like 16 year-old Tyrone Wallace who is not his biological son?
6. Explore Renee's relationship with her Aunt Clara growing up. Did Aunt Clara resent Renee or was her aunt's strictness a form of love? Did Aunt Clara resent Renee's mother, Tina Joye? If so, why?
7. Is Renee's restlessness actually genetic? Could she be more like her "free-spirited" mother than she thinks?
8. What do you think was the long term effect on Renee of having her father, LeRoy Curtis absent throughout most of her childhood?
9. Why does Veda fail to develop a maternal bond with her infant daughter, Sherrelle at birth and even into the child's pre-teen years? Would you consider Veda a "good" mother? Why or why not?
10. What prompts Sherrelle to forgive her mother by the end of the novel? Can you comment on a child's apparent need to connect to his or her biological parent despite that parent's shortcomings as a parent, nurturer, or role model? Think of other parent/child relationships illustrated in the book such as Kenneth with his Dad, Dr. Walter Blackwell.
11. Does Dr. Blackwell love his son, Kenneth? Backup your opinion with examples from the book and/or your own understanding of parent/child relationships.
12. How does Veda's childhood experiences (her relationship with her mother/her exposure to the Pastor) affect her life choices and her psyche as a woman?
13. Comment on the depictions of the main characters' mother/daughter relationships, i.e. Veda/her mother and Renee/her mother.
14. How do you think Renee views the foster mother, Shirley Ann Turner?

15. What factors contributed to the collapse of Louis Simms and Veda's marriage? Could anything have saved that marriage?
16. Do you think Renee's marriage to Bill can be salvaged?
17. What is your opinion of Veda's boyfriend, LaMarr Coleman? Can you analyze what is driving him to behave as he does?
18. Renee's colleague, Dr. Helen Stone, acts as Renee's own therapist, not as a best friend. Why do you think it is easier for Veda to maintain a close girlfriend relationship with Natasha and have another female to share her problems with, whereas Renee does not appear to have any close girlfriends that she can confide in?
19. What is the significance of Renee's near death experience when she nearly drowns at the end of the book?
20. Reread the last few paragraphs of the novel, beginning with the text, "The sign above the hospital entrance stated: Washington Hospital Center ... Where Miracles Happen Every Day." What do you see as the significance of this line and how the book ends?
21. What are some of the underlying themes revealed in this novel that you can identify as statements that the book makes?

New Questions

22. What metaphor does the story illustrate as represented by its title?
23. Who do you see as the story's Central Character(s)? How would you describe the central character's conflict? Internal Conflict? External Conflict?
24. Who do you see as the story's antagonist? Explain why.