

Book Club Suggestions

There are many thought-provoking questions raised by Chloe's Mistigri. Our protagonists, Chloe and PJ, come of age during one of the most tumultuous and transformative periods in the history of human endeavor, and the world they lived in and the challenges they faced were not unique to them. The novel is laced with universal themes and may spur you to consider different perspectives on any one of a number of topics: love, race, music, economics, war, politics, fame, justice. Here are some questions your book club may wish to consider:

1. Chloe and PJ share some common ancestry. When Chloe's free white ancestors married free blacks in Haiti, why were their offspring considered black? Why not white? Why the choice?

Related research questions: When was interracial marriage legalized in Louisiana? When had interracial marriage first become *illegal* in Louisiana?

2. Josephine Baker and Louis Armstrong were two of the most popular entertainers in Europe in the early 1930s. Both entertainers were born in the United States. Why were they living in France?

Related research question: What did Josephine Baker and Louis Armstrong have in common as children?

3. While Big Tony enjoys Peggy Lee singing *Why Don't You Do Right?* on the car radio, Chloe mentions Joe McCoy's *Weed Smoker's Dream*. She also says, "White thieves." Francie used the same words when Jack noticed many of the records in the Music Box Café were missing. What were Francie and Chloe saying?

4. What happened while Norah Davis was singing with Snakehips Johnson's band in a nightclub in the West End of London? What would it have been like, to be in that basement club on that night?

Related research question: Were there any integrated bands playing in America at that time?

5. What happened to the farming and fishing families living in St. Bernard's Parish and Plaquemines Parish in April 1927?

Related research questions: Have the families who lost their land ever been compensated as they were promised? Who took over their land?

6. What do you think the golden chestnut meant to Francie?
7. While traveling to Abbeville, both Chloe and PJ experience a similar challenge. How did those events make you feel? Did you feel similarly toward those two events, or differently?

8. Why do you think Josephine sent Chloe away?

Related research questions: Why did Josephine Baker revive the nineteenth century opera, *La Créole*? Did Josephine Baker have children?

9. What do you think about Chloe's relationship with Hamilton?
10. Beattie found herself in a very difficult situation. What kind of courage would she have needed to react differently? Can you imagine yourself in that position, in Baton Rouge in 1942?
11. When Big Jack flew his boys over the flood, why was everyone on the Atchafalaya River levee black?
12. While traveling through Chicago, Chloe is referred to as a *paper bag*. What does that mean?

Related research question: During the period of this novel, what did the word *passing* mean, in racial terms?

13. Do you think Dr. Herod was being protective of Chloe, or selfish?
14. What do the Monarch butterflies symbolize?

15. What do you think about Emma's infidelity?

Related research question: At the time, was it harder or easier to get a divorce in the UK than in the US?

16. What did they mean when members of the American Volunteer Group said they were "going dark" at the Silver Grill in Toungoo?
17. What alternative employment might have been available to Sanda? How realistic would it be to expect her to move somewhere to seek other opportunities?
18. What does the Bengal tiger symbolize?

19. How was Francie's Down's Syndrome commonly treated at the time? Can you think of any misunderstood biological traits or medical issues that carry a similar stigma today?
20. Jack made some money smuggling bonds out of war torn China, and Shu Hao would not have approved because he believed smuggling hurt his homeland. But the Chinese businessman with whom Jack did the deal was going to use the money to build a grain mill, which would help the Chinese people. Was what Jack did good or bad?
21. Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the ruler of Nationalist China, was educated in the United States. What impact did this have on the Second Sino-Japanese War?

Related research questions: What impact did this have on the outcome of World War II? What happened to Madame and the Generalissimo after the war?

22. What do you think about Meyer Lansky leaving the reception early?

Related research question: What happened to Meyer Lansky's business interests in Havana?

23. Was Louis Armstrong Jewish?
24. Can people who suffer from bigotry be bigots? If so, why do you think that is?
25. Presuming Indian Colonial Army Sergeant Major Abhaijeet Dahralla was captured and not killed when Japanese took Singapore from the British in February 1942, what do you think came of him?

Related History

26. In the 1930s, many European countries were still reeling from the political upheaval and devastation from the Great War that ended in 1918, and there were political vacuums left by the destruction of various European monarchies. What were the most popular political structures competing to rule European countries at the time?

Related research question: The word *socialism* is thrown around quite a bit in today's American political discourse. As the word is being used today, is it the same or different than it's meaning in the 1930s?

27. If Franklin D. Roosevelt had not been president in 1932, what might have happened politically in the United States prior to the Second World War? Would

America have become involved in the Second World War? Would America still be a democratic-republic?

28. How might life today be different if the Japanese had found and sunk the US pacific aircraft carrier fleet in Pearl Harbor?
29. The United Kingdom's prime minister, Winston Churchill, said, "I will not win a war only to lose an empire." What did that statement mean?

Related research question: What are the similarities and differences between the beliefs held and the claims made by today's self-titled *white supremacists* and their political leadership, and each of the world's major leaders in 1942: Churchill, Hirohito, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt and Stalin?