

Reader's Guide

Author of **QUEEN SUGAR**

NATALIE BASZILE

Friends AND Family

a novel



PAMELA
DORMAN
BOOKS
VIKING

1. The novel is bookended by Babs's memories of Jodie. How does the loss of Jodie's friendship feel similar in impact to the loss of Nora's? How is it different?
2. When Babs tells Nora about her affair, she describes the "invisible suitcase." What do you think is in Babs's invisible suitcase? Does she take anything out, or add anything new, over the course of the novel?
3. The idea of showing Russ's office to Galen makes Babs decide to go through with the Napa pig party. Why do you think offering Galen "a bit of the fantasy" means so much to her? Why is he so upset by this decision? Could this have gone any other way?
4. Babs describes her parents as being "old school" and not very emotionally close. But she also describes the things they handed down—from gumbo recipes to memories of Muhammad Ali—in great detail. In what ways does the novel explore ideas of legacy and inheritance? Think about Babs and Reese, Nora and her children, both women and what we know of their parents.
5. Babs and Nora consider themselves family at the beginning of the novel. But after moving in with them, Nathan says to Babs and Galen, "Y'all are my family now." How does the novel explore different definitions and expectations of family?
6. Babs and Nora both think that Nora is a person who has "put in all [the] work" to understand racism and privilege and to be culturally aware while raising a Black son. Why do you think Nora still struggles to see Babs's and Nathan's perspectives on the police encounter?
7. Babs is determined to find out who called the police on Nathan. But when the caller comes to her house, she finds she has nothing to say to her. Why did knowing matter so much to Babs? Did facing the caller offer Babs what she wanted, something different, or nothing at all?

8. Babs and Nora come from very different backgrounds, but their children go to the same private school, they both live in affluent neighborhoods, and they both come from dual-income, white-collar households. How does the novel explore the different kinds of privilege each of them has, and the way it either does or does not live up to their expectations?
9. Despite experiences the characters declare unforgivable in the moment, forgiveness always comes around in one way or another. How do Nora and Elaine, Galen and Babs, and Babs and Nora model different kinds of forgiveness? Why do the characters choose to forgive one another?
10. Galen tells Nathan, “There’s no formula for Blackness, Nathan. No rules. No one gets to define Black for you. It’s what you feel inside.” How does the book explore the characters’ relationships to their own personal expressions of Blackness? Think about Mecca’s decision to choose a name for herself, Reese’s art, Nathan’s blaccent, and other characters’ choices throughout the novel.
11. How do the characters use different aspects of culture to express and manifest confidence (or lack thereof) in themselves? Think about Reese’s, Mecca’s, and Babs’s fashion; the Wild Geese book club; Galen’s love of cooking; the characters’ relationships to boxing; and what music means to the different characters.
12. Babs and Nora are often a world of two when they are together. How does this dynamic lead to a different kind of relationship from the ones Babs has with Mecca and Logan, the Savages, or the community she finds at the Black Brunch Club?
13. Babs and Galen’s reconnected love story is central to the novel. In one of the final scenes, Babs muses, “We had once made each other feel seen. . . . And I wanted to have that again.” Do you think they return to each other in spite of or because of the emotional upheaval that surrounds them? Through Babs and Galen, and Nora and Stuart, what does the novel show us about long-term romantic relationships?