ReadingGroupGuides
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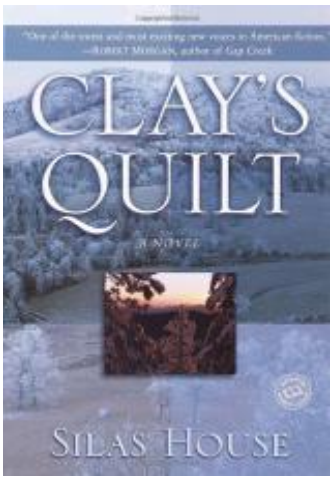
Clay's Quilt

by Silas House



About the Book

On New Year's Day, Anneth Sizemore decides it is time to leave her husband. With her three-year-old son, Clay, in tow, she heads for her hometown in the Appalachian Mountains. Along the way, she dies suddenly, leaving Clay alone and without a family. As an adult, Clay Sizemore is a Kentucky coal miner in love with his town but unsure of his place within it. He finds his family in the townspeople. Together, they help Clay fashion a quilt of a life from what treasured pieces surround him. In the great Southern tradition, Silas House has written a novel that will warm readers' hearts and charm their souls.

Discussion Guide

1. When Clay told his Aunt Easter he was moving out of her house, she cried until her eyes were red and swollen. She tells Clay that a family should live right together. Does Clay's tight-knit, extended family enable or hinder his search for his mother, Anneth, and his quest for meaning in his life? Discuss how your own experiences within an extended family relate to Clay's.

2. How does the Pentecostal religion affect Clay Sizemore's life? What influences have the Free Creek Pentecostal Church had on Clay? Give examples of how Clay both abides by and rebels against the church's teachings. How does the Pentecostal faith compare to your own religious experiences?

3. Discuss the author's use of dialect in this story. What words or phrases spoken by the characters were unfamiliar to you? How do the characters' speaking styles affect your interpretation of the story? What do you learn about the characters by the way they talk?

4. Discuss how music is used throughout the novel. Are you able to identify with the musicians and/or songs that are referenced? What do the various musical choices say about the characters in the novel?

5. What does Alma's fiddle and her style of music signify for you? Does the fiddle serve as a larger metaphor in the story?

6. What role does nature and the Appalachian landscape play in **Clay's Quilt**?

7. Clay's Uncle Paul, the quilter in this story, feels geography and history beneath his fingertips while searching for fabric to use in a quilt. What does this mean? How does the quilt work as a symbol in this story? What are your own experiences with family quilts?

8. What is your reaction to Easter's second sight, or her ability to foresee the future? Is it a blessing or a curse? Have you ever known anyone who had visions such as Easter? Do Easter's visions allow the reader to have a second sight as well?

9. Explain the relationship between Clay and Cake. Are they just drinking buddies?

10. What purpose does Anneth's letter to Clay serve in the novel?

11. What does the title of the second part of the novel, Flying Bird, mean to you?

12. If home is a dominant theme in this story, what happens to the plot, the characters, and the tone of the story when Alma and Clay leave the mountains of eastern Kentucky and travel to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina?

13. Compare and contrast the rituals of Appalachian weddings and funerals in **Clay's Quilt** to your own experiences.

14. Does it seem incongruent or troubling to you that many of the characters, so deeply rooted in family tradition and religion, also participate in a lifestyle of drinking, drug use, and domestic violence? Why or why not? What does the author achieve by juxtaposing sacred and secular behaviors throughout the story?

15. With which character(s) do you most closely identify? Why?

16. Discuss the perceptions your reading group has about Appalachian people in general. Does this novel alter your notions about contemporary life in the Appalachian mountains of Kentucky? In what ways?

17. Has your group read other novels set in Appalachia or about Appalachian characters? If so, compare and contrast those novels to **Clay's Quilt**.

Author Bio

Silas House was a finalist for a 2024 Grammy Award, winner of the 2022 Duggins Prize, and is a two-time winner of the Southern Book Prize. His writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Time*, the *New York Times*, *the Advocate*, *Time*, *Garden & Gun* and other publications. He teaches at Berea College and at the Naslund-Mann Graduate School of Creative Writing.

Critical Praise

"A long love poem to the hills of Kentucky. It flows with Appalachian music, religion, and that certain knowledge that your people will always hold you close. . . . Like the finely stitched quilts that Clay?s Uncle Paul labors over, the author sews a flawless seam of folks who love their home and each other."

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