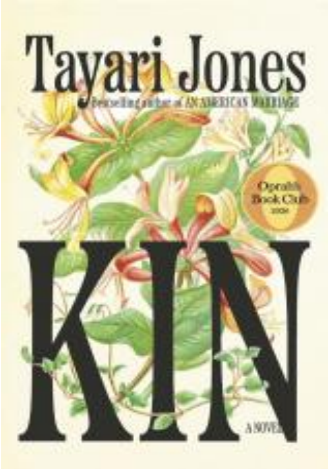
ReadingGroupGuides
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Kin

by Tayari Jones



About the Book

A magnificent new novel from the bestselling, award-winning author of AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE. Tayari Jones has written an unforgettable novel that sparkles with wit and intelligence and deep feeling about two lifelong friends whose worlds converge after many years apart in the face of a devastating tragedy.

Vernice and Annie, two motherless daughters raised in Honeysuckle, Louisiana, have been best friends and neighbors since earliest childhood but are fated to live starkly different lives. Raised by a fierce aunt determined to give her a stable home in the wake of her mother?s death, Vernice leaves Honeysuckle at 18 for Spelman College, where she joins a sisterhood of powerfully connected Black women and discovers a world of affluence, manners, aspiration and inequality.

Annie, abandoned by her mother as a child and fixated on the idea of finding her and filling the bottomless hole left by her absence, sets off on a journey that will take her into a world of peril and adversity, as well as love and adventure, culminating in a battle for her life.

A novel about mothers and daughters, friendship and sisterhood, and the complexities of being a woman in the American South, KIN is an exuberant, emotionally rich, unforgettable work from one of the brightest and most irresistible voices in contemporary fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. We are all born into stories that are already underway. Do you think Annie?s and Vernice?s trajectories were ordained by the mothers they never knew? How much are their paths paved by their own decisions? What role does chance play in their journeys?

2. Annie and Vernice are both motherless, but their circumstances are different. Vernice knows that she will never see

her mother again, but Annie harbors hope for a reunion. Which of them is in a better position?

3. On page 50, Babydoll attempts to demonstrate that she has Annie all figured out. She describes her as shy and calls her a princess. Annie thinks to herself, ?Nobody would for one second think to call me shy if I stood next to Niecy...? (50). In what ways do Niecy and Annie need each other to define themselves?

4. Why is it so hard for Irene to tell Vernice she loves her?

5. Issues such as domestic violence, LGBTQIA+ rights and reproductive justice play a significant role in this story, which is set decades before these topics were talked about publicly. How have things changed since then, and how are they similar?

6. On the way to Spelman, Vernice is kicked off the bus for accidentally sitting in the white section. A Black man comes to her ?rescue? and slaps her --- he claims for her protection --- but Vernice senses something more menacing. What do you believe is his motivation? Is this violence different from the time in her childhood when Irene slaps her?

7. Dignity is a recurring theme in KIN. In what ways do the characters seek to have dignity, even though they live in a world that is determined to degrade them?

8. There are light sprinkles of magical realism in this book. How did mentions of ghosts and superstition enhance your reading experience? What is the difference between superstition, spirituality and religion?

9. Why do you think Spelman is a ?hellhole? to Joette (133)? Why doesn?t Vernice feel the same way?

10. How are Lulabelle and Mrs. McHenry similar as found mothers?

11. When Vernice and Mrs. McHenry meet for the first time, Mrs. McHenry?s intense interest in Vernice almost overwhelms her (154). Why do you think it was such a memorable experience to have someone?s undivided attention? Can there be ?love at first sight? outside of the realm of romance?

12. There are so many different interpretations of love in this book: Joette and Vernice, Vernice and Franklin, Bobo and Annie, Babydoll and Clyde, Annie and Vernice. How do these different relationships explore love? Which was your favorite?

13. Is Bobo justified in leaving Annie?

14. Babydoll gives a biting review of Lulabelle: ?She?s a pimp.... A pimp will always give you what you need to stay alive. What?s a pimp going to do with a dead whore? (197)? Do you agree? Does Lulabelle care about anyone more than profit? Does her affection for Annie excuse her other actions?

15. When Vernice and Franklin are courting, Franklin comes across a case involving orphaned children, and he gets emotional, thinking of Vernice. As he cries, Vernice asks him, ?Could you cry for Annie?? (214). What is the significance of this request?

16. Explore the concept of ?contagious humiliation? regarding the young girl who needs to use the bathroom at the bus

station where there are no toilets for Black people (241?243).

17. At the wedding, is Joette miserable because of her love for Vernice, or is her unhappiness due to something greater?

18. When Vernice seeks help for Annie, Mrs. McHenry warns her to turn away and ?build a moat? between her and the mess (297). What do you think of that advice?

19. Were you surprised by the ending? Why or why not?

20. Use your imagination to project five years past the last page. What do you think the characters are up to?

Author Bio

Tayari Jones is the author of five novels, most recently KIN and AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE, which was an Oprah?s Book Club selection and also appeared on Barack Obama?s summer reading list and his year-end roundup. It won the Women?s Prize for Fiction, the Aspen Words Literary Prize, and an NAACP Image Award, and has been published in two dozen countries. Jones is the C.H. Candler Professor of English and Creative Writing at Emory University and lives in Atlanta.

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