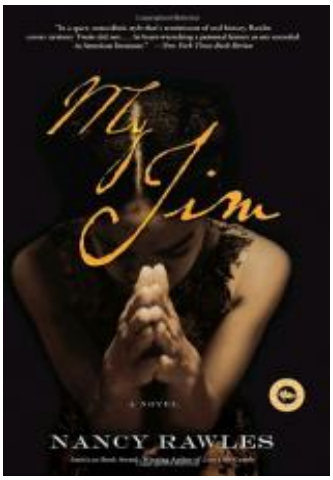
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My Jim: A Novel

by Nancy Rawles



About the Book

To help her granddaughter accept the risks of loving, Sadie Watson mines her memory for the tale of the unquenchable love of her life, Jim. Sadie's Jim was an ambitious young slave and seer who, when faced with the prospect of being sold, escaped down the Mississippi with a white boy named Huck Finn. Sadie is suddenly left alone, worried about her children, reviled as a witch, punished for Jim's escape, and convinced her husband is dead. But Sadie's will and her love for Jim animate her life and see her through.

Told with spare eloquence and mirroring the true stories of countless slave women, **My Jim** recreates one of the most controversial characters in American literature. A nuanced critique of the great American novel, **My Jim** is a haunting and inspiring story about freedom, longing, and the remarkable endurance of love.

Discussion Guide

1. Have you read **Huckleberry Finn**? How does **My Jim** alter your interpretation of that classic's themes and attitudes? Is Sadie's Jim the same man as Huck's?

2. After a fever, Jim becomes a "seer," able to predict the future. Do you believe he could really do this, or was there some other explanation for his accuracy? How did his ability to "see" help him and his fellow slaves?

3. Throughout the novel, small items --- a button, a bowl, a knife --- take on totemic significance. Discuss what each item meant to Sadie, and why such things became so important. Which one do you think was most important to her? Is there a similarly significant item in your own life?

4. The colloquial language in **My Jim** is reflective of a slave woman's scant education, and at times challenging to understand. How did this affect your reading of the novel? In what ways are Marianne's sections different from Sadie's?

Would it have been as successful if it had been written in standard English?

5. Discuss the Mississippi River's power in the lives of slaves. How does it serve as a metaphor? What did it mean to Sadie, and to Jim?

6. Throughout the novel, superstitions and religion are treated with nearly equal reverence. Why do you think that is?

7. Marianne Libre has a choice --- to leave with Chas, or to stay with Sadie. Why does she have such a difficult time making a decision? On page 14, Sadie says to her, "You scared to love cause you scared to lose." How did Sadie's experience with Jim enable her to understand that so clearly?

8. What function do the Marianne sections serve to the novel? How might it have been different if it were purely Sadie's voice?

9. On page 17 Sadie says to Marianne, "Cant lets you go off to no prairie less you got your family with you." Discuss the significance of the memory quilt Sadie and Marianne sew.

10. Where did Sadie find pleasure in her life? Was it real pleasure?

11. For slaves, the definition of "family" was by necessity different from what free people considered it. Who was Sadie's family? What about her children? Jim?

12. Why didn't Jim try to take Sadie with him when he ran? What were her feelings about him leaving? How would you have felt to be left behind in slavery?

13. How does this novel compare to other slave accounts you may have read, both fictional and non-fiction? What does it remind you of?

14. How does reading **My Jim** affect your thinking about race relations today?

15. Although the novel is entitled **My Jim**, is it really Jim's story?

Author Bio

Nancy Rawles is an award-winning novelist and playwright. Her novel **Love Like Gumbo** was the recipient of the American Book Award. She lives in Seattle.

Critical Praise

"A wonderful first-person narrative . . . both a love story and a chronicle of a brutal time in American history."

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