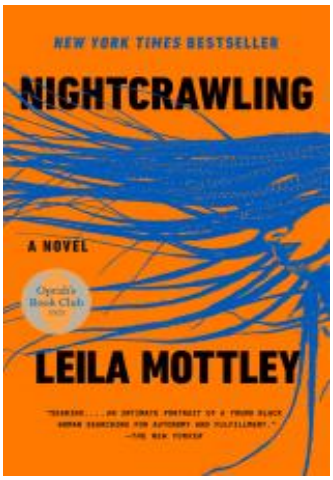
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Nightcrawling

by Leila Mottley



About the Book

A dazzling novel about a young Black woman who walks the streets of Oakland and stumbles headlong into the failure of its justice system --- the debut of a blazingly original voice that ?bursts at the seams of every page and swallows you whole? (Tommy Orange, bestselling author of THERE THERE).

Kiara and her brother, Marcus, are scraping by in an East Oakland apartment complex optimistically called the Regal-Hi. Both have dropped out of high school, their family fractured by death and prison. But while Marcus clings to his dream of rap stardom, Kiara hunts for work to pay their rent --- which has more than doubled --- and to keep the nine-year-old boy next door, abandoned by his mother, safe and fed.

One night, what begins as a drunken misunderstanding with a stranger turns into the job Kiara never imagined wanting but now desperately needs: nightcrawling. Her world breaks open even further when her name surfaces in an investigation that exposes her as a key witness in a massive scandal within the Oakland Police Department.

Rich with raw beauty, electrifying intensity and piercing vulnerability, NIGHTCRAWLING marks the stunning arrival of a voice unlike any we have heard before.

Discussion Guide

1. A recurring element in NIGHTCRAWLING is the imagery of water, from the swimming pool in Kiara?s apartment complex to the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. What do these bodies of water represent to Kiara, and how do they manifest themselves in her emotional state throughout the text? Returning to the first and last pages of the novel, how does Kiara?s perception of the pool change?

2. Which images of Oakland stand out to you most? How do development and underdevelopment contrast each other

within the city? Could your own hometown be described in this way?

3. In the absence of parental figures, Kiara must piece together her own family, reflecting, ?Mama used to tell me that blood is everything, but I think we?re all out here unlearning that sentiment, scraping our knees and asking strangers to patch us back up? (page 32). Does Kiara succeed in creating a chosen family? Who are the members, and how do they support one another?

4. What are the different degrees of success and survival that Kiara sees in the characters around her, such as Alé, Cole and Uncle Ty?

5. NIGHTCRAWLING is interspersed with flashbacks to moments in which Kiara felt connected with her big brother, Marcus. Is Marcus a good brother? How do these flashbacks differ from the Marcus who interacts with Kiara within the timeline of the story? In what ways does he support Kiara, and in what ways does he fail her?

6. Describe the circumstances that lead to Kiara?s nightcrawling.

7. On page 82, Kiara reflects, ?Houses give away all their secrets at the door. Dee?s is full of scratches. Mine doesn?t have a working lock no more.? Do you see symbolism in Kiara?s unlocked door? Over the course of her story, how does she attempt to find and/or create safety for herself and Trevor?

8. On page 130, Kiara describes watching Camila dance and realizing that she is not as free as she thinks she is. How does the protection Demond provides Camila parallel the protection the police department provides Kiara? Is either woman really safe or free?

9. Compare Kiara?s father?s experiences with the Oakland Police Department as a Black Panther to those of Kiara and the sex workers she encounters. In what ways are their experiences similar, and in what ways are they different?

10. Do you think it is important that the story is written from a first-person perspective? How would the novel be different if it was told by a character other than Kiara?

11. Despite their strained relationships with their mother and father, do Kiara and Marcus inherit any of the behaviors and personalities of their parents?

12. Describe your impressions of Marsha and the development of her relationship with Kiara. What steps must Marsha take to gain her trust? In what ways can Marsha see Kiara, and in what ways is she blind to her experiences?

13. How did your perception of Kiara and Alé?s relationship shift as the novel unfolded?

14. What is the significance of Marcus? choice to bail out Cole instead of himself? Were you surprised by his choice? Why do you think he made this decision?

15. During her testimony for the grand jury, Kiara repeats, ?I was a child? (page 263). Why is this important for Kiara to recognize?

16. How did you react to the grand jury?s verdict?

17. Read or listen to a few poems by Leila Mottley. As you reflect on the novel, what elements of her poetry do you notice being incorporated into NIGHTCRAWLING?

Author Bio

Leila Mottley is the author of the novels NIGHTCRAWLING, an Oprah?s Book Club pick and *New York Times* bestseller, and THE GIRLS WHO GREW BIG, as well as the poetry collection WOKE UP NO LIGHT. She is also the 2018 Oakland Youth Poet Laureate. She was born and raised in Oakland, where she continues to live.

Nightcrawling
by Leila Mottley

Publication Date: April 11, 2023
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 288 pages
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN-10: 0593312600
ISBN-13: 9780593312605