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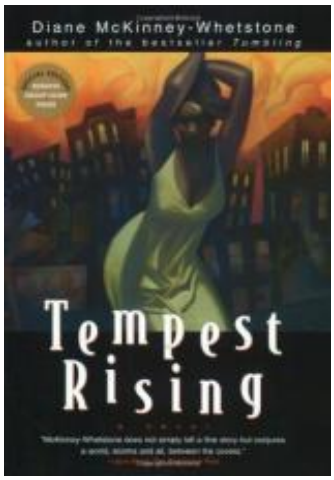
Tempest Rising

by Diane McKinney-Whetstone



About the Book

It is 1965 in Philadelphia. Clarise, Finch, and their three adolescent daughters are living the dream life of the black financially privileged when suddenly Finch's lucrative catering business falls on hard times and Clarise suffers an apparent nervous collapse. The daughters are placed in the foster care of Mae and her stunningly beautiful yet mean-spirited daughter, Ramona. The girls' presence in and subsequent disappearance from Mae's house force Mae and Ramona to confront the brutal secret that caused their hearts to lock against each other.

Discussion Guide

1. When the author was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, there were few prominent black writers, especially females. Now, a whole new genre of books by African-American women writers is gaining ground. How do you think Ms. McKinney-Whetstone's early reading experiences shaped her as a writer? Do her books **Tumbling** and **Tempest Rising** speak only to black audiences, or do they have universal, crossover appeal?

2. Recount the number and variety of ways in which the author uses food to convey a mood, describe a character, or mark a change in the plot. Are all these food references positive in nature? Can you recall other novels whose plots and characters hinge on references for food and eating (for example, Like Water for Chocolate)?

3. In **Tempest Rising** the definition of "family" is altered by the author' use of aunts and uncles, rather than traditional parents, in raising Clarise. Did this pose advantages and/or disadvantages to the nurturing Clarise received? Did her relationship with her aunts and uncles have bearing upon her own daughters' upbringing?

4. Ramona's lack of a father figure no doubt influenced her choice of male companions in adult life. Does this explain her ambivalent attitude toward men? How did Tyrone and his father, Perry, fulfill Ramona's.image of, and need for, men in her life? Did they perpetuate her father's indefinable, absentee presence, or represent more stable entities?

5.What made Mae's treatment of her daughter Ramona change sodrastically after the murder of Donald Booker? Do you think Ramona's forgiveness at the end of the book was plausible after a lifetime of neglect and abuse?

6. Much of **Tempest Rising** takes place during the Civil Rights movement, and the lives of its characters are changed, for better and for worse, by the introduction of the Civil Rights Act. Discuss the paradoxical impact of this historic law and its effect on Clarise, Finch, and their family.

7. Ramona has been described by both the author and reviewers as the book's central character. In what ways is she more fully developed than Clarise or Mae? In what ways does she attempt to subdue - and perpetuate - her roller coaster-like emotional life? How does she benefit by perpetuating her conflicting natures?

Author Bio

Diane McKinney-Whetstone is the author of the national bestseller**Tumbling**. A native of Philadelphia whose father served two terms as a Pennsylvania stare senator, she grew up in a close-knit family with five sisters and one brother, attending public schools and graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in English. She is a regular contributor to *Philadelphia Magazine* and her work has appeared in *Essence* and the *Sunday Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine;* She has received numerous awards, including a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant, Discipline Winner in the Pew Fellowship on the Arts, the Zora Neale flurston Society Award for creative contribution to litera-ture, a Citation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for her portrayal of urban family life as presented in **Tumbling**, Author of the Year Award from the national Go On Girl Book Club, and more. She has participated regularly in the intensive Rittenhouse Writer's Workshops and reaches fiction writing at her alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania. She lives with her husband, Greg, and teenage twins outside Philadelphia.

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