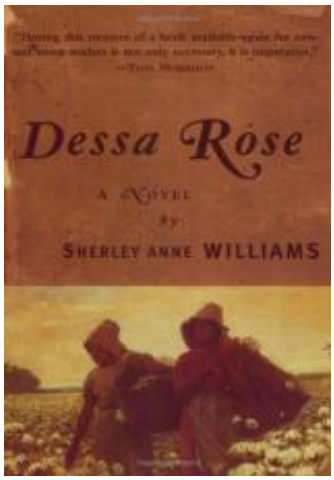
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Dessa Rose

by Sherley A. Williams



About the Book

In 1829 in Kentucky, a pregnant black woman helped lead an uprising of a group of slaves headed to the market for sale. She was sentenced to death, but her hanging was delayed until after the birth of her baby. In North Carolina in 1830, a white woman living on an isolated farm was reported to have given sanctuary to runaway slaves. In this classic novel of courage and redemption, acclaimed author Sherley Anne Williams asks the question: "What if these two women had met?"

These two strong women, one black, one white, form a forbidden and ambivalent alliance as a bold scheme is hatched to win freedom. Trust is slowly extended and cautiously accepted as the women unite and discover greater strength together than alone. Bound by fate but divided by prejudice, they explore and defy racial barriers in a moving story of courage, freedom, friendship, and love.

Discussion Guide

1. The use of names and titles is an important aspect of *Dessa Rose*. Find some of the points where a name or title shows the reader what a character is feeling, or marks a turning point in the novel.

2. Although Dessa and Rufel come from dramatically different backgrounds, are there ways in which their situations are similar?

3. By the end of the novel Dessa and Rufel have come to understand each other in a new way. What do they learn about one another to make this new understanding possible?

4. The prologue to Dessa Rose begins in Dessa's unconscious mind as she lies remembering, perhaps delirious, in the cellar at the Hughes farm. The last section, "The Negress", is narrated in Dessa's own first person voice. How do you

think this adds to an overall understanding of the characters, especially Dessa?

5. Dessa Rose is set more than 150 years in the past. What do you think the novel has to say about freedom and race relations in our own time?

Author Bio

Sherley Anne Williams (August 25, 1944?July 6, 1999) was an African-American poet, novelist, professor and social critic. Many of her works tell stories about her life in the African-American community.

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