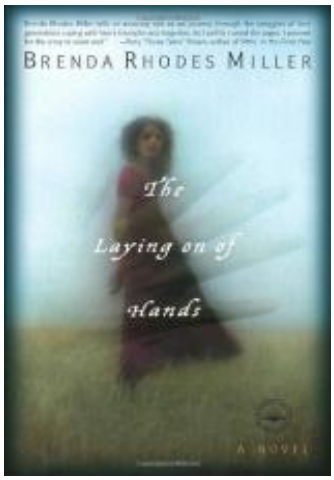
The Laying on of Hands: A Novel

by Brenda Rhodes Miller



About the Book

An older woman with the gift of "laying on hands," looks back on her life and tries to understand why she was often unable to heal those she loved the most.

Discussion Guide

1. Healing and healers have a prominent role in **The Laying on of Hands**. Throughout her life, Muchie struggles to understand and accept the healing gift. How does Muchie really feel about healing? What does she think of healers and of being a healer herself? Is it easy or difficult for her? How does she react to following in the family tradition of being a healer? Discuss your personal experience with healing.

2. Has the world changed for African-American women since Miss Muchie's time? What events have transpired that might alter Muchie's worldview? Discuss how Muchie's life reflects racial and social conditions from her childhood in Mississippi to the rest of her life in Alabama.

3. Is family important to Muchie? Give examples. How does she relate to her father? Her mother? Describe her relationship with her grandmother. What kind of wife and mother does Muchie become?

4. What are the four things that Muchie would say made up her whole world? If you made such a list for your world, what would you include and why? Do you see your world as larger or smaller than Muchie's?

5. Which events in her childhood have the most profound effect on Miss Muchie? How do these events affect her? Do they make her question her faith? Have you ever questioned your faith? If so, why?

6. How is Muchie transformed when she meets Teddy for the first time? Explain Helen's role. Who does Muchie hurt

and why? Explain how she reconciles her behavior to her parents' expectations.

7. Who is Reverend Harper and what is his role in Muchie's life? How does that compare with Reverend Hill's role?

8. Describe Muchie's healing experiences and how she responds to them.

9. Love and loss are recurring themes in **The Laying on of Hands**. Who does Muchie love in the novel? Who loves her? How and why does she lose the people she loves? Discuss her relationship with Teddy compared with her relationship to other people she loves.

10. What does Muchie do to get out of difficult situations? For example, how does she escape the sawmill? How does she free herself from her parents' control? How does she relate to Mr. Winston's attention. Discuss whether her methods tell you anything about her character.

11. Throughout the novel, Muchie builds strong friendships. What new friendships does Miss Muchie form to replace the family she has abandoned? How do friends enrich her life?

12. Food shows up often in the story. Discuss the various events that are celebrated or commemorated with meals in your life compared or contrasted with Muchie's.

13. Is Muchie house proud? How does she feel about where she lives? Describe her emotions concerning where she lives in each part of the novel.

14. Do you think Muchie is a selfish or selfless person? Why do you think so?

15. Would you want Muchie for a friend? For a relative? Why or why not?

16. Talk about how Muchie's personality changes over the course of the novel and what the changes mean.

17. Why do you think Muchie married Ernest Winston? Were his reasons for marrying her similar to hers for marrying him? Did their marriage evolve and grow?

18. How did Tom-Tom help Muchie? What made his relationship with her different from that of his sister? Do you think Muchie loved both her surviving children the same way?

19. If you had to write a sequel to **The Laying on of Hands**, what would Muchie's life be like? How would she and Ernest Winston act? What would her response be to her children and her healing gift?

Author Bio

Brenda Rhodes Miller is the author of **The Church Ladies' Divine Desserts**and executive director of the D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. She is also a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and Jack and Jill. She and her husband, who is a Baptist pastor, live in Washington, D.C.

Critical Praise

"**The Laying on of Hands** is a nostalgic literary journey that wraps around a reader's heart. It warms the soul, feeds the spirit and reaffirms the power of love."--- Norma L. Jarrett, author of **Sunday Brunch**"**The Laying on of Hands** is a rich and absorbing story as warm and lush as the South where it is set. In this remarkable book, Brenda Rhodes Miller has given us engaging characters who touch deeply and transform us, much as the miracles they perform, showing us in the process the amazing healing power of love."--- Christopher Benson, author of **Special Interest** and co-author of **Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America**"Masterfully conceived, The Laying on Hands evokes a time when faith and family sustained us as a people emerging from slavery. Miss Muchie, Tyler Mama, Teddy, Mr. Winston and all the characters in the novel by Brenda Rhodes Miller live with us and are the kind of people we know and love, or wish we had known."--- Dr. Dorothy I. Height, author of **Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir** and Chair/President Emerita, The National Council of Negro Women, Inc."Family, spirit, faith, loss, acceptance of an awesome yet imperfect gift--these are merely notes and chords in the wonderful song Brenda Rhodes Miller has composed. "Miss Muchie" Winston croons a lifetime of melodies, sweet and bittersweet. Resonant in all of us."--- Christopher Chambers, author of **Sympathy for the Devil** and **A Prayer for Deliverance**

The Laying on of Hands: A Novel

by Brenda Rhodes Miller

Publication Date: May 4, 2004
Paperback: 272 pages
Publisher: Broadway
ISBN-10: 0767915569
ISBN-13: 9780767915564