

Book Discussion Kits - African American Focus

[*The Audacity of Hope*](#) by Barak Obama - The junior senator from Illinois and future U.S. President calls for a return to America's original ideals and revealing how they can address such issues as globalization and the function of religion in public life.

[*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*](#) by Malcolm X - The classic collaboration of Alex Haley and Malcolm X that tells the truth about race and racism.

[*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*](#) by Earnest Gaines - A novel in the guise of the tape-recorded recollections of a black woman who has lived 110 years, and has been both a slave and a witness to the black militancy of the 1960's.

[*The Autobiography of My Mother*](#) by Jamaica Kincaid - A fictional chronicle of a woman obsessed with piecing together the story of the mother she never knew.

[*Beloved*](#) by Toni Morrison - After the Civil War ends, Sethe longingly recalls the two-year-old daughter whom she killed when threatened with recapture after escaping from slavery 18 years before.

[*Between the World and Me*](#) by Ta-nehisi Coates - In a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, asking the question of what is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

[*Blood Done Sign My Name*](#) by Timothy B. Tyson - In this outstanding personal history, Tyson, a professor of African-American studies who's white, unflinchingly examines the civil rights struggle in the South.

[*The Bluest Eye*](#) by Toni Morrison - Eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove, an African-American girl in an America whose love for blonde, blue-eyed children can devastate all others, prays for her eyes to turn blue, so that she will be beautiful, people will notice her, and her world will be different.

[*Boy, Snow, Bird*](#) by Helen Oyeyemi - This reimagining of the Snow White story, set in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, is recast as a story about secrets and lies, mothers and daughters, lost sisters and the impossibility of seeing oneself or being seen in a brutally racist world.

[*Coldest Winter Ever*](#) by Sister Souljah - Winter Santiago, the daughter of one of Brooklyn's most powerful drug czars, uses her own weapons—including sex and an aggressive attitude—to stay on top, after her father's empire is threatened by a drug war.

[*The Color of Water: a Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*](#) by James McBride - An inspirational memoir of growing up in an interracial family headed by a white Jewish mother.

[*Colored People: a Memoir*](#) by Henry Louis Gates - A rich and touching memoir of growing up in West Virginia in the 1950's by a celebrated scholar, writer and Harvard professor.

[*The Covenant with Black America*](#) by Tavis Smiley - A collection of essays that plot a course for African Americans to improve their circumstances in areas ranging from health and education to crime reduction and financial well-being.

[*Daisy Turner's Kin*](#) by Jane C. Beck - A daughter of freed African American slaves, Daisy Turner became a living repository of history. The family narrative entrusted to her began among the Yoruba in West Africa and continued with her own century and more of life.

[*The Ditchdigger's Daughters: a Black Family's Astonishing Success Story*](#) by Yvonne S. Thornton - The memoir of a prominent physician who recalls growing up as one of five daughters in a black family headed by a determined father.

[Dr. King's Last Day](#) by Georgia Davis Powers – The author, the first person of color and the first woman elected to the Kentucky State Senate, gives an eyewitness account of the hours leading up to Dr. King's 1968 death and the lives of the five friends who spent those last hours with him.

[Dreams from My Father: a Story of Race and Inheritance](#) by Barack Obama - The son of an African father and white American mother discusses his childhood in Hawaii, his struggle to find his identity as an African American, and his life's accomplishments.

[Drinking Coffee Elsewhere](#) by Z.Z. Packer - This debut collection of short stories dealing with black men and women, mostly young and urban. treats listeners to the richness of highly developed characters and leads them to some intriguing scenarios.

[The Emperor of Ocean Park](#) by Stephen Carter - Set in two privileged worlds: the upper crust African American society of the Eastern seaboard—families who summer at Martha's Vineyard—and the inner circle of an Ivy League law school. A riveting novel of suspense with the saga of a unique family.

[A Family Affair](#) by Reshonda Tate Billingsley - After she gives up a chance to attend Julliard to care for her sick mother, Olivia Dawson learns that her father is alive and well--and very wealthy--and decides to confront the man who left her and her mother in his wake.

[Fifth Born](#) by Zelda Lockhart - Triggered by an accidental meeting with a relative she had not seen in a long time, long-buried memories resurface to reveal a shocking truth to Odessa about the sexual abuse that marked her early family life.

[Go Tell It on the Mountain](#) by James Baldwin – An autobiographical novel that tells the story of the deep spiritual struggle of a fourteen year old black boy growing up in a Harlem community in the 1930s and of his attempts to find his own identity as the son of a Pentecostal minister.

[God Help the Child](#) by Toni Morrison – The story of a woman who calls herself Bride, whose stunning blue-black skin is only one element of her beauty, her boldness and confidence, her success in life; but which caused her light-skinned mother to deny her even the simplest forms of love.

[The Good Lord Bird](#) by James McBride - Mistaken for a girl on account of his delicate features and sackcloth smock, 12-year-old slave Henry Shackleford is liberated by abolitionist John Brown and accompanies the increasingly fanatical Brown on his crusade to end slavery.

[The Hand I Fan With: a Novel](#) by Tina M. Ansa - A rich story of the search for love and companionship in a small Georgia town.

[The Help](#) by Kathryn Stockett - (Regular and Large Print) Limited and persecuted by racial divides in 1962 Jackson, Mississippi, three women, including an African-American maid, her sassy and chronically unemployed friend, and a recently graduated white woman, team up for a clandestine project.

[I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings](#) by Maya Angelou – In this first of five volumes of autobiography, poet Maya Angelou recounts a youth filled with disappointment, frustration, tragedy, and finally hard-won independence.

[If Beale Street Could Talk](#) by James Baldwin - A starkly realistic tale of a talented young artist unjustly arrested and locked away in New York's infamous Tombs, and the sustaining love of his family.

[If This World Were Mine](#) by E. Lynn Harris - An engrossing and fast-paced novel about four African-African friends whose deep bonds of intimacy are threatened by conflicts of career and romance.

[The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#) by Rebecca Skloot - (Regular & Large Print) Scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine.

[*The Invention of Wings*](#) by Sue Monk Kidd - Traces three decades in the lives of a wealthy Charleston debutante who longs to break free from the strictures of her household and pursue a meaningful life; and the urban slave, Handful, who is placed in her charge as a child before finding courage and freedom.

[*Invisible Man*](#) by Ralph Ellison - The classic novel of the experiences of a young black man during the Depression as he travels from the Deep South to Harlem portray the invisibility of his life.

[*Kindred*](#) by Octavia Butler - A modern black woman is snatched abruptly from her home in California and transported to the antebellum South where she must save the life of her white, slave-owning ancestor.

[*The Kitchen House*](#) by Kathleen Grissom – Orphaned aboard a ship from Ireland to America, a young girl is sent to a plantation where she works with the slaves of the kitchen house. Under the care of the master's illegitimate slave daughter, she becomes deeply bonded to her adopted family, though set apart from them by her white skin.

[*The Known World*](#) by Edward P. Jones - When a black slave owner dies, his widow Caldonia mismanages their Virginia plantation with disastrous results.

[*A Lesson before Dying*](#) by Ernest Gaines - The story of a black man unjustly accused of a killing and a teacher who must struggle with the universal question of how to live and die with dignity in segregated Louisiana.

[*Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*](#) by Nathan McCall – An honest and searching look at the perils of growing up a black male in urban America, Washington Post reporter Nathan McCall tells the story of his passage from the street and the prison yard to the newsroom of one of America's most prestigious papers.

[*Mama Day*](#) by Gloria Naylor - A captivating story of the conjuring powers of Mama Day, tested when the stubbornness of her New York City-bred niece, Cocoa endangers her to the Georgia island's darker forces.

[*The Man in My Basement*](#) by Walter Mosley - To save the home that has belonged to his family for generations, Charles Blakey, a young black man whose life is slowly crumbling around him, agrees to rent out his basement for the summer to a mysterious stranger.

[*Middle Passage*](#) by Charles Richard Johnson - This is a picaresque tale, historical romance, sea yarn, slave narrative, and philosophical novel about Rutherford Calhoun, a newly freed slave and irrepressible rogue.

[*Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker*](#) by Jennifer Chiaverini - Presents a fictionalized account of the friendship between Mary Todd Lincoln and her dressmaker Elizabeth Keckley, a former slave who bought her freedom from slavery and went on to become a well-known modiste in Washington.

[*Native Son*](#) by Richard Wright - In 1930s Chicago Bigger Thomas, a young, poor black man, is caught in a downward spiral after he kills a young white woman in a brief moment of panic.

[*The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*](#) by Wes Moore - Two kids named Wes Moore were born blocks apart within a year of each other. Both grew up fatherless and had difficult childhoods. But one grew up to be a Rhodes Scholar and White House Fellow, while the other ended up a convicted murderer.

[*Passing*](#) by Nella Larsen - First published in 1929, *Passing* is a remarkable exploration of the shifting racial and sexual boundaries in America. Larsen, a premier writer of the Harlem Renaissance, captures the rewards and dangers faced by two negro women who pass for white in a deeply segregated world.

[*Possessing the Secret of Joy*](#) by Alice Walker - Confronting the modern controversial issue of genital mutilation, Walker's main character, Tashi struggles with understanding and madness.

[*Push*](#) by Sapphire - Told from the point of view of an illiterate, brutalized Harlem teenager, this intense, explicit novel charts the psychic damage of the most ghettoized of inner-city inhabitants.

[*Saint Monkey*](#) by Jacinda Townsend - Two friends from a 1950s small Black community in hardscrabble eastern Kentucky try to retain their friendship when one of them is invited to New York to play the Apollo Theater with a jazz group while the other sinks lower into the poverty and care of a scraping-by rural life.

[*Salvage the Bones*](#) by Jesmyn Ward - Enduring a hardscrabble existence as the children of alcoholic and absent parents, four siblings from a coastal Mississippi town prepare their meager stores for the arrival of Hurricane Katrina while struggling with such challenges as a teen pregnancy and a dying litter of prize pups.

[*The Secrets of Mary Bowser*](#) by Lois Leveen - Based on the true story of Mary Bowser, an educated freedwoman who worked with the Underground Railroad and ultimately posed as an illiterate slave in the Confederate White House in order to spy on President Jefferson Davis.

[*Silver Sparrow*](#) by Tayari Jones - In 1980s Atlanta, James Witherspoon is living a double life. He has two families, a public one and a secret one. When the daughters from each family become friends, James' secrets are revealed and lives are changed forever.

[*Singing in the Comeback Choir*](#) by Bebe Moore Campbell - A successful producer returns to Philadelphia to help the elderly grandmother who raised her and tries to revitalize the ghetto of her youth.

[*Slaves in the Family*](#) by Edward Ball - A National Book Award-winning family biography traces the Ball family history back to their arrival in America as well as the slave families owned by and related to the Ball's.

[*Song yet Sung*](#) by James McBride - Liz Spocott, a beautiful young runaway slave, suffers a nasty head wound. When she awakes, she can see the future—from the near-future to Martin Luther King to hip-hop—in her dreams. Liz's visions help her and her fellow slaves escape, but soon there are new dangers on her trail.

[*Sula*](#) by Toni Morrison - The story of a young African-American girl who leaves her oppressive neighborhood to expand her dreams but finds many of her previous relationships tested when she returns ten years later.

[*Their Eyes Were Watching God*](#) by Zora Neale Hurston - The story of tragedy and triumph of an early 20th century African-American woman.

[*The Wedding*](#) by Dorothy West - A family saga of race and class focusing on the relationship of an African American woman and her white jazz musician husband.

[*Wench*](#) by Dolen Perkins-Valdez - Situated in Ohio, a free territory before the Civil War, Tawawa House is an idyllic retreat for Southern white men who vacation there every summer with their enslaved black mistresses.

[*White Like Me: Reflections on Race From a Privileged Son*](#) by Tim J. Wise – Wise examines white privilege as a social institution in America and how that it can ultimately harm its recipients in the long run and make progressive social change less likely.

[*Who Asked You?*](#) by Terry McMillan - Already burdened with the dramas of her other adult children, her senile husband and her interfering sisters, BJ finds herself caring for her grandchildren when one of her daughters disappears.