

❧ Reading Group Guide ❧

1. *The Fruits of Atterley* begins with a modern-day description of Atterley Plantation. The author also flashes forward to the present in Chapter 20, and again in the novel's Epilogue. Do you believe the author's use of this literary device adds or detracts from the story? Why?
2. In what ways does Hannah's behavior towards Rebecca conform to traditional depictions of the "slave mammy"? In what ways does it differ?
3. The author contrasts the lifestyle of Atterley's house slaves in the "circle" with that of the field slaves who live in the "street". In what ways were the lives of the house slaves better? In what ways were they more difficult? The house slaves' close association with Atterley's master and mistress caused resentment in the rest of Atterley's slave community. To what extent was this resentment justified? Do you believe there are any parallels in today's black community?
4. What is the lesson Hannah is trying to teach Gus and Promise by telling them the story in Chapter 9? To what extent do you think the two have adopted it by the end of the book? How is this theme illustrated in the novel as a whole?
5. In Chapter 10, Atterley's lake and orchards are described in detail. What do you believe the author intended Atterley's "Promised Land" to symbolize?
6. How do Abraham, Muley, Tobias and Sir Henry illustrate slavery's effect on the traditional roles of men as protectors and providers? In what ways do each of them attempt to regain a sense of manhood? Do you believe there are any parallels in today's society?
7. On numerous occasions, Promise demonstrates a desire to be a gentlewoman like her mistress, Rebecca. How does the book contrast the way black and white women were viewed and treated in the antebellum South? In what ways were both black and white women victimized by the institution of slavery?
8. In Chapter 22, Gus tells Promise that "being a Negro, and of course a woman, you are to be submissive to every other being that God has made in His image". Discuss the different ways Promise, Hannah, Juno, Molly and Cora attempt to obtain and assert power and influence given the confines of antebellum Southern society. To what extent do you believe they were each successful?
9. Both Gus and Promise exhibit racist beliefs at different points in the book. How are their opinions about race formed as children? In what ways do these views change and evolve as the story unfolds and reaches its conclusion? What motivates these changes?
10. How would you characterize the nature of Gus and Promise's relationship? Do you believe genuine love between master and slave was possible? Why or why not?