

DAUGHTER OF A DAUGHTER OF A QUEEN READERS GUIDE

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. “Royal blood runs purple through my veins. And I am talking real Africa blood. Not that tea-water queens over in England have to make due with. My royal blood comes from my grandmother, my *Iyaiya*, as we call her in For, our secret Africa language.” (3)

Discuss Cathy Williams’ lineage and how she sees herself through the lens of her family’s history and culture. Do you or could you imagine carrying such a sense of self-possession or having such a destiny to chase?

2. “Burn every grain of Rebel wheat and every kernel of Rebel corn! Burn it to the ground! I want the crows flying overhead to have to carry their own rations!” (5)

This is one visceral, violent snapshot of the Civil War and the “total war” style of fighting brought to the battlefield. Did you feel that the more raw, honest writing brought you to the front lines, and into the historical period? Was it an easy leap for you to make?

3. Were you surprised by any realities of a soldier’s life in this era? The sheer inexperience of the young recruits (“straw foot, hay foot”)? Did you get a strong sense of how an army shapes up together?

4. How do Cathy’s fellow cooks help her integrate into their camp? Are they sympathetic or mostly apathetic to her plight? How does she bond with Solomon?

5. “But I was Mama’s Africa child and if I let the water fall from my eye those tears would of washed away the strength and magic and power Mama had cut into me. Then I’d be like everybody else: A slave not a captive.” (21)

What is the distinction Cathy makes between being a *slave* and being a *captive*? How does this difference shape the way she resists and persists?

6. “How I wished I could of told those stories in our secret queen language that we spoke when there were no whites about. Iyaiya and Mama and me could paint curlicues, do backward flips, and run across rainbows in that limber tongue.” (22)

What is Cathy’s native tongue? What ideas or thoughts might only be expressed in her innermost language? If you are multilingual, are there words or ideas that you find are best kept in your native language? What are they?

7. Why are Clemmie and Cathy both motivated to go West, even if they are following vastly different paths and troops to get there? Is one mode riskier than the other? In what ways?

8. “The woman’s body I was hiding was like an old friend I missed more than I could say. . . . I whispered to my hidden self and told her she was my twin, my sister, my secret strength.” (170)

When does Cathy decide she is going to pose as a male soldier? How does she keep up the act and disguise her female characteristics and hygiene needs? What is at stake if her cover is blown? Do you think you could have had the same level of endurance?

9. “When I spoke, my own words startled me for they came out of a place deeper inside of me than I even knew was there.” (129)

How does Iyaya color the story, even though she never appears physically in the book? What mark has she left on her ancestors, especially on Cathy?

10. “Oh, I was still plenty afraid, but I’d demoted fear to just another condition you have to work around.” (87)

What dangers—societal, environmental, physical, emotional—does Cathy face along her journey? Yet how does Cathy embody fearlessness? Where does her battle acumen and ferocious instincts come from?

11. Did you find any of the villains or more unsavory characters of the novel, like Dupree or Vickers, somewhat sympathetic? Who and what actions could you understand the motivations for in a time of war? How does Cathy get her revenge on Vickers for his cruelty?

12. “He tended to me gentle as a mama to her babe.” (202)

How does Lem and Cathy’s relationship grow and what do they come to mean for each other? How is Lem’s compassion expressed?

13. What power lies in names? What does “Cathy Williams” come to mean? Or “William Cathy,” “Wager Swayne,” or “Sergeant Allbright”? Do you believe Wager was afraid to answer Cathy’s first cries of his name?

14. Is it hard to imagine this juncture in history where the West is perceived as a pure and free place to chase one's destiny? What does Cathy find waiting for her out West? Does it fulfill its promises to her?

15. How might we honor women lost to history with stories like Cathy's, for their service and sacrifice? In what ways was she a (literal) trailblazer?

16. How did you react when Wager and Cathy at last reunited? How does this union create danger and uncertainty for Cathy? Is the risk worth everything they have both suffered for?

17. "John Horse had the same iron in his soul that was never going to be bent nor beaten into another shape." (223)

Discuss the significance of the meeting with the Black Seminole tribe, John Horse, and key cavalry members. Are their plights not so dissimilar? How are the tribes and the cavalry unit both mistreated by the white military leaders, government officials, and settlers? Also, discuss the perception of Native Americans at this juncture in history. How do field reports and graphic storytelling effect policy or the treatment of the tribes?

18. Did you think Cathy's great mentor General Sheridan betrayed her at the medal ceremony? What did you expect to come from the up close interaction? Does he redeem himself ultimately? Why do you think Cathy still regards him with tenderness and respect?

19. What did you take away from this book? What surprised you? What were the toughest scenes for you to read, or the most emotionally gratifying?