



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN BY JAMES BALDWIN

1. There are many people with secrets in this story. Who is keeping a secret? Should these secrets be kept, or is it better to share information even if it will hurt others?
2. Many of the characters moved to the North for a better life. How did life in the North compare to the life that was left behind?
3. What are we to make of the many references to dirt and filth—the name “Grimes”, the home that despite Elizabeth’s and John’s efforts never becomes clean, the “dusty space before the altar” where John has his conversion?
4. Will Florence reveal Deborah’s letter and expose Gabriel’s past? Why or why not? If she does, how might Gabriel’s, Elizabeth’s and John’s lives change?
5. If John’s 14th birthday had taken place in March 2006 rather than 1935, might his future hold more promise?
6. Is Gabriel a hypocrite or a sincere, though flawed, human being?
7. We are told in Part One that “it was [John’s] hatred and his intelligence that he cherished, the one feeding the other.” Has he relinquished his hatred by the end of the novel?
8. In the Bible, Gabriel was the angel who explained messages from God and announced to Mary the conception of her son, Jesus. What could be the significance of the name Gabriel for John’s stepfather?
9. Why is the book in three parts? What do their titles (and the chapter titles) have to do with the content?
10. How is sex portrayed in the novel? What is it about sex that brings the characters down or holds them back? Is there ever any positive view of sex?
11. What is the importance of music in the novel?
12. How does the use of all those biblical references affect your experience as a reader?
13. What's the deal with John and Elisha? What kind of relationship do they have? What kind do you think they each want?



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14. The novel stretches back to the emancipation of the slaves in the south, through Florence's memories of her mother's stories. How does that link back in time connect to the novel's present?
15. How does Harlem contrast with the rest of New York in the novel?
16. Why can't Gabriel accept John anymore? What changed between the time that he met him and married Elizabeth and now?
17. How does religion organize the characters' lives?

Questions from Scoop.com and Chicago Public Library



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