



# Colorado Book Club Resource

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NOTES OF A NATIVE SON BY JAMES BALDWIN

1. Baldwin portrays his stepfather in a complex way - neither saint nor villain. based on the stepfather's actions and influence, would you say he played a more destructive or constructive role in shaping Baldwin's life? Give examples from the text to support your view.
2. In 'Notes of a Native Son', Baldwin often reflects on the challenges he faced due to his race. Despite the hardships, do you think Baldwin would change his race if he had the chance? Why or why not?
3. In the book, Baldwin leaves the church and later criticizes it for how it handles personal crises. Could his stance be seen as a general critique of religious institutions, or is it more specific to his personal experience? Consider his actions and his words in multiple parts of the book.
4. Baldwin's escape to Paris symbolizes his need for sanctuary from American racism. However, he returns to participate in the civil rights movement. Was this a form of self-sacrifice or a necessary step for personal growth? Could it be both? Discuss using events and quotations from the text.
5. Baldwin describes his childhood as a 'bleak fantasy'. Yet, he became one of the notable figures of the civil rights movement and an acclaimed writer. Do you think his challenging childhood contributed to his success or did he succeed despite it? Support your perspective with examples from the book.
6. "Comforting Falsehoods" is a theme demonstrated in the first essay. Can you describe a situation where a character preferred a comforting lie over a harsh truth, and how that shaped their experiences or decisions? Do you think the truth is always the better choice? Why or why not?
7. "Interracial Community" is another key in this book. In your opinion, how is the importance of building an interracial community emphasized in the novel? Do you think Baldwin successfully conveys the idea that "Negroes are Americans and their destiny is the country's destiny"? How does this resonate with today's society?
8. "The Paradox of Racism and Resistance" offers a complex look at the battle against inequality. Considering the characters, identify the moments when resistance to racism reproduced racist tropes. What does this say about the struggle against systemic racism? Is there a way to combat racism without inadvertently fueling its fire?
9. Baldwin puts a lot of emphasis on his message that "Hate is Seductive, Love is Hard". Can you recall a situation where a character chose hate over love? How did that choice affect them? Do you believe that love could indeed grow from the fertile ground of pain?



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10. Baldwin suggests that "Stereotypes are Always Self-referential", existing only in the minds of those who perpetuate them. Can you identify moments in the text where characters were forced to confront their own stereotypical views? How does this theme tie into the ongoing societal issue of racial stereotyping?
11. In "Notes of a Native Son," James Baldwin explores the internalized hatred that he deems the 'native son's bitterness.' How does he demonstrate this concept through the relationships in the book, mainly the one he has with his father? Does it reflect the societal situation of the time, and how does it resonate today?
12. The idea of 'Human Connection, Above all Else' is prevalent in Baldwin's work. In what way do you see this theme playing out in the story and the characters' interactions? How does this theme challenge us to rethink our definitions of connection, particularly in our current social climate?
13. Baldwin confronts the concept of racial identity in America fundamentally being a reaction to white prejudice. How does he justify this view in his experiences as written in the book, and how might this relate to or challenge current racial discourses?
14. In "Notes of a Native Son," Baldwin draws parallels between the oppression of Black people and their internal struggles. For instance, Baldwin's father and Richard Wright's character Bigger Thomas both symbolically represent a loss of ability to form human connections due to societal violence. Can you identify other examples of this symbolism in the book? Do you find this mechanism effective in shedding light on unavoidable societal violence?

*Discussion questions created by AI from SuperSummary.com*



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