



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SHARKS IN THE TIME OF SAVIORS BY KAWAI STRONG WASHBURN

1. The book opens from the perspective of the mother, Malia, whose memories set the groundwork for the novel. How would you describe her attitude towards the early, supernatural events that shape the rest of the story?
2. As the narration shifts perspectives, what does each character add to your understanding of a modern Hawaiian family?
3. What is the significance of Dean's basketball playing, Nainoa's ukulele playing, and Kai's hula dancing, and later, rock climbing? What do these activities reveal about each siblings' respective attitude towards fate, family, and responsibility?
4. There are several references to "old Hawai'i" or "old kings" throughout the novel—such as when Dean describes his arrival in Spokane, or when Kai is describing the Hawaiian community in San Diego—how does each character view their relationship to Hawaiian culture and traditions? How does tragedy and/or poverty influence this relationship?
5. Both Dean and Kai describe their initial encounters with American mainlanders, in which they are confronted with Hawaiian stereotypes. How does Washburn's depiction of the typical, modern Hawaiian family compare with other representations of Hawaiians in media or literature?
6. The story not only shifts in perspective, but in place—what do these various settings/cities signify to each character?
7. How does Kai's relationship with Van, Hao, and Katarina, compare to Nainoa's relationship with Khadeja and Rika?
8. In Chapter 16, Malia says: "If a god is a thing that has absolute power over us, then in this world there are many." What are the "gods" of this book?
9. There are two incidents in the book in which Dean attempts to save Nainoa—first, with the sharks, and later, in Waipi'o Valley—and one in which he saves Kai. Each time he is met with resistance. What do these various incidents relay about how sacrifice, saviorship, and kinship operate in this novel?
10. What does "Sharks In The Time of Saviors" mean? Does your interpretation change as the plot unfolds?
11. Augie, the father, is the only family member whose perspective we don't get—except briefly, at the very end—though some of the final events center around him. How does his role relate to the overarching themes of the novel?

Discussion questions from the publisher.



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