



BLACK SUNDAY

A novel by Tola Rotimi Abraham

Reading Group Guide & Discussion Questions

1. How does *Black Sunday* touch on the subjects of poverty and trauma? Do you think that the author, Tola Rotimi Abraham, creates a realistic portrait of a family affected by these circumstances? How did the family's experiences, rooted in urban Nigeria, reflect lived experiences familiar to you where you reside?
2. At one point, Ariyike states that she and her sister "were glad to have Mother's attention again" and would laugh at their mother's jokes or acerbic asides even when they weren't funny. They became "fakers" but "happy." Have you ever been in a similar situation where you pretended to be happy to spare someone else's feelings? Have you ever had to spare your own?
3. Ariyike has a very toxic view of women, especially those she works with. When she first meets Erica, the woman who gets the on-air presenter position for a comedy show, she makes a mockery of Erica's appearance, telling her that her "cheeks are huge, you look like you have whole lemons stuck under there." Ariyike goes on to say that she can't understand "the rage I was feeling nor the discomfort" and immediately makes it her mission to get the job over Erica. Later in the novel, Ariyike has an affair with her new boss, Dexter, because it was "the idea that I had the ability to hurt someone as beautiful and carefree as Cindy that I found so addictive and intoxicating." How does Ariyike's internalized misogyny play a role in her professional and personal life? What do you believe is the root of these emotions?
4. In *Black Sunday*, consensual sex is uncommon. How does the novel portray the perpetrators and the victims? What does it say about rape culture and power dynamics?
5. Ariyike is describing the two different Gods reflected in the New Church and the old ones. The older churches "taught of a God who was responsible for everything, both good and bad." However, New Church had a God that was "only good, and He was good all the time." If you were to join one of these churches, which might you become a member of? Why did you make the choice that you did?
6. In the chapter "How to Be the Teacher's Pet," why does the author switch to a second-person voice ("you") for Peter, when the other characters' sections are in first-person voices ("I")? What distance might the author be trying to create, or close, by switching the perspective of the speaker?
7. "You realize then from reading those poems that every language in the world must have a word like *ibanuje*, a word for 'afraid' and a word for 'sad' and a word for 'tears.' You did not tell Miss Abigail, but the more you read the *sufferhead* poetry she gave your class, the less alone you began to feel." This is a quote from Peter during his chapter "How to Be the Teacher's Pet". Do you think that giving feelings a name makes them easier to talk about? Why or why not? Are there words you always use or never use when discussing emotions? When was the last time you felt less alone after reading a book?

8. Ariyike talks about watching the television show *Family Matters* “for a few necessary minutes every Saturday” and pretending that the family patriarch, Carl Winslow, was her father because he reminds her of what a father should be like: “balding, round-faced, and old.” What does it say that in Ariyike’s ideal world, her father would be replaced by this fictional character? Do you believe that the trauma of being plunged into poverty has spearheaded this particular coping mechanism? Why or why not?

9. If this book, or a sequel, followed these characters for another ten years, where might the story go next? Would it include forgiveness? For whom?