

Discussion Questions for *Hosanna*

SPOILER ALERT: *These questions reveal important scenes in the book*

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PROLOGUE

- The story begins with Mother Hill's point of view. What is the significance of opening the story with her voice?
- What are your impressions of Mother Hill?
- What does emancipation mean to Hosanna? And is she really free?

CHAPTER 1

- The novel is primarily written from Hosanna's point of view. How would you characterize her voice? What does her voice reveal about her personality and worldview?
- Compare and contrast Midville to other towns and cities you've read or know.
- The story is set in small town Georgia during the 1940s. What aspects of the story are universal and reflect similarities and differences to past and present events?
- What is the irony of Americans fighting in World War II?
- Describe the irony of the Women's Foreign Mission Board raising money for Africans.
- Hosanna declares to Mother Hill that "folks won't change, not less you make them." Do you agree with that sentiment? Is it possible to get all that you desire through brute force?
- Mother Hill tells Hosanna, "You can't force the love of God in folks." How does this statement reflect Hosanna's beliefs and actions thus far? And do you think Mother Hill is right or wrong in making that statement?

CHAPTER 2

- What are your impressions of Miss Margret? Are you able to find some sympathy for her character and/or circumstances? Why?
- In what ways does Mother Hill take on the role of mediator in the Steffner House?
- Miss Margret says the purebred was God's intention. What do you think of her comment?
- Hosanna is dependent on turpentine to relieve her of her burning chest pain. What role can substances have in masking and/or alleviating our pain?

CHAPTER 3

- How do you feel about the way in which Hosanna treats Miss Gracie?
- Mother Hill tells Miss Gracie, "He ain't your God." Why did she feel compelled to say this to Miss Gracie?
- What affect does Mother Hill's hope and enthusiasm play in Miss Gracie's life?
- After Miss Gracie gives birth to Hosanna, she starts calling Mother Hill, "Mama," and her real mother, "Margret?" Why would she start that in adulthood?

CHAPTER 4

- What impressions do you have of Miss Gracie and how she's handled her plight in life?
- What does Mother Hill mean by the concept of one blood? What would she like people to understand?
- Is Hosanna right about Miss Gracie being a false invalid? Why?
- Why does Adison take the risk in visiting Miss Gracie on Tuesdays?

CHAPTER 5

- How does Hosanna's bitter relationship with her own family affect her relationship with John Irvin's family?
- What is it about John Irvin's character that keeps him committed to Hosanna despite her troubles?
- Contrast the ways in which Hosanna and John Irvin view people and society.
- Why does Hosanna resent John Irvin helping others?
- What do you think Mother Hill told John Irvin about Hosanna in order to keep him hopeful about her potential transformation?
- What role does John Irvin seem to play in Hosanna's life?
- Why does Hosanna say Miss Margret prefers country-bred Negroes?
- Why does Hosanna call the Ku Klux Klan, the Ku Ku Klan? What does that tell you about Hosanna's view of them?
- What do the people living along M'donia, including the John Irvin's kinfolk, have in common with white segregationists?
- What does the fascination John Irvin's kinfolk have with Marcus Garvey tell you about their beliefs?

CHAPTER 6

- Why is Hosanna particularly troubled by Beth Sarah's visit?
- Why is the color of the skin more important to Miss Margret than the color of blood?
- Why does Mother Hill feel compelled to express to Hosanna why she's special in the eyes of God?
- Why does Hosanna compare Beth Sarah to a purebred pony?
- How does race impact all the interactions, relationships, and associations in this chapter?
- How do we know that Miss Margret's new pastor will be different than his father?
- What impact did the war and Cordelia's death have on Silas?
- Do you agree or disagree with Hosanna's decision to have Beth Sarah wash dishes? Why?
- What did you anticipate the consequences would be after Hosanna revealed the secret?
- What are the similarities between the racial tensions in M'donia and Hosanna's circumstances?
- How does Hosanna express her prejudices? And how does Mother Hill try to correct her? Discuss the irony of Hosanna's views.
- Why doesn't Mother Hill want Hosanna to share what they discuss with Miss Margret?
- Compare and contrast Martin Luther King, Jr.'s perspective on race with Mother Hill's.

CHAPTER 7

- Why does Mother Hill compare Adison's farm to the Promised Land?
- Describe the similarities between the way the town of Midville is divided with the way in which modern day cities and towns are divided.
- What does Mother Hill mean by the wilderness?
- How is One Eye's story the same and/or different from Adison's story?
- Describe the different groups in Black Bottom, then compare and contrast their agendas.
- Discuss Lil' Martha's grievance. Do you sympathize with her? Why?
- Why is it so offensive to Hosanna for Adison to show more concern for Miss Gracie than he does for her?

CHAPTER 8

- What are the clues and the consequences of the so-called Negro Rebellion in this chapter?
- Why does Mother Hill try to appease Miss Margret after Hosanna reveals the secret?
- Mother Hill prides herself on always telling the truth. Why does keeping the Steffner secret trump that stance?
- Why doesn't Miss Fisher believe Hosanna's story?
- Why does Hosanna blame Miss Gracie when the boo-leggers attack?
- Hosanna runs for Mother Hill's life. Why wouldn't she run for her own?

CHAPTER 9

- Why do these World War II African American veterans feel emboldened in their protest?
- Compare and contrast the slumbermen with Silas's soldiers.
- Why is John Irvin increasingly frustrated with Hosanna's exploits?
- How does the hope of a refuge help Hosanna during her days at Miss Fisher's?
- Why won't Hosanna give Miss Fisher the privilege of telling her where to sit?
- How does Hosanna's rebellious personality actually help her deal with the mistreatment she's received in life?

CHAPTER 10

- The all-white primary is banned in this chapter. How will that affect the Midville way of life going forward?
- What similarities does this chapter have with the prologue?
- Why can't Hosanna endure humiliation from Miss Margret and Miss Fisher so she can keep her job?
- Why does Hosanna take Miss Gracie's cumbersome throne when there were plenty of other cherished antiques in the home?
- Why was Sully willing to help Hosanna?
- Why isn't Hosanna afraid for her life when Mister Hoke points a gun at her?
- Why doesn't the ringmaster have any influence over Mister Hoke?
- Why doesn't John Irvin have any influence over Hosanna?
- John Irvin expresses his discontent with Hosanna's behavior. Who do you agree with – John Irvin or Hosanna?
- Why did Mother Hill's ploy work against Miss Margret?

CHAPTER 11

- Describe how Miss Margret tries to quell the Negro insurgency in Midville as well as in her home.
- Hosanna began asking Miss Margret a slew of questions about cleaning. Why did that remedy work?
- Hosanna resents hearing Sully rave about SeeSee. Explain the irony of it all. Compare and contrast Sully and Miss Gracie and their relationships with their daughters.
- Why are racial tensions rising at this point in the story?
- Why can't Miss Margret be patient with Sully?
- What is Hosanna trying to achieve by sharing Sully's story with Miss Gracie?
- What do you think of Miss Margret after she called the sheriff on Sully?
- What impression did you have of Miss Gracie's reaction to Hosanna's threat towards the end of the chapter?

CHAPTER 12

- Do you think Eugene Talmadge's rhetoric has had any influence over Miss Margret's treatment of Sully in any way?
- If Sully had not been imprisoned, would he have changed the way he did?
- Why does Mother Hill shun confrontation when the topic of race is concerned?
- Was John Irvin right or wrong for refusing to sell the higher priced sodas?
- Hosanna has had to work without pay most her life. So why does she resent John Irvin working for free?
- Why does knowing Hosanna's true intentions matter to John Irvin so much?
- If you had to take sides in the disagreement between Hosanna and John Irvin, who was right? Why?

CHAPTER 13

- What could you infer about Miss Gracie's picture?
- Why do you think Adison refuses to discuss his relationship with Miss Gracie?
- Put yourself in Lil' Martha's shoes. How does she perceive this peculiar relationship between Adison and Hosanna?
- Why do you think Adison asked Lil' Martha to live with him many years ago, especially when he had no intention of having a relationship with her?
- What does Lil' Martha's violent beating of Hosanna tell you?
- Why does Hosanna refuse to let Adison go?
- What do you think of Hosanna's perception of the people living in Black Bottom?

CHAPTER 14

- Who are the victims of stereotypes in Hosanna? Do any of the characters break through these stereotypes and reveal the fallacy of stereotyping people by race?
- Mother Hill declares that Hosanna and Miss Margret are a lot alike. Compare and contrast the personalities of Miss Margret and Hosanna.
- What impact do you think Sweet Teeth had on Mother Hill's way of handling life at the Steffner House?
- Describe Mother Hill's views on race and justice. Do you agree or disagree with her?
- Mother Hill describes what Miss Gracie was like growing up. How has her personality affected her today?
- What does it mean when Sweet Teeth said you've got to be real thirsty to drink from a rock?
- How can Sweet Teeth's example be modeled in our society today? And could it?
- At the end of this chapter, Mother Hill suggests that Hosanna depends on her too much? Do you believe that? Can you say the same thing about Miss Margret and Miss Gracie?
- If turpentine is not the answer to Hosanna's problem, then what "balm" does she really need?

CHAPTER 15

- The novel is set during segregation, a highly intense political time in history. How does the political climate affect the racial tensions in the story?
- What significance does the white female protestor have on the story?
- Compare and contrast different characters and how vocal they feel they can or cannot be with regards to their opinions.
- Why can't Hosanna seem to express her feelings for John Irvin?

CHAPTER 16

- Compare and contrast Hosanna and Mother Hill's desired approach towards the care of Miss Gracie. Who do you agree with?
- What does it take to humble Hosanna? When has she been humbled before?
- Why does Hosanna attempt to provide comfort to Mother Hill in the way she did?
- Why is Hosanna confused about Mother Hill's passing?
- What impressions do you have of the relationship between Miss Margret and Mother Hill?
- How did Mother Hill foreshadow her death?

CHAPTER 17

- How does Hosanna's behavior display her love for Mother Hill?
- What can you infer about Hosanna's chronic chest pain from this chapter?
- Why does Mother Hill still have tremendous influence over Hosanna?
- Why does Hosanna feel compelled to confront Miss Margret in order to seek respect for Mother Hill?
- Compare and contrast what the death of Eugene Talmadge means to Midville to what the death of Mother Hill means to the Steffner House.

CHAPTER 18

- In what ways does Miss Margret's pastor show his position on Jim Crow throughout the story?
- Why does the "ringmaster" take such an unpopular position during a highly contentious period in Midville's history?
- Why does Miss Gracie care so much about the news on the radio?

CHAPTER 19

- What are your impressions of the town tensions when the driver warns Silas about being out in the open?
- Why does Hosanna view her birth certificate as her emancipation papers?
- Why can't Hosanna continue to trash Miss Margret's bedroom?

CHAPTER 20

- Why has Adison patiently waited all these years for Lil' Martha to leave in her own time?
- Compare and contrast how Lil' Martha and Hosanna tried to impose their will on Adison and John Irvin.
- Why can't Hosanna throw the shoe at John Irvin?

CHAPTER 21

- What impact does the battle for the African American vote have on the wider story?
- How does Hosanna display her true feelings for John Irvin in this chapter?
- In what ways does the fear of loss take center stage in this chapter?
- Why does John Irvin's reassurance, at the end of this chapter, mean so much to Hosanna?

CHAPTER 22

- Discuss how the townspeople view Silas's life to that of John Irvin's.
- What affect has John Irvin had on the townspeople? How is Silas and John Irvin different in their approaches to race relations? Can you have one approach without the other? Which approach do you prefer?
- Mama Irvin attempts to explain the concept of family to Hosanna. What hinders Hosanna from totally grasping the concept?
- What is the significance of the ringmaster's presence and support during this stage of the story?

CHAPTER 23

- What impressions do you have of Hosanna's inner turmoil during the vigil by John Irvin's bedside?
- Why has she lost patience with Mother Irvin?
- Compare and contrast the ringmaster's relationship with his father to the relationship Miss Gracie has with Miss Margret.
- Why would Miss Gracie come to Hosanna's rescue now?

CHAPTER 24

- Compare and contrast the sparrow with Miss Gracie and her life.
- What do you think provoked Miss Gracie to try life at this point?
- What do you think Miss Gracie wants and needs from her mother?
- Why is Miss Margret so steadfast in her position?
- Describe the differences between Hosanna and Miss Gracie's temperaments.
- Why was it necessary for Miss Gracie to be an invalid all these years?

CHAPTER 25

- Why does Hosanna seem to reach her breaking point with Miss Gracie in this chapter?
- How is Hosanna so emotionally defeated in this chapter than in any other time in the story? What has changed?
- Why won't John Irvin reveal who tried to kill him?
- The story does not reveal how John Irvin gets this rolling store. What do you suspect?
- What impressions do you have of John Irvin and his feelings for Hosanna?

CHAPTER 26

- When Miss Gracie takes on the role of Mother Hill, how does that affect Hosanna?
- Why would Miss Margret surprisingly try to connect with Miss Gracie during this stage of the story?
- How is Miss Gracie caught in the middle of Miss Margret and Hosanna? And why is it so difficult to please both?
- Why is Hosanna threatened by Miss Gracie going to the party with Miss Margret?

CHAPTER 27

- After Miss Margret and her ilk leave the church, her pastor boldly invites Negroes to take their pews. Why would he take such a bold position so early in the history of Civil Rights?
- What does the writings in the progressive Baptist publication say about Miss Margret's pastor?
- What does Miss Gracie's speech to Truman tell you about her worldview?
- What new impressions do you think Hosanna has of her mother after the speech?
- When Miss Gracie shielded Hosanna from the "boo-leggers," what did it remind you of? What impact would Miss Gracie's actions have on Hosanna?

CHAPTER 28

- After Miss Margret threatens Adison's life, why would Miss Gracie feel compelled to reveal the truth at this point?
- Hosanna tells John Irvin that she won't grumble. Why does this statement mean so much to him?
- Why did it take enormous courage for Miss Gracie to make her revelation in 1948, the year of this scene? And why did Hosanna say that Miss Gracie's burdens were lifting when her troubles were just beginning?

CHAPTER 29

- What does the refuge symbolize in Hosanna's life?
- How does John Irvin's birthday gift help complete Hosanna's story?
- Hosanna has always felt she needed to confront people in order to win for her cause. But here she says the greatest sign of victory is when you can overcome yourself. What do you think she means by this?
- John Irvin tells Hosanna don't fret about wiping the tears. Why not?

CHAPTER 30

- How did you like and/or dislike Hosanna as a character?
- How did you like and/or dislike Mother Hill as a character?
- How did you like and/or dislike Miss Margret as a character?
- How did you like and/or dislike Miss Gracie as a character?
- How did you like and/or dislike Adison as a character?
- How did you like and/or dislike Lil' Martha as a character?
- The sparrow is a reoccurring symbol in the story. Who and/or what does the sparrow represent?
- How is the town of Midville its own character, with its own story line?
- Do you feel Miss Margret will ever change? Do you see any signs?
- This story ends in 1967. In what ways have attitudes about race improved or worsened since then?
- Hosanna explains how she overcame her issues about her past. What can we learn from the point of view she holds by the end of the book?
- Did Hosanna captivate your attention from beginning to end? What scenes were the most interesting and/or memorable? Why?