

ONE MARYLAND ONE BOOK 2024

WHAT STORM, WHAT THUNDER

Myriam J. A. Chancy

TEACHER'S GUIDE



WHAT IF EVERYONE READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME, THEN CAME TOGETHER TO TALK ABOUT IT?

When we read a great book, we can't wait to share the experience with others. That's one of the joys of reading. In this spirit, Maryland Humanities created One Maryland One Book to bring together diverse people in communities across the state through the shared experience of reading the same book.

Now in its seventeenth year, One Maryland One Book remains Maryland's only state-wide community reading program. Each year, the selection process is guided by a common theme. The theme for 2024 is **Restorative Futures**.

The Maryland Center for the Book at Maryland Humanities partners with public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, correctional facilities, and other organizations to bring book-centered discussions and other related events to communities across Maryland. But One Maryland One Book is not just about reading or literature; it is also about bringing people together for meaningful dialogue.

The book selected for 2024 is *What Storm, What Thunder* by Myriam J. A. Chancy.

GRAB YOUR COPY

Find a FREE copy of *What Storm, What Thunder* at your local library or purchase it from a bookstore and get reading! Maryland Humanities has partnered with libraries across the state to hold print copies of the book for giveaway, as well as adding e-book and audio editions to their catalog.

REACH OUT

Each year, more than 15,000 Marylanders read the One Maryland One Book selection. How many of those people are your friends or family? Use the book to jumpstart a meaningful conversation in person or virtually with an old friend or to make a new one.

PULL UP A CHAIR

We invite you to join Maryland Humanities and thousands of other Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related events happening around the state and online from mid-September to mid-November, including the author tour in October. To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to onemarylandonebook.org and click on Events.

After each One Maryland One Book program you attend, please visit omobfeedback.org and share your thoughts by taking our brief survey.

For all the latest information, "like" or follow us:

 [facebook.com/MDCenterfortheBook](https://www.facebook.com/MDCenterfortheBook)

 [@MDHumanities](https://twitter.com/MDHumanities)

 [@MDHumanities](https://www.instagram.com/MDHumanities)

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND CEO



Welcome! We are thrilled to have you join Maryland Humanities for the seventeenth year of One Maryland One Book, Maryland's largest reading and discussion program. Since 2008, the OMOB has brought together thousands of readers across the state to explore a specific work of literature through discussions at book clubs, libraries, colleges, museums, and more.

Literature has the power to delight, inform, and connect us. The OMOB is selected by a committee of distinguished members of Maryland's literary community. We hope this connects you to parts of your community in a new way.

What Storm, What Thunder is a novel that aptly captures this year's theme of Restorative Futures, as characters in and around Port-au-Prince, Haiti navigate how to move on in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquake. Crossing themes of class, race, religion, gender, and migration, it shows us how a community both fractures and repairs through trauma.

We at Maryland Humanities hope this book continues to affect readers with its lush, lyrical prose and interconnected perspectives that paint a vivid, loving mosaic of Haiti and its people. This book presents many opportunities to discuss how we envision moving forward after disaster.

We encourage you to pick up your copy of *What Storm, What Thunder* and join the conversation at one of our many public events across the state. This guide features discussion questions and a guide to further reading and learning, compiled by our partners at Baltimore County Public Library.

As a program of the Maryland Center for the Book at Maryland Humanities, One Maryland One Book is made possible each year through the generosity of our sponsors and community partners. We greatly thank them for their support. Find out more how to get involved at www.onemarylandonebook.org.

Please join us!

Alicia S. Jones, Board Chair
Lindsey Baker, CEO



Photo Credit: N. Affonso

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Myriam J. A. Chancy is the author most recently of the novel *Village Weavers* (Tin House). Her previous novel, *What Storm, What Thunder*, was named a best book of the year by NPR, *Kirkus*, *Library Journal*, the *Boston Globe*, and *The Globe and Mail*; shortlisted for the CALIBA Golden Poppy Award and Aspen Words Literary Prize; longlisted for the Brooklyn Public Library Book Prize and the OCM Bocas Prize; and awarded an ABA from the Before Columbus Foundation. Her past novels include *The Loneliness of Angels*, winner of the Guyana Prize for Literature Caribbean Award in Fiction; *The Scorpion's Claw*; and *Spirit of Haiti*, shortlisted for the Commonwealth Prize's Best First Book in Canada and the Caribbean. She is also the author of several academic monographs, including *Harvesting Haiti: Reflections on Unnatural Disasters* and *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*. Her recent writings have appeared in *Whetstone Magazine*, *Electric Literature*, and *Guernica*.

She is a Fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and HBA Chair in the Humanities at Scripps College in California.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Reprinted with permission from publisher

At the end of a long, sweltering day, an earthquake of 7.0 magnitude shakes the capital of Haiti, Port-au-Prince. Award-winning author Myriam J. A. Chancy masterfully charts the inner lives of the characters affected by the disaster—Richard, an expat and wealthy water-bottling executive with a secret daughter; the daughter, Anne, an architect who drafts affordable housing structures for a global NGO; a small-time drug trafficker, Leopold, who pines for a beautiful call girl; Sonia and her business partner, Dieudonné, who are followed by a man they believe is the vodou spirit of death; Didier, an emigrant musician who drives a taxi in Boston; Sara, a mother haunted by the ghosts of her children in an IDP camp; her husband, Olivier, an accountant forced to abandon the wife he loves; their son, Jonas, who haunts them both; and Ma Lou, the old woman selling produce in the market who remembers them all.

Brilliantly crafted, fiercely imagined, and deeply haunting, *What Storm, What Thunder* is a singular, stunning record, a reckoning of the heartbreaking trauma of disaster, and—at the same time—an unforgettable testimony to the tenacity of the human spirit.



MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION COMMON CORE STANDARDS

RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

RH.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RL.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

RL.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

GENERAL THEMES:

identity and culture; home and belonging; loss and grief; memory; love; family and community; parent-child relationships; sibling relationships; neglect and abandonment; generational trauma; racism and colorism; imperialism, exploitation and injustice; faith; communal violence and institutional violence; acceptance and letting go

Content Warning: suicide; physical abuse; sexual assault; neglect; depression and mental health struggle; sex work and drug dealing; racist hate and violence; sexist hate and violence; sexual relationships. Sexual Assault (pg 163-164); references to “fucking” (pg 239); Olivier’s section uses significant profanity to express pain, frustration, anger and hopelessness.

BEFORE READING QUESTIONS:

These questions can be used in an anticipation guide activity where students respond independently first and then share their responses with partners or as a fully independent activity, where students complete written reflections.

- What do you know about Haiti? Pull from any background knowledge you have - it can be what you’ve learned in school, what you’ve learned through television and/or media, what you’ve learned from family and friends, etc. Be as specific as possible!
- What lessons have you learned from your relationship with your parents/guardians? This could come from their presence or absence, and these lessons may be positive, negative, or somewhere in between. Be as specific as possible in your response.
- In your culture, when someone passes away, what are the traditions or rituals you engage in? This could be religious practices, ethnic practices, or just personal practices that you and/or your community do to honor their life and memory.
- When there is a tragedy that occurs to a particular community, what are some ways that people bear witness to that tragedy? Consider tragedies that may occur on the local, national or global level. Be as specific as possible in your response, using real-world examples.
- How do you define home? Is it a person, a place, a time period, a memory, a culture, or something else entirely? Be as specific as possible in your response!
- How does where you’re from influence who you are? Be as specific as possible in your response, using real-world examples.
- What lessons have you learned through your relationship with your siblings? These lessons may be positive, negative, or somewhere in between. Be as specific as possible in your response.
- How does a person’s experience with race and racism shape their perspective? Explain your answer with support from your own experiences with race.
- How does a person’s social class influence their values / beliefs? Explain your answer with support from your own experiences with social class.

BEFORE READING ACTIVITIES

Activity #1: Building Background Knowledge - Need To Know's

For a jigsaw activity, students are divided into small groups. Each group is tasked with becoming an “expert” on a particular topic, text, or idea. They complete their research and then “jigsaw” where they break out from their original expert group, and present their knowledge to other groups, taking notes on the other groups’ topics. [LINK: Check out this resource for more information on how to do a jigsaw activity with your students.](#)

- **Step #1:** Begin the activity by having students complete the first 2 columns of a K-W-L capture sheet about Haiti. KWL stands for Know, Want To Know, and Learned. Have students independently complete the K column, answering the question: What do I know about Haiti? Then have them work with a partner to come up with 1-2 questions for the W column, responding to the prompt: What do I want to know about Haiti?
- **Step #2:** Begin the activity by dividing students in groups of 4 to 5. Assign each group one of the following background knowledge topics: **Haitian revolution, NGO (non-governmental organization), Haitian vodou, Port-au-Prince, 2010 Haiti Earthquake.**
- **Step #3:** Have students work together with their group to explore two to three articles related to their topic and create digital infographics (consider: Canva, Google Slides) or posters to summarize 10 “Need To Know’s” about their topic - these should be 10 pieces of important information that would be beneficial to someone who knows nothing about their topic.
- **Step #4:** Have students “jigsaw” by making new groups that are made up with ONE student from each of the original groups. Now each group has 5 experts in it, for the five different topics. Have students present the information from their infographics to each other, sharing out what they’ve learned and taking notes on the other 4 topics to gain important background knowledge for the context of the novel overall.
- **Step #5:** Close the activity by having students fill in the column L(earn) on their K-W-L capture sheet, responding to the question: What have I learned about Haiti?

Potential resources for students to become “experts” on the 5 background knowledge topics:

- Haitian revolution
 - ['The Greatest Heist In History': How Haiti Was Forced To Pay Reparations For Freedom](#)
 - [Britannica: Haitian Revolution](#)
 - [Black Past: Haitian Revolution](#)
- NGO (non-governmental organization)
 - [Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO\): Definition, Example, and How It Works](#)
 - [Roles of NGOs](#)
 - [NGOs and their Role in the Global South](#)
- Haitian vodou
 - [Vodou is elusive and endangered, but it remains the soul of Haitian people](#)
 - [The Black religion that’s been maligned for centuries](#)
 - [Voodoo: the revolutionary roots of the most misunderstood religion](#)
- Port-au-Prince
 - [Britannica: Port-au-Prince](#)
 - [Black Past: Port-au-Prince](#)
 - [Doctors without Borders: Port-au-Prince](#)
- 2010 Haiti Earthquake
 - [Britannica: 2010 Haiti earthquake](#)
 - [Haiti in ruins: A look back at the 2010 earthquake](#)
 - [2010 Haiti Earthquake: 10 Years Later](#)

Activity #2: Multilingualism and Code-Switching

Throughout the novel, multiple characters speak in Haitian Creole (also spelled **kreyòl** in the text) as well as English, switching back and forth as they describe their various experiences to the reader. Complete this discussion based activity to get students thinking about the cultural significance of language and the value of multilingualism.

- **Step #1:** Begin the activity by having students discuss the following warm-up question with a partner/small group: *What is the value of language?* Push them to think about MULTIPLE ways that language is beneficial to humans: socially, culturally, interpersonally, emotionally, etc.
- **Step #2:** Independently or in groups, have students explore [this resource about the benefits of multilingualism](#) and then choose 2 additional resources to explore from the list below:
 - [Linguistic Code Switching: What It Is and Why It Happens](#)
 - [What Code-Switching Is and How It Works](#)
 - [5 Reasons Why People Code Switch](#)
 - [Britannica Topic: Haitian Creole](#)
 - [Haitian Creole is a Living Language](#)
- **Step #4:** For each of the 3 resources they explore, have students answer the following 3-2-1 prompt activity:
 - 3 Key Points From Each Resource
 - 2 Insights About The Benefits of Knowing Multiple Languages
 - 1 Important Quote And Why You Chose It
- **Step #5:** Have students share out their 3-2-1's with each other and discuss any/all of the following reflection questions:
 - Do you speak more than one language? If so, what is it?
 - What context do you use each language in? Consider: home, school, friends, family, work, etc. How do you decide what context is appropriate for what language you use? Can you think of a time when you used a particular language in what was considered "the wrong" context? Share what that experience was like for you.
 - What slang words do you use that are specific to your culture, nationality, geographic region, friend group, family, etc. Choose 1-2 of your most frequently used slang words/phrases and explain the meaning and what context you would use this word/phrase in.
 - Think back to a time when you used language that someone you were with was unfamiliar with. How did this affect your interaction with this person?
 - Think back to a time when you were around people who were speaking a language you did not know or understand. What was that experience like? What are the possible benefits of being exposed to languages you do not know?

Activity #3: Bearing Witness

One of the ways this novel functions is as a tool to bear witness to a tragedy. Literature is often used in this way, as are other forms of art and media. Complete this discussion based activity to get students ways they currently bear witnesses to local, national, and global tragedies.

- **Step #1:** Begin the activity by having students discuss the following warm-up question with a partner/small group: *Part A: Define the word tragedy. Part B: Explain what it means to "bear witness."*
- **Step #2:** Divide students into groups of 4-5, and have them generate a list of tragedies. Ask them to come up with 3-5 tragedies for each of the following categories: local, national, global. Work together as a class to come up with one example for each category together, so they have a starting point. Examples include: **local - The Francis Scott Key Baltimore Bridge Collapse, April 2024; national - The Titanic, 1912; global: COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020.** Encourage them to think about tragedies they've learned about in history class, through the news, through social media, from family members or friends, etc.
- **Step #3:** Using their lists, ask students to list different ways that people bear witness to these tragedies. To jump start their thinking, consider giving them the following list of examples: creating memorials, sharing images or articles on social media, donating to charities/organizations, creating art (books, poetry, movies, murals, etc) about the tragedy, creating media (news articles, documentaries, public service announcements, etc) about the tragedy, raising awareness through informational media or artwork, protesting for change, creating petitions for change, lower the flag, creating holidays to commemorate the tragedy, creating clothing to commemorate the tragedy, etc.
- **Step #4:** Ask students to consider literature as a tool to bear witness to tragedy by responding to any/all of the following reflection questions:
 - What stories have you engaged with that bear witness to a real life tragedy? These stories can be in any format: book, movie, documentary, comic, etc.
 - Why is it so common for humans to share stories of tragedies from our local, national and/or global past? What is the purpose of this? What is the benefit?
 - How can fictional storytelling be a tool for bearing witness to a real life tragedy? Consider what a narrative source can provide that a non-narrative source cannot.
 - Predict what you might be able to learn from this fictional novel *What Storm, What Thunder* about the Haitian earthquake that you could not get from a non-narrative source like a news article or documentary.
- **Step #5 - Bonus:** If time, ask students to select one of the tragedies from their list and create something to bear witness. They may consider creating: a drawing, a poem, a visual PSA, a social media post.

CHARACTER CONNECTIONS LIST

The main characters in the story are all interconnected, both through family and through their community in Port-au-Prince. Below they are listed along with their most relevant connections to other characters to help students keep track:

Ma Lou - mother of Richard; grandmother of Anne; maternal figure in her larger community of Port-au-Prince

Richard - estranged son of Ma Lou; estranged father of Anne

Anne - estranged daughter of Richard; granddaughter of Ma Lou

Sara - wife of Olivier; mother of Jonas

Olivier - husband of Sara; father of Jonas

Jonas - son of Sara and Olivier

Didier - brother of Sonia, Paul and Taffia; often referred to as Didi

Sonia - sister of Taffia, Paul and Didi; partner of Dieudonne

Taffia - sister of Sonia, Paul, and Didier

Leopold - business associate of Sonia and Dieudonne

CREOLE TERMS - QUICK GUIDE:

The majority of Creole (Kreyòl) terms used in the text are roughly translated by the author through context - however, here are a few that are not, that students will benefit from knowing the meaning of:

“Sak pase?”: What’s up? What’s happening? What’s going on?

Douz: 12; referring to the earthquake by the date it struck, the 12th of January in 2010

vodouisant: A practitioner of Vodou

soucouyant: a figure in Haitian and Caribbean folklore, typically an old woman, believed to shed his or her skin at night and travel in the form of a ball of fire, and to suck the blood of victims while they sleep

zonbi: A dead person under the influence of a Vodou sorcerer; the word zombie is derived from this word

goud: the currency of Haiti

bayakou: a sanitation worker who works to empty the fecal sludge out of pit latrines in Haiti, especially in larger cities, such as Port-au-Prince

READING QUESTIONS

Ma Lou, p. 5

- The novel opens with a traditional Vodou song about bones. What do bones do for the human body, literally? Based on the lyrics of this song, what larger idea could bones represent, symbolically?
- How did being sent to Catholic school as a child impact Ma Lou’s relationship with the Haitian cultural practice of Vodou? What benefits came with her Christian upbringing? What drawbacks?
- What does Ma Lou remember about Douz, the earthquake? Include details about what happens to the young boy Jonas and his family. Why do you think Ma Lou shared details about her relationship with Jonas before revealing to the reader what happened to him?
- What do we learn about Ma Lou’s son Richard? Be specific about what details she shares. What is the main source of tension in their relationship?
- Explain how the market women give people a “little corner of peace” (11) after the earthquake. What do people want from them and how is Ma Lou able to give it to them?

Sara, p.13

- Provide details about how Sara grew up. How do her childhood struggles shape her relationship with gratitude?
- Describe the life Sara and her husband Olivier build together. What was the atmosphere like in their home?
- On pg.20, Sara reveals that she is Jonas’s mother. How does this create a tonal shift for the audience, based on what they have previously read, both earlier in this section and in Ma Lou’s previous section?
- What happened to Sara’s family during the earthquake? Include details about her husband, her son, and her two daughters.
- Sara says that after the earthquake, she has crossed into an “in-between” (p.24) Explain what she means by this by sharing how her behavior and mental state change while she’s living in the aid camps after the earthquake.
- Describe the difference in the death rituals they have for people in Haiti before the earthquake, and the ones they have when people die in the aid camps after the earthquake. What death rituals exist in your own culture? How do they influence people’s grieving process?
- What steps does Sara take to interact with the spirits that keep tugging at her arm while she sleeps? Who does she believe this is? What aspect of her old life before the earthquake is it connected to?
- Characterize Sara at the end of this section. What aspects of her identity have come to define her in the aftermath of the earthquake? Consider her relationship with her husband, her role as a mother, and her connection to the spirit world in this section.
- Sara says that her husband’s nickname for her was wozo, meaning “reed...you bend but you do not break” (27). Based on what you’ve learned about Sara in this section, do you think this is an appropriate nickname? Explain why or why not.

Sonia, p.35

- Sonia says that her partner, Dieudonné, could sense that something terrible was coming on the day of the earthquake. What two signs - one scent and one sight - does he notice from the time he wakes up to when he makes his way down to the hotel bar?
- How do Sonia and Dieudonné escape when the hotel collapses in the earthquake?
- Why is Sonia considered a “fallen woman” (41)? Why does she face discrimination from her community for her choice of profession? How is this choice of profession empowering for her?
- Explain how both Sonia and Dieudonné are outsiders in their communities. What parts of their identity separate them from the people around them? What parts of their identities do they rely on to survive? How and why do they become reliant on each other?
- When Sonia is a little girl, she goes to work with her mother, who is a domestic worker in a rich family’s house. What does Sonia take notice of in this house? What does she find out about the connection between her and the daughter of the family who owns the house? How does this experience of going to work with her mother influence Sonia’s understanding of her choices in life as a woman of low socioeconomic status?
- What do Sonia and Dieudonné dream for themselves? How is dreaming an important component of ambition and hope? What difficult choices do both Sonia and Dieudonné make to pursue their dreams?

Richard, p.57

- Consider your relationship to water. How do you access water to drink and clean yourself? How does this compare to how Haitians are accessing water. How is your access to water related to your social class and where you live?
- Why is Richard trying to sell bottled water in Haiti? How does connecting this product to “the American Dream” (61) make it more desirable to the executives? What is problematic/unethical about this approach? Consider how access to water is related to social class for people living in Haiti.
- Explain why Richard compares the Haitian hotel to Las Vegas. What “excess [and] debauchery” does he witness while staying there?
- Explain what Richard means when he says, “I rebirthed myself. I am my own mother.” How does this reveal about his values? What does it reveal about his understanding of individuality versus family/community?
- Describe Richard’s relationship with Patricia. What does each person gain from being with the other? What does Richard try to “dominate” Patricia about that causes tension? What ultimately pushes Patricia to divorce Richard?
- Characterize Richard’s relationship with his children with Patricia and his daughter Anne. In what ways does he provide for and care for them? In what ways does he neglect them?
- While in Haiti, where does Richard go instead of visiting with his mother? How is this location related to his childhood?
- While he’s swimming, what do “the voices” tell Richard about his responsibilities as a father?
- Describe the final image of the chapter. What happens to Richard while he’s in the ocean and what could this symbolize?

Leopold, p. 97

- Why is Leopold interested in Sonia?
- What experiences does Leopold have as a child that push him away from innocence?
- Describe what the boys in the Boy Scout troop try to do to the turtle hatchlings (103). What does their behavior reveal about power and greed? Leopold brings the turtle hatchlings as an example of beauty. What is the larger message about how humans often regard natural beauty?
- When Leopold returns to the turtle beach as an adult, what is he doing (107)?
- How does Leopold get trapped in the elevator?
- Explain how Leopold’s choices as an adult lead to his mother’s distance from him: “she’d become less hopeful, didn’t believe in him like she used to” (107).
- How does Leopold’s behavior change after his six months in prison? Include details about changes he makes in his work life and his role as a father.
- What brings Leopold to Haiti? Explain how Haiti represents a kind of freedom for Leopold that he does not have back at home in Trinidad.
- Leopold reflects memories of his daughter Mathilde while trapped in the elevator. Describe the memory that involves seeing the scarlet ibis. What is the tone of this memory? What does it reveal about Leopold’s values as a parent?
- Characterize Leopold before and after the earthquake. Include the major changes that Leopold makes to his life after being rescued. How do Leopold’s experiences during the earthquake result in a shift in his character?

Taffia, p.129

- Why do people enjoy the show *Frijolito*? What elements remind them of their own family and culture?
- What happens to Tatíe in the earthquake?
- What does Taffia remember about how people worked together to assist with the dead and injured people?
- Taffia’s family says that after the earthquake, Taffia “screamed for two days” about “things I wish I could forget” (130). Describe what Taffia is screaming about - what does she witness that was so scarring?
- Describe how people adapt to life in the aid camps. How do people support each other? How do people take advantage of each other?
- Taffia notes that Paul begins to spend time with “the night prowlers” (135). Who are the night prowlers and what they do in the aid camps? What does their behavior reveal about how power and greed can become prominent in a crisis?
- While living in the aid camps, how is rain both “a blessing and a curse” (137)?
- When foreigners put a manager in charge of the aid camp and give the manager a significantly better tent, how do the rest of the refugees respond? What is the symbolic meaning of their response?
- How is Tatíe’s TV a tool for building community and connecting across social class?
- Taffia explains that she “learned a few things” watching the telenovelas (143). Explain what she learns about: deception, beauty standards and racism/colorism, family, acceptance vs rejection; gender roles and stereotypes. Which of these lessons that Taffia learns do you think are relevant in our society today?
- Taffia’s brother Didi sends Taffia a music box. Which songs deeply affect her and why?

- Describe the social hierarchy that exists at Taffia’s school. What gives people like Selena and Stevenson power? What roles are people like Taffia relegated to?
- How does Paul’s physicality and reputation change as he spends more time with the night prowler boys in the aid camp? How do these changes impact his mental state?
- What do Junior and the night prowler boys do to Taffia? How is this connected back to Junior’s treatment of Taffia at school and at the club? Explain how fear, power, rejection are factors in their violent interaction.
- The year ends with the birth of Taffia’s son. Explain how this birth impacts multiple women in the aid camp.

Didier, p. 171

- What does Didier admire about Ma Lou? Compare this with Richard’s observations about her as his mother. What qualities does Didier recognize in her that Richard does not?
- How does driving a cab in Boston make Didier “find out what it means to be black in America” (177). Describe the experiences he has that help him define Blackness. What does he learn about whiteness in America as well?
- Historically, how do people relate to dogs in Haiti, and why (183)? How is this different from how people relate to dogs in America? Based on Didier’s observations, what do dogs symbolize in America? Include the incident with the dog and red car on the highway in your explanation.
- What is a Makout, and how are they related to traditional masculinity and power? Why is Paul drawn to them, and why is Didi disturbed by them (187-188)?
- What happens when Guy sends Didi to South Boston? What judgements/stereotypes does Guy have about Haitian immigrants specifically that contribute to his decision to let Didi “walk into a trap” (191)?
- Guy gives Didi a dog, Siwo, when he is recovering. How does caring for Siwo impact Didi’s mental health?
- What is Didi’s intention when he sends Taffia the music player? What does he hope the songs will convey to her?
- Didi is with a woman from Bangladesh when he hears the news about the earthquake in Haiti. How does she show care for him in this situation? How does she also show disregard/coldness towards his situation? How does the woman’s perspective on tragedy and loss contrast with Didi’s?
- At the beginning of his section, Didier says that as a result of his experiences in America, he “did all there was left to do: I got religion” (172). After reading his section, explain which of his experiences you believe prompted him to become religious.

Olivier, p. 229

- Olivier is an accountant and he opens his section describing how the money from the international community is allocated and spent after the earthquake. What is his perspective on why the market women would actually know how to spend the money to best serve the Haitian community?
- Summarize Olivier’s social commentary on corruption and how American greed and capitalism impact the Haitian experience with receiving direct aid after the earthquake. What is the “white saviors promise” to refugees if they leave the aid camps in the capital city and go out to the camps in the desert (232-233) - and why is this “promise” problematic?
- Describe Olivier’s tone in the beginning of this section. Select three inner thoughts that he shares about his family, his limited choices after the earthquake, and the US relief services. How have his experiences impacted his emotional state?
- How do Olivier and other men respond to the jackals (who we also know as the night prowlers)? According to Olivier, what are the potential motivations for this response (239-240)?
- Explain what Olivier means when he says that “philanthropy is a form of necrophilia” (242). In your explanation, include where the donations to relief funds are actually going and why they aren’t getting to the people suffering on the ground.
- What is the difference in Olivier’s response to Jonas’s leg injury compared to his wife Sara’s response? How does he deal with witnessing so much pain compared to her?
- Olivier slowly confesses choices that he’s made to survive the aftermath of the earthquake. Explain these choices, including ones he made regarding his son, his wife, and leaving the original aid camp. How do these choices impact his sense of self worth?
- Summarize the story of Olivier’s grandfather and the Italian plantation owner (249-250). What does this story reveal about greed and exploitation? What is Olivier’s regret about how his ambition to reclaim this land changed when he got married?
- After being attacked by the jackals (night prowlers), Olivier says “I am no longer a man. I am of no use” (252). Explain what he means by this statement. What is he feeling and why does he feel this way?
- Even though Olivier makes the choice to throw himself in front of the water truck, make an argument that his death is not entirely his fault. What circumstances pushed Olivier down this path and left him in such a hopeless mental state? What is the larger message about how government power, corruption and neglect can have personal consequences that make life unbearable?

Anne, p. 255

- Where is Anne when she learns about the earthquake?
- What degree do both Lucien and Anne have? How do they hope to use their degrees to help Haiti?
- Anne says that soon the “disaster vultures would descend on the island” (258). How has housing after the earthquake been turned into a profitable business opportunity? What is problematic about companies trying to make money off of a natural disaster?
- In what ways does Kigali, Rwanda remind Anne of Port-au-Prince? Consider what similarities exist between these two places after the Rwandan genocide and the Haitian earthquake.

- Describe how Anne works to track people and relocate people in Haiti during the weeks after the earthquake. How does she go about tracking people? How is she treated by Haitians living in the aid camps? How does hearing the refugees' stories impact Anne? What incident does she witness that pushes her breaking point?
- Characterize Anne's relationship with Ma Lou. How does she provide support to Anne throughout her childhood, and how does she support Anne while Anne is working in Haiti.
- Explain how Anne grieves her mother and her father in different ways. Compare how Anne feels throughout her mother's declining health and death versus how Anne feels when finds out about her father's death in the newspaper (278-280).
- What was unique about the murals in Holy Trinity Cathedral, a Haitian church that had been built by "an African-American led congregation" (281)? What happens to the murals after the earthquake?
- Anne decides to enter the competition for rebuilding the Notre-Dame Cathedral. What does she draw inspiration from for her submission in the competition? Why does she want to keep the ruins of the old cathedral? Why does she believe ruins are valuable?

Jonas, p. 289

- Jonas opens his section by referencing the number 12 and its significance. How is this number related to his life before the earthquake? How is it related to the day of the earthquake? How is it related to his injured life after the earthquake?
- How does Jonas describe his existence after death? Explain how he interacts with his mother, his sisters and his father.
- Why do you think the author includes this section with Jonas's point of view? He has already been mentioned in several other character's perspectives. So what does hearing from him directly about his experiences reveal about the tragedy of this earthquake?

Ma Lou, p. 295

- Explain what Ma Lou means when she says, "mourning came to have only one meaning: letting go" (296). What are some of the ways that Ma Lou witnesses people working to process and let go of their grief? What are some ways that people work to process and let go of their grief in our society today?
- Why does Ma Lou attempt to dig up her husband and family's bones? What does she tell the judge about why the bones are significant?
- Where do Ma Lou, Anne, Taffia, and Sara go to cleanse and bury the bones? Why does Ma Lou choose this place?
- Explain the significance of the final scene of the women in the waterfall. How does the water help them honor the ones they've lost and put their grief to rest?

Richard
p.57**Access to Water**

In the novel, Richard is a wealthy executive who sells bottled water. Use his chapter to take a closer look at the bottled water industry and discuss their own relationship with access to water.

Resources to consider including:

- [Bottled Water Market](#)
- [The fight to stop Nestle from taking America's water to sell in plastic bottles](#)
- [UN: Bottled water industry can undermine progress towards safe water](#)
- [The plastic water bottle industry is booming. Here's why that's a problem.](#)
- [A look into the injustices of bottled water](#)
- [The twisted story of how bottled water took over the world](#)
- [How the bottled water industry is masking countries' failures to supply drinking water for all](#)

Taffia
p.129**Television**

In Taffia's chapter, Taffia discusses how Tatie's TV is a tool for building community and connecting with people across social class. She also notes that the show *Frijolito* teaches her lessons about social norms and expectations regarding race, class and gender. Use Taffia's experience to have a discussion about the power and impact of television in our society today. Then have students choose a popular TV show and explain the lessons and message that the show presents to its viewers about society.

Music

Taffia's brother Didier sends her a music player with a collection of songs that he hopes will have a deep impact on her. Use Taffia's experience listening to these songs and Didier's experience putting the songs list together to have a discussion about the power and impact of music. Then have students create their own playlist. This can either be a playlist for themselves or a soundtrack for a character, selecting and explaining songs that are important to them or songs that represent the character's experience.

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <p>Didier p. 171</p> | <p>Race, Discrimination and Boston</p> <p>In Didi’s chapter, he talks about how his experiences as a cab driver in Boston teach him “what it means to be black in America” (177). Use this chapter, as well as outside resources, to have students take a closer look at Boston’s history with racism. Have students consider what they already know about Boston and what they learn about its history with race and discrimination.</p> <p>Resources to consider including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why Boston has a racist reputation among Black Americans, and what’s changing • A deeper look at hate crimes against people of color in Boston • Busing in Boston • How Has Boston Gotten Away with Being Segregated for So Long? • The Direct Line Between Slavery And Racism In Boston • Boston’s Racist Past Haunts Its Present |
|--------------------------|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Olivier p. 229</p> <p>Anne p. 255</p> | <p>NGOs and Relief Funds</p> <p>In their chapters, both Anne and Olivier are critical of the NGOs and relief organizations in Haiti after the earthquake. Anne says that soon after the earthquake, the “disaster vultures would descend on the island” (258). Use her chapter along with Olivier’s chapter, as well as outside resources, to have students take a closer look at NGOs and relief funds, researching their effectiveness after the earthquake in Haiti. Then have students choose a different tragedy - Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, Maui Wildfires, etc - and repeat this research process. What NGOs and relief funds were involved in the response to these tragedies, and how effective were they?</p> <p>Resources to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complicated story of NGOs in post-disaster Haiti • Are Foreign NGOs Rebuilding Haiti or Cashing In? • Lessons From Ineffective NGOs in Haiti • In Search Of The Red Cross' \$500 Million In Haiti Relief • Haiti 10 years later: What happened to the billions pledged to help the people of Haiti? • How the Red Cross Raised Half a Billion Dollars for Haiti and Built 6 Homes |
|--|--|

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <p>Ma Lou p. 295</p> | <p>Death Rituals</p> <p>Use this chapter to have students take a closer look at Saut d’Eau, the waterfall that Ma Lou visits with Anne, Sara, Taffia and Sonia at the end of the novel to put her family’s bones to rest. Then have students do research about other death rituals around the globe, to discuss the death rituals that exist in their own cultures, and reflect on how rituals are an important part of grief, acceptance, and honoring those who have died.</p> <p>Resources to consider including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the trail of the Vodou pilgrimage to Saut d’Eau • How coronavirus is changing the ways we grieve and mourn the dead • Funeral customs from around the world • 7 Unique Burial Rituals Across the World |
|--------------------------|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Consider:</p> <p>Ma Lou p. 5</p> <p>Sara p. 13</p> <p>Sonia P.35</p> <p>Taffia p.129</p> <p>Ma Lou p. 295</p> | <p>Haitian Womanhood</p> <p>Have students focus on the chapters from women’s perspectives, as well as additional outside resources, and discuss the struggles and challenges that were unique to Haitian women during this crisis, and how they are still working to address these issues today.</p> <p>Resources to consider including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Years After Haiti’s Earthquake, Women Are Still Shattered by Sexual Exploitation • Haiti: Earthquake Recovery Failing Women and Girls • Women’s status in Haiti 10 Years After The Earthquake • The earth hasn’t stopped shaking for women: Haiti earthquake 14 years later • Haiti’s Women Face New Struggle To Survive • The Haitian Women’s Collective • Haitian women and girls empowered by UN Women amid humanitarian crisis |
|--|---|

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Any chapters | <p>Belonging</p> <p>Read “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon with your students. Have students write an “I Am From” poem for the perspective of a specific character from the story and/or from their own perspective. Use this link for an example poem template. Encourage students to use specific imagery - sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch - in a similar way to Lyon’s poem, that engages the reader’s senses and helps the reader understand the character’s experiences from the novel.</p> |
| Any chapters | <p>Poetry & Perspective</p> <p>Have students analyze one or more poems that are a response to the earthquake in Haiti. They can put these poems in conversation with the perspectives presented in the novel, discussing why it is important to engage with multiple perspectives when it comes to learning about a particular event, community, and culture.</p> <p>Poems to consider including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 12, 2010 by Lionel Trouillot • Seasons of Grief by Guy-Gerald Menard • Earthquake in Haiti by Muhammad Shanazar • Haiti by Jennifer Rahim • Under the Rubble by Guy-Gerald Menard • Port-au-Prince on an IV Drip by Louis-Philippe Dalembert • Poems of Solidarity for Haiti |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Any chapters | <p>Intersectionality</p> <p><i>Intersectionality</i> is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a prominent Black woman scholar and American civil rights advocate, currently a professor at UCLA School of Law and Columbia Law School. Create a discussion-based activity that uses the questions and follows the steps below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step #1: Look at an identity wheel (like this one) and list as many parts of their identity as you can • Step #2: Based on your list, choose 3 parts of your identity that you believe impact your day to day lives THE MOST. Write one sentence about WHY you chose each part, incorporating examples/evidence from your life if possible. • Step #3: Based on your list, choose 3 parts of your identity that you believe MOST SIGNIFICANTLY impacts how OTHER PEOPLE view you and/or treat you. Write one sentence about WHY you chose each part, incorporating examples/evidence from your life if possible. • Step #4: Based on your list, choose 1 part of your identity that you believe gives you power OR limits your power in society today. Write one sentence about WHY you chose this part, incorporating examples/evidence from your life if possible. • Step #5: Watch this video. According to this video, what is intersectionality? What parts of Emma DeGraffenreid’s identity impacted how she was treated by the business that refused to hire her? What can intersectionality help us understand about social justice and about how people are viewed and/or treated in society? • Step #6: During or After Reading The Novel: Think back through the sections of the novel. Focus on one or more of the main characters in the novel, and answer the following questions with examples from the story: What parts of identity have the biggest impact on this character? How do multiple aspects of this character’s identity impact the way they are viewed and/or treated by others in the story? Do any parts of their identity either give them power or limit their power? • Bonus Step #7: Interested in investigating further? Read this article from Global Citizen.org and this article from Columbia School of Law! |
|--------------|---|

POWERFUL PASSAGES: CLOSE READING RECOMMENDATIONS

Close reading is the careful analysis of a brief but significant passage in the text where the author uses multiple specific language features to convey a particular effect (theme, tone, characterization, etc). These can be used for discussion or for students to reference when writing language analysis essays.

Recommended close reading passages include:

- Page 9 - 10: Tone
- Bottom of page 11 - 12: Theme
- Page 21: Characterization
- Page 53 - top of 54: Theme
- Page 147 - top of 148: Theme
- Page 170: Theme
- Page 198 - top of 199: Theme
- Page 226: Theme
- Page 231 - 233: Theme and Characterization
- Page 307: Theme



AFTER READING - ESSAY (OR DISCUSSION) QUESTIONS

Theme: Loss of Innocence and Coming of Age

Sonia notes that she doesn't want to have children because so many children in her family and community struggle to "keep some shred of innocence" (54). In literature, a coming of age story is typically about a character's experiences transitioning from the innocence of childhood into the (sometimes harsh) realities of adulthood. Write an essay that analyzes loss of innocence in the novel. What experiences rob characters of their innocence, both before and after the earthquake? How does this loss of innocence shape their understanding of the world as adults? Characters to consider include: Leopold, Paul, Taffia, Jonas, Anne, and Didier. What truths or understandings about loss of innocence does Chancy reveal through these characters' experiences?

Theme: Hope and Faith

Didier claims that "Haitians will believe in anything that gives them hope" (172). Write an essay analyzing hope and faith in the novel. Who and/or what do characters put their faith in and why? How do characters find and/or hold onto hope in moments of trauma and crisis? Characters to consider include: Didier, Taffia, Anne, Ma Lou, Richard, Sonia, and/or Leopold. What truths or understandings about hope and faith does Chancy reveal through these characters' experiences?

Theme: Home

Much of Chancy's novel focuses on the complexity of home. Write an essay where you analyze one or more character's definitions of home. For this character(s), is home a place, a person, a memory, a culture, a relationship, a period of time - or something else entirely? Your analysis should include a distinct definition of home from that character's perspective, supported by evidence in the text that demonstrates this definition.

Theme: Family

Much of Chancy's novel focuses on complex relationships within families. Write an essay where you examine a main character's relationship with their family and how the earthquake influences said relationship. Start by considering the character's role within their family that defines them - are they a parent, a child, a sibling, etc. Then analyze what lessons the character learns through their relationships with their family members. Be sure to specify how these relationships have impacted the character's understanding of themselves. This may include their beliefs, their values, their desires, their hostilities, their obligations, etc.

Theme: Beauty vs Depravity

Leopold comments that his time in Haiti is full of both beauty and depravity, and he wonders "which of them would be more likely to survive" (127). Write an essay that explores events and experiences throughout the novel that hold both beauty and depravity. What lessons do characters take away from these experiences? What truths or understandings about beauty and depravity does Chancy reveal through these events and experiences?

Theme: Power

Much of Chancy's novel focuses on the struggle for power in Haiti, both before the earthquake and in the aftermath. Write an essay that analyzes the role of power in the novel. Choose one to three characters and discuss how they use their power. Who uses their power to abuse, harm and/or exploit versus who uses their power to care for and/or empower others? What motivates these choices? What part(s) of each character's identity give or limit their power in Haitian society? Consider aspects of identity such as: gender, social class, education level, etc. What truths or understandings about power does Chancy reveal through these characters' experiences?

Theme: Community

Didier claims that one thing he learns from driving the cab is "that there is no such thing as community" (226). Do you think the author believes this is true? Write an essay that responds to this statement, commenting on the role of community in this novel. Which characters belong to a community and which characters are isolated? What are the benefits of either? What are the drawbacks? How does the connection to a community, or lack thereof, impact the characters' experiences' and their understanding of the world?

Motif: Water

In literature, a motif is a feature that recurs across a story that has symbolic significance. Write an essay that analyzes water as a motif in the novel. Consider when water comes up throughout the story. What does it represent in each different context? How is it used as a tool to provide insights about larger themes such as: identity/culture, grief, greed, community, power and survival? Support your analysis with evidence from multiple sections of the text.

Characterization and Perspective

Throughout the novel, readers hear directly from twelve different characters, many of whom are interconnected, and comment on one another. Select a focus character who has their own section in the novel. What do we learn about this focus character from the section written in their perspective? Then identify one to two additional sections where someone else provides an alternative perspective about your focus character. How do these additional perspectives change the reader's understanding of your focus character? What new insights do these additional perspectives provide about your focus character - about their motivations, their values / beliefs, their behaviors, etc.

The content and resources of this guide were created by Shannon James. Portions have been reprinted with permission from Tin House Books.

One Maryland One Book is presented in partnership with Howard County Library System and is sponsored by The Institute of Museum and Library Services via the Maryland State Library Agency, with additional support from PNC Foundation.

Maryland Humanities is an educational nonprofit organization. Our mission is to create and support educational experiences in the humanities that inspire all Marylanders to embrace lifelong learning, exchange ideas openly, and enrich their communities. To learn more, visit mdhumanities.org.



Maryland Humanities
3600 Clipper Mill Road
Suite 320
Baltimore, MD 21211

(410) 685-0095
www.mdhumanities.org

A PROGRAM OF



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



SPONSORED BY

