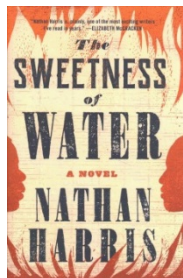


Community Raving About Books

(C.R.A.B.) Book Club Guide



***The Sweetness of Water* by Nathan Harris**

Little Brown, 2021; 368 pages/audio 12 hours

“As the best writers can do, Nathan takes us back in time, and helps us to feel we are right there with Prentiss and Landry as they get their first taste of freedom. I rooted for them, and feared for them too.”

—Oprah Daily, 6/15/2021

Summary

In the waning days of the Civil War, brothers Prentiss and Landry, freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, seek refuge on the homestead of George Walker and his wife, Isabelle. The Walkers, wracked by the loss of their only son to the war, hire the brothers to work their farm, hoping through an unexpected friendship to stanch their grief. Prentiss and Landry, meanwhile, plan to save money for the journey north and a chance to reunite with their mother, who was sold away when they were boys. Parallel to their story runs a forbidden romance between two Confederate soldiers. The young men, recently returned from the war to the town of Old Ox, hold their trysts in the woods. But when their secret is discovered, the resulting chaos, including a murder, unleashes convulsive repercussions on the entire community. In the aftermath of so much turmoil, it is Isabelle who emerges as an unlikely leader, proffering a healing vision for the land and for the newly free citizens of Old Ox.

Author Information

Nathan Harris holds an MFA from the Michener Center at the University of Texas. He is a recipient of the University of Oregon's Kidd Prize and was a finalist for the Tennessee Williams Fiction Prize. He lives in Austin, Texas. *The Sweetness of Water* is his first novel.

If you liked this book, try these!

The Water Dancer by Ta-Nehisi Coates

The Known World by Edward P. Jones

Sorrowland by Rivers Solomon

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Sample Discussion Questions for *The Sweetness of Water* by Nathan Harris
Source: PGCMLS Selection Department staff

What do you think is the significance of the title?

Several of the characters deliberately seek out solitude and silence. Yet, when they do speak out finally, disaster ensues. Was Caleb right to speak up about how Landry was killed? Should Isabelle have told off the members of the dinner party in defense of her husband? Why did Landry reveal that he can talk just when it was most prudent to keep silent? Are you ever motivated to speak out or act up in spite of the danger?

Why does George continue to seek the “beast” even after he learns it was just a trick?

How many of the issues explored in this novel do you think still have relevance today?

In the last sentence of the book, Isabelle is thinking, "Yet sometimes - just sometimes - hope was enough." Was this a hopeful story? What gives you hope in difficult times?