

**Book Club Questions for  
Let Us Descend by Jesmyn Ward**

1. How does Jesmyn Ward use magical realism in "Let Us Descend" to convey the harrowing experiences of the characters, especially Annis? What effect does the inclusion of spirits and the supernatural have on the overall narrative?
2. Annis faces immense challenges, including separation from her loved ones, starvation, and mistreatment. How does her inner strength and resilience shape her character throughout the story? In what ways does she find moments of hope and connection amidst the horrors of slavery?
3. The novel incorporates elements from Dante's "Inferno." How does this literary reference enhance the story's depth and meaning? How does Annis's journey mirror or deviate from Dante's descent into hell?
4. The book explores the relationships between family members, even in the face of extreme adversity. How do the interactions between Annis, her mother, and the spirits of her ancestors illuminate the themes of love, loss, and familial connections?
5. In what ways does "Let Us Descend" shed light on the brutal realities of slavery in pre-Civil War America? How does the author's meticulous research and historical accuracy contribute to the novel's impact?
6. The novel has been criticized for its portrayal of sexual slavery. How did you perceive Ward's approach to this sensitive topic? Did it contribute to the depth of the characters or feel gratuitous?
7. The narrative employs stream-of-consciousness style, particularly in Annis's thoughts and reflections. How does this writing technique enhance the emotional intensity of the story? How does it help readers connect with Annis on a deeper level?
8. The novel discusses the plaçage system in New Orleans, a practice where white men formed relationships with free women of color. How did Ward handle this topic, and what insights did it provide into the complexities of race, power, and relationships during that time?
9. Language is an important aspect of the novel. Ward weaves dialects and metaphors into the characters' speech. How did the language contribute to the authenticity of the story, and did you find it effective in immersing you in the historical setting?

10. How did Annis's relationships with her mother, Safi, and others shape her identity and resilience throughout the story?
11. Given the extensive historical and literary references in the novel, do you think these elements enriched the story or made it more challenging to engage with? Did you find the allusions to Dante's *Inferno* and other historical events enhanced your understanding of Annis's journey?
12. How does Jesmyn Ward's prose style influence the reader's experience? Can you identify specific passages or descriptions that left a lasting impression on you?
13. Annis's encounters with the spirits of her ancestors are a significant aspect of the story. How do these spiritual connections serve as a source of guidance and strength for Annis? How do they contribute to the novel's themes of heritage and resilience?
14. Considering the challenging themes and graphic scenes in the book, how did you personally cope with the emotional impact of the story? Did any particular moments resonate with you strongly?
15. Jesmyn Ward is known for her ability to explore complex themes of grief, joy, and resilience. How does "Let Us Descend" contribute to the broader discussion of Black American history and culture? In what ways does it challenge or redefine traditional narratives surrounding slavery and its aftermath?