

Book Club Questions for The Poisonwood Bible

1. How does the Price family dynamic change over the course of the novel? How does each family member cope with the challenges they face in the Congo, and how do these challenges shape their relationships with one another?
2. The story is narrated from the perspectives of Orleanna and her four daughters. How do these multiple narrators enhance or alter your understanding of the events in the novel? Whose perspective did you find most compelling, and why?
3. Explore the novel's portrayal of religion, particularly Nathan Price's evangelical beliefs. How does his unwavering faith impact the family and their interactions with the Congolese people? What commentary do you think the author is making about religious zealotry?
4. What significance does the title phrase, "the poisonwood bible," hold in the context of the main characters' lives and the novel's central themes? How does the origin of this phrase play a crucial role in understanding its implications within the story?
5. Barbara Kingsolver carefully crafts the distinct voices of the Price sisters. How does each sister's perspective provide insights into her personality, relationships with others, especially their parents, and their experiences in Africa? How does the narrative effect change when seen through the sisters' eyes?
6. The Kikongo word "nommo" carries profound meanings related to being and naming. What parallels can be drawn between nommo and Christian beliefs? How do the sisters' Christian names and their Kikongo names reflect their individual traits and behaviors?
7. Characters in the novel have diverse beliefs about justice. Leah, in particular, reflects on her understanding of justice. How do different characters define justice, and do you think any true justice prevails by the novel's conclusion?
8. Adah, Leah, and Rachel each arrive at their own philosophies of life. What story does Adah believe in, and how does it differ from the beliefs of her sisters? How would you characterize their respective life philosophies, and which, if any, do you find most compelling?

9. Discuss the cultural clash between the Price family, representing Western ideals, and the Congolese people. How does this clash manifest in various aspects of the story, including language, customs, and traditions? What does the novel reveal about the complexities of cultural understanding and acceptance?
10. Each of the Price daughters undergoes significant personal growth. How do Leah, Adah, Rachel, and Ruth May evolve throughout the novel? What pivotal moments contribute to their development, and how do their experiences in the Congo shape their identities?
11. Consider the backdrop of political events in the Congo during the 1950s and 1960s. How does the political climate influence the characters' lives and decisions? What impact do colonialism and the fight for independence have on the narrative?
12. Explore the symbolism in the novel, such as the poisonwood tree itself. What does the tree represent, and how does it reflect the larger themes of the story? Are there other symbols that stood out to you, and what do they signify?
13. Barbara Kingsolver tackles complex social, political, and environmental issues in this novel. How does her perspective as an author influence the way these themes are portrayed? Do you think the novel presents a balanced view of these issues, or does it lean in a particular direction?
14. How do various characters embody different forms of balance or imbalance? Are specific characters associated with particular types of balance? Does any sister ultimately convey the importance of balance?
15. Explore the cultural, social, and religious disparities between Africa and America as portrayed in the novel. To what extent do Orleanna and her daughters grasp these differences? What do you think Kingsolver is trying to convey regarding these cultural distinctions?
16. Nathan Price, the family patriarch, does not have a voice of his own in the narrative. What insights do we gather about his beliefs and actions through his wife and daughters? Is it crucial to understand his perspective, or does the story gain depth without it?
17. What types of captivity and freedom are examined in the novel? How do various characters experience and cope with these emotions? What are the underlying causes and outcomes of each?

18. Several characters, including Nathan Price, face moments of redemption or self-realization. Which characters do you believe experience redemption, and what leads to these moments of change? Are there characters who do not find redemption, and why?
19. The novel concludes with ambiguity, as the carved-animal woman denies the existence of certain villages. What do you interpret from this ambiguous ending, and how does it reflect the broader themes of the novel?
20. The novel has received both praise and criticism for its portrayal of Christianity and the Western perspective. How did your own beliefs and background influence your reading experience? Did your opinions about the characters or the story change as you progressed through the novel?