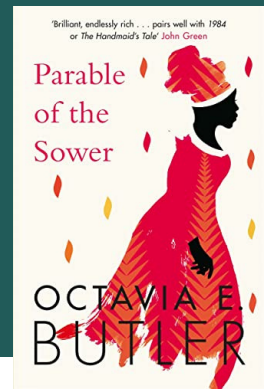


# Discussion Questions

## Parable of the Sower

### by Octavia E. Butler



- The near future of Parable of the Sower reflects an America steeped in chaos with relentless poverty and lawlessness. Education is no longer guaranteed for everyone and violence is rampant. The author has said that she came to this vision of the future by imagining our current woes progressing unchecked to their logical ends. Do you agree or disagree that this is a possible future for America? In terms of government and societal stability as well as future technological advancements, in what ways do you believe America will change in the next 20+ years? Do you think things will be better or worse than they are now?
- If the theme of this novel was reduced to a bumper sticker it would be, "God is change." What did you make of this theology? Is Earthseed a system of beliefs that appeals to you? Have you ever considered change as a religious experience?
- Lauren Olamina has hyperempathy syndrome, an illness that gives her the delusion that she feels both the pain and pleasure of those around her. Do you think it is significant that this is a congenital disease she contracted because her mother was a drug abuser? How has this illness made Lauren different from those around her? Why was she unable to tell anyone about it? Why do you suppose it is significant to the story that she has this illness?
- Why does Jo react so negatively to Lauren's concerns about being better prepared as a community and as individuals to face crises? Do you think that Lauren's ideas, including community night watches and studying local wild plant life to see if it can be used for food, are excessively paranoid? Lauren's father pointed out that the community as a whole had trouble thinking far ahead and into such sensitive areas. Do you see ways in which people in today's America are equally unable to think ahead?
- How does drug use and addiction shape the lives of individuals and society throughout the book? Did you find these portrayals realistic and/or relatable?

- Why do you think Butler draws parallels between slavery in the early United States and Parable of the Sower's 21st-century economy?
- What do you think seeds and acorns symbolize in Parable of the Sower?
- How do the lessons of the biblical parable of the sower from Luke 8:5–8, quoted in Chapter 25, apply to Lauren Olamina and other characters? What relationship do you see between this parable and the novel? Why do you think Butler chose Parable of the Sower for the title?
- According to Lauren, "The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars." She feels that we must go, "Beyond Mars. Other star systems. Living worlds." What are your thoughts about space exploration? Is it an important use of resources? Do you think humanity's future is among the stars?
- Lauren Olamina says, "That's the ultimate Earthseed aim, and the ultimate human change short of death. It's a destiny we'd better pursue if we hope to be anything other than smooth skinned dinosaurs — here today, gone tomorrow, our bones mixed with the bones and ashes of our cities." What do you think about the possibility of humans becoming extinct? Do you think this is possible, and how do you think it would happen? Do you think this is something we have any control over?
- How does the novel guide us in thinking about building networks, especially when others might not share beliefs with us? Must we all believe the same thing to build together?
- An important issue in this novel is how well people know one another and when and how to trust people. How do you learn to trust? How much do you have to know about a person in order to trust that person? What sort of lessons about trust do you think this novel holds for us? Do you think that it is easier or harder to trust people in our current social situation?