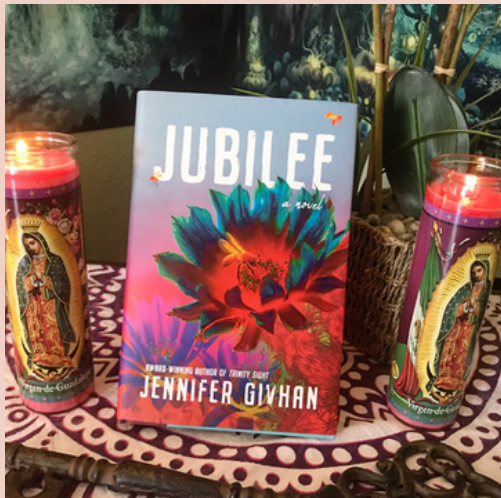


Book Club Jubilee

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Discussion

1. The author has said about JUBILEE, “There are so many other factors at play as the novel charts Bianca’s unlearning of many of the harmful, patriarchal ideologies that she internalized growing up on the border... She has to learn to mother herself whole, and she does that by becoming a mother, at first figuratively, through Jubilee. The world cannot see Jubilee as the beautifully magical real tool for healing that she is, and they tend to see only the mental health stigma including delusion. Upon these backdrops, Bianca’s story unfolds.” The novel is centered around motherhood and mental health problems, and Bianca so desperately wants to be a mother but is met by obstacles trying to deem her “unfit” because of her attachment to Jubilee. How does this dynamic shape her life? How does the novel’s treatment of motherhood affect your view of what it means to be a mother. Is Bianca a mother throughout the novel? Why or why not?

2. In an interview with *Writer's Digest*, the author has said that she fell in love with Jubilee and hopes readers will see her as the magical real symbol of hope that Givhan intended her to be. As a Reborn doll who is so lifelike, Jubilee may fall into the uncanny valley for some, as Joshua discusses in the book (page 52 hardcover). Why doesn't Jubilee fall into the uncanny valley for Joshua? How do those around Bianca feel about Jubilee? Does the doll fall into the uncanny valley for you? Why or why not?

3. The story of La Llorona is mentioned several times throughout the book, a woman who supposedly drowned her kids in a fit of grief and madness, then immediately regretted it and cried out on the riverbanks for them ever since, snatching children she mistook for her own. How does Bianca relate to La Llorona and how does the book as a whole function as a retelling of La Llorona?

4. The author has said in interviews, "The trauma in JUBILEE is inspired by my girlhood as a Chicana on the Mexicali border of Southern California, experiencing the cultural stigmas in the Mexican-American community toward teenage sexuality, childbearing, abortions, miscarriages, and violent relationships with machismo boys and men." How does JUBILEE portray machismo and the toxic ideologies surrounding manhood and womanhood, and how do these portrayals shape Bianca's journey toward self-discovery and healing?

5. How do the poems and poetic *Letters to Jubilee* function throughout the novel? What purpose do they serve for the storytelling, characterization, and a deeper understanding of Bianca? Do they contextualize her mindset and emotions, for instance? Do they make her a more understandable and sympathetic character although she is also an unreliable narrator?

6. The novel uses magical real and surreal techniques throughout, quoting surrealist painters and utilizing lyric imagery that has a dreamlike, fever-dream quality. Since magical realism often creates a unique tone and atmosphere of wonder, magic, mystery, or just a sense of strangeness, what effect do these techniques have on Bianca's story, including her internal journey? Consider the landscape of the Imperial Valley and how the place itself becomes a character in the novel.

7. The author has stated that she was inspired by Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and how the heinous act that Sethe commits in the story is recast through the social and magical real lenses of post-structuralism so that Sethe becomes a sympathetic character and we readers can understand her plight as an individual mother and representative of the larger, unjust system around her. How does Bianca's journey likewise provide a lens into the larger culture around her? How does she, like Sethe, take her baby somewhere she can keep her safe?

8. The author often reads "Nightbloom" at readings of *JUBILEE* because it gets at the heart of the novel, for her, and she feels the theme can be boiled down to the last words of that chapter: "A daughter doesn't solve anything; she needed her mama to tell her this. But she makes the world a lot less lonely. A lot less ugly" (111). Where do you see examples of this thematic center playing out throughout the novel?

9. Why do you think Joshua stayed with Bianca, even after he realized the extent of her mental health crisis? Are his reasons at all logical, or purely emotional? Can you envision a scenario in which you might stay with someone you love for similar reasons?

10. Family support is also at the heart of this novel. How might things have been different for Bianca if her family had supported her earlier in her life? How do they change throughout the novel alongside Bianca and Jubilee?

11. Talk about Jayden's role in the novel. The author has said that in some ways, he was inspired by her son, whom she and her husband adopted as a newborn when the couple was just 23-years-old. How does the adoption storyline support the themes about motherhood/parenthood?