

Reader's Guide to Salvage the Bones by Jesmyn Ward.

UAA/APU Books of the Year 2018-2020 *Community Resilience*

What challenges do Esch and her family face before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina? How would you describe the Batiste family before the storm? How does each family member demonstrate resilience regarding the challenges they face as individuals and as a family? How would you describe the family after the storm?

The setting for Salvage the Bones is the fictional community of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi. How would you describe it and the Pit, the location where the Batiste family has lived for generations? What would it be like to grow up in Bois Sauvage? What are gender and race relations like there, and how do you know?

How do the family members' actions as they anticipate and weather Hurricane Katrina work in their favor or work against them? What role does the larger community of Bois Sauvage play in the build up to and the aftermath of the hurricane?

The novel opens with a scene of a pit bull giving birth to a litter of puppies. How does each member of the Batiste family react to the puppies' birth and what do we learn about each of them as a result?

Why is Skeetah so bound to China and her puppies? How does his relationship with his dog illuminate the bonds among the Batiste siblings, particularly in the absence of their mother? What does Esch learn about mothering from watching China with her puppies?

Compare the portrayal of Hurricane Katrina in Salvage the Bones with news coverage of the actual storm or of another recent extreme-weather event that has threatened human beings. How does the book's depiction of devastation enlarge your understanding of the dangers posed by climate change?

Discuss the presence of Mama in the novel. How does she live on in her husband's and her children's memories?

How do Esch's feelings about her pregnancy evolve through the chapters of the novel? How does her love of Greek mythology sustain her through the challenges posed by the pregnancy and her feelings for Manny?

Daddy seems to know that a storm is on its way before anyone else does. How does he know this, and how do his family and his community react to his early preparations? Why do his preparations fail to protect his family from the force of the hurricane?

Chapter Five shares the title of the novel. How does the phrase "salvage the bones" help you to understand both the chapter and the novel?

What do you think about the violence depicted in this novel (China's killing of her puppy, Daddy's loss of his fingers, the dogfight(s), the hurricane)? How does the violence influence the book's portrayals of love?

At the end of the novel, Big Henry tells Esch, "This baby got plenty of daddies" (255). Who are the "daddies" who will help Esch raise her child? What does each one have to offer?

Does Esch's gender cause her to experience the book's events differently than her brothers or her father do?

What does this novel say to you? Does it affect your thinking about climate change and personal and community resilience? If so, how?