

Discussion Points for Readers of *Kindred*

Prologue

How does the title *Kindred* tell the story of Dana? How does it relate to the other characters? To our society as a whole?

What was Butler's motivation in writing *Kindred*?

How does the prologue set up the story? Why does Butler use such a device? What tone does the first sentence of the Prologue set for your reading of the novel?

Abusive behavior occurs throughout the book and is assumed by the police investigating Dana's injury. In what ways does this novel address or illuminate issues of domestic violence?

The River

What sources of conflict have there been between Dana and her husband Kevin before Dana goes to the past? How do these conflicts affect them during their time in the past?

The Fire

What role does Rufus's mother have in the formation of his character, and is Rufus strongly influenced by her?

Why does the author have Dana go back and forth in time as opposed to just being thrust back to the plantation for the duration of the book?

Stereotypes are often addressed in Butler's novels, including *Kindred*. In *Kindred*, how does the author, with her various characterizations, reveal the origins of stereotypes? How does she deflate them?

Paradox refers to something that may seem contradictory, but nevertheless may be true. What paradoxes are found in this section?

The Fall

How do Dana and Kevin experience their time in the past differently? For example, when they witness a group of slave children acting out the scene of a slave auction, how do each of them react? What does this reveal about their characters?

Dana is cast back to antebellum Maryland to save the life of young Rufus, a slave owner's son. As she repeatedly does so, staying longer and longer in the past and getting to know Rufus as he grows into a man, how does she influence him and his attitudes toward slavery?

Dana and Kevin discuss how they cannot change history. Why, then, does Butler send Dana back in time, the driving narrative force of the novel? In terms of not altering history, could Dana have chosen not to save Rufus?

How do the characters in *Kindred* assume the roles assigned them? How do they resist?

The Fight

Issues of difference are often addressed in *Kindred*. How does the author present various dichotomies such as black and white, master and slave? What other such differences does she challenge the reader to consider, and how?

What are the similarities between Dana's relationship with Rufus and her relationship with Kevin?

Communication (or lack thereof) is a theme that runs throughout the novel. Consider Carrie, who is unable to speak, but can still "talk." How do the different characters communicate with each other, especially over time?

The Storm

What are the similarities between Dana and Alice? Why does Dana survive and Alice does not?

What is the difference between a house slave and a field slave? How does Dana understand and react to the distinctions? Are there any contemporary parallels?

How do the different plantation slaves react to their own circumstances and to Dana's?

The Rope and Epilogue

In *Kindred*, how do the psychological affects of slavery and slave ownership on men differ from the affects on women? Do these injuries have any contemporary parallels?

Butler addresses the complex issue of slavery on many levels, raising important questions. Consider these questions for yourself: How does physical slavery occur? How do people become mentally enslaved? What affect does slavery in our past have on our contemporary society?

When Dana returns with Kevin to the present day, she says that she "never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery." How does this reflect current attitudes about race and ethnicity?