

## The Darkest Child—Reading Group Guide

1. Rozelle Quinn was the child of a rape which left her mother permanently injured. What effect did this have on Rozelle's upbringing? On her ability to mother her own children? Did she exhibit any maternal feelings toward her children? What instances of good treatment by her mother did Tangy Mae recall?
2. As the book opens, did Tangy Mae really believe her mother was dying? If she did, how could she have remained so innocent? Would things have been different today? How is the loss of Tangy's innocence reflected in her telling of the story? Do you think Rozelle would have explained about "the birds and the bees" to any of her children? How traumatic would it have been to be forced into performing sexual acts with no knowledge of what to expect? In matters pertaining to her mother's sexuality, was Tangy Mae truly naïve, in a state of denial, or neither?
3. Rozelle has been brutal but she has never killed one of her children until she throws Judy from the porch (Chapter 27). She is convincing when she tells the sheriff it was an accident. Why does Tangy momentarily refuse to believe her own senses? When she thinks "No mother could do that, not even mine. Could she?," who or what is she questioning?
4. Rozelle began to have children long before birth control pills were legal. Do you think she would have used "the pill" if it had been available? Rozelle says of Judy's birth, "It broke something inside me they can't fix. Had to take it out...said I couldn't have no mo', and all I got was a darkie." Do you think Rozelle hated Judy because she was dark-skinned or because her birth ended Rozelle's childbearing days?
5. What effect did Rozelle's appearance have on her mental condition? What benefit if any did she derive from her beauty? What was the effect upon her of the difference between her treatment by white society and the treatment she would have been accorded if she had been "passing" as white? Did this disparity between appearance and reality have an effect on her mental stability? What does Rozelle expect from life in Pakersfield other than honor from her children?
6. How is Mushy different from her mother? How did she manage to leave the family to go to work in Cleveland? Did this experience really change her? Is Tangy Mae right to judge her for her drinking? Why has she returned to Pakersfield? What were Mushy's options?
7. Did Junior Fess have the right idea? Could he have proceeded differently and still been true to himself? Why did Rozelle keep silent about what she knew had happened to him?
8. Why didn't Tarabelle retrieve "the box" while her mother was in the hospital? Why did she wait for her eighteenth birthday? Tarabelle tries to murder her mother. Why is she so much more angry than the other children? Was she justified? Should she have honored her mother even though her mother did not honor her? What were Rozelle's feelings for Tarabelle?
9. The Sheriff's job is contingent on the respect of the townspeople. Could that be the reason he denies Sam as a son? Knowing Rozelle's history, do you believe Sam was the Sheriff's son? Is there ever any indication that the Sheriff cared for Sam? Did Sam care for anyone other than his mother? Was

the burning of the town's stores by Sam and his friends an act of protest against racism, a selfish response to Junior's murder and Sam's incarceration, or a combination of many things?

10. Despite her mother's disparagement, and the demeaning things she has had to endure, Tangy Mae retains her pride and ambition. How has she been able to survive and become a good person? Where does her strength come from? When she leaves at the end of the book, could she have done anything else? Was she selfish to leave? Should she have taken Laura with her?