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Nina Revoyr

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LMU COMMON BOOK: READERS' GUIDE

SOUTHLAND

BY NINA REVOYR

Consider some of the following questions as you read or discuss the Common Book. We'd love to hear your thoughts, too!

Share them with us at commonbook@lmu.edu. You can also connect with us at [facebook.com/lmucommonbook](https://www.facebook.com/lmucommonbook), or by using the #lmucommonbook hashtag.

Structure

- Who is the protagonist in the novel? Is there more than one protagonist presented? If so, who?
- The chapters are labeled by year, sometimes with characters names and year, and they are presented without a chronological sequence. How does this organization affect the reader's experience and understanding? Why would a writer choose to tell a story in this manner?
- What changes more across the decades represented, the character of the people depicted, the social attitudes and norms, or the city's landscape?
- What is the narrative purpose of depicting a love affair in decline (Jackie and Laura's) alongside a detective story into a murder?

Historic Events

- What are the similarities and differences between Manzanar and the neighborhood where Frank Sakai's store is located? How are they similar to and different from the neighborhood where Jackie's family moved after the Watt's riots in the mid-sixties?
- In what ways have race relations improved since the 1965 and 1992 Watts and LA riots? In what ways have they not?
- Why does society refer to the social justice events that took place in the Watts and Los Angeles area in 1965 and 1992 as riots? What is the difference between a "riot" and an "uprising"?

Neighborhoods / Place

- How did the opportunities available to Jackie and her sister differ from those available to Curtis Martindale and James Lanier? How did Jackie's family move lessen her possibility of living a life similar to Curtis and James?
- How have the demographics of the locals in the story changed between 1930 and the mid-1990s when the story ends? What factors influenced those demographic changes?
- Where are the locations mentioned in the book relative to one another?
- How does the built environment encourage community and divide it? What is the difference between creating a ghetto, forming an enclave, and fostering a community?
- How does access to transportation, or lack thereof, affect this story?
- What kinds of spaces allow people of different backgrounds to meet and mingle? What kinds of places reinforce divides between people?
- How do government policies depicted in the novel shape the trajectory of characters and the narrative?

Racial Segregation

- How does racial segregation affect the outcome of Southland?
- In your opinion, does racial segregation still exist today? If so, in what ways are they depicted?

Relationships

- How did Jackie's relationship with her grandfather differ from that of her relationship with her parents and her aunt? Consider your own relationships with different generations in your family.
- How is Jackie's sexual identity important to the novel? How might it have been a different story if she were heterosexual?
- Does love have a redemptive purpose in this novel, and for whom?
- In what ways do these characters combine romantic love with sex and in what ways do they keep the two distinct?

Self-Identification

- America is considered a melting pot; however, we are not blending well. How long does it take for one to be considered "American" after being the first in their family to be born in the United States?
- What does it mean to be American?

Science and Technology

- How might the technology available today have changed the events in the book, if they were available in 1930? During the internment at Manzanar? During the Watts Riots? In the mid-90s?
- What is the typical temperature of a freezer like the one in Frank Sakai's store? How long would the boys have been able to survive locked in the freezer?