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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

The First Part Last

by

Angela Johnson

(New York: Simon & Schuster BFYR, 2010)

Author:

Angela Johnson, born June 18, 1961 in Tuskegee Alabama once commented: "I don't believe the magic of listening to Wilma Mitchell read us stories after lunch will ever be repeated for me. Book people came to life. They sat beside me in Maple Grove School. That is when I knew. I asked for a diary that year and have not stopped writing. My family, especially my grandfather and father, are storytellers and those spoken words sit beside me too.

"In high school I wrote punk poetry that went with my razor blade necklace. At that point in my life my writing was personal and angry. I didn't want anyone to like it. I didn't want to be in the school literary magazine, or to be praised for something that I really didn't want understood. Of course, ten years later, I hope that my writing is universal and speaks to everyone who reads it. I still have the necklace, though."

Johnson attended Kent State University and has worked with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Ravenna, OH, as a child development worker, 1981-82; and is currently a free-lance writer of children's books. [From aalbc.com]

Summary:

Bobby is a typical urban New York City teenager -- impulsive, eager, restless. For his sixteenth birthday he cuts school with his two best buddies, grabs a couple of slices at his favorite pizza joint, catches a flick at a nearby multiplex, and gets some news from his girlfriend, Nia, that changes his life forever: He's going to be a father. Suddenly things like school and house parties and fun times with friends are replaced by visits to Nia's pediatrician and countless social workers who all say that the only way for Nia and Bobby to lead a normal life is to put their baby up for adoption. Then tragedy strikes Nia, and Bobby finds himself in the role of single, teenage father. Because his child -- their child -- is all that remains of his lost love.

With powerful language and keen insight, Johnson tells the story of a young man's struggle to figure out what "the right thing" is and then to do it. The result is a gripping portrayal of a single teenage parenthood from the point of view of a young on the threshold of becoming a man. [From aalbc.com]

Questions:

1. Describe how Bobby and Nia's parents react to the news of her pregnancy. How would your parents react?
2. Find a quote that most reveals who Bobby is as a person. Explain why you picked it.
3. Can you think of three examples that show what kind of father Bobby is to Feather?
4. What do you think is the most difficult thing for Bobby? Why? Consider this question after a few chapters, then again at the end of the novel and see if the answer changes.
5. What do you think will happen to these people ten years into the future?
6. What questions would you ask Bobby?
7. What questions would you ask Mary?
8. What questions you would ask Nia?
9. On page 36 Bobby says, ". . . which pisses her off and makes her scream, and then I look around my room and miss me." What do you think he means?
10. Angela Johnson tells the story backwards. Why do you think she chose this way to tell the story?
11. How would you cope if you were Bobby?
12. Would you make the same choices? Why or why not?
13. How would you cope if you were Nia?
14. Would you make the same choices? Why or why not?
15. If Bobby had Nia's help with Feather would he be a different father?
16. What makes you think so?
17. Do you agree with Mary and Fred's approach to grandparenthood? Why or why not?
18. How do you think your life would change as a teenager if you suddenly had the responsibility of an infant? List the things you do every day now. Make a new one based on a life with baby.

[YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee]