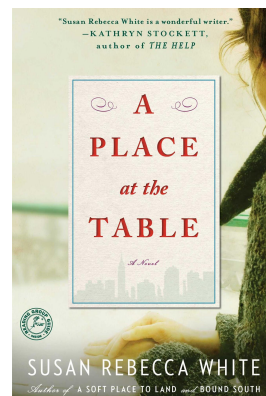


Discussion Questions

A Place at the Table

Susan Rebecca White



1. In Alice's prologue, language is a symbol of empowerment and oppression for her family. Her relatives both pride themselves on their ability to speak well and manipulate their speech to avoid social conflict. Are there other instances in the story where language and speech are politicized in a similar way?
 2. Alice, Bobby, and Amelia escape to New York City to start over. Why do you think the author chose New York City? Would any other city work as well for the characters?
 3. Cafe Andres is loosely based on Cafe Nicholson, a historic Manhattan restaurant known for its clientele. Can you think of any other restaurants that you have visited or heard of that are similar?
 4. Cooking is practically a religious experience for Bobby. Why do you think cooking heals his spiritual wounds in such a way that even moving away from home cannot cure? Does Amelia have a similar experience?
 5. In order to assimilate his recipes into the cafe's menu, Bobby invents what he calls "stealth southern cuisine," which is a combination of his Southern cooking methods and the cafe's French-inspired cuisine. What are some other hybrid food genres? Which is your favorite?
 6. After Bobby's "failed" first dinner with Alice and subsequent promotion, he describes the experience as one where "the universe delivered me a beautiful gift wrapped in hideous packaging." Does Bobby receive similar gifts at any other point in the novel? Could Bobby's friendship with Alice after Sebastian's death be considered such a gift?
 7. Bobby struggles with religion throughout the story and is notably rejected from the Catholic communion. If you were Bobby, how would you have reacted to such a rejection? Is it possible for Bobby to resolve his issues with faith and religion?
 8. In her discussion with Bobby about grief food, Alice says, "Cooking is the one thing that has never failed me." Is this true for other characters in the novel?
 9. There are many boundaries in the story from racial segregation to religious and sexual orientation differences. What cultural tension is the most harmful in the novel and does it still exist in society today?
 10. Where do you envision the characters are today if they lived in the real world?
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