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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

A Land More Kind Than Home by Wiley Cash

Summary

For a curious boy like Jess Hall, growing up in Marshall means trouble when you get caught spying on grown-ups.

Adventurous and precocious, Jess is protective of his older brother, Christopher, a mute whom everyone calls Stump. Though their mother has warned them not to snoop, Stump can't help sneaking a look at something he's not supposed to—an act that will have repercussions. It's a wrenching event that thrusts Jess into an adulthood for which he's not prepared.

He now knows that a new understanding can bring not only danger and evil—but also the possibility of freedom and deliverance.

Told by resonant and evocative characters, *A Land More Kind Than Home* is a haunting tale of courage in the face of cruelty and the power of love to overcome the darkness that lives in us all.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the epigraph the author chose to open the book and from which the novel's title derives. What is the significance of this particular quote? How does it set the novel's tone and mood? Explain what the title—"a land more kind than home"—signifies.
2. The novel is told from three characters' perspectives. How does this add to the story and deepen it as it unfolds? How might it be different if it had been told from only one of the character's point of view?
3. Talk about Carson Chambliss. Describe his character. Why does he have such a magnetic hold on his congregation, and especially on Julie? Is Julie a good mother? Can you understand why she behaved the way she did? Do you think she understood the truth of her son, Stump's fate? Why is Addie so afraid of him?
4. How might the events of the story have unfolded differently if Jess had told his mother the truth about what she heard at the Sunday afternoon service?

5. Describe this small North Carolina town in which the story takes place. What is it like? How does its size and remoteness influence the lives of those who call it home? Sheriff Clem Barfield is not native to Madison County. How does this impact the way he sees this place and its people?
6. How can religion uplift a person's soul? How can it be corrupting influence? Julie considers herself to be a "good Christian woman." What do you think? Whether you are Christian or not, religious or not, what is your definition of a "good Christian?" Is anyone in the novel virtuous, and if so, in what way?
7. Why did Addie pull the children out of Chambliss's services? Did she have any other options?
8. When Jess asks his grandpa if Stump will be able to talk in heaven, Jimmy tells him, "Of course he will. We'll all be able to talk. And we'll be able to understand each other." What does his answer reveal about him and the world? What is he trying to teach Jess?
9. Think about Jimmy Hall. What kind of relationship does she have with his son? What about with Sheriff Barefield?
10. Can this novel be compared to a Shakespearean tragedy? If so, in what ways? Think about various stories and proverbs from the Bible. How are they reflected in the story?
11. What role does nature and the natural world play in the novel?
12. Addie believes that this place and its people will be saved in the wake of tragedy. Do you believe in salvation? What role does forgiveness play in this story? Do you think people can change for the better? What about Jimmy Hall? How do the novel's events impact his relationship with the sheriff and with his grandson, Jess?
13. Think about the novel's themes: revenge, faith, betrayal, goodness and evil, forgiveness and understanding. Choose a character and show how these themes are demonstrated through his or her life.

Summary and Discussion Questions from the publisher.