

READING GROUP GUIDE

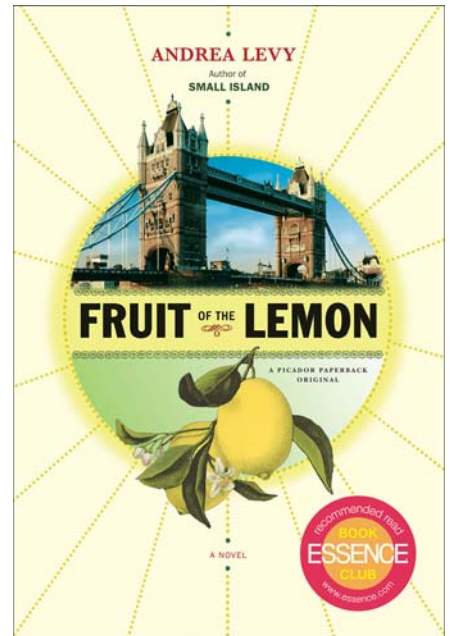
Fruit of the Lemon

A Novel

by Andrea Levy

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Fruit of the Lemon* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Fruit of the Lemon*.

About the Book

Faith Jackson knows little about her parent's lives before they moved to England. Happy to be starting her first job in the costume department at BBC television, and to be sharing a house with friends, Faith is full of hope and expectation. But when her parents announce that they are moving "home" to Jamaica, Faith's fragile sense of her identity is threatened. Angry and perplexed as to why her parents would move to a country they so rarely mention, Faith becomes increasingly aware of the covert and public racism of her daily life, at home and at work.

At her parent's suggestion, in the hope it will help her to understand where she comes from, Faith goes to Jamaica for the first time. There she meets her Aunt Coral, whose storytelling provides Faith with ancestors, whose lives reach from Cuba and Panama to Harlem and Scotland. Branch by branch, story by story, Faith scales the family tree, and discovers her own vibrant heritage, which is far richer and wilder than she could have imagined.

Fruit of the Lemon spans countries and centuries, exploring questions of race and identity with humor and a freshness, and confirms Andrea Levy as one of our most exciting contemporary novelists.

“Levy's raw sense of realism and depth of feeling infuses every line.”

—*Elle*

“Bright and inventive . . . Levy's command of voices, whether English or Jamaican, is fine, fresh and funny.”

—*The Observer*

“Always refreshingly undogmatic . . . [readers] will recognize the truthfulness of the world which Andrea Levy describes.”

—*The Sunday Telegraph*

“A thoughtful comment on racism and the importance of knowing where you are from.”

—*The Sunday Times*

“At times, you might even be tempted to read bits and pieces aloud, just to hear the lyrical quality of the Jamaican-accented English. Though Levy writes specifically about black Jamaican Britons and their struggles to be acknowledged as full members of the larger society, her novel illuminates the general situation facing all children of postcolonial immigrants across the West....”

—Uzodinma Iweala, *The New York Times Book Review*

“The author draws on her deep wellspring of inspiration, the history and dislocation that has informed all of her fiction, rooted as it is in the black-British working-class immigrant experience, as observed from the perspective of the second generation . . . Unassuming though Levy's empathetic talent may appear to be, her gift for incisive social commentary is wholly evident in this low-key novel.”

—*The Miami Herald*

About the Author

Born in 1956 to Jamaican parents, Andrea Levy is the author of three previous novels. She lives and works in London.

Discussion Questions

1. The first sentences and the last sentences of *Fruit of the Lemon* reflect each other. What does the author accomplish by doing this? What does this say about how far Faith has come? How has she changed?
2. What was the first thing you noticed about Faith's relationship with her family compared to her relationship with her housemates? How is she different in the two worlds? Discuss the concept of cultural assimilation, as it appears in *Fruit of the Lemon*. Do you believe such a

thing exists? How voluntary is it on Faith's part? Have you ever experienced the feeling of being "Other"? Where is Faith most comfortable?

3. Examine the racism Faith encounters. How does she react to it, and why? Have you ever encountered or witnessed it? Is it different from the racism of supremacist groups? How would you have reacted, in Faith's situations?
4. Why is Faith so upset about her parents moving back to Jamaica? Why is Carl not? How are Faith and Carl different from each other? What does being black mean to them? What does being Jamaican mean to them? What does being Londoners mean to them?
5. Discuss the ideas of identity, family and community. How are they established and influenced, specifically in the characters of Faith and Marion? How does race factor into these ideas? How does being first-generation (the child of immigrants) factor in?
6. What are the dynamics of Faith and Marion's relationship? How does it change? How does Marion use feminism to disguise her feelings about race? Are gender and race comparable? Which is more of an influence?
7. Examine the scene on pages 137-143. What does it reveal about Faith and her life? How do Carl and Ruth perceive her? How does she perceive them? Why does Ruth become hostile toward her? What do you think of Ruth in retrospect, knowing that she has been raised in a white family?
8. How does Faith confront the racism she encounters? Reread the scene in the pub, with Simon, his mother, and the man who talks to Faith about Jamaica. How does each of the characters react to the man's story? Why does Faith express regret over telling the man about slave names? How does the man react to it? What happens in the dialogue between Faith and Simon's mother, afterwards? What is your impression of Simon's mother?
9. What motivates Faith's decision to visit Jamaica? Is there a final straw? How does she feel on the journey there, and once she arrives in the airport? Have ever you experienced something similar? How are things both familiar and foreign at the same time? What are Faith's first impressions of her family, especially Auntie Coral? How is her perception affected?
10. There is a major change in narration when Faith is in Jamaica. Why do you think this happens, and what does it indicate? Consider what Coral says on page 185: "You must have lost time somewhere...You can't leave England and come all that way without losing some bit of yourself." How does the movement of time within the story change? What are Faith's feelings of displacement? How does she begin to recognize herself within her family and Coral's stories?
11. When did you first notice a change in Faith? Examine the chapter 'Wade's Story Told to Me by Violet.' How does her idea of her parents change? Could you identify with her? Consider the idea of the 'Mother Country.' Where does this term come from, and what does that have to do with Faith? What does the 'Mother Country' mean, historically, emotionally and metaphorically?

12. Discuss Faith's realizations in the last few pages of the book. What do they reveal about parents and children? How has Faith's perception of race and racism changed? About her parents and friends? Why do you think that Faith never wanted to hear her parents talk about Jamaica? How has her relationship with them changed?
13. Did *Fruit of the Lemon* change your ideas about race and racism? What subtleties did it reveal? How familiar or unfamiliar was Faith and her story? How did your perception of her change? What does *Fruit of the Lemon* say about self-realization?

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