



Reading Group Gold

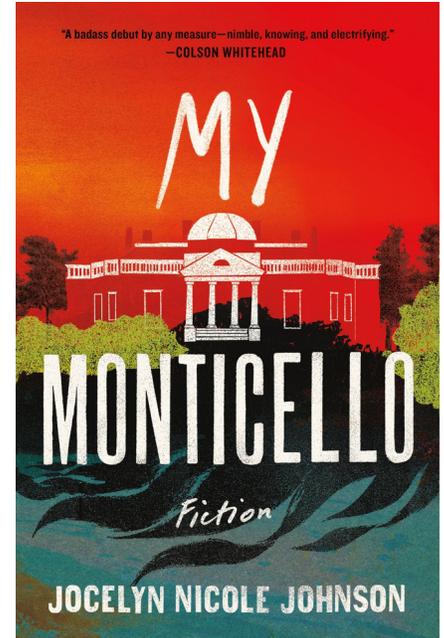
My Monticello

Fiction

by Jocelyn Nicole Johnson

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Each story in *My Monticello* along with the novella take place in the state of Virginia. How is Virginia a character in this book?
2. How does the author explore the theme of home? Who is permitted to fully claim America as ‘home’ and what are the costs of exclusion? What are the individual costs of separation, for those excluded and for those included?
3. The characters in stories and novella are all facing great personal challenges within their internal and external worlds. The author approaches these stories using first, second third person and in varying forms—for example “Buying a House Ahead of the Apocalypse” takes shape in the form of a list. What impact does each narration choice and form have on the story and on you as a reader?
4. Most of the pieces in *My Monticello* are centered in some way on the relationships between parents and children—whether they be students struggling to get adults to see who they really are (“Something Sweet on Out Tongues”), or adult children trying to make sense of family legacies (“Virginia is Not Your Home” and “My Monticello”). What are some of the challenges in these relationships? Do you relate to any of the generational and/or familial strains highlighted by some of the characters?
5. Johnson makes references to recent events related to racial discrimination, violence, and climate change. In the novella, she imparts a lot of historical information about Sally Hemmings and Thomas Jefferson. What role does history play in the short stories and the novella? What can we learn from “the others who lived, dream and died” in this country?



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6. The diverse cast of characters in “My Monticello” find their way to Jefferson’s plantation home in an attempt to survive the white mob that has forced them out of their own homes. On “this little mountain,” they make an attempt to create a society based on mutual care and respect, and in many of the short stories, like “The King of Xandria,” there is palpable love expressed in the struggle to survive and do what is right for loved ones. What do the stories and the novella have to say individually and as a whole about a path toward a future that honors all who dwell in America and the land itself?