

# FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### TIME'S MEMORY

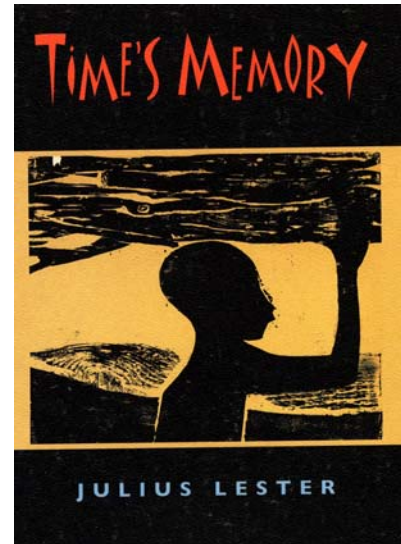
by Julius Lester

#### Reading Level

Grades 9 and up / Young adult

#### About the Novel

Amina, a young West African woman stolen from her village, is on a slave ship when she discovers she is pregnant. Amina soon realizes that this is no ordinary baby, and after arriving in America, she gives birth to Ekundayo, a young man sent by the creator god Amma, the master of life and death. Amma is worried. His people have always known how to take care of the spirits of the dead—the *nyama*—so that they don't become destructive forces among the living. But amid the chaos of the African slave trade and the brutality of American slavery, too many of his people are dying and their souls are being ignored in this new land. Amma sends Ekundayo to a plantation in Virginia, where he becomes a slave on the eve of the Civil War. Amma hopes that Ekundayo will be able to find a way to bring peace to the *nyama* before it is too late. But Ekundayo can see only sorrow in this land—sorrow in the ownership of people, in the slaves who have been separated from their children and spouses, in the restless spirits of the dead, and in his own forbidden relationship with his master's daughter. How Ekundayo finds a way to bring peace to both the living and the dead makes this an unforgettable journey into the slave experience.



#### Discussion Questions

- The book is divided into three parts. Why do you think the author structured the book like this? What is the main theme of each part?
- How do the epilogue and prologue act as “bookends” and help you understand who is narrating the story, who is recording the story, and why? How do they work in tandem with the body of the book?
- Why is it important that Nathaniel tell the whole story of his ancestors, from the time they first became enslaved?
- How does Julius Lester's use of a multi-perspective narrative affect the telling of the book?
- The first chapter of Part One opens with Josiah Willingham, a grieving man who has lost his faith in God and who is regretting his part in the slave trade. How does this set the tone for the book?
- Throughout the story, the author offers information to define the word *nyama*. By the end of the book, what do you understand *nyama* to mean? How would you compare *nyama* to similar terms from other religions and philosophies?

- “Words were as alive as any man, woman, or child. They had an odor . . .” (p. 31) On several occasions the truthfulness of a speaker’s words is measured by the tangible quality of smell. How do we evaluate someone’s words? What do we say when we believe someone’s words to be truthful? To be false?
- In Part One, Chapter 5, the author uses the term “Time’s memory” for the first time. Julius Lester challenges the concept of linear time in the structure of *TIME’S MEMORY*. Had you thought of time, of history, in this way before? Why did the author choose this as the title of the book?
- In the Author’s Note, Julius Lester states, “The story is perhaps one of the most autobiographical I’ve ever written.” (p. 228) What do you think he means?
- A dream inspired Julius Lester to begin writing *TIME’S MEMORY*. What role do dreams play in the novel? (e.g., p. 44)
- The narrator says in the Prologue: “We are more than our personal memories.” How does this statement affect or change your ideas about memoirs and memoir writing?
- What kind of information would you need to collect or find out in order to write your own “Time’s memory”?

#### **About the Author**

Julius Lester began his career as a musician, photographer, and political activist in the 1960s. Since 1968 he has written more than forty books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for children and adults. Among the awards accorded his books are a Newbery Honor citation, a *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Award, and National Book and National Book Critics Circle award nominations. He lives in Belchertown, Massachusetts.

#### ***Time’s Memory***

by Julius Lester

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#### **FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX**

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