

Jump at the Sun

by Kim McLarin

Harper Collins

A Reading and Discussion Guide

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Upham's Corner Branch, Boston Public Library

Massachusetts
Honor Book
2007



SUMMARY

What is more important, the needs of your loved ones or your sense of self? This is the question Grace, the central character of *Jump at the Sun*, grapples with when her family moves to the Northeast and she gives up her academic career to be a stay-at-home mom. This internal struggle is especially difficult for her because of the decisions her mother and grandmother made when raising their own children.

Grace's grandmother, Rae, a sharecropper's daughter and wife in Mississippi, chose to leave her children whenever the whim took her. Her mother, Maddie, chose the opposite route, giving everything for the good of her children, to the point that there was nothing left to nourish her own soul.

Grace's fears that she is the worst mother are compounded by a sense of guilt that she is the beneficiary of the results of generations of racial struggle and that she is not grateful enough or making enough use of her advantages as a well-educated, upper-middle-class, modern black woman.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Grace is feeling so trapped? What changes would make her happy? Are these changes that she needs to make internally or are they things outside influences?
2. As the story begins Grace is locked in the basement accidentally, how is this a metaphor for her larger life situation?
3. This book is structured with three women in one family each telling her own story, did you like the way the narrator switched? To which of the women did you relate best?
4. Compare Grace's mother and grandmother to her mother in law. How are they similar, how are they different?

5. What role does race play in the book? Are Grace's feeling about her family universal or are they unique to ethnic minorities who have struggled to achieve the trappings of success?
6. What role does Place play in the story? Is the northeast a metaphor for a standoffish atmosphere?
7. What is Grace's relationship with her mother and/or grandmother? How does her own struggles with motherhood effect these relationships? How is she like and unlike the other women in her own parenting choices?
8. In this book about mothers what is the role of the fathers? What do these roles say about the characters and the society McLairn portrays?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kim McLarin is the author of the critically-acclaimed novels *Taming it Down* and *Meeting of the Waters*, both published by William Morrow. She is a former staff writer for *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Greensboro News & Record* and the Associated Press. She is currently writer-in-residence at Emerson College in Boston.

[From Author website: kimmclarin.com]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Articles on Motherhood

- "Rethinking Feminist Attitudes Towards Motherhood," Katherine Gieve. *Feminist Review* (0141-7789) 1987.Iss.25;p.pp. 38-45
- "Unshackling Black Motherhood," Dorothy E. Roberts. *Michigan Law Review Symposium: Representing Race* (0026-2234) 1997-02.Vol.95,Iss.4;p.pp. 938-964

Amazon.com entry (includes author blog and *Washington Post Book World* article):

http://www.amazon.com/Jump-at-Sun-Kim-Mclarin/dp/0060528494/ref=pd_bbs_2/102-8673331-0370502?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1185894207&sr=1-2

Author Interview about *Jump at the Sun*: <http://www.kimmclarin.com/bio.htm>

Reading Guide from Harper Collins:

<http://www.harpercollins.com/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=17688&isbn13=9780060528492&displayType=readingGuide>

Reviews

- *Black Issues Book Review* 8.4 (July-August 2006): p37(1).
- *Booklist*, vol 102, number 19, p38)
- *Boston Magazine* 44.7 (July 2006): p24(1).

- *People Weekly* 66.4 (July 24, 2006): p43.
- *Publishers Weekly*, vol 253, issue 22, p36
- *USA Today* (May 25, 2006): p06D.



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