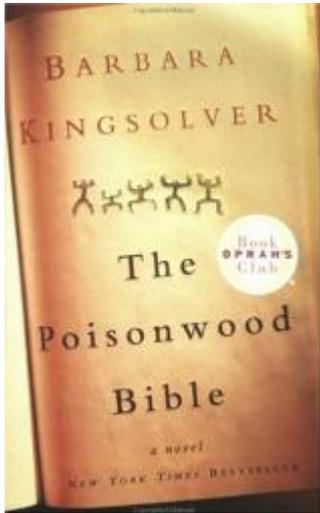


The Poisonwood Bible (Oprah's Book Club)

by Barbara Kingsolver



About the Book

God's Kingdom in its pure, unenlightened glory. So fourteen-year-old Leah Price expects when, in the summer of 1959, she arrives in the Congo with her family. Her Baptist-preacher father, Reverend Nathan Price, assigned to Kilanga mission, is determined to enlighten the savages and to rule his family with strict biblical sanction. Leah's twin, Adah, the victim of hemiplegia at birth, limps along and maintains silence. Fifteen-year-old Rachel resents being dropped on "this dread dark shore" far from America's fashions and comforts. Ruth May, five years old, faints. And their mother, Orleanna, readies herself to protect them all from whatever perils may come--from jungle, river, or father and his terrible God. From 1959 through 1998, the Price sisters tell their stories, in alternating narratives that reflect their ages as the years pass and the understandings that they achieve. Those stories--together with Orleanna's retrospective commentaries--reveal the amazing forty-year saga that the Prices and the Congo share. Cultural and spiritual conflicts, confusion and revelation, hunger and pleasure, cruelties and kindness, suffering and love, all combine with the day-to-day life in Africa's villages to enrich this wondrous tale. This is Barbara Kingsolver's most daring, complex, and rewarding novel--a whopping good story told with tender majesty. The wisdom that Rachel, Adah, Leah, Ruth May, and Orleanna wrest from their lives is also ours.

Discussion Guide

1. What are the implications of the novel's title phrase, the poisonwood bible, particularly in connection with the main characters' lives and the novel's main themes? How important are the circumstances in which the phrase comes into being?
2. How does Kingsolver differentiate among the Price sisters, particularly in terms of their voices? What does each sister reveal about herself and the other three, their relationships, their mother and father, and their lives in Africa? What is the effect of our learning about events and people through the sisters' eyes?
3. What is the significance of the Kikongo word nommo and its attendant concepts of being and naming? Are there Christian parallels to the constellation of meanings and beliefs attached to nommo? How do the Price daughters' Christian names and their acquired Kikongo names reflect their personalities and behavior?
4. The sisters refer repeatedly to balance (and, by implication, imbalance). What kinds of balance--including historical, political, and social--emerge as important? Are individual characters associated with specific kinds of balance or imbalance? Do any of the sisters have a final say on the importance of balance?
5. What do we learn about cultural, social, religious, and other differences between Africa and America? To what degree do Orleanna and her daughters come to an understanding of those differences? Do you agree

with what you take to be Kingsolver's message concerning such differences?

6. Why do you suppose that Reverend Nathan Price is not given a voice of his own? Do we learn from his wife and daughters enough information to formulate an adequate explanation for his beliefs and behavior? Does such an explanation matter?
7. What differences and similarities are there among Nathan Price's relationship with his family, Tata Ndu's relationship with his people, and the relationship of the Belgian and American authorities with the Congo? Are the novel's political details--both imagined and historical--appropriate?
8. How does Kingsolver present the double themes of captivity and freedom and of love and betrayal? What kinds of captivity and freedom does she explore? What kinds of love and betrayal? What are the causes and consequences of each kind of captivity, freedom, love, and betrayal?
9. At Bikoki Station, in 1965, Leah reflects, "I still know what justice is." Does she? What concept of justice does each member of the Price family and other characters (Anatole, for example) hold? Do you have a sense, by the novel's end, that any true justice has occurred?
10. In Book Six, Adah proclaims, "This is the story I believe in . . ." What is that story? Do Rachel and Leah also have stories in which they believe? How would you characterize the philosophies of life at which Adah, Leah, and Rachel arrive? What story do you believe in?
11. At the novel's end, the carved-animal woman in the African market is sure that "There has never been any village on the road past Bulungu," that "There is no such village" as Kilanga. What do you make of this?

Author Bio

Barbara Kingsolver was born in 1955, and grew up in rural Kentucky. She earned degrees in biology from DePauw University and the University of Arizona, and has worked as a freelance writer and author since 1985. At various times in her adult life she has lived in England, France, and the Canary Islands, and has worked in Europe, Africa, Asia, Mexico, and South America. She spent two decades in Tucson, Arizona, before moving to southwestern Virginia where she currently resides.

Her books have been translated into more than two dozen languages, and have been adopted into the core literature curriculum in high schools and colleges throughout the nation. She has contributed to more than 50 literary anthologies, and her reviews and articles have appeared in most major U.S. newspapers and magazines.

Kingsolver was named one of the most important writers of the 20th Century by *Writers Digest*. In 2000, she received the National Humanities Medal, our country's highest honor for service through the arts. Critical acclaim for her books includes multiple awards from the American Booksellers Association and the American Library Association, among many others. *THE POISONWOOD BIBLE* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the Orange Prize, and won the national book award of South Africa, before being named an Oprah Book Club selection. *ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MIRACLE* won numerous prizes, including the James Beard award. *THE LACUNA* won The Orange Prize for Fiction in 2010.

In 1998, Kingsolver established the Bellwether Prize for fiction.

She has two daughters, Camille (born in 1987) and Lily (1996). Her husband, Steven Hopp, teaches environmental studies. Since June 2004, Barbara and her family have lived on a farm in southern Appalachia. Barbara believes her best work is accomplished through writing, raising her children, and being an active citizen of her own community. She is grateful for the good will and support of her readers.

The Poisonwood Bible (Oprah's Book Club)
by Barbara Kingsolver

Publication Date: October 1, 1999
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 560 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0060930535
ISBN-13: 9780060930530