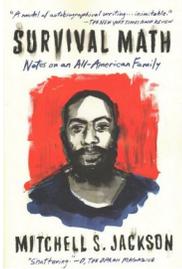


# Books by the Stack



## **Survival Math by Mitchell S. Jackson**

Survival Math takes its name from the calculations Mitchell and his family made to keep safe—to stay alive—in their community, a small black neighborhood in Portland, Oregon blighted by drugs, violence, poverty, and governmental neglect.

**Why you'll like it:** *Sobering. Candid. Compelling.*

**About the Author:** Mitchell S. Jackson is an American writer based in New York City. He is the author of the 2013 novel *The Residue Years*, as well as *Oversoul*, an ebook collection of essays and short stories. Jackson is a Whiting Award recipient and a former winner of the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. After reading “Composite Pops” and “Matrimony” discuss what you think young Mitchell’s relationship to his mother is like.
2. As you’re reading this book, research the history of Portland. Assign book club members to come with information about its founding, its socioeconomics over the past 100 years, and the diversity of the city from founding to present day.
3. After your book club does research on the history of Portland, reflect back on the Prologue. What makes more sense to you with the context of the history of Portland?
4. Identify the documents used as source texts for each of the centos. How do the documents speak to the question posed at the beginning of each poem? How does each poem contextualize the preceding section of essays?
5. The essay “Apples” begins on page 67. How do you understand this metaphor in your own words? Relate Jackson’s definition of apples to the supreme court confirmation hearings of justice Brett Kavanaugh, and in particular, to the women senators who cast affirmative votes for him.
6. On page 114, Mitchel makes the following statement: “I never had anyone in my life to tell me this is what a man is. This is what you should look for in a man. This is how a man should treat you.” And on page 119, in statement Three, Mitchell’s former lover says of her own dad “I think a lot of the stuff that he did to us was because he couldn’t do what a man was supposed to do.” How does a man in modern day America construct his masculinity? From the perspective of the first half of *Survival Math*, what does masculinity mean?
7. Discuss the chapter that begins on page 161, “American Blood.” Paraphrase Jackson’s definition of American Blood. How does this idea relate to the crisis of Mexican and Lantinx immigration?
8. On page 184, Jackson makes this statement: “The White-Slave Act has been less about the protection of sex workers, or women’s suffrage, or even feminism than it’s been about punishing the men who compel those women. Look into the history of the White-Slave Act, and decide how you align with that statement.

**9.** In the chapter, “The Scale” Mitchell makes use of “math” or formulas several times. Find those instances and discuss how they work in the structure of the essay.

**10.** In “The Pose” Mitchell goes into detail about the practice of sex work in his family and the larger community. He’s very open about his connection to the trade and his treatment of women. What does this do for you as the reader? Have you read other memoirists that are this vulnerable?

**11.** After you’ve read the epilogue, discuss how you see the reflections of who Mitchell is now in this essay. How has he changed in the lifetime he’s shown you in these pages? What does being a father mean to him

*(Questions provided by the publisher)*



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