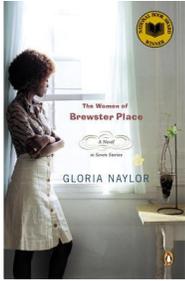


# Books by the Stack



## **The Women of Brewster Place by Gloria Naylor**

Brewster Place is a blind alley feeding into dead end. It is the story of seven fictitious women characters; they are “hard-edged, soft-centered, brutally demanding, and easily pleased.”

**Why you'll like it:** *African American fiction. Character-driven. Moving.*

**About the Author:** Gloria Naylor was born in 1950. She received a bachelor's degree in English from Brooklyn College and a master's degree in African American studies from Yale University. She taught at several universities including George Washington University, the University of Pennsylvania, New York University, Princeton University, and Boston University. Her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, won the American Book Award and the National Book Award for first novel in 1983. It was adapted into a two-part television movie in 1989. She died in 2016 at the age of 66. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What do you think of the novel's structure? How does each woman's individual voice reinforce the novel's themes as a whole? Does this group of women represent a cross section of women in general?
2. In what sorts of ways do each of these women find comfort in the hardships of their everyday lives? How does this reflect the strengths and weaknesses of each woman?
3. Each of these women cope with enormous loss in their lives, but each manages their grief differently. Compare, for instance, Mattie's loss of her house and her son with Ceil's loss of her baby. What could these women learn from each other?
4. How does Naylor portray the South, where many of these women came from, as both a land of plenty and a land of harsh deprivation? How are these women's lives different living in the North – are they happier? More fulfilled? More subject to racial bias? Is there more opportunity for them in Brewster Place than in the South?
5. What do you think of the way Lorraine and Theresa are treated by the other women in Brewster Place? What is Naylor saying about prejudice? Why do you think she concluded the novel with their story?
6. Each of these women is capable of enormous love, but they are often hurt by their loved ones. What do you think Naylor is saying about a woman's capacity for love? Is this sort of love “worth it”? Would these women be happier if they had hardened their hearts to those who eventually let them down?
7. What do you think the “death” of Brewster Place means for the future of its residents? How does Brewster Place continue to live on, once it is vacant? What do you make of Mattie Michael's dream, in which the women of Brewster Place dismantle the structure, brick by brick?

**8.** How solid is the logic in Butch's philosophy that life is like eating sugar cane: "You gotta know when to stop chewing..."? What are the advantages of that philosophy? What are the weaknesses of it?

**9.** Most of the women in this novel are mistreated by men, both emotionally and physically. Why do you suppose these men treat these women this way? In what ways do women mistreat men in this novel? Are there any positive relationships between men and women in the book? In the most violent chapter of the book? Lorraine is raped repeatedly. Why, then, does she kill poor old Ben?

**10.** At the end of the book, Kiswana and some of the others hope that their block party will be successful and that their Block Association will benefit from some significant changes. What do you expect are their chances for success? On what evidence do you base your opinion?

*(Questions provided by the publisher and ReadingGroupGuides.com)*



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