It is the last season of high school life for Nadia Turner, a rebellious, grief-stricken, seventeen-year-old beauty. Mourning her own mother's recent suicide, she takes up with the local pastor's son. They are young; it's not serious. But the pregnancy that results from this teen romance, and the subsequent cover-up, will have an impact that goes far beyond their youth.


About the Author: Brit Bennett graduated from Stanford University and later earned her MFA in fiction at the University of Michigan. Her work is featured in The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, The Paris Review, and Jezebel. She has won a Hopwood Award in Graduate Short Fiction as well as the 2014 Hurston/Wright Award for College Writers. Brit is one of the National Book Foundation's 2016 5 Under 35 honorees. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. To what degree do you think Nadia’s discomfort about her ambition is just in her head, and to what degree do you think her community sees her as an outsider because of it? Why is leaving home so revolutionary for Nadia? What can her academic accomplishments give her that her community cannot?

2. Nadia and Luke are two black teens who go to a mostly white school, on the edge of a military base. When Luke ends up in the hospital, he becomes conscious of how a Hispanic male nurse suffers from others’ stereotypes. How does the author approach identity in relation to race? How must Nadia change the way she interacts with people inside or outside of her community?

3. The Mothers strives to handle teen pregnancy with compassion and wisdom, portraying it as a life-transforming experience with incalculable ramifications. Why do you think Nadia makes the choices she does? How do these choices affect her life, Luke’s life, and even the larger community?

4. After his football injury, Luke must struggle to redefine his own sense of himself, his potential and expectations. Later in the book he befriends a male physical therapist who shows Luke that he, too, has the potential for ministering to the sick or injured – which is a sort of “mothering” in itself. How does Luke’s sense of masculinity change, before and after his injury? How does the author explore masculinity in the depiction of Nadia’s father, a professional military man who must learn to connect with his daughter? Do you think that, in the end, both father and daughter have found a way to communicate and show their love to each other?

5. The novel has a distinct nucleus, made up of “The Mothers,” the elderly women of the black church community who watch over the small-town goings-on with a presence that evokes the tone a fable. Their chorus, Greek in format, shows the insularity and defiance of a small, loving community. How do “The Mothers” embody the community? In what ways do they impose their own experiences - their beliefs, their upbringings, their age – on the younger generation?
6. Another focus of the book is Nadia’s relationship with her best friend, Aubrey, as they help each other through adolescence and motherlessness. It provides poignant commentary about the ways women rely on one another, and about the necessity of navigating hard truths with the people we love. How do Nadia and Aubrey change over the course of the book - both within their friendship and the outside of it? What does this friendship give each of the girls?

7. As Nadia maneuvers the adolescent world and beyond, how does her grief over her mother’s death change her? Do you think it ultimately strengthens her? Weakens her?

(Questions adapted from the publisher’s Teacher’s Guide.)