

Readers' Guide
The Sweetest Hallelujah

1. Discuss how the themes of sin and redemption play out in the lives of Betty Jewel and Cassie. In what ways does Cassie save Betty Jewel, and vice versa?
2. What do you think of Cassie's decision to adopt Billie? Is it dangerous? Selfless? What does it say about Cassie's character, about her friendship with Betty Jewel, and about her marriage to Joe? Would you have made the same choice? Why or why not?
3. Discuss the role of family in the book. In what ways does familial responsibility drive the actions of the characters? Do you agree or disagree with the line "Family is family no matter what?" Why or why not?
4. *The Sweetest Hallelujah* features a cast of strong female characters: Betty Jewel, Cassie, Billie, Queen, Fay Dean, Sudie, and Merry Lynn. Discuss each of their roles in the story and how they drive the narrative forward. Which of the characters do you relate to the most and why? Do you have a favorite?
5. The novel is told in alternating perspectives between Cassie, Betty Jewel, and Billie. How does this affect how you read/understand the book? What are the advantages and disadvantages of multi-perspective storytelling?
6. History plays a particularly important role in *The Sweetest Hallelujah*. In what ways does the setting and period (Mississippi in the summer of 1955) impact the story? How would the story have been different if it had been set in the present?
7. Discuss Billie's journey in the story and her relationship to Betty Jewel, Queen, Saint, Cassie and Mike Malone. How does each of these characters impact Billie's life? How do you think her life will play out after the last page of the book has been turned?
8. Discuss the role of Dead Alice in the story. What does her presence signify, and how does it change throughout the book?
9. Betty Jewel, the Saint, and Joe are all musicians; there are song lyrics referenced throughout the book; and the gentle sound of the blues is present at every turn. Discuss the significance of blues and music in the story?