

The Reading Guide

Reading Group Questions

1. Discuss the narrative structure of THE LONG SONG.
2. 'None of my books is just about race. They are about people and history.' To what extent do you think that this is true of THE LONG SONG?
3. 'Writing novels is a way of putting back the voices that were left out.' Do you think that Andrea Levy has achieved this aim in THE LONG SONG?
4. Discuss Andrea Levy's use of language and imagery in THE LONG SONG. How do you think that the rhythm of her writing contributes to its power? What, for you, makes her writing unique?
5. How does Andrea Levy bring nineteenth-century Jamaica to life in THE LONG SONG? How does she evoke scene and atmosphere?
6. Discuss Andrea Levy's choice of July as her narrator. Do you think that she is a reliable narrator? How does her version of events influence our reading of the novel? How do the sections with her son Thomas affect our view of July?
7. How are the relationships between parents and children explored in the novel? What is the impact of love, sacrifice and loss on these relationships?
8. 'That is not the way white men usually behaved upon this Caribbean Island.' What do you think of the character of Robert Goodwin? Are you surprised by his behaviour and the changing nature of his feelings for July?
9. THE LONG SONG centres on the lives of two women – July and Caroline – whose circumstances could not be more different. Do they, however, have anything in common or share any characteristics?
10. When reading THE LONG SONG, which particular emotions were evoked for you? Were any of these surprising or unexpected?
11. There is a link between SMALL ISLAND and THE LONG SONG. If you've read both, did you spot this?

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Also by Andrea Levy

Small Island

The Fruit of the Lemon

Never Far from Nowhere

Every Light in the House Burnin'

About the Book

You do not know me yet but I am the narrator of this work. My son Thomas, who is printing this book, tells me it is customary at this place in a novel to give the reader a little taste of the story that is held within these pages. As your storyteller, I am to convey that this tale is set in Jamaica during the last turbulent years of slavery and the early years of freedom that followed.

July is a slave girl who lives upon a sugar plantation named Amity and it is her life that is the subject of this tale. She was there when the Baptist War raged in 1831, and she was present when slavery was declared no more. My son says I must convey how the story tells also of July's mama Kitty, of the negroes that worked the plantation land, of Caroline Mortimer the white woman who owned the plantation and many more persons besides – far too many for me to list here. But what befalls them all is carefully chronicled upon these pages for you to peruse.

Perhaps, my son suggests, I might write that it is a thrilling journey through that time in the company of people who lived it. All this he wishes me to pen so the reader can decide if this is a book they might care to consider. Cha, I tell my son, what fuss-fuss. Come, let them just read it for themselves.

About the Author

Andrea Levy was born in England to Jamaican parents who came to Britain in 1948. She has lived all her life in London. After attending writing workshops when she was in her mid-thirties, Levy began to write the novels that she, as a young woman, had always wanted to read – entertaining novels that reflect the experiences of black Britons, which look closely and perceptively at Britain and its changing population and at the intimacies that bind British history with that of the Caribbean.

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Praise for THE LONG SONG

'Sensational...The story is expertly fashioned' *Sunday Telegraph*

'A terrific book: beautifully written and imagined, and full of surprises... A brilliant historical novel' A N Wilson, *Reader's Digest*

'[A] literary light ready to dazzle' *Financial Times*

Praise for SMALL ISLAND

'Every scene is rich in implication, entrancing and disturbing at the same time; the literary equivalent of a switch-back ride' *The Sunday Times*

'What makes Levy's writing so appealing is her even-handedness. All her characters can be weak, hopeless, brave, good, bad – whatever their colour. The writing is rigorous and the bittersweet ending, with its unexpected twist, touching... People can retain their dignity, however small their island' *Independent on Sunday*

'Never less than finely written, delicately and often comically observed, and impressively rich in detail and little nuggets of stories' *Evening Standard*

'An engrossing read – slyly funny, passionately angry and wholly involving' *Daily Mail*

'A work of great imaginative power' Linton Kwesi Johnson

'As full of warmth and jokes and humanity as you could wish' *Time Out*

'Gives us a new urgent take on our past' *Vogue*

'An involving saga about the changing face of Britain' *Mirror*

'Explores the Caribbean experience of immigration to Britain with great sensitivity'
Independent

'A terrific book' Alan Plater