

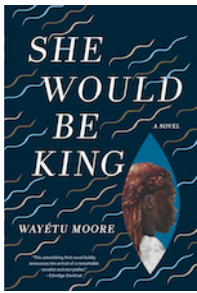
Graywolf Press Reading Group Guide

She Would Be King by Wayétu Moore



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Gbessa, June Dey, and Norman Aragon come together from very different locations—Liberia, Virginia, and Jamaica. How do their experiences differ? How are they similar?
2. *She Would Be King* is a work of fiction that incorporates historical events. What did you know about Liberia before reading the book? What new questions do you have?
3. In what ways does *She Would Be King* trace the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade?
4. The narrating presence of the wind both cautions and comforts the characters in the novel. On pages 60-61 we're given a clue about where the voice in the wind comes from. How does this presence change the way the entire novel is read?
5. Where do the special powers of the three main protagonists originate? How do their abilities align with their experiences, personalities, and cultures?
6. How does the magical realism employed in *She Would Be King* relate to recent pop culture representations of African superheroes, such as *Black Panther*?
7. What does *She Would Be King* have to say about the power of storytelling?
8. How are Gbessa's life and experiences shaped by the treatment she receives simply for being a woman? How does that relate to how women are treated today?
9. Gbessa's relationship to her Vai heritage changes when she joins the settlement in Monrovia. What are the tensions between the cultures, and how does she balance them in her life?
10. How is the relationship between Gbessa and Safua complicated by social status? Name three other relationship dynamics that make *She Would Be King* a love story.
11. What role does motherhood play in the novel? How do the various characters experience kinship and lineage?
12. In her author note at the beginning of the book, Wayétu Moore talks about a story that inspired the writing of her novel. In what ways does this seed of inspiration take root in the narrative? Is there anything in *She Would Be King* that similarly inspires you to tell your own story?



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FURTHER READING

While loosely based on a short chapter in Liberian history, *She Would Be King* is a fictional retelling of the country's founding. If these pages inspired your interest in Liberia, I recommend the following works:

Clarence E. Zamba Liberty, *Growth of the Liberian State: An Analysis of Its Historiography*

C. Patrick Burrowes, *Black Christian Republicanism: The Writings of Hilary Teage (1805–1853), Founder of Liberia*

D. Elwood Dunn, editor, *Liberian Studies Journal* (Volume XIV, Number 2)

Stephanie C. Horton, editor, *Sea Breeze Journal of Contemporary Liberian Writings (2004–2011)*

C. Patrick Burrowes, *Between the Kola Forest and the Salty Sea: A History of the Liberian People Before 1800*

William Henry Heard, *The Bright Side of African Life* Robtel Neajai Pailey (scholarly works)

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley (poetry)

Vamba Sherif (novels)