



DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1 Why does Octavia Butler write a first-person slave narrative in the late twentieth century? If she wanted her readers to think about the atrocities of slavery, why have Dana travel back and forth through time? *
- 2 How does visually illustrating *Kindred* affect the reader's interpretation of the story? How does seeing a violent act differ from reading about it? What compromises may have been made between text and image in this adaptation?
- 3 How has 1819 permanently left its mark on Dana? How does the use of time travel in this story affect our understandings of history and its construction? *
- 4 Dana says that Tom Weylin "wasn't a monster...[he was] just an ordinary man who sometimes did monstrous things his society said were legal and proper" (p. 134). Why does Dana make this distinction, and what is Butler trying to communicate? *
- 5 **Steve McQueen's *Ashes***, currently on view at the ICA, focuses on a captivating young man McQueen met while filming in Grenada. Using a double-sided screen to present two parallel realities, *Ashes* asks questions similar to those in *Kindred* about presence, legacy, and fate. A visitor watching one screen overhears the sounds of the other, infiltrating their perceptions of what is presently visible. Does our perception of the strong and vibrant *Ashes* change as we hear of his fate? How does situating a story in two different time periods affect the impact of the work?
- 6 Butler writes:

"I began with a man as main character, but I couldn't realistically keep him alive. So many things he did would have been likely to get him killed...The female main character, who might be equally dangerous, would not be perceived so." (p. 51)

How does Dana's gender function socially as she moves between two time periods in the novel?

- 7 **Henry Taylor** has described his paintings—mostly portraits—as landscapes of his social scene. *i'm yours* at the ICA features three variously aged individuals staggered in space. Each figure occupies a separate plane, suggesting a social or emotional distance between them. Their grouping, however, also implies their relation. How do those we interact with shape our understandings of ourselves and others?
- 8 **Nari Ward** (whose midcareer survey *Sun Splashed* will be on view at the ICA Apr 26 – Sep 4) often repurposes familiar and found elements to evoke common associations or to represent something larger. The mangos in *Mango Tourist* (2011), for example, or the tanning bed in *Glory* (2004) contribute to questions of how Caribbean identities are constructed and transformed for the use of others. What is the effect of using “stand-ins” to address bigger ideas?
- 9 **Sophie Calle's** *The Doctor's Daughter*, now on view at the ICA, works with image and text, truth and fiction. Together, text and image construct a fictional person and narrative; functioning as a caption, the text endows the sexually charged and seedy scene with a degree of authenticity. How do the image and the text each change our understanding of the other?
- 10 *Kindred* is categorized as “speculative fiction,” or science fiction and fantasy. The genre alludes to worlds not possible within our understanding of reality. Likewise, the graphic novel is often utilized for telling fantastical stories. How might *Kindred* have been different without the speculative element? What is the role of “the imaginary” in constructing a future for those with traumatic histories?
- 11 Can different forms of art change how we understand and share history? Can you think of some examples?

This discussion guide was developed by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. Questions with an asterisk * have been adapted from a Penguin/Random House Teacher's guide on Butler's *Kindred*. Additional questions can be found at penguinrandomhouse.com. The quote from Octavia Butler in question 5 is taken from an interview with Octavia Butler by Charles H. Rowell, in *Callaloo* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1997)

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Clockwise

Steve McQueen

***Ashes*, 2002-2015**

Two-channel video transferred from 8mm and 16mm film (color, sound; 20:31 minutes), two-sided screen, and posters, dimensions variable. Gift of Tristin and Martin Mannion. © Steve McQueen. All rights reserved.

Henry Taylor

***i'm yours*, 2015**

Acrylic on canvas, 73 1/8 × 74 1/4 inches (185.7 × 188.6 cm). Purchased through the generosity of the Acquisitions Circle. © Henry Taylor

Sophie Calle

***The Doctor's Daughter (La fille du docteur)*, 1991**

Gelatin silver print, transparent paper, note cards, transparent envelopes, faux leopard skin, and cardboard box, Photograph, 37 3/8 × 49 3/8 inches (94.9 × 125.4 cm), Artist's book, 11 3/4 × 8 3/4 × 1 3/8 inches (29.8 × 22.2 × 3.5 cm). Gift of Peggy and David A. Ross in honor of Jill Medvedow. Courtesy Sophie Calle and Paula Cooper Gallery. © Sophie Calle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Nari Ward

***Mango Tourist*, 2011**

Foam, battery canisters, Sprague Electric Company resistors and capacitors, and mango seeds 3 figures, each 120 x 72 x 72 inches (304.8 × 182.9 × 182.9 cm). In collaboration with MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong. © Nari Ward