

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Kindred

Discussion Questions

Directions: You will be expected to answer these discussion questions from the book. I suggest that you complete a few each day as you read. However, I understand that you each have other classes and extracurricular commitments. Therefore, you can manage your time and complete them as you wish. However, they will be collected at the end of our unit. If you have questions or do not understand something, please ask. It will save your time and your grade. **USE COMPLETE SENTENCES & A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER TO RECORD YOUR RESPONSES.**

1. Both Kevin and Dana know that they cannot change history. They say, “We’re in the middle of history. We surely can’t change it” (Butler 100). Then again, they remark, “It’s over... There’s nothing you can do to change any of it now” (Butler 264). What, then, is the purpose of Dana’s travels back to the antebellum South? Why must you, the reader, experience this journey with Dana?
2. How would the story have been different with a third person narrator rather than a first person narrator?
3. Many of the chapters in *Kindred* resist classification. In what ways does Dana explode the slave stereotypes of the “mammy, the handkerchief-head, and the female Uncle Tom” (Butler 154)? In what ways does she transcend them?
4. Despite Dana’s determination to refuse the “mammy” role in the Weylin household, she finds herself caught by it. She states, “I felt like Sarah, cautioning” (Butler 156). Others see her as the mammy as well. They state, “You sound just like Sarah” (Butler 156). How, if at all, does Dana reconcile her conscious efforts with her behavior? How would you reconcile them?
5. “I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery.” Dana says this to Kevin when they have returned to the present and are discussing their experiences in the antebellum South. Do we also in the twenty-first century still have conditioned responses to slavery?
6. How do you think Butler confronts us with issues of difference in *Kindred*? How does she challenge us to consider boundaries of black/white, master/slave, husband/wife, past/present? What other differences does she convolute? Do you think such dichotomies are flexible? Artificial? Pragmatic?
7. Compare Tom Weylin and Rufus Weylin. Is Rufus Weylin an improvement over his father? How is Dana’s influence evident on the adult Rufus evident? Give a specific example from the text.
8. Of the slaves’ attitude toward Rufus, Dana, observes, “Strangely, they seemed to like him, hold him in contempt, and fear him all at the same time” (Butler 229). How can they feel these contradictory emotions? How would you feel toward Rufus if you were in their situation?
9. Compare Dana’s professional life (when she met Kevin) to her life as a slave on the Weylin plantation. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

10. When Dana and Kevin return from the past together, she thinks, “I felt as though I were losing my past here in my own time. Rufus’ time was a sharper, stronger reality (Butler 191). Why would the twentieth century seem less vivid, less “real” to Dana than the nineteenth century?
11. Dana loses her left arm as she emerges- for the last time in the novel- from the past. Why is this significant?
12. Kevin is stranded in the past for five years, while Dana is there for less than one year. Why did Butler feel Kevin needed to stay in the past so much longer than Dana? How have their experiences affected their relationship to each other and to the world around them?
13. A common trend in the time travels of science fiction assumes that one should not tamper with the past, lest you disrupt the present. Butler obviously ignores this theory and her characters continue to invade each other’s lives. How does this influence the movement of the narrative? How does it convolute the idea of cause and effect?
14. Dana finds herself caught in the middle of a relationship between Rufus and Alice. Why does Rufus use Dana to get to Alice? Does Alice also use Dana?
15. The needs and well-being of other residents of the plantation create a web of obligation that is difficult to navigate. Choose a specific incident and determine who holds power over whom; assess how it affects the situation.
16. Dana states: “It was that destructive single-minded love of his. He loved me. Not the way he loved Alice, thank God. He didn’t seem to want to sleep with me. But he wanted me around- someone to talk to, someone who would listen to him and care about what he said” (Butler 180). How does the relationship between Dana and Rufus develop? How does it change? What are the different levels of love portrayed in Kindred?
17. Discuss the ways in which the title encapsulates the relationships within the novel. Is it ironic? Literal? Metaphorical? What emphasis do we place on our won kinship? How does it compare with that of the novel?
18. Do you believe that Dana and Kevin’s story actually happened, or do they simply get caught up in the nostalgia of examining old papers and books? How would their situation’s significance have changed in Dana’s and Kevin’s lives if it had been imaginary? If it were merely nostalgia or an imagined situation, how would that change your perception of the antebellum South and the treatment of slaves? Would that make the events less significant?
19. Butler opens up the novel with the conclusion of Dana’s time travels. The final pages of the book, however, make up an epilogue that once again demonstrates a linearly progressive moment of time. How does the epilogue serve to disrupt the rhythm of the narrative?
20. After returning from his years in the nineteenth century, Kevin had attained a “slight accent.” Is this alteration symbolic of greater changes to come? How do you imagine Kevin and Dana’s relationship will progress upon re-entrance into 1976?
21. Here are the titles of each section of the novel: Prologue / The River / The Fire / The Fall / The Fight / The Storm / The Rope / Epilogue. How do these titles weave into the theme of science fiction?