

Pacific Lutheran University

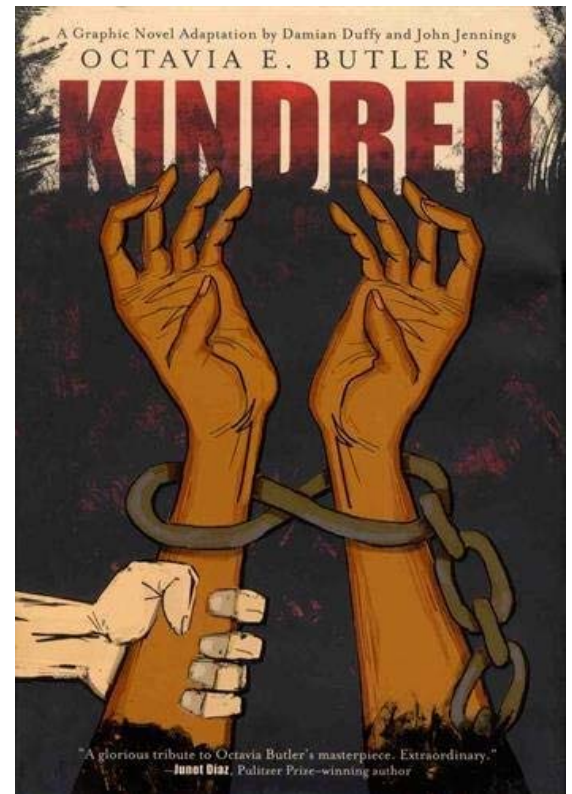
Common Reading Discussion Guide 2019

Featuring:

*Kindred: A Graphic
Novel Adaptation*

written by
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adapted by
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As you read *Kindred*, we encourage you to use this reading guide to assist you in thinking deeply and critically about the book. This will help you prepare for the small group discussions with your writing 101 faculty member and peers.

To be prepared and organized for class you should **make notes** of items of particular interest to you, **including page numbers** so that you can easily locate information **to support your claim/opinion** during the discussions.

Theme: Images as Narrative or Story

Background: Most of us are used to thinking of narrative in terms of textual narrative: how the words on the page tell a story. But the visual arts also tell narratives, whether the way the sequential images in a storyboard or a Renaissance church walk the viewer through the story, or the way a Classical statue in motion invites the viewer to imagine what just happened and what's about to happen. Graphic novels combine the artistic techniques of textual narrative with those of visual narrative.

Questions to consider:

1. How is the experience of "reading" the graphic novel different from the experience of written text?
2. How do the images expand on the text--what do they add? Are there drawbacks to the format of the graphic novel? What is the relationship between the images and the text? That is, which pictures are worth 1,000 words, and which words are worth 1,000 pictures?

Theme: Systems of Power and Oppression

Background: Rufus is educated and indoctrinated into a system that pits men and white slave owners against women and black slaves. Dana is a black woman, and therefore subject to Rufus, but she is also a visitor from the future who saves Rufus's life time and again, and he feels that he is especially close to her. Dana and Rufus both know both roles, but Rufus's feelings of closeness to Dana do not keep him from succumbing to the system of which he is a part. His system perpetuates despite his relationships.

Questions to consider:

1. Dana is not the only person enslaved in the novel. What are the psychological effects of slavery on the other characters, and how do they relate to a system of oppression which is the only one they've ever known?
2. What are the effects of time travel on Dana's husband, Kevin? How long does it take Dana and Kevin to adjust to him as a white male in the pre-Civil War South? Does Kevin become accustomed to being thought of as a slave owner? Does he shift from pretending to internalizing? Does Dana shift in how she sees him?
3. What fundamentally supported the system of slavery and kept it functioning? Can you come up with systems today that rely on the same fundamental supports? I.e., where do you see modern day systems of slavery?

Theme: The Effect of Time

Background: The main character, Dana, cycles between the pre-Civil War South and her life in 1970s California. In a few months of her time she experiences the entire life of Rufus, from young child to adult. As Rufus ages, his status -- and the way that they relate to each other -- changes: Dana and the young Rufus have a different relationship than Dana and the adult Rufus.

Questions to consider:

1. How do Dana's and Rufus's different roles interrelate and how do the power dynamics shift over time?
2. What are the effects of juxtaposing in a very short time (for Dana and for the reader) the young Rufus with the adult he later becomes?
3. What are the psychological effects on Dana of spending time in a slave state? How much time does it take for her to become accustomed to being thought of as a slave? Does she ever shift from pretending to internalizing?
4. What are the psychological effects on Dana of returning to her own time?

Theme: Race - Particularly the History of Race Relations in the US

Background: James Baldwin said, "I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am also, much more than that. So are we all." Race is a social, political, economic, and cultural phenomenon, not rooted in biology, but constructed and reconstructed through time and context. Our racial identities are constructed not only by the understanding and meaning that we have created of ourselves, but also through an understanding of history, social and political context, and our relationship to others.

Questions to consider:

1. Can we see Dana's history and subsequent maiming as allegory for race relations in the US? Can we her husband Kevin as allegory as well? For what?
2. The text raises the question: how can we repair the psychological (and therefore physical) damage of race relations: in what ways can we each be agents and in what ways can we not? What are the limitations of our agency? Positionality: what, if anything, does it mean for the narrative that a woman's book has been adapted by two men?

Theme: Familial Bonds/Expectations

Background: The family is a fundamental unit of society, but it is one that we may not always choose for ourselves. Families may center around many axes: biological, emotional, cultural, and others. For many people, “family,” whoever that is, evokes a sense of belonging, love, and above all obligation: an obligation to their family of more thought, consideration, and forgiveness than they owe other persons, whether or not they chose their family.

Questions to consider:

1. What is the true nature of the relationship between Dana and Rufus? Is Dana complicit in Rufus’s crimes? That is, does she keep him alive for her own sake?
2. How is Rufus humanized or dehumanized and what does that mean?
3. Kevin is a foil to Rufus: how does each man show a different way of relating to Dana?
4. To which other family members does Dana feel an obligation? How does this obligation emerge?

Additional resources:

[The Publisher’s Teaching Guide](#)

[Kindred: A Graphic Novel at San Diego Comic-Con 2016](#)

Nnedi Okorafor [TedTalk](#): “Sci-fi Stories That Imagine a Future Africa”
[13th - Documentary](#)

For further reading:

[Octavia’s Brood](#)

[Kindred](#)

[Lilith’s Brood](#)

[Parable of the Sower](#)

[Black Girl Dangerous](#)

[Crunk Feminist Collective](#)

[Science Fiction/Fantasy women of color authors](#)