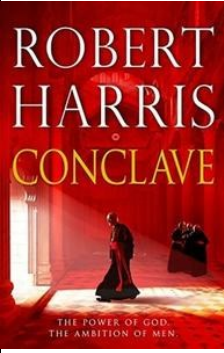




# Discussion Guide



## About the Book:

*The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store*

Author: James McBride

Riverhead Books, 2023

Website [www.penguin.co.uk/authors/165242/robert-harris](http://www.penguin.co.uk/authors/165242/robert-harris)

<https://www.facebook.com/RobertHarrisAuthor>

## Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. What was the element of murder/mystery in this book. How did the author wrap it around the story?
3. The author wrote this book in part to speak for children with disabilities. How do you see this playing out in the lives of Dodo, Chona and Monkey Pants?
4. The author creates an intimate portrait of early urban American life in "Pottsville," a segmented society of whites, Jews and African Americans. What was the pecking order and how did they relate across their positions? The book is partially about the power of community. What power did you see among them? Is this type of community familiar to you? Why or why not?
5. Discuss the relationship of Moshe and Chona. What brought them together? How is the name of the store, "The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store" significant.
6. Consider the childhood friendship of Chona and Bernice. What caused their falling out? Has anything like this ever happened to you? Did you have friends across races growing up, and/or as an adult? How has racism affected your friendships?
7. Moshe ran a music hall and theater. How did this entertainment bring people together? What were the challenges for him in this business? Do you see any of these challenges continuing today?
8. Both Chona and the doctor suffered from polio as children. How did that affect them and how did they deal with their disabilities stemming from it?
9. Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?
10. What do the MAMs have to say about the book? Whom do you agree with?

## Listen on YouTube:

James McBride discusses the themes in his new novel, 'The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store' (7:07)

Author James McBride on new novel "The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store," power of community (6:30)



**NANCY:** McBride creates a very believable portrait of early 20th century urban America life in “Pottsville”, lifting up the gifts of children with disabilities and the power of community. With well-developed characters, the author creates a fascinating story with imperfect, but lovable, and difficult characters.



**ABIGAIL:** Whew. This story was a lot. It was difficult for me to read at times. I’m glad I read it because it took me into realities I’m not very familiar with. I do like the way the author created kindness among the characters in the midst of difficult situations.



**SALLIE:** Of course Dodo is my star in this book. We all have gifts and limitations, and you see that when you work with kids. I think the author did an artful job lifting up the gifts of Dodo. Although he was deaf, he had so many positive gifts. A triumph for the community that they cared about him so deeply into his future.



**PRISCILLA:** I felt so sorry for Dodo and Monkey Pants. What happened to him? It wasn’t clear to me. Sometimes Christians aren’t very nice. That Doctor Roberts, for example. Marching with the KKK? What he did to Dodo and Chono? He got what he deserved, even though it wasn’t quite intended.



**MOLLY:** Whew. This is hard reading for me, seeing the life of African Americans in these times. I know MacBride is telling the story of that side of his family and also his Jewish roots. Going about it a little different that the MAMs with their revelations in the roots, but a variation on our theme, don’t you think?



**JANE:** Loved this book showing out the wonderful entrepreneurs in the 30s in the US. The not-so-profitable grocery store, Moshe’s successful dance hall/theater, the Jewish shoe guys. So many people working hard to develop business! The Spirit of America



**KATHARINE:** This book would be great for a 20th century American history class, or perhaps sociology. It really gets beneath the surface of race and status and shows how life is for people living in this time. I found the Jewish stratification particularly interesting. Maybe good for a religious history class, too.