

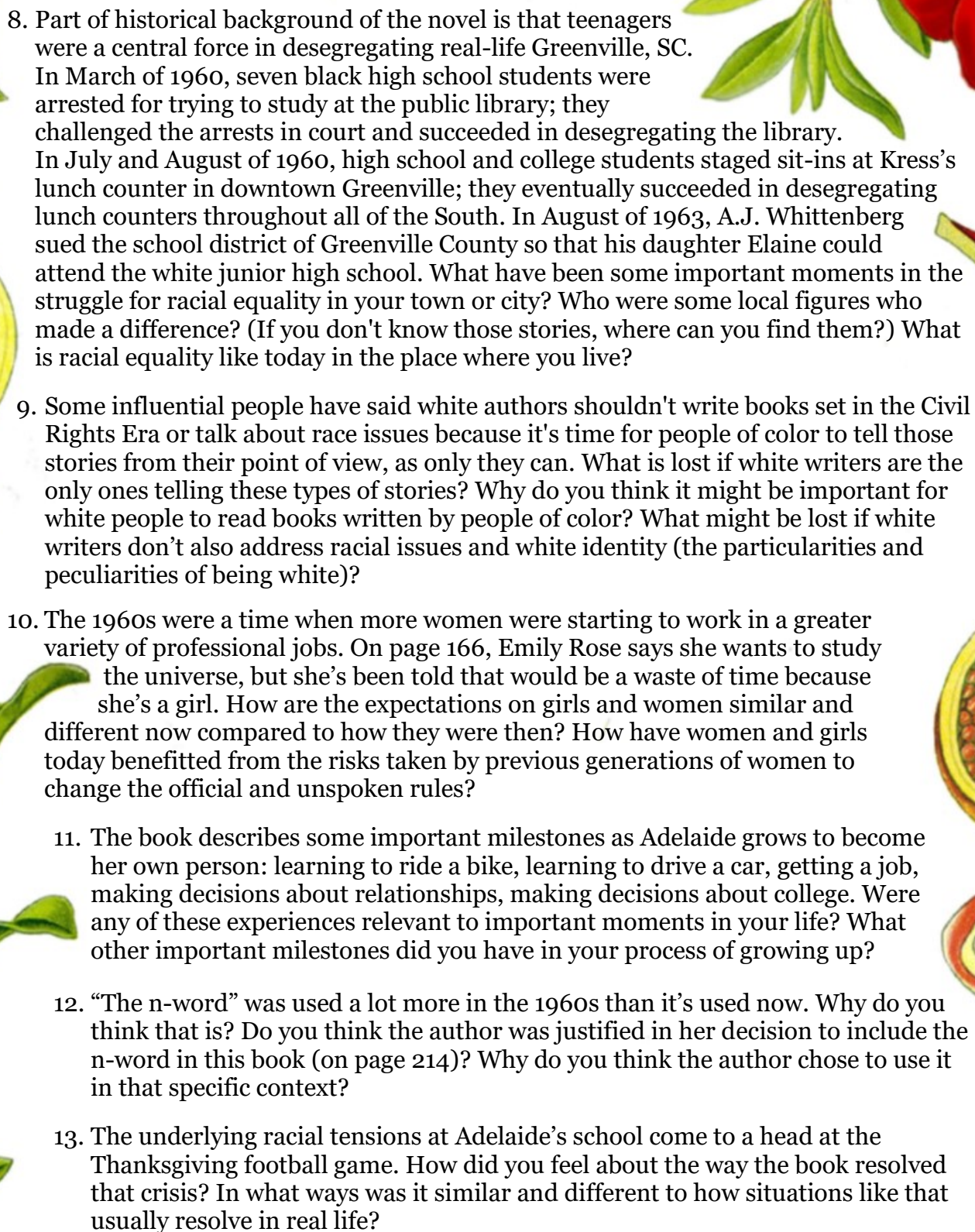


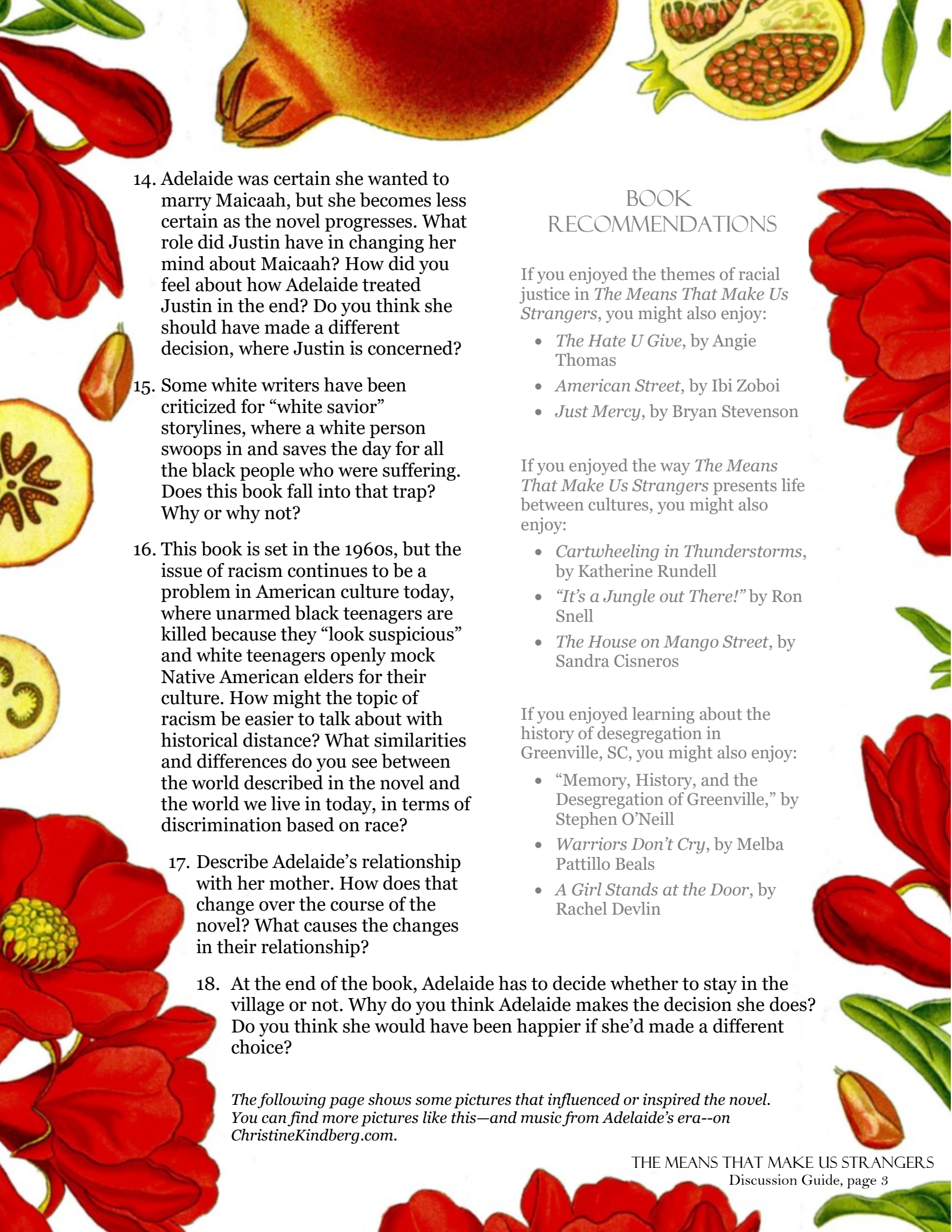
THE MEANS THAT MAKE US STRANGERS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

These are way more questions than would be possible to discuss in a single book club meeting. The author's hope is that discussion leaders will pick and choose from the different types of questions according to what they think will work best for their group. Enjoy!

1. What does *home* mean for Adelaide? How is the definition of *home* different for her at the beginning and at the end of the book? How is this different from how you might define *home* in your own life?
2. In chapter 1, Adelaide says "I would wish I could have packed my favorite tree, the wide expanse of the fields, the smell of coffee roasting over the fire, the sunset." Have you ever felt that way about a place? What are the things that you most miss about that place?
3. The pomegranate seeds that Adelaide receives from Maicaah, which become a symbol of her promise to him, echo the pomegranate seeds in the Greek myth of Persephone. (Persephone was Hades' wife, who was doomed to live in the underworld several months out of the year because she ate pomegranate seeds from Hades' table). What similarities and differences are there between Adelaide's pomegranate seeds and Persephone's?
4. People say moving is one of the most stressful things in life, and a move like Adelaide's, where every aspect of life changes completely, can definitely be classified as a traumatic event. The five members of Adelaide's immediate family each adjust to the transition in their own way. What differences and similarities do you see in the ways Adelaide, her parents, and her sisters adjusted?
5. When Adelaide starts classes in Greenville, she's immediately drawn to the black students. Why do you think that is? Why does Adelaide become friends with Wendy, Sarah May, Lion, Frederica, and Nathan, even though they don't know what to make of her?
6. Adelaide asks a lot of dumb questions because she doesn't understand what's going on around her in Greenville. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like everyone but you understood what was happening? How did you handle that situation?
7. It takes Adelaide a while to recognize that her black friends are treated differently by the other students and the teachers. What are some of the ways they are treated differently? Why do you think Adelaide doesn't realize this immediately? Why do you think the white students acted that way? What other realizations does Adelaide make over the course of the novel? What *doesn't* she realize that she probably should have?

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8. Part of historical background of the novel is that teenagers were a central force in desegregating real-life Greenville, SC. In March of 1960, seven black high school students were arrested for trying to study at the public library; they challenged the arrests in court and succeeded in desegregating the library. In July and August of 1960, high school and college students staged sit-ins at Kress's lunch counter in downtown Greenville; they eventually succeeded in desegregating lunch counters throughout all of the South. In August of 1963, A.J. Whittenberg sued the school district of Greenville County so that his daughter Elaine could attend the white junior high school. What have been some important moments in the struggle for racial equality in your town or city? Who were some local figures who made a difference? (If you don't know those stories, where can you find them?) What is racial equality like today in the place where you live?
9. Some influential people have said white authors shouldn't write books set in the Civil Rights Era or talk about race issues because it's time for people of color to tell those stories from their point of view, as only they can. What is lost if white writers are the only ones telling these types of stories? Why do you think it might be important for white people to read books written by people of color? What might be lost if white writers don't also address racial issues and white identity (the particularities and peculiarities of being white)?
10. The 1960s were a time when more women were starting to work in a greater variety of professional jobs. On page 166, Emily Rose says she wants to study the universe, but she's been told that would be a waste of time because she's a girl. How are the expectations on girls and women similar and different now compared to how they were then? How have women and girls today benefitted from the risks taken by previous generations of women to change the official and unspoken rules?
11. The book describes some important milestones as Adelaide grows to become her own person: learning to ride a bike, learning to drive a car, getting a job, making decisions about relationships, making decisions about college. Were any of these experiences relevant to important moments in your life? What other important milestones did you have in your process of growing up?
12. "The n-word" was used a lot more in the 1960s than it's used now. Why do you think that is? Do you think the author was justified in her decision to include the n-word in this book (on page 214)? Why do you think the author chose to use it in that specific context?
13. The underlying racial tensions at Adelaide's school come to a head at the Thanksgiving football game. How did you feel about the way the book resolved that crisis? In what ways was it similar and different to how situations like that usually resolve in real life?



14. Adelaide was certain she wanted to marry Maicaah, but she becomes less certain as the novel progresses. What role did Justin have in changing her mind about Maicaah? How did you feel about how Adelaide treated Justin in the end? Do you think she should have made a different decision, where Justin is concerned?

15. Some white writers have been criticized for “white savior” storylines, where a white person swoops in and saves the day for all the black people who were suffering. Does this book fall into that trap? Why or why not?

16. This book is set in the 1960s, but the issue of racism continues to be a problem in American culture today, where unarmed black teenagers are killed because they “look suspicious” and white teenagers openly mock Native American elders for their culture. How might the topic of racism be easier to talk about with historical distance? What similarities and differences do you see between the world described in the novel and the world we live in today, in terms of discrimination based on race?

17. Describe Adelaide’s relationship with her mother. How does that change over the course of the novel? What causes the changes in their relationship?

18. At the end of the book, Adelaide has to decide whether to stay in the village or not. Why do you think Adelaide makes the decision she does? Do you think she would have been happier if she’d made a different choice?

The following page shows some pictures that influenced or inspired the novel. You can find more pictures like this—and music from Adelaide’s era—on ChristineKindberg.com.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

If you enjoyed the themes of racial justice in *The Means That Make Us Strangers*, you might also enjoy:

- *The Hate U Give*, by Angie Thomas
- *American Street*, by Ibi Zoboi
- *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson

If you enjoyed the way *The Means That Make Us Strangers* presents life between cultures, you might also enjoy:

- *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms*, by Katherine Rundell
- “It’s a Jungle out There!” by Ron Snell
- *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros

If you enjoyed learning about the history of desegregation in Greenville, SC, you might also enjoy:

- “Memory, History, and the Desegregation of Greenville,” by Stephen O’Neill
- *Warriors Don’t Cry*, by Melba Pattillo Beals
- *A Girl Stands at the Door*, by Rachel Devlin



Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world, and it is one of two African countries that wasn't colonized by Europeans. The Oromo people group is the largest ethnicity in Ethiopia, but they are politically oppressed within their own country.



In 1963, A.J. Whittenberg and 5 other parents sued the school board of Greenville County so that their children could transfer into white schools. Judge J.R. Martin ruled that the school board had to allow the transfers, and in 1964, Elaine Whittenberg became the first black student at Greenville Junior High School.



Schools in Greenville weren't fully integrated until 1970. This photo, which shows four students in the new, integrated high school, inspired some of the descriptions of Wendy, Lion, Frederica, Nathan, and Sarah May.



This yearbook photo spread shows Greenville as it was in the mid-1960s. The yearbook is from Parker High School, on which Adelaide's high school is based.