***Kindred* Journal #1 –** “The Prologue” and “The River”

In his critical essay, Robert Crossley quotes an interview with Octavia Butler in which she states, “Fiction writers can’t be too pedagogical or too polemical”; Crossley goes on to write that “the route [Butler] pursues to her readers’ heads is through their guts and nerves, and that requires good storytelling, not just a set of issues” (274). –

**Essential Questions** *(I am able to answer these questions by the end of the novel):*

1. What is the purpose of Butler’s literary experiment?
2. Why is she writing a first person slave narrative in the late 20th century? What “lens” is she using?
3. What does she want her 21st century readers to think about and consider? If she only wanted us to think about the atrocities of slavery, then there would be need for her protagonist travel back and for the through time.

**The Prologue & The River – Answer the following questions:**

1. What is the purpose of the prologue? Often the purpose is to provide necessary backstory for the novel or to set the stage for the drama to come. What else could be going on?
2. What effect does the use of *in medias res* have on the audience, as the story begins?

**Subtext:**

When you subtext, you are attempting to get into the mind of a particular character in a story by understanding the context, plot devices, and characterization. After reading the text out loud, begin writing you subtext in 1st person POV. The following should come through in your writing

1. How you think the character is feelings
2. The qualities or personalist traits the character is displaying that make her/him deal with the given situation in a particular way
3. The circumstances that are affecting her or his actions
4. What seems to be motivating this character
5. How the character reacts to other character and the key conflicts in the scene

Subtext #1

Subtext #2

Subtext #3

Subtext #4

**Kindred Journal #2**

“The Fire” (1/2)

Summarize the main events from the section of reading –

Examine your artifact. Based on your reading, what do you think it is?

How is it important to the plot?

What does it symbolize to the character(s) in the chapter?

What does it symbolize to the reader?

How is it culturally and historically significant?

Does this artifact function as a literary allusion? Explain.

**Kindred Journal #3 –** “The Fire” (3-6)

**Summarize the reading:**

**What do we know about the following characters so far?**

Dana –

Kevin –

Rufus –

One other character (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_) –

Select one of the essential questions to answer based on what we know so far about the novel:

**Kindred Journal #4 – “**The Fall” (1-4)

The theme of a book often revolves around the key **conflict** or **paradox**. In this section Butler fully utilizes **irony, paradox,** and **foreshadowing** to move the reader beyond the plausibility of time travel and further into the purpose of the novel: Dana’s and the reader’s, experience in the early 19th century American South.

**Paradox:** *A statement that initially appears to be contradictory, but then, on closer inspection turns out to make sense.* Ex. Fair is foul and foul is fair (from *Macbeth*)

*My own example:*

**Foreshadowing:** *The use in a literary work of clues to indicate or suggest events that have not yet occurred.*

Ex. The apparitions in *Macbeth*. The dead body in the boat in *Huck Finn*

*My own example:*

**Irony:** A contrast between expectation and reality – between what is said and what is really meant. the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect.

Ex. A traffic cop gets a parking ticket. A teacher gets a speeding ticket in a school zone.

*My own example:*

**Extension questions – select four to answer on the back of this page.**

1. The book calls Kevin and Dana “kindred” spirits (57); how is the way they see the world similar? How does this connect to the title of the book?
2. How is the following quote ironic and why is it significant to the plot’s development? “‘People don’t learn everything about the times that came before them’, I said. Why should they?” (63).
3. Foreshadowing is used extensively in these sections; how will “The Fall” end? What are the clues?
4. How does Sarah’s situation represent one of the many paradoxes that exists in slavery?
5. How is the following quote ironic, as well as an example of a key difference between Kevin and Dana in 1819? “I hate to think of you playing the part of a slave at all” (79).

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**Kindred Journal # 5** – The Fall (5 – 8)

**Step 1:** Create a web of the 10 most important events in “The Fall”.

Then number them in order of importance to the plot’s development (1 is the most important)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

**Step 2: Journal Writing**

**• What is the theme of “The Fall”?**  
*Theme is what controls all the expressive choices a writer makes in a story— what to put in, what to leave out, how to decide on the angle of vision, narrative structure, tone. The theme itself responds to the writer’s vision of life; this vision is based on the writer’s “filter” for reality (social group, class, race, sex, society, etc.). The filter acts as a schema or “lens” through which the writer sees and writes about the world. (Clayton)*

**• What lens is Butler asking the reader to look through in the following passage?**  
 “‘You might be able to go through this whole experience as an observer,’ I said. ‘I can understand that because most of the time, I’m still an observer. It’s protection. It’s nineteen seventy-six shielding and cushioning eighteen nineteen for me. But now and then, like with the kids’ game, I can’t maintain the distance. I’m drawn all the way into eighteen nineteen, and I don’t know what to do. I ought to be doing something though. I know that’... ‘Just started to teach Nigel to read and write,’ I said. ‘Nothing more subversive than that’”(101).

**• Which events make Dana’s reality more “real” for the reader?**

**Step 3:** Think and write critically about “The Fall.”  
**Select ONE of the following prompts – attach your answer to this journal entry.** *Consider this writing practice for your one page essay due at the end of the novel ☺*  
 **1. Find a quote . .** . It can be a statement that you have already thought a bit about or something new, but you need to choose a quote that you feel in some way speaks to this section of the book and its purpose. Perhaps it takes up an interesting issue or dilemma that has followed a character throughout the book thus far. Be sure to use supporting evidence.   
  
**2. Answer a question . .** .There are pressing ethical questions that are raised in Kindred; choose one that has not yet been answered. Fully analyze and explore a question that has been on your mind about the book. Be sure to support your analysis and exploration with evidence from the book.   
  
**3. Take up an issue . . .** This book is overflowing with issues that overwhelmingly affect the reader historically, culturally, and socially. Discuss an issue that interests you as it relates to this section of the book, again support your analysis and exploration with evidence from the book.

**Kindred Journal # 6 – “The Fight” Part 1-10**

***Reread*** *Dana and Kevin’s discussion about getting married in the 1970s. This is a very important section of the book, in terms of Butler’s overall purpose.*  
Which racial issues does the conversation raise?   
  
  
  
How do we see the legacy of slavery in American culture more than 100 years after the Civil War?  
  
  
  
  
 And now—150 years after the Civil War?

**Select at least 10 questions to answer -**

1. What are Kevin and Dana’s families’ reactions to their decision to get married?

2. Why does Dana’s aunt accept her desire to marry Kevin?

3. How has 1819 permanently left its mark on Dana?

4. What realization does Dana have when she regains consciousness on her bathroom floor?

5. Explain why Dana is so disoriented—”It was real”(115), “Nothing was real”(116).

6. What is Dana’s ethical dilemma as she is drawn back to Rufus this time?

7. Who is Isaac and why is he fighting with Rufus?

8. How much time has passed and where is Kevin?

9. What will happen to Alice now that she and Isaac are runaways?

10. What are the key differences between what Rufus wants in 1825 and what Dana and Kevin have in 1976?

11. How does Rufus try to justify attempting to rape Alice?

12. Rufus has leverage to control Dana now and he’s not afraid to use it, what is it?

13. Why is the marriage ceremony between Nigel and Carrie significant?

14. Dana says that Tom Weylin “wasn’t a monster... [he was] just an ordinary man who sometimes did the monstrous things his society said were legal and proper”(134).

15. Why does Dana make this distinction? What bigger statement about society is Butler making?

16. What happened to Luke? What does this incident teach Dana?

17. Why does Weylin essentially own Dana at this point? Explain.

18. How can the conversation Dana and Rufus have about history be part of Butler’s purpose? “‘No it isn’t,’ I said. ‘That book wasn’t even written until a century after slavery was abolished.’ ‘Then why the hell are they still complaining about it?’” (140-141).

19. Why is Rufus “blackmailing” Dana? Is this manipulation apparent in his personality earlier in the book?

20.How do you feel about Dana’s attitude toward Sarah’s “acceptance” of begin a slave (145)?

21. How is Rufus’ purchase of Alice another paradox of slavery?

22. Dana has deluded herself into thinking she has some sort of control over Rufus. When does she realize that she has none? Explain.

23. Who was the father of some of Sarah’s children? How does this impact Dana’s earlier judgments and attitude toward Sarah?

24.What is Rufus “buying” from Nigel (155)?

25. When Dana has to explain to Alice that she is now a slave there are several role reversals. What are they? Explain.

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**Kindred Journal # 7 – “The Fight” Part 11 - 16**

**Select at least 10 questions to answer -**   
1. Why is Rufus’ statement “But I’m not going to give up what I can have” (163), so important? What does it show you about him in general?

2. Rufus threatens Dana with an ultimatum regarding Alice, what is it?

3. What is Dana’s moral dilemma?

4. Psychologically and philosophically why wouldn’t Dana go to Rufus?

5. Why won’t Alice run again? What are her other options?

6. What finally makes Dana decide to run?

7. Dana has an important realization when she says, “I crept away from the Weylin house, moving through the darkness with even less confidence than I had felt when I fled to Alice’s house months before. Years before. I hadn’t known quite as well then what there was to fear. . .” (171).

8. Who betrays Dana and why?

9. After Dana is captured she is unable to go home, why?

10. Again, Butler seems to reverse Dana and Alice’s roles; she makes them seem so similar, how does she do this?

11. Why does Dana compare her failed attempt to runaway to Harriet Tubman (177)? What does she realize?

12. Even Liza seems to think Dana and Alice are interchangeable: hurt one to hurt the other. Why is this important?

13. Why does Tom Weylin write to Kevin?

14. Explain the difference between what Dana “gives” Rufus and what Alice “gives” Rufus (180).

15. How does Dana describe Rufus’ view of her?

16. Explain the following quote “Slavery was a long slow process of dulling” (183). Teacher’s Guide: Kindred 8

17. How old is Kevin?

18. How does Alice show her strength when Kevin comes? Why doesn’t she acknowledge Dana’s “good-bye”?

19. How does Rufus’ reaction to Dana and Kevin leaving bring us back to another moment in the book? Why would Butler do this?

20.At this point who is the bigger monster, Rufus or Tom Weylin?

21. Dana and Alice have seemed to become the same woman to Rufus, how and why?

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Create a thesis statement making a claim about why Octavia Butler has made these two characters so similar, but still very different.

What evidence do you have to support the thesis so far?

**Kindred Journal #8 – “The Storm” (1-5)**

Select two short passages from this section. Summarize including key events, actions, and details.

**Quote: “**

**” ( ).**

**Summary:**

**Quote: “**

**” ( ).**

**Summary:**

**Choose one of the two sections and complete the following:**

1. Explain why this is an important part of the story.

2. Respond personally to this passage. Select several words or phrases in the passage and explain which emotions the words evoke; then continue to explain your personal reactions and/or associations to the material.

3. Reflect more broadly on the cultural connotations the words/phrases may carry, as well as on what this passage tells us about people or the world in general. Make broad, general connections here (hint, hint, Butler’s purpose?).

4. Create a symbol or image in pencil, pen, marker, whatever, which shows the meaning you have assigned to the page. Then explain why you chose the symbol/image you did.

**Kindred Journal #9 – “The Storm” (6 - 13)**

Select two short passages from this section. Summarize including key events, actions, and details.

**Quote: “**

**” ( ).**

**Summary:**

**Quote: “**

**” ( ).**

**Summary:**

**Choose one of the two sections and complete the following:**

1. Explain why this is an important part of the story.

2. Respond personally to this passage. Select several words or phrases in the passage and explain which emotions the words evoke; then continue to explain your personal reactions and/or associations to the material.

3. Reflect more broadly on the cultural connotations the words/phrases may carry, as well as on what this passage tells us about people or the world in general. Make broad, general connections here (hint, hint, Butler’s purpose?).

4. Create a symbol or image in pencil, pen, marker, whatever, which shows the meaning you have assigned to the page. Then explain why you chose the symbol/image you did.

**Kindred Journal #10 – “The Rope” and “The Epilogue”**

Answer these questions:

1. Who does Kevin get to bandage Dana’s wounds? a. Why won’t suicide work to bring her home again?
2. How long has it been in 1976? How long has it been in 1831?
3. Kevin wants Dana to let Rufus die, why can’t she?
4. Why is the following quote important? “You know someday, you’re going to have to stop dragging that thing around with you and come back to life” (244).
5. How is the following quote part of Butler’s purpose? “‘I’m not a horse or a sack of wheat. If I have to seem to be property, if I have to accept limits on my freedom for Rufus’s sake, then he also has to accept limits—on his behavior toward me. He has to leave me control of my own life to make living look better to me than killing and dying’ . . . ‘If your black ancestors had felt that way, you wouldn’t be here’” (246).
6. Why did Alice commit suicide? Why did Rufus “trick” Alice? Think critically! What does Dana demand from him?
7. Look up catharsis. When does the process of writing become cathartic for Dana? How could this moment also be part of Butler’s purpose?
8. What does Rufus want Dana to do now that Alice is gone?
9. How does Alice’s death make Dana’s situation more dangerous? How does Rufus reveal the way he sees Alice and Dana?
10. What is the one weapon Dana has that Alice didn’t?
11. What does the Epilogue leave you thinking about?

**Kindred Journal #11 – Final Assessment**

**OPTION ONE**

While reading the book Kindred by Octavia Butler you have been asked several times to think critically about what Butler’s purpose is. Why did she write this book? Why did she create the structure she did? What does Butler want her 21st century readers to think about? What “lens” is Butler using? Why is Butler writing a first-person slave narrative in the late 20th century? If she only wanted her readers to think about the atrocities of slavery, then there would be no need to have Dana travel back and forth through time.

In his essay “The Novelist as Teacher,” Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe wrote, a writer “must remain free to disagree with his (her) society and go into rebellion against it if need be. But I am for choosing my cause very carefully.” (42).

**Step 1:** In the final journal, reflect on Achebe’s quote and the role of the writer in society.

**Step 2:** In an essay of one page (single space, one-inch margins, 12 pt font) explain how the purpose of Butler’s novel fits into Achebe’s description of the writer’s role. What is the purpose of Butler’s literary experiment? You will need a thesis statement and at least two quotes to support your ideas. I can help you with further organization ideas ☺

**OPTION TWO**

1. Family Narrative: (One page, single space, one inch margins, 12 point font)
   1. Step 1: Journal about an ancestor or relative they would “go back” and meet if they could.
   2. Step 2: *(Usually at home through conversation)* - What facts can you discover about this ancestor or relative that you could build a story around? If the person is still alive can you get in contact with her or him to learn some details? If the person is deceased do you have other relatives you can talk to in order to get the information you need? Ask questions that are curious. Sometimes people don’t believe that they have lived through or seen anything “important.” This is part of your challenge.
   3. Step 3: The next task is to tell a family story from that person’s first-person narrative voice. This assignment may seem difficult at first because of the person’s historical or physical distance from the writer; however, fiction is often based on fact. This could be a story that was told to you long ago or one that is told to you solely for this project. The topic of this story ought to have something to do with your family history.
      1. • Here, strive to capture the storyteller’s voice. Often this is what is lost over time, and this is one of the most important aspects of the story. Think about why first-person family narratives are both engaging and important.
      2. • Butler is allowing her fictional character to tell a first-person slave narrative, which is a first person family narrative.
   4. Things to focus on. . .
      1. Create a voice that is seemingly from the time period (yes, you must go back in time) and the narrator’s actions/statements/ thoughts must be reasonable and convincing (this voice should not sound like YOU).
      2. Fully describe the story’s setting/time period, and the story should be organized (conflict, complication, climax, resolution) and well-told (that means clearly understood by your audience).
      3. Fully develop the narrator and character(s); the actions/thoughts/statements of the narrator and character(s) must be reasonably accounted for; create a good sense of who the narrator and character(s) are.
      4. The story should make sense and there should be little confusion as to why you are choosing this part of your family history to tell.

**Creative Project Options**

Final products must be typed or if drawn, not in pencil.

1. Write a song or poem exploring a theme found in *Kindred*
2. Create a thematic poster depicting an important aspect of *Kindred*
3. Create a comic strip of an important scene. Include at least three quotes.
4. Think of something else? Let me know!