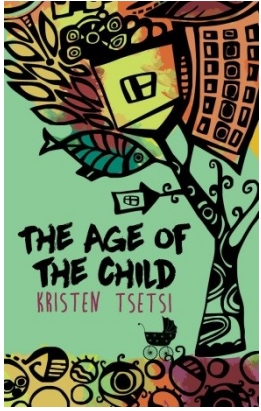


Discussion questions for *The Age of the Child* by Kristen Tsetsi



General questions

- Did the book engage you immediately or did it take some time?
- What emotional response did the story evoke in you?
- Did the book take you outside your comfort zone?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book?
- How is fatherhood explored in the book?
- Who are the villains and who are the victims? Are they the same throughout?
- What main themes does the novel explore?

Characters

- Did you like the characters and, if not, how important is it to you that characters be likeable?
- Were there any characters you loved to hate?
- Which character, major or minor, did you either like the most or have the most empathy for?
- Who were you rooting for?
- Did any of the main characters surprise you at any point? If so, how?
- What are your feelings about Margaret's exit from the story? Did the author prepare the appropriate groundwork?
- Who is the Rectifier?
- Who is ultimately responsible for the conditions at Exile?

What they do, what they say

- Do you agree with Katherine that Graham's decision to be with Absolut Meredith is "fair"?
- What is the first real choice Katherine gets to make entirely on her own (related to her role as a reproductive person) after learning she's pregnant?
- When Graham surprises Katherine with the news that he wants to keep the baby, he tells her, "There's no reason anything has to change!" To what extent does this prediction prove to be true for Graham? For Katherine?
- When Annabelle escapes and Lenny asks where the bird is going, Lenny's dad says, "Annabelle's going to die, sweetheart." Should he have been honest? Would the answer be different if Margaret hadn't added, "But happy"?
- Margaret and Lenny avoid the news because it's unpleasant. Is this a dangerous or healthy method of self-preservation?
- Do you applaud Lenny's almost-perfect patience with Millie or do you think she allows herself to be a doormat?

- According to Lenny, the only thing that matters when it comes to how one person treats another is intent. Do you agree? Does her intent ever reveal her to be less than pure?

Conflict

- What is the central conflict?
- What role do cigarettes play as Katherine deals with her personal conflict?
- To Floyd, Boris represents a chance to do right what his own parents did wrong. What does Boris represent to Lenny?

Structure & Style

- How do you feel about not knowing the details of what happened to Chester Walton? Would knowing change how you respond to his situation?
- Where Graham is and whether he's alive or dead is never brought to a conclusion. Should it be?
- What do you think the alternating limited points of view contribute to the story? How do they add to your understanding of the characters?
- How does the author use foreshadowing to hint at Graham's eventual absence?
- Where do Millie's experiences mirror Katherine's, and what effect does that have? (Remember that mirror images aren't identical; they're flipped.)

Social issues

- Millie doesn't feel loved or valued. How does this impact her in her younger years, and then in her later years?
- Millie's desire to earn her mother's love is largely responsible for the implementation of parent licensing, the goal of which (agree with the system or not) is to prevent child maltreatment. In the interest of overcoming adversity, people often achieve great things. Does this present an argument in favor of a certain percentage of unhappy childhoods?
- In the book, parent licensing guidelines for those who want to have children borrow from those in the real world designed to protect children available for foster care or adoption. Should biological children have the same protections as foster or adoptable children?
- People have a tendency to casually urge others, whether they're strangers or loved ones, to have children—regardless of whether they want any. Did this novel make you see that kind of urging or pressure any differently?

Moral dilemmas

- Katherine feels justified in lying to Graham because he's changed his mind about an understanding they once had about whether to have children. Do you agree or disagree that she's justified?
- In the end, Lenny chooses to save the baby, but not to keep her. What do you think about both of her decisions and the consequences others face as a result?
- Floyd chooses to take advantage of Lenny by having sex with her while her hormonal birth control is, unbeknownst to her, deactivated. Since Millie was probably correct when

she said Lenny would love her own child if she had one, and because Lenny has proven herself to be nurturing and selfless and has more than enough money to provide for a child, is his behavior at least somewhat forgivable?

Final questions

- Did any passages strike you as insightful or profound, or was there a section of dialogue that encapsulated a character or the story as a whole?
- What did the title say to you when you first saw it, and what did it come to mean to you by the end of the novel?
- Were you satisfied with the ending, or do you think something different should have happened?
- Had you read reviews before reading the book? If so, did you agree with the reviewers?
- If you had to halve the size of your book collection, would this book stay or go?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would it be?