



An American Marriage

Book Club Kit

Discussion Questions

1) The title of this novel is *An American Marriage*. Do you feel this title accurately represents the novel? Why or why not? And if you do find the title appropriate, what about the story makes it particularly “American”?

2) When Celestial asks Roy if he would have waited for her for more than five years, he doesn’t answer her question but reminds her that, as a woman, she would not have been imprisoned in the first place. Do you feel that his response is valid, and do you think it justifies his infidelity? Do you believe that he would have remained faithful if Celestial had been the one incarcerated? Does this really matter, and if so, why?

3) You may not have noticed that Tayari Jones does not specify the race of the woman who accuses Roy of rape. How did you picture this woman? What difference does the race of this woman make in the way you understand the novel’s storyline?

4) Andre insists that he doesn’t owe Roy an apology for the way his relationship with Celestial changed. Do you agree? Why or why not?

5) There are two father figures in Roy’s life: Big Roy is the one who shepherded him into adulthood and helped him grow into a responsible, capable person, but Walter is the one who taught Roy how to survive. Do you feel these men deserve equal credit? If not, which was the more important figure in Roy’s life and why?

6) Roy is hurt when Celestial, in discussing her career as an artist, doesn’t mention him or the role he played in giving her the encouragement and freedom to follow her dreams, but Walter argues that she is justified in her silence. Do you agree? Do you think her silence is due to shame, or is she just being practical in how she presents herself to advance her career?

6) It is obvious that Andre is different from Roy in many ways. Do you feel that ultimately he is a better match for Celestial? If so, why? Also, why do you think Celestial and Andre decide against formally marrying? Do you think that as a couple they will be good and nurturing parents? Do you feel that as a couple, they will be better at parenting than Celestial and Roy would have been? If so, why?

These questions are from Oprah’s Book Club (oprah.com) and ReadingGroupGuides (readinggroupguides.com).



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Tayari Jones

Photo by Nina Subin
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About Tayari Jones

Tayari Jones is an author and academic best known for her 2018 novel, *An American Marriage*, which was featured in Oprah's Book Club. Jones was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. Her parents both participated in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and eventually both became professors at Clark Atlanta University.

Jones attended Spelman College, a historically Black women's college in Atlanta, before getting her master's degree from the University of Iowa and a Master of Fine Arts in fiction from the University of Arizona. Her first book, *Leaving Atlanta*, was published in 2002 and draws on the Atlanta Child Murders of 1979-1981, which happened while Jones was in elementary school.

Jones is the author of four books: *An American Marriage*, *Silver Sparrow*, *The Untelling*, and *Leaving Atlanta*. She is an Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University and the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Creative Writing at Emory University.

About *An American Marriage*

In addition to being an Oprah's Book Club Selection, *An American Marriage* also appeared on Barack Obama's summer reading list and year-end roundup. The novel was awarded the Women's Prize for Fiction, the Aspen Words Prize and an NAACP Image Award.

Sources

- "Tayari Jones," tayarijones.com/about
- Wikipedia, "Tayari Jones," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tayari_Jones