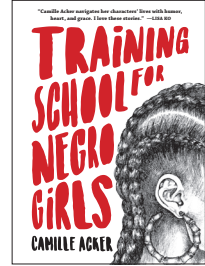


READING GROUP GUIDE

TRAINING SCHOOL FOR NEGRO GIRLS by Camille Acker

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1. Consider the title of Acker's collection. What forces try to "train" the stories' black women and girls, and how do they manifest differently in relation to the protagonists' age, income level, or neighborhood? Conversely, what are some moments in these stories when black women and girls resist or break free from those forces?
2. In "Cicada," what relationship do you see between Ellery and the cicadas she so enjoys? How do you interpret her final act, when she throws their shells at Lori's car?
3. "Everything She Wants" is the first and perhaps only story in the book that deals with mental health and illness. How does this story represent and understand mental illness in the black community, specifically among black women?
4. In "Mambo Sauce," Constance tries to combat Winging It's closure, only to discover that Anne, the owner, wants to sell the restaurant and pursue other aspirations. How do scenarios like Anne's complicate the discourse surrounding gentrification? Do you agree with Constance's assertion that "once gentrification started it could not be stopped" (158)? If so, what are ways to mitigate the damages caused by gentrification when it has already taken root? If not, what are ways to stop it?
5. How does adhering to respectability politics benefit the protagonists at times, or even free them from certain discriminations? How, in turn, does it harm or imprison them?
6. In "Cicada," Ellery is disappointed when she wins the piano competition and discovers the \$500 promised to the first-place winner is actually a savings bond, not a cash prize. What are other instances in *Training School* where empty promises entice and/or disappoint the protagonists? How do these empty promises relate to the recurring burden of respectability?
7. Stories like "Strong Men" depict how a black community comes together, in this case to celebrate a high school graduation. In contrast, what do the protagonists experience when they lack the support of a close-knit black community or feel like they don't belong? Consider stories like "Final Draft of College Essay," "Mambo Sauce," and "The Ropes."
8. In "The Ropes," Ebony is framed as a troublemaker by her teacher and loses her special permission to attend Watson Elementary. How do the limiting expectations thrust on young black girls like Ebony and their unfair treatment give rise to the world-weary teenagers of "Who We Are"?
9. Both Janice of "Training School for Negro Girls" and Constance of "Mambo Sauce" yearn to fit in to a specific community. How do these two experiences of wanting to belong relate to one another? How do imbalances of privilege prevent the two from fully belonging? And what's preventing them from overcoming that urge to belong?

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