

# READ GLOBAL BOOK GROUP

## *These Ghosts are Family*, by Maisy Card

### Questions

(adapted from Simon & Schuster)

Warm-up: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this novel?

1. Describe Abel. How does the captain in England see him, which is the cause for his new life? How do the women in his life see him, his wives and his daughters? How does Vera see him? How does Estelle see him? Are these judgments of him fair?
2. Who—or what—do you think are the ghosts that the title refers to?
3. What do the Rastafarians represent in the context of the book? And what does their ideology threaten—especially in regards to women like Vera’s mother, who value whiteness and believe that it is “partly a state of mind, part manipulation of the body” (26)?
4. At the beginning of the book, Caren thinks that “perhaps, a life does not belong exclusively to one person” (10). What does it mean in the case of the present-day characters (Abel, Estelle, Irene) distancing themselves from their familial obligations?
5. Early on in Vera and Abel’s marriage, she thinks “she never thought he was the of man to hit a woman, but she’s not sure anymore. She never thought she was the kind of woman to cheat on a man. They don’t know each other at all” (39). How much do you think a married couple can ever really know each other?
6. Debbie decides to destroy the journal of her ancestor, Harold Fowler, in order to drown out his voice in her head. What did you make of Debbie’s decision?
7. Louise grows up thinking that she’s white, and is shocked when she learns that her mother, Florence, was a slave. How does this knowledge change how she sees herself? How does it change how others see her?
8. When Vincent and Irene are children, the women of the neighborhood perform an exorcism on their mother, Vera. In response, Vera says “You nuh know what free woman look like, so you say is demon” (144). Discuss the things that happen to Vera during this exorcism. How do these echo the traumas undergone by their ancestors?
9. When Abe, Irene’s son, is in the hospital, hoping his sister will emerge from a coma, he recites the names of his ancestors like an incantation. He says “If anything is left of the real Abel Paisley, even a thimbleful of ash, he’ll wear him proudly around his neck as a poultice. He’ll exalt him, like the rest of his ancestors, even if he isn’t worthy” (251). What does Abe mean by “worthy” and how is it valued?

10. Why do you think the novel ends with the story of the three girls who were kidnapped at Vera's funeral? What are these girls hungry for? How does this fit into the other themes throughout the novel?

Wind-down: Did this discussion change your 1-10 rating for this book?

## Notes

### **Ancestors – Spanish Town, 1831-1832**

Louise Paisley  
Peta-Gay Fowler  
Harold Fowler  
Henry Paisley  
(Maddie, Enoch Fowler)

### **The Lamb or the Lion – Kingston, 1966**

Abel Paisley  
Vera Paisley  
(Bully, Marcia, Roman)

### **Past Lives – Brooklyn, 1999**

Irene Paisley  
Betty

### **Gratitude – Independence City, 1999**

Bernard  
Vera Paisley  
The Little Girls  
(Vincent Paisley, Irene Paisley)

### **How We Are Born – Harold Town, 1999-2010**

Bernard  
The Little Girls  
Norma Montague  
Astor Graham  
Birdie Wimberley  
(Philomena Randolph, Augustus Monroe)

### **Replacement – Brooklyn/Harlem, 2003**

Ruthie Reynolds

Abel Paisley/Stanford Solomon  
Adele Solomon  
Estelle Solomon  
(Eileen Reynolds, Kofi, Grace)

### **The True Death of Abel Paisley – Harlem, 2005**

Abel Paisley/Stanford Solomon  
Irene Paisley  
Caren Solomon  
Ruthie Reynolds  
(Adele Solomon, Estelle Solomon, ghost of Vera Paisley)

### **Atonement – Brooklyn, 2010**

Debbie Norgood  
Vincent Paisley  
(Harold Fowler, Maddie, Florence, William McDaniel, Peta-Gay Fowler)

### **Forgive Me – Brooklyn, 2011**

Vincent Paisley  
Ernie Pitt  
(Irene Paisley, Rebecca Ann Pitt, Vera Paisley)

### **Estelle's Black Eye – Harlem, 2020**

Caren Solomon  
Estelle Solomon

### **Ancestor Worship – Queens 2020**

Abe Paisley  
Irene Paisley  
(Florence Paisley, Chloe Paisley)

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