

“An epic, enchanting debut.” —ELLE

THE PEACH SEED

BOOK
CLUB
KIT

A Novel

ANITA GAIL JONES



WELCOME TO THE BOOK CLUB KIT FOR *THE PEACH SEED*.

Please note: In order to provide book clubs with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *The Peach Seed*, you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. Why do you think *The Peach Seed* was chosen as the book's title? What is the significance of the peach seed?
2. Did you have prior knowledge about the Albany Georgia Civil Rights Movement before reading this book? What do you think is its significance in American history?
3. What did you learn about the connections between the Middle Passage slave trade, and its impact on the lives of future generations for all Americans?
4. Jeffery Renard Allen's blurb states that in this novel, the past resurfaces as unfinished business in the present. How do you think it's manifesting now in people's lives and events?
5. How did the Albany Movement create the challenges that Fletcher and Altovise faced in their relationship? How did these experiences shape them, their worldviews, and their relationship over time?
6. This book was written through the points of view of four Black men in one family. What did you learn from their stories and their perspectives?
7. As the ancestral/enslavement story in 1700s Senegal shows, Blacks participated in the capture of other Blacks. As a reader, how do we navigate those two realities?
8. What do you think enabled the Dukes families to protect themselves and provide a buffer to bigotry, and then expand their capacity to grow love and hope? How could their experiences help us deal with societal challenges we face today?

9. What is the relationship between the peach seed monkey and the novel's exploration of the African diaspora?
 10. What role did the peach seed monkey play in the Dukes family's legacy through the generations and how was this disrupted when Fletcher gave the monkey to Altovise?
 11. What was the role of the women in the novel?
 12. How does the author use humor in the story? Pinpoint some lighter moments and discuss why you think she chose to include them in a story with so many heavy themes.
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Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR: **A Conversation with Anita Gail Jones**

What was the genesis of the book?

It began with a question for my father, Mr. Silas Jones, who had passed away so I was on my own for the answer. My dad was born in 1921 in southwest Georgia and lived his whole life there. He was part of The Greatest Generation, but was not able to realize the promises made to that generation because, as a Black man, he lived in what James Baldwin called "the teeth of the Southern terror." And yet—he managed to be a leader in our family, church, community, and on his job when the domineering culture, and the US government through laws and policies, considered him less than human. I wanted to explore how he did this and turned to fiction for an answer.

How did you discover Peach Seed Monkeys?

Back in the 1960s Mr. Paul Hems, an elder cousin on my mom's side, gave me and my late sister, Bettye, each a peach seed monkey he had carved. The tail on mine broke and in 1997 when we lost Bettye to a tragic plane crash, I found hers nestled in her jewelry box. I had not seen it or talked to her about it in decades. And there it was; perfectly intact even though she was gone. A decade later, it worked its way into the story that would become this book.

There's a historical timeline that imagines the life of an unknown ancestor—Malik—who is abducted from forced into slavery. Why was it important to give the reader access to someone so far back in the Dukes' lineage?

We've seen many movies, read many novels and accounts focused on the horrors of *The Middle Passage*. The tender moments deserve equal time. Enslaved peoples were fully human and we need to represent the full range of their very human lives. So I knew that even though my characters could not know their lineage, I was excited to have readers know—and wish they could tell the characters. Also, I wanted to show the 200-year arc of the Dukes family; beginning with Malik and ending with Bo D.

Another central character is the legacy of the Civil Rights Era. What did you want to explore as it relates to place and your characters?

From the start I intended to elevate the little known, factual Albany Georgia Civil Rights Movement which was part of an on-going struggle in the region dating back to Reconstruction and still going today. The Albany Movement involved many local civic and political groups, including the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Dr. King and his team came down from Atlanta to help with desegregating the city. The Movement wrongfully went down in history as a failure because these goals (for many reasons) were not met. Local icons such as Shirley and the late Charles Sherrod never stopped working, and King took what he learned on to Birmingham and beyond. In this way, Albany, GA was a crucial training ground for American activism. Because the Movement was powered by high school and college students, I knew my hero couple had to be 18 during that era so that I could drop them right down into the action.

How does this resonate into the present?

Once again, all over the world young people are the engines driving awareness, action and change around social injustices. Shows you how far we still have to go.

How did you approach the research?

Even with miracles of DNA, it was part of an evil strategy that African Americans can still hit the wall of history in researching our ancestry. Research for Malik was gut-wrenching, revision after revision. Drawings of slave ship holds, firsthand accounts, Google map. I'd often weep, and long for the last time I'd have to edit those sections. The 60s research received a huge gift: in 2011 I made a trip back to Albany, Georgia for the 50th Anniversary of the Albany Movement. Took place on campus of Albany State University and was astonishing. Meeting and interviewing people who had lived the lives my characters are recreating was too good to be true.

What are two key things would you like people to take away from reading *The Peach Seed*?

19th Century short story writer, Guy de Maupassant said: ***“Our memory is a more perfect world than the universe: it gives back life to those who no longer exist.”*** And to that I add: through imagination, fiction takes this further by giving life to characters who never existed. A novel has a beautiful chance to make these fictional folk our guides into very real worlds of history that might otherwise never be known; lost to lies and evil revision.

It is my hope that the story will sit with people of all walks of life:

—Specifically: I hope those who live in, or grew up in southwest Georgia—as I did—come away feeling a sense of reflection, pride and validation at seeing our little corner of the world authentically represented in a way that resonates universally.

—More broadly: I also hope that people who did not grow up in the south, have no connections with it beyond negative perspectives and connotations will be sparked by curiosity; by a desire to learn more about how Black families dealt —and still deal —with the horrific southern terror of enslavement's attempts to strip away all humanity and power. And to witness, through this specific story, how strong love and power rise through tyranny.