

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## **BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA**

**by Dorothy Allison**

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- Bone is nicknamed when, at birth, her "Uncle Earle announced that I was 'no bigger than a knuckle-bone.'" In what way does this name come to define her character? Does it reflect on her life in any way other than her size?
- When Bone is born, Anney is fifteen, dirt poor, and unmarried. With so many obstacles, why is she so focused on Bone's birth certificate, which no one but her will see? How does she pass this preoccupation on to Bone?
- Bone's identity as a female shifts tremendously throughout the book. She worships her uncles and takes pride in being a tomboy. Yet, on page 91 she says, "I liked being one of the women with my aunts, liked being a part of something nasty and strong and separate from my big rough boy-cousins and the whole world of spitting, growling, overbearing males." How does gender play a role in the book? How does Bone's relationship with other characters in the book shape her conception of her own gender?
- In the middle of the book, Bone suddenly becomes quite religious. On page 150 she claims, "I became fascinated with the idea of being saved, not just welcoming Jesus into my heart but the seriousness of the struggle between salvation and damnation, between good and evil, life and death." What do you think inspires this newfound fanaticism? How do her religious feelings relate to her relationship with Daddy Glen? With her feelings of illegitimacy?
- The issue of race is consistently present on the periphery of the book. At certain points, Bone shows particular interest in black people. For example, on page 83, when her Aunt Alma moves into an apartment building downtown, Bone becomes fascinated by one of the black children living below her relatives. Similarly, Bone and Shannon Pearl's fight on page 170 is provoked by Bone's anger at Shannon's family's racism. Why is race so important to Bone? How does race play a part in her own identity as a white person? As an illegitimate child?
- In Greenville County, it is clear that family means something different than the traditional "nuclear" family. Bone's aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandmother all have distinct roles in the book. How do they each contribute to Bone's upbringing? How do you think Bone would define family?
- On page 300, Raylene says: "Bone, no woman can stand to choose between her baby and her lover, between her child and her husband." How does this quote come to define Bone's family? In what ways throughout the book are Anney's loyalties tested?



**Skokie Public Library**

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