

Week 1
The Poisonwood Bible
Discussion Questions

WARNING: THIS DISCUSSION WILL CONTAIN SPOILERS. If you haven't read Books 1 and 2 and don't want spoilers, please come back to discuss when you are done with those sections.

Story Recap

In Books 1 and 2, we meet the Price Family: father Nathan, mother Orleanna and their 4 daughters, Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May. Orleanna and her daughters follow Nathan reluctantly to Belgian-ruled Congo in attempts to spread the word of his Baptist faith. The first couple books talk about the family's initial culture shock and adjusting to their new financially impoverished environment. The section ends when the Congo earns independence from Belgium and new Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba's speech.

Discussion Questions

1. Which narrator's voice do you connect with or want to know more about what she's thinking? Do you like the alternating narrators?
2. What do you think of Nathan? Is he the right person to preach to the Congolese? Do you think he will be successful in his mission?
3. What do you think of Nathan and Orleanna's relationship? Are they in love or is their marriage more a business arrangement.
4. The Price Family carries little things from the US on them to the Congo, the small comforts of home to start their mission. They carried garden seeds and cake mix. What comforts of home would you take with you if you were traveling abroad?
5. The family has quite a culture shock when they arrive in the Congo. From the meager housing accommodations (which are considered lavish to the Congolese) to the cooking style requiring all day to boil water to prepare meals and have a warm bath. Have you ever been to a place which gave you a culture shock? How did it make you feel? What did you learn from it?
6. The girls make hope chests. I didn't know the meaning behind them. Did you have one or make one?

7. We learn early on that tragedy is in the horizon. Do you think the Price family is strong enough to endure it together? What do you think of their family dynamic?
8. What message do you think Barbara Kingsolver is trying to teach us with this part of the story?
9. What does independence mean to the Congolese? How do you think independence will impact the Congolese village where the Price Family lives? Are they ready for it? Will it make their condition better or worse?

And some more in-depth questions from LitLovers:

10. What are the implications of the novel's title phrase, the poisonwood bible, particularly in connection with the main characters' lives and the novel's main themes? How important are the circumstances in which the phrase comes into being?
11. Why do you suppose that Reverend Nathan Price is not given a voice of his own? Do we learn from his wife and daughters enough information to formulate an adequate explanation for his beliefs and behavior? Does such an explanation matter?
12. What do we learn about cultural, social, religious, and other differences between Africa and America? To what degree do Orleanna and her daughters come to an understanding of those differences? Do you agree with what you take to be Kingsolver's message concerning such differences?