

Week 3
The Poisonwood Bible
Discussion Questions

WARNING: THIS DISCUSSION WILL CONTAIN SPOILERS. If you haven't read Books 4-5 and don't want spoilers, please come back to discuss when you are done with those sections.

Story Recap

Book 3 ended with the family escaping the vicious nsongonya, Leah tells Anatole she loves him and there are plans hatching to assassinate Lumumba. Book 4 begins with Orleanna's vision of how the US was involved in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese Prime Minister. Tragedy strikes the Price Family and young Ruth May is the victim. The long-awaited rain comes to the Congo after her passing and Reverend Price takes the opportunity to baptize the Congolese children who have come to pay respects to Ruth May. The Price Family is forever changed after Ruth May's passing. Orleanna and the girls leave the Congo without their father and make the long walk to their freedom. Rachel, Leah and Adah take vastly different paths in their lives.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think Nathan's saying of "Tata Jesus is Bangala!" signifies? In Congolese, when pronounced correctly, Bangala means "something precious and dear". But the way Nathan says it means "the poisonwood tree".
2. Orleanna says, "I was occupied so entirely by each day, I felt detached from anything so large as a month or a year. History didn't cross my mind. Now it does. Now I know, whatever your burdens, to hold yourself apart from the lot of more powerful men is an illusion." Do you feel like you're living on auto-pilot? Like history is passing you by? How do you ground yourself and be present in the moment? In the blink of an eye, our kids grow up and we're decades older.
3. Adah said, "In that other long ago place, America, I was a failed combination of too-weak body and over-strong will. But in Congo I am those things perfectly united: Adah." Where do you feel you are perfectly united, perfectly whole?
4. What did you think of Adah's miraculous recovery? Why now was she able to get past her physical handicaps and speak?
5. How does Ruth May's death impact Leah? Are you surprised she stayed in Africa and married Anatole?

6. Leah gives us a glimpse of life in other parts in Africa. Where children are sold into prostitution and where everything must be bargained for, even medical care. How did her childhood prepare her for her the difficulties of raising biracial boys in Africa?
7. Are you surprised how Rachel turned out and that she stayed in Africa?
8. Share some of your favorite quotes from this book.