THE NOVELS OF SHARON G. FLAKE

The Skin I’m In
Tr. Ed. 0-7868-0444-0 • $14.95
Pbk. Ed. 0-7868-1307-5 • $5.99

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Who Am I Without Him?
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Sharon G. Flake Boxed Set
The Skin I’m In, Money Hungry, and Begging for Change
Pbk. Ed. 0-7868-5164-3 • $17.99

This discussion guide was prepared by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of the poetry collection Sketches from a Spy Tree. Visit www.tracievaughnzimmer.com

Jump at the Sun
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THE NOVELS OF SHARON G. FLAKE

Discussion Guide

Who am I Without Him?
Sharon G. Flake
short stories about girls and the boys in their lives

Begging For Change
Sharon G. Flake

The Skin I’m In

Money Hungry
Sharon G. Flake

JUMP AT THE SUN
About this Guide:

This guide includes discussion questions intended to provoke thought and consideration of the themes of these stories, which include friendship, family, race relations, societal pressures, intergenerational issues, self-acceptance, poverty, and homelessness.
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## The Novels

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WHO AM I WITHOUT HIM?

About this book:
Sharon Flake takes readers through the minds of girls trying to define themselves while struggling to remain relevant to the boys in their lives. This is a complex, often humorous, always on-point exposition of youth resolving to find self-worth . . . any way they know how.

Awards, Reviews & Quotes:
A Booklist Top Ten Romance Novel for Youth

“Flake’s stories are startling, realistic, and poignant.” —VOYA

“Hilarious and anguished, these 10 short stories . . . speak with rare truth about family, friends, school, and especially about finding a boyfriend. Flake never denies the truths of poverty, prejudice, and failure.” —Booklist, Starred Review

“Flake’s handling of her theme shines with an awareness of the real-life social, emotional, and physical pressures that teens feel about dating. Honest and valuable.” —Kirkus, Starred Review

“Flake has a way of teaching a lesson without seeming to do so. Addressing issues and situations that many girls face in today’s often complex society, this book is provocative and thought-provoking.” —School Library Journal

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

1. **So I Ain’t No Good Girl**
   Why does the young woman let Raheem treat her in the manner he does? Does she have a choice? What will her future relationships be like?
2. **The Ugly One**  
Discuss the significance of Barley’s comment “Just ’cause you ugly, don’t mean you can’t have friends”? What issues surround the relationship between the way you look, the way you are treated, and the way you feel? How does Asia’s fantasy life differ from reality? How is this significant?

3. **Wanted: A Thug**  
Predict whether Melody will follow the advice she was given. If she does, will Rowl-D just find someone new? Discuss fidelity in teen relationships. Do you think this story accurately shows how teens treat each other? How faithful are boys vs. girls in teen relationships? Do you think it is fair for the girl to suffer all the consequences of an illicit encounter? Why or why not?

4. **I Know a Stupid Boy When I See One**  
Discuss this quote: “I like boys like him . . . Slow, stupid boys. They give you anything you want, and you ain’t hardly gotta do nothing to get it, neither.” What does this reveal about the girl’s character? Does this contribute to what happens to her in the end? Did the ending surprise you? What did you think of it?

5. **Mookie in Love**  
Have you ever seen a family conspire against someone’s relationship? When, if ever, would your family find a reason to do this? Describe the family of aunties when they get together. Do they remind you of your family in any way? How?

6. **Don’t Be Disrespecting Me**  
Discuss how one poor choice E made led to more. Was there a time he could have reversed the chain of events? Do you think E’s mom was just clueless, or was she complicit in his mistakes?

7. **I Like White Boys**  
Discuss this quote: “But do I only get to like boys that look like me? Or can I be like girls who look like Wendy, and get to pick any boy I want?” Where do you think Erika got her idea about what beauty is? Can these ideas and influences ever be overcome? How?
8. **Jacobs’s Rules**
Would you like to see this experiment done in your own school? Why or why not? Who do you think learned the most from the experiment described in this story?

9. **Hunting for Boys**
What do you think it would be like to be a member of a strict church group like the Calvary Church of God’s Blessed Example? Who do you think will stick to the rules and who will not? What makes you think this?

10. **A Letter to My Daughter**
Would you like to receive a letter like this from your own father? Why or why not? Do you agree with this father’s opinions about who would make a good companion? Why or why not?

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**About this book:**
Thirteen-year-old Maleeka, uncomfortable because her skin is dark in color, meets a new teacher, who has a birthmark on her face, and who helps makes some discoveries about how to love who she is as well as her own appearance.

**Quotes and Reviews:**
Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent (1999)
ALA Best Book for Young Adults (1999)
YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers (1999)
Texas Lone Star Reading List (2000-2001)

“Flake’s debut novel will hit home.” —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

“Young teens will appreciate Flake’s authenticity.” —*School Library Journal*
DISCUSSION GUIDE:

1. Would you consider Maleeka Madison and Char friends? Why or why not?

2. Do you think Maleeka should have talked to her mom about the homemade clothes? Why didn’t she?

3. How would you handle a bully like Char?

4. How are Miss Saunders’s face and Maleeka’s insecurity about her color related? What could Maleeka learn from Miss Saunders?

5. Miss Saunders gives up a lucrative business career to become a teacher in a difficult school. What does this say about her as a person? Would you ever consider teaching as a career? Why or why not?

6. Do you think Maleeka should have forgiven Caleb? Would you?

7. What is the misunderstanding between John-John and Maleeka? What does it reveal about them both?

8. Predict what Maleeka will be doing in ten years. What about Char or Miss Saunders? Give evidence from the text that helps support your predictions.

9. What is your favorite scene in the book? Why?

10. How would this book be different if written through the eyes of Char? Miss Saunders?

11. Were you surprised that Maleeka went along with Char’s plan against Miss Saunders?

12. Can girls ever learn to love the “skin we’re in”?
About this book:

Thirteen-year-old Raspberry Hill is starved for money. She will do just about anything legal to get her hands on the almighty dollar. Memories of being homeless, sleeping in the streets, and eating from handouts keep Raspberry’s eye on the only prize that matters to her—cold, hard cash.

Quotes and Reviews:

A 2002 Coretta Scott King Honor Book

★ “The razor-sharp dialogue and unerring details evoke characters, rooms, and neighborhoods with economy and precision.” —Booklist, Starred Review


Discussion Guide:

1. What emotion do you think is behind Raspberry’s need to make and hoard money?

2. When Raspberry took the money Ja’nae owed her, her friends got angry. Did you agree with their response? Why or why not?

3. Mai is obviously uncomfortable with her mixed heritage. Her brother, Ming, doesn’t seem to have a problem with it. How do you account for such opposite responses within the same family?

4. Discuss the personal characteristics and qualities of the girls in the book: Raspberry, Zora, Ja’nae, and Mai.

6. Many characters jump to conclusions and make assumptions about other people’s behavior, even the behavior of those with whom they are friends. Discuss the way this drives the conflict in the novel, and give specific examples of how each conflict is resolved.

7. Raspberry says to boys who tease her, “I’m gonna have a Lexus one day, y’all won’t be laughing then.” Do you think her goals will come true? Why or why not?

8. Mai is embarrassed that her dad doesn’t speak English well. Raspberry gets mad when her mom tries to correct her grammar. Why is the way we speak so important? What does it say about us?

9. At first none of Raspberry’s friends want to help her clean houses for money. What does this say about them? About Raspberry?

10. Which scenes do you think reveal the most about each character? Defend your choices.

About this book:
Raspberry Hill, who was once homeless, vows never to end up on the streets again. To her, money equals security. When a troubled neighborhood teenager attacks her mother, Raspberry becomes desperate for things in her life to change and ends up stealing from her best friend. But nothing good comes of bad money.
Awards and Reviews:
2004 YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers
CCBC Choices 2004
Booklist Top Ten Fantasy Book
Bulletin Blue Ribbon Book
Chicago Public Library Best of the Best Book
Texas Lone Star Reading List
Bank Street Best Book of the Year 2004

★ “Flake’s strength . . . lies in developing genuine, believable adults and children.” —The Bulletin, Starred Review

★ “Flake’s charged, infectious dialogue will sweep readers through the first-person story as Raspberry describes her fears and moral quandaries; her new romance; her fierce love for her mother; and her powerful, conflicted feelings about her dad . . . A hopeful novel.” —Booklist, Starred Review

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

1. Why does Rasberry steal Zora’s money? Do you think Zora should consider her a friend anymore? Why or why not? Would you be able to forgive Raspberry?

2. Which adults in Rasberry’s life act as surrogate parents? How do adults other than your parents influence your own life? Can other people ever make up for a missing parent?

3. Ms. Hill says, “We can make something sweet and good out of all the mess around us. If we want.” Do you agree with her? How does she try to accomplish this in her life? How could you?

4. Would you ever write letters that you wouldn’t send? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree with Rasberry that Ms. Hill brings on some of the grief in her life by digging into other people’s business? If you do, explain how. If not, why not?

6. Rasberry says, “I’m gonna live in a big house, with four bathrooms, eight fireplaces, and a refrigerator so big it’ll have four doors on it.” What qualities about Rasberry make you believe this statement? What personality traits does Rasberry possess that will make her dreams come true? Are their any qualities she’ll have to overcome to succeed?

7. Why doesn’t Zora tell the other girls about what Rasberry did? Would you have told them?

8. Do you feel sorry for Rasberry when she gets her own money stolen? Why or why not?

9. Why do you think Rasberry’s stealing escalates in this novel?

10. Why does Sato accept the fact that Raspberry stole once from her friend? Do you think he would still be interested in her if she repeated the offense? Do you think this will affect Raspberry’s penchant for pilfering money? Why or why not? Would this be an important issue for you in a relationship? Why?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

SHARON G. FLAKE is the groundbreaking author of the 2002 Coretta Scott King Honor Book Money Hungry and its sequel Begging for Change. With The Skin I’m In, her first book for children, she won the Coretta Scott King / John Steptoe Award for new authors and was selected as a Publishers Weekly Flying Start Author to Watch. More recently she published a collection of short stories about teen girls and the boys in their lives called Who Am I Without Him? And was named a Booklist Rising Star. Her next book Bang! is due to be published in Fall 2005. Mrs. Flake lives with her daughter in Pittsburg, PA.