

Free Soil Book Discussion Guide

1. The preface of *Free Soil* is the poem *A Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes. How does this poem foretell the story that unfolds? How many stories of deferred dreams are in the story?
2. Why did the meeting at the firehouse have such an impact on Zenobia?
3. At the meeting where Zenobia discovers the idea of the Diaspora, a man warns against creating a group of people who have nothing to lose. Who are these people in *Free Soil* and how do they play out in the story. How do people who have nothing to lose play out in your community, your country, your life?
4. The concept of 'give me liberty or give me death' can be seen throughout history among oppressed people. Have you ever questioned your own freedom? To what extent would you go to free yourself from whatever binds you?
5. Ryan tells Zenobia that he wants to give her a reason to love him every day. Does he do that? How does that help or hinder their relationship?
6. In the story, some African Americans structured their dreams in the new land based on their experience in America. Discuss the slavery experience and the American Colonization Society influence in shaping Liberia. How did the past influence Liberia's future? What do you believe are other conflicts going on in the story?
7. What was the indigenous peoples' reaction and response to the African American settlers?
8. Can you think of other situations where one population 'settled' in the midst of another and the outcome? Was it similar?
9. What caused the 1980 coup d'état?
10. Zenobia experiences a series of emotional setbacks that lead to her crossroads. How do vulnerability and eagerness play out in the story? What does she discover?
11. Discuss the role of religion in individual lives and in the culture of Liberia.
12. In *Free Soil*, Daisy tells the story of Rain from the perspective of Moses Williams' family, that she survived slavery by focusing her attention on the hope of one day returning to free soil. Do you believe hope can overcome despair?
13. With all that Sarah has suffered, she gathers inner strength and her voice when she chooses a desperate option to save her son. Do you believe she had other options? Was her husband's opinion considered?
14. If Sarah's second child had been a girl, do you believe Sarah would have considered the same option?
15. What could have happened to a male child in Liberia during that time?
16. The practice of 'cutting' or female circumcision might seem to be barbaric. Would an honest look at your own cultural or religious practices seem barbaric or bizarre to an outsider?
17. It has been said that women are the culture bearers of a family and community. The story discusses 'cutting' as a cultural expectation passed down from mother to daughter. Discuss how Sarah's relationship with her mother changed her relationship with her own children. Can you think of behaviors and expectations of mothers in your family, culture, or community that might influence future generations of women?
18. Throughout the story, everyday people discuss their strong opinions about what is going on in Liberia at that time. Might Liberia have had a different future if that silent group had come together and organized for action?