



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood

“[Noah’s] electrifying memoir sparkles with funny stories...and his candid and compassionate essays deepen our perception of the complexities of race, gender, and class.” ~ Booklist (starred review)

Summary

Trevor Noah’s unlikely path from apartheid South Africa to the desk of *The Daily Show* began with a criminal act: his birth. Trevor was born to a white Swiss father and a black Xhosa mother at a time when such a union was punishable by five years in prison. Living proof of his parents’ indiscretion, Trevor was kept mostly indoors for the earliest years of his life, bound by the extreme and often absurd measures his mother took to hide him from a government that could, at any moment, steal him away. Finally liberated by the end of South Africa’s tyrannical white rule, Trevor and his mother set forth on a grand adventure, living openly and freely and embracing the opportunities won by a centuries-long struggle.

Born a Crime is the story of a mischievous young boy who grows into a restless young man as he struggles to find himself in a world where he was never supposed to exist. It is also the story of that young man’s relationship with his fearless, rebellious, and fervently religious mother—his teammate, a woman determined to save her son from the cycle of poverty, violence, and abuse that would ultimately threaten her own life.

The stories collected here are by turns hilarious, dramatic, and deeply affecting. Whether subsisting on caterpillars for dinner during hard times, being thrown from a moving car during an attempted kidnapping, or just trying to survive the life-and-death pitfalls of dating in high school, Trevor illuminates his curious world with an incisive wit and unflinching honesty. His stories weave together to form a moving and searingly funny portrait of a boy making his way through a damaged world in a dangerous time, armed only with a keen sense of humor and a mother’s unconventional, unconditional love. (From the publisher)

Trevor Noah

Born Feb 20, 1984 in Johannesburg, South Africa, to a black South African mother and a white European father. He has hosted numerous television shows including South Africa’s music, television and film awards and two seasons of his own late night talk show, *Tonight with Trevor*

Noah. In 2014, he joined *The Daily Show* as a contributor and became host in September 2015. The show received three 2018 Primetime Emmy nominations, including Outstanding Variety Talk Series, Outstanding Interactive Program and Outstanding Short Form Variety Series. Trevor has written, produced and starred in eight comedy specials, including *Afraid of the Dark* on Netflix. Trevor's latest stand-up special, *Trevor Noah: Son of Patricia*, premiered November 20 on Netflix. *Son of Patricia* touches on racism, immigration, camping and more. In 2016, Trevor debuted his one-hour stand-up special *Trevor Noah: Lost in Translation* on Comedy Central. Trevor was the subject of David Paul Meyer's award-winning documentary film *You Laugh But It's True*, which tells the story of his remarkable career in post-apartheid South Africa. His Showtime comedy special *Trevor Noah: African American* premiered in 2013. He was nominated for Personality of the Year at the 2014 and 2015 MTV Africa Music Awards and won the award in 2015. Trevor's success has also spanned to sold-out shows across five continents. Trevor is currently on his first-ever arena tour across North America with Loud & Clear.

Born a Crime was published in 2016.

Discussion Questions

1. Were you familiar with Trevor Noah before reading this book? Have you seen The Daily Show?
2. Trevor's experience growing up seemed similar to the experience of people growing up in our country more like 60 years ago than 30 years ago. Does his youth resonate with you in the ways that racism affected him and in the childhood that he had growing up not very long ago?
3. How does language play a role in Trevor's life and what he observes in human culture?
4. What role does being mixed play in Trevor's life? How do Americans see him?
5. How did Trevor's Mom raise him? What were the impacts of her not putting limitations on him and raising him unlike any example she had of how to raise a child? How would you describe Noah? Patricia?
6. What did you think about Trevor's Mom's discipline?
7. Where did Trevor fit in? Who accepted him? Why did Trevor always feel like an outsider? How did he cope with that?
8. Do you think Noah had a good childhood? How do you think his childhood is unique from others who grew up in South Africa? What types of danger did Noah face in his childhood?
9. What did you think about Trevor's relationship with his biological father, Robert? What was Trevor's father like? How did you view him as a person?
10. How was apartheid similar to American Jim Crow and how was it different?
11. What did you think about the way Trevor's Mom tried to raise him to treat women, and how does that reconcile with her marrying Abel? Why did she marry Abel when she said she wouldn't consider marrying Trevor's father?
12. A lot of what happens in this story is told with humor, even though many things were very dark. Would you consider Trevor an optimist and how did his attitude and views of his own life influence the person he became?

13. Even though he's only 34, did him sharing his story of his life affect your views on things such as regret and taking chances and the choices that you make?
14. How does this book compare to other memoirs/autobiographies you have read? What do you think of Noah's writing style? Do you like his voice?
15. What did you think of how he structured the book?
16. Who do you think Noah had in mind as the audience for his memoir?
17. How can this book contribute to understanding current state of race relations in United States?
18. Are there any quotes from book you'd like to share? Any passage or line that was particularly memorable? Favorite chapter?
19. Do any of his stories / comments challenge your beliefs? Do you think any of his opinions are provocative?

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