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This will give you an idea of the format and content.

Kindred

by

Octavia E. Butler

1979



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

This science-fiction novel is set in Altadena, California in (at the time of the writing, the present day day) 1976, and the fictional Weylin Plantation on the rural eastern shore of Maryland near Baltimore in the.....

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Edana (Dana) Franklin - She is both the main character and the narrator of the story. She is a young black woman who is also a published writer. She and Kevin (her white husband) live in 1976, and have just purchased their first house together. Suddenly, Dana is pulled back into the past by a white ancestor in antebellum (or pre-civil war) Maryland, which was a slave state. How she copes with the task of preserving his life so her ancestor can be born brings the reader a unique view of life as a slave.

Rufus Weylin - He is Dana's white ancestor who has grown up in the life of a slave owner. He is just a boy when he first calls Dana for her help to save his life, but she returns several times to see him grow into his twenties. He is a complex character who has an indelible need to possess two women: Dana and Alice.

Kevin Franklin - He is a white man married to a black woman in current day 1976, when such bi-racial unions were still somewhat rare, he is a totally devoted husband to Dana and also a published writer. At first, he has some problems believing what happened to Dana, but because he loves her, he accepts her strange tale of time travel. Eventually, he comes to believe it for real when he is accidentally pulled back in the past with Dana and remains there for five years before she returns for him.

Tom Weylin - He is Rufus' father and according to Rufus, he is a fair man even if he isn't likeable. He doesn't hesitate to whip his slaves as punishment or to abide by all the rules of the ante-bellum South such as not educating slaves. However, he also keeps his word, once given, even to blacks, and.....

Many additional major and minor characters are identified in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist is Dana Franklin, the young woman who is pulled into the past by her ancestor, Rufus Weylin. She is forced to learn to live as a slave and deal with Rufus' obsessive behavior until such time as her ancestor and Rufus' daughter, Hagar, is born.

Antagonists - The main antagonist is Rufus Weylin who calls Dana from the future to save his life when he is just a little boy. His obsessive behavior over the years that follow make him a danger not.....

Climax - The climax occurs when Dana finally feels threatened enough by Rufus to kill him and....

Outcome - Rufus dies at Dana's hand and she returns to Kevin in 1976, with one terrible consequence: she leaves part of her arm, where he was holding onto her, behind in the past. When she is well, she and her husband fly from California to Baltimore, Maryland, to see if they can uncover what happened.....

SHORT PLOT SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Dana, a modern black woman, is celebrating her twenty-sixth birthday with her new husband when she is abruptly snatched from her home in California and transported to the ante-bellum South. Rufus, the white son of a plantation owner, has summoned her across time to save him from drowning. After this first summons, she is

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drawn back, again and again, to protect Rufus and ensure he will grow to manhood and father the daughter who will become Dana's ancestor.

Each time she arrives in the past, Dana's sojourns will become more and more dangerous because of Rufus' obsessive need for her. The reader never knows whether she will survive one journey or.....

THEMES

The Horrors of Slavery - The first important theme is that of the horrors of slavery. Dana is forced into the past where she sees people bought and sold, sees families torn apart, and experiences torture at the hands of her "owner." This terrible institution will also come to tear apart our country in the Civil War while Dana experiences its consequences on a personal level. It is important to note that the idea of acceptance of this institution invades the white and the black population alike. Whites grow up to.....

Additional themes are identified and discussed in the complete study guide.

MOOD

The mood is mostly dark, because of the people who are held in slavery and the impact of both Tom and Rufus Weylin on them. There is always the fear of torture and of being sold to a state even.....

BIOGRAPHY OF OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Octavia Butler was born on June 22, 1947 in Pasadena, California. Her father (Laurice) died when she was an infant and she was raised by her mother and grandmother. Her mother was also named Octavia and she worked as a maid.

She received the nickname Junie, because she was the junior to her mother Octavia and she was diagnosed with dyslexia as a child. She began writing stories when she was a young girl and soon became interested in science fiction. She went to college at Pasadena City College and received an associate degree. She then went to UCLA, but she never completed her degree as writing became more important to her. She died suddenly, due to a fall at her home, at the age of 58 on February 24, 2006.

Best known as the author of the *Patternist* series of science fiction novels. This refers to her goal of exploring such ideas as sexual identity and racial conflict in a literary genre like science fiction, that would normally not speak to such ideas. She grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood in Pasadena, California. Her mother recognized her writing ability early and worked two jobs to buy her a typewriter and pay for.....

Works by Octavia Butler include:

Kindred (1979)

Fledgling (2005)

The Patternist series

Patternmaster (1976)

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

PROLOGUE

Summary

The plot opens with the narrator's (Dana Franklin, a young, black woman) revelation that on her last trip home, she lost her left arm as well as about a year of her life and much of the comfort and security she had not valued until she was gone. With these mysterious words, the reader is thrust into the combination history/fantasy story of Edana Franklin. The loss of her arm nearly leads to the imprisonment of her husband, Kevin, whom the

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police suspect hurt her so badly. She finally convinces them it was an accident, and because they can't figure out how he could have hurt her the way she was hurt, they let him go. He explains that he told the police as much of the truth about her accident as he could, and that he couldn't explain how it happened. The Prologue ends with Dana whispering that she doesn't know how either.

Notes

The Prologue seems meant to establish several mysteries about Dana Franklin and her husband, Kevin, which will possibly never be solved. Kevin and Dana both obviously are in the dark about how she lost her arm, and the event seems to indicate that they have experienced something quite unexplainable. That means that these experiences will now unfold through Dana's flashback.

THE RIVER

Summary

This chapter opens with Dana's observation that the trouble she experienced began long before June 9, 1976 – her birthday. However, it is the day she first becomes aware of it. It is also the day she meets Rufus, the day he calls her to him for the first time. She and Kevin have just moved from Los Angeles to their first house a few miles away in Altadena. She is unpacking and sorting their voluminous amount of books. Kevin sits down and indicates he's frustrated, because he had a half dozen ideas for his Christmas story while they were moving, but now, he has lost them all. Then, Dana keeps him busy by telling him to help her shelve their collection. That way, she says, his ideas may come back to him.

Just as she pushes a full box toward him, she suddenly becomes dizzy and nauseated. The room blurs and darkens, and she collapses to her knees. Kevin moves to touch her, and just as he does, he vanishes from her sight, and she finds herself kneeling on the ground beneath trees and beside a wide tranquil river. She sees a child splashing and screaming and she realizes he's drowning. She reacts instinctively, jumping into the river, fully clothed, to find a small red-haired boy floating face down in the river. She turns him over, gets a good hold on him, and tows him into shore. There is a red-haired woman pacing along the edge of the river, crying. Once she sees Dana is wading, she jumps to her and grabs the boy from her hands. She screams that the boy is not breathing, and Dana immediately pulls to mind how to do artificial respiration. She sets to work on the dying child while the woman strikes her over and over, exclaiming that Dana has killed her child. He eventually revives, coughing and screaming himself, and Dana is relieved. She wonders as his mother utters his name – Rufus – how a reasonably nice-looking kid could have such an ugly name. Then, she hears another voice demanding to know what's going on, and she finds herself looking down the barrel of the longest rifle she has ever seen. Suddenly, the sick dizzy feeling returns, and the man with the rifle and the woman and the boy disappear, and she is kneeling once again in her own house.

Now, Dana is across the room from where she had originally disappeared, and Kevin is aghast at what has happened. Dana is in shock, shaking with fear and residual terror. She aches as well where Rufus' mother had struck her. Kevin cannot figure out how she moved across the room and how she became soaked with water. Dana eventually becomes composed enough to begin telling her husband what she experienced. Details that she didn't realize she had taken in come to mind: the tall pine trees, the woman's clothing, the fact that they had spoken with a Southern accent, and of course, the long, deadly, unforgettable gun. Kevin acts as if she's insane, because she was only gone for a few seconds. However, the facts cannot be denied: she vanished and returned a few seconds later, all the way across the room and soaked with river water.

Of course, they don't know what to think and Dana is scared to death that it will happen again. The worse feeling she has is the sense that she's no longer safe. Eventually, the experience begins to recede from her as if she had viewed it on television and that it is no longer real. However, she consciously knows that it was real, and that she's pulling away from it out of fear.

Notes

This chapter presents Dana's first experience of time travel, although neither she nor Kevin ever use this term to describe what happens to them. The chapter also serves to introduce Rufus, his mother, and his father. Their behavior during this experience sets the foundation for what their behavior later in the novel.

It's also important to note that the author never explains why such an event would just suddenly happen to Dana. This is the beginning of a realization for the reader that the author doesn't need to explain why time travel would just happen. Her purpose is beyond the science fiction of the story. It is ultimately more about the history and the psychology of the characters impacted by the history.

THE FIRE

Summary

PART 1

Dana tries to forget what has happened to her by showering away the mud and brackish water, but Rufus and his parents have not quite settled back into the dream stage as she wishes. Kevin has already finished shelving the books and suggests they go out for something to eat. However, Dana is afraid to go out and refuses with a panicked sound to her voice. So, Kevin calls for take-out food. Then, while they eating, the dizziness and nausea set in again. Once more, Dana vanishes.

PART 2

This time, she finds herself sitting on a small bed sheltered by an abbreviated canopy. In front of her is a red-haired boy who has his back to her. She wonders if he is Rufus. Then she notices that he has small stick, the end of which he is using to set fire to the curtains. She reacts again instinctively, grabbing the upper part of the burning draperies, and throwing them out the half-opened window. She feels that once again she has averted disaster for this little boy and waits for the nausea to return so she can go home. However, the room remains unblurred, and the bedroom is undeniably real. She turns back from the window and looks at the boy. She doesn't believe he is Rufus, but rather an older sibling, because this boy is older by three or four years from the drowning child she had saved.

Dana steps over what's left of the draperies on the floor and grabs the stick from his hand and throws it in the fireplace. She tells the boy that the stick should be used on him before he burns the house down. The boy threatens – once again in a Southern accent – that he'll tell his daddy. Dana knows at this point that she may be stranded here for a while and that she must calm this boy to learn all she can. She reminds him that he'll have plenty to explain beyond just her if he calls his daddy, and that quiets him. Of course, the boy wants to know who she is and how she came to be there. Dana instead asks him his name and he answers that it's Rufus. She has returned to the past several years after her first visit. At first, he claims he doesn't recognize her, but when she reminds him of his near-death in the river, his memories of her come back. He describes how he almost drowned, how he saw her in a strange room surrounded by books, and that she was wearing pants like a man. He also tells her that his daddy thought she was a man, too. When he questions his mother later about where Dana went so suddenly, his mother hits him, something she had never done. That shows how.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Dana Franklin - Dana is a strong, independent woman who has made a name for herself as a published author. She is beginning a new marriage with a white man, an unusual relationship in 1976, but even more unacceptable in 1819. Suddenly, at a time when she is most happy and content, she is pulled by the force of Rufus Weylin into the past to save his life. She then faces the horrors of living as a slave and being the object of Rufus' obsessive need for her. However, the reader sees a Dana who learns that she has the strength and the courage to face the worst the ante-bellum South can throw at her. She is whipped, insulted, slapped, threatened with being

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sold, and treated in a way she has never been treated before, and yet, she faces it all with dignity, a strong sense of self-preservation, and compassion for those around her who are treated worse than she is. Through her experiences, the reader sees what it took to survive in slavery, and how blacks were forced into submission and didn't accept slavery, just because they felt it was an acceptable way of life. They accepted because.....

Rufus Weylin - From the very beginning, the reader can see how needy Rufus is. He has an over-indulgent mother and a father who shows him little if any attention. So when he is in trouble or dying, he doesn't think of his parents. Instead, he calls out to someone he sees sitting in a house, unpacking books. Thus is born his.....

Kevin Franklin - He is Dana's husband and is a white man in a bi-racial relationship. He has just married her and is moving into their new house with her, when Dana is called to the past. He has a hard time at first believing what has happened right in front of his eyes, but when he is forced back there with Dana, he is in a position where he must believe. Kevin's greatest concern is to protect his wife and so.....

Additional characters are analyzed in the complete study guide.

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The author divides the plot into chapters that coincide with the times when Rufus need Dana. They include: The River (when he almost drowns), The Fire (when he sets the curtains in his room on fire with the intention of getting revenge against his father), The Fall (when Rufus falls out of a tree and breaks his leg), The Fight (when Rufus rapes Alice and Isaac nearly beats him to death), The Storm (when Dana.....

THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of **the horrors of slavery** is one that is unusual for a science fiction novel. Rather than concentrating on the possibility of time travel, the author makes it the mechanism by which she explores how horrible and long lasting were the consequences of slavery. Dana is a young successful black woman who is forced to live what her ancestors lived. She must accept the burden of the work they did, the punishments they received, and the fears they lived with daily. She, too, even though she's a soft, spoiled girl living where technology rules, must learn to survive, knowing she's only a piece of property. This is the ultimate horror of slavery: the loss of one's humanity. Taking a beating, being tortured, fearing always being sold into the Deep South, or dying at the hands of one's owner are all insignificant when one thinks about the basic loss of.....

AUTHOR'S STYLE

Octavia Butler writes in a simple, straightforward style with uncomplicated vocabulary. She writes the story as if she is Dana experiencing the world of slavery. Then, she shifts to flashback to.....

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins on Dana's twenty-sixth birthday, June 9, 1976, as she and Kevin are unpacking boxes for their new house. She is called suddenly into the past to save Rufus Weylin's life and

FALLING ACTION

The falling action involves Dana healing from losing her arm and then.....

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is first person. The narrator is Dana Franklin who tells the reader through flashback about

OTHER ELEMENTS

FORESHADOWING

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is foreshadowing which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

1. The narrator opens the novel with the revelation that on her last trip home, she lost her left arm as well as about a year of her life and much of the comfort and security she had not valued until she was gone. This prepares us for the agony she faces when forced into time travel by her ancestor, Rufus Weylin.
2. Dana refers to her time travel as “the day he calls her to him for the first time.” This is foreshadowing of the many times Rufus will call Dana to save him.....

Many additional examples are identified in the complete study guide.

IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

1. Kevin makes an ironic comment that there are so many other fascinating times they could have gone back to visit. The irony comes from the idea that they had a choice. Actually, they were forced back by Rufus.
2. Dana warns Nigel about bringing the books out of hiding in the kitchen where anyone can walk in and catch them. She gives Nigel a test and he spells every word correctly; as she’s praising Nigel and feeling proud of his accomplishments, she carefully burns the test paper in the fireplace. Suddenly, the door opens again and Tom Weylin enters very unexpectedly. After all the precautions she takes, Dana is still caught teaching Nigel to read.....

Many additional examples are identified in the complete study guide.

QUOTATIONS - IMPORTANT QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

The following quotations are important at various points in the story. (Beacon Press, 1979):

1. “ ‘I don’t have a name for the thing that happened to me, but I don’t feel safe any more.’ “(pg. 17; Dana has just returned from her first time travel and now feels unsafe for the first time in her life.)
2. “Fact then: Somehow, my travels crossed time as well as distance. Another fact: The boy was the focus of my travels – perhaps the cause of them.” (pg. 24; Dana comes to this conclusion after she returns to Rufus for the second time.)
3. “The boy already knew more about revenge than I did. What kind of man was he going to grow up into?” (pg. 25; Here Dana makes an observation about Rufus during the second visit to save him.).....

Many additional quotations are identified in the complete study guide.

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols and metaphors**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Metaphors are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

1. Tom mutters as he leaves Dana that it seems that she is there to be Rufus’ caregiver. In this sense, she is a symbol of all that keeps him alive, and as a caregiver, she becomes the object of his obsessive love.
2. The map of Maryland that Dana is forced to burn is a symbol of freedom as is the North Star, which will have to serve in its place.
3. Dana is also a caregiver of Alice, both as a friend and as the one.....

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7. Alice tells Dana that Rufus uses the children against her just the way you use a bit on a horse, and she's tired of having a bit in her mouth. This is a metaphor of slavery, and how.....

Another element found in this book is a motif. A **motif** is a recurring thematic element in the development of an artistic or literary work. There is one important motif in *Kindred*: the motif of a paradox, a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true, flows throughout the story. Some examples of paradox include:

1. The author never explains why time travel would just suddenly happen to Dana. This is the beginning of a realization for the reader that the author doesn't need to explain it. Her purpose is beyond the science fiction of the story. It is ultimately more about the history and the psychology of the characters impacted by the history. This is a paradox, because time travel isn't an ordinary aspect of life, and yet Butler makes it seem ordinary and acceptable.
2. Dana returns to the past several years after her first visit. So she hasn't.....

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *Kindred*

Author: Octavia E. Butler

Date Published: 1979

Meaning of the Title: It refers to the various familial connections in the novel including: Dana is the descendent of Rufus and Alice. Dana is beginning a new family with Kevin. Dana comes to identify with the slaves as family members. Noth Dana and Kevin have a difficult time.....

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. The story begins in the present
 - a. after Dana has been sent back willingly to her own time by Rufus.
 - b. after Dana has killed Rufus and returned whole and safe.
 - c. after Dana has killed Rufus, but returned having left her arm in the past.
2. Kevin and Dana are very much in love, but are
 - a. at different levels of success.
 - b. a bi-racial couple.
 - c. at odds all the time about whether she really experienced time travel.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) c 2.) b 3.) c 4.) b 5.) a 6.) a 7.) b 8.) b 9.) a 10.) c 11.) a 12.) c 13.) c 14.) c 15.) c

ESSAY TOPICS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Both Dana and Kevin say several times that they can't change history. What, then, is the purpose of Dana's travels back in time?
2. In what ways does Dana explode the slave stereotypes of "the house-nigger, the handkerchief head, the female Uncle Tom"? In what way does she transcend them?.....

END OF SAMPLE EXCERPTS

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