

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards

**Presented by the Cleveland Foundation*

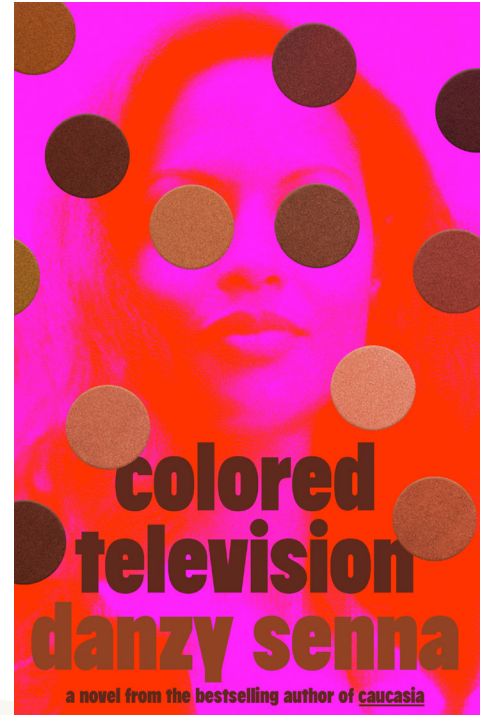


CLASS OF 2025 BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Colored Television

by Danzy Senna

FICTION



1. The word “mulatto” is rooted in the Spanish word for mule and was used in the 19th century to racially classify people specifically of mixed Black and white ancestry. The “tragic mulatto” stereotype often depicted mixed-race characters as tragically stuck between two worlds. Throughout the novel, Danzy Senna uses the word nearly 100 times. What do you think about Senna’s reclamation of the word mulatto? How does Jane in “Colored Television” depart from the tragic mulatto archetype?
2. Jane is a complicated character that’s susceptible to a lot of influences. She’s constantly wondering how she’s being perceived and she’s constantly trying to perceive herself. Were you rooting for Jane? Could you understand her motivations?
3. Senna writes in a way that complicates the traditional antagonist and protagonist division. In this novel, Jane and Hampton Ford both want the same thing, but the way they go about it is quite different. Why do you think Senna resists the traditional antagonist and protagonist division? Can you think of a moment in your own life where the antagonist and protagonist in a situation share traits?
4. “Colored Television” is a work of literary fiction that is entertaining, page-turning and anxiety-inducing. How does Senna’s use of plot drive the story forward? How does the use of humor and satire deepen her commentary on race relations?
5. Jane and Lenny are positioned as opposites when it comes to artmaking. Lenny is rooted in his values and resists representation. Jane is trying to figure out how to capitalize on her identity. There’s even a plot twist in the novel that centers on theft of creative material. What does it mean to capitalize on an identity and how does appropriation show up in “Colored Television?” The commodification of identity in the world of artmaking is complicated. What do you think about the role of the artist in this novel?
6. This novel explores class divisions, especially between the creative class and the intellectual class. Multicultural Mayberry was a fictional neighborhood in Los Angeles where diversity and class appeared to blend in harmony. How does class division show up in your city? Does your city have a Multicultural Mayberry? What does the ideal neighborhood look like to you?