

KooKooland by Gloria Norris

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Norris chose to open the book with her experience of going to see *Blood Feast* at the drive-in? What is the significance of this opening chapter as a whole? How does it set up the reader's expectations and resonate/echo later in the book?
2. How do you feel about Jimmy's character and the ways that Norris makes him a complicated figure? How does he come across as a man, husband, son, and father? When and where do we see complexity or a deeper layer to these personas? Are there moments that make you empathize or sympathize with him? If so, why?
3. Throughout the story, we see Jimmy manipulate others around him in various ways. How does he do so, and how does he justify such manipulation? How does Gloria cope with his behavior? How do you see misogyny playing into the family and community dynamics?
4. How do other people's reactions towards Jimmy shape Gloria's view of him?
5. Jimmy is from a proud Greek-American family. Where does he demonstrate his heritage, and where does he choose not to follow it? What do his choices reveal about him? What role does "Norris luck" play in the book?



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6. How might the events of Norris's memoir unfold differently if they happened today? How might they be the same? Would the book differ in style and content if the events took place in the present-day, and if so, how?

7. Does Gloria become a kind of spectator to the events of the book at times rather than the protagonist? If so, who does she put in the spotlight instead? Why do you think she wrote it that way, and what do these choices do for the book?

8. In some ways, this book departs from our expectations of the traditional memoir, venturing into true crime territory and exploring broad issues like mental illness and prison reform. What genre(s) would you place this book in, and why?

9. Throughout the memoir, Norris refers to her parents by their first names; what might the significance of this be? Norris includes her father among her acknowledgments in the back of the book. Were you at all surprised by this, and how does it impact your feelings about the book, if at all?

10. For a short time, Gloria converts to Catholicism to be closer to Susan (page 83) and Jimmy declares himself an agnostic (page 85). What role does religion play in the lives of the characters, and in the book as a whole?

11. Throughout the book, Jimmy often attempts to isolate his family members by pitting them against each other. One recurring example is Jimmy's defensiveness when he feels his wife takes Gloria's side during arguments. In what ways are the characters isolated, and how does the theme of isolation arise in the book? What are some other themes that you thought were the most important?



Discussion Questions

12. When officers approached Hank to arrest him, they treated him with patience and consideration. Do you think he would have received the same treatment if he were of a different race or social class? How do race/class factor into the book more broadly?
13. What qualities did you notice about Norris's language in the book? How, for instance, does she use slang and even words that might be considered anachronistic today for effect? How did Norris's language choices impact your experience of reading the book?
14. How fully does Jimmy conform to the 1960's image of a man? How is his abusive behavior informed by masculinity? Where and how has this image changed through the decades, and what hasn't changed in our cultural perspective?
15. On page 234, Jimmy says, "They say everything, and I mean everything, starts in the blood." This would seem to say he believes in nature (that people are born a certain way due to their genetics) over nurture (that our upbringing and environment determine the people we become). Do you think that Gloria's story reinforces one view or the other, or both? What are your own thoughts on this topic?
16. How does the fact that the book is set in Manchester impact your experience of reading it? Were there familiar sites or places you could picture, and did this enhance your reading? What do you think is different about Manchester today versus the city as depicted in the book?



Additional Resources

- An interview with the author: <http://glorianorris.com/kookooland-qa/>
- “Sins of a Family” by P. F. Sloan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCo9jvNPywI>
The song whose lyrics serve as an epigraph for the book.
- **Some resources for help and information related to issues raised in this book:**
 - The YWCA: ywcanh.org/domestic-violence
Women’s Crisis Line (603) 668-229
 - Families in Transition: fitnh.org (603) 641-9441 ext 401
 - New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence: nhcadsv.org;
Domestic violence hotline: 1 (866) 644-3574;
Sexual assault hotline 1 (800) 277-5570
 - National Alliance for Mental Illness, New Hampshire:
naminh.org/find-support/support-groups 1 (800) 242-6264
 - Farnum Center for the Treatment of Addiction: farnumcenter.org (603) 622-3020
- For more information about One Book One Manchester and upcoming events, go to 1book1mht.com
- This discussion guide was written and designed by the students of the Building Literary Community class at the Institute of Art and Design at New England College Fall 2019

