

Discussion Questions

Brit Bennett, *The Vanishing Half*

1. Let's look at the title of the book. It can include ALL the characters in the novel. How so?
2. A quote about Stella... "She hadn't realized how long it takes to become somebody else, or how lonely it can be living in a world not meant for you." Have any of us felt this way? If so, what has one done, or what can one do to feel that the world can be a place to belong to just as we are?
3. Let's talk a little about Mallard, the town where the twins grew up. What was significant about it? Let's consider how it was formed, and how it vanished, too.
4. A quote (page 187) "She wanted Desiree to see how convincingly she played her role, but she was living a performance where there could be no audience." Relate this quote of Stella's to Kennedy.
5. Compare and contrast the love relationships in the novel –Desiree and Early, Stella and Blake, and Reese and Jude. What are their separate relationships with the truth? How much does telling the truth or obscuring it play a part in the functionality of a relationship? How much does the past matter in each case?
6. Many of the characters are engaged in a kind of performance at some point in the story. Kennedy makes a profession of acting, and ultimately her fans blur the line between performance and reality when they confuse her with her soap opera character. Barry performs on stage in theatrical costumes that he then removes for his daytime life. Reese takes on a new wardrobe and role, but it isn't a costume. One could say that Stella's whole marriage and neighborhood life is a kind of performance. What is the author saying about the roles we perform in the world? Do you ever feel you are performing a role rather than being yourself? How does that compare to what some of these characters are doing? Consider the distinction between performance, reinvention, and transformation in respect to the different characters in the book.
7. Desiree's job as a fingerprint analyst in Washington DC is to use scientific methods to identify people through physical, genetic details. Why do you think the author chose this as a profession for her character? Where else do you see this theme of identity and identification in the book?