



Book Club Questions
Swift River by Essie Chambers

1. Before reading *Swift River*, what, if anything, did you know about sundown towns? Did you learn anything about them that surprised you?
2. Did reading *Swift River* make you think differently about your own hometown, and whether there are elements of your own town's history that have been largely omitted from the historical record? Are there narratives about your hometown that you might view differently now? If you wanted to learn more about the history of your hometown-both the history that's been written about and the history that's been left off the record-where would you start?
3. What do you think happened to Diamond's father?
4. So many of the characters in *Swift River*, from Diamond to Ma to Shelley to Pop to Clara, have different modes of survival, different ways of getting through hard times. Discuss the different ways these characters deal with difficulty. Did you relate to some of these strategies or coping mechanisms more than others?
5. As the only Black person in all of *Swift River*, Diamond is something of an outsider. Discuss ways in which her "otherness" sometimes renders her hyper-visible and other times renders her largely invisible.
6. How important is your family or community history to you and your understanding of yourself and your place in the world? Have you ever learned something about your family or ancestors that sifted your understanding of who you are and where you come from?
7. Of the three main voices in *Swift River*-Diamond's, Lena's and Clara's-whose did you connect with the most? What, if anything, did you relate to about each woman?
8. Lena sends Diamond Clara's letters to Sweetie, but she doesn't have Sweetie's responses to Clara. Did you imagine any of Sweetie's responses? Did you feel like you got a good sense of her through Clara's letters to her?
9. What did having the three voices of Diamond, Lena and Clara add to your understanding of this family and the history of *Swift River*? Other than the fact that these three women are related, did you notice any similarities between their voices and personalities and perspectives? Any stark differences?
10. At the end of the novel, we find out a bit about how Diamond and Ma's relationship evolves in the coming years and decades after the story ends. Use your imagination to fill in some of the details. What do you imagine might bring them together into Diamond's adulthood? What might break them apart?

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