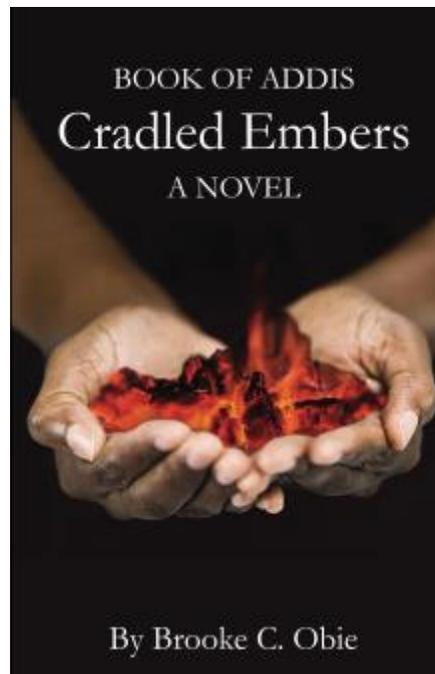




***BOOK OF ADDIS: CRADLED EMBERS*©**

SYLLABUS AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

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***ABOUT BOOK OF ADDIS: CRADLED EMBERS*©**

When 17-year-old enslaved girl Addis accidentally kills her enslaver, the first president of the young country Amerika, she unwittingly becomes the face of the greatest conflict in the nation's short history. On the run for her life, with unlikely friends and a world of enemies, Addis becomes the most wanted person alive and a global symbol of hope for enslaved people longing for freedom.

Written in an 18th Century Black Diasporic vernacular, *Book of Addis* reaches back in time to explore the intergenerational impact of oppression and plots a daring path into the future. An epic tale of love, loss, and the cost of liberation, *Book of Addis: Cradled Embers* is the first novel in the 3-part literary fiction series *Book of Addis*.

www.brookeobie.com



PRAISE FOR *BOOK OF ADDIS: CRADLED EMBERS*©

“This is a brilliant piece of work.”

— Susan Cheever, best-selling/award-winning author, *Drinking in America: Our Secret History*

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About the Author

Brooke C. Obie, JD, MFA, is an award-winning writer and the former editor-at-large for EBONY.com. Her work has appeared in *Ebony*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *MarieClaire.com* and more. Her thesis for The New School’s MFA in Fiction program, which became *Book of Addis*, was a finalist for the Fulbright Fellowship. She’s attended writing workshops with Columbia University in Paris, France and *Callaloo Journal of African Diaspora Arts & Letters* workshop at Oxford University in July 2016. Brooke lives happily in Harlem.

www.brookeobie.com



BOOK OF ADDIS: CRADLED EMBERS© SYLLABUS

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"I woke now, sure enough." --Taddy

These books, films, musical selections, museums influenced the creation of *Book of Addis*©.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF BLACK MOTHERHOOD

"Put a woman in a tight space, she liable to do anything." –Dido

[Kincaid, Jamaica, *The Autobiography of My Mother*.](#)

[Ladner, Joyce, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman*.](#)

[Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*.](#)

[National Black Women's Reproductive Justice organization.](#)

[Shire, Warsan, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*.](#)

[Walker, Alice, *The Color Purple*.](#)

MISOGYNOIR

"More joy, more love, more time to be more when you aint got to get nobody off your neck."--The Griot

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[Hurston, Zora Neale, *How it Feels to Be Colored Me*.](#)

[Lorde, Audre, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.](#)

[Morrison, Toni, *The Bluest Eye*.](#)

[Skloot, Rebecca, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.](#)

[Trudy, "Explanation of Misogynoir," *Gradient Lair*, April 28, 2014.](#)

[Truth, Sojourner, *Aint I a Woman?*](#)

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[Wallace, Michelle, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*.](#)

DECONSTRUCTING WHITE MASCULINE IDEOLOGY AND REIMAGINING BLACK MASCULINITY

"You think cause a no-color man say he own her that she up to be owned?" –Taddy

[Brave, Richie, "The Masculine Un-Masculine Masculine Male," Tumblr. Oct. 25, 2013.](#)

[hooks, bell, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*.](#)

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[McLean, Shay Akil. "Patriarchy and Gender Lesson Plan." Web blog post. *Decolonize All the Things: The UNsettling Reflections of a Decolonial Scientist in a Constant State of Rage*. Web 2016.](#)

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[Smith, Mychal Denzel. *Invisible Man Got the Whole World Watching*.](#)

THE POWER OF WRITING AND SPEAKING IN THE VERNACULAR

"Have your own something." --The Griot

[Ahmad, Dora, *Rotten English, A Literary Anthology*.](#)

[Iweala, Uzodinma, *Beasts of No Nation*.](#)

[James, Marlon, *Book of Night Women*.](#)

[Randall, Dudley. *The Black Poets*.](#)

BLACK PROTEST AND REVOLUTION

"There be sides to this thing."--The Griot

[Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time*.](#)

[Césaire, Aime, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*.](#)



[Davis, Angela, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*.](#)

[Equiano, Olaudah, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*.](#)

[*Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners*. Dir. Shola Lynch. Realside Productions, 2013. Film.](#)

[Oney Judge \(woman who escaped from George Washington and inspired BOOK OF ADDIS\).](#)

[Shakur, Assata, *Assata*.](#)

[*Simone, Nina*. Revolution YouTube Playlist.](#)

[The Black Power Mixtape. Dir. Göran Olsson. Story AB, 2011. Film.](#)

[Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.](#)

[Wells, Ida B., *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*.](#)

[Williams, Chancellor, *The Destruction of Black Civilization*.](#)

THE HISTORY OF AFRICANS IN AMERICA

“They kill a oji in flesh or spirit, for the good of the whole, then hide they bloody hands beneath white gloves.” --The Griot

[*13th*. Dir. Ava Duvernay. Kandoo Films, 2016. Film.](#)

[Alexander, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.](#)

[Berlin, Ira, *The Making of African America*.](#)

[*Chambers, Douglas B. Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia*.](#)

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[Douglass, Frederick, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself*.](#)

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[The Fugitive Slave Acts.](#)

[Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* \(book and documentary series\).](#)

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[Haley, Alex. *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*.](#)

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IGBO AND YORUBA CULTURE

"Eboe be for truth telling."--The Griot

[Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*](#)

[Adichie, Chimamanda, *Americanah*.](#)

[Adichie, Chimamanda, *Half of a Yellow Sun*.](#)

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***BOOK OF ADDIS: CRADLED EMBERS*©**

READERS' GUIDE & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you think the subtitle *Cradled Embers* and cover image of a Black woman's hands holding burning coals mean?
- 2) The word "menor" is a made-up word with a negative connotation in the BOOK OF ADDIS universe, whereas "oji" is an Igbo word that means "Black" and refers to people in this world. What if any impact did reading a book about slavery without the usual slurs have on you?
- 3) Dido, Turk and Pompey are the real names of three Igbo people enslaved to James Madison's grandfather, Ambrose Madison, and were accused of Ambrose Madison's murder. From armed insurrections, to feigning illnesses and breaking tools to thwart the exploitation of their labor, how much were you taught in school about the many acts of enslaved people's rebellions in America?
- 4) Dido makes the ultimate sacrifice to protect her daughter Taddy. Taddy grows up resenting her mother for her absence and chooses to protect her children in a different way than Dido. Ultimately, Taddy learns that there is no way to protect her children or herself from oppression and finds kinship with her mother Dido's sacrifice. How do the differences between the way Dido and Taddy seek to protect their children compare to the way Black mothers cope with oppression, even today?
- 5) Anti-Blackness is the degradation of Black culture, physical features, hair styles, ways of speaking and ways of being as less than a White standard. How did you feel about reading a story written in a Black vernacular? When you read the words "Black" and "dark" in *Book of Addis*, what did they signify?
- 6) Even though Ekwueme has been enslaved, he is able to learn to allow Addis to be her own person and make her own decisions, whereas Tembu, who is a free man living in a free Black community with women leaders, still desires to control Addis. What do these two examples of Black masculinity reveal about what it means to a man, and a free person?
- 7) A consistent form of control over Black women's bodies in America has been forced reproduction. How does Nnene maintain control over her body after several instances of rape?
- 8) How did you feel about the way the Meroës handled their fellow villagers who did not want to join the revolution or leave for the Falls?
- 9) "Your chains aint mine," Addis tells Sabine. Sabine has trouble finding her place in the revolution whereas Thom is more easily accepted, even if his words are sometimes clumsy. Both desire to align themselves with oppressed Black people. What does Thom understand that allows him the trust Sabine doesn't readily receive?



***BOOK OF ADDIS: CRADLED EMBERS*© AUTHOR Q&A WITH BROOKE C. OBIE**

Q: What aspects of your life inspired you to write Book of Addis?

A: I grew up in Gainesville, Virginia and went to Stonewall Jackson High School near the location of the Battle of Bull Run, so Civil War history was inescapable. I took many school trips to Mount Vernon to learn about our benevolent first president George Washington, so when writing a story about slavery in America, I had to go back there, back to where the country began and center the story around the enslaved people of a Washington-like character in a Mount Vernon-like prison.

In college, Nigerian classmates would ask me if I am Nigerian because of my last name, Obie, which is a very popular first and last name for Igbo Nigerians. I did a DNA test and found my ethnicity to be majority Nigerian. I was fascinated by records I found of slavers warning other slavers about the rebellious nature of Igbos, so I reimagined many of the rebellious acts of Igbo slaves in BOOK OF ADDIS.



A beautiful thing about Igbo culture and Black Diasporic culture is the focus on ancestry and community and how necessary it is for us to connect to the past in order to make it into the future. That spirit is infused in Black American culture, as well, as is made manifest in Addis, who is Igbo on her mother's side and of unknown origin on her father's side. She's a composite of many different cultures, like Black American culture is a composite of many different cultures, and in the end, she embraces every side of herself, especially her Igbo heritage, when she reconnects with the God of her ancestors and becomes someone who lives for something larger than herself.

Q: The complications of Black motherhood permeate BOOK OF ADDIS. Addis has a very complex relationship with her mother, Taddy, who is labeled a mistress to their enslaver and has children by him. Taddy's mother Dido makes huge sacrifices to protect her daughter. Addis' surrogate mother Nnene takes steps to prevent herself from having biological children but still mothers Addis and others. Why did you choose to explore the complexities of Black motherhood in this book?

A: This world doesn't exist without Black motherhood, and not just in the biological sense. Black matriarchs have nurtured, toiled and birthed the earth. It's impossible to write about Black history during and after colonization and slavery, even fictionally, without addressing the complications of Black motherhood, as greats like Toni Morrison and Jamaica Kincaid have done. Taddy, Dido and Nnene are examples of so many real Black women who endured sexual torture and other forms of violence to protect children, husbands and other people from experiencing it. They also highlight that all civil rights



issues are reproductive justice issues for Black women in White Supremacist systems—from slavery to police brutality, mass incarceration and basic wellness.

What happens to these women when they try and fail to protect their children from systems of oppression? What happens to the children? How does internalized misogyny factor into their relationships with each other? *BOOK OF ADDIS* explores all of these questions and the continuation of the generational curse of judging our mothers' survival mechanisms. Addis seeks to punish Taddy and Taddy judges her own mother Dido. Oppression operates the way it's supposed to by stirring up hopelessness when you know you'd give your life for your children and you know that still isn't enough.

Q: In the midst of the hopelessness of slavery, there is great hope in *BOOK OF ADDIS*. How are your characters able to maintain hope and even joy?

A: To properly manifest the spirit of my ancestors in my women characters, it was imperative that they not be portrayed as mythical “strong Black women,” but women who are sometimes broken, depressed, deeply impacted by being mistreated and severely damaged. Somehow, they're still standing, still capable of love. They're holding onto their dignity and humanity by their fingernails, surviving however they could. That's just reality. In the midst of her oppression, Addis and her lover Ekwueme steal secret moments of physical love and joy for themselves and each other. They risk their lives to experience consensual love, agency and emotional connection. Joy and love were their first declarations of war. It's not anger or hate that begin the revolution for these characters; it's joy and love.

Q: *BOOK OF ADDIS* is written entirely in Black vernacular. Why did you decide to write the whole book in this voice and not just the dialogue between enslaved people?

A: The first draft of the prologue was written mostly in Standard English, with only the dialogue in vernacular—and it was terrible! It was terrible because I didn't believe in the vernacular. I saw it as something shameful, a sign of poor education, a remnant of oppression, and so when it came out of me from that space onto the page, it read as something embarrassing and shameful.

Fortunately, I discovered Aimé Césaire and his epic poem *Notebook on a Return to the Native Land* while studying in Paris with Columbia University and learned of his strategy to cause a revolution in thinking by reconstructing the French language he was forced to learn as a result of colonization. He invented words, he took words apart, he recreated syntax and sentence structure—all to say to his French colonizers, “You cannot control my tongue.”

The following fall during my first semester at The New School's MFA program, I took the seminar Writing in the Vernacular. In that course with the brilliant Robert Antoni, I began to understand more of the exciting history of writing in Black vernacular, and that so many previously silenced and marginalized voices were choosing to write in the vernacular as a political statement, that this way of speaking and



writing was intentional, it was rebellious, it was beautiful and valid. So when I began to understand the vernacular from that perspective, it just poured out of me as poetry, as rebellion, as beautiful, as valid.

I loved the spirit of the vernacular in Langston Hughes's and Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry, so I took that. I loved how well I could hear the vernacular in my head when I read Louise Bennett's poetry, so I took that. I loved Uzodinma Iweala's use of gerunds in his vernacular in *Beasts of No Nation*, so I took that. I loved the use of a dash instead of quotation marks around dialogue that Roddy Doyle used in *The Snapper*, so I took that. I love how Junot Diaz's dialogue looks on the page, so I kept that in mind when crafting my dialogue. I also wrote a lot to music. I assigned music to specific characters that embodied the spirit of each character, so particularly the dream scenes have a lyrical feel to them. It took years to get everything just right.

Q: Why did you choose speculative fiction as the way to tell a neo-slave narrative?

A: There is so much about my ancestry that is beautiful in the face of great ugliness, and there is so much that I didn't know about slavery that I know now because of my research for this series and it made me think, "What if I had been taught this in elementary school, middle school, high school, college? Who would I be?"

I believe everything happens for a reason and for an appointed time in real life, but in speculative fiction, it doesn't have to be that way. So in my imagination, I wrinkled the timeline and put versions of real life heroes of mine and real slave rebellions and events into this 1790s Amerika dimension, because why not? History is what history is; the beauty of fiction is that the story can be whatever you want it to be. Without diminishing the experiences of my ancestors, I wanted to create something new, something hopefully healing, but at the very least, something entertaining.

Q: BOOK OF ADDIS is told from many perspectives, but mainly Addis and mainly Black women. However, one chapter is told from the perspective of the gruesome White overseer Haynes. Was giving him a voice a difficult choice and why did you make that choice?

A: Haynes is based on a real Louisiana slave owner, a woman named Delphine LaLaurie, who also mutilated and tortured her slaves like Haynes does with President Burken's slaves. He's also a manifestation of the prophetic warning that the sins of the father pass on to the son. Many Americans do not see the connection between America's state-sanctioned slavery of Africans and the institutional racism that exists today. But not seeing it does not erase its presence or its impact. Institutional racism has always been dangerous, and not just to those it oppresses. Haynes is a cutter, and his scars are the evidence of what racism does to even a person who this system is designed to protect. That doesn't excuse or justify his heinous acts, it just explains him.



Black Americans are socialized to see the world from White American perspectives in order to survive, so it was not difficult for me to conjure up Haynes' perspective. I was doing what I've been trained to do in many senses, by humanizing oppressors. Washington wasn't some red-faced horned devil, he was a human being who felt the way he felt and did the things he did and justified those things the way he justified them. The evil that exists in the world is done by people who look an awful lot like folks who live next door and folks who some consider heroes. It's important for story-telling that characters get to be fully formed, but it's most important for truth-telling that humans get to be fully human.

Q: What do you hope readers take away from reading your debut novel?

A: I hope readers get excited about the true history that's present in this book. So much of it is fiction, but I hope people will research Dido, Turk and Pompey, whose real names I used, and see what impact these Igbo slaves had on James Madison's grandfather. I hope people see in Addis George Washington's real life slave, Oney Judge, and read the story of her escape and how she was able to remain free of him, despite his best efforts. I hope people take it upon themselves to learn more about Black history outside of Rosa Parks and popular quotes from Martin Luther King. I hope people test their DNA and find out their ancestry. I hope new writers read this and feel permission to write whatever they want to write without fear. I hope people read this and believe, like Dr. Marc Lamont Hill says, "Another world is possible."