

# *"Outskirts" Book Club Discussion Guide*

1. The Jim Crow laws were still on the books in Mississippi in 1967, when the Kruger family moved to Mound Bayou. How was your understanding of that time in our history impacted by the author's story?
2. If you were a white individual living in a segregated environment, would you have used a "whites only" facility? Do you think people overreacted to Aura doing so during her first trip to Mound Bayou?
3. Why might some of Mound Bayou's residents object to the Krugers moving to Mound Bayou, given that their intent was to help?
4. Aura sent her Jewish children to a Catholic mission school. Would you be willing to send your children to a school sponsored by a religion other than your own?
5. The two youngest Kruger children, Charles and Jo, respond very differently to the family's move to Mississippi. How can two children in the same family have such a different experience?
6. Leon decided to move the family to Mississippi without consulting with Aura. Although unusual, such unilateral decision-making was not unheard of in the 1960s. What would you do if your spouse behaved as Leon did? Would you have moved your family to a poor area to help others?
7. Why didn't Jo tell her parents what happened during their first football game in Mound Bayou? Years later, Aura told Jo that if she had, they would have moved away. What do you think would have happened in that case, and what would have been the impact on the Kruger family and on the town?
8. Academics have argued for years about how to approach Ebonics – a term created in the 1970s to describe the linguistic manner in which many African Americans speak – concerned that pushing a modification of speaking patterns could be detrimental to self-esteem. How did this play out in Aura's classroom?
9. Aura deals effectively with a student behaving violently. As a mother-of-four in her forties, was she better prepared to deal with this situation than a new teacher just out of college? What can we do as a society to better train teachers?

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10. The Krugers' participation in the Civil Rights Movement was not met with uniform approval from the people of Mound Bayou. Why might a person of color object to the Krugers' involvement?
11. After several months as a teacher, Aura began a class by writing, "Black is not beautiful" on the blackboard. Could she have done this in her first week on the job?
12. Dr. Martin Luther King was shot while the Krugers lived in Mound Bayou. They received numerous phone calls advising them to either leave town or stay locked in their trailer. Were they truly in danger and was it acceptable that they sent the children to school?
13. During their second year in Mississippi, Aura enrolled in graduate education classes at the Whites Only college in the next town. She stated that this was acceptable because she was improving her skills as a teacher. Was that a rationalization to enable her to do as she wanted? What would you have done in her situation?
14. Through studying Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Aura challenged her students to consider their prejudices, comparing anti-Semitism with racism against blacks. Was this an effective classroom technique?
15. When eleven-year-old Jo was attacked by four local boys, the town priest begged the Krugers to leave town. What would you have done?
16. Jo was hesitant to return to Mound Bayou, balking at the idea when her editor suggested that it was necessary if she wanted to write an honest, authentic book. In the end, the trip resulted not only in a better book, but also in a sense of closure for the writer. How do you think Jo was changed by her journey back in time?
17. How is racism different today from in the 1960s? Do you believe that we still have institutional racism, despite the elimination of the Jim Crow laws?
18. Have you ever been discriminated against because of your race or religion or gender or sexual orientation or nationality or age? How did it make you feel?
19. White privilege has been receiving a lot of attention recently. Do you feel at all privileged because of your background or who you are?
20. What do we need to do as a society to eradicate racism?