

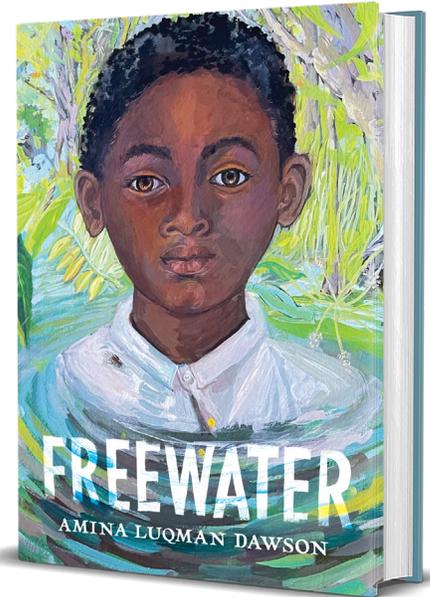
FREEWATER

AMINA LUQMAN-DAWSON BOOK CLUB GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Under the cover of night, twelve-year-old Homer flees Southerland Plantation with his little sister Ada, unwillingly leaving their beloved mother behind. Much as he adores her and fears for her life, Homer knows there's no turning back, not with the overseer on their trail. Through tangled vines, secret doorways, and over a sky bridge, the two find a secret community called Freewater, deep in the swamp.

In this society created by formerly enslaved people and some freeborn children, loosely based on the history of maroon communities in the South, Homer finds new friends, almost forgetting where he came from. But when he learns of a threat that could destroy Freewater, he crafts a plan to find his mother and help his new home.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Freewater? What do you think is the significance of the settlement's name?
2. New arrivals to Freewater can choose a new name for themselves, and all residents are able to choose a swamp call that helps them communicate with the community. Why do these identifiers have such important meaning—especially to those who were previously enslaved? What does adopting swamp sounds symbolize for Freewater's people as they cohabitate with the land?
3. What does Homer mean when he shares that he can turn himself invisible? Why does he view this as a survival tactic? Why does invisibility become something he struggles to maintain when he returns to Southerland?
4. How would you evaluate Nora's process of learning about the actual cruelties of slavery? Do you think she fully understands the part she and her family play in slavery by the end? In what ways do her attempts to help fall short? Why? As a child with little control over such circumstances, how can she use her privilege to stand up for what she believes in?
5. Why aren't children born in Freewater allowed to leave like other members of the community? How does only knowing life in Freewater affect how Sanzi and Juna view themselves and the world? How does the behavior of the two Freewater-born sisters differ from the other kids who were born on plantations?

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6. Sanzi's mother reminds her, "Out there, they take and take from the land. They use us to do it. Only ugly comes from that land" (p. 177). What is Freewater's relationship with nature? In what ways do the people of Freewater use the resources that are provided by their land differently than plantation owners? What do you think she means by the "ugly" that comes from their land?
7. Ada continually refers to wanting to fly throughout the book. What does flight mean to her?
8. When the group of kids leave the swamp and encounter a white man on the road, Amina Luqman-Dawson writes, "Beyond her clothing there was something about Juna that set her apart. Something [the white man] hadn't seen before" (p. 336). What do you think this "something" could be? What was the cause of Juna's strong reaction to interacting with a white man for the first time?
9. Freedom is a theme throughout *Freewater*. It means different things depending on the character. What does it mean to Sanzi? Homer? Suleman? To all those who inhabit Freewater?
10. Two Shoe's actions almost reveal Freewater's clandestine location and threaten its survival. What hard choices does Two Shoes make to protect his family? Is Two Shoes the villain in this story? Why? Why not? If he is not a villain in the story, who or what is?
11. Sanzi and Ferdinand are at odds for much of the story. Why don't the two get along? What is it about Ferdinand's experiences beyond Freewater and Sanzi's within Freewater that make understanding one another difficult?
12. *Freewater* is written from multiple perspectives. What did you learn from different characters' chapters? Which character did you respond to most strongly?
13. In her author's note Luqman-Dawson discusses learning about "maroon communities" and how those true stories inspired *Freewater*. Were you surprised to learn that these secret swamp communities actually existed? Why? How does the history we learn shape how we view the world?
14. In *Freewater*, inhabitants face a risky existence as a small enclave of freedom in the midst of enslavement. They created numerous, rules, norms, and traditions to preserve their freedom and protect themselves from the racism and cruelty beyond Freewater's limits. In what ways have African Americans continued that legacy today?

