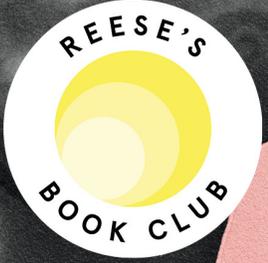




SEVEN

DAYS

IN JUNE



TIA

a Novel

WILLIAMS

BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Eva Mercy is an author who feels creatively stuck, grateful to a series that has made her not only successful and given her a devoted following but also pigeon-holed her as a certain type of writer. Discuss the challenges that artists can experience in changing style.
2. The potential director for the Cursed movie adaptation states that the characters need to be white to be “accessible.” What are some instances of whitewashing you’ve witnessed in popular culture? Discuss the repercussions this has on our culture and society.
3. “Your misogynoir is showing” is Eva’s response when Khalid denigrates her writing as “fluff.” Why do you think a value system has been assigned to different kinds of writing, where genres such as fantasy and romance are seen solely as entertainment and not art? Can you think of ways to combat this perception?
4. Eva Mercy has spent much of her adult life too busy with work and motherhood to date. She’s also been too scared. Discuss the ways that these seven days in June allow Eva to be vulnerable and open herself up to love. How have your own experiences with love made you feel vulnerable?
5. Eva and Shane both feel like misfits and outsiders. When they meet, they seem to understand each other on a molecular level. What does *Seven Days in June* make you feel about the importance of being loved and understood by someone else? Discuss what the novel says about allowing yourself to be seen and accepted for who you are.

6. Motherhood, mothering, and what we carry through generations are themes at the core of *Seven Days in June*. Discuss the ways that both Lizette and Eva carry traumas of their ancestors with them, and the ways it makes Eva intent on not repeating the cycle with Audre. How have you seen this play out in your own life, in your relationships with your parents or your children?

7. Shane works with students like Ty to give back to the community and heal from his own childhood trauma. Later, when he decides to coach basketball at the YMCA, he's found a different model of giving back, without creating unhealthy dependencies. Discuss Shane's trajectory over these seven days and the ways in which he grows.

8. Lizette tells Eva, more than once, that the women in their family are cursed in love, which Eva believes to be true. However, she eventually breaks free from that mentality when she realizes that, unlike all the other women in her family, she found a man who loved every part of her. Looking at Eva's life, and your own experiences, how does one learn from the choices of those before them? How does one keep from making the same choices?

9. Eva and Shane's relationship illustrates that though two people can fall in love with one another, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are always ready to be together. Eva and Shane realize that to be together they need to work on themselves. What were some of the ways that Shane and Eva needed to heal and deal with their pasts in order to be ready for one another? What does the novel say about being ready for love, being in love, and growing in love?

10. What other sweeping dramatic love stories does Eva and Shane's remind you of?

a Novel

A CONVERSATION WITH TIA WILLIAMS

What inspired you to write *Seven Days in June*?

I was inspired by a couple of ideas. I've always been interested in the concept of "the one who got away." What happens when they suddenly reappear in your life? Would you be ready? Would you still care? Would you drop everything? Would you say all the things you've been waiting to say, forever? And then, one lazy Saturday I was watching Leo DiCaprio and Claire Danes in *Romeo + Juliet* (as one does), and I started daydreaming about what would've happened to those two wildly dramatic, self-destructive teenagers if they hadn't died. If they simply went their separate ways and found each other again years later, as well-functioning, responsible adults. I started writing the draft that weekend.

Were there any major changes to the novel, the plot, or characters between your first draft and now?

In the first draft, Audre was much younger—like, in early elementary school. I found out quickly that I needed her to be more mature, so she could verbally spar with Eva and Shane. Plus, my daughter is twelve and very precocious, so the dialogue came naturally to me! Also, at first, there were more flashbacks. My favorite was the scene where Shane and Cece meet for the first time. It's a little window into how he got his big break and became a literary star. Cece's in LA for work and staying at the Roosevelt Hotel—and a very rootless Shane is working in housekeeping. When he stops by her room with a new duvet (after Cece popped Moët and accidentally sprayed her bed), they have a quick conversation, he figures out she's a publishing bigwig—and he smoothly hustles his way into getting her to read his manuscript. It's actually a really funny, revealing chapter, but I cut it because it's not key to Shane and Eva's story. Sometimes, as a writer, you create these lost chapters just to give yourself the information, so you understand your characters more fully.

Did you learn anything new about yourself during the process of writing this novel?

I wrote my first novel in my early twenties. As a younger writer, I felt the need to explain cultural nuances for the benefit of non-Black audiences. Writing this novel in my forties, I'm no longer compelled to explain my characters or their worlds to anyone. You get it, great! If not, I enthusiastically encourage you to google it.

Were there any characters that took longer to reveal themselves to you, or any sections in the novel that were more difficult to write?

It was hard for me to write about Eva's invisible disability, because I, too, have had chronic daily migraines since I was a child. It's a totally debilitating, misunderstood condition, and it's ruined relationships with friends, boyfriends, you name it. Constant pain makes you feel isolated like you're watching life happen around you but you're unable to participate fully—and it's almost always accompanied by depression. It was like pulling teeth, writing scenes where I had to describe the pain or how alien it made Eva feel. I was frightened to confront those feelings, head-on.

Eva has a deep love of horror books and movies. How did you decide to include that as part of her personality, and does it connect with Eva's feelings of being an outsider?

I'm a massive, massive horror fan. I loved *Cujo* as a kid, which is about a sweet Saint Bernard who gets infected with rabies, and then slowly turns absolutely murderous. Some of the scenes are written from the dog's point of view, and you can see how he slowly retreated into himself, and his perspective went wonky, and he went crazier and crazier as the infection took over. That's how living with chronic pain feels. You're slowly driven mad by this thing, but it's all on the inside—you're not outwardly, obviously sick in a way that people understand. You're silently terrorized. That was Eva's experience. Horror is the language of the outsider. No matter what subgenre—haunted houses, vampires, slasher flicks—horror is about being preyed upon, and that's how Eva felt.

This novel is filled with fun pop-cultural references from the early 2000s to today. Were you inspired by any specific moments in terms of creating particular scenes or atmosphere?

I'm an unrepentant pop-culture junkie! I love leaving time stamps in fiction. Whether it's a popular song or fashion trend, those details are like fun little nostalgic surprises that take you immediately to a certain place and time. Even though she was only in the novel briefly during a flashback, I loved writing Annabelle Park's character. With her Juicy Couture minidress, diamond studs, and Chihuahua named Nicole Richie, you just know who this chick was in 2004!

Though the characters in *Seven Days in June* have suffered real pain and trauma, your novel is about joy, passion, and creativity. How important was it for you to write a funny, sexy Black love story?

We don't get enough stories that celebrate and amplify Black humanity. All parts of it, not just art about oppression. I'm interested in the hilarious, sexy, joyful, regular, banal, everyday ecstatic moments. When I was growing up, I soaked up romantic comedies, Judith Krantz, Jackie Collins, and any film written by Nora Ephron. But these dramatic, glorious, everyday slices of life never starred Black characters. It always seemed that we had to suffer in art. It's exhausting, and it's not the only Black experience. We're dazzling, and I wanted to show that.



New York's creative Black community and the literati play a significant role in *Seven Days in June*, and it reads like you had a lot of fun writing those scenes. Have you found being a part of an artist community necessary or helpful to you as a writer?

As a writer, I definitely feel that it's necessary to find a community of like-minded artists. Writing is a lonely experience—you don't do it by committee, it's just you and the blank page—so connecting with people who get it helps prop you up. Also, most creative communities are pretty colorful and scandalous, so there's endless plot inspiration!

Who are some of your favorite writers, and did they influence the way you wrote *Seven Days in June*?

This is going to sound weird, because I don't write in the horror genre, but in terms of the flashback structure, I was influenced by Stephen King's *It*. In the scenes following the protagonists as kids, you learn everything you need to know about who they are, as adults. As a reader, the flashbacks help you piece together clues about the characters. Along the same vein, I've always loved *One Day* by David Nicholls—each chapter follows the life of two protagonists on July 15, over twenty years. I find it fascinating, the way love changes and grows as the characters blossom and evolve. Plus, *One Day* somehow manages to be hilarious, sexy, and moving, all at once. My favorite kind of story!

What are some of your favorite love stories?

Their Eyes Were Watching God is the most deeply romantic novel I'd ever read. In Zora Neale Hurston's hands, even the most mundane observations become mythological. The story was written at the height of the dazzling Harlem Renaissance, but it takes place in an all-Black, backwater Florida town and follows the life of Janie, a vivacious woman with a complicated past who falls in love with a (much) younger man. The love between Janie and Tea Cake is sensual beyond belief, and back then, it was damn-near impossible to find Black love in mainstream fiction. Honestly, the way Hurston wrote their love story was a revolutionary act.

A SEVEN DAYS IN JUNE PLAYLIST

Tunes to put you in a "star-crossed lovers" mood

"Leave the Door Open" by Bruno Mars, Anderson .Paak, Silk Sonic

"All I Need" by Method Man ft. Mary J. Blige

"He Said" by Dvsn ft. Miguel

"Kiss it Better" by Rihanna

"Can't Get You Off My Mind" by Lenny Kravitz

"Damage" by H.E.R.

"Wicked Games" by The Weeknd

"There Goes My Baby" by Usher

"No Angel" by Beyoncé

"I Couldn't Be More in Love" by The 1975

"Talk" by Khalid

"Up Late" by Ari Lennox

"Forever in My Life" by Prince

"Luster" by Raven Leilani

"My Favorite Mistake" by Sheryl Crow

TIA WILLIAMS RECOMMENDS:

(AFTER YOU READ *SEVEN DAYS IN JUNE*)

TV SHOWS

Insecure
Better Things
Fleabag
Gilmore Girls
Euphoria
Normal People
Girlfriends
Big Little Lies
Ginny & Georgia
I May Destroy You

MOVIES

Romeo + Juliet
Love Jones
The Notebook
Love and Basketball
Crazy/Beautiful
Weekend
About Last Night (2014 version)
Mahogany
Eve's Bayou
In the Mood for Love
The "Before" Trilogy: Before Sunrise, Before Sunset, and Before Midnight

BOOKS

One Day by David Nicholls
Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë
Get a Life, Chloe Brown by Talia Hibbert
Fates and Furies by Lauren Groff
Love in Colour: Mythical Tales From Around The World, Retold by Bolu Babalola
Hate to Want You by Alisha Rai
Open Water by Caleb Azumah Nelson
Who Do You Love by Jennifer Weiner
Cane River by Lalita Tademy
The Fault in Our Stars by John Green
Passing by Nella Larsen