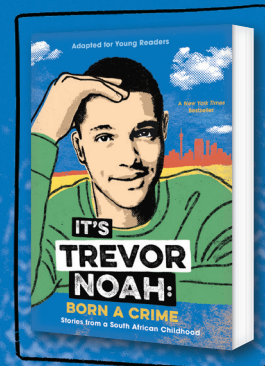


IT'S TREVOR NOAH:

BORN A CRIME

ABOUT THE BOOK: Trevor Noah tells the story of growing up as a biracial boy in South Africa during and post apartheid in this young readers' adaptation of his bestselling adult memoir *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. The title of his memoir is *It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime*. What is the meaning of "born a crime"? How would it feel for your very existence to be considered a crime? How does this concept impact Trevor's life?
 2. What does *apartheid* mean? Look up the definition and discuss the history of apartheid in South Africa. Read the "Apartheid History" chapter at the end of the book.
 3. Religion is a central theme of Trevor's childhood memories. How did his mother's interest in religion affect his relationships, his everyday life, and his actions?
 4. Trevor describes his mother as being "rebellious" and includes stories of her childhood in his memoir. Notice the similarities between his mother's behavior and Trevor's. What else does Trevor have in common with his mother? How are they different?
 5. Trevor and his family endured many hardships because of racism. Have a conversation about these moments and how they affected Trevor's life. How did racism affect the lives of other people in South Africa? What were the differences for black people and white people?
 6. Trevor speaks multiple languages. He says he "learned that the quickest way to bridge the race gap was through language." Trevor shares a memory of coming across a group of "Zulu guys" who were talking about mugging him. They decided not to when they realized he could understand them and speak their language. Reflecting, Trevor says he understood "that language, even more than color, defines who you are to people" (pp. 53–54). What does he mean, and how is this idea reflected in this encounter? Do you use language differently in different situations? At school? At home? With friends?
 7. Trevor's mother told him: "Learn from your past and be better because of your past, but don't cry about your past. Life is full of pain. Let the pain sharpen you, but don't hold on to it" (p. 67). Do you think he followed his mother's advice based on his memoir? What does he share about what he has learned from his memories?
 8. Trevor's name is both meaningless and meaningful. He explains: "The names Xhosa families give their children always have a meaning, and that meaning has a way of becoming self-fulfilling. . . . When it was time to pick my name, she chose Trevor, a name with no meaning whatsoever in South Africa, no precedent in the family. . . . My mother wanted her child beholden to no fate. She wanted me to be free to go anywhere, do anything, be anyone" (pp. 67–68). How are names tied to expectations?
- What do you know about your name? Who named you? Were you named after someone? Research the origin and meaning of your name.
9. Trevor says he was blessed with a trait he inherited from his mother: the "ability to forget the pain in life" (p. 94). Think of some examples from the book where this happens. Do you think Trevor's outlook—"never let[ting] the memory of something painful prevent [him] from trying something new" (pp. 94–95)—is a smart approach to life? Do you have a similar attitude? Why or why not?
 10. Think about the meaning of the word *oppression*. Trevor says: "People love to say, 'Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime.' What they don't say is, 'And it would be nice if you gave him a fishing rod'" (p. 182). Consider Trevor's addition to the old adage. What is he trying to say about helping others? Discuss short-term vs. long-term needs.
 11. When Trevor finished high school, he ended up working "in the hood" for a few years, instead of pursuing his education. When he looks back on why he stayed, he says, "The hood was strangely comforting, but comfort can be dangerous. Comfort provides a floor but also a ceiling" (p. 212). What does he mean? How do people get stuck doing something comfortable? What do people need to be propelled forward?
 12. Reflecting on a potential deal with a stolen camera, Trevor thinks about why we cause others pain. He says: "We live in a world where we don't see the ramifications of what we do to others, because we don't live with them. If we could see one another's pain and empathize with one another, it would never be worth it to us to commit the crimes in the first place" (pp. 215–216). Do you agree with him? Can you think of examples from your own life that support this? How else does this apply to Trevor's life?
 13. As a boy, Trevor loved to pull pranks and make people laugh. How did this change how he saw himself? What about how others saw him? How easy or hard do you think it is to say or do funny things?
 14. What does Trevor's story suggest about the human condition? What do you take away from his memories, and how can you apply his lessons in your own life?
 15. Trevor tells stories of devastating oppression and accepted racism alongside tales of hilarious encounters with vibrant characters, including friends, love interests, and peers. Which are your favorite stories, and why?
 16. This memoir is about Trevor's childhood through his teens. What title would you give your memoir? Start writing!