

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Finding Me
by Viola Davis

BOOK GROUP

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Viola Davis is a critically revered, award-winning actress, producer, and New York Times Best-Selling Author. She is the first black actress to win two Tony Awards (*Fences* & *King Hedley II*), an Oscar (*Fences*) and an Emmy (*How to Get Away with Murder*). Davis was most recently seen starring in *The Woman King*, which she also produced. In 2012, Davis and her husband Julius Tennon founded their production company, JuVee Productions, with its focus being on giving a voice to the voiceless through strong, impactful, and culturally relevant narratives.

BOOK SUMMARY

Finding Me: A Memoir (2022) is a *New York Times* bestselling memoir by actor Viola Davis, encapsulating her journey of growing up in poverty in Rhode Island and overcoming the trauma of her circumstances to find global success and fame. Davis is a celebrated actor with numerous awards and accolades to her name. At the time her memoir was published, she was the only African American to have won the Triple Crown of Acting: a Tony, an Emmy, and an Oscar. Through the retelling of her own experiences and the insights she has drawn from them, Davis touches upon themes of the interrelation between poverty, race, and trauma; the long and arduous process of coming to terms with one's identity in the face of marginalization and discrimination; and the heavy hand that luck, chance, and privilege play in the glitzy world of Hollywood.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Memoirs are often written so that the subject can take ownership and “tell their own story.” Do you think it is a smart move to reveal experiences and secrets to control the narrative?
2. For many years Viola saw herself as that 8-year-old girl constantly fleeing for her life. Are there moments in your life that have defined you; moments that continuously replay in your mind? How do you process those memories? What have you learned from them, if anything?
3. How does sharing her trauma help Viola take back the power from those situations where she felt powerless?
4. What do you think kept Viola going even in the darkest times?
5. A central element of Viola's story is colorism: “When you are a dark-skinned girl,” she writes, “no one simply adores you.” She recalls grappling with feeling ugly and unseen, and later to acknowledge the role it played in her pain. How important do you feel this thinking/trauma played in her overall life story?
6. Viola found acting to be an outlet and coping mechanism at an early age. Why do you think this particular activity allowed her to claw her way out of her everyday life?
7. In the memoir, Davis calls out her “warrior fuel”—something inside her that kept her from giving in to defeat. Is there anything in your life that you consider your warrior fuel?
8. How did her parents' relationship shape Viola's relationships and thoughts on parenting?

9. Viola had 3 ceremonies with her husband Julius. What role do you think he and their love story played in her life?
10. At several points in the memoir Viola discusses her desire/need to help her family out financially (when she finally got to a place where she was making “a little money”). “I thought I could save them. I thought my money and success could save all of them. I learned the hard way that when there are underlying issues, money does nothing. In fact, money exacerbates the problem because it takes away the individual’s ability to be held accountable.” How do you think she handled boundaries and her family’s financial issues?
11. Viola’s story reminds us that it’s never too late for a new beginning. (Chapter 16 — “My biggest discovery was that you can literally re-create your life. You can redefine it. You don’t have to live in the past.”) Have you ever re-created your life?
12. What are your thoughts on Viola’s trip to Africa? What did this experience do to her? Do for her?

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