



Parable of the Sower: A Graphic Novel Adaptation

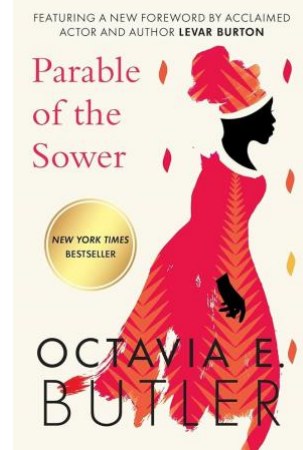
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Grades 9-12

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Discussion Questions

1. The Olamina family and their neighbors live in Robledo, a walled-off community located somewhere in the northwestern suburbs of Los Angeles. While the inhabitants of Robledo sometimes venture beyond the walls for work or shooting practice, they are isolated from the surrounding city. To what extent is Octavia Butler's description of a dystopian Los Angeles a critique of social and economic concerns of the present day?
2. While her family still lives in Robledo, Lauren tries to convince her father, Reverend Olamina, that they should prepare the community for an inevitable invasion. He refuses, telling Lauren, "It's better to teach people than to scare them" (page 49). Do you agree with Lauren or with Reverend Olamina? Does fear motivate people to take useful action?
3. Lauren is fifteen years old when the story begins, but she is already looking to the future and thinking about ways to help her community. How does her perspective as a young person shape her view of the world? Is she an effective leader on her journey northward?
4. Lauren Oya Olamina and Taylor Franklin Bankole both have last names that come from Yoruba, a language widely spoken in southwestern Nigeria, as well as Benin and Togo. Their names have significant meanings; Oya is the goddess of winds and storms, a powerful warrior, and has the ability to bring about change. Olamina can be translated as "This is my wealth."



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The name Bankole comes from “Bá mi kó 'lé,” or “Build a house with/for me.” How are these many meanings revealed in the actions and thoughts of the two characters?

5. On page 229, Lauren and Bankole have a conversation about her “hyperempathy syndrome,” which makes her physically experience the pain of others. Bankole suggests that it would be better “if most people had to endure the pain they caused.” Is Bankole right that hyperempathy would be good for their world? How might it help and how might it hurt people as they try to survive?
6. This version of *Parable of the Sower* relies heavily on images to convey information about the characters and the various settings. Choose a panel from the book that you find especially interesting or helpful for understanding the story. What details do you notice?

Extension Activities

1. *Parable of the Sower* is set between 2024 and 2027 in California. In the dystopian world of the novel, local government and public education have collapsed, private corporations enslave people, violence is rampant, and water is scarce. However, Octavia Butler did not write in anticipation of this world actually emerging. In an interview with Juan Williams of National Public Radio, she said, “The problems that I write about are problems that we can do something about. That’s why I write about them.” Imagine your community twenty years from now; what issues are of greatest concern to you? Follow Butler’s lead and write a short story that describes your community in the future and warns readers about a problem that might arise, as well as how it can be addressed.
2. Damian Duffy and John Jennings adapted Butler's narrative into a graphic novel version of *Parable of the Sower*. Read Butler’s short story [“The Book of Martha”](#) and select a scene that you can visually adapt. Draw your version or use images you find online or in a magazine to picture Butler’s imagined conversation between a confused Martha and God.

