

# invisible child

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this book called *Invisible Child*? What makes these children—and their parents—unseen?
2. How does America's history of racism and Black disenfranchisement intersect with the story of Dasani's family? What government policies and social inequities have impacted this family over time?
3. Is Fort Greene one place or two separate neighborhoods? Discuss the upsides and downsides to gentrification, contrasting the wealthy part of Fort Greene with the area where Dasani lives. Does proximity to wealth make Dasani's life better or more difficult?
4. Discuss the role of the author, Andrea Elliott, in reporting and writing this story. What are some of the ethical challenges of a project like this? Did you feel Elliott's presence while reading the book?
5. Elliott writes that Dasani's parents, depending on your perspective, are "either 'working the system' or 'making ends meet.'" Did you share one of these opinions before you started reading? Did your opinion change after reading the book?
6. Dasani's family is repeatedly displaced. What impact do you think this had on Dasani and her siblings?
7. Dasani has developed an arsenal of skills to help her survive—from her command of household chores to her analysis of caseworkers' vocal intonations and facial expressions. "None of these skills were captured on her report card," Elliott notes. Should schools evaluate students solely on their academic performance or on a wider range of life skills?
8. Does *Invisible Child* complicate the popular American refrain that you should "pull yourself up by your bootstraps"? Does it also challenge the argument that government aid is the only solution to poverty?





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9. Elliott writes, “Dasani is well versed in city politics, not because she follows the news. She is simply forced to notice what other children miss.” How much did you know about your city’s politics when you were Dasani’s age? In what other ways is Dasani forced to grow up quickly?
10. Should Chanel and Supreme have lost custody of their children? In what ways might the child-protection system help a family like Dasani’s? How does the system fall short, or even harm families?
11. Discuss the importance of positive role models and their impact on Dasani’s life—especially African-American women like Faith Hester, the Brooklyn school teacher, or Julie Williams, the therapist at Milton Hershey School. What are the limits of a role model’s influence on a child’s life?
12. What are the factors that caused Dasani to leave Hershey? What, if anything, could have prevented that outcome?
13. Does achieving conventional success require Dasani to disconnect from her family, culture, or identity? Is that a price worth paying, or even a fair price to ask?
14. Dasani has a complicated relationship with her mother, Chanel—just as Chanel had with her own mother, Joanie. How might this mother-daughter dynamic help or hinder a family living on the edge?
15. It’s common for survivors of trauma to escape their pain by drinking or taking drugs. What events might have triggered Chanel and Supreme’s dependence on drugs? Did their struggle with addiction impact your view of them as parents?
16. How did you feel at the end of the book? What kind of trajectory do you see for Dasani and her siblings?
17. What surprised you the most about Dasani’s story?

