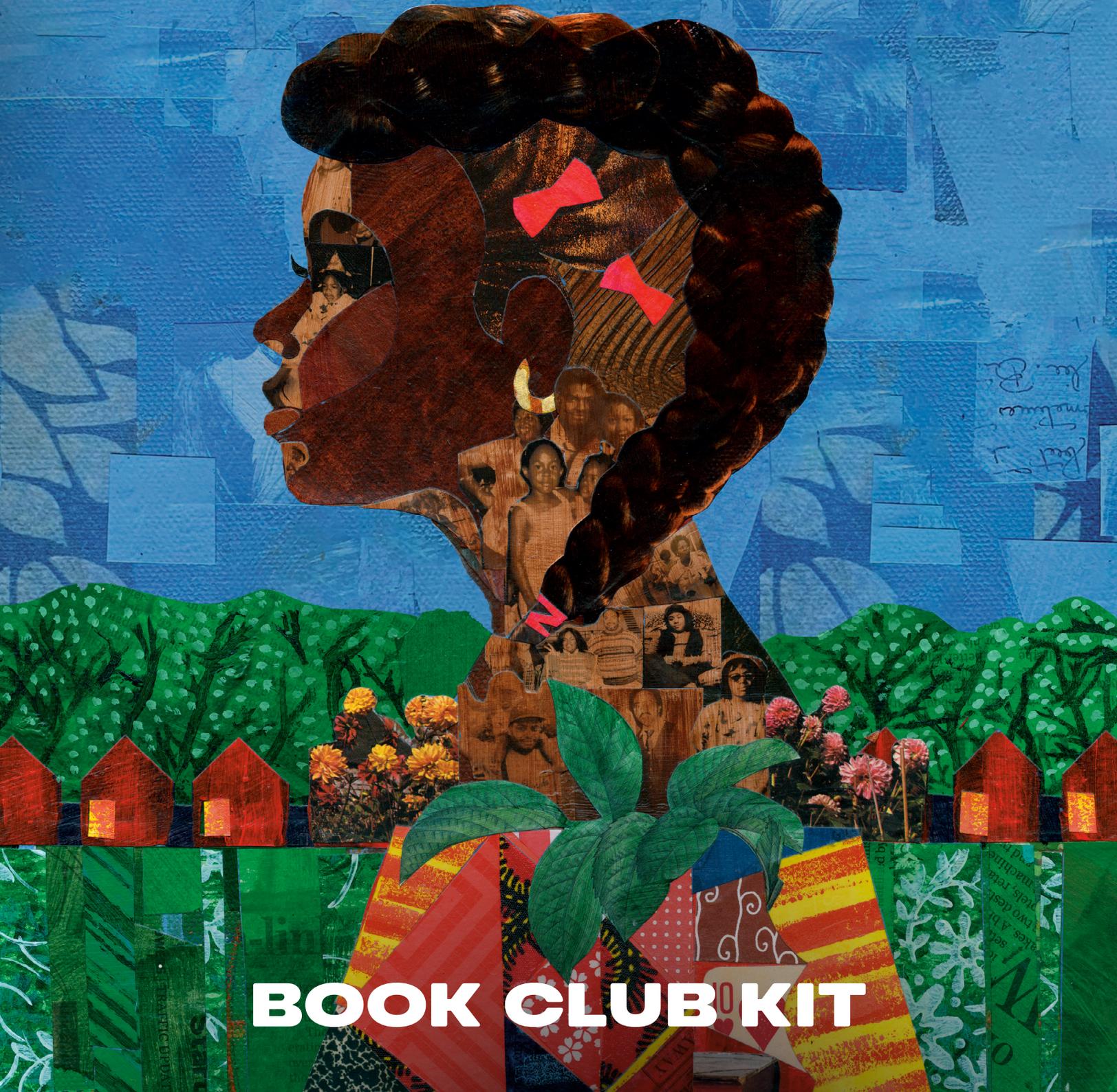


DELANA R. A. DAMERON

REDWOOD COURT



BOOK CLUBKIT

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

DEAR READER,

I have been thinking about the stories and people that comprise *Redwood Court* for my entire life. The intergenerational family at the center of the book is a fictionalized version of my own family: African American and Southern; troubled and triumphant in their quest to live full, rich lives in spite of all of the obstacles thrown their way. Mika Tabor, seven years old at the start of these pages, is witness and scribe to her family's journeys, while also charting her own path—crafted in the image of and taking improvisational departures from her elders.

On his 50th birthday, my father realized—despite his attempts to deter me—what it meant to have a daughter who sought a writing life with deep devotion, and who used her family members as points of narrative inquiry. I think he finally understood that, through my pursuits, there would be a record of his living, his life. I had called from New York City, where I was living at the time, to wish him a happy birthday. Daddy remarked how he had “made it.” He went on to explain that his father had only lived to 49, and that all he wanted in life was to live longer than that. Do something his father never did. In the same conversation Daddy had suggested some things to explore in my writing, a small gesture he had started doing on our calls. “Maybe one day you’ll write—”

My last extended phone call with my father was nine years later, on Father’s Day in 2018. After my mother’s debilitating stroke in 2016, Daddy was her primary caregiver despite his own health having failed numerous times before that. So much so that, at age 59, we believed he was living on extremely borrowed time. Daddy started that conversation on Father’s Day the way he sometimes did: “Maybe one day you’ll write—” and told me a story I had never heard before, about his last visit with his grandmother before his father’s orders overseas. How as soon as they landed in Germany on the first leg of their journey, she was hit by a car back home while crossing the street carrying glass milk bottles. Daddy lost his only living grandmother at five years old. It’s moments like this, snippets of what was known, that provide touch points for explorations into what will be forever unknown to me. These are the kinds of narrative braids that inform *Redwood Court*: the knowns that give way to the forever-unknowns.

Too, I thought a lot about place while writing this book. Specifically, about how the Black experience in contemporary culture is often very much a story of dichotomy: urban vs. rural. Resourced vs. under-resourced. Well-known geographical locations vs. fictional ones (still often rural or urban). It was important to me to locate *Redwood Court* in a real, existing place: Columbia, South Carolina, where I grew up. While Columbia is (now) known for a few things, the city still doesn’t have a cultural identity in the way that some of the larger metropolitan areas in its orbit do. This erasure undoubtedly suggests the erasure of its inhabitants—and a level after that, the utter invisibility of the Black folks who populate it.



A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

But Columbia is a real place. Within it, a real street: Redwood Court. Growing up in the 1990s, the people who loved me made that street feel like a small town. And because of the ways infrastructure ruled the movement of Black life, the neighborhood in which the Court was located did operate like a small town—a collection of safe spaces to gather, do business, etc. It is a real-life Black suburbia, a landscape not often explored in literature or otherwise, but one I was indelibly shaped by.

And so, when I was creating the universe for this novel, I visited my own family archives as references: A photo of my grandparents playing spades. My sister and Goofy at Disney World. My grandfather's army enlistment photo. The obituaries that pepper the photo albums. Those snapshots of lives lived—my own extraordinary ordinary loved ones—launched me into areas of exploration and story-making along the way.

After my father died, I moved back to Columbia in 2019, having lived away from it for 17 years. I returned to an almost-empty homeland: my grandmothers, grandfather, aunt, an uncle, godmother, and others were all gone. The time away had made clear to me what an immense gift I was given by my elders: a community filled with Black people—blood and almost-blood—who loved me. I hadn't realized until writing *Redwood Court* that that same kind of fierce love would need to protect Mika from whatever a prejudiced world might make of her: that she was somehow lacking, less than, not equal. Rooted by her family's influence, she could fight against any inclination that she was anything other than the young girl they raised her to be.

With *Redwood Court*, I have insisted that my family and my hometown be my anchors—my beloved subjects and the narrative jumping off-points into the forever unknowns of our collective legacy as descendants of the institution of American Slavery. Above all else, it is my hope that this book enters the literary archives as a poignant accounting of a working-class Southern Black suburban experience, highlighting the interior lives of extraordinary ordinary Black folk—its own special kind of Americana.

**DÉLANA
R. A.
DAMERON**



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which character resonated with you the most? Why?
2. What through-lines did you see across the generations?
3. What did 154 Redwood Court represent for Weesie and Teeta? For Rhina? For Mika?
4. “One of the things Weesie brought with her to Redwood Court that had been instilled in her in Georgia was an overwhelming sense that where systems fail, people prevail.” How did this sense influence Weesie’s actions? How did those actions influence their neighborhood?
5. We see through various characters’ points of view throughout the novel, but it’s really Mika’s coming-of-age story. How would you characterize Mika? What was it like getting to know certain characters through her—and then through their own thoughts?
6. What do you imagine Sasha’s interior world was like? What were her hopes and dreams?
7. What does Redwood Court have to say about the idea of family? Of community? How did the characters support each other throughout their lives? Where, if at all, did this support fall short?
8. “You have all these stories inside you—that’s what we have to pass on—all the stories everyone in our family knows and all the stories everyone in our family tells,” Mika’s grandparents tell her. What family stories will you pass on?
9. The novel is suffused with nostalgia, from the lyrics of The Spinners and The O’Jays to decidedly ’90s popular culture. What was this part of the reading experience like for you? How might these nostalgic moments enable a reader to connect even more deeply with the characters and story?
10. “You understand a thing differently when it’s called something else, maybe closer to what it’s about or what it’s doing,” Cousin Daisy says. “I think we do [have to call our neighborhoods ghettos]. It changes the relationship we have with our understanding of what has been allowed to us.” Discuss the conversation Cousin Daisy sparks during her visit. How do the other characters react? What is your point of view on the argument? Does this conversation dull the shine of Redwood Court for Weesie, Mika, and the others? Why or why not?
11. Teeta and Major are both veterans. How are their experiences similar? How are they different? How does Teeta’s advice to Major change the trajectory of his life?
12. Teeta and Major choose their battles when it comes to confronting racism—sometimes they choose to ignore it, or to play the supplicant role the white person in question expects. What did you think about these scenes?



JOURNAL PROMPTS:

FEELINGS OF NOSTALGIA FROM REDWOOD COURT

Did your family take trips together during the summer? A road trip? Disney World? Write down your favorite family trips from your childhood.



Do you remember your first computer? How old were you when you first used it? Do you remember what it looked like? What year was it?



How did your family celebrate your birthdays? A party in the backyard? Your favorite dinner?



JOURNAL PROMPTS:

FEELINGS OF NOSTALGIA FROM REDWOOD COURT

Do you remember who taught you to ride a bike? Did you fall often, or were you a fast learner?



Does your family have any special holiday traditions? Which holidays did you celebrate? Do you have a favorite memory?



REDWOOD COURT PLAYLIST

Listen to a playlist of music curated by author DéLana R. A. Dameron.

GOIN' UP YONDER

Walter Hawkins

AIN'T NOBODY HERE BUT US CHICKENS

Louis Jordan & His Tympany Five

YOU GOTTA BE

Des'ree

THE RUBBERBAND MAN

The Spinners

WORKING MY WAY BACK TO YOU / FORGIVE ME, GIRL

The Spinners

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS

Billie Holiday

THE RAIN (SUPA DUPA FLY)

Missy Elliot

FU-GEE-LA

Fugees

BREAKDOWN MARIAH CAREY, KRAYZIE BONE,

Wish Bone

STAY (I MISSED YOU)

Lisa Loeb

IN MY OWN LITTLE CORNER

Laura Osnes

LITTLE DRESSMAKERS / THE WORK SONG / SCAVENGER HUNT / A DREAM IS A WISH YOUR HEART MAKES / THE DRESS / MY BEADS / ESCAPE TOTHE GARDEN

Mice Chorus

WHEN YOU BELIEVE

Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey

WONDERWALL

Oasis

LINGER

The Cranberries

IRONIC

Alanis Morissette

ROLLIN' WITH MY HOMIES

Coolio

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

Coolio

INDEPENDENT WOMEN, PT. 1

Destiny's Child

DANCE TONIGHT

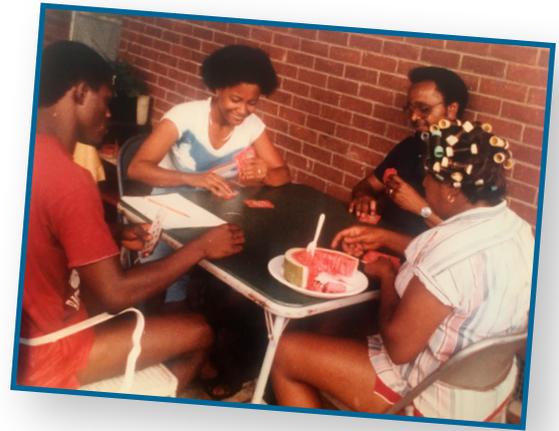
Lucy Pearl



PLAY SPADES LIKE WEESIE AND TEETA

Weesie & Teeta's Spades House Rules

"Weesie had set up a card table on the carport for spades. She was in the middle of the game with the largest cut of watermelon—a host cut—I'd ever seen. I hadn't noticed then, but she didn't even take her hair out of her rollers! I paused for a second and looked over Weesie's shoulder while she counted books in her hand: trump, trump, deuce of diamonds, deuce of spades. She was going to clean the table. She cut her eyes at me and I knew to keep walking and not call out that I knew she had at least seven books like she and Teeta taught me. Instead, I gave a different observation." —Redwood Court



- Play to 500
- Order of Wilds (highest to lowest):
 - **Big Joker**
 - **Little Joker**
 - **2 of Diamonds**
 - **2 of Spades**
 - **2 of Hearts and 2 of Clubs are not in play**
- A winning play / round is called a “book”
- If a team bids a “Boston” they claim they’re winning all books, and the host can determine if that’s winning the whole game, or if they will include those points won in team total. Should be determined at top of play
- “Board”: Minimum number of books a team has to bid, or 4 books
- If a player is not dealt a Spade or wild card, they can request a re-deal.
- No playing a Spade card until being used to cut (attempt to win) a play; then players can lead plays with Spades.
- Dealer can flip over 4 cards per player during dealing.
- If a team bids 5 books, but only wins 4, they lose 10 pts. x number of books bid (-50 pts.).
- If a team bids 5 books, but wins 6 books, the books over the amount bid are called sandbags. Team would receive a score of 51 (10 pts. x books bid + # of sandbags)
- After 10 sandbags, the team would lose 100 pts.

