

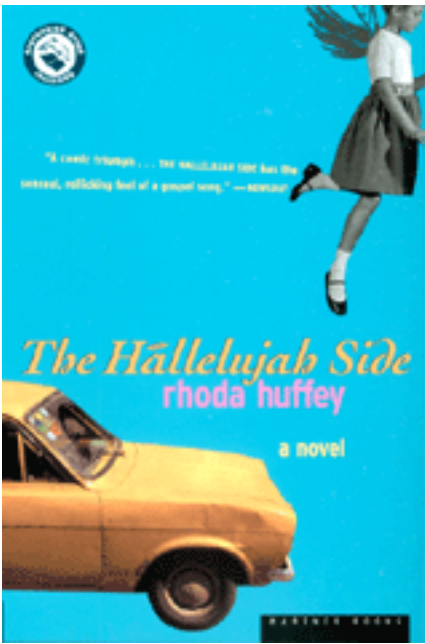
The Hallelujah Side

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- Questions for Discussion

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Questions for Discussion

We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of *The Hallelujah Side* for every reader.

1. What things of this world does Roxanne love, including tree leaves, grass, and sidewalks? How does her love of these things conflict with the faith expected of her, and to what extent is it reconcilable with that faith? What are the consequences of her love for the things of this world?
2. Pastor Fish believes that "Human beings had to get their blood boiling each day . . . to stay in top working order." How do Winston and Zelda Fish and others get their blood boiling? What might be the attendant dangers and benefits, if any?
3. How do Winston and Zelda Fish reconcile their faith's rejection of worldly things with the worldly activities that they enjoy (dancing, reading *Newsweek* and *Das Kapital*, and flying, for example)? To what extent are the expression and practice of anyone's religious faith determined by personal likes and dislikes?
4. We are told that Zelda Fish "was a perfect housekeeper, but when the Spirit entered she forgot housework." In what ways can the entrance of the Spirit interfere with the necessary, life-supporting activities of everyday life? What are the manifestations of the Spirit's presence in Zelda and others?
5. How unusual, or common, are Colleen's insistence that Winston and Zelda are not her true parents and her acting out of religious practices from other churches? How would you explain her behavior? Why doesn't Roxanne engage in similar behavior?
6. What do Pastor Fish and his congregation consider to be Holy Ghost power? How might that "power" be described in nonreligious terms? What instances are there in the novel of this power's operation, and what are its consequences?

7. What possible conflicts are there between Zelda's faith and her position as Pastor Fish's wife, on the one hand, and her job as Welcome Wagon Hostess, on the other? How do they reflect the greater conflicts between the actual world and the world of faith? How do details from Zelda's past help us to understand her resolution of these conflicts?
8. "Grownups were hard to fathom," Roxanne thinks, as Zelda and Mrs. Bell giggle over dropping the logs. What does Roxanne find hard to fathom about the adults in her world? How does she go about trying to understand them?
9. In what ways, and why, do Mrs. Bell's attitude, manner, and behavior change when Zelda mentions Winston's calling and invites the newcomer to their church? How do nonbelievers generally respond to the unsolicited advances of believers, and why?
10. How does Roxanne deal with the boredom of her father's sermons, the anxiety of waiting for the Second Coming, and the demands of her parents' faith? How do her discoveries concerning herself lead her away from the church and the fear of being left behind?
11. What is the significance of the most frightening of Roxanne's three demons being "a stuffed toy horse, soft and fluffy"? To what extent, in the book and in life, does the malevolent take on the appearance of the familiar, amusing, or comforting? Does one have to be a fervent believer to accept the operation of evil in the world?
12. What role do Chick and Miriam Woolworth play in the novel and in Roxanne's development? To what extent is their behavior reasonable and understandable, or not? Why do they behave the way they do?
13. Beginning with "putting idols before God" (that is, hoping for a ripe ear of corn before the Second Coming occurs), what "sins" are specified? To what extent are these "sins" part of everyone's day-to-day life? In what ways are they spiritually harmful or life-enhancing?
14. We are told that "In Iowa you could lose your bearings in a moment," as Roxanne—on her way downtown to meet Superba—does. In what ways, and with what consequences, do characters in this novel lose their bearings? In what ways might being "reborn" constitute as much a loss of one's bearings as getting lost along unfamiliar streets?
15. "Children should be left alone to go at their own pace," Winston Fish insists. In what ways, or not, does Winston put these words into action? To what extent are Colleen and Roxanne allowed to find their ways toward adulthood "at their own pace"? To what extent do they dictate their own pace despite their parents' actions?
16. What is Roland's effect on his brother's congregation from the moment he stands up? How would you account for that effect? What comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between a spellbinding preacher and a mesmerizing entertainer, and between the former's congregation and the latter's audience?
17. In what ways may we interpret Roland's advice to Roxanne—"But you got to listen when God talks"? To what extent may different people experience this in different ways? In what ways does "God talk" to the people in The Hallelujah Side?
18. How would you interpret Roxanne's flying dream? What might that dream

have to do with her hopes and desires, her relationships within her family, her parents' church, and Iowa? What is its importance in relation to the rest of the book?

19. What definitions might we ascribe to the word soul in the novel? Which of the word's meanings and usages apply most importantly to Roxanne and her experiences?

20. How would you explain Roxanne's apparently otherworldly experiences—from hearing the voice of God and seeing Blue Nose, to talking to the hedge and seeing flashing lights at the Camp Meeting, to sensing a hum in the universe? Are they only the sensations and perceptions of a particularly imaginative and sensitive preteen?

21. Why does Winston insist that Roxanne will not sing with Aretha Franklin but will be formally baptized into the church, and then leave the final decision to her? Why does he choose not to use any of the preventive means available to him?

22. What are some of the ways in which one may "rock one's soul"?

This Discussion Guide was written by Hal Hager & Associates, Somerville, New Jersey.