



## **FOR LAMB**

by Lesa Cline-Ransome

### **THEMES**

- Racism, Racial Violence, and White Terrorism
- Black Resistance
- Family
- Secrets
- Survival
- Sacrifice
- Hope

★ “Unforgettable.”

—*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

★ “A devastating page-turner that tells an all-too-realistic story.”

—*The Horn Book*, Starred Review

★ “Powerful.”

—*Booklist*, Starred Review

★ “Will leave readers with a visceral understanding of history.”

—*BookPage*, Starred Review

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

An interracial friendship between two teenaged girls goes tragically wrong in this powerful historical novel set in the Jim Crow South, the first young adult novel by the Coretta Scott King Honor Award–Winning Author Lesa Cline-Ransome.

*For Lamb* follows a family striving to better their lives in late 1940s Jackson, Mississippi. Lamb’s mother is a hardworking, creative seamstress who parents with a firm but loving hand to keep her children safe in segregated Jackson. Lamb’s brother has a brilliant mind and has even earned a college scholarship for a Black college up north—if only he could curb his impulsiveness and rebellious nature.

Lamb herself is a quiet and studious girl. She is also naive. As she tentatively accepts the friendly overtures of a white girl who loans her a book she loves, she sets off a calamitous series of events that pulls in her mother, charming hustler uncle, estranged father, and brother, and ends in a lynching.

## PRE-READING

### Teaching Hard Histories

The history of lynching, racial violence, and White terror in the United States during the Jim Crow era is difficult for students of all ages and should be approached with care and consideration. The content can be emotionally triggering for students who may need time and space to process the reading. Prior to reading, teachers may want to have students watch the video ([tinyurl.com/4yazr3wj](https://tinyurl.com/4yazr3wj)) by the Equal Justice Initiative on racial terror.

After watching, students should explore what it means to learn about the pain and trauma of others. The teacher may want to facilitate a brief conversation about trauma, allowing time for writing and sharing. Additionally, the teacher may want students to consider how examining past traumas with an empathetic, critical lens provides opportunities to learn from these experiences in advocating for a more just and inclusive society. Before reading the novel, it is recommended that the teacher facilitate the development of community norms with their students for language, behavior, and participation that honors both the topics covered in the readings and student needs.

### Teaching with Timelines: Building a Historical Context

For students to develop an understanding of the period of time during which the story *For Lamb* takes place, it is recommended that teachers guide students in an exploration of the historical context surrounding the Jim Crow era. Timelines are a strategy to help students better understand a time period by providing a visual aid for identifying relationships between historical events and a visual prompt to activate student prior knowledge.

As the class explores history, reference the timeline to situate new evidence in relation to other historical events, to infer how events are connected, and to determine cause and/or effect between events. Listed below are some historical events directly referenced in the story *For Lamb*. This is not an exhaustive list, and other events that deepen students' understanding of the historical context should be welcomed and added to the timeline.

- American Slavery
- Abolition of Slavery/Emancipation
- Reconstruction Era
- Jim Crow Laws
- The Great Migration
- 1918 Shubuta Lynchings

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "If a Negro wants something more than some scraps, you best pack your bags and make your way over to the train depot, start heading north yesterday because you ain't going to find it here. The *Chicago Defender* posts jobs with good pay asking, no, begging, Negroes to make their way north" (pp. 15–16). Why would African Americans choose to leave their homes in the South for the North? What does this tell you about living conditions in the South versus life for African Americans in the North?
2. "Pastor Lewis talks about being of service. About giving and not wanting nothing back. About sacrifice. A lamb of God" (p. 47). What does "sacrifice" mean to you? Do you agree with Pastor Lewis's definition? What kinds of sacrifices did African Americans make in the Jim Crow South?

*Extension:* Choose a character from *For Lamb* (Momma/Marion; Simeon; Lamb; Chester; Chime). What sacrifices did they make and why?

3. "I didn't raise you to be no fool, Simeon. Who do you think you are? You want to live long enough to get to that school up North, then you better learn how to live here in the South. You understand me" (p. 77)? Why was Momma so hard on Simeon for being outspoken? Do you agree that it was better for Simeon to stay quiet? Why or why not?

4. How were racial violence and White terror used to maintain White supremacy in the South?
5. How did Momma's view of survival differ from Simeon's?
6. "Lamb, she gotta stay true to the name I gave her. Quiet. Meek. She got to listen good" (p. 157). What does Momma naming her daughter Lamb tell us about the fear of racial violence and challenges of raising a Black child during the Jim Crow era?
7. How did racial violence impact the way Lamb interacted with Marny and the way Momma interacted with Dr. Tremper?
8. How did people who were not targeted by lynching respond to the violence that was regular and public? How did Marny react?
9. What privileges did Marny have that Lamb didn't have? How did these privileges, or lack of, impact the way Black and White people moved in society and interacted with others outside of their communities?
10. In what ways did African Americans from the South strive for equality and freedom during the Jim Crow era?
11. "White folks ain't got much of a problem with colored long as they ain't messing with their money. Soon as you do, they gonna find any way to stop you. Burning your fields. Burning a cross. Hanging from a tree" (p. 199). How does this statement shed light on the economic roots of White supremacy?
12. "'They don't string people up in the North, that it?' Momma laughed. 'Maybe not from a tree. But they sure do in a courtroom. Or a jail cell. Please . . .' Momma shook her head. 'Y'all ain't escaping nothing by leaving here. Just getting a different set of problems'" (p. 80). What does Momma mean by this statement?
13. What role did the *Chicago Defender* play in the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North?
14. Why didn't Lamb go to the authorities when she was sexually assaulted by George Tremper?
15. Why was Momma lynched when she had not been convicted of a crime?
16. How was Momma's death a sacrifice?
17. African Americans resisted racism during the Jim Crow era in many ways. Some forms of resistance were formal, such as the formation of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Other forms were less formal, such as the creation of safe spaces for African Americans to come together, celebrate, and build community. In what ways did African Americans resist segregation and racism in the story *For Lamb*? How did these forms of resistance nurture and protect Black lives?
18. When thinking about how African Americans were targeted by racial violence during the Jim Crow era, what connections can you make to today? Which groups are targeted (or continue to be targeted) today? How does that impact their ability to live freely?
19. What are resistance movements and efforts being taken by African Americans today? How does their fight connect to struggles during the Jim Crow era?

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### Poster-Making

In the early 20th century, the *Chicago Defender* reported on issues of racism and discrimination as well as stories of Black social and economic progress in the North. Eye-catching headlines, graphic images, and red ink were used to capture the reader's attention and bring national attention to injustices in the South in the hopes of galvanizing people into taking action. Think of a topic or cause that is important to you. Use eye-catching headlines, slogans, and symbols/images to grab people's attention and bring awareness to your cause.

### Rhetoric in the News

Dr. Tremper refused to call Marion by her name, instead repeatedly referring to her as "Auntie." These forms of language, or rhetoric, were used to perpetuate racist ideas that African Americans were less than Whites and deserving of the unjust treatment they received. Find examples of rhetoric in the media today that are used to categorize and dehumanize a group of people. Discuss what the impact of the rhetoric is on the group.

### Memorializing the Lives Lost to Lynching

Few public memorials exist that address the United States' history of lynching, and most victims have never been publicly acknowledged. To honor and memorialize those who lost their lives to lynching, students can design and create a memorial. The memorials can include an explanation of the memorial, an event, victim, or geographic location where lynchings took place.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo Credit: John Halpern



**Lesa Cline-Ransome** is the author of more than twenty books for young readers, from picture books through young adult novels, including the award-winning Finding Langston trilogy. Her work has received a plethora of honors, including dozens of starred reviews, NAACP Image Award nominations, a Coretta Scott King Honor, the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, and a Christopher Award. Her work has been named to ALA Notable Books and Bank Street Best Children's Book lists. Lesa lives in the Hudson Valley region of New York. Visit her online at [LesuClineRansome.com](http://LesuClineRansome.com).