

Summer Reading Guide for

Born a Crime: Stories from a S. African Childhood by Trevor Noah

In several interviews, Trevor Noah explains that his book is about his mother and *for* his mother. He dedicates it to her, thanking her for “making [him] a man.”

What stories and anecdotes about his mother does Noah share with us?

What do we know about her? What matters to her? What decisions does she make?

What does she experience in her life? How does she respond to adversity?

How does she shape Noah’s character and life—how does she make him a man, and what exactly is a man according to this book?

Noah’s book also chronicles the evil and insanity of apartheid, or apart hate, as he calls it. It will be important for you to understand what apartheid is, so you may want to read “Apartheid History” in the back of the book (281-292) before you begin on page 3.

Can you define apartheid in three or four sentences?

What are the similarities and differences of apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow laws in the United States?

Many have said famously that “those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.” What important lessons or take aways can we apply to current social justice issues?

What role does Nelson Mandela play in ending apartheid?

Let’s also examine this book as writers.

Notice how Noah structures his book. Look at the chapter titles on the Contents page. Flip through the book and notice how he begins or ends chapters with a historical explanation or an editorial comment. As you read, notice how this structure changes—helps?—your understanding and enjoyment of the book.

As a comedian and television host, Noah clearly knows how to tell stories. Notice *how* he tells his stories with the printed word. What details does he include? What is his writing voice and style? What aspects of his stories do you enjoy, respect, respond to most?

What are your favorite passages in the book? As you read, be sure to mark up (underlining or annotating is best!) all of the contenders for your favorite moment. Be ready to discuss your top three or four when classes begin. (One of mine would be page 182 when Noah adds to the old aphorism about “teaching a man to fish.”)