



Shadow Folk and Soul Songs **By Matthew Johnson**

Book Club Discussion Guide and Reflection Questions

- Reflect on how *Shadow Folk and Soul Songs* engages with issues of social justice and activism, echoing the concerns and struggles of writers from the Harlem Renaissance era to the present day. How do the poems in this collection confront issues of race, inequality, and injustice? Poems to read and consider could include, “Lazarus is a Black Man,” “Strong As We Know How,” and “The Sun Looks on Me, Why Won’t You?”, among others.
- Examine and talk about how *Shadow Folk and Soul Songs* fosters cross-generational connections and dialogue around black music history. How do the poems bridge the gap between past and present, inviting readers to engage with the legacy of black musical pioneers? Poems to read and consider could include, “Consciously in Vogue,” “Hard Times of Delta Blues,” “Hip-Hop Romance on Saturday Night” and “Who Stole the Soul, Robert Johnson?”, among others.
- Discuss how the poetry collection depicts the idea of a shadow as a companion or alter ego, accompanying the poet throughout *Shadow Folk and Soul Songs*. How do the poems explore the relationship between the conscious self and the shadow? Think about W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. Poems to read and consider could include, “A Light After Midnight (12:01),” “My Brother, My Shadow,” and “Shadow Mural,” among others.
- Think about how *Shadow Folk and Soul Songs* uses language as a musical instrument, playing with sound, unconventional rhythm, and repetition to create a lyrical reading experience. How do the jazz poems in this collection invite readers to listen to the music of words? Poems to read and consider could include, “Because of Harlem’s Dream,” “Looking for Charlie Parker,” and “The Spill of Sugar Hill,” among others.
- Consider how *Shadow Folk and Soul Songs* celebrates the artistry of storytelling, showcasing the impact of language as a means of expression, communication, and contribution to memories and cultures. How does this poetry collection spark conversations about storytelling in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us? Poems to read and consider could include, “Black Words in the Street,” “Dialect An’ Standard of Dunbar,” “For World,” and “Your Stories.”
- Analyze the cover and title of *Shadow Folk and Soul Songs*. Consider the symbolism of dancing silhouettes in relation to the contents of this poetry collection. How does the choice of this cover and title foreshadow or complement the content of the poems? Review and discuss if there are specific poems or motifs that stand in relation to the cover art and title.