

Discussion Guide

Jewels and Other Stories

1. In what way might the short story form be seen as a particularly apt one to describe the fractured society of apartheid South Africa? Might these short stories be read as a mosaic of separate, 'broken' pieces, which together describe the whole?
2. In this collection, do the stories progress in a sequence with an overall narrative arc? Do you feel there is a sense of ending?
3. Does the title *Jewels* echo themes that thread through the collection as a whole? What different kinds of 'jewels' are there in the book?
4. What importance do the physical landscape, and different landscapes, have in the stories? What kind of landscapes are they, and what contribution might they have to the themes and effects of the book as a whole?
5. There are many "voices," or different people's perspectives, in this collection. Many perspectives are from people who are/were voiceless: the disenfranchised black people of apartheid South Africa. Do you think that some of the white adults in this book are voiceless, even powerless, as well?
Do you think a book might be understood as an attempted remedy for voicelessness and powerlessness? Do you think *Jewels* achieves voice or empowerment for anyone?
6. Do you think characters in the book, both black and white people, seem to be trapped, even imprisoned, in their world? What are the different kinds of imprisonment for the characters? What are some of the ways they attempt to escape?
7. Some characters in *Jewels* do not have a name, while others' names carry unusual weight. What importance can you ascribe to names and naming in the book? Do you think the question of who *gives* someone a

name recurs through the stories, and what might be the wider significance of this?

8. Three stories in the collection feature characters who are artists (painters). You might consider in what way the act of painting in these stories mirrors the act of writing. What, if anything, do you think each artist-character in the book achieves through his/her work?

9. What do you think of the author's use of language, and her rendering of different characters' language (English, or references to other South African languages like Afrikaans and Zulu)? Do you think the variations in language, and characters' difficulties with language through the collection reflect on themes of the book as a whole?

10. Did this book reveal aspects of 1970s South Africa that you didn't know? Can you think of other works of fiction set in similar authoritarian societies, and what concerns or effects these works share?