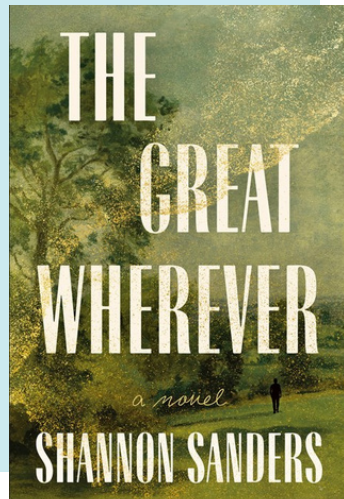

DISCUSSION GUIDE



The Great Wherever

by Shannon Sanders

An expansive family saga told with a wry and distinctly modern voice that explores the ways we learn to define ourselves through and against our families, how we carry on after loss, and how the past lives on in all of us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Lamb family farm is at the center of the novel, both literally and figuratively. What does the land represent to different generations of the family? How does its meaning change over time, from Thomas's original purchase to the present-day debate over whether to sell it?
2. Thomas Lamb's purchase of the farm is an extraordinary achievement, particularly for a Black man of his time. What role do his relationships with the Lanyer family play in making that purchase possible? How does the novel explore the complicated relationship between Black prosperity and the white families who have historically controlled land, wealth, and power?
3. The four Lamb children have very different relationships with their parents, one another, and the family farm. How do their personalities and the roles assigned to them within the family shape their choices?
4. Thomas originally intends to leave the entire farm to Peter, recognizing his special connection to the land. Was this a fair decision?
5. What did you make of Joah's relationship with Luke Lanyer?
6. Do you believe Joah played a role in Peter's death, or is his guilt more complicated than that?
7. Peter's sexuality is something the family seems unwilling to acknowledge openly, despite rumors about his private life. How does Peter's experience reflect the expectations placed on members of the Lamb family? In what ways are all the siblings constrained by the family's ideas about who they should be?
8. Aubrey is intelligent and capable, yet she seems reluctant to pursue the opportunities available to her, whether professionally or personally. What do you think holds her back? Did you find her frustrating, sympathetic, or some combination of the two?
9. How does Aubrey's relationship with Boyd reflect her sense of self-worth?

10. Aubrey arrives in Tennessee knowing relatively little about her family's history or the land she has inherited. How does her understanding of the Lamb family—and her place within it—evolve during her visit? What role do her developing relationships with Darlissa and Hayes play in that experience?
11. Aubrey's decision about whether to sell her share of the farm puts her at odds with relatives who feel a much stronger connection to the property. Did you sympathize with her desire to take the money and move on, or with the others' determination to preserve the land? What obligations, if any, do descendants have to protect something their ancestors worked so hard to acquire?
12. The novel is narrated by La'Dar, one of four ghosts whose lives and deaths span generations of Lamb family history. What does each ghost—Zena, Fern, Peter, and La'Dar—contribute to the story? How do their different experiences illuminate the family's history, secrets, relationships, and connection to the land? What does their perspective allow us to understand that the living characters cannot?
13. The ghosts are bound to the farm, and only certain members of the Lamb family can see them. What do you think determines who can see the ghosts and why they remain tied to the land?
14. When Aubrey sells her share of the farm, the La'Dar immediately lose her ability to follow her life or know her thoughts. What did you make of this moment? Does her separation from the land represent a loss of family identity and connection, or might it also offer a kind of freedom?
15. What do you think the novel ultimately suggests about the things we inherit—and the things we choose to leave behind?