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Crave: Sojourn of a Hungry Soul

By Laurie Jean Cannady

A Study Guide for Students

Synopsis

A young black woman's searing debut memoir about growing up poor and facing the challenges of both physical and emotional hunger. Cannady knew what it was like to be hungry even before she was born: "Food was a scarcity in my Momma's womb, my first home." Her mother, Lois, was still a teenager when the author was born and had already experienced rape at the hands of her first baby's father. Cannady's father, Carl, was the second man in Lois' life, and until Lois gave birth, he seemed to offer hope for a brighter future. But the longer the author's mother stayed with him, the more abusive and parasitic he became, hitting Lois and feeding off the little money she received from welfare. The first significant male figure to enter Cannady's life after Carl was Pee Wee, who helped make the family's hunger disappear. But his contributions to the household came at a cost. Until Pee Wee was arrested for pedophilia, he sexually abused Cannady and threatened to kill Lois if Cannady ever told her the truth. Other men entered and left the family's life and brought temporary security and nourishment with them. Yet inevitably, they all became unreliable and/or violent. This instability, combined with Cannady's early experience with sexual victimization, led her into the arms of boys and men who were just as damaged as she was. However, the great tragedy was that these boyfriends genuinely wanted to care for Cannady before they succumbed to their own brutal conditioning. Throughout this at-times painful narrative, the author also celebrates the strength of her bonds among the members of her family and especially with her mother. These bonds offered her the sustenance she needed to become a woman whose hunger to escape the cycle of abuse eventually trumped dysfunction and chaos and put her on a road to a better life. A bold, honest, and courageous memoir.

Author Bio

Laurie Jean Cannady is a professor of English at Lock Haven University, where she spends much of her time encouraging students to realize their true potential. She is a consummate champion of women's issues, veterans' issues, and issues affecting underprivileged youth. Cannady resides in central Pennsylvania with Chico Cannady and their three children.

Study Questions

Knowledge:

1. Identify the author's writing style in terms of content, voice, and/or personality.
2. Identify and discuss the overall theme(s) of the memoir.
3. List three (3) specific sections that caught your attention. Why?

Comprehension:

1. After reading the memoir, explain how the title correlates with the subheadings above each of the sections.
2. Several of the characters in the memoir experience sexual abuse during adolescence, discuss the impact of sexual abuse in today's society versus twenty years ago.
3. Explain how the narrator characterizes the male characters in the story.

4. Obstacles such as sexual abuse, violence, and poverty were stacked against the narrator's family. Discuss the social impacts of the narrator during that time and ones she'd have to deal with beyond.

Application:

1. Construct an analysis of the narrator's character.
2. Analyze the many environments in which the narrator grew up in. Discuss.
3. Report on the way(s) the narrator's environment played a role in the narrator's upbringing and shaped the person she'd become by the end of the memoir.

Analysis :

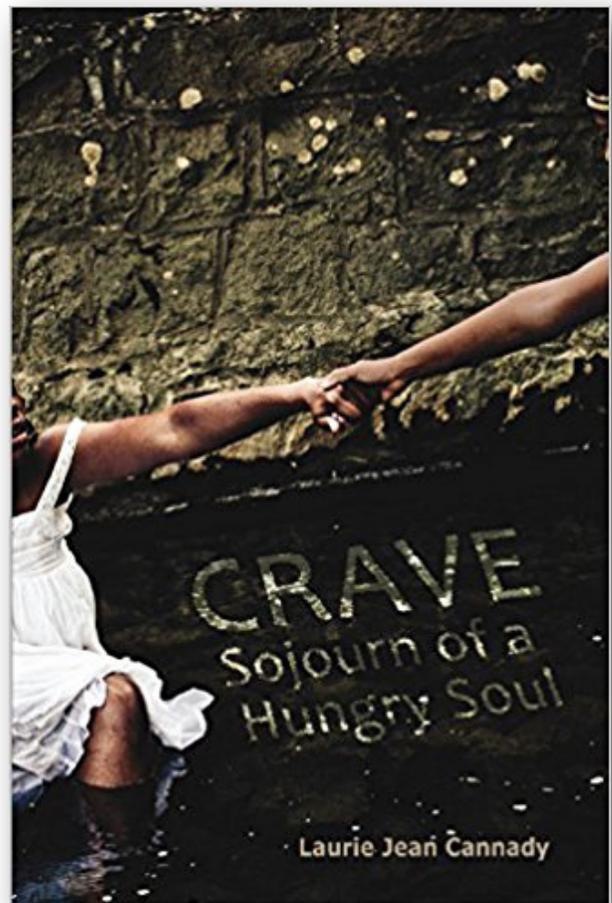
1. Compare the narrator's upbringing to that of her mother's. Differences? Similarities?
2. Categorize the narrator's life cycle: adolescent, teenager, young adult.
3. Analyze the impact of single parenthood on family and society in today's time.

Synthesis

1. Hypothesize what life would be like for the narrator beyond the end of the book.
2. If you were to edit this memoir, what sections would you add or delete? Why?
3. Invent an alternate ending.

Evaluation

1. Critique the narrator's characterization of herself or others.
2. Assess why the narrator felt the need to share this story.
3. How has the triumphant trials of the narrator made an impact of you?



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