



## *Jewel* by Bret Lott

Announced on January 19, 1999

### Discussion Questions

1. Jewel's mother called the stories of who Jewel was and where she came from, "stones in your pocket." What did she mean by this? What were Jewel's "stones" and how did they affect the course of her life?
2. "I say unto you that the baby you be carrying be yo' hardship, be yo' test in this world. This by my prohpehsying unto you, Miss Jewel." These words of Cathedral not only carried great portent, but haunted Jewel throughout her life. Discuss the various implications of Cathedral's prophecy. With this same statement, the author interjects a spiritual element to the story. Is it believable? Or does it seem to run counter to the tone of the rest of the book?
3. When Jewel slaps Cathedral, it is a defining moment for both of them. Besides being an expression of Jewel blaming Cathedral for Brenda Kay's accident, what else did this act signify? Was slapping Cathedral, a slap at faith?
4. Did Jewel's determination and action-oriented path to help Brenda Kay diminish Jewel's religious faith?
5. When Jewel returns to make amends with Cathedral and is offered no comfort, why does Cathedral reject her? Why is Cathedral angry and unforgiving?
6. What did the author assign the names Jewel and Cathedral to these characters? Are we to assign meaning to them? If so, what?
7. Jewel's attitude toward blacks and her understanding of racial issues evolved after moving to California. Was she able to overcome all of her prejudice? Did she eventually see blacks and whites as equal?
8. To what degree did the racial attitudes of the south compared to those of Los Angeles affect Leston's ability to adjust to life in Los Angeles? Is Leston a racist? Discuss his attitude toward Blacks.
9. Was Jewel's decision to move to California based solely on getting help for Brenda Kay or was she just as eager to climb out of the ignorance and stagnation of being "white trash?"
10. Can any of Jewel's determination to do better for herself, for Brenda Kay, and for her family, be attributed to Missy Cook, the grandmother whom she despised? What was the significance of Missy Cook burning Jewel and her mother's belongings? What did it mean to Missy Cook? What did it mean to Jewel?
11. Was Jewel fair to Leston? Did she sacrifice too much of him, his happiness, his wishes for Brenda Kay? Did Leston die a broken man?
12. Leston implies that because of Jewel's fierce love and determination Brenda Kay would have come progressed just as far if they remained in Mississippi. Do you agree?
13. Why does Leston throw away the lighter that he proclaims is the one thing that will always be his? What finally makes him agree to sell the house he built and move to California? Was it weakness in the face of Jewel's fierce will, or was it the strength of his love for her? Does the author let us know Leston as much as we need to in order to understand all of his actions?
14. How would the experience of a woman today giving birth to a child with Down's syndrome differ from Jewel's? How would it be the same?



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*Continued*

15. Jewel considered Brenda Kay both a burden and a blessing. Were these in equal parts? What blessings did Brenda Kay bring? In the end, did Jewel see her as the hardship she had to bear?
16. If Brenda Kay had been born a normal child, what would have happened to Jewel and her family? Would they have stayed in Mississippi?
17. Did Jewel love Brenda Kay more than her other children?
18. Is Jewel a believable character? Is she flawed enough or too good to be real?