

Parable of the Sower Study Guide

Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Parable of the Sower Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Author Biography.....	5
Plot Summary.....	6
Chapter 1.....	9
Chapter 2.....	11
Chapter 3.....	13
Chapter 4.....	15
Chapter 5.....	17
Chapter 6.....	19
Chapter 7.....	21
Chapter 8.....	23
Chapter 9.....	25
Chapter 10.....	27
Chapter 11.....	29
Chapter 12.....	31
Chapter 13.....	33
Chapter 14.....	35
Chapter 15.....	37
Chapter 16.....	39
Chapter 17.....	41
Chapter 18.....	44
Chapter 19.....	46
Chapter 20.....	48



[Chapter 21..... 50](#)

[Chapter 22..... 52](#)

[Chapter 23..... 53](#)

[Chapter 24..... 55](#)

[Chapter 25..... 57](#)

[Characters..... 59](#)

[Social Concerns..... 65](#)

[Techniques..... 66](#)

[Thematic Overview..... 67](#)

[Themes..... 68](#)

[Style..... 70](#)

[Historical Context..... 71](#)

[Critical Overview..... 73](#)

[Criticism..... 74](#)

[Critical Essay #1..... 75](#)

[Topics for Further Study..... 79](#)

[What Do I Read Next?..... 80](#)

[Key Questions..... 81](#)

[Further Study..... 82](#)

[Bibliography..... 83](#)

[Copyright Information..... 84](#)

Introduction

The protagonist is Lauren Olamina, an African American girl who is fifteen years old when the novel begins. She lives in Robledo, about twenty miles from Los Angeles, which has become a walled enclave only partially protected from the rampant lawlessness and desperate poverty that exists beyond the walls of the neighborhood. When the enclave is completely destroyed by bands of arsonists and thieves, Lauren is one of the few survivors. She heads north, on foot, with a couple of companions in a perilous search for a better life.

Butler's disturbing dystopia, written in the form of Lauren's diary entries, is at once an adventure story, a coming-of-age story, and a thought-provoking exploration of some negative trends in American society that have become more pronounced in the decade that has elapsed since the novel was written.

Author Biography

Octavia Estelle Butler was born in Pasadena, California, on June 22, 1947, the daughter of Laurice and Octavia Margaret (Guy) Butler. Her father died when she was a baby, and her mother supported the family by working as a maid. Butler loved reading science fiction stories as a child, and she soon started writing them herself. At the age of thirteen she was submitting her own stories to magazines.

Butler attended Pasadena City College, and while a student there she was awarded fifth prize in the *Writer's Digest* Short Story Contest. She received an Associate of Arts degree in 1968 and went on to attend California State University, Los Angeles, in 1969, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

In 1969, Butler entered the Open Door Program of the Screen Writers' Guild, where one of her tutors was Harlan Ellison. At Ellison's suggestion she enrolled in the Clarion Science Fiction Writers' Workshop, held in Pennsylvania. As a result of taking the workshop, she sold two short stories. Deciding she wanted to be a writer, she supported herself with low-paying jobs such as dishwashing and cleaning, while continuing to write, often getting up at three o'clock in the morning to do so. When she was laid off from a telephone sales job in 1974, she decided to use the time to write her first novel, the science fiction tale *Patternmaster*, which she completed in less than a year and sold to Doubleday. *Patternmaster* was published in 1976 and was quickly followed by three more novels in the *Patternmaster* series: *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), and *Wild Seed* (1980). In between, Butler published *Kindred* (1979), a mainstream novel focusing on African American history.

In 1984, St. Martin's published *Clay's Ark*, a fifth volume in the *Patternmaster* series. In that year she also won the Hugo Award, for her short story "Speech Sounds," and in 1985 she won the three most prestigious science fiction awards for her novelette *Bloodchild* (1985): the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, and the Locus Award. After this, Butler turned her attention to the science fiction trilogy, *Xenogenesis*, which was published by Warner Books. The three novels were *Dawn: Xenogenesis* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989).

Butler then hit a barren spell. She knew she wanted to write about a woman who wanted to start a new religion, but she could not produce a manuscript that satisfied her. Eventually the ideas flowed smoothly, and the result was *Parable of the Sower* (1993).

Butler received a MacArthur fellowship in 1995. In 1998, her novel *Parable of the Talents*, which she described as a continuation of *Parable of the Sower*, was published by Seven Stories Press and republished by Warner in 2000. The novel won the Nebula Award for best novel, 1999. Also in 2000, the three novels in the *Xenogenesis* were collected under the title of *Lilith's Brood* and published by Warner Books.



Plot Summary

Chapters 1—3

Parable of the Sower begins in July 2024, in Robledo, in southern California. It is Lauren Olamina's fifteenth birthday. California has changed drastically over the past three decades. Water is scarce and expensive, there are few jobs, and climate changes have produced massive rains followed by years of drought. Lauren lives in a neighborhood that is walled off for protection from the homeless people, drug addicts, vandals, arsonists, and thieves who roam the unwalled residential areas. Lauren's father is a Baptist minister, and Lauren goes to church to be baptized, even though she no longer believes in the Christian God. The church is outside the wall, and the family goes armed. Many of the houses are burnt out and have been looted, and homeless families wander the streets. Lauren feels their pain because she suffers from "hyperempathy syndrome," also called "sharing."

Several weeks later, a neighbor named Mrs. Sims shoots herself. She was in despair after her family died in a house fire started deliberately. Meanwhile, Lauren tries to form a new concept of God. She decides that God is change, because the reality of life is that everything changes.

Chapters 4—9

In February 2025, Lauren goes to the hills with a neighborhood group for target practice, where they encounter a pack of feral dogs. They shoot one dog, and as it dies, the hyperempathic Lauren feels its pain. Guns are essential because the family cannot rely on the police to protect them. In Lauren's neighborhood, every household has at least two guns.

In March, after three-year-old Amy Dunn wanders off and is shot dead, Lauren talks with her friend Joanne Garfield about how they need to make plans to survive before their neighborhood is overrun by thieves and killers. She wants to learn how to live off the land, and she plans to create emergency packs of supplies should they have to leave in a hurry. She tries to enlist Joanne's help, but Joanne tells her parents, exaggerating what Lauren said. Lauren's father tells her to stop panicking people, but he does allow her to start teaching the neighborhood kids about her ideas.

When thieves rob the gardens, the community sets up an armed neighborhood watch. But the thieves keep coming, and Lauren is desperate to think of a way out. She develops her God-is-Change belief system further, calling it Earthseed.

Keith, Lauren's thirteen-year-old brother, slips out of the neighborhood, stealing Cory's key. He returns, beaten up. Two weeks later he disappears again for nearly two weeks. When he returns, he is wearing new clothes, but he will not say where he has been. His



father beats him severely. Two months later, Keith leaves again, this time returning with money, which he gives to Cory. Then he leaves again.

Chapters 10—13

In June 2026, Keith returns after an eight-month absence. He has been squatting in an abandoned building with friends but will not say how he acquires his money. Later, he admits to robbing and shooting. In August, he is tortured and killed, probably by drug dealers.

There are more robberies, and by October the community is starting to come apart. The Garfields move to Olivar, a coastal suburb of Los Angeles, which has been bought by a company called KSF. Lauren fears that the company will cheat and abuse people. She decides that next year she will go north, maybe as far as Canada.

In November, Lauren's father disappears and is assumed dead. Lauren speaks at a church service for him, and she begins to emerge as a leader in the community. She takes over her mother's teaching responsibilities.

The day before Christmas Eve, the Olamina house is robbed. Another house, where the Payne and Parrish families live, burns down, leaving only one survivor.

Chapters 14—19

In July 2027, the entire neighborhood is overrun by violent intruders. Fires blaze everywhere. Lauren is one of the few to escape. When she returns, the place is littered with corpses, and scavengers are at work. Lauren gathers supplies, and as she leaves she meets Harry Balter and Zahra Moss. Learning that her entire family is dead, Lauren decides to head north, and Harry and Zahra go with her. Lauren cuts her hair so she can be taken for a man. They buy supplies and begin walking on the freeway, heading for the 101 that would take them up the coast toward Oregon. Hundreds of other people are walking the highways. Lauren has a gun and Harry a knife to protect themselves against predators. Lauren insists that they trust no one. At night, they take turns keeping watch. On their first night, they are attacked by two men. Lauren and Harry kill them both.

They replenish their water supplies from a commercial water station. It is a dangerous place, and Lauren and Harry help to scare off two men who attempt to rob a woman and her husband. They reach the ocean, and Lauren improves their survival skills by devising a method to make seawater drinkable. The couple they helped, Travis and Natividad, and their six-month-old baby, Dominic, join up with them, although the newcomers are suspicious at first. As the days go by, Lauren talks to her group about Earthseed. Travis and Zahra are interested, and Lauren regards Travis as her first convert.



There is an earthquake, and fire breaks out in a community as they pass. Scavengers flock to it and there is gunfire. Lauren meets another traveler, Taylor Franklin Bankole, and he stands guard as Lauren and her friends pull two young women, Allison and her sister, Jill Gilchrist, from the rubble of a house. A man attacks Lauren, and she kills him with her knife. Allison, Jill, and Bankole travel on with Lauren's group. They reach Salinas, where they replenish their supplies, using money they have taken from corpses.

Chapters 20—25

They avoid the Bay area because the earthquake has created chaos there. Camping just east of San Juan Bautista, they emerge unscathed after a nearby gunfight at night. Bankole brings in a three-year-old child, Justin Rohr, whose mother has just been killed. Allie soon takes charge of him.

They reach the San Luis Reservoir. A friendship springs up between Lauren and Bankole, and she explains her Earthseed philosophy to him. They become lovers, and he is shocked when he finds out she is only eighteen.

By September, they reach Sacramento. They pass some horrible sights, including a dog with a child's arm in its mouth and a group of kids who are roasting a severed human leg. Bankole tells Lauren that he owns three hundred acres of land in the coastal hills of Humboldt County, where his sister lives with her husband and three children. He wants her to leave the group and go with him. Lauren thinks it might be a good place to begin the first Earthseed Community.

The group is surprised to discover that a ragged woman, Emery Tanaka Solis, and her nine-year-old daughter, Tori, have crept into their camp at night. After some discussion, the group decides to take them along with them. The next day, they are joined by Grayson Mora and his eight-year-old daughter, Doe. Grayson does not trust the group but stays for the sake of his daughter. It later turns out that Grayson, like Lauren, is a "sharer," as are Emery and Tori.

Several days later, a man tries to grab Tori and attacks Emery. Lauren shoots him, and the rest of the group fight off the remainder of the gang, but Jill is shot dead. They continue on their way, narrowly escaping a raging fire before they arrive at Clear Lake. Eventually they reach Bankole's land, but the house has been destroyed and all his family killed. They decide to stay and build Acorn, their Earthseed community.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Parable of the Sower is a futuristic novel that takes place roughly over the course of three years, from 2024-2027. The novel is written as a series of journal entries by the main character, Lauren Oya Olamina, who is fifteen when the book opens. Lauren is developing a philosophy of life - a pseudo religion, in which the basic tenet centers on the concept of change. Society in the United States in the year 2024 has deteriorated into a semi-state of anarchy. The police force is corrupt, and other governmental services, such as fire protection and welfare, are ineffective or non-existent. Only the very wealthy are able to afford the manpower and weapons to remain safe from roving gangs of addicts and malcontents who rob, rape, pillage and murder any vulnerable citizen. Groups of families who live adjacent to each other in neighborhoods have walled their homes in and created mini-communities for protection and sustenance.

The opening page, before the actual beginning of chapter one, is titled "2024," which is the year that the novel begins. The first page is a quote from a book called *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, by Lauren Oya Olamina. Lauren is the narrator and protagonist of the story. When the story opens, she is fifteen years old. The quote on the first page is from a book she writes throughout the entire novel. Earthseed is a quasi-religion, which Lauren is developing through her observations of life. The essence of this first quote is really a very succinct summation of one of the major themes of the entire novel - that one must accept and work with change with unrelenting dedication.

Chapter one opens with seven lines which express the essence of the Earthseed philosophy: "All that you touch/ You Change./ All that you Change/ Changes you./ The only lasting truth/ Is Change./ God/ Is Change."

Lauren comes to the conclusion that God and change are one and the same. The reader eventually learns that Lauren views God as an impersonal force, which is eternal but can be acted upon, hence the line, "All that you touch/You change."

The book opens on July 20, 2024, and Lauren has just waked from a recurring dream in which she is learning to fly. She has still not totally mastered the skill, and in her dream, she bangs into walls and doorways, trying to fly away and escape a conflagration. Sometimes the fire overtakes her, and she partially wakes before slipping into the second half of the dream, which is more normal. She is talking with her stepmother in Spanish while they hang clothes out to dry. She lies back in the full clothes basket and observes the stars. Her stepmother, Cory, says that she would rather have the brilliance of the city lights as they used to be. Lauren prefers to be able to see the stars. Her stepmother nods, saying that at least the light from the stars does not cost anything.



Chapter 1 Analysis

Lauren, at age fifteen, is not old enough to have known any other life but that behind the walled enclosure of the cul de sac upon which Lauren's family, and a few other families, live. The father of Lauren's family is both a Baptist minister and a college professor, who works outside the walled neighborhood at the local college. The neighborhood is a mixture of blacks, whites, Asians and Hispanics, but they are united in their efforts to provide a safe environment for their families inside the walled area. Groups of adults and children who are at least fifteen ride their bikes weekly outside the wall armed with guns and knives to go into the country to practice target shooting. They often encounter addicts, prostitutes, gangs and corpses while they are traveling outside the "wall." No one goes outside "the wall" without several others accompanying them - the safety in numbers philosophy.

Lauren, just turning fifteen the day after the story opens, is mature way beyond her years. Her dream in the opening chapter foreshadows future events when her neighborhood walls will be breached and the residents will be murdered or flee. She is a serious, deep-thinking child, the oldest and the only female, with three younger half-brothers. She believes that the "Earthseed" philosophy that she is writing is based upon observable truths, and that if it is followed, it will lead its adherents to eventually seek sanctuary on other planets, thus the name of the philosophy "Earthseed." The United States is still engaged in space exploration, which most citizens believe to be a waste of money. Lauren, however, believes that eventual settlement on other planets is both inevitable and positive, so she is glad that the space program has not been abandoned.

The reader may find it difficult to believe that the social upheavals in the United States have led to such a dysfunctional society by the year 2024. The narrator implies that the history in the book portrays the actual history of the United States, at least until 1993, when *Parable of the Sower* is published. The reader must accept the premise upon which the book is written - that by the year 2024, law and order, clean, fresh water and a ready supply of decent food are only obtainable by the wealthiest. The rest of the population must band together either into groups that obey their own moral conscience living in walled, somewhat self-sufficient communities, or into groups of gangs that wander the cities killing and stealing to survive.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Lauren, two of her brothers and several other neighborhood children are receiving baptism by immersion today. They are riding on bicycles in a large group outside the wall to receive the sacrament of baptism in a church, which, for some miraculous reason, has remained unscathed by the social anarchy in the city. Lauren does not believe in the doctrines of the Baptist church, but she loves and respects her father too much to inform him that she has no desire to undergo the rite of baptism. Her brother, Keith, has no faith in Christianity either, but he does not care whether he is baptized or not. It is easier not to argue with their dad.

Lauren does not like her half-brother, Keith, thinking he is dumb, not in an intellectual way, but socially. Keith, though only thirteen, is fascinated with the goings on outside their walled neighborhood and is determined to leave home as soon as possible and make his way in the world to become successful. As the group makes their way down the potholed pavement, people even poorer and hungrier than they are stare at them. Lauren tries to avoid seeing the people around her because she is afflicted with a birth defect called hyperempathy. While pregnant with Lauren, Lauren's mother took a street drug, Paracetco, which gives Lauren the unavoidable ability to physically feel the pain of others. Lauren's father and the other parents of the children being baptized invested in potable water for the occasion, which indicates how important the adults believe it is that the children are baptized. Lauren, while waiting for her turn, muses on what she thinks God is. She thinks of the many different religions and their opinions about what or who God is. She wonders if God is actually something totally unlike what any religion believes.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The fact that Lauren has to visually see an afflicted person to feel his or her pain seems to imply that the empathy she feels for the person is actually an illusion. Lauren concedes that it seems that her hyperempathy must be delusional, but she feels unable to control it. This paradox is never really cleared up in the book, although, later in the book, Lauren meets other people like herself, which suggests that hyperempathy syndrome is not all in the person's head.

Lauren is busy formulating her own theory of what God is while waiting to undergo the rite of baptism in the Baptist church. It is obvious that she is extremely bright. Though she has been home schooled her entire life, she is quite aware of the various religious ideas throughout the ages. Although Lauren is younger than many major religious figures whose ideas birthed new religions (such as Jesus and Buddha), as the book progresses, the reader realizes that Lauren's ideas may indeed birth a new religion.

Lauren believes both that she is tapping into "truth" with her observation and that these truths will perhaps save humanity from extinction if people embrace them.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The epigraph at the opening of this chapter concludes with the line, "And God is Change," similar to the God/Is Change end line of the epigraph in chapter one.

Tuesday, July 30, 2024. Chapter three opens with a couple of newsy bits of information. First, a female astronaut on a mission to Mars has been killed. Second, the cost of water has again increased, along with the deaths of water peddlers, who sell water on the street. Lauren says that at least if they have to go dirty with less frequent bathing, they will not be as likely a target outside the wall because they will blend in.

Lauren notes that the last large television-like apparatus has finally broken. It is owned by Mrs. Yannis, who has charged a small admission to the neighborhood residents to watch the news and other programming on it. Lauren wonders how Mrs. Yannis will now support herself. Mrs. Yannis's two sisters have moved in with her, though, so Lauren figures they'll be all right, since one works as a nurse and one as a pharmacist. All three of the sisters are widows. Mrs. Yannis's dentist husband was killed by cross fire while riding his bike home from work two years ago.

Saturday, August 3, 2024. The dead astronaut is to be returned to earth for burial, even though when she knew she was going to die on Mars, she requested that they leave her on the planet. Lauren argues with her father about the benefits of the space program and decides that she will adopt this dead astronaut as a role model.

Monday, August 12, 2024. Mrs. Sims's body is discovered by Lauren's dad and stepmother, Cory. Mrs. Sims, who committed suicide several days earlier, was a holier-than-thou religious fanatic who was prejudiced against anyone or thing that was different from her own background. Mrs. Sims was robbed a while back, and even though the whole neighborhood helped her replace what was stolen, she never recovered from the robbery. Then several days before Mrs. Sims killed herself, her son, his wife and their five kids, plus four other relations of the wife all died in a deliberately set fire. Lauren wonders how among eleven people, none are able to escape the house. The suicide upsets Lauren because she knows that Mrs. Sims believes that people who kill themselves go to hell. Lauren wonders if Mrs. Sims really believed that, why she would trade temporary pain now for eternal pain in hell.

Saturday, August 17, 2024. Lauren is obsessing about Mrs. Sims. Lauren does not believe what Mrs. Sims believed, but Lauren is uncertain exactly what she does believe. She resolves to start organizing the snippets of verse about God that she has been writing down and try to discover what she believes. Lauren finally distills her thoughts about God into a succinct poem: "God is Power - / Infinite,/ Irresistible,/ Inexorable,/ Indifferent./ And yet, God is Pliable - / Trickster,/ Teacher,/ Chaos,/ Clay./ God exists to be shaped./ God is Change."



Lauren believes that these words about the nature of God are the "literal truth." In the remainder of this day's entry in her diary, Lauren expounds on what the above poem means. She believes God neither loves nor hates people. She believes that God molds people and that people mold God. Lauren concludes that someday, in spite of her dad's beliefs and that of the rotten world outside the wall, she is going to have to do something with the truths she is learning.

Wednesday, November 6, 2024. A new president is elected, one who is determined to end the expenditures of the space program. Lauren is worried that he will do so. Lauren also wonders about the laws the new president believes will have to be suspended to get the country back on track.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter three is where the reader starts to realize that the United States is teetering on the brink of collapse. Several events foreshadow the future, and the most telling is the death of Mrs. Sims's family members in a fire of suspicious origin. As the story progresses, the reader learns that a new street drug, nicknamed Pyro, is the reason behind the increase of arson and other fire-related incidents. Pyro causes its users to be obsessed with fire and its effects. The Pyro addicts set fire to both individuals and homes in order to watch the flames destroy life. These addicts also rape, murder and steal.

The fires the Pyro addicts set are a symbol of society "going up in flames." Yet, taking the symbology a step further, it can be developed into a metaphor of the phoenix - the legendary bird, which must burn in order to rise from its ashes into rebirth. Lauren, in developing her "Earthseed" philosophy, has a vision of being the answer to what society may evolve into from the ashes of its death. Lauren has not fully articulated this concept either to herself or anyone else.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter four is preceded by a page titled "2025," bearing a brief quote from Lauren's developing book, *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. In this quote, Lauren suggests that intelligence can speed up the act of evolution, which otherwise can take generations of survival of the fittest. However, if intelligence is either mistakenly or willfully used wrongly, it can result in unbridled acts of procreation and death.

The second quote, which is the epigraph of chapter four, states that a dupe of God may become God's co-worker and eventual molder of God, but if one is afraid, one may become God's toy or quarry.

Saturday, February 1, 2025. A three-year-old, Amy Dunn, sets a fire in her family's garage. No one is hurt, but the garage is destroyed. The neighborhood has a fire plan, which works perfectly in this fire. The plan is in effect because the fire department fees are too expensive to save a garage.

Lauren wonders what will happen to Amy, who is a somewhat neglected child, whose mother was only thirteen when she gave birth to Amy. Amy's mother, Tracy, became pregnant from rape by an uncle, but the family took no action against the uncle. The neighborhood men got together and told the uncle that he would be better off living somewhere else, so Tracy's mother resents Tracy, thinking it is her fault that the uncle has been exiled. Lauren decides to get Amy into the school that she and her stepmother run. Lauren figures that if someone does not help Amy now, the kid will be lost later.

Wednesday, February 19, 2025. Mrs. Sims's cousins, who inherit her house after her suicide, move into the place. The two cousins, twins, both have children and deceased spouses and occupy the house with their kids. They subtly accuse the neighbors of stealing from the house after Mrs. Sims's death. No one has done so. It is an unspoken law that no one in the walled community would steal from anyone else inside the walls.

Saturday, February 22, 2025. The group from the neighborhood, adults and older children, go out for their weekly target practice in the hills. They run into a pack of wild dogs. The neighbors are fighting almost like wild dogs as they ride their bikes to the target area. Many of the group do not like the fact that one of the men, Richard Moss, is a polygamist. He does not attend church, but instead he has created his own version of religion, leaning heavily on the Old Testament patriarchal system.

Lauren's father makes her shoot at squirrels, rats and birds, both to get practice at moving targets and because they eat the food out of the gardens. Lauren has an uncomfortable reaction to their deaths because of her hyperempathy. Lauren says that her dad is the motivation behind the neighborhood learning to use guns. Lauren's dad is



convinced that things are deteriorating in the country and that eventually it will be a totally anarchic society, where people will have to protect themselves.

In addition to feral dogs, there are some groups of homeless people out where they target practice. While they are shooting, one young woman, Aura, screams and shoots her weapon at a dog, almost hitting another shooter. Lauren's dad makes her holster her weapon and questions her about what she saw. It turns out that she did see a dog, but she thought it was going to attack because it was panting in the heat. Aura confesses that she has never seen a dog before and probably overreacted.

As the group walks back to where their bikes are parked, another dog comes too close, and someone shoots it. Lauren approaches the dog, which is still alive, and she can feel its pain. She shoots it in the head and kills it in order to spare both herself and the dog the pain. Lauren is still dazed from the impact of the dog dying as they ride home.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Lauren is using intelligence to lessen the span of evolution. One way is by taking Amy Dunn under her wing to try to redeem Amy from the neglect Amy suffers in her home. Lauren, only fifteen, is mature enough to realize that there are serious problems in the society and that if children are not raised differently, evolution will go backwards.

The act of Lauren killing the already wounded dog foreshadows Lauren killing a human in the future. The pain Lauren feels from the dog's wounds and death is only a small degree of the pain which she will feel under the same circumstances when a human is the victim. The experience with the dog will help her to be prepared for the future when it is with a human; otherwise, she might have a mental breakdown.

The degree to which the society has already deteriorated is evident in that some of the younger people have not even seen a dog except as a hunter, with humans as just another source of food.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The epigraph in this chapter is about belief and how it is either active or nothing.

Sunday, March 2, 2025. It is raining, which has not happened for six years. Many of the people in the neighborhood leave church in the middle of the service in order to set out barrels and other containers to catch the rain.

Monday, March 3, 2025. It is still raining, and Lauren is awestruck with the wonder of it.

Tuesday, March 4, 2025. Amy Dunn has been killed by a stray bullet, which found its way through a small hole in the gate that closes off the neighborhood. Lauren is grief stricken. She had planned to give a birthday party for Amy when she turned four in a couple weeks. Lauren feels that she lives in an oasis surrounded by a jungle.

Wednesday, March 5, 2025. It is still raining. Amy is already cremated, and Lauren is talking to her best friend, Joanne Garfield, in Lauren's bedroom. They talk about Amy and how Lauren had befriended her and helped her. Lauren admits that she had paid no attention to the young girl until after Amy set the garage on fire.

Lauren confides in Joanne about her ideas about the breakdown of society and says that Amy's death should be a wake-up call to others. Lauren tells Joanne about her dreams of traveling north to Oregon, Washington or even Canada. The two girls talk about the dire news they have been hearing about cholera epidemics in the South and a measles strain, which is killing lots of people. Joanne believes there is nothing that can be done about all the problems. Lauren says that there are some actions to take now to ensure their survival. Lauren shows Joanne several books about wilderness survival. Joanne borrows one to take home and read. Additionally, Lauren discusses the steps she is already taking to get ready for an emergency and urges Joanne to begin to do the same. Joanne is skeptical but takes a book on edible plants to look over.

Thursday, March 6, 2025. The rain stops. Lauren wonders how many years it will before they see rain again.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter five signals the end of the exposition section of the novel. The exposition sets the stage and history of what has occurred up to the moment of the rising action. Amy Dunn's death initiates the initial rising action of the novel until the first climax in chapter fourteen, when the neighborhood is devastated by gangs of Pyro addicts.

Lauren is studying and formulating survival plans because she is determined to overcome any obstacle she may encounter, whether safely ensconced in her walled

community or in the dangerous world outside. Until Lauren is tested, though, she will not know if her plans will serve her well or not. Lauren is determined not only to survive but also to find a better course of action for her and those who align themselves with her. Out of this vision arises her Earthseed philosophy.

The fact that it is raining after six years of total drought is indicative of how badly human negligence has affected the climate, although many still refuse to believe that that excesses of industry and pollution have brought about these climate changes. The drought may also be a symbol of the aridity of the human spirit in these days. Joy, love and altruism are being stomped out by the drive to survive.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Saturday, March 8, 2025. Lauren's best friend, Joanne, reveals Lauren's thoughts and plans about surviving should the neighborhood walls be overrun. Lauren's father lectures her about scaring people with a gloom and doom attitude. Lauren is happy that she has not discussed her Earthseed philosophy with Joanne. Lauren's dad encourages her to teach the young children out of several of the family's outdoor survival books. Lauren's dad tells Lauren that people do not want to see the dark chasm that may loom ahead for the country. Lauren's dad does encourage Lauren to keep a survival backpack, but he tells her to say that it is for earthquake emergencies. After their little talk, Lauren's dad takes her into the backyard to point out where there are guns and money buried.

Sunday, March 9, 2025. Lauren's dad preaches about Noah's ark in church. Joanne apologizes to Lauren for telling her parents about Lauren's plans. Joanne asks Lauren if they are still friends. Lauren no longer considers Joanne a friend, but she is noncommittal when Joanne asks her.

Wednesday, March 12, 2025. Thieves climb the wall and steal some of the garden produce from various household gardens. The neighborhood sets up a watch schedule, with two people standing watch each shift. Cory, Lauren's step mom, asks Lauren's father what the watch people will do if the thieves ignore their warning. He says that they will shoot the thieves. Cory quotes one of the Ten Commandments, "Thou Shalt Not Kill." Lauren's father responds with another Bible verse about defending your family. Lauren wonders if they have had this discussion before, since they both seem to have a Bible verse handy for their argument.

Saturday, March 15, 2025. The neighborhood watch is functioning. The group meets once a week to discuss problems and to practice shooting and self-defense. Because of the garden thieves, people are beginning to realize how dangerous the situation is becoming in their area.

Saturday, March 29, 2025. Thieves try to steal Mr. Moss's rabbits, but the neighborhood watch catches them. The thieves run off without any of the rabbits, and they drop a Glock 19 pistol in their haste to climb the neighborhood wall. Cory gets into an argument with her husband about their vigilante group, saying that next time, the thieves might shoot and that it could even be him who is killed. Cory cries and asks what the family will do if her husband is killed. He replies that they would continue to live. Lauren overhears her parents arguing, and she thinks to herself that there must be a way to create a better future.



Chapter 6 Analysis

Lauren is precocious enough to understand that more plans need to be formed for future emergencies. Even though Lauren's dad asks Lauren not to scare people, he sees the need to become more prepared for a possible lawless future, which is why he preaches about Noah's ark. Lauren is angry about so much denial among the neighborhood residents. Lauren's decision to put together a survival pack foreshadows the future, along with the fact that thieves are becoming bolder about climbing the wall into their neighborhood.

Lauren is frustrated by her stepmother's denial of the fact that their neighborhood is surrounded by a concrete jungle of people who will steal and kill to obtain food, drugs and money. Lauren is scared for her dad's safety, but she believes he is justified in believing it is right to shoot intruders.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

In the epigraph to this chapter, the word "Earthseed" is defined. Earthseed is "all that spreads Earthlife to new earths."

Saturday, April 26, 2025. Lauren further elaborates that her "God-is-Change belief system," is Earthseed. Lauren devises this name as she is planting in the garden. Lauren believes that this Earthseed philosophy comes to her; it is not her making it up. She believes the ideas in Earthseed already exist and that she is merely discovering them. Lauren struggles with one paradox that she is unable to understand: "Why is the universe?/To shape God. Why is God?/To shape the universe." Lauren believes that someday when people are not so focused on her age, they will pay attention to her writings and use them to create a better future.

Saturday, June 7, 2025. Lauren has finished collecting the items for her survival pack. She wishes she had a gun to put in it. She asks her Dad after target practice for a pistol to include in her pack, but he says no because he is afraid her younger brothers will find it. Lauren asks her dad about moving the family up to Oregon, Washington or even Canada. Her dad replies that the borders to all those places are closed, and people are even shot trying to cross into Canada. Lauren disagrees with her dad, and she writes a metaphor to express that she cannot grow in her parent's shadow.

Monday, June 16, 2025. Lauren listens to a newscast on the radio about possible life being found on other planets. The idea of life on other planets sets Lauren to thinking about what it would take to develop life on another planet. Lauren believes it would be better to settle a new planet without using any ties to Earth.

Saturday, July 19, 2025. Lauren writes in her diary that she will be sixteen on July 20. She longs to be older. Lauren also notes that Amy's mother, Tracy Dunn, has disappeared. The family thinks she has fled "outside" the wall.

Sunday, July 20, 2025. Lauren receives in her mind two more lines of her Earthseed philosophy. She writes that the fate of Earthseed is to populate the stars. Lauren does not know how this will happen, but she believes that someday it will.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Much happens in this brief chapter, which plays a large part in moving the book forward. First, the reader learns that Lauren believes that the ideas she writes in her notebooks are not her own creation, but rather, she is accessing them by being willing to hear. In other words, Lauren, metaphorically speaking, dips into the bucket of truth and pulls out ideas, the sum of which she names Earthseed. Lauren believes this to be a new quasi-



religious belief system whose ultimate purpose is to propel humans to populate other planets in many galaxies.

Lauren has finished assembling her survival pack, which will be a life saver for her in the future. The pack, in some ways, represents her ideas of Earthseed, in that Lauren will leave her present "planet," i.e. her neighborhood, and go forth to sow the seeds of her ideas in other places, carrying just her pack and severing ties with her birth "planet."

Lauren's preoccupation with her age is because she believes that if she were older, people would take her and her philosophy more seriously.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Saturday, July 26, 2025. Tracy Dunn has not returned. Lauren believes her to be dead. Lauren writes that Tracy Dunn was pregnant. Lauren discusses the gossip surrounding an unmarried seventeen-year-old becoming pregnant, but Lauren's main thought about the pregnancy is wondering why anyone would bring a baby into such an unstable world. Lauren thinks about her boyfriend, Curtis, and she is emphatic that she would never marry and have a bunch of babies in such a world as the one she lives in at the present.

Saturday, August 2, 2025. Lauren discusses the target practice session and the fact that they found the corpse of an elderly woman. After seeing the body, one of the female adults in the group said she does not want to come out for target practice any longer.

Lauren's thirteen-year-old brother, Keith, begs to go with them to shoot, but he is told that he can't until he turns fifteen. While the group is target practicing, Keith steals his mom's key to the neighborhood gate and goes outside. When the group returns, Lauren's dad prepares to go out and find Keith, but he gets home just before the dad goes out. Keith is beaten up and only wearing his underwear. A group of five toughs have stolen his clothes and the key to the neighborhood gate.

Sunday, August 3, 2025. Keith has to stand in front of the congregation and admit what he did the day before. Lauren's father keeps asking Keith over and over to explain his stupidity in going alone outside the wall. Keith explains that he wants to prove that he is a man and capable of using a gun and helping protect the neighborhood. Keith is unwilling to admit his culpability in his actions for a long time, but his father's persistence wears Keith down. Keith finally admits that he was not thinking very well to have left on his own. Lauren notices that during church, Keith sits stone-faced, suppressing a growing anger.

Chapter 8 Analysis

At first glance, one might think that Keith's father is rather harsh on the young man merely for venturing outside the neighborhood, but as shown earlier in the chapter, the United States is in a state of near anarchy. This is demonstrated at the beginning of the chapter by the fact that a group of law-abiding, educated citizens are going into the surrounding countryside to conduct target practice. Additionally, finding a corpse lying around with no one making an effort to do anything about it is also indicative of the chaos within the social order of the country.

Keith's lack of remorse and rationalization for his misdeeds demonstrate a serious defect in his character. At age thirteen, he is old enough to understand the dangers that

his actions pose to himself, his family and neighborhood. The reader probably already senses that Keith will come to a tragic end.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Sunday, August 17, 2025. Keith is given a BB gun for his birthday, and he disappears for almost a full day. Lauren believes he has gone outside again.

Monday, August 18, 2025. Lauren's father goes out looking for Keith, but to no avail. Cory, Keith's mother, is frantic, but there is not much that can be done. They pay the police fee for a search, but nothing turns up.

Tuesday, August 19, 2025. Keith still has not come home. Cory shouts at her husband, Keith's father, and accuses him of not caring. She says that if Lauren were missing, the father would be out there day and night searching. Lauren overhears her stepmother saying this and is hurt. Lauren's father comes in to Lauren later to say that Cory apologizes for the statement and that she does not mean it. Lauren does not believe her dad.

Thursday, August 20, 2025. Keith returns Wednesday night. He does not explain where he has been or how he obtained the new, expensive clothing he is wearing. His dad takes the BB gun away from him and smashes it, and then he beats Keith. Lauren feels every bruise and cut from Keith's beating.

Saturday, October 25, 2025. Keith leaves again, stealing his mom's gate key and her Smith & Wesson. Lauren hates Keith for how his actions are tearing apart the family.

Monday, November 3, 2025. Keith comes home while his dad is out. He gives his mom some money and two of his brothers some chocolate. Keith merely gives Marcus and Lauren a sarcastic grin. Cory begs her son not to go away, but Keith assures her that he is doing well and can take care of himself.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The reader by this time has an overview of Lauren's family history. Lauren's mother dies while giving birth to Lauren. Her father marries Cory, and they have four sons together. They are Lauren's half brothers. Keith is the oldest of the four boys. Marcus is next. The other younger two are seldom mentioned. Since Lauren is the narrator of the book, she refers to her father as Dad, so readers do not learn his name.

Keith is closest in age to Lauren and serves as a foil to her character. Where Lauren plans her actions carefully and analyzes herself and those around her, Keith is impetuous and superficial. Keith thinks of himself first, whereas Lauren nurtures and does more than her share of the workload. At first, the reader might think the differences are due to Lauren being older than Keith, but their difference in age is less than two

years. As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear which personality type is better able to survive in a disintegrating society.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter ten opens in the year 2026. The chapter is preceded by a section break, emphasized by a two-stanza quote from the *Earthseed* book about civilization. The two main points of the poem are that civilization is a way of taking advantage of the strengths of many to fulfill the needs of the group. Verse two, though, suggests that if civilization does not fulfill its function, it will fall apart unless a "unifying force" acts upon it.

The *Earthseed* quote at the start of the chapter can be summed up by saying that as people become more and more fearful, they kill and destroy. This continues to a greater and greater degree until total anarchy exists, at which point the civilization can be saved only by one who leads either by fear or charisma.

Thursday, June 25, 2026. Keith has been living outside for almost a year. He comes back in periodically to give his mother, Cory, some money and to show them how successful he is. This time, Cory is not home, so he tells Lauren about his life on the outside. Lauren cooks him a meal, and they argue about responsibility. Keith has been living with some older guys who let him stay with them because he can read and write and they cannot. They steal continually, but they often cannot operate the technology that they steal because they cannot read the manuals. Keith can and teaches the older guys how to use the equipment that they steal.

Lauren sighs while Keith and she are conversing, and she predicts that Keith has not finished causing their family pain and grief. Keith says he only cares about his mom and that Keith is no part of his dad. Lauren gets angry and tells Keith that he looks exactly like his dad.

Lauren pumps Keith for information about how he survives on the outside. Keith gives her a synopsis of his life for the past year and asks why she wants to know. Keith guesses that Lauren is thinking of leaving home. Lauren does not deny it. Keith describes robbing and killing a man who befriended Keith. Lauren is horrified that Keith would kill someone who helped him. Keith has no conscience about his actions, even rationalizing them by saying that the guy was crazy to want to move to Alaska. Keith dismisses Lauren's plans to someday live outside the wall, saying that she would last no more than a day because of her hyperempathy syndrome.

Monday, July 20, 2026. Keith sneaks up on Lauren in the early evening and hands her a wad of money, saying it's for her birthday. Lauren remembers the man Keith robbed and killed and hands the money back, saying she does not want it. Keith refuses to take it and says to do whatever she wants as he kisses her on the cheek and leaves again.



Wednesday, August 26, 2026. Today, Lauren's parents are called to the morgue to identify Keith's body.

Saturday, August 29, 2026. Lauren writes a brief description of how Keith was tortured by razors and fire before his death. Lauren's father describes Keith's body to the surviving siblings in order to scare them about the outside. The police try to pin the murder on Lauren's father or Cory, but the neighborhood stands behind them. The service is held by another minister. Lauren writes that her dad looks aged. Lauren tries to comfort Cory, but Lauren feels resentment from Cory. Lauren thinks Cory wishes it was Lauren who was dead, not Keith, her favorite. Lauren believes that Cory dislikes her for not being her real daughter. Lauren is unable to cry about Keith's death, even though she loves him. Lauren also hates Keith, believing him to be an irredeemable sociopath, one who has no conscience. Lauren believes Keith would have grown into a monster, preying on those weaker than he. Lauren believes that the estrangement among family members began when her dad beat Keith so badly the second time he went outside the wall. Lauren does not grieve for Keith, but she does grieve for the family that will never be the same again.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Keith is condescending of Lauren, who he does not believe would survive outside the safety of the neighborhood, but obviously Keith has unrealistic views of his own ability to survive. The fact that Keith brings Lauren a birthday present and kisses her on the cheek just a few days before his death suggests that he may have sensed that he was in over his head outside the walls. Keith, up to this day, never offers Lauren anything when he periodically returns to his home during the year he lives outside. Now, he uncharacteristically does so, handing her a huge sum of money. Perhaps Keith does not sense his impending death, but the reader realizes that something is different by Keith's actions.

The reader now knows that if Keith is a foil to Lauren, then perhaps Lauren's choices may indeed ensure her survival if and when she leaves the safety of the neighborhood walls. *Parable of the Sower* is filled with images of violence and degradation, and the reader may wonder sometimes if there is any good left in this futuristic society. Perhaps, though, the author is demonstrating her faith in humankind in showing that those who kill and rape and rob do not necessarily survive, even in such a lawless community. The reader learns as the novel moves forward that when Lauren is forced to live outside the protection of the neighborhood and her family, she can, indeed, survive and still retain her decency and altruistic personality.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Saturday, October 17, 2026. The frequency of burglaries in the neighborhood is increasing. Lauren believes the safety of the neighborhood is questionable. She thinks that it is probably small-time thieves conducting the burglaries, because according to her deceased brother, Keith, the professional thieves go for businesses and wealthier neighborhoods. One elderly neighbor is killed, although her grandsons kill two of the robbers. Lauren finds it a bit ironic that her parents are using the money Keith gave them in order to help those victimized by robberies.

Tuesday, October 20, 2026. A new company named "KSF" has bought the town of Olivar, California and promises to establish a safe, productive community. The company invites people to apply to move there and work for them. The people will live in company-supplied housing and purchase their supplies from company-owned stores. Lauren's parents argue about applying for a job with them, since both have PhD's and are teachers. Cory calls KSF and learns what salary is being offered. Cory and Lauren's dad discuss it and realize that even with the two of them working, they would not earn enough to take care of the family.

Saturday, October 24, 2026. Marcus, one of Lauren's younger brothers, tells Lauren that the Garfield family is applying for acceptance into the Olivar community. Lauren is sad to hear the news. Marcus is sweet on Robin, a cousin to Joanne Garfield. Robin is quiet and intellectual, and Lauren approves of Marcus's interest in her. Lauren learns that several other families are applying to enter Olivar, and Lauren wonders if company-owned cities will become one way of organizing communities. Lauren thinks about the fact that she'll turn eighteen next year and will be old enough to make her own choices about leaving her town and traveling north to Oregon or Washington.

Saturday, October 31, 2026. Lauren has made up her mind to travel north when she turns eighteen. She believes that she can earn a living by teaching and that she will draw converts to her Earthseed philosophy. On this day, Lauren names the book she is writing: *Earthseed: The Book of the Living*. Lauren wonders if there have been any other books called the book of the living as opposed to the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Lauren's main goal in developing her Earthseed philosophy is "clarity and truth."

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter eleven introduces one of the ways a deteriorating society gains order: by tyranny. The company KSF offers people safety and security, but the price is their freedom. Lauren's father observes that KSF is just a modern variety of company towns, which were popular in the late 1800s and throughout at least a good half of the 1900s. These companies provide housing and jobs in exchange for loyalty. At least, it seems



that way in the beginning, but what ends up occurring is legal slavery. The people must pay the company rent for the housing and purchase their groceries and other necessities in the stores owned by the company. The wages are so poor that the company extends credit in the stores, and pretty soon, the so-called employees are in so much debt that they are never able to pay it off. KSF is able to push through a law that says that if one accrues debt to KSF, then that person may not legally leave the company until the debt is paid in full. This debt also falls upon the heirs if the person dies. The company, essentially, owns these people. This is why Lauren's father is uninterested in moving to Olivar.

This chapter is significant in that Lauren has resolved both to travel north when she is of age and to actively work to gain followers to her Earthseed philosophy. Lauren says that if she finds others who are preaching the same message, she will join them, indicating that she does not crave the fame of being the founder of this philosophy.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Saturday, November 14, 2026. Joanne, Lauren's closest friend, is moving with her family to Olivar. Joanne has mixed feelings. Joanne's boyfriend, Harry, will not go with them because he says that it's a trap and that they'll be enslaved legally. Lauren's estimation of Harry rises when she hears his opinion. Lauren tries to reason with Joanne and talk her into staying and marrying Harry. Joanne thinks the prospects in the neighborhood are worse. The two friends part with sadness, both convinced that the other is doomed.

Tuesday, November 17, 2026. Lauren's father, who spends the night at the college where he teaches, has not returned home this morning. The neighborhood organizes a search, but they are unsuccessful.

Wednesday, November 18, 2026. The neighbors expand their search for Lauren's father into the surrounding hills. Lauren knows they are now searching for his body. Lauren is on the search and finds herself more affected than ever before at the filth and squalor of the area outside her neighborhood. They notice dead bodies now and then. Then they come upon an arm, obviously from a black person, lying in the dirt. They hear a man screaming in pain as if he is being tortured, but they are unable to locate the source of the screaming in the hills. Lauren does not believe it sounds like her father, but she is unsure. Others assure her that it is not her father. The group searches until dark and finds five bodies and other remains of humans, but none is Lauren's father. They return home at dark.

Sunday, November 22, 2026. Lauren preaches at church about the need for perseverance. Lauren cites the parable in the Bible about the widow who is so persistent to some officials that the widow wears them down and receives what she needs. Lauren is determined that the neighborhood will remain safe and civilized. After Lauren is through preaching, one of the women begins a song called "We Shall Not Be Moved." The congregation files out, hopeful but sad, knowing that this service, though not stated, is probably Lauren's father's memorial.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Lauren's father's disappearance and probable death demonstrates that no one is safe when society breaks down and law and order are non-existent except for those wealthy enough to buy protection. Lauren's father, more than anyone, has prepared for any eventuality. He practices common sense, learns to defend himself and is aware of the many ways he can be harmed, and yet it does not save him in the end. Unlike his sociopath son, Lauren's dad is honorable, honest, religious and charitable. The implication here is that no one is safe in this society and that unless something

changes, everyone will be subject to torture and death by those who have abandoned conscience and human decency. Lauren, though touched by the song "We Will Not Be Moved," at the end of the Sunday service, believes it is inevitable that each of them will be moved. Lauren is determined to make it her choice and not be forced into a decision as to when and where and how to move.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Saturday, December 19, 2026. Another minister officially conducts a funeral service for Lauren's dad. Lauren realizes that when she leaves home now, she will not have to say goodbye to her dad because he has left her. Lauren decides that if her father cannot survive outside, she, as a female, would have no chance, so she will disguise herself as a man. This will be easier because of her slender build and height.

Tuesday, December 22, 2206. Olivar sends a moving van with armed guards to move Joanne's family to their town. Cory questions the black guard about Olivar, and Lauren wonders if Cory is thinking of applying to move there. Lauren thinks it unlikely they would be accepted. Lauren and Curtis, Lauren's boyfriend, talk after Joanne and her family are gone. Curtis states that he wants to leave the neighborhood and travel north. He notices Lauren's face and realizes that she has been planning to leave alone. He is upset with her and wants to know how she could leave him. Lauren tells him that she does not think it fair to ask him to go with her into such a dangerous world. Lauren is also unsure about when she can leave Cory and her three younger brothers now that her father is dead. She expresses this to Curtis and says that she will marry him as soon as she believes her family can care for themselves. Then they will leave together.

Thursday, December 24, 2026. Intruders set fire to a home in the middle of the night. By the time the fire is put out, three other homes, including Lauren's, have been robbed. The family hears on the radio that arson is occurring much more frequently across the United States due to a street drug named Pyro, which causes its users to crave the excitement of watching fires. Many valuables are stolen from Lauren's home, but most of their cash and weapons are still there. Cory looks beaten down by this latest situation. The entire Payne family, except for one, perishes in the fire. Lauren, despite the despair around her, and even in her own mind, keeps telling herself to adapt...God is change.

Tuesday, December 29, 2026. Cory begs to be paid to assume her deceased husband's classes at the college. They agree, and she pays a small fee to the unemployed men in the community to escort her to and from the college. Lauren assumes the task of educating the neighborhood children, which Cory had been doing. Two other people take up the role of preaching and holding Sunday school. Lauren thinks to herself that the community is holding together, but she is unsure how long it will last.

Wednesday, December 30, 2026. Wendall Parrish, the sole survivor of the fire a few days earlier, decides to go live with some relatives in another community. He walks like a dead man.



Chapter 13 Analysis

The mood of the novel is becoming darker and more somber with each chapter. This is not a simple conflict between a single protagonist and single antagonist, but a conflict between those who still choose to live by a moral code and those for whom right and wrong have no significance. Unfortunately, the lawless horde greatly outnumbers those who still value human life and moral standards. The lack of news and communication makes the neighborhood vulnerable to attack by any number of groups. Ultimately, the group that razes the neighborhood is Pyro addicts, looking for the thrill of burning homes and people. The burning of one home in this chapter foreshadows what is to come as the society degenerates into complete anarchy.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Chapter fourteen opens in the year 2027 with a section separation page containing a quote from *Earthseed*. The quote says that Earthseed people are preparing for life on other planets.

Saturday, July 31, 2027 - morning. The night before, Lauren's family awakes to the smell of smoke and the sound of screaming. They grab a few possessions and run out the door to encounter chaos. The neighborhood gate has been smashed through by a truck, and there are Pyro addicts running around setting fires and shooting people. Lauren grabs a gun from a dead neighbor and continues running, trying to catch up to Cory and her brothers. Lauren is tackled by a Pyro, and she shoots him. As soon as she recovers, she runs towards the gate. Lauren has lost track of Cory and the boys, but she assumes they will head for the outskirts of town. Lauren finds an abandoned shell of a house and settles into a corner of the garage to wait for morning. When Lauren wakes, she decides she must go back to the neighborhood to search for Cory and her brothers.

Saturday, July 31, 2027 - evening. Lauren is writing in her journal about what she finds when she goes back to her neighborhood. All the houses are fully or partially burned down. She notices a number of dead bodies of neighbors, and most of the females of all ages have been raped. Some of the bodies were almost cut in two by machine gun fire. Lauren arrives at her house, which is mostly in ruins, and scavenges a set of clothing and shoes for Cory and her three brothers. Lauren also unearths the hidden money in the back yard and stuffs it into her pack. On her way out of the neighborhood, she meets up with Zahra Moss and Harry Balter. Zahra tells Lauren that as she was being raped, she saw Lauren's stepmother, Cory, and Lauren's three younger brothers being killed. Lauren does not believe they are dead, saying she found no bodies anywhere in the ruins. Zahra insists that she saw them being killed. Harry, Zahra and Lauren sit on a curb for several hours until Lauren rises, picks up her pack and says that Harry and Zahra can come with her to the abandoned home where Lauren spent last night. The three trudge to the site. Harry's speech wanders because he received a blow to the head the night before. They arrive safely at the garage and rest.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The setting for the first fourteen chapters of the novel is the neighborhood and surrounding area where Lauren grew up. A climax, that of the destruction of the structures and many of the residents of the neighborhood, propels Lauren out into the world. Lauren is proven right to those who chided her about her fears that just such a tragedy would take place, but it is bitter proof. Few are left alive to take note.



When Lauren's dad is murdered, Lauren thinks that the only positive side to his loss is that she need not experience the grief of leaving him. Now, with Cory and her brothers dead, Lauren no longer has to delay getting on with her plans. It is an almost unbelievable tragedy that Lauren must lose her entire family in order to be free to fulfill her own perceived purpose - that of spreading the Earthseed philosophy. As Lauren meets others while on her northward quest, she finds that many have suffered tremendous loss in a society which no longer values life.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Sunday, August 1, 2027. The three survivors who have banded together spend Sunday recovering at the abandoned home site. Harry is sick and weak from a concussion, but he eats and drinks water and is able to walk around a little. Zahra tells her story of how she was running with her young daughter in her arms when someone shot the daughter and then grabbed the child and threw her in a burning house. Zahra also relates a little about her own childhood and how Richard Moss, her husband, bought her from her mother at age fifteen and married her. He was kind to her, even though his other two wives were not. Lauren informs Zahra that her husband is dead; Zahra seems genuinely sorrowful.

The three discuss plans. Lauren asks Harry if he will go to Olivar and join with Joanne and her family. Harry replies that he still believes Olivar is as bad an option as their neighborhood. The three take stock of what they have among them. Harry and Lauren decide to head north. Lauren is going to cut her hair and travel pretending to be a man. Lauren asks Zahra if she wants to come with them. Zahra cries and says that she has nothing to offer possession-wise. Lauren comforts her and assures her that they will not leave her behind. At least Zahra has lived on the outside before and understands how to survive. Harry and Lauren say that is a good contribution to the group.

Monday, August 2, 2027. Having decided to travel north, the three new friends make a stop at a secure department store to lay in supplies. Lauren goes inside while Harry and Zahra guard their belongings. The guard at the entrance demands proof that Lauren is able to pay for her purchases, and Lauren reluctantly reveals her wad of cash. Lauren purchases an assortment of foods, medicines and a few boxes of ammunition for her pistol. After Harry and Zahra finish their buying and selling, they find the freeway they need to follow to get to Highway 101, which they will take north until they find a place to settle.

The three join hundreds of other travelers toting possessions and babies headed west. Most people visibly carry guns and knives as a statement that they are willing to defend their lives and their possessions. Harry and Zahra both carry knives, and Lauren hopes they will be able to use them if it becomes necessary. Lauren is not yet willing to trust the other two with her secret - the fact of her hyperempathy syndrome. Any person knowing that Lauren has this malady can use it to disable her and take everything from her; therefore, Lauren must get to know Harry and Zahra better before she can trust them enough to reveal this weakness. Zahra notices that Lauren is deep in thought and asks her what is wrong. Lauren just affirms that she is thinking, but Zahra admonishes her to pay more attention because "[p]eople get killed on freeways all the time."



Chapter 15 Analysis

Although Lauren, at fifteen, is quite mature for her age when the novel opens, she is still a child depending upon her father, and to a lesser extent, her stepmother for safety and guidance. The fact that Lauren does not totally depend upon her parents and draws her own conclusions from her observations may be what gives her the ability to survive when so many others do not. Now, as chapter fifteen opens, Lauren enters a new stage in her life when she is solely responsible for her own decisions and survival. She does not slide gently into adulthood, but she is propelled forward in a horrific way that even stuns her, although for years she has believed that her neighbors clung to a false sense of security in their walled-off community.

The Parable of the Sower is, among other things, a bildungsroman, or coming-of-age, tale of the main protagonist, Lauren Olamina. The novel has two distinct informal sections. The first fourteen chapters take place in the walled neighborhood when Lauren is still under the rule of her parents. The last eleven chapters depict the young adult Lauren, moving from a state of knowledge to experience. Lauren learns intellectually a great deal about the world outside her neighborhood walls, but once she is forced to survive outside those walls, the knowledge becomes experiential. Lauren's journey in the final eleven chapters (15-25), is her coming-of-age test to find out if she is able to take the ideas of her imagination and make them work in a world of chaos.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Monday, August 2, 2027. Lauren's first day is crammed with learning new knowledge. She experiences how hard it is to walk long distances when one is only used to walking around a few neighborhood streets. Sucking on a pit or pebble helps to stave off thirst. It is safer to maintain an overnight camp without a fire because you are harder to spot. Despite this last bit of new knowledge, the three occasionally build a fire, which is illegal, in order to cook a hot meal. Lauren and Harry impulsively want to trust people who come to check them out at night or to ask to share. Zahra keeps the two from doing so, and Lauren quickly picks up the "trust no one" survival instinct. Harry has more trouble doing so, as protected as he and Lauren were in their walled-off neighborhood.

Harry keeps arguing about the trust no one philosophy. He points out that if he had not trusted Zahra and pulled the Pyro addict off her, she would have been killed after being raped. Lauren points out that it is different among the three of them. They come from the same neighborhood and have agreed to stick together and be honest with each other.

While the three are discussing their plans around the fire, two large guys come up and stand just outside the ring of light. Lauren, Zahra and Harry stand, and Lauren confronts the guys, asking what they want. The two men keep eyeing Zahra, who is stunningly good looking. Lauren tells them to get away, but they continue standing there. Lauren pulls out her pistol. At that, the two men run off. The three friends divide up watch, with Lauren taking first shift. They let the fire burn down so that they are not as visible.

While Lauren is standing watch, she writes in her notebook. Zahra observes Lauren for a while and then asks Lauren to teach her how to read and write. Lauren tells Zahra they will start class the next day. Lauren wakes Harry to stand watch and promptly falls asleep. Lauren is waked several hours later by shouts and gun shots. A body falls on top of her. She pushes the body away, jumps up and smashes a rock on the head of a man who is struggling for the gun in Harry's hand. When they take stock, they find that Harry has killed the one guy, and the other, whose head is bashed in, is barely alive. Lauren asks for the gun to finish the unconscious man off, but Harry will not hand the weapon over. Lauren pulls a knife out of her pack and slits the wounded man's throat. The three then strip the bodies of all valuables and move camp.

Lauren realizes that Harry is shocked at her slitting the wounded man's throat. The three discuss whether it was the right thing to do or not. Zahra seems to accept Lauren's decision, but Harry does not. Lauren then tells Zahra and Harry about her hyperempathy syndrome and how it affects her. Harry believes Lauren to be manipulative because she did not reveal her problem back when they were neighbors. Lauren explains that her dad insisted that she keep the fact hidden. Zahra has no problem about the situation, so Harry lets the discussion drop by changing the topic.



Harry asks Lauren what she writes in her notebook every evening. She replies that her notebook is a diary of the day's events and her thoughts about life. Harry asks if he can read some of it. Lauren shows him the first lines of her *Earthseed* book. Lauren believes that these lines "say everything."

Chapter 16 Analysis

Much happens during this first day and night of the three friends' journey. Lauren discovers that her somewhat idealized thoughts of travel are tainted by such mundane matters as blisters, sore muscles and thirst. The reader may wonder why thirst is discussed in some detail. It is because water is a precious commodity in the years during which the book takes place. Everyone must purchase their water by the gallon at water stations, unless they find a stream or river, but then the water can be dangerously polluted. When at a water station, travelers are particularly vulnerable to attack because gangs watch for those who have enough money to buy water.

The first night out, the group is attacked, so their "breaking in" period to learn how to survive on the road is brief. Hard lessons are already plentiful. The fact that Lauren is a quick study is due to her determination to survive and the fact that she has given a great deal of thought to what she would do under adverse conditions. The rift between Harry and Lauren could have become irreparable under any but the most stressful conditions. Harry cannot reconcile his image of Lauren as "preacher's kid" and female with that of an incognito male ruthlessly wielding a knife. He seems to finally accept that it is his attitude which must change if he and the others are to survive.

The *Earthseed* philosophy can be summarized by the lines quoted near the end of this chapter. The concept of change is at the heart of the philosophy. The only constant is change, and those who fail to adapt, die.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Tuesday, August 3, 2027. As the Lauren, Zahra and Harry walk along Highway 28, they are aware of a brush fire coming up from behind them. They move steadily all morning, trying to stay ahead of the flames. Zahra cries as they are walking, since she thinks of their neighborhood burning and of the Pyro addicts throwing her baby into the flames. When the three stop for the night, they stay close to the freeway in case the fire jumps the road. Zahra volunteers to stand first watch, so Lauren falls asleep. Lauren wakes later and hears Zahra and Harry making love. Lauren, who is as affected by people's physical sensations from sex as from injury, holds herself in rigid control until the two are done. She lays awake, angry that the two of them have jeopardized the group's safety by having sex on watch. A bit later, Lauren hears Harry snoring, the pistol lying unattended in his lap. Lauren grabs the pistol, waking him, and tells him that she'll stand the rest of his watch. He insists that he is awake. She warns him about paying attention and not becoming distracted by Zahra. He understands her implication.

Wednesday, August 4, 2027. The three stop at a commercial water station. While there, they notice two thieves stealing a water container from a woman who is holding a baby. The woman's male companion attacks the thief, who hands off the container to his buddy, who runs off with it. Lauren trips him as he darts by, and he drops the container. Lauren draws her pistol, and he gets up and runs. Lauren picks up the water and hands it back to the couple with the baby.

As the three leave, Zahra and Lauren walk together. Lauren reminds Zahra of what Zahra told Lauren several days earlier about being alert on the freeways. Zahra figures out that Lauren heard Harry and Zahra making love while Zahra was on watch. She tells Lauren it will not happen again. Lauren says that if they want privacy, Lauren will move away from camp while standing watch. Zahra asks Lauren if she is jealous. Lauren says she has mixed feelings, but she sure does not want to end up with a baby while traveling, so she is content to stay unattached. Zahra shrugs and does not seem bothered about the prospects of pregnancy. The mixed-race couple who lost their water bottle at the fill station is following the three friends from a far. Lauren does not think they are trouble, but she watches them.

Thursday, August 5, 2027. The travelers come in sight of the Pacific Ocean. None of them has ever seen that much water, nor can any of them swim. Harry strips to his underwear and wades into the water. The two woman wait until sunset in order to be more inconspicuous. After bathing, Lauren digs a hole in the sand and waits until it fills with water and tastes it. She once read that one could obtain drinkable water that way. She tastes the water, which is brackish, but probably drinkable when purified with their tablets.



The couple is still shadowing them, so Lauren gets permission from the group to invite them to join them. When Lauren makes the offer, the man is very suspicious of Lauren's motives. Lauren tells the two that they could be allies and that five are better than three. Lauren walks away and thinks the two will probably join them, but perhaps not that evening.

Friday, August 6, 2027. During Lauren's watch, several dog packs invade the beach. One pack attempts to carry off the baby of the couple sleeping near them - the ones Lauren helped at the water station. Lauren yells a warning and then shoots the dog closest to the baby. Lauren falls to the ground with a gasp, feeling the pain of the dog. She realizes that when she has to shoot, she will do better to drop to the ground first. Harry relieves Lauren of the gun and takes over watch. Zahra notes that someone carries the dog off, probably to eat. Harry says it does not matter because he is not yet ready to eat a dog. The next evening, the young couple with the baby joins the other three. The man's name is Travis Charles Douglas. His wife is Gloria Natividad Douglas, and the six-month-old baby is Dominic, nicknamed Domingo.

The couple tentatively walks over and offers some chocolate to Lauren and her friends. Natividad thanks Lauren for saving the Domingo. Natividad seems to already trust Lauren, Harry and Zahra, but Travis is still aloof. Natividad tells the others that they are headed to Seattle to settle with Travis's aunt and hopefully find paid work. The five sit and discuss their past and their dreams. Harry lets slip that Lauren is a female. Natividad smiles and says that she told Travis that Lauren does not seem like a man. Travis still states that he can watch out for his family. The others ignore him, knowing that it is just his masculine pride speaking. Natividad notices Lauren writing in her notebook and is surprised to learn that Lauren can read and write. Natividad asks to hear some of the poetry that Lauren has written.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Lauren's fate to share both the pain and the pleasure of those around her is perhaps an extended metaphor of the group, which she and her two friends gradually form with others of like mind. The rugged individual is no longer an option in a culture where might and numbers are what ensure survival. Members of a group must be loyal to the point where they figuratively share each other's pain and joy. Lauren represents the penultimate of this survival trait, although, ironically, it can also be Lauren's doom. In sharing the pain of someone that she has to injure or kill in order to protect herself or others in her group, she herself is incapacitated and vulnerable to harm. It is only through trusting her "pack" for survival that Lauren can be safe.

The altruistic act of saving the young couple's water from the thugs who steal their jug offers a balance to the times that Lauren, Harry or Zahra must harm others to keep themselves safe. This kindness demonstrates that although it is a lawless and chaotic society, it is possible to show kindness and mercy. Balancing violence with kindness may be what saves the souls of those caught up in a disintegrating society. Even though the man is suspicious of Lauren's later offer of an alliance, the fact that the two lovers



continue to follow Lauren and her friends from the water station shows that the urge to join in life-giving societies still exists. Lauren's later offer to the couple that they join the other three is also an attempt to form a community. When one's society no longer provides safety and order, then the best way to survive is to form one's own community, which is what Lauren is doing. At the end of the chapter, the group has grown from three to six, including a baby. The baby added to the group represents the future and is an optimistic signal that life continues.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Sunday, August 8, 2027. Sunday is a rest day for the group, who find themselves on a beach on the outskirts of Santa Barbara. Lauren chats with some of the locals and is amazed to find people who are actually at the beach for a picnic. Lauren questions them about the area and the possibilities for jobs. They tell her that not much is available. They also mention that painted people are setting fires in the area. Lauren knows it is Pyro addicts.

Travis asks Lauren if she actually believes in her Earthseed writings. Lauren replies that she believes in every word of it. Travis does not understand how God can be defined as change, which is an idea or concept, not a personality. As they continue discussing Earthseed, Travis alludes to various theories in science. Lauren expresses surprise and asks where Travis was educated. Travis relates that his mother was a teacher until his father died, at which time his mother took a job as a domestic in a wealthy household. Travis's mother continued to teach him and she borrowed, without permission, one book at a time from her employer's library for Travis to read. After Travis's mother died, Travis continued to work for the wealthy family and eventually obtained permission to marry Natividad, who also worked for the family. Things were fine until the man began to lust after Natividad. The man's wife helped Travis and Natividad escape. Lauren thinks to herself that their stories have a lot in common with the slavery era.

Travis and Lauren continue to discuss Lauren's Earthseed philosophy, with Harry joining in as he walks up from a swim. Travis still cannot visualize God as change. Travis says he cannot imagine praying to change. Lauren counters the argument by saying that her god is not an authority figure to which one prays. Travis asks why Lauren has to call change "God." Why not just talk about a philosophy centered on the idea of change? Lauren replies that by naming change God, people remember the ideas, since God is usually important to them. Travis does not find Lauren's philosophy very comforting, and Lauren replies that the purpose is not comfort. Travis then wants to know what the purpose is. Lauren tells him that the ultimate purpose of Earthseed is to take root among the stars - for people to spread far and wide in the galaxy and beyond. Travis is still skeptical and argues on and on with Lauren, who does not mind.

Sunday, August 15, 2027. Travis is Lauren's first disciple of Earthseed, and Zahra is the second. Zahra says that she wants to be part of a community that does not treat people the way Travis, Natividad and her own mother are treated. Lauren thinks to herself that Earthseed is being born right there along Highway 101. Lauren starts projecting into the future and wonders what the Earthseed community will need and where they can settle.



Chapter 18 Analysis

Lauren is not only surviving on the outside, but she is, in a small way, sowing the seeds of a new pseudo-religion, finding others who are interested in her Earthseed philosophy and who desire a better way of living and a better future. It is interesting that Travis is Lauren's first convert, considering the fact that he is so vocal in arguing with her about the philosophy.

This futuristic society has some characteristics of the world just preceding Armageddon as described in Biblical Book of Revelations. It is possible that the author is suggesting that the answer to the problems of Earth is the propagation of the human species on other planets.

There are different ways of coping with a disintegrating society, two of which are demonstrated in this book. The most popular is reactionary politics, i.e. ultra-conservatism, usually going back to an earlier era when times seemed ideal. This type of reaction is seen both with the company-owned community, Olivar, and with the semi-slavery state which Travis and his wife, Natividad, worked under. The fact that Travis's employer's wife had to help the couple escape is indicative of an arrangement more akin to slavery than employment. The second way of coping is demonstrated by Lauren's approach, which is to form a new society built upon newly formed principles.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Friday, August 27, 2027. An earthquake hits the area where the small Earthseed group is stopped. A number of people outside their group fall because of the precarious balance of the packs on their backs. No one seems to be injured, although Lauren, ignoring her "live and let live" policy, goes over and assists an elderly gentlemen to gain an upright position. Harry finds a sock stuffed with a few hundred dollar bills which does not appear to belong to anyone in the area, and Lauren tells him to hurry and jam it in his pocket. Lauren suggests that Harry buy a gun with it, and she offers to buy him a new pair of shoes out of her pocket so he can afford the gun.

An older black man, who is fairly well dressed and pushing a cart of possessions, makes the remark that the world has gone crazy after hearing guns and screams from a subdivision down the road. Lauren noticed the man earlier and decides she likes his looks. The man continues to walk with them and introduces himself as Taylor Franklin Bankole. Lauren feels an instant bond with Bankole, as he wishes to be called, because both of their ancestors chose surnames from Yoruba, a tribe in Africa, back in the 1960s. Bankole is fifty-seven, one year younger than Lauren's father.

As the group is continuing down the road after the quake, they hear some cries for help, which sound like women. The group decides to investigate and possibly help. They find a house, partially collapsed, with the women pinned under one end. Some of the group stands guard while others dig the women out. There are two sisters, Jill and Allie, who are suspicious as to why these people would help them. Lauren explains to the two that they must come now because it is too dangerous to stand around much longer. Harry, with gun in hand, leads the group through the crowd of scavengers, while Bankole brings up the rear holding a 9mm automatic.

Lauren and her companions are attacked suddenly as a stranger grabs Zahra and another grabs Lauren. Lauren, who had a six-inch knife in hand, stabs it to the hilt into the man's chest. His pain causes Lauren to scream in agony as she, too, experiences what he feels. Lauren, through her haze of pain, hears other shots. After Bankole and Harry pull the dead man off Lauren, they take stock. There are four dead men, and several escaped wounded. No one in their group is injured. Lauren goes behind the ruined house and changes clothes while the others strip the dead of money, jewelry and weapons. The two sisters ask to join the group. They are former prostitutes who worked for their pimp dad. Lauren tells them that they do not have to believe in what the group is doing, i.e. Earthseed, but they do have to pull their weight and stand with them if there is trouble. They agree. Bankole also asks to join them, and he is welcomed.

The group arrives in Salinas late in the day and purchases some supplies and more water, but they do not want to be in the city when it gets dark. They quickly finish shopping and head northward again. Just north of town, they find an elderly couple with



wares spread out over two tables. They purchase an older Winchester rifle and some ammo from the couple. Bankole is adamant that the group needs a rifle.

Chapter 19 Analysis

The original group of three has grown to nine, which gives them more protection and eyes, but in the larger the group, they each know less the others. This creates a possibility of treachery. So far, Lauren has listened to her intuition in who she agrees to accept, but she is cautious. None of the new members will stand watch alone for a while.

When the two sisters, Jill and Allie, ask who the group is, Harry replies, "Earthseed," while Lauren adds that they are looking for a place to establish a community. Lauren is not certain if Harry is serious or being playful, but it is significant in that this is the first time the group has named itself and its purpose. The two sisters so not want to join a religious cult, but Lauren assures them that they do not have to believe in their philosophy in order to join. Again, here is a change from the usual religious or social groups from the past, where one had to swear some sort of belief in their doctrine in order to join. Lauren and the rest of the group are embracing change not just as a philosophy, but also as a way of living.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Saturday, August 28, 2027. Lauren listens to the ear bud radio and learns that the San Francisco Bay Area is in complete chaos due to the earthquake, so they decide to turn inland and skirt the Bay Area via Interstate 5. There is still quite a bit of unrest in the area where they are, so they decide to skip their usual days of rest and continue walking.

Sunday, August 29, 2027. The group settles for the night in a deserted area well off the highway. Sometime during the night, automatic weapons fire erupts near the road. The group lies very still and watches as two gangs chase each other, shooting weapons. Some sort of truck explodes in the distance, which seems to end the fighting. Both gangs walk off towards the west, but no one can find Bankole. Harry and Lauren search the area and find him carrying a child whose mother has just been killed. Lauren is unhappy about the prospect of having a three-year-old join the group, especially with no adult to care for him. The child begins to sob, which also incites Dominic to start crying. Natividad breast feeds both children. Lauren stands watch with Allie for the rest of the night.

The new group member's name is Justin Rohr. His dead mother had papers on her, including his birth certificate and several thousand dollars. Justin seems to adopt Allie as his substitute mother, although she tries to discourage the boy. Allie had a son, who was killed by Allie's father when the child was only a few months old. Jill whispers her story to Lauren as they walk. After their father murdered Allie's baby, the two sisters packed their belongings and left, setting fire to their home where their dad was passed out drunk beside the baby's body. Jill still worries that their dad will catch up to them. Lauren reassures her that it is very unlikely.

The group passes through Hollister and re-supplies. The earthquake has damaged much of the town, but instead of robbing each other, the town seems to be helping each other out. Lauren is amazed.

Chapter 20 Analysis

By now, the steps for survival are fairly routine - watch one's back constantly, scavenge what you can, strip the dead after you kill them or someone else does and show kindness and compassion only when it is safe to do so. Many readers may be appalled at the idea that one completely strips the dead and uses whatever is found on them, but in an anarchist society, squeamishness will quickly earn one a grave.

The addition of Justin to the group is a symbol of hope. Children are necessary for the future of the human race, so Justin symbolizes the hope for the future of this group of humans. With the arrival of Justin and the idea of a future that he symbolizes, it is

possible that the group has arrived at a point where survival is no longer as doubtful as it was when Lauren, Harry and Zahra first set out from their decimated neighborhood. Justin, too, may be the means of healing for at least Allie, and perhaps some of the other group members.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Monday, August 30, 2027. The group arrives at the San Luis reservoir. Lauren is amazed to see so much clean water in one place, although even she can tell that the water level is much lower than it used to be. Although there are quite a few people settled around the area, they are able to find a fairly deserted area to camp. They make up a watch list and begin to take care of the multitude of chores they have been delaying - washing and mending clothes, cleaning guns, airing out bedding and other necessities. After the household chores are completed, the couples drift off by themselves. Lauren finds herself alone with Bankole, who listens to her as she talks about Earthseed. Bankole asks what a member in good standing has to do, and Lauren replies, "[T]he essentials...are to learn to shape God with forethought, care and work; to educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves; and to contribute to the fulfillment of the Destiny." Bankole says it sounds too simple, and it is inevitable that Earthseed will eventually change, since God, after all, is change.

Lauren asks Bankole about his past. He tells her how his wife was murdered by some burglars who broke into their home when Bankole was gone. Bankole stayed in his walled neighborhood until gangs destroyed it, similar to what happened to Lauren's neighborhood. Bankole is traveling north to find a place to live and work. As Bankole is speaking, Lauren realizes that he is a physician. Lauren senses that Bankole is either telling a lie or two or is withholding information. She believes he is doing it out of a survival instinct rather than immorality. Lauren finds Bankole intriguing and attractive and hopes he will decide to stay with her long term. After the two make love, Bankole discovers that Lauren is only eighteen. He is appalled that he is involved with such a young woman. As Lauren and Bankole are talking, Lauren frowns at something Bankole says, and he asks her why. She says she is thinking of a young man she dated and planned to marry.

Tuesday, August 31, 2027. The group stays at the reservoir resting, so Lauren begins reading/writing lessons for any who want them. Lauren offers some of her Earthseed philosophy to the students. Harry groans but actually corrects Allie when Allie says she will not pray to a god of change. A gun battle ensues during the night. Lauren is on watch, and she thinks to herself how strange it is that it seems normal to lie quietly waiting for the gunshots to end.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Violence and daily gun battles are so common that it seems normal to everyone to just wait it out, lying still and flat in the hopes of attracting no attention. It is akin to people in current times who encounter a rainstorm and run under an overhang until it passes by. The reservoir, filled with water, is symbolic of the future, in that water is life, the human



body being at least seventy percent water. The reservoir seems to bring couples together to form new relationships and possibly produce the next generation.

Lauren, who is suspicious of everyone outside the walls of her neighborhood at the beginning of her journey, is gradually learning that she must trust some persons in order both to survive and to ensure the planting and harvest of her Earthseed philosophy. One sees her circle expanding to include more and more, and so far, her intuition has not failed her in telling her whom to trust.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Thursday, September 9, 2027. The group continues to make their way north along Interstate 5. Interstate 5 is more deserted than Highway 101, and Lauren wonders why. There is also more vehicular traffic on the road, and there are more human bones scattered around. Bankole believes that trucks would accidentally hit people and not stop because of the danger. Lauren is in the lead when she stumbles upon four young teens roasting a human leg at a campfire. Lauren signals to the group not to come forward, and they skirt the gruesome scene. Bankole informs Lauren that he has a sister in Oregon who is living on some land that Bankole has owned for a few years. Bankole wants Lauren to split from the group and stay with him on the land. She tells him no, but he does not take that seriously. Lauren tells him that she wants to start an Earthseed community. Lauren will not desert the group, so Bankole asks if that is why she is with him, as a provider. Lauren says no.

Lauren confesses to Bankole that she is not a virgin and that she has hyperempathy syndrome. Bankole, as a doctor, has read some information about the syndrome. He tells Lauren that the two things she mentioned do not matter to him. He adds that he will even accept her community of people if she will marry him.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This very short chapter establishes a future both for Lauren and Bankole and for those who are traveling with them. Although Bankole does not believe in Lauren's vision for an Earthseed community, he is willing to accept it in order to gain Lauren as his wife. The fact that the two of them are planning for a future demonstrates the ability of the human spirit to hope and strive for a better life, even in the midst of such horrors as finding children eating human flesh.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Friday, September 10, 2027. Another gun battle occurs during the night hours. Lauren manages to sleep through part of it, thinking ironically about how she can be so complacent with bullets and screaming all around her. The next morning, as Lauren is crawling out of her sleeping bag, she notices two sleeping persons who are not part of her group. One of them, a young woman, wakes and begins to rise. Her daughter, a young girl about age seven, wakes, rolls into a tight ball and begins to scream. Her mother also rolls into a tight ball. Lauren speaks soothingly to them and offers them a meal before they leave. They sit up, and other members of the group begin to offer food. The mother asks if they can stay with the group. The group has a vote, and though some are hesitant, they agree to let them stay. Harry tells Lauren that she is going soft because last week Lauren would never have agreed to allowing them to join the group. Lauren admonishes Jill for not watching carefully enough that the woman and her daughter were able to sneak into camp. The woman's name is Emery Tanaka Solis, and her daughter is Tori Solis. Emery and her husband had been working on a company farm. He died, and she is now responsible for his debt to the company. The company took Emery's two sons to sell for part of the debt. Emily ran away with her daughter.

Sunday, September 12, 2027. Tori makes friends with a girl close to her own age, who is traveling with her father, Grayson Mora. Lauren invites Grayson to join them with his daughter. Grayson is aloof and hesitant, even though he does want to join the group for the sake of his daughter. Lauren has the sense that he is an escaped slave, although he now has supplies. Bankole points out the oddness in Grayson's behavior and talks to Lauren about it. She replies that if they were slaves, they should be intensely loyal to the group once the ex-slaves trust them. Lauren compares the situation of them aiding these fugitives with the underground railroad in the United States in the 1800s. Lauren is concerned about having two little girls that will make the group more vulnerable. Bankole counters that the two are silent and quick and have to be to have survived so far.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The more Lauren and the rest of the group trust, the more people are drawn to them and become trustworthy. When Lauren, Harry and Zahra first set out from Southern California, they rely solely upon each other, and even when they occasionally see someone who needs help and seems harmless, they stick to themselves. In chapter seventeen, when the group offers friendship to Travis, Natividad and their baby, Domingo, the three cross a line and never cross back. Although they are still careful and watch their backs continually, they no longer see themselves as a tiny, isolated community, but rather as a growing community. In most of the instances when they offer sanctuary to someone, it is because a child accompanies the adult. Relearning trust is

necessary for each person in the group because others who lack even basic morality have scarred each person.

By chapter twenty-three, readers see one of the major themes in the book, which is the idea that humans need community for survival. Additionally, it is shown that the basic instinct of most decent people is to trust others. This is a particularly difficult lesson for Lauren and others who suffer from hyperempathy syndrome because they are so vulnerable to exploitation.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Friday, September 17, 2027. Earlier in the week, on Tuesday, the group stops for a short break. The two girls go off with Emery to pee, and the rest of the group hears screams. They fend off an attack of six or more slavers, killing several of them. A stray bullet kills Jill as she is running towards camp with Tori in her arms. Lauren receives a bullet graze in her side. Allie, Jill's sister, is so distraught over Jill's death that she allows no one near her except the three-year-old, Justin.

Mora wants to leave the area because he believes the men will be back after dark. Lauren is resentful that Mora grabbed his kid and ran from the conflict, but Harry points out that he came back and helped dig Jill's grave. Lauren and Harry discuss the fact that Emery, Tori, Mora and Doe are all "sharers," i.e. have the hyperempathy syndrome. Some of Mora's actions now make more sense.

The group leaves the scene of the attack, since it is likely the Pyro addicts will return at night. Mora walks alongside Lauren for a while and asks her about her hyperempathetic response to the deaths of the addicts. Mora asks why there is a white man in the group, so Lauren explains that she has known Harry all her life. Lauren tells Mora that they all defend each other. They never steal from each other, and they do not shoot anyone except in self-defense. Lauren asks Mora if he is willing to abide by those rules. He nods, but he still seems suspicious.

Lauren walks beside Allie without saying anything. Tears course down Allie's cheeks, and Lauren pulls her to her and hugs her, holding on at first when Allie rebuffs her. Lauren holds her and lets her sob and moan until Allie seems to be empty for the moment. Lauren thinks that in spite of the loss of Jill, Allie still has those who care for her and who are family.

After a break, Lauren and Emery begin talking as they continue their northward trek. Emery says the Pyro addicts probably will not bother such a large group. Emery and Lauren talk about being sharers, and Lauren asks if all three of Emery's children had the syndrome. Emery says no, that some sharers cannot have children, and they do not always pass the syndrome on to their children.

The group notices that the Pyros have set fire to much of the countryside behind them and that the wind is moving the fire towards them. They break to eat some lunch, but then they move forward, trying to get to Clear Lake before the fire overtakes them. Sometime during the night as they are still walking, the fire does catch up to them. They huddle against its fury, putting wet clothes over their mouths. Though it seems as if the fire lingers a long time, it finally roars off in another direction, leaving the group singed but safe.



That night when Lauren and her companions make camp, Mora volunteers for first watch with Lauren. Lauren refuses to give him a gun, since he does not know how to use one, so Mora asks Bankole for a gun. Bankole refuses, and Mora accuses him of having no balls to stand up to Lauren. Bankole tells Mora that if he does not like the group, he can find someone else to travel with. Mora does not apologize, but he does stand watch weaponless.

Sunday, September 26, 2027. The group arrives at Bankole's property and is stunned to find the house burned to the ground and no sign of its inhabitants.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Despite every security precaution possible, the group has suffered the loss of one of its members. It would be unbelievable that they could travel hundreds of miles in what is essentially a guerilla war zone and not suffer losses. What is significant about the death of Jill is that it is a defining moment for the group and their relations to each other. Every group member has lost one or several family members, some their entire family. Thus, they are in the process of redefining what constitutes a family. Their new idea of family is simply that, if you no longer have a family, you make your own. The value in embracing this philosophy is that one then can depend on friends as if they are family. Blood is no longer thicker than water.

Clearly, this will become an egalitarian community, with each member having equal status regardless of race or sex. When Bankole tells Mora that he may leave if it bothers him that a woman tells him what to do, Bankole is both supporting the right of Lauren to lead and also demonstrating that Bankole himself is willing to abandon the role he learned that the male's job is to protect the woman. In this community, it is the task of each person, male or female, to protect and contribute to the success of the community.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Friday, October 1, 2027. Bankole and Harry go into the town nearest his land in order to inquire about his sister's fate. The police say they have no idea about what happened. The police search Bankole and steal the few thousand dollars on him, saying it is the police fees to make an investigation. Bankole and Harry return with no answers but some supplies. The people, both individually and as a group, are trying to decide whether to stay and try to create a community here or to travel further north. While deciding, they bury most of their valuables in case the police do decide to come out to the land to steal whatever they can find.

One night after a good meal, the group is sitting around a campfire and debating about whether to stay or go. They rehash the same pros and cons over and over. Finally, Lauren says that they each just must commit or not, and so she goes around the circle. Each person has a say and talks about what he or she plans, and each person concludes that the plan may or may not come to fruition. Ultimately, everyone in the entire group decides to stay. They begin to plan how to survive.

Sunday, October 10, 2027. Bankole decides it is time to bury the bones of his sister and her family. Lauren suggests that each of them "bury" their dead. They decide to hold a memorial service where each person will speak about their deceased loved ones. Bankole and Lauren talk, and Bankole tells Lauren that he wishes she had known the country back when it was still salvageable. Bankole believes that the deterioration of the country is still in process and that it may become even more ugly than it is now. He does not believe there is much chance they will survive on this land. Lauren is much more optimistic.

The group holds their memorial service. Each person quotes verses and thoughts that express feelings about the loved ones. They each then plant oak trees in memory of their loved ones. After, they hold a love feast, and they decide to name their new home and community, "Acorn."

The last lines in the book are quoted from the Bible, Luke, Chapter 8: 5-8. It tells of a Sower who plants seed. Some of the seed falls where birds eat it. Some falls on rock with little soil, so it sprouts but cannot grow. Some seed falls among weeds, which choke the new plants out, and finally some falls in good soil and produces good fruit.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Lauren, though not much older than when the book opens, has gained attention of the group, who accord her more respect than she may have thought possible for someone who is only eighteen. Early in the book, Lauren writes that she cannot wait until she is older so that others will listen to her and give her ideas consideration. She now knows



that it is not necessarily age that matters, but experience and what one does with those experiences. Lauren has proven herself worthy as a leader and is instrumental in convincing the others in the group to establish their community on Bankole's land.

The members of this group have had a few disagreements over the course of their travels, but one wonders how so many divergent people could be fairly harmonious while traveling over miles of land in a pseudo-war zone. Perhaps the fact that they are able to sublimate their own desires for the good of the group is what ensures their survival. It is interesting to speculate as to how long this harmony will continue as they settle into the arduous task of day-to-day survival under primitive conditions.

The reader may sense that the end of this book is merely the end of one phase of the story and the beginning of another, which the author bears out, since she has written a sequel to this book, titled *The Parable of the Talents*. The second book is based upon a quote from Matthew 25:14-30 and is about the development of the community of Acorn.



Characters

Harry Balter

Harry Balter is a young white man from the same neighborhood as Lauren. His girlfriend is his first cousin, Joanne Garfield, but they split up when the Garfield family moves to Olivar. Harry survives the violent attack on the neighborhood and is one of the original members of Lauren's group. His new girlfriend is Zahra Moss. Harry is more trusting than Lauren, and on the road he has to learn to become more ruthless.

Taylor Franklin Bankole

Taylor Franklin Bankole is a fifty-seven-year-old black doctor who joins Lauren's group halfway through their journey. Since he is much older than the others, he is able to give them steady advice and support. Bankole is from San Diego, and he left his community after it was destroyed by arson. Five years earlier, his wife died after being beaten by thieves. Bankole and Lauren are attracted to each other and soon become lovers. He tells Lauren that he is on his way to three hundred acres of land that he owns in the coastal hills of Humboldt County, California. He hopes to meet up with his sister and her family who live there. Lauren and the group make this their destination, but when they arrive, they find that the house has been destroyed and the family killed.

Dominic Douglas

Dominic Douglas is the six-month-old son of Natividad and Travis.

Gloria Natividad Douglas

Gloria Natividad Douglas, known as Natividad, is a Hispanic woman, the wife of Travis Douglas and the mother of Dominic. This family joins Lauren's group quite early in the trek. With her husband, Natividad used to work as a maid for a rich couple, but she ran away when the man tried to seduce her.

Travis Charles Douglas

Travis Charles Douglas is a black man, the husband of Natividad. He used to work as a handyman and gardener for a rich couple. Travis is suspicious of Lauren's group at first but soon warms to them. He becomes interested in Lauren's idea of Earthseed.



Amy Dunn

Amy Dunn is a three-year-old girl in Lauren's neighborhood. She sets fire to the family garage. Later, she is accidentally shot dead.

Tracy Dunn

Tracy Dunn is Amy Dunn's sixteen-year-old mother. She was only twelve when her uncle made her pregnant with Amy. After Amy's death, Tracy disappears and is never found.

Jay Garfield

Jay Garfield is the head of the Garfield family, who are friends with the Olaminas. Jay, who is white, leads the search for Lauren's father after he disappears. Later he takes his family to the company town of Olivar.

Joanne Garfield

Joanne Garfield is the daughter of Jay Garfield, the girlfriend of Harry Balter, and Lauren's friend. Her friendship with Lauren cools when she divulges to her parents details of Lauren's plan for survival. After that, Lauren does not trust her anymore. Eventually, Joanne moves to Olivar with her parents.

Allison Gilchrist

Allison Gilchrist, known as Allie, is Jillian's twenty-five-year-old sister. After her father killed her baby because it would not stop crying, the two sisters burned the house down while the drunken father slept. Fleeing a life of prostitution and poverty, they took to the road. When Lauren's group pulls Allie and Jill out of the rubble of a house hit by an earthquake, they join the group. Allie takes charge of Justin Rohr.

Jillian Gilchrist

Jillian Gilchrist is Allison's twenty-four-year-old sister. She shares Allie's history of poverty and abuse. Neither she nor her sister can write, although they can read a little. Jill is shot dead when the group is attacked by a gang.

Bianca Montoya

Bianca Montoya is a pregnant seventeen-year-old Latino girl in Lauren's neighborhood. She plans to marry her boyfriend, Jorge Iturbe, and continue to live in the neighborhood.



Doe Mora

Doe Mora is the eight-year-old daughter of Grayson Mora.

Grayson Mora

Grayson Mora is the Latino father of Doe Mora. He joins Lauren's group toward the end of their trek. He is quiet, aloof from the group, but protective of his daughter. Like Lauren, he has hyperempathy syndrome.

Richard Moss

Richard Moss is the father of Aura and Peter Moss. He has three wives, including Zahra, whom he bought from her homeless mother when she was fifteen. Moss is an engineer for a big commercial water company. He has also put together his own form of religion, which emphasizes patriarchy and the subordination of women. Moss is killed when the neighborhood is overrun.

Zahra Moss

Zahra Moss is the youngest of Richard moss's three wives. Ross bought her from her homeless mother. Her new home is the first house she has lived in. When the neighborhood is destroyed, Zahra sees her baby daughter killed. But she escapes and heads north with Harry, who becomes her boyfriend. Zahra cannot read or write until Lauren starts to teach her.

Cory Olamina

Cory Olamina is Lauren's stepmother. An educated woman with a Ph.D., she teaches the neighborhood children. When the neighborhood deteriorates, she wants to move to Olivar but cannot persuade her husband to go. After her husband disappears, she takes over the teaching side of his job. Cory is killed when the neighborhood is attacked and burned.

Gregory Olamina

Gregory Olamina is Lauren's youngest brother. He is killed when the neighborhood is overrun.



Keith Olamina

Keith Olamina is the oldest of Lauren's three brothers and Cory's favorite, although he and Lauren do not get along well. He is twelve when the story begins. Keith is not very intelligent and dodges work and school whenever he can. His ambition is to leave the neighborhood and go to Los Angeles and make money. When he is thirteen, he frequently leaves the neighborhood for long periods. He acquires money and new clothes, but he will not say where he got them. After a few months of living dangerously, he is tortured and killed, possibly by the drug dealers he thought were his friends.

Lauren Olamina

Lauren Olamina is fifteen years old when the story begins. She lives in Robledo, California, with her father, stepmother, and three brothers. Her dead mother was taking the prescription drug Paracetco, and this was why Lauren contracted "hyperempathy syndrome," which means that she feels the physical pain of others in her own body. On the advice of her father, she tries to keep this condition secret, since she thinks she might be perceived as weak. She only confides in people she trusts.

Lauren is an academically gifted student. She finished her high school work early and has taken college-level courses. She also reads voraciously and is extremely well informed about history and current events. Although her father is a Baptist minister, Lauren has already lost her faith in the Christian God. She develops her own religion called Earthseed, based on the idea that God is Change. Change is her watchword. Even before disaster hits their community, she is certain that she does not want to live the life that is expected of her: to marry young, have children, and live in impoverished circumstances in Robledo. She also guesses that her neighborhood will be destroyed in the near future, and she makes plans to escape, reading everything she can about how to survive in emergency situations and how to live off the land.

When the disaster happens, Lauren shows that she is strong willed and determined and that she possesses great leadership qualities. She is the undisputed leader of the small group that heads north along the freeway, seeking a better life. She is ruthless, she kills when she has to, and she ensures that her group does what it has to do to survive. Gradually, she also instills in her companions a sense of ethics and community. Although she is tough, she also cares about others and shows compassion. She is rewarded when the group arrives at Bankole's land, where she can put her dream of founding an Earthseed community into practice.

Marcus Olamina

Marcus Olamina is Lauren's brother. At thirteen, he is already handsome, and he attracts girls. His friend is Robin Balter, Harry Balter's sister. Marcus is killed when the neighborhood is attacked.



Reverend Olamina

Reverend Olamina is Lauren's fifty-seven-year-old father and the husband of Cory. He is a college professor and dean and a Baptist minister. A very strict father, he severely beats Keith for misbehavior, which produces a permanent estrangement between father and son. He has also beaten Lauren, but she does not hold it against him. Reverend Olamina is a tough-minded man who does his best to protect his family in difficult circumstances. His own parents were murdered fifteen years earlier, and his first wife was a drug addict. Olamina goes missing from the neighborhood one day and is never found. He is presumed dead.

Wardell Parish

Wardell Parish is a strange and solitary man who lives in Lauren's neighborhood. His sister and all her children are killed in a house fire.

Justin Rohr

Justin Rohr is a three-year-old boy who is taken in by Lauren's group after his mother is killed just outside San Juan Bautista.

Emery Tanaka Solis

Emery Tanaka Solis is the twenty-three-year-old mother of Tori Solis. She married at thirteen and bore three children. After her husband died, she worked for an agribusiness conglomerate that made a virtual slave of her. She fell into debt, and the company took her two sons. She then fled with her daughter and headed north. They are taken in by Lauren's group toward the end of their trek.

Tori Solis

Tori is the nine-year-old daughter of Emery Tanaka Solis.

Curtis Talcott

Curtis Talcott is Lauren's boyfriend in Robledo. He wants to marry her and leave Robledo, but she says she must stay and help her family until she is eighteen. Although she says she will marry him if he waits for her, her heart is not in it. There is too much of herself that she is unable to share with him. She never sees him again after the neighborhood is attacked and burned, and she assumes he was killed, though she never knows for certain.

Kayla Talcott

Kayla Talcott is the mother of Curtis Talcott. After Reverend Olamina disappears, Kayla takes over some of his preaching and church work, even though she is not ordained.

Social Concerns

Parable of the Sower predicts the rise of an age of terrorism in America, a terrorism that engulfs the peaceful, traditionally secure middle-class public. It also threatens the rich. Parable of the Sower has its setting in Los Angeles and California in a near future in which civilization is disintegrating and culture is descending to savagery. It presents a massive biblical resonance, a theme of the discovery of self through ordeals of violence, and a destiny that produces a passionate love relationship. The forces set in motion in the historical past, especially America's, are a tide that has overwhelmed the present and doomed the future to suffering and disaster, with a redemption and salvation of a very private and individual kind arising in the lives of the few who are patient and passionate and truthful enough to believe such survival is possible. The predicted state will be thrilling, dangerous, tragic, and transforming of the late-twentieth-century American way of life. It is, in a mordant way, a novel of social revolution through dissolution of the existing political dispensation. The novel as part of its theme and plot addresses the absence of a moral core in American culture, and fashions elements of an ethos in the form of a scripture, *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, that might guide people through such chaotic times. Such a mantra of wise advice presupposes a source of hope that will drive appetite for survival and culture and love. The hope comes from some people, not all. But others who cannot find it in themselves are not lost. Those who have hope can imbue some others with it. Ultimately, the culture and love that is equal to the challenge of survival in a terrifyingly dangerous world may look strange to the present.

Not only will national cultures mix and make new ones, but the generations will dissolve their barriers so that the love between the eighteen-year-old protagonist woman, Lauren, and the fifty-seven-year-old man, Taylor Bankole, is recognized as part of the foundation of a better life for those who can accept it.

Techniques

Like Butler's other novels, *Parable of the Sower* is written in the first person; this time concertedly because the novel consists entirely of entries in Lauren Olimina's journal which cover a selection of days spanning three years and three months from Lauren's fifteenth birthday on July 20, 2024 to October 10, 2027. We do not know if some entries have been omitted, although the likelihood is that none are.

The reader knows in addition that some time has passed since the journal entries were completed, because it has been interpolated with headnotes to its twenty-five chapters consisting of excerpts from the apparently published volume by Lauren titled *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. The effect is much like the quotation of biblical passages.

In fact, Butler's title is explicitly biblical, and she ends the novel with the King James translation of the passage of St. Luke 8: 5-8, beginning "A Sower went out to sow his seed:" Thus, too, *Earthseed*, is a book within a book.

Butler-the-writer's hero Lauren is also a writer. Butler knows how she feels.

Moreover, the resolutely present tense of the journal entries confers an immediacy of meaning that can heighten the reader's understanding of the wonderful preciousness of the present, which is so fleeting in a universe where, as Lauren believes, "God is change."



Thematic Overview

In *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, created by a woman with a powerful will to survive and flourish, is evidence that individual persons can make a difference. Indeed, a novelist can make a difference. The inference is that some people will be helped by definition of a ritual with which to fix meaning in life. They want a spiritual discipline. They want it especially in the late twentieth century in which culture and civilization are fundamentally unstable. The secular culture satisfies too few of the needs of people, leaves too many poor and without hope. The result is a proliferating underclass increasingly contemptuous of laws, especially of those that protect property — none of which belongs to the underclass millions. People steal, vandalize, assault, and murder. Property is increasingly vulnerable. The wealthy withdraw into fortified enclaves, only to fight a losing battle that must end when the walls are breached and the gates broken. In July 2024, the outset of the story, Lauren Olimina is sixteen. It is her birthday and the birthday of the Christian minister father she loves very much. Her mother Cory is a teacher.

Lauren is lucky to have such parents.

She loves to read and write, and keeps a journal that becomes in fact the text of *Parable of the Sower*. They live in a fortified enclave. Very soon, the disenfranchised mob breaks in, and Lauren's parents die. Lauren escapes into the dangerous world. All she has is the love her parents gave her, a precocity for language, an unflagging hope, and her destiny. Some of the people she meets will be moved to hope because of her hope.

Parable of the Sower's title, allusions, and references are explicitly biblical.

Moreover, the report of Lauren's journal is of events of a journey in search of a place to make a home and a life, very like the quest for the biblical promised land of the Hebrews. Her *Earthseed* rules for life, too, like the Bible suggest rituals and advice for the survival of the community. Having drawn these comparisons, there are also significant biblical elements that *Parable of the Sower* repudiates. In fact Butler would elevate the place of women so that the recognition of the talent for thought and leadership is not biased by gender as it is, especially in New Testament interpretations by virtually all institutional Christianities.

More simply, Butler's belief in the Bible, whatever it is, is masked in *Parable of the Sower*. But she has assimilated the Bible, perhaps an acknowledgement of how important it is in the history of African American writing, and the history of the ordeal of African people in America.



Themes

Change

Lauren rejects traditional religion. Based on her experience, she sees no relevance in a belief system focused on the Christian God. Instead, she forms her own religion based on her observation that everything in the universe changes. Change is the one constant in life. People can either accept change and work with it for the betterment of themselves and their community, or they can resist it, hoping in vain that things will carry on the way they always have done.

For Lauren, change is God. This God shapes humans and is in turn shaped by them. God is dynamic process, not a static, transcendental lawgiver and judge. Change is an irresistible force, and humans can harness it to promote the spiritual evolution of the race. According Lauren's Earthseed religion, each human life is a seed that can sprout into something valuable and productive if it can adapt to changing realities. By yielding to change, this human earthseed can also shape it constructively. The consequences of failing to do so are death and chaos. The ultimate expression of Earthseed, its destiny, is "to take root among the stars," to spread human life to other planets and galaxies.

Freedom

Lauren's trek north is a journey toward freedom. She is escaping the prison of a walled community in which there is no hope for a full, productive, free life. Most of the people her group accumulates on the way are fleeing from some kind of slavery or exploitation. Zahra Moss is escaping an oppressive marriage that rests on a belief in male superiority. Harry has turned down a chance to go to the company town of Olivar, in which the residents give up their freedom and their rights in order to buy security. Jill and Allie flee from a life of prostitution in which their pimp was their father; Travis and Natividad escape from menial service to a rich man who thought he had the right to seduce Natividad; Emery Solis and her daughter are escaping virtual slavery to an agribusiness that keeps them in permanent debt and even takes Emery's sons away. Bankole, too, is escaping from conditions of life similar to those that Lauren was enduring. He seeks freedom on the land he owns in the coastal hills. The members of Lauren's Earthseed community who decide to settle there will at least be free to shape their own destiny, although there is no guarantee they will survive.

Loss and Restoration of Community

The novel is divided into two halves. The first half, set in Robledo, shows how the social order in California in 2024 has broken down. Society is split into several groups. The rich live in walled estates, with lavish security systems. The middle classes, much threatened and impoverished, live in walled communities and try to maintain a semblance of normal life. But jobs are scarce, and no one has any prospects. Inflation



has eroded the value of money, and essentials such as water are expensive. In Lauren's neighborhood, people try to grow as much of their own food as they can. For meat, they rely on eating rabbits. Everyone in the community over the age of fifteen is trained in how to use guns, since they cannot rely on a corrupt police force for protection against the thieves who regularly break into their community. Outside, in unwallled areas, the rule of law and the sense of community have totally collapsed. Homeless, dirty, desperately poor people roam the streets, along with drunks and drug addicts. Many are addicted to a drug that makes them commit arson, because they love to watch things burn.

The second part of the novel presents a gradually emerging contrast between the lawlessness and brutality of life amongst the traveling bands of refugees and the sense of community and mutual responsibility that eventually characterizes Lauren's group. Lauren's quest is to recreate what an ideal community should be. At first, because of the dangerous situation she is in, she is ruthless, trusting no one and looking out only for herself and her two companions. But as she continues to travel north, she does not shut out the voice of compassion. A key moment is when she pulls Allie and Jill out of the rubble of a house. Bankole, who has never lost his sense of values, says to her, "I was surprised to see that anyone else cared what happened to a couple of strangers." Another key moment comes when Emery and her daughter are found in the group's camp. Lauren goes out of her way to feed them, offering them two of the five sweet pears that she had bought only two days earlier. Seeing her example, other members of the group share what food they have. When Lauren puts out the idea that Emery and the girl could join their group, Harry tells her she is going soft. "You would have raised hell if we'd tried to take in a beggar woman and her child a few weeks ago." But Lauren is not going soft. She is simply demonstrating that in spite of the degradation and danger all around her, humans can still show that they care about each other. Then, when Jill is killed, Lauren comforts the grief-stricken Allie with a hug. The message she conveys is *"In spite of your loss and pain, you aren't alone. You still have people who care about you and want you to be all right. You still have family."* When Lauren's new "family," a heterogeneous, multiracial group that spans several generations, arrives at their destination, they have learned to take care of each other. They are ready to develop a community based not on fear or exploitation but on mutual respect and shared values.

Style

Dystopia

A dystopia is an unpleasant, sometimes frightening, imaginary future world. Dystopias usually take undesirable aspects of present-day society and depict a world in which those aspects have become dominant. In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler creates a dystopia by magnifying some disturbing social trends that occurred in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These trends included the widespread use of designer drugs (custom-made, mind-altering drugs such as Ecstasy). In the novel, use of the drug pyro reaches epidemic proportions. It makes people commit arson because doing so feels better than sex. Another trend in the 1990s was the increasing popularity, particularly in California, of gated communities protected by security fences. These become the walled communities in 2024 California. In both cases, the walls go up because of fear of crime. Homelessness, illiteracy, and global warming were other issues in the 1990s that appear in larger form in the novel.

Image and Metaphor

The novel takes its title from the parable of the sower in the gospel of Luke. The sower is like the spiritual teacher who spreads the word of truth. Some people listen; others do not—just as seeds take root in some places but not in others. In the *New Testament*, the sower is Jesus; in the novel, it is Lauren. The metaphor of the seed occurs again in the name Lauren gives to her new religion, Earthseed. It is also reflected in the name of the first Earthseed community: Acorn. The acorn image occurs earlier in the novel, too. Lauren loves to eat bread made with acorns rather than wheat or rye. Her father tells her that he had a difficult time persuading his neighbors to eat acorns. They wanted to cut down the oak trees and plant something else they considered more useful. Lauren learns from a book how to make acorn bread, and this helps to sustain their group as they travel north. The acorn image conveys the idea that the seeds of new life are always available, not only in nature but in humans, too.

Historical Context

Illiteracy

Rising rates of illiteracy became a matter of public concern in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1989, it was estimated that 13 percent of seventeen-year-old Americans could not read or write and that twenty million Americans had problems with literacy. Some could not read or write at all, and this often resulted from poverty or being in culturally disadvantaged families. Others were partially literate and could read street signs and grocery lists but not much more. Often this was due to undiagnosed learning disorders such as dyslexia. According to a 1987 National Assessment of Educational Progress government survey, although 96 percent of those between twenty-one and twenty-five years old had basic reading skills, less than 48 percent were capable of reading a map well enough to use it properly. In the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey by the Department of Education, over 40 percent of the adult population fell short of the literacy skills needed to succeed on a day-to-day basis.

Gated Communities

In the late 1980s, fear of rising crime in urban areas led to a growth in the number of gated residential communities in the United States, particularly in California and other western and southern metropolitan areas. These were communities where access was controlled through gates and security guards. Sometimes fences topped with barbed wire surrounded the community. An example of a gated community is Canyon Lake, located seventy miles east of Los Angeles. Created in 1968, it incorporated as a city of its own in 1990. Gated communities proved an effective deterrent against crime, and their numbers increased throughout the United States in the 1990s. In 1997, there were about twenty thousand gated communities, which increased to around fifty thousand by 2000.

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime was a prominent feature of life in the United States at the time *Parable of the Sower* was written. According to a 1994 Gallup Poll, 52 percent of the people in the United States named crime as the most important social problem, up from only 9 percent in a similar poll conducted eighteen months earlier. A 1993 poll showed that 87 percent of U.S. residents thought that crime was higher than a year earlier. This was not in fact true, since the crime rate fell from 1991 to 1994, but people thought it was true. There was a particularly strong fear in urban areas of street crime and random, gang-related violence. Fear of crime led legislators and the public at large to call for harsher punishments for criminals. In California, a "three strikes" law was passed in 1994. It mandated a sentence of twenty-five years to life for a third felony conviction if the previous felonies were serious or violent.



Homelessness

Homelessness in America increased drastically during the 1980s, to an estimated two million people in 1989. Some experts argue that the policies of the Reagan administration were to blame for cutting welfare programs and making massive cuts in the budget of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD was the main government sponsor of subsidized housing for the poor. The situation was not helped by the fact that poverty also increased during the 1980s. In 1978, 24.5 million people lived below the federal poverty line; by 1988 this had risen to 32.5 million. The gap between rich and poor also increased. Another factor in the rise of homelessness in the 1980s arose from concerns about the rights of the mentally ill. It became harder to commit people to mental hospitals against their will. The result was that many mentally ill people ended up on the streets. It is estimated that one-third of the homeless during the 1980s were mentally ill and that a similar proportion had problems with substance abuse.

Climate Change

Concerns about global warming, an increase in Earth's average surface temperature, were first raised in the 1980s. The phenomenon was also known as the "greenhouse effect." Many scientists believed that global warming was caused by an increase in emissions of gases such as carbon dioxide resulting from the burning of fossil fuels for energy production. In 1988, James Hansen, director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at NASA, told a U.S. Senate committee there was strong evidence that global warming was being caused by human activity. He warned that if global warming were not reversed, it would cause catastrophic climatic changes. Throughout the 1990s, scientists warned of extreme weather including floods, heat waves, droughts, and hurricanes that would occur as a result of global warming.



Critical Overview

Although Four Walls Eight Windows, the original publishers of *Parable of the Sower*, tried to present the book as similar to the fiction of other African American writers such as Toni Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara, reviewers seemed still to regard it as science fiction. This did not prevent the novel from receiving high praise. For Faren Miller, in *Locus*, it "presents what is simply the most emotionally and intellectually appealing religion I've encountered in nearly four decades of reading sf." Miller commented on the grim nature of the world depicted and the religious issues Butler presents but added that the novel "functions beautifully as fiction, brimming with living characters and the crazy complexity of life."

Hoda Zaki, in *Women's Review of Books*, pointed out that Butler drew extensively on African American history:

[I]mages of slavery remind us of the U.S. past: slaves hiding their attempts at self-education and literacy, and fleeing cruel overseers; Lauren's band of survivors, which recalls the Underground Railroad; the pervasive feeling that freedom, work and security lie to the north.

Zaki also pointed out that Butler shows characters from a variety of racial backgrounds in positive roles that are not usually found in science fiction novels about the future. Zaki concluded, "In a world increasingly polarized ethnically and racially, [Butler's] work contributes a needed critical element to the genre of science fiction."

In a glowing review in the *New York Times Book Review*, Gerald Jonas commented that although religious awakenings are common in science fiction of the future, they are often arbitrary and conventional, but Butler "dares to take Lauren's revelations seriously," and this enables her to show how Lauren's ideas capture the allegiance of her followers. Jonas concluded that the novel succeeded on many levels: "A gripping tale of survival and a poignant account of growing up sane in a disintegrating world, it is at bottom a subtle and disturbing exposition of the gospel according to Lauren."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1



Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses Parable of the Sower in terms of dystopias, utopias, archetypal patterns, coming-of-age novels, and the character of the narrator, Lauren.

Butler is a writer of great originality whose work does not fit neatly into categories. Although she is usually referred to as a science fiction writer and *Parable of the Sower* was reviewed in the science fiction section of the *New York Times Book Review*, there is in fact little science fiction in it. Butler pays scant attention to the technological aspects of her near-future society, merely mentioning in passing "Window Wall" televisions and the newest "multisensory" entertainment systems that include such things as "reality vests" and "touch-rings." Much more important to Butler's purpose is the fact that almost no one in Lauren's Robledo community can afford these items.

Parable of the Sower properly belongs to the category of dystopia. Dystopias come in many forms. George Orwell's *1984* (1948), for example, depicts an oppressive, totalitarian society. A more recent form of dystopia is the "cyberpunk" novel, such as Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992), in which highly sophisticated information technologies exist alongside environmental degradation, rampant crime, and the domination of ruthless corporations. Yet another form is the feminist dystopia, in which women are systematically oppressed, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) and Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974).

Parable of the Sower resists easy classification, though, since it has elements of a number of different kinds of dystopias. It offers some censure of the political system, although that is not the author's main target. In Butler's 2020s, the federal government seems to have become irrelevant rather than oppressive. It wastes money on space programs and makes futile attempts to tackle homelessness and unemployment by passing legislation that restricts workers' rights.

The all-powerful corporation, at the heart of many "cyberpunk" dystopias, makes an appearance in the novel as the company town of Olivar, where people get protection from crime and unemployment but at the expense of individual rights and freedoms. The reader is left in no doubt that Lauren and Harry make the right choice when they elect not to go to Olivar. Feminist elements also appear in the novel, although it does not present a systematic portrait of the institutionalized oppression of women. Women have the opportunity to become astronauts and go on the latest mission to Mars. Indeed, a female astronaut is killed on Mars. But in contrast to that, Butler presents many examples of men behaving badly to women. Richard Moss, for example, adopts a quasi-religious patriarchal family system that creates a system of virtual slavery for his many wives. Apparently, this is a common practice amongst middle- and upper-class men. Butler delivers a crushing verdict on Moss when she describes him, after the catastrophe overwhelms Lauren's neighborhood, lying stark naked in a pool of his own blood. So much for patriarchy.



To add to the complexity of this novel, it might be pointed out that within the dystopia is also a vision of utopia. Utopian works, of which the prototype is Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1515—1516), depict an ideal society. Lauren's vision of Acorn, a self-reliant community built from scratch on a few hundred acres of farmland, in which the new, enlightened religion of Earthseed is to take root, is a utopian vision. It is still in the future, and there is no guarantee that it will succeed, but the verses from Lauren's "Earthseed: The Books of the Living," which appear as epigraphs to each chapter, are constant reminders that within this miserable dystopia a utopia is ready to spring up. Lauren, of course, thinks her religion is new, and some elements of it are, particularly the vision that it is the destiny of Earthseed to colonize the stars. But its central idea, "the only lasting truth is Change," was expressed over two-and-a-half-thousand years ago by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, whose famous phrase was "All is flux; nothing is stationary." Even in 2024, it appears that there is still nothing new under the sun.

Be that as it may, within the dystopian/utopian framework of her novel, Butler manages also to touch on the archetypal pattern that mythologist Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) described as the "monomyth." In the monomyth, the hero hears a call to adventure, leaves his familiar environment, and journeys to an unknown or unfamiliar realm, where he undergoes many trials. He then returns to his society to bestow a boon on his fellow man. It is not difficult to see a similar pattern, with some variation, in *Parable of the Sower*, as well as some of the standard elements in a coming-of-age novel. Lauren—a female protagonist, of course, not a male one—is only fifteen when the novel begins. On the threshold of maturity, she must decide what she believes and what she wants to do with her life. When another neighborhood girl, Bianca Montoya, gets pregnant at seventeen and decides to marry her boyfriend, Lauren knows that this is the life expected of her too—to marry young, have children, and remain in poverty. Lauren would sooner commit suicide than endure such a life. Like many a strong-willed fifteen- or sixteen-year-old, she clashes with her stern father, who, as the representative of the older generation, is more conservative and cautious than she. Lauren knows she must break with the old ways of doing things, just as she has already broken with the religion of her father, which does not speak to her personal experience. She boldly plans to encounter life beyond the walled neighborhood that is all she has ever known, and she does not falter when this "call to adventure" finally comes. When she shepherds her small group on their dangerous journey north, like the hero of the monomyth, she faces many dangers in an environment where the rule of law, and human kindness, no longer exists. The boon she brings is a vision of renewed hope for humanity—an agrarian, back-to-nature utopian community that will act as a counterpoint to corrupt cities and lawless countryside where all civilized values have been destroyed.

It is Lauren, then, who carries much of the interest in the novel. She is far more well developed by the author than any of the other characters, most of whom, except perhaps for Bankole, remain somewhat sketchy. (Bankole, incidentally, has something in common with the archetype of the wise old man. His ethical values are not impaired by the chaos around him, and it is he who guides the group to their safe haven.) Lauren is certainly an unusual, even strange, figure. She is something of a child prodigy, since



even at fifteen she has a sophisticated understanding of the world and an emotional maturity well beyond her years.

As Lauren matures over a period of three years, she becomes a visionary, a prophet, and a charismatic leader, who also has formidable, practical organizing skills. No one in her group ever disputes that she is their leader, and she never lets them down, usually one step ahead of the others in anticipating danger and taking steps to avoid it.

In an interview with Rebecca O. Johnson, published in *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, Butler commented on her character Lauren, but in a way that some readers might find surprising. She says she found it hard to write the book "because I knew I would have to write about a character who was power-seeking. I didn't realize how much I had absorbed the notion that power-seekers were evil." Butler thus found herself out of sympathy with her main character. She got around the problem by deciding that "power can be a tool. . . . [M]oney, knowledge, religion, whatever is common among human beings, can be beneficial or harmful to the individual and is judged by how it is being used."

An author's views of her own work must be respected, but it does not mean that other views are not possible. It might be interesting, for example, to discover how many readers reach the conclusion that Lauren is a power seeker. Certainly she has a missionary desire to promote certain ideas; she wants to persuade and lead, but those personal qualities do not of themselves make her a power seeker. Lauren's situation in life is as much forced on her by circumstances as created by her own will. Earthseed, the religion she creates, teaches humility before the irreducible fact of change. It does not sound like a religion that calls for a messiah figure or an autocratic leader.

If the creative and resourceful Lauren does seek power, it is not from any egotistical or selfish desire to dominate others. This would be doubly hard for Lauren since she is an empath. She has the capacity to feel the pain of the oppressed to an unusual degree. The origins of this "hyperempathy" lie in her mother's abuse of a drug named Paracetco when she was pregnant with Lauren. In creating this detail, Butler builds on a distressing fact that emerged in the early 1990s: Some babies born to cocaine-addicted mothers were addicted to cocaine from birth. Lauren emphasizes that her condition is a delusion (the doctors call it "organic delusional syndrome"), but delusions are real to those who suffer from them. She is also encouraged to keep her condition a secret, since it is perceived as a weakness. The pain of others has the power to disable her completely, but sometimes a person's greatest weakness is also the source of her greatest strength.

It is not hard to see in fifteen-year-old Lauren as she rides her bicycle in an unwallled area, absorbing the distressing scenes ("I tried not to look at them, but I couldn't help seeing□collecting□some of their general misery") an echo of the legend of the Buddha, who as a young man walking in the street was awakened to the reality of human life by the sight of old age, sickness, and death, from which he had previously been shielded. From this arose his desire to find the cause of suffering and the means by which it might be removed. Just as the compassion of one man gave rise to one of the world's great



religions, so the vision of a young girl, in entirely different circumstances, in a different time and place, and in a different way, gives rise to Earthseed, a religion that embraces suffering as an inevitable part of the change that is the fundamental principle of life itself.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Parable of the Sower*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.



Topics for Further Study

Research the history of illiteracy in the United States. What can be done to tackle illiteracy in the United States? How have educational methods developed over time to accommodate new finds or theories in literacy studies? Develop a political platform, a curriculum, or a tutorial that employs some of the methods for dealing with illiteracy that you encounter during your research. Try to propose some of your own resolutions and include them in your project.

In the novel, water is scarce and expensive. Research the topic of water supply. Is water likely to become a scarce commodity in the twenty-first century? If so, what regions of the world already have this problem or will have this problem? Will the United States be affected and, if so, which areas?

There are many sides in the current debate about global warming and climate change. Study the arguments about whether global warming is currently happening or not, about the effects of global warming on the environment as well as industry, and about who is responsible for helping industries comply with environmental sanctions aimed at reducing harmful emissions. Document your findings and prepare to debate with other members of your class by picking the argument with which you agree most and developing a strong defense for your position.

Research the history of company towns in the United States in the nineteenth century. Write an essay that explains how your research compares with the description of Olivar in the novel. Is Butler's representation of Olivar historically accurate? Does the author leave out important elements that you found in your research? If so, what are those elements?

Is Butler's pessimistic vision of America in the 2020s convincing? Are such developments likely or unlikely? Can you see ways in which America might develop differently?

What Do I Read Next?

Parable of the Talents (1998) is Butler's sequel to *Parable of the Sower*. The Earthseed community that Lauren founded is collapsing. Her followers are enslaved, her daughter is kidnapped, and she is imprisoned by religious fanatics. But Lauren continues to believe in Earthseed and must find a way for the Acorn community to survive.

Neal Stephenson's bestselling *Snow Crash* (1992) is a fast-paced, near-future dystopia, in which the United States is a collection of city-states controlled by corporations and the Mafia controls pizza delivery. The hero, named Hiro Protagonist, is a computer hacker (and samurai swordsman) who battles with a deadly designer drug called Snow Crash, that is also a sinister, world-endangering computer virus.

A Clockwork Orange (1962), by Anthony Burgess, is a grim dystopia narrated by Alex, a member of an extremely violent teenage gang. When Alex is imprisoned, he is subjected to a new government-sponsored treatment program designed to cure his violent behavior. He comes out of it as a model citizen but has no free will nor the capacity to do good or experience pleasure.

The Handmaid's Tale: A Novel (1986), by Margaret Atwood, is a near-future fable in which the United States has become the Republic of Gilead, controlled by religious fundamentalists. Women are strictly controlled and have no rights. Atwood's target is the Christian right's views about the proper role of women. She attempts to show what might happen if such views are taken to their logical conclusion.



Key Questions

Butler's works feature principally women of nonwhite races as protagonists, mostly African American. She has in her stories followed the history of the United States and of western civilization from the past into the near future. In her prospectus, America is never politically or culturally stable. It is instead precarious in the past and doomed in the future. The causes of this are the use of slavery and its heirs, capitalism and monopoly capitalism by America's founders. In this setting of disintegrating nations Butler's stories propose that sex remains a powerful drive. The lust for power precipitates a maelstrom of violence. Nevertheless, in this chaos hope persists, and those who hope with strength find endurance and love. All of Butler's stories are testaments that love is at the center of human meaning.

1. How persuasive is Lauren's Earthseed philosophy? How is it like and different from the Bible?
2. How does the excerpt from Luke 8: 5-8 with which the novel ends convey a meaning of Parable of the Sower?
3. How convincing is Butler's representation of the love between eighteen-year-old Lauren and fifty-seven-year-old Taylor Bankole?
4. What are the conditions of parenting and children in Parable of the Sower? Are they more or less elaborately attended to in the novel?
5. Lauren is closest to two men much older than she, her father and Taylor Bankole. If Butler must put a love relationship in this novel, how is this one between her and Bankole better than any other?
6. Lauren is psi sensitive to the feelings of other. If she did not possess this trait, would it be more difficult for her to maintain her integrity?
7. The essential tenet of Earthseed is that "God is change." Does the text of Earthseed need to be interpolated as it is as chapter headings, as well as being created in the story?
8. Lauren's mother was a teacher. Her father was a minister. They account for her extraordinary love of reading, writing, and thinking. What theory of education is represented in this novel?
9. Parable of the Sower ends with the survivors setting up life in the country. Does Butler believe an agrarian culture is better than an urban one?
10. How plausible is Butler's prediction that American civilization will fail so badly (inflation at 1000%) in the early twenty-first century?



Further Study

Butler, Octavia, and Stephen W. Potts, "'We Keep Playing the Same Record': A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler," in *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 70, November 1996, pp. 331—38.

Butler discusses the science-fiction genre, responses to her work, and themes her work addresses.

Fry, Joan, "An Interview with Octavia Butler," in *Poets & Writers Magazine*, Vol. 25, March/April 1997, pp. 58—69.

Butler discusses a range of topics, including her favorite writers and where the philosophical ideas in *Parable of the Sower* come from.

Wiloch, Thomas, Review of *Parable of the Sower*, in *Bloomsbury Review*, May/June 1994, p. 24.

Wiloch applauds Butler for not following the pattern of most science fiction. She is not content to tell a standard adventure story but instead turns it into a character study of a young woman.

Bibliography

Johnson, Rebecca O., "African-American, Feminist Science Fiction," in *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, Vol. 19, No. 6, February 1994, pp. 12—14.

Jonas, Gerald, Review of *Parable of the Sower*, in *New York Times Book Review*, January 2, 1994, p. 22.

Miller, Faren, Review of *Parable of the Sower*, in *Locus*, December 1993, pp. 17, 19.

See, Lisa, "An Interview with Octavia Butler," in *Publisher's Weekly*, Vol. 240, No. 50, December 13, 1993, pp. 50—51.

Zaki, Hoda, Review of *Parable of the Sower*, in *Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 11, Nos. 10 and 11, July 1994, pp. 37—38.



Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor

David Galens

Editorial

Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research

Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture

Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions

Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia

Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design

Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing

Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact

The Gale Group, Inc

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535

Or you can visit our Internet site at

<http://www.gale.com>

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any



form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department

The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535