

Telegraph Avenue Study Guide

Telegraph Avenue by Michael Chabon

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Telegraph Avenue Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
I. Dream of Cream.....	5
II. The Church of Vinyl.....	7
III. A Bird of Wide Experience.....	9
IV. Return to Forever.....	10
V. Brokeland.....	12
Characters.....	14
Objects/Places.....	18
Themes.....	21
Style.....	23
Quotes.....	25
Topics for Discussion.....	28



Plot Summary

Telegraph Avenue by Michael Chabon is set in modern times on Telegraph Avenue in Oakland, California. The novel explores the lives of six people who are all interconnected by familial connections, place and time. The novel begins with two scenes that set the tone of the book. The first scene is that of an African-American boy on a bicycle with a white Jewish boy who is standing on a skateboard and has his hand on the rider's shoulder. There is a scene set in 1973 of two men in a Toronado, Luther Stallings and Chandler Flowers, both Black Panthers. Flowers shoots a man at the Bit O' Honey lounge, and Stallings is the getaway driver. Both of these scenes haunt the novel as it moves forward in time.

The novel opens when Gwen Shanks, Archy Stallings's wife, is 36-weeks pregnant. The novel elapses one week in time. Archy and his business partner, Nat Jaffe, are worried about their nostalgic record store in downtown Oakland, because Gibson Goode an ex-professional football player for the Steelers and the fifth richest black person, is going to built a Dogtown Thang just blocks from Brokeland Records. The Dogtown Thang will be a multi-plex movie theater, food court and media store, including a Beats department with a large collection of records. The small businesses along Telegraph Avenue are trying to fight the gentrification to preserve the character of the neighborhood.

City Councilman Chan Flowers has forsaken his violent past as a Black Panther and hopes that all has been forgotten. But when Luther Stallings, Archy's father, blackmails Flowers into giving him money to make a modern blaxploitation film of the 70's, Archy is regrettably involved. Though Councilman Flowers supports Gibson Goode and has approved of the building of the Dogtown Thang, he now has to reconsider with the blackmailing and the involvement of two people who know of the murder committed in the 70's.

Meanwhile, Archy is caught cheating on his wife. Also a son that he never knew he had, shows up in his life, Titus Joyner. His father-figure, Cochise Jones, is killed moving an organ for a gig they were performing. The novel's tension is heightened by both the situation with Luther Stallings and Chan Flowers and the days leading up to the funeral.

Gwen and Aviva, Nat's wife, run the Berkley Birth Partners practice. At a home birth the woman fails to deliver the placenta and the woman is rushed to the hospital. At the hospital the doctor dismisses the midwives and Gwen fights back. The doctor files a complaint against them and their hospital privileges are in jeopardy. The husband of the woman also threatens to sue them.

Julie, Nat and Aviva's son, has become good friends with Titus Joyner, but his love and physical desires for Titus complicate things. Julie has discovered that he is gay and although the boys explore sexual interactions together, Titus continually reminds him that he is not gay, although Julie is. Both boys, at 14, are lost and trying to claw their way out of boyhood.



Although this novel is full of serious issues, danger, and conflict, it ends in a way similar to a Shakespearian comedy with a happy ending and everyone making up, and moving on with their lives happily.



I. Dream of Cream

I. Dream of Cream Summary

In Chapter I, "Dream of Cream," all of the main characters and their surrounding dramas are introduced. Nat Jaffe, who is white and Jewish, and Archy Stallings, who is African-American, co-own a nostalgic record store in Oakland, California on Telegraph Avenue. The novel centers around, initially, the impending doom that a new record store will be opened by Gibson Goode, a wealthy ex-pro-football player will be opened down the street, putting Nat and Archy out of business.

Aviva, Nat's wife, and Gwen, Archy's wife, are also partners. They co-run the Berkley Birth Partners together and are midwives. In this chapter they deliver a baby at a woman's home and the birthing woman does not deliver the placenta. They call an ambulance and she is rushed to the hospital. At the hospital Gwen and the attending OB-GYN get into a fight. She calls him sexist and racist and she refuses to apologize for her behavior. Aviva is upset that Gwen's behavior is going to get them in trouble.

Just before the birth, Gwen, who is also pregnant, catches her husband having lunch with another woman and discovers that he has cheated on her.

Julie, Nat and Aviva's son, has found a new friend whom he's fallen in love with, an African-American boy named Titus, who is essentially an orphan until Julie realizes that Titus is really Archy's son. Julie tells Nat who tells Archy and because Archy is not prepared to tell his wife about this after she has just discovered that he has cheated on her asks if Nat and Aviva will allow Titus to stay with them for a few days.

Valletta Moore, Luther Stallings's girlfriend, finds Archy and tells him that his dad is in trouble and needs money. Archy wants nothing to do with his father.

Also in this chapter, there is a flashback between city councilman Chan Flowers and Archy's father, Luther Stallings, both men were Black Panthers in the 1970's and Luther was a getaway driver for Chan Flowers when he shot Popcorn Hughes.

I. Dream of Cream Analysis

This chapter establishes who each character is and their connection with each other. Though each character is involved in their own isolated drama, the drama inevitably extends to the other character's due to personal and professional relationships. The impending doom is that Gibson Goode's store Dogtown Thang will be approved and ground will be broken within one month. Also, within one month's time, Archy's pregnant wife is due.

Though Archy Stallings wants nothing to do with his father as Valetta Moore begs for help for the both of them, it is not out of malice that he refuses. He feels that his father



was bad father who abandoned him and did nothing but put his security at risk. Ironically, he does the same thing to Titus within the first day of meeting him. He does not deny the boy, but he does say that he will not be telling his wife right away and does not allow the boy, Titus, to come home with him.

Though the Stallings drama seems isolated within the family, the Jaffe's are inevitably affected. Both Nat and Aviva are partners with the respective Stallings and their son Julie has fallen in love with Titus.

This chapter serves as the background for the story. All of the conflicts and dramas have been explained and the rest of the novel is a series of scenes watching the dramas unfold.



II. The Church of Vinyl

II. The Church of Vinyl Summary

Cochise Jones, a dear friend of Archy's, comes to pick up a record player that Archy was fixing. He talks to Archy about the news of Titus. Archy shrugs it off and says that being a sperm donor doesn't make him a father. Cochise Jones leaves angry, but Archy doesn't know why. Later that evening, Nat and Archy, Cochise are performing for a democratic convention. Cochise fails to show up. They soon discover that loading his organ into the truck, it fell back on him and crushed him. Cochise Jones is dead.

The characters are stunned. With the death of Cochise Jones, the owners and customers of Brokeland Records feels that part of Oakland had died too. Nat and Archy plan a funeral at Brokeland Records. Nat also rounds up people to have a meeting to oppose the Dogtown Thang. Councilman Flowers shows up and tells Archy that he is looking for his father, Luther Stallings. Archy tells him he doesn't know where he is and doesn't care.

Meanwhile, Aviva and Gwen go to Chimes Hospital to apologize to Dr. Lazaar. Aviva hopes that if they apologize, Lazaar won't file a complaint with the hospital. Instead, Gwen refuses to apologize and offends him again. Gwen and Aviva argue and when they arrive back at the practice, they learn that Garth Newgrange, the birth woman's husband, plans on suing them. While at their practice, Titus walks in and Aviva breaks it to Gwen that Titus is Archy's son.

Julie and Titus continue to be friends. They have entered into a physical relationship though Titus keeps telling Julie that he is not gay, but will allow the physical intimacy to continue but that it means nothing.

II. The Church of Vinyl Analysis

When Cochise Jones talks to Archy about Titus, Cochise becomes agitated and saddened by the fact that Archy is doing just what his father Luther had done. He is not taking responsibility for the son that he has. He's not being a father. Cochise thinks about the boy that he lost and how he would give anything to be a father to his boy. Archy does not know that this is what Cochise is thinking about, or the fact that Cochise ever had a son.

Ironically, while Cochise is thinking this and aching for a son he's never had. Archy is thinking of Cochise as the closest thing he has ever had to a father figure. When Archy discovers that Cochise has died, he is the most upset and distraught and he puts the most effort into throwing his funeral. He allows the funeral to take up so much of his time and attention, he lets all of the other dramas in his life become less important. His pregnant wife leaves him, he lets his son stay with him and then fights with him. His

relationship with Nat is falling apart because he won't promise Nat that he won't take a job that Gibson Goode has promised him.

Though race has been introduced as a central theme to the story, race issues arise in this chapter. Dr. Lazaar is a white Berkley doctor and Gwen is an African-American woman. As a midwife, she believes that she us fighting sexism, racism, against the white obstetricians at the hospital. As a matter of pride, she refuses to apologize. She thinks that Aviva doesn't understand because she is a white woman.



III. A Bird of Wide Experience

III. A Bird of Wide Experience Summary

In Chapter III, the perspective shifts to that of Fifty-eight, Cochise Jones's parrot. Aisha, a friend of Cochise Jones, is cleaning out his apartment and being afraid of the bird, decides to open the window and set it free. The parrot flies from character to character and watches just for a moment before flying on. The parrot spies Gwen and Aviva arguing about Gwen's needing to apologize to the doctor and Garth Newgrange about the trauma of the home birth. Luther Stallings is plotting his ill-conceived plan to blackmail Chan Flowers and Julie and Nat Jaffe are at home, waiting for Aviva's arrival, the matriarch of the family.

After the parrot visits these characters briefly, allowing the reader of just a glimpse of what they are doing, it flies off to its freedom.

III. A Bird of Wide Experience Analysis

Reading about the character's actions through the bird's perspective is like watching a movie montage, when you can see the characters but cannot hear what they're saying or know what they're thinking. Like the parrot, the reader is simply an observer watching from the outside. This chapter, different in form and perspective than the other chapters, and by far the briefest, works to connect all of the characters in the book. Though the character's connections have already been illustrated thus far through friendships and familial ties, what this chapter serves as is a reminder that though the characters seem disconnected in feelings, despite their relationships with each other, all they really want is the same thing. It is their universal humanity that bonds them together and to their community and connections; along with the desire to feel loved; successful at one's work; and happy. These are all things that a bird would not understand.

The bird reaches his freedom when he flies away from the humans that he has spent his life watching. This is suggestive that also for the characters to be truly free, they must leave Telegraph Avenue and the bonds, which also act as shackles, that bind them there. This is a crucial tipping point in the novel. Like the parrot, Fifty-Eight, the characters can continue to spin and oscillate away from each other, or they can begin to heal and come toward each other.



IV. Return to Forever

IV. Return to Forever Summary

Gwen is staying with Mrs. Jew, her kung fu master. Gwen is miserable and uncomfortable and decides early in the morning to sneak back into her house to steal her pillow. Once she gets there she is confronted with a huge mess. Julie and Titus are passed out in front of the TV with food containers everywhere and they have rented Luther Stalliing old movies. Gwen does not grab her pillow and leaves after a brief confrontation with Titus.

Archy wakes up to the mess in his house and the realization that Gwen was there and also saw the mess. He yells at Titus and Julie and is especially upset by the fact that the boys have rented his father's old movies. Titus tries to hit Archy but misses and cuts himself on a disc.

Titus and Julie leave the Stallings house with a plan to gather up as much money as they can and run away. Titus wants to meet Tarantino and show him the screenplays that he's been writing. While Julie and Titus are secretly dropping off Gwen's body pillow, out of sympathy, they run into Valetta Moore. They know that if they follow her they will find Luther Stallings, Titus's grandfather. They hail a taxi and follow the old Toronado to a mechanic's garage.

Luther meets his grandson and seems emotional at the idea. He is also flattered that the boys are so interested in him. Luther tells them about his plan to make one last movie and re-release the others. Archy shows up at the garage because the taxi driver's business is on Telegraph Avenue and the driver recognizes Julie. Archy takes the boys home.

Everyone prepares for Cochise Jone's funeral. And for this event there seems to be an unspoken truth. The boys help set up and clean the record store. Nat and Archie momentarily quit arguing, even Gwen attends. Archy gives a long emotional eulogy and eventually has to stop because he is so overwhelmed with emotion.

IV. Return to Forever Analysis

This section is a turning point for Gwen Shanks. She realizes that she deserves to be comfortable and wants her house back. After sneaking in, she decides that she'll claim it after the funeral and kick out Archy. She also realizes that she is sick of feeling like a second-class citizen compared to doctors. Though she supports the practice of midwifery, she feels she won't be able to really affect change unless she is sitting on the other side of the table.

When Gwen confronts Titus at her house. She realizes that she is caring Titus's brother. With this, they force a connection. Both of them have been abandoned by Archy.

There is one scene in Chapter IV that breaks with the form of the rest of the chapter. One scene is written like a script from a blaxploitation action film. It is the scene where Julie and Titus plan to run away. Once they are caught by Aviva, the magic ends and the narration resumes as usual.

Archy's problems are piling up, but until after Cochise Jone's funeral, he refuses to deal with any of them. But what he doesn't realize is that inaction is in itself action. His wife, business partner and friend, father and enemies are tiring of Archy's immaturity. Archy's plan is to grow up and change his life—as soon as the funeral is behind him.



V. Brokeland

V. Brokeland Summary

In the final chapter of *Telegraph Avenue*, dramas are resolved and everyone goes back to living happily ever after. Chapter V begins the morning after the funeral. Much happens the evening after the funeral and everyone seems to wake up the morning after ready to move on with their lives.

Archy cheats on Gwen again with her lesbian employee, Kai. Nat gets drunk, crashes his car, and lets Gibson Goode's blimp free.

Meanwhile, the boys Titus and Julie decide that they want to help Luther Stallings. They follow Valetta Moore again and end up at an apartment complex. What they don't realize is that Chan Flowers's nephews are following them. The nephews bust in and kidnap Luther and Valetta and the boys run free.

Archy calls Nat to go pick them up. Nat, Aviva, and Gwen are sitting at the kitchen table talking about the events of the evening before. The police call for Nat, and Gwen tells Aviva that she is leaving the practice. A woman goes into labor and Aviva must deliver the baby on her own, Gwen drives Nat to pick up the boys.

During their drive, Nat explains his car accident and the situation with the blimp to Gwen. For the first time, he realizes that he may be arrested. When they reach the boys, they look distraught, and Titus runs away. Julie wants to go after him but neither Gwen nor Nat allow it.

Archy goes to Chan Flowers funeral home and demands that he be allowed to see his father. Chan and Luther talk about how what happened in the past needs to stay in the past. Though there seems to be imminent danger for Luther Stallings, once Archy arrives Chan Flowers seems to soften. They make a deal, which is Archy denying anything ever happens if his father tries to go the police. Chan trusts Archy and calls him a good man.

Gwen goes into labor and all she wants is Aviva, but Aviva is delivering another baby. Julie finds Titus to tell him his son is being born. The attending doctor at the hospital is Dr. Lazaar and Gwen will not allow him anywhere near her. Nat ends up delivering the baby.

After the baby is born, Gwen applies for medical school. Archy, Luther and Gwen live in their house with the new baby and Archy becomes a real estate agent. Aviva continues her practice and Nat begins to sell records online, rather than at a storefront. All ends well and everyone is happy, except for Luther Stallings, who is in the same place at the end as he was at the beginning.



V. Brokeland Analysis

Everything is tied together with comedic effect in this last chapter. Though there are many serious issues throughout the book, it still has the absurd comedic effect of a Tarantino movie. Though the majority of the book spans one week, the last scene jumps forward a few months so that the reader can see what the characters have learned from the dramas of the previous week.

Archy fails his wife many times, he fails his son, yet the other characters still hold him in high esteem. Though he may be doing things that are hurtful and selfish, people are still treating him like he is a good person. The character may doubt his ability to change after Cochise Jone's funeral, but he takes action by quitting his job and becoming a real estate agent.

Gwen also takes control of her life and though she leaves Aviva to go to medical school, but the two still remain friends.

Now, it is the end of summer and Titus and Julie are preparing to go back to school. Their relationship has changed, but they still remain friends. Julie, has begun cross dressing and is still discovering who he really is.

The final chapter ties together any loose ends so that the reader, like in a Shakespeare play, know that all has ended well.



Characters

Nat Jaffe

Nat Jaffe is one of the protagonists in the novel. He is a Caucasian Jewish man who co-owns Brokeland Records with Archy Stallings. Nat tries to be a good father and husband. Unlike, Archy Stallings, Nat is extremely faithful in his relationships. When Archy does not deny or confirm whether he is taking the Dogtown Thang job, Nat likens it to breaking up. The end of Brokeland Records is devastating for Nat.

Nat is emotional and temperamental, even though he is extremely loyal. He throws fits and yells at people and has also been known to get in a fistfight or two. After Cochise Jone's funeral, Nat gets drunk, crashes his car and releases his nemesis's blimp into the sky. He does it as a childish prank, but when he considers that the blimp may fall from the sky and hurt someone innocent, the thought sickens him.

It is in chapter four, when the police are looking for him and Archy calls him to go pick up Titus and Julie, that his true character is revealed. Nat's life is falling apart, but when he sees his son Julie who is upset because his tape player broke, Nat comforts him like the tape player is the most important thing in the world.

Archy Stallings

Archy Stallings is the co-owner of Brokeland Records with Nat Jaffe. Archy is African-American, short and rotund. He likes to wear leisure suits and is confident in who he is. Though many characters attest to the quality of what his person, Archy does much to betray his wife and son. With a son on the way, Archy knows that he needs to pull himself together, lest he turn out the way his father did. And for Archy Stallings's character, this is the irony, he hates his father but up until nearly the end of the book, he acts like the father he despises.

Though events leading up to the ending of the book read as if there's no hope for Archy's character, he does change. He changes to be a better husband and a better father to his sons. In return, he forgives his father and becomes a better son, though he still does not want a personal relationship with his father. Through his own trials, he realizes that he and his father are not so different than he thinks, and that being a father isn't as easy as he thought it was. He knows he needs to show up for the important people in his life and he does just that.

Gwen Shanks

Gwen Shanks is Archy Stallings wife and Aviva Roth-Jaffe's business partner at Berkley Birth Partners. She is a midwife and 37 weeks pregnant. In Chapter I, Gwen's life begins to crumble around her. She finds that Archy has been cheating on her, she



makes a mistake at a birth and then gets in a fight with a doctor at the hospital and she learns that her husband has a 14-year-old son that he has neglected to tell her about.

For the following two chapters, she survives and realizes that her life should be about more than just survival. She decides that she will live in her house and kicks Archy out. She also decides that she's not going to apologize to the doctor that harasses her after the birth and that she wants to be a doctor. She realizes that though black midwives have been delivering babies for hundreds of years, in Berkley it is liberal white woman who can afford the best healthcare who seek out homebirths. She feels that to really affect change, she must become one of her enemies as a midwife.

Though it seems that there is no possible way that she would take Archy back, she does. Chabon does not show how this was resolved, but flashes forward to her preparing for medical school and living happily-ever-after with her family.

Aviva Roth-Jaffe

Aviva Roth-Jaffe is Nat's wife and work partners with Gwen Shanks. She is known as the Alice Waters of home births. Gwen feels that Aviva can silence herself though she's disrespected by doctors because she is a white woman. Aviva always appears to be calm and in control. Though she is one of the main characters in the novel, her perspective reveals little beyond what the other characters observe.

She is progressive, yet conservative in her personal life. She's been married for many years to Nat and has a son named Julie. She does not go through a transformation like other protagonists.

Julie Jaffe

Julie Jaffe is Nat and Aviva's 14-year-old son. He is skinny and awkward looking with a penchant for music and blaxploitation movies. He looks up to his father and Archy Stallings. Julie is struggling to define his sexuality and when he meets Titus, he falls in love with him.

Though Julie is coming-of-age, there are still many moments when he is just a boy. For example, when his tape recorder broke. He is upset and distraught, just as a small child would be. In the end of the novel, Julie changes by embracing who he is. He never denied it, but in the end he is cross dressing and fully embracing the fact that he is different.

Titus Joyner

Titus Joyner is Archy Stalling's 14-year-old son from Texas. Titus has been orphaned, that is, until he claims a father in Archy Stallings. Titus is quiet and looks much older



than his fourteen years. He wants nothing more than to have a family, though he tends to push people away.

He wants his father to love him, and for his father to love his father. He wants to live a happy life as a family and doesn't understand why everyone around him keeps messing that up. He looks at his family with a gratitude that they don't have for each other. He has this perspective because he came from nothing and then his mother died.

Though he enters into a consensual physical relationship with Julie Jaffe, he insists that he is not a homosexual.

Cochise Jones

Cochise Jones was a famous organist from the 1970's. He lived in Oakland, California and was a frequent customer of Brokeland Records. When he died, the businesses and patrons along Telegraph Avenue celebrated his life and remembered him as an important figure. Archy Stallings thought of Cochise Jones as a father figure. He died loading his organ for a gig that he was going to play at a democratic convention.

Chan Flowers

Chan Flowers used to be good friends and was an active member of the Black Panthers. In 1973, he shot Popcorn Hughes, who later died from a complication from the gunshot wound. Flowers reforms and becomes a prominent figure in the community as the owner of the funeral home and a city councilman. Chan Flowers is being blackmailed, for money, by Luther Stallings. He only takes Stallings somewhat seriously, but at the end of the novel reaches his breaking point.

Luther Stallings

Luther Stallings is Archy Stallings father. In the 1970's he was a star in blaxploitation kung fu movies. He has been in and out of prison since then and in and out of rehab. Archy wants nothing to do with him. He enters Archy's life again when he is seeking help raising funds for a new movie. Stallings blackmails Chan Flowers for money. Archy has to bail him out of his trouble with Chan Flowers.

Valetta Moore

Valetta Moore is Luther Stallings on-again off-again girlfriend. She was his leading actress from many of his films in the 1970's.



Dr. Lazaar

Dr. Lazaar is the attending physician at Chimes Hospital that Gwen Shanks gets into an altercation with.

Garth Newgrange

Garth Newgrange threatens to sue Aviva and Gwen after his wife's home birth goes awry and she must be rushed to the emergency room.

Mrs. Jew

Mrs. Jew is the kung fu master of Luther Stallings, Archy and then later Gwen Shanks. She acts as a voice of reason and calm for many of the characters.



Objects/Places

Bit O' Honey Lounge

The Bit O'Honey Lounge is where Chan Flowers shoots Popcorn Hughes while wearing the children's Batman glove.

Kung fu

Kung fu serves as a motif of the novel. All of the characters are touched by kung fu somehow being in their lives.

Brokeland Records

Brokeland Records is the nostalgic vinyl record store that is co-owned by Nat Jaffe and Archy Stallings.

Telegraph Avenue

Telegraph Avenue is the city in Oakland, California where Brokeland Records is located.

Oakland

The novel is in Oakland, California.

Berkley

Berkley and its gentrification is encroaching on the character of the businesses in Oakland.

Race

Race is a major theme in the novel Telegraph Avenue.

Midwifery

Midwifery is practiced by Gwen Shanks and Aviva Jaffe. I



Batman glove

The Batman glove is worn by Chan Flowers during a murder in 1973. Chan is later blackmailed by Luther Stallings — who has kept the glove.

Fifty-Eight

Fifty-Eight is Cochise Jone's parrot. Chapter III is written from the perspective of the bird.

Toronado

The Toronado is the getaway car that Luther Stallings was driving when Chan Flowers shot Popcorn Hughes. Later in the novel, the Toronado still runs and is still driven by Luther Stallings, but has become downtrodden and decrepit.

Dogtown Thang

The Dogtown Thang is the proposed complex that is to be built in Oakland, just blocks away from Brokeland Records.

Zeppelin

The zeppelin is what Gibson Goode uses to wine and dine his prospective employees and business partner. Nat Jaffe releases it after Cochise Jone's funeral.

Suff

Suff is a sweet drink that is made from the milk of sesame seeds. Gwen craves it during her pregnancy.

Music

Like kung fu and Tarantino films, music is an obsession among the male characters.

Tarantino Films

The movie director Quentin Tarantino is a motif throughout Telegraph Avenue. Many of the characters strive to bring back the popular movie type—Blaxploitation films—from the 1970's. The characters believe that if they pitched their ideas to Tarantino, then they will be successful.

Chimes Hospital

Chimes Hospital is wear Gwen and Aviva may lose their hospital privileges.

Themes

Race

Race relations among the inhabitants of Telegraph Avenue is a central theme to the book. Chabon addresses the issues of race obliquely—during intimate conversations, fleeting impressions and thoughts. Much of the major conflicts is not caused by race relations, but the people's reactions and response may be influenced thus.

The six protagonists comprise of a white family and a black family. Education and upbringing vary throughout the six characters. None of the characters initially think race is an issue until they enter into conflicts together, and they wonder if their partners react to the world differently based on their personal outlook.

One of the only characters who deals with race directly is Gwen Shanks when Dr. Lazaar calls her hair nappy. Not only does she accuse him of being racist, but she refuses to apologize to him later about her behavior. She has an epiphany, realizing that no matter how progressive and liberal the white doctors are at the hospital, a black midwife will never win against them. From this she decides to be a physician herself, feeling that this is the only way she that can make it. Gwen believes that Aviva does not feel the same angst because she is white.

The other major conflicts in the story are often not between opposite races. For instance, the tension with Gibson Goode gentrifying Telegraph Avenue by building an elaborate complex complete with a record store that will most likely put Archy and Nat out of business.

Nostalgia

One of the central themes of Telegraph Avenue is that of nostalgia. The novel's tension occurs early, beginning with the threat of a Dogtown Thang being built and gentrifying the neighborhood. Nat and Archy are worried about their nostalgic vinyl record store going out of business.

Likewise, others in the community do believe that the Dogtown Thang will bring commerce and jobs to the area, but that it will inevitably change the character and history of the neighborhood. Ironically, all of the characters want to leave their personal histories behind but not their physical histories. Once Cochise Jones dies, the protagonists seem more willing to change despite the nostalgic surroundings that keep them grounded in one place.

Motifs within the novel that support the theme of nostalgia are: kung fu and blaxploitation movies, records, vintage instruments, leisure suits, and jazz and funk music.



Coming of Age

One subplot in the novel is that of Titus and Julie's relationship. Both boys are fourteen and both boys are figuring out how to leave boyhood behind and become a man. Julie, Nat and Aviva's son, has grown up in a liberal household eating tempeh and being told to express himself. He had grown up sheltered and enjoyed the fortune of a safe and healthy home and family.

Julie befriends Titus during a film class and meets a boy that is nearly his opposite. Titus, an orphaned African-American boy, who is tall and quiet and masculine in appearance, has grown up in chaos not having a sound support network.

Julie and Titus become friends but it quickly turns into something else. Julie realizes that he is gay and develops a crush on Titus. They enter into a physical relationship, but Titus allows but states that he is not gay.

Each boy is desperately trying to find his place in the world and as the novel moves forward in time, the boys' actions oscillate between childish antics and being forced to deal with life's injustices.

In Chapter IV, when Nat picks up Julie, after all they have been through, Julie looks as if he is going to cry because his tape player broke. And in that moment, Julie is still just a boy who needs his father.

Style

Point of View

The chapters are divided into different sections by extra spaces and with the extra space, the reader is notified that the perspective is changing. The story is told in the third-person point of view, with alternating perspectives. The story will follow one character's perspective during part of a story and then there will be a page break or extra physical spacing and the following scene will be in the perspective of a different character.

Characters whose perspective's are included in the novel: Gwen, Aviva, Nat, Archy, Luther, Valetta, Aisha, Titus, and Julie.

Setting

The novel is set in 2004 in Oakland, California. Gibson Goode, the fifth richest black man in America and ex-pro-football player, plans on building a multiplex complex which will feature a record store, possibly putting partners Nat and Archy out of business.

For the characters, Telegraph Avenue, a busy commercial street in Oakland, represents the character of the neighborhood that many of the characters have grown up in. Though Goode is a black man, many of the other African-American characters still see the new complex as gentrification of the neighborhood. They come together to fight Goode and preserve Brokeland Records, a place of business that has forged a community on Telegraph Avenue.

Briefly, the story flashes back to scenes from the 1970's, when Chan Flowers and Archy Stallings were Black Panthers. The physical objects and settings in this scene still exist in modern times, though the Bit O' Honey lounge goes out of business in 2004, which is an omen for the owners of Brokeland.

Language and Meaning

Chabon uses many complicated words that have derived in the last ten years from contemporary technology.

Nearly all of the characters speak with a highly intelligent vocabulary and are able to analyze movies and music. The novel includes jargon that terms that describe and explain blaxploitation movies as well as funk and jazz music.

Based on language, meaning and content, Telegraph Avenue is an adult novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into five chapters and each chapter is divided, by a shift in perspective and physical spacing on the page, multiple times. From the beginning to the end, a one week elapses. This is marked by Gwen's pregnancy.

Within each chapter, scenes are written, as in a Tarantino film, and often with each new scene is a new perspectives, though it is the same cast of character's perspectives repeated over and over. This gives the reader a sense of the plot being braided together. Chabon allows for the reader to sympathize with many of the characters because the reader has had the perspective from each of the main character's point of view.

The form breaks briefly in Chapter III when Fifty-Eight, a parrot, flies outside the characters windows and the reader simply observes what is happening with no internal perspectives. In this chapter it is like the reader is seeing the character as they see each other, from an outsider's perspective.



Quotes

"You never would get through to the end of being a father, no matter where you stored your mind or how many steps in the series you followed. Not even if you died" (Chapter 1, p.10).

"Fathering imposed an obligation that was more than your money, your body, or your time, a presence neither physical nor measurable by clocks: open-ended, eternal, and invisible, like the commitment of gravity to the stars" (Chapter 1, p. 10).

"Their value was indexed only to the sense of personal completeness, perfection of the soul, that would flood you when, at last, you filled the last gap on your checklist." (Chapter 1, p. 20).

"Mr. Jones was also, as far as Archy knew, the first person to use the term Brokeland to describe this neighborhood, the ragged fault where the urban plates of Berkeley and Oakland subducted. "Hello, Fifty-Eight" (Chapter 1, p. 35).

"Then he strapped himself into his escape machine, and headed for the Nimitz Freeway, San Jose, Los Angeles: the world and the fortune that awaited him" (Chapter 1, p. 80).

""Tarantino himself has often argued that his movies should be situated in the context of the big-screen musical, with the outbursts of violence serving the same structural narrative function as the musical numbers," Peter Van Eder said" (Chapter 1, p. 97).

"When you chose to pledge your share of labor and your worldly assets to partnership with a man who liked to get up on his high horse, make speeches, let it rip, it was probably because you knew that somebody had to do that from time to time, and it wasn't going to be you. 'This store is our world'" (Chapter 1, p.117).

"He resolved on the spot to be equal to the challenge of bearing up. He was a husband who could be true. He was Superman grabbing hold of the train engine as it plunged from the bridge" (Chapter 1, p.122).

"Everything was manifestly all right. And yet something continued to rankle at Mr. Jones, like a sour finger of acid in the windpipe, a failure that loomed ahead of or lay behind both Archy and himself" (Chapter 2, p.130).

"Her apology was, as apologies so often are, fighting words. She was sorry only that she was not sorry at all" (Chapter 2, p.143).

"Because since yesterday Archy had been trying to resume his former state of happy ignorance and think as little as possible about the child he already had" (Chapter 2, p.154).



"Because in ten years or more, Archy had never thought of the boy, not once, a habit of oblivion that continued even now, with the kid back and smacking up against the outside of their life like a moth banging against a lampshade" (Chapter 2, p.154).

"A neighborhood in a city that was largely black and poor and hungry for the kind of pride-instilling economic gesture that the construction of a Dogpile Thang represented, however gestural and beneficial only to Our Beloved Corporate Overlords it might turn out to be - this motley gathering of freaky Caucasians united, to hazard a guess, only by a reflexive willingness if not a compulsion to oppose pretty much anything new that came along, especially if it promised to be big and bright and bangin; in the process, creating and abandoning an unholy mess in his own kitchen, a mess that, his rapidly cycling brain chemistry began to whisper to him, was probably a metaphor, a prophecy of how this whole thing was going to turn out; hoping to forestall this realization, Nat sought explanation for Archy's evident dismay in the picture frame. Archy had used it to mount the sleeve of his cherished copy of Redbonin', with its starkly lit, extreme close-up Pete Turner photograph of" (Chapter 2, p. 198).

"Nat already dreaming of opening his own store, lacking only half the cash, half the records, and half the foolishness necessary for the undertaking" (Chapter 2, p. 229).

"I'm not going to blame nobody, and I don't know what the reason is, because I haven't studied it, and like with everything misfortunate in life, I bet there's ten, twelve reasons for musical civilization getting wiped out by this here particular firestorm, what's he call it in the book" (Chapter 2, p. 230).

"...your museum, there, maybe sell one every now and then for some white dentist or tax attorney to take home and hang on his wall. I'm offering you, I'm saying, come on, let's really put them out there where the kids are, where the future's spending its money. Teach them. Explain what all those broken-up old pieces mean, why it's all important. Then maybe one of those kids, maybe he's going to come along, learn what you have to teach" (Chapter 2, p. 231).

"They were little more than boys, and yet while they differed in race, in temperament, and in their understanding of love, they were united in this: The remnant of their boyhood was a ballast they wished to cut away. And still boyhood operated on their minds, retaining all its former power to confound wishes with plans" (Chapter 4, p. 280).

"Mr. George Pullman, houses in which they built up families that sent children and grandchildren to college and trade school and eventually to the United States Congress, then getting back onto the trains in the morning to ride south and east, spreading the news of their own prosperity, so that by the time World War II blew up, Oakland was the Hollywood of middle-class black aspiration, except that unlike in Hollywood, once you got to Oakland, you actually stood a chance of making good" (Chapter 4, p. 316).

"Thus, feeling something very close to fly, and doing what she had to do, Gwen went to see about taking back her house" (Chapter 4, p. 333).



"She laughed, happy to see him irritable again. She let go of every part of him except for his hand, which she squeezed between both of hers until their wedding rings clinked like flint and steel or a pair of champagne flutes. "You'll be all right" (Chapter 4, p. 364).

"She tried to imagine it as a place that would feel congenial to a man who not only dressed the way Mr. Jones dressed but also understood, according to the fluty-voiced old Marxist librarian, the interactions of base and superstructure, the way ultimately, class struggle underpinned all the racism in America" (Chapter 4, p. 367).

"If you were trying to pass as white, the thing was always to keep your distance from your darker relatives, but if you were a white guy living along the edge of blackness all your life, the worst thing was somebody around you trying to do the same" (Chapter 4, p. 369).

"'It's Too Late' was about Cochise Jones. Lying useless in his casket. Sitting at the bedside of his wife when she had lain dying. The song was about the people gathered here who might never have had the chance to meet Mr. Jones, and those who might have spoken differently, said more, the last time they saw him, had they known. It was about Titus growing up with no father, and Aviva trying to hold on to her one and only baby, and the dream of Brokeland Records. It was about some large percentage of the aggregate wishes, plans, and ambitions espoused by the people gathered here today" (Chapter 4, p. 371).

"Like so many kinds of masculine loyalty, it was really only a manifestation of cowardice" (Chapter 5, p. 393).

"Empty cans, empty bottles, empty store, empty night, Nat's empty life lived fruitlessly and in vain" (Chapter 5, p. 412).

"'Pop, I broke my tape player,' Julie said" (Chapter 5, p. 420).

"For all the loneliness and anger, for all the stupidity and shame, for all the pain that losing Archy, the store, the vision that Brokeland had always - exactly like Archy said in his eulogy— represented to Nat, with a warrant out for his arrest on a charge of zeppelin rustling, and the possible destruction of the Bay Bridge or, who knew, the Sphinx, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, on his conscience; right then, with his little boy restored sobbing to his embrace, it honestly did feel okay" (Chapter 5, p. 420).

"The merchandise was not the thing, and neither, for that matter, was the nostalgia. It was all about the neighborhood, that space where common sorrow could be drowned in common passion as the talk grew ever more scholarly and wild" (Chapter 5, p. 465).



Topics for Discussion

Why is the title of the novel Telegraph Avenue and not Brokeland Records? How is Telegraph Avenue more appropriate?

Which characters are round and dynamic characters? Which characters are flat and which ones are one-dimensional?

What role does race play in the novel?

Is this novel a tragedy or comedy?

Which character changes the most? What is their catalyst?

Describe the role of the kung fu motif that is woven throughout the text. How does this link all of the characters?

In Chapter IV, why is it surprising that after all Julie has been through in the book that he is most upset about his tape player breaking? What does this suggest about his character? What does Nat's response to his son suggest about Nat's character?

What was the climax of the novel? What changes did it set in motion?

Why was it so difficult for Gwen to say "I'm sorry" to both Dr.Lazaar and the Garth Newgrange? Why does she finally say it to Garth in the end?

What does Cochise Jones represent?

How is the novel cinematic? How does the form of the novel reflect cinema and a the motif of Tarantino's films?

How are Archy and Nat foil characters?

How are Gwen and Aviva foil characters?

How does Mrs. Jew act as the voice of reason for the characters? How is her studio a place of refuge?