



SINK



READING GROUP GUIDE

1. *Sink* opens with the line: "Of all the protagonists in this story - both real and imagined - just Joey, the boy, owned an Easy Bake Oven." This is one example of the shaky borders between real and fantastical in Joey's retelling of events. In what ways do moments of fantasy help or hurt Joey?
2. How would you describe Joey's self-image at the beginning of the book? How would you describe it at the end? How have his family members, friends, tormentors, and even his pets contributed to his view of himself at various stages?
3. With visceral descriptions of an apartment with roaches, but no doors, and a Philadelphia neighborhood with people, but few friends, the setting of *Sink* can be unforgiving. As outsiders, or those who grew up under different circumstances than Joey, it's easy to forget that there's joy to be found in these places as well. What are some moments in which Thomas submerges us in that joy?
4. After a brutal beating from Popop, which followed a traumatic event at Joey's school, *Sink* cuts to an interlude: "Things aren't exactly looking up for our heroes, folks... What will they do? What will the boy do with them?... Find out next time, on *Dragon Ball Z*." The "Find Out Next Time" trope is popular with episodic TV and anime, which Joey consumes regularly. Why does Thomas introduce the interlude here? How does it affect the resolution you're anticipating to Joey's story at this point in the book?
5. How does Thomas approach the concept of childhood in *Sink*? Between Tia, Joey, Mika, and Julian, who is or isn't allowed to experience certain aspects of childhood? What is the boundary between childhood and adulthood? How might that boundary be blurred?





6. Joey is criticized for his perceived lack of manhood throughout this memoir, by none more aggressively than Popop. According to Popop's worldview, what makes a man? In what ways does Joey accept or reject these expectations of manhood?
7. The protagonist of *Sink* is male, but some of the boldest characters and voices (Tia, Erica, Dotty) are female. In the face of toxic masculinity displayed by many of the male characters (Popop, Kevin, even Joey himself) how does the author manage to express the strength and individuality of female characters?
8. Of the many characters in *Sink*, who is or isn't deserving of our sympathy? Joey, for example, is the victim of multiple acts of violence and abuse, but later confronts his own capacity to inflict violence and abuse onto others. Does Joey's fallibility diminish our sympathy for him? What about characters like Popop, Ganny, and Keisha? To what lengths are you willing to extend your sympathies?
9. Central to Joey's understanding of himself and those around him is his understanding of Black identity and the experience of being Black in America. How does Joey understand his own Blackness, and what shapes his perception? In what ways is he forced to confront the implicit biases, microaggressions, and outright racism of the world at-large?
10. After moving in with Dotty, Joey is tasked with multiple chores, one of which being the cleaning of the sink. "There was something in him, some filth that could not be scraped clean, no matter how hard and how long he might attempt excavation. The sink seemed to embody this conundrum..." How does this metaphor of the sink apply to the narrative as a whole? How might it have influenced the title?
11. *Sink* takes place between the late 90s and the early 2000s. On both a small and large scale, how does that era shape and inform the story being told? In what ways is the temporal setting meaningful or meaningless?
12. Why do you think the author has chosen to end the narrative where he does? Does the book end on a sad or hopeful note? What sort of future do you envision for Joey?

