

Reader's Guide for

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky

By Heidi W. Durrow

Introduction

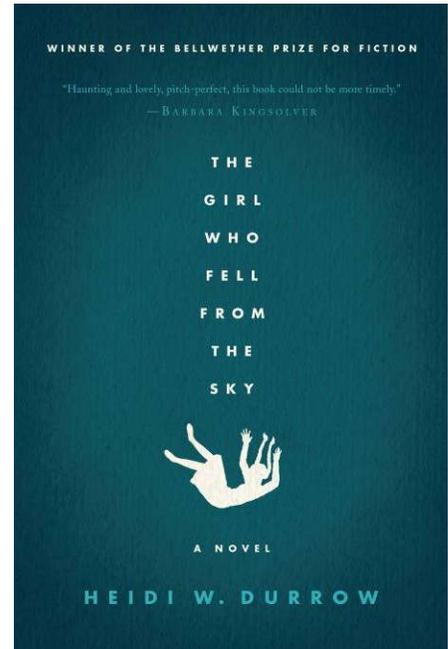
This debut novel tells the story of Rachel, the daughter of a Danish mother and a black G.I. who becomes the sole survivor of a family tragedy.

With her strict African American grandmother as her new guardian, Rachel moves to a mostly black community, where her light brown skin, blue eyes, and beauty bring mixed attention her way. Growing up in the 1980s, she learns to swallow her overwhelming grief and confronts her identity as a biracial young woman in a world that wants to see her as either black or white.

Meanwhile, a mystery unfolds, revealing the terrible truth about Rachel's last morning on a Chicago rooftop. Interwoven are the voices of Jamie, a neighborhood boy who witnessed the events, and Laronne, a friend of Rachel's mother. Inspired by a true story of a mother's twisted love, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* reveals an unfathomable past and explores issues of identity at a time when many people are asking "Must race confine us and define us?"



In the tradition of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, here is a portrait of a young girl--and society's ideas of race, class, and beauty. It is a winner of the *Bellwether Prize*, established by writer Barbara Kingsolver, for best fiction manuscript addressing issues of social justice.



Discussion Questions

1. What is Rachel's central dilemma?
2. What prevented Nella from returning to her family in Denmark?

3. Why does Brick become fascinated with Rachel? What does he ultimately hope for his relationship with her?
4. How do you make sense of Roger's absence from his daughter's life?
5. Why does Rachel develop such a strong bond with Aunt Loretta?
6. Grandma is a church-going woman. But what is most important to her about her religion? What does she want Rachel to value about religion?
7. What does Rachel make of being told she's beautiful?
8. "Grandma's dreams come from hearing about Up North when she was growing up in Texas on a farm, on a road that had no name. Grandma's dream is bigger than her life. I guess at Mor's dreams; having a husband, a family, love. That's the way I would list them. But then I think about it again—her dream maybe was feeling the way she felt with Doug—the way she would smile easy; she would laugh easy; she would play. At least at first. Then the sky in her dream got low too." How would you describe Grandma's dreams? Nella's? Rachel's?
9. If Rachel had a theme song, what would it be?
10. What difference, if any, does it make knowing that the book is inspired by a real event?
11. Do you think that in the age of Obama, biracial/bicultural people will continue to experience the same kinds of stereotypes and stigma that Rachel did?

About Heidi W. Durrow



Heidi W. Durrow is a graduate of *Stanford, Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism* and *Yale Law School*. She is the recipient of a *Fellowship in Fiction* from the *New York Foundation for the Arts*, a *Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Emerging Writers*, a *Jentel Foundation Residency*, and won top honors in the *Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition* and the *Chapter One Fiction Contest*. She has received grants from the *Elizabeth George Foundation*, the *American Scandinavian Foundation*, the *Roth Endowment* and the *American Antiquarian Society*. Originally from Portland, Oregon, Heidi has worked as a corporate litigator at *Cravath, Swaine*

& Moore, and as a consultant to the *National Football League* and *National Basketball Association*. She is the co-host of the award-winning weekly podcast *Mixed Chicks Chat*, and co-founder of the *Mixed Roots Film & Literary Festival*. Her writing has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Callaloo*, and *Essence*.

For more information about *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky*, please visit www.heidiwdurrow.com. Book clubs and reading groups interested in having Heidi W. Durrow join you for a discussion (in person or via conference call) please email heidi@heidiwdurrow.com with "Book Club" in the subject line.