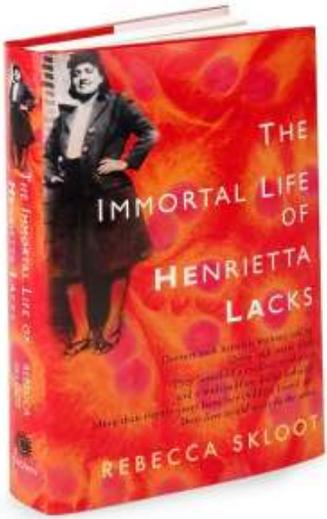


The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

by Rebecca Skloot

Book Club Questions

1. What did you know/think about Henrietta Lacks before reading the book? What did you learn while reading? Did anything you read change your previous opinions?
2. In your opinion, what were the most interesting parts of the book?
3. What was a specific passage that struck you personally—as interesting, profound, funny, incomprehensible, or illuminating?
4. Consider Deborah’s comment on page 276: “Like I’m always telling my brothers, if you gonna go into history, you can’t do it with a hate attitude. You got to remember, times was different.” Is it possible to approach history from an objective point of view? If so, how and why is this important, especially in the context of Henrietta’s story?
5. What did you learn about the time periods discussed in the book?
6. How was the book structured? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book?
7. Did any parts of the book make you uncomfortable? If so, why did you feel that way?
8. Deborah says, “But I always have thought it was strange, if our mother cells done so much for medicine, how come her family can’t afford to see no doctors? Don’t make no sense” (page 9). Should the family be financially compensated for the HeLa cells? How would you respond if you were in their situation?
9. Religious faith and scientific understanding play important roles in the lives of the Lacks family. How does religious faith help frame the Lacks family’s response to and interpretation of the scientific information they receive about HeLa? How does Skloot’s attitude toward religious faith and science evolve as a result of her relationship with the Lackses? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book as a whole? How about the subject?
10. Reflect upon Henrietta’s life: What challenges did she and her family face? What do you think their greatest strengths were? How did she face death? What do you think that says about the type of person she was?
11. Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend?



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Additional Resources

1. **Radiolab segment** about the book, featuring an interview with Deborah Lacks and the author: <http://www.radiolab.org/story/91716-henriettas-tumor/>
2. **Timeline of events** detailed in the book:
http://rebeccaskloot.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/HenriettaLacks_RGG_timeline.pdf
3. **Slide show of photos** related to Henrietta's life and to the book:
<http://rebeccaskloot.com/the-immortal-life/book-special-features/#photos>