



# WHITE BLOOD

KIKI PETROSINO

READER'S GUIDE

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. A double sonnet crown, like my poem "Happiness," is a sequence of fifteen linked sonnets. How do the repeated lines at the beginnings and endings of each sonnet contribute to, and advance, the overall emotional impact of the whole sequence?
2. How would you define the concept of "Happiness" as presented by the poems in the long sequence? What kinds of happiness are possible (or perhaps impossible) in this poem?
3. How do you think the epigraph, taken from Lucille Clifton's "Message from the Ones," connects to the themes of this book? Who, or what, is "watching" the poet?
4. Many of the poems in "Albemarle" contemplate the material objects within, and the physical space surrounding, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. To what extent do Jefferson's "things" stand in for Jefferson himself--his beliefs, values, and what he symbolizes in our present time? What other historical figures occupy this same sort of monumental symbolism, and what do you believe they all have in common?
5. In writing the poems for this book, I was alternately inspired and baffled by the experience of being a tourist (especially a tourist of color) at famous historical sites like Monticello. How is the touristic encounter an interesting position from which to write a poem about a place?
6. Do you think it's possible for time travel to happen in a poem?
7. I wrote the sequence of erasure poems, "What Your Results Mean," after taking a DNA test to determine my ethnic admixture. What can be special, but also problematic, about the language surrounding these sorts of "tests?"
8. I wrote the poems in "Louisa" about the small rural county where many of my African American ancestors lived as enslaved and free people. I have never lived there myself, but the place possesses legendary importance in my family folklore. How can it be powerful to write about a place you know, but have never lived?
9. This book begins with a dream-like "Prelude" and ends with a psalm, or song, as an "Interlude." How do you think these poems connect with notions of music?



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Natalie Wollenzien / Publishing Assistant / [assistant@sarabandebooks.org](mailto:assistant@sarabandebooks.org) / 502-458-4028

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10. I wrote the poem “Psalm” in honor of the victims of a mass shooting in Louisville. Up to this point in the book, violence has been a subtext, but not the overall theme, of the poems. Why do you think it makes sense to end this book with an open meditation on the consequences of mass violence?

## WRITING EXERCISES

1. A major challenge in composing the poems for *White Blood* was contending with missing or incomplete historical records. Think of an incident in your life which greatly affected you, but for which there is no written record. Write a poem in which you imagine how the documentation of that event might look or sound. What information would be provided in such a document? What would still be missing, fragmentary, or otherwise incomplete?
2. Using a genealogy website like Ancestry.com, locate an interesting document connected to one of your ancestors. Choose an ancestor whom you did not know in life. The document may be a census record, will & testament, diary entry, marriage certificate, death record, or other text. Compose a poem in which you weave some of the actual language from this text into your own lines. How does your poetry change when this “new, yet old” language is introduced?