

Marlborough Public Library Adult Book Club

June 10 or 12, 2025

*James* by Percival Everett

Questions abridged from: <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/james/guide>

1. Twain is well-known for his satirical writing. Where does Everett use humor and satire in *JAMES*? What social and cultural conditions does the novel's satire mock or critique?
2. Reflect on Jim's narration. Why does he switch between vernacular and standardized English? How did this code-switching affect your reading experience?
3. Describe Huck's role in the story. How does Jim's fugitive status, as well as race, color, class, age and education, influence the relationship between the two characters?
4. *JAMES* depicts the brutalities of slavery, particularly the violence inflicted upon enslaved women and girls, through the stories of Sadie, Lizzie, Sammy and Katie. What are the unique threats that these characters must navigate? How does Jim react to the gendered violence that he encounters?
5. Return to Jim's travels with the minstrel group. What does the novel say about the performance of race? How do blackface minstrelsy and racial passing complicate or undermine racial classification? Can all the characters be seen as performers of race?
6. Jim's quest for freedom parallels his quest for literacy. Discuss the key moments on his journey to writing his story. What are the texts that he studies? Who are the characters who give him the tools and encouragement to write?
7. Were you surprised by Jim's revelation in chapter one of part three? Returning to earlier passages, can you identify any moments of foreshadowing from Everett? How would you characterize Huck's reaction? Have you ever learned something shocking about your family's history?
8. *JAMES* features an ensemble of fugitive and enslaved characters. How does Everett affirm the humanity of these characters in his writing? Was there one who was particularly memorable to you?
9. The Mississippi River is central to the landscape of the novel. What is the role of the river? How did it shape the political landscape of the region and the events of the novel?
10. Reflect on the title, *JAMES*. What's the significance of Jim renaming himself? Why do you think Everett chose to title the novel in this way?