

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

**Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the
discussion companion for
Junot Díaz's novel**

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

Novel published by Riverhead Books,
Penguin, New York, 2007.
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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the hardcover edition of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion was written by Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed. She is the founder of Bookclub-in-a-Box and an international speaker with more than 30 years experience as a teacher and school librarian. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educational study seminars, and personal pleasure.

This guide was co-written by Erin Balsler and Samantha Bailey. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

You Choose What to Use.

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

The guide is formatted to give you extra space to make your own notes.

How to Begin

Relax and look forward to enjoying your book club.

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind the scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more "hands on" support, feel free to contact us.

What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.

Do We Need to Agree?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences. You can contact us via our website (www.bookclubinabox.com), by email (info@bookclubinabox.com), or by phone (1-866-578-5571). We would love to hear from you.

Discussion Starters

There are as many ways to begin a book club discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

- Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)
- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote. (Not necessarily from the novel.)
- Discuss the historical information of the novel. (Not applicable to all novels.)
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the Bookclub-in-a-Box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

Above All, Enjoy Yourself

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Keys to the Novel

Author Information

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

“They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began ... Fukú americanus, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World ... No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we’ve all been in the shit ever since.” (p.1)

Oscar de Leon was born and raised in Paterson, New Jersey, to a family that originated in the Dominican Republic. The circle of his natural world is small and includes a parade of the mostly unrequited loves of his brief and wondrous life. Everyone, including Oscar himself, considers him to be Dominican rather than the born American he is. Oscar is obese, with no obvious social skills, but he is incredibly smart. He is a veritable encyclopedia of classic, fantasy, and science fiction literature and film, and a master

notes

of Dungeons & Dragons. Oscar can recite the character lists of all comic books in existence as though each were his intimate and personal friend.

The only thing Oscar wants is love, but he has no luck. Blame it on fukú, the curse that befell the Dominican people when the Europeans arrived on their shores many centuries ago. The fukú entrenched itself in the people's consciousness, their culture, and their history. There is no escape from fukú, not even by moving elsewhere. It follows Oscar's family for generations. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel includes large ideas about life, superstition, and immigration, but the novel is primarily about the integration of these three motifs and how they shape each and every one of us.

Keys to the Novel

The best way to unlock Junot Díaz's extraordinary novel is to understand the multiple levels and details of pop culture, literature, poetry, fantasy, science fiction, cinema, history, immigration, and psychology. An alternative method is to read this novel and just let Díaz guide the way. There is no shortcut to fully appreciating this book. If time permits, it would take multiple readings, but we hope that this guide points the way to understanding the main features of the story, the background, and the characters.

Author Information

- Junot Díaz was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on December 31, 1968. He was the third of five children, with two brother and two sisters. His father worked as a forklift operator while his mother held two jobs: cleaning houses and working on an assembly line.
- Shortly after Díaz was born, his father left the family for America so he could better support them. Díaz stayed behind with his siblings, his mother and his grandmother. In 1974, when Díaz was six years old, the entire family immigrated to New Jersey to be reunited with his father.



**Thanks for previewing this
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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