



WHEN
BLACK
WOMEN
BREATHE

POEMS

BOOK CLUB

Discussion Guide

Praise From Readers

"*When Black Women Breathe* is a must for anyone who is unclear of the fortitude, fire, and faith Black women own."

Charlette Wafer, author of *Flint to Flame*

"The creative candor exuded in Chisolm's *When Black Women Breathe*, gives the pages immense magnetism. This literary work flaunts personal historical references that keep the reader fully engaged."

Marc Lacy, speaker, writer and producer

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Archuleta A. Chisolm



From the Author

Hi there! I'm Archuleta and welcome to *When Black Women Breathe*. I started writing this collection at the onset of the pandemic. With so many thoughts and feelings during a difficult time, I challenged myself to dig deep and be honest and real with myself. I wanted Black women to be able to see themselves in each poem and finally let go and breathe. I wanted to honor Black women - their unrelenting spirit, bravery and complexity. These poems communicate the beautiful diversity of Black women's identity, spirituality and expressions of Black womanhood. *When Black Women Breathe* opens the gaps and fragments in Black women's journeys and honors the space in between.

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Pre-Reading Questions

Take a moment to answer these general theme questions about the book.



- 01 Define *Breathe*. Think about the phrase "When Black women breathe." What do you notice, remember, and imagine as you analyze the title?
- 02 What does being a Black woman mean to you? What has being a Black woman taught you - good or bad?
- 03 Describe a time when someone has shown you empathy (an understanding of your feelings). Why was this moment important for you? Describe a moment when you have shown empathy toward someone else, particularly a Black woman. Why do you imagine this might have been important for the other person?
- 04 Do you think your childhood experiences continue to shape who you are and how you live your life? How? In what ways do these experiences show up in your life, even if you don't fully understand them?

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Discussion Questions

1. In the opening poems of *When Black Women Breathe*, the author is describing different childhood experiences. What are you able to gather about the women the author speaks about? What can you infer has changed between then and now? What details are meaningful to the author? What do you believe the author is feeling as she describes her childhood memories?
 2. In the poem *Everyday Gone*, the author writes "Every day we allow our voices to slip and try to recover them after they're long gone" (page 13). From your perspective as a Black woman, what does it mean to allow your voice to slip? How can you recover your voice personally and professionally?
 3. In the poem *Fury* (page 25), the author talks about "The storm can rage wars within you, but never rush its plan. "What evidence does the author give us to show that we can handle trying times?
 4. The author writes three poems that include names in the title (pages 29, 35 and 51). What themes is the author expressing in each of these poems? What lessons or truths is the author trying to convey to the girls/women named in the poems?
 5. What is the author describing in *For the Women Who Had to Put Some Things Back* (page 78)? Where do you think the author is and what is the lesson to be learned?
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6. The author makes some difficult revelations throughout the book which lead to life-changing truths. What has prompted you to make hard decisions in your life? How did it change you as a person? How difficult or easy is it for you to face truth.

7. Reflect and respond to these quotes:

"You think it will be better, like choosing organic fruit over the regular. It still gets soft in the middle and bruises."

"Remember what you've learned - the part you locked away. Use it now to save your life."

"When I embrace my awkwardness, laugh at myself, and render myself okay."

"I don't want to be like the women with scowls on their faces, lines from the regrets of their past."

"We throw bones into the closet and try to forget what happened."

"There's nothing left for them to pick apart, so they'll try and destroy my origin."

"And the angry Black woman wasn't really angry at all. Just weary."

"Trauma will make a liar out of you."

"I hear them say this - Black women need to smile more. Well, face it, some days life is just too real."

8. In the final poem, *When Black Women Breathe*, what feelings come about as you read it? How does the poem speak to the uniqueness of Black women?

LET'S GET STARTED!

Hello readers, If you're a book club, church, women's group, or just want to get your friends together, I'd love to connect with you. I am available in-person and on Zoom.

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