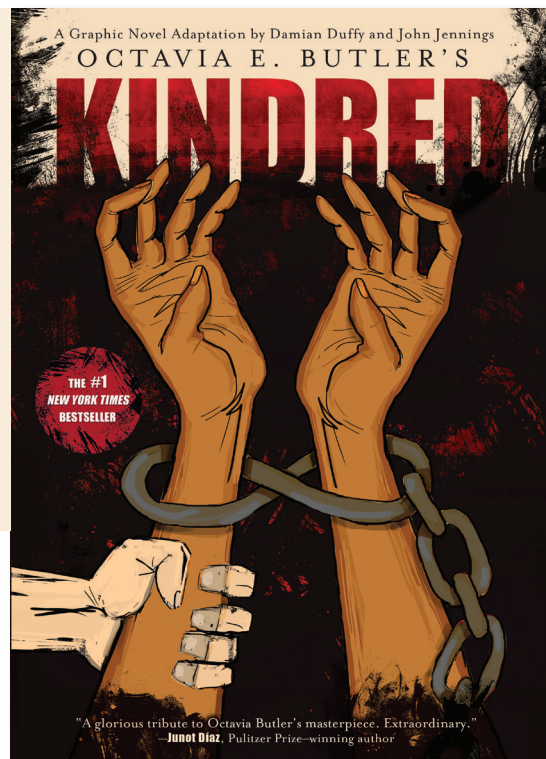


## TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

# KINDRED

BY DAMIAN DUFFY AND  
ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JENNINGS



### A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

This book is a graphic novel adaptation of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. On the surface, the story is a tale of time travel interwoven with slavery that poses the question "What if we could go back and change the past?" Butler, however, takes the reader deeper than that, raising questions of agency, race in society, and the strength of ancestral ties. Butler's words are adapted by Damian Duffy and illustrated by John Jennings to reflect the complexity of Butler's grappling with slavery in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. Daring, breathtaking, and calculating, this version of *Kindred* will draw students' interest. Visually appealing yet devastating, *Kindred* is a powerful and timely tool of reckoning for challenging students to question constructions of race, class, and identity in America.

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### BEFORE READING

#### Biographical Sketch: Octavia Butler

Butler was born in Pasadena, California, in 1947. She wrote both science fiction and fantasy and is the author of fourteen novels and numerous short stories. Butler's work frequently tackled and questioned the social constructs that bind human beings together. She also presented nuanced discussions of race that were often overlooked in literature. Butler is widely read and celebrated: her novel *Parable of the Talents* won the prestigious Nebula Award for Best Novel and her novella "Bloodchild" won a Nebula Award for Best Novelette. Butler also won two Hugo Awards: a best novelette award for "Bloodchild" and best short story award for "Speech Sounds." In 1995, she won a MacArthur Fellowship, more commonly known as a "Genius Grant." Butler died in 2006 in Lake Forest Park, Washington. Butler was posthumously inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2010.

Butler's presence in science fiction and fantasy is important: she is one of the few black women recognized and celebrated in the genres. Further, Butler paved the way for other science fiction and fantasy writers of color including Nnedi Okorafo (who wrote the introduction for this version of *Kindred*), Sheree Renée Thomas, Daniel José Older, Tananarive Due, and Chesya Burke.



#### Preview the Text

Consider your definition of literature and a graphic novel: What are your expectations for a graphic novel? Are they similar or different than your expectations for a traditional book?

Begin to look at illustrations as texts: Think about the symbolism and meaning of coloring, positioning of characters, and other messages that may be hidden or directly drawn to get the readers' attention. Use the removable cover and hardcover illustrations to help get this conversation started.

Discuss and share your definition of a slave narrative: What do you think are the defining characteristics of slave narratives? How do you expect these traits to appear in the *Kindred* graphic novel?

## CENTRAL THEMES

### Constructions of family and community

(CCSS RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.2, RL.11-12.5, RH.11-12.4, RI.11-12.4)

At the beginning of the story, provide a definition of the word “kindred.” Return to this definition at the end of the novel. Does your earlier definition still apply? How has it changed? How has it remained the same?

Consider how race impacts the relationships that Dana develops: Although the reader focuses on the relationship between Dana and Rufus, her white ancestor, Dana also develops familial ties with Weylin family slaves like Carrie, Sarah, and Nigel. Point out panels where the impact of slavery on relationships is most noticeable.

Map out the family ties that are illustrated in the novel: Rufus and Dana, Alice and Rufus and Isaac, etc. How do Duffy and Jennings illustrate the (il)legibility of relationships taken for granted like slave families? How are they illustrated? How does Jennings illustrate the tensions between the relationships of the enslaved and their owners or other white people (e.g., 123-124; 140-143; 201-204)?



### Lasting impact of slavery through present times (CCSS RL.11-12.6)

Butler intentionally centralizes slavery at the center of her novel to address its lasting impact on Americans via Dana, the African American protagonist. *Kindred* uses slavery to complicate the ideal of Americans achieving “post-Civil Rights” status. What do you think “post-Civil Rights” means? Compare this definition to the current push for America to be considered “postracial.”

Through Dana, Butler challenges the belief that slavery is neatly compartmentalized by history, having a beginning and end. Dana struggles with this realization throughout the text, often manifesting as a physical and direct effect on her body (whippings, the loss of her arm, slitting her wrists, etc.). Butler has said that Dana’s oppression was deliberate and her mutilation at the end of the novel was intentional, that “I couldn’t let her come back whole . . . Antebellum slavery didn’t leave people quite whole.” Compare and contrast the reaction of Kevin’s family to his marrying Dana (p. 103) and the Weylins’ reaction to Dana’s relationship with Rufus throughout the story. What is similar? What is different?

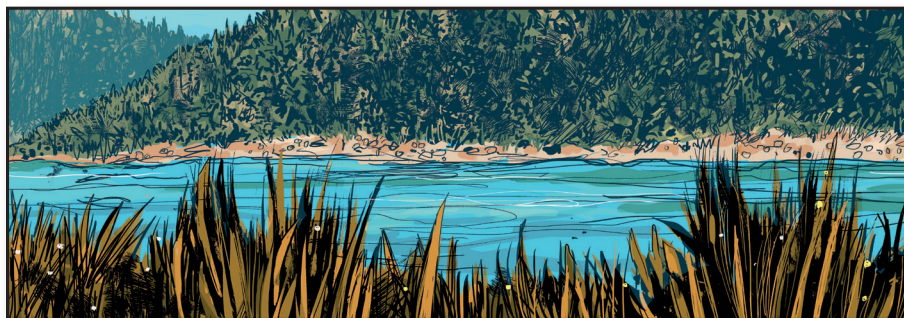
Butler includes startling overlaps between the menial jobs Dana endures to support herself as a writer (pp. 60-61) and her forced labor as a slave (pp. 185-188). What role does gender play in how slavery is presented to the reader? Would the response to Dana’s tale be different if Dana were identified as a black man? Discuss the importance of Butler’s centering of enslaved black women to the development of the plot. Why does Butler insist on the presence of black women at the forefront of her novel about slavery?

### World-building in the past and present (CCSS RH.11-12.6, RH.11-12.7, RI.11-12.7, RL.11-12.9)

Perhaps most amplified in the original novel and this adaptation is the act of world-building, the use of culture and history to create a different world. While the majority of Butler’s settings are imagined and often otherworldly, *Kindred* takes place in a realistic and speculative space of 1976 Los Angeles and 19th-century Maryland. Discuss the setting and intention of the novel by brainstorming about the prologue (p. 7). What does Dana mean by “home”? How does Dana’s definition of home evolve as the novel progresses? What role does illustrating that home space play in how the reader understands slavery?

Butler discussed researching slavery and slave narratives to write *Kindred*. Read an excerpt from a slave narrative such as Frederick Douglass’s or Harriet Tubman’s, both former slaves who escaped from Maryland. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Try your hand at illustrating the text in similar fashion to Duffy and Jennings’ adaptation.



Compare and contrast the illustration of slavery in *Kindred* to other contemporary popular culture representations of slavery like *Django Unchained* or *Underground*.

Consider how Duffy and Jennings' interpretation of Butler's work may or may not reflect her vision of the world she intended in her original novel. **What are some of the ways that Jennings' illustration of Butler's world-building can impact the meaning of the original *Kindred* text?**

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES AND RESOURCES

### EXTRA WRITING ACTIVITIES

#### Writing Exercise

Create "journal entries" from Dana's, Kevin's, or Rufus's perspective about major events from the book (Rufus and Dana's initial meeting, Alice's suicide, Kevin's disappearance in Maryland).

#### Art Direction

Pick your favorite panel or splash page (images that take up the entire page) and deconstruct it: What is the symbolism in the use of particular colors, positioning of characters and setting, etc.? What is important about their selected panel or splash page to understanding the story? What would they change? Why?

#### Easter Egg Hunt

In groups, review sections of the graphic novel and look for "Easter eggs": those intentionally hidden messages that are lurking in plain sight. Look at names, locations, and paneling.



### FURTHER READING

There is a list of Butler's work on [p. 240](#). It is also significant to recognize Butler's influence on other writers of color in the science fiction and fantasy genres. For further reading, see:

Sheree Renée Thomas, editor: *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*

Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown, editors: *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movement*

Rose Fox and Daniel José Older: *Long Hidden: Speculative Fiction from the Margins of History*

Tananarive Due: *African Immortals Series*

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Below are the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards that can be met by extending *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* with these questions, prompts, and activities.

#### RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

#### RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

#### RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

#### RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines “faction” in *Federalist* No. 10).

#### RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

#### RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

#### RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

#### RL.11-12.9

Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.



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Teacher's Guide conceived and written by Regina N. Bradley, Assistant Professor, Armstrong State University.

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<http://bit.ly/ABRAMSTeachingGuides>

WORKSHEET

**REVISING NARRATIVES**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**DIRECTIONS:**

Many of the characters' experiences presented within the text are told from Dana's point of view. Select one of the characters from the novel that has limited speaking (e.g., Carrie) or first-person narrative and write the experience from their perspective. Make sure that your story includes "unknown" information: emotional responses, background information that Dana may not be privy to, etc. Be creative!