



## You Know Better

By Tina McElroy Ansa  
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### Summary

It is the spring weekend of the Peach Blossom Festival in the tiny middle Georgia town of Mulberry, but things are far from peachy for the Pines women. LaShawndra, an eighteen-year-old hoochie-mama who wants nothing more out of life than to dance in a music video, has messed up ... again. But this time she isn't sticking around to hear about it.

Not that her mother seems to care; after all, Sandra is busy working on her real estate career and on the local minister. It's LaShawndra's grandmother, Lily, a former schoolteacher, principal, school board administrator, and highly respected cornerstone of the Mulberry community, who is scouring the streets at midnight looking for her granddaughter.

Over the course of one weekend these three disparate but connected women, guided by a trio of unexpected spirits, will learn to face the pain in their lives and discover that with reconciliation comes the healing they all desperately seek.

In this magical, deeply resonant novel, Tina McElroy Ansa goes straight to the heart of family, women's relationships, and the generational divide to reveal the soul that bonds us all.

### For Discussion

1. Nurse Bloom instructs Sandra to "Bless your child!" What kinds of blessings are you passing along to your children? What kinds of curses do we pass along without realizing it?
2. Many of the talents and gifts evident in Lily and Sandra are overlooked in LaShawndra. Why do you think this is? What are some of those gifts?
3. Music is a large influence in the main characters' lives. How does each character view music and its part in her life?
4. Do you believe in Spirit guides and why? What is a spirit guide in your estimation? How can it be of help?
5. Do you agree with Lily and Sandra's estimation of the younger generation? Their music? Their language? Their dress? Their goals?
6. Who in the novel do you most identify with? With whom would you like to identify?
7. What elements of spirituality do you see in the novel besides the appearance of Miss Moses, Nurse Bloom, and Miss Liza Jane?
8. Sandra says she feels as if she is the middle child of the Pines family trio. How do the three Pines women relate to each other and the world as The Eldest (Lily), the Middle Child (Sandra), and the Baby of the Family (LaShawndra)? Do you see these same dynamics in your own family? In other families you know?
9. How has the town of Mulberry changed since you first encountered it in Ansa's debut novel *Baby of the Family*? How has it changed and grown with each of her novels?
10. How do Lily, Sandra, and LaShawndra view spirituality, religion, and faith? How do these views differ or meld? How do these views change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
11. Although women are definitely in charge in *You Know Better*, discuss the men in the novel: Charles, Wee Willie, LaShawn, Pastor, the nameless men the three women have dated.
12. Sandra has had a spotty history with men. Do you think Sandra and the Pastor will find a meaningful relationship with one another? Why do you think she is drawn to him?
13. Crystal is a character the reader doesn't see, but who is significant to LaShawndra and critical to the plot of the novel. How does Crystal's part in the novel affect your view of Lily, Sandra, and LaShawndra?
14. What concrete steps can we take to reclaim our children? Which ones were suggested to Lily and Sandra? What steps to reclaim herself were suggested to LaShawndra? How do you see these same issues in your own lives?
15. Compare LaShawndra to other young women you know. What specific challenges do women of this generation face? How different are they from the challenges you faced at that age?
16. Discuss your response to the kinds of words LaShawndra uses nonchalantly - words like "ho," "nigga," and "bitch." How do you feel about the way this language influences black culture? Our society as a whole?
17. Each woman is able to learn something from her visiting spirit that she could not learn from any of the others. What does Lily learn from her time with Miss Moses? What realization does Sandra have with Nurse Bloom? What conclusions does LaShawndra draw from Miss Liza Jane? Did any character experience the world in a way that was surprising or shocking to you?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Tina McElroy Ansa is the author of the novels *Baby of the Family*, *Ugly Ways*, *The Hand I Fan With*, and *You Know Better*. She has contributed the essays "Postcards From Georgia" to CBS News Sunday Morning. An avid gardener, birder, and amateur naturalist, she is married to Jon'e Ansa, a filmmaker. They reside on St. Simon's Island, Georgia. She and her husband are currently producing the film adaptation of her first novel *Baby of the Family*.