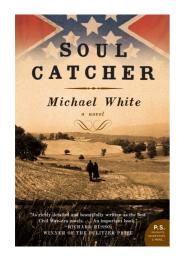
## **Reading Guide**



# **Soul Catcher**

By Michael C. White ISBN: 9780061340734

#### Introduction

Soul Catcher is a bold and exquisitely written epic novel about two people on the run in the Northern states before the Civil War-a tracker and the runaway woman slave he has pursued-and the harrowing and heart-rending journey home that will change them forever.

Augustus Cain is a man in a corner. In Richmond a few years before the Civil War, he faces a past that he dreams of forgetting, a present without prospect or fortune-and with the loss of his horse, his most precious possession, at the gambling table-a clouded and uncertain future. But he has a skill that has given him some success if not pride: he is an expert tracker of runaway slaves. Then a wealthy plantation owner named Eberly, who holds a gambling IOU from Cain, comes to him with a proposition: if Cain will travel into the North and retrieve a runaway named Rosetta, Eberly will pay him more than Cain has ever made before and forgive his debts.

So begins a journey into the heart and soul of America in the years before the war that will threaten to tear it apart. Cain and his companions-the Strofe brothers and the malignant man named Preacher-follow Rosetta to upstate New York and Boston and then take up their hard ride South, a trip that for Cain and Rosetta will become an unforgettable test of character and will, mercy and compassion.

#### **Ouestions for Discussion**

- 1. How does Cain justify his life as a slave catcher? Is Cain essentially an evil man or merely a man of his times?
- 2. Cain is someone deeply troubled by inner demons. What are some of these demons and what part do they play in his character?
- 3. The novel is very much a physical journey. How does this journey mirror or spur Cain's spiritual journey?
- 4. Cain likes to read Milton's Paradise Lost. How is the poem used in the novel and how does its story of Satan's rebellion against God reflect Cain's conflict?
- 5. How are the four slave catchers—Cain, the Strofe brothers, and Preacher—different?
- 6. Little Strofe is often singing ballads. What part does music play in the novel? In particular, how does it comment on the larger themes of the story?
- 7. The Fugitive Slave Act (part of the Compromise of 1850, which was passed in an effort to prevent a conflict between North and South) forced Northerners to help in the apprehension of runaways. How does this play out in the novel?
- 8. Rosetta is a woman who is both embittered, yet still filled with hope. How do these two aspects conflict in her?
- 9. In addition to the subject of slavery, Soul Catcher also becomes a love story about Cain and Rosetta. And yet, under the distorting effects of the slave system, can love really exist between two people, one white and one black?
- 10. John Brown was considered both a crazed fanatic and a prophet of change. How does the novel portray him?
- 11. Violence plays a large role in the novel. For instance, John Brown says that America is in need of "a lot of killing." Can violence ever be justified? Can it ever be redemptive?
- 12. Any historical novel can be, if it is effective, relevant to contemporary times. What about the novel resonates with America today?
- 13. In the novel's epilogue, we see that Cain has made a choice. What does this suggest about Cain and about his times?

### **About the Author**

Michael White teaches at Fairfield University and is an entertaining and illuminating speaker. He is the author of three New York Times Notable Books and lives in Connecticut.