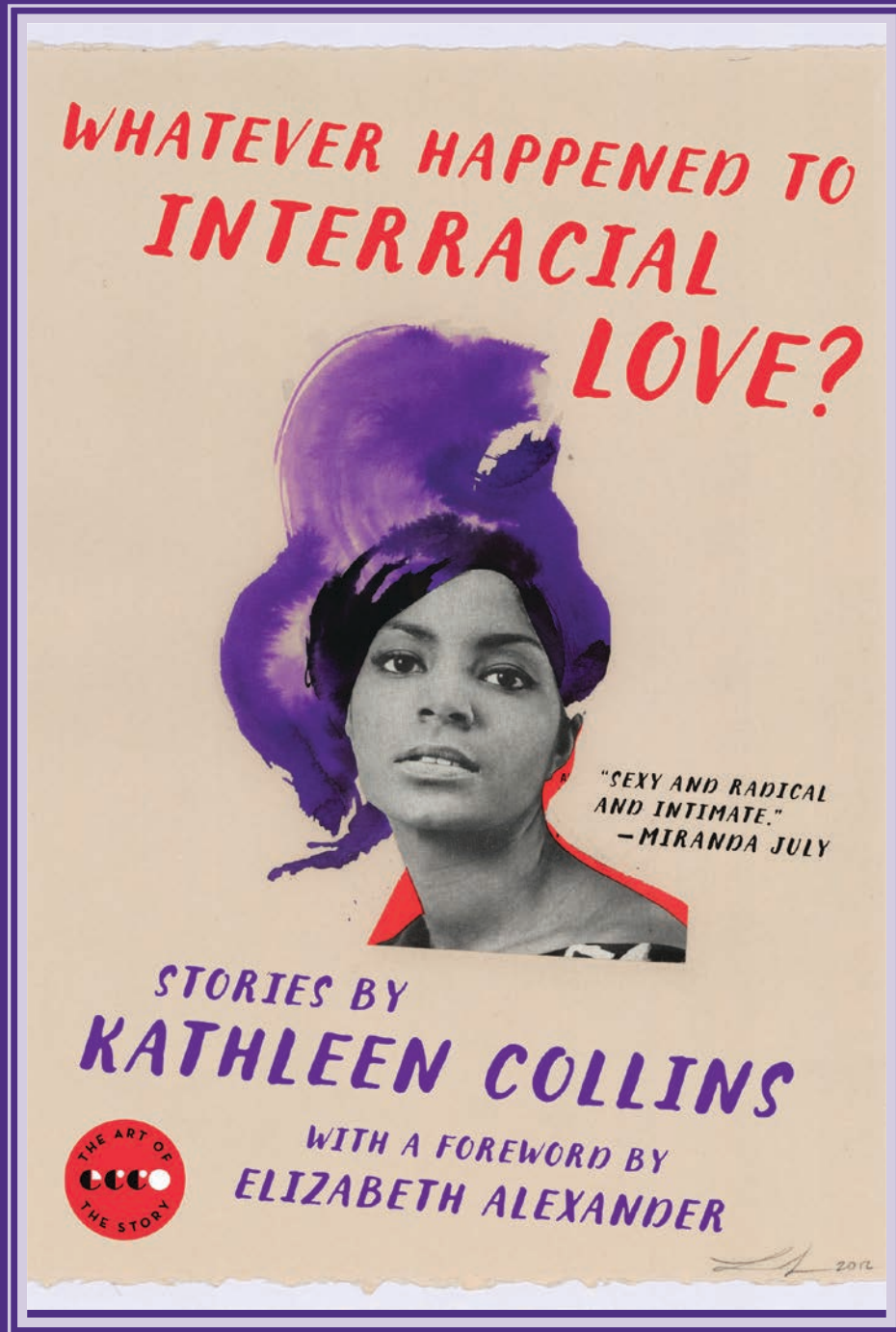


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



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About the book

“From the first page you know you’re in the hands of an exceptional writer, and this would be an undiluted joy if not for the fact Kathleen Collins’ voice was never fully heard in her own lifetime. To be this good and yet to be ignored is shameful, but her rediscovery is a great piece of luck, for us. Collins’ stories are passionate and light-footed, angry but also delicate - they move like quicksilver, conjuring up character, theme and situation in a couple of pages. She edits precisely - like the film maker she was - and she’s deliciously funny. She speaks of the many-sided lives of black women with care and intelligence. I adored this book.”

— Zadie Smith, author of *Swing Time*

Whatever Happened to Interracial Love? is the posthumous short story collection from Kathleen Collins. The stories integrate the African-American experience in a way that makes her characters into fully-realized human beings that intersect with themes of racial identity, socioeconomic class, gender, and sexuality.

About the author

Kathleen Collins, the first black woman to produce a feature-length film, was an African-American playwright, writer, filmmaker, director, and educator from Jersey City, New Jersey. She passed away, aged 46, in 1988.

Discussion questions

EXTERIORS (PP. 1-3)

- What is the point of view of this story? How does that affect the narration?
- How does the title relate to the plot of the story?
- Narrative structure is guided through the use of lighting design and direction. How do we experience moving through the plot based off this structure?
- How do you perceive the couple that is the subject of the story? What kind of emotional arc is experienced through the structure of the story?

INTERIORS (PP. 5-14)

- Compared to “Exteriors,” how does the point of view in this story change?
- What do you learn about the husband and the wife through their monologues? How would you describe them as individuals and as a couple?
- Structurally and thematically, why is the use of monologue significant? What does that device allow for that a conversation couldn't?
- How do the relationships depicted in “Exteriors” and “Interiors” compare?

THE UNCLE (PP. 15-20)

- What causes sorrow in this story?
- How does the uncle's sorrow become something triumphant to the narrator?
- As a child, how does the narrator perceive her aunt and uncle? How do these impressions change when she becomes an adult?

HOW DOES ONE SAY (PP. 21-26)

- How does the protagonist's haircut highlight the theme of racial consciousness?
- What is the disconnect between the narrator's view of race and her father's? Why does he seem to want her to blend in, when she takes pains to not do so?
- How does the French professor contribute to the narrator's sexual awakening?

ONLY ONCE (PP. 27-31)

- What meanings does the phrase “only once” have throughout the story?
- How does this girl's sexual experience compare to that of the girl in “How Does One Say”?
- On page 31 we learn the incident that made the man less cheerful, less full of laughter. What was the catalyst for this change?
- Compared to the girl in “How Does One Say,” the man's racial awakening brings anguish and despair. Why is there such a difference between these experiences? Is it a comment on the experience of a black woman's racial consciousness versus that of a black man's?
- What makes “that kind of man” not singular to the narrator?

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO INTERRACIAL LOVE? (PP. 33-57)

- What happens to romance when set within a context of experience, history, and politics during the civil rights movement?
- What fractures are highlighted within the black community in the story?
- How does the use of parentheses function throughout the story? How do parenthetical narratives inform the larger story?
- How does private/personal political thought and activism influence personal relationships in this story?
- Similarly, do we recontextualize the civil rights movement through these private point of views?
- What about the North makes it impossible for a character to fully inhabit their blackness?
- Throughout the story, there is a continued emphasis on civil rights protests being violent only from one side. In what ways to broken protestor bodies lead to broken love?

CONFERENCE: PARTS I AND II (PP. 59-67)

- There is variety in how the theme of reminiscing is depicted throughout the story. How many different ways can we see it?
- How is romance depicted in this story?
- What are the differences between Charlie Jones and Jason in this story? What is the narrator's experience like with each of them?

THE HAPPY FAMILY (PP. 69-82)

- Early in the story, how does the narrator define a "happy family"? Does the family depicted here ultimately live up to that definition?
- How is Christine's family different from that of Ralph, Lillie, Andrew, and Marguerita?
- Why is it significant that the happy family's story ends so disastrously?

TREATMENT FOR A STORY (PP. 83-86)

- "Treatment" in the title of the story references a film treatment. In what way does the story reflect that form?
- How would you describe the male protagonist?
- Does the female protagonist change her opinion of the male protagonist and her surroundings as the story progresses? Why or why not?

STEPPING BACK (PP. 87-91)

- How does this female protagonist's sense of racial identity compare with the protagonists of "How Does One Say" and "Whatever Happened to Interracial Love"?
- Why does the narrator say, "But again and again I am astonished at how uncolored I really am"? In what ways is she "uncolored"?
- To what does the title refer?
- How does the woman rebel? Why do you think she rebels?

WHEN LOVE WITHERS ALL OF LIFE CRIES (PP. 93-109)

- How does conversation function in the story? How many stories are being told?
- What differences does Ricardo see in Miriam and Barbara?
- How would you describe the relationship between Ricardo and Miriam?
- Is Ricardo's blunt honesty kinder somehow?
- Ricardo says, "Reasons are like smiles, man, useless games people play." (109) How does this simile work?
- The title of the story is a play on the title of one of Miriam's drawings, with one difference that the word "love" replaces "life." Why is this change significant?

BROKEN SPIRIT (PP. 111-113)

- Why does the man's spirit break?
- How does the man perceive blackness in America?
- Is it love or infatuation that the woman feels for the man?

DOCUMENTARY STYLE (PP. 115-120)

- Why is the narrator so full of rage?
- How does race affect opportunity in this story?
- The narrator brings to the story an expectation that he and his boss would be closer allies because they share blackness. How does the narrative defy this expectation?

LIFELINES (PP. 121-137)

- How many lifelines exist in this story?
- Does the meaning of writing letters change as the story progresses?
- How does setting affect the narrator?
- Why does the narrator return to the beauty salon? What does she think returning would achieve? What does it actually achieve?

OF POETS, GALLERIES, NEW YORK PASSAGES (PP. 139-147)

- How would you describe Edouardo?
- Louise is different from the other characters in the story. In what ways is she different?
- How does Edouardo see Louise?
- Does it matter that we don't know why Edouardo slapped Louise? What purpose does recounting the violent moment serve to the narrative?

DEAD MEMORIES...DEAD DREAMS (PP. 149-175)

- Why are Lillian and her father outsiders in her mother's family?
- What are the elements of Southern Gothic in this story?
- Besides as meals for the family, what is the significance of food in this story?
- How does memory function in this story? What kinds of things are remembered? What is the impact of those memories?

Writing Prompts

- A variety of the stories in *Whatever Happened to Interracial Love?* deal with experiencing an awakening, for better or worse, to racial identity. How do the characters in this collection experience race?
- How does personal experience and personal activism act as a lens throughout this collection for the civil rights movement?
- Many of these stories have elements from film as key parts of their structural elements. How does your reading experience change when you have such visual cues?
- Socioeconomic class is a theme that runs throughout many of the stories in this collection. In which stories is socioeconomic class a significant thematic element? Why is class a focus in these stories? What tensions arise from its inclusion in the plot, and are those tensions resolved?
- There are many kinds of revolution illustrated in this story collection: racial, sexual, and social are some broad categories. How do stories in *Whatever Happened to Interracial Love?* connect various kinds of revolution?

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