

Sister Bessie thought her choir should participate in the Annual Singing Convention, but it was 1956, and a lot of people disagreed.



The Sing is a delightful book! It tells a powerful story with authentic insight into humanity with just the right touch of humor. The issues the story addresses are still with us.

Don Pratt

The Sing For Book Clubs

Discussion Guide · Special Book Club Pricing · Author Information

The Plot—

Stumpy Fowler wakes up one fine May morning and goes about his business, just as he does almost every day. He prizes the peace and orderliness of River Falls, a Southern town of some 2,000 souls that—one day a year—more than quadruples its population with the Annual Singing Convention. The Sing is what River Falls is known for.

But on that same morning, Bessie Williams, the help for Stumpy's wife, Mae Beth, is putting a plan into action that—if it works—will put the Bethel AME Choir in the Singing Convention and literally change its complexion forever. It's not, as Bessie says, a big thing, but there are any number of people in River Falls who don't agree.

Sing Committee chairman A.Y. Pollard says it's never been done, and now's not the time to do it.

Klansman Claymore Thomas says it's racemixing and against the Bible.

And any number of other people wish that the whole question would just go away and that Bessie would quit rocking the boat.

What Bessie says is not a big thing sparks a bunch of lies, some blackmail, a kidnapping and a lot of soul searching.

What it's about—

The book examines with a lot of heart and a good bit of humor the complexities of race relations in the 1950s, a time—as it turns out—is not so different from today in many ways. There were intricate personal relationships and equally tangled societal relationships. It's a close-up look at the myriad attitudes that made the culture of the 1950s, some of which are back today.

What readers say about The Sing—

Chuck Holmes speaks with a voice from the '50s, but sadly, many of the voices can still be heard today. Who is family? How do we treat those we consider family? How do we overcome prejudice that we've grown up with? How do we know something is wrong if we've never thought about it? The Sing might make you uncomfortable. That's probably a good thing.

§

This is not just the story of a small, Eastern North Carolina farm community; it's a story about all of us, then and now. The characters are real and the relationships are complicated. Bessie—Mrs. Bessie Williams—interrupts the rhythm; she wants change and she doesn't "...want to be waiting for 'later' when Jesus calls me home." Chuck Holmes examines the lives of those who intersect, their confrontations, and their inner strengths or lack thereof. Chuck's perspective is as one who was there. The Sing is a truly three-dimensional story told vividly about heroes and heels that will leave you thinking long after you put the book down; it will challenge your resolve.

§

You don't have to be from the South to recognize these people and their culture. Holmes has a wonderful ear for dialogue and you'll recognize the universal themes he weaves so skillfully into a suspense-driven plot.

§

The Sing is a delightful book! It tells a powerful story with authentic insight into humanity with just the right touch of humor. The issues the story addresses are still with us. I too, was raised in the south. The descriptions of people and attitudes are spot-on. It is a realistic story about injustice and courage. I loved the book! I felt like I knew these people.

Discussion Guide

1. The plot of *The Sing* has to do with a black choir trying to get into an all-white singing convention, but what, in your opinion, is the book really about?
2. Who is the hero of the story? Why do you say that?
3. Which of the characters do you admire the most? Which do you admire the least?
4. Each of the major characters has his or her own motives for their reaction to the situation? What are the motives for each of the following characters and do you consider the motives admirable? Which of the motives do you sympathize with?
 - a. Stumpy Fowler
 - b. A.Y. Pollard
 - c. Claymore Thomas
 - d. Bessie Williams
5. Which of these motives have to do with what we came to call integration? If they are not that, what are they?
6. *The Sing* is set in 1956? Is it purely a period piece, or are there parts of it relevant to today?
7. Do you think that River Falls was significantly different in 1957 than it was in 1956? What do you think happened in that town after the book ends?
8. If you had written *The Sing*, would you have given it a different ending?
9. Often people talk about life in the 1950s being simpler. Based on the time as it was depicted in the book, would you agree with that?
10. Is there anything you can take from the book that would be personally useful

Book Club Pricing

Your local library may have *The Sing* or may purchase it on request. If not, Book clubs can purchase *The Sing* for \$14.25 plus shipping (a 25% discount) on orders of six or more books shipped to the same address from chuckholmes.org. If requested, books will be signed by the author.

About the Author:

Chuck Holmes has been a writer for more than 50 years, with more than 100 public television credits, published articles, essays, and short stories. *The Sing* is his first novel, and his book of essays—*More than Just Cellular: Musings on Life Past, Present, and Eternal*—was published in 2019. Holmes lives near Atlanta, GA with his wife and near his children and grandchildren. He can be contacted at chuck@chuckholmes.org.