

One Book, One Campus 2009-2010
Student-Created Readers' Guide for *There Are No Children Here*
by Alex Kotlowitz

Created by IU South Bend Student Erin Rockhill-Gilvin and IU South Bend Alumni ('09) Seianna
Giden and Elizabeth Miller

1. Discuss the author's use of writing in seasons.
2. Discuss the incident at the train tracks in the beginning of the book. What kind of images to the children have of the world outside of Henry Horner Homes? Does life in the homes prepare one for life outside it?
3. How does generational poverty shape one's concept of normality?
4. Could you imagine living like the children in this book? How do the actions of your parents impact your life?
5. Discuss generational poverty and situational poverty.
6. What can be done to correct this kind of situation? Can it be corrected, or will places like the Henry Horner Homes always be a part of our society?
7. Discuss the theme of prejudice in the book.
8. Think about Pharoah and his stammer. Is it psychologically related to the stress of his environment? How do Lafayette and LaJoe deal with the stress? How does Pharoah and Lafayette's father?
9. Describe the relationship between the brothers.
10. Discuss Rickey and the relationship with the family.
11. Discuss the amount of crime in the book. How do you think the kids live with it?
12. Discuss the story of Bird –Leg. What do you think happens to people who witness so much death and violence?
13. Describe the Lafayette and Pharoah's view of death.
14. What do you think of the fact that most parents in their neighborhood purchase burial insurance for their children?
15. Discuss the way the gangs use the residents of the homes—the amount of control that they have over them (aka 'The Jimmy Lee Factor'). How would describe him and his relationship with the police?
16. Do the gangs do any good (or perceived good) for these communities?
17. Why do the gangs prey on children?
18. What are the residents thoughts about the police?
19. Discuss the living situation of the Rivers' family.

20. Discuss the apartment itself. At one point, 13 people lived there. Can you fathom living in such conditions?
21. Discuss the deterioration of the Henry Horner Homes.
22. Discuss the location of the Henry Horner Homes. They are near nicer neighborhoods, so why is there such desolation there?
23. Can you believe that the Henry Horner Homes situation can happen in the United States? Why does it? What kind of mindset can allow this to happen?
24. Why do you think the government allowed the deterioration of the Henry Horner Homes?
25. The Henry Horner Homes have since been torn down and new housing is being built. Will the same thing happen again?
26. Discuss the incident with Craig. How does this reflect police issues in the area?
27. How did Craig's death change Lafayette?
28. Describe the numbing of Lafayette throughout the course of the book.
29. Discuss LaJoe and Lafayette's need to clean during stressful moments.
30. Discuss the learned helplessness of life in the Henry Horner Homes.
31. How did the tenants try to fight for better living conditions? What were the barriers that kept this from happening?
32. Why did the state take LaJoe's assistance away?
33. Discuss what happened with Lafayette and the situation that led to his going through the juvenile court system.
34. Discuss Pharoah and school. Was it his haven? How would you teach a child in a situation such as his?
35. Discuss Pharoah and the spelling bee. Is there a feeling that good news can never prevail?
36. Discuss the need for birth control in the Henry Horner Homes. Do you think the residents received sex education and had ready access to it?
37. Discuss Kotlowitz's writing style and use of foreshadowing.
38. Do you wonder how the children and their mother are doing now?
39. How is this book different from others on the subject?