

# THINGS THEY LOST

## OKWIRI ODUOR

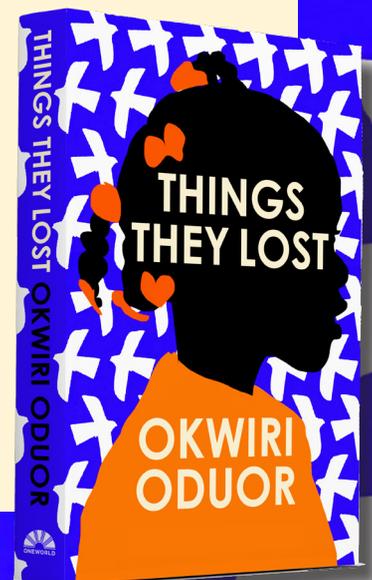
### READING GUIDE



Centred around the unforgettable Ayosa Ataraxis Brown, *Things They Lost* delves into the nuances of a turbulent mother-daughter relationship. Alongside this thoughtful examination of intergenerational trauma, Okwiri Oduor's debut novel is also a joyful, exuberant story of a small Kenyan community and an unconventional coming-of-age tale.

The questions below are intended to help you get the most out of your book group's discussion of this exciting debut. Happy reading!

1. There are many different mother figures in *Things They Lost*. Which character most closely resembles what we might see as a traditional 'ideal' of motherhood, in your opinion?
2. Is Nabumbo Promise a bad mother? If so, is it possible to empathise with her at all? Discuss your reactions to her character, and how these might have changed over the course of the novel.
3. *Things They Lost* is often very poignant, but it is also extremely funny. How does Okwiri Oduor use language to generate humour? Were there any moments that struck you as particularly funny?
4. Consider the theme of inheritance in *Things They Lost*. What does this mean for Nabumbo and Ayosa in particular? Discuss the symbolism of the Manor Mabel Brown in the context of the Brown family history.



5. “Death is tart! Death is cloying!” the townspeople cry on Epitaph day at the start of the novel. And yet by the end of the day “the townspeople tied cardigans round their waists and writhed to *It’s Disco Time with Samba Mapangala & Orchestre Virunga*”, thinking that they too could not wait to die. In what ways do we see this combination of celebration and mourning in subsequent reflections on death in *Things They Lost*?
6. In Chapter 16, Sindano tells Ayosa they must talk about the wraiths: “Ayosa Ataraxis Brown, we’ve got to discuss this. It will do you no good to bury your head in the sand.” Where else do we see characters trying to ‘bury their heads in the sand’, ignoring problems or dangers? And what are the consequences of this attempted secrecy?
7. Mapeli Town is part of the real world – aware that the Cold War is escalating in Europe or that Benazir Bhutto has been sworn in as prime minister of Pakistan. But it is also a town where little girls ride horse-drawn cars and wraiths masquerade as the local milkman. How does Okwiri Oduor manage to balance the real and the magical in her novel? Did Mapeli feel real to you while reading?
8. Being alone is very different from being lonely. Do you agree with this? Discuss the depiction of isolation and, by contrast, friendship, in *Things They Lost*.
9. Is there a turning point in Ayosa’s relationship with her mother? If so, where do you think this is?
10. What do you imagine Ayosa and Mbiu will do in the minutes and hours that follow the end of the novel? And what do you think is the honest answer to the question that Mbiu asks at the very end of *Things They Lost*?



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