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X: A Novel by Ilyasah Shabazz with Kekla Magoon

Discussion questions used at SPL February 13 & 14, 2018

Discussion Questions taken from the Reading Group Guide from Publisher:

1. Instead of telling the story in chronological order, the author moves back and forth through time. What effect does this have on the story? Why is this important to the story?
2. Early in the story, Malcolm says “I am my father’s son. But to be my father’s son means that they will always come for me” (page 5). What do you think Malcolm means? How does this statement foreshadow everything that happens to him?
3. Malcolm buys a bus ticket to Boston, and in that moment he realizes “it takes less than a minute to buy a new life” (page 8). What do you think Malcolm means? How did that one action change Malcolm’s life?
4. As Malcolm leaves for Boston, he reminisces about his biological family and his foster family and comes to the conclusion that leaving won’t be very difficult. Why does he feel this way?
5. Malcolm refers to the influence Marcus Garvey had on both of his parents. What did Garvey stand for, and how can his influence be seen in the way Malcolm thinks?
6. When Malcom is very young, his parents tell him that he can be anything he wants to be. While Malcolm believes this for a while, he later decides that their counsel is not true. What causes Malcolm to turn away from his dreams?
7. In Chapter 3, Mr. Ostrowski shares his true opinion of Malcolm’s potential. What effect does this conversation have on Malcolm, and how does it influence his future actions?
8. Upon Malcolm’s arrival in Boston, his half-sister Ella wants him to experience the city before he gets a job. How does this change Malcolm?

9. Shorty tells Malcolm: "In this world, everything's a hustle. . . . If it doesn't look like a hustle, you got to look at it from another angle" (page 114). Why does hustling appeal to Malcolm so much? Why is he drawn to the world of the hustler?
10. Everyone seems willing to offer Malcolm credit at first. How does this become a problem for him later on?
11. Malcolm's family confronts him about his selling and using drugs, dating white women, and losing his job. How does Malcolm rationalize his actions, and what does this do to his relationship with his family?
12. When Malcolm works at Small's in Harlem, he listens as two men discuss "Negro improvement." Malcolm reasons that "Negroes don't need improvement. Real Negroes don't sit around and talk about how things should be and what they should have. Real Negroes go out and get some of their own" (page 253). How has Malcolm's life up to this point personified this sentiment? Why does he feel this way?
13. On May 19, 1943, Malcolm turns eighteen years old. How is he feeling about his life at this point in time?
14. Malcolm feels that it is inevitable that he will go to jail and claims "the whole court is out to get [him]" (page 322). Whom does Malcolm blame for his troubles and why?
15. 22843. With these numbers, Malcolm begins to look at his life in a new way. How does Malcolm see the world through these numbers?
16. After hearing and seeing Bembry in prison, Malcolm remembers that "words are a weapon" (page 331). What do these words mean to Malcolm, and how does he begin to change?
17. What impact does Elijah Muhammad have on Malcolm? How do his words change Malcolm?
18. Malcolm believes that everything in his life has led him to where he has arrived, to be a new man, to follow Islam, and to be ready to serve Allah. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
19. The words "Up, up, you mighty race" resonate with Malcolm. How does he use these words to create a new life for himself and his people?

20. At the end of the story, Ilyasah Shabazz has added notes to explain many of the events that take place in this novel. Why did she choose to combine fiction and facts? What effect does this have on the story she has told?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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Title:

Discussion questions taken from a website:

website address:

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Read any of the Biography outlines/links or information you find fascinating-

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Learn more about Malcom X:

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The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Malcolm X & Alex Haley – BIO X-3rd Floor Non-fiction

Malcolm X. : a life of reinvention by Manning Marable – BIO X-3rd Floor Non-fiction

Read any of the Biography outlines/links or information you find fascinating-

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