

Victor LaValle, *Lone Women* (2023)*

1. *Lone Women* features fantastical, mystical elements that are counterbalanced by the most ordinary aspects of real, daily life. Discuss where the author finds the appropriate balance between fantasy and reality in this book to make it both accessible and believable.
2. The story takes place during early twentieth century America—the mining boom is over and abandoned ghost towns litter the landscape. How do you think this historical backdrop affects the behavior of the characters?
3. How are the themes of *Lone Women* relevant to modern discussions of race, privilege, and power?
4. How does the magical realism employed in *Lone Women* relate to recent pop culture representations of Black horror, such as *Get Out* or *Us*?
5. Explore the motif of ghosts in the novel, paying close attention to what it means to be haunted. Who appears as a ghost in the story, and to whom? What do these ghosts represent to the people who see them? Are the ghosts a welcome presence, or are they a source of terror?
6. Discuss the depiction of violence in *Lone Women*. What do scenes of violence— including Joab killing Delmus, Elizabeth ripping off Mrs. Mudge’s arm, and Mrs. Price getting shot—add to the novel? How do violence and tenderness coexist in this troubled setting?
7. The following statements are reiterated several times throughout the story: “Queer folk. That’s what they say about the Henrys” and “a woman is a mule.” What is the significance of the repetition? How do their meanings shift as the novel progresses?
8. This novel is both historical fiction and magical realism. How does Victor LaValle achieve his unique writing style? What details does he use from each genre? What does each add to the emotional content of the story?
9. In what ways does the past influence the present in *Lone Women*? How do the characters try to repress or escape the pain of their histories? What does the novel tell us about the relationship between past and present? How does this affect the characters’ interpersonal relationships and help them heal?
10. What did you think about the ending—were you satisfied or disappointed with it? How do you picture Adelaide and the rest of the lone women’s lives after the story closes?

**These questions are from the publisher, Random House, and also available in the paperback edition.*