

Leave Taking

by Winsome Pinnock · Language: EN

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Overview

Leave Taking by Winsome Pinnock is a powerful play that explores the lives of three generations of Caribbean women living in London. The story centers on Enid, a first-generation immigrant from Jamaica, and her two British-born daughters, Del and Viv. Enid is deeply rooted in her traditional beliefs and practices Obeah, a spiritual system she brought from the Caribbean, while her daughters struggle with their identities as Black British women. Del, the elder daughter, is rebellious and angry, while Viv, the younger, is academically inclined but emotionally withdrawn. The play opens as the family is in crisis, with Del having dropped out of school and Viv on the verge of a breakdown, and it follows their journey toward understanding and reconciliation.

The narrative arc is driven by the arrival of a mysterious Obeah woman, Mai, who comes to help the family. Through her interactions with each woman, the play delves into themes of cultural displacement, the legacy of colonialism, and the search for belonging. As the characters confront their pasts and their connections to Jamaica, they begin to heal the fractures in their relationships. The play is significant because it gives voice to the experiences of Caribbean immigrants and their descendants in Britain, a perspective often marginalized in mainstream theatre. It also challenges stereotypes about Obeah and spirituality, presenting it as a source of strength and healing rather than superstition. Leave Taking is a poignant and lyrical work that speaks to the universal human need for roots and identity, while also being deeply specific to the Caribbean-British experience.

Key Takeaways

- The play highlights the generational divide between immigrant parents and their British-born children, showing how cultural heritage can be both a source of conflict and a path to healing.
- Obeah is portrayed not as a negative superstition but as a legitimate spiritual practice that offers guidance and empowerment to the characters.
- The search for identity is a central theme, with each character struggling to reconcile their Jamaican heritage with their British upbringing.
- The play demonstrates the importance of confronting the past, including the traumas of colonialism and migration, in order to move forward.
- Female relationships—between mothers, daughters, and sisters—are the emotional core of the play, and their support for one another is crucial to their survival.

- The use of poetic language and symbolism, such as the recurring image of the sea, underscores the characters' connection to the Caribbean and their longing for a sense of home.
- The play challenges the audience to reconsider what 'home' means for those who have migrated and for their children who have never known the ancestral land.

Chapter Summaries

Act One

The play opens in the London home of Enid, a Jamaican immigrant, and her two daughters, Del and Viv. Enid is worried about Del, who has dropped out of school and is behaving erratically, and about Viv, who is withdrawn and secretive. The family is visited by Mai, an Obeah woman from Jamaica, who has come to help. Del is hostile to Mai, while Viv is intrigued. Enid is initially resistant to Mai's presence, but she agrees to let her stay. The act establishes the central conflicts: the daughters' disconnection from their heritage, Enid's guilt about leaving Jamaica, and the family's inability to communicate openly.

Act Two

Mai begins to work with each woman individually. She helps Del confront her anger and her fear of failure, revealing that Del has been hiding a pregnancy. Viv, who has been secretly reading books on Obeah, asks Mai to teach her. Enid, meanwhile, is forced to confront her own past, including the abandonment of her first child in Jamaica. The act deepens the characters' emotional journeys, showing how each is struggling with the weight of their history. The tension between the family members escalates, but there are also moments of connection and understanding.

Act Three

The climax of the play occurs as the family gathers for a ritual led by Mai. During the ritual, Enid finally confesses her secret about the child she left behind, and Del and Viv learn the truth about their mother's past. This revelation brings a catharsis, allowing the family to begin to heal. Del decides to keep her baby and take responsibility for her life, while Viv embraces her heritage and her desire to learn Obeah. The play ends with a sense of hope and renewal, as the characters find a new understanding of themselves and each other.

Themes

- Cultural identity
- Generational conflict
- Spirituality and Obeah
- Migration and belonging

- Mother-daughter relationships
- Colonial legacy

Notable Quotes

- "We are all leaves on the same tree, but we have been blown by different winds." — Mai says this to Enid, explaining the different paths the family members have taken.
- "You can't run away from your shadow, child." — Mai tells Del that she cannot escape her heritage or her problems.
- "I left my heart in the island, but my body had to come here to survive." — Enid reflects on her decision to leave Jamaica.
- "The sea is a memory that never forgets." — Viv says this while talking about her connection to Jamaica.
- "We don't have to be the same to be together." — Mai counsels the family about accepting their differences.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Leave Taking about?

Leave Taking is a play by Winsome Pinnock about a Jamaican immigrant mother and her two British-born daughters in London. It explores their struggles with identity, cultural heritage, and the legacy of migration. The arrival of an Obeah woman helps them confront their past and heal their fractured relationships.

Is Leave Taking worth reading?

Yes, Leave Taking is a powerful and moving play that offers a rare perspective on the Caribbean-British experience. Its poetic language, complex characters, and exploration of themes like identity and spirituality make it a rewarding read for anyone interested in contemporary drama or postcolonial literature.

How does Leave Taking end?

Spoiler: The play ends with a ritual led by Mai that brings the family to a catharsis. Enid confesses her secret about leaving a child in Jamaica, and her daughters learn the truth. Del decides to keep her baby, Viv embraces her heritage, and the family finds a new sense of unity and hope.

Who should read Leave Taking?

Readers interested in British theatre, Caribbean literature, and stories about immigration and identity will find Leave Taking compelling. It is also valuable for students of drama and postcolonial studies, as well as anyone who appreciates character-driven plays with emotional

depth.

How long does it take to read Leave Taking?

Leave Taking is a short play, typically around 80 pages. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it would take about 2 hours to read, but most readers will finish it in one sitting of 1-2 hours.