



Book Club Set

Invisible Boy

By Harrison Mooney

About the Author



Harrison Mooney is a writer and journalist. Born to a West African immigrant mother, he was adopted as an infant by a white family and raised in the Bible belt of British Columbia. He has worked for the *Vancouver Sun* for nearly a decade as a reporter, an editor and a columnist. His writing has also appeared in the *National Post*, the *Guardian*, *Yahoo* and *Maclean's*. Harrison Mooney lives in East Vancouver with his family.

He is the author of the memoir *Invisible Boy*, one of the *Globe & Mail's* most-anticipated books of 2022. It chronicles his journey as a transracial adoptee “from white cult to Black consciousness” in Abbotsford, BC and has drawn comparisons to Tara Westover’s *Educated*.

Mooney is a veteran digital storyteller for Postmedia, and used his residency to connect with fellow adoptees, people of colour, and ex-evangelicals, while mentoring aspiring writers and digital content creators through a series of in-person workshops and panels.

As an emerging writer, Harrison used the residency to gain experience hosting events, teaching workshops, and even found time to begin work on his next writing project.

Retrieved from: <https://www.vpl.ca/person/harrison-mooney>
<https://www.harpercollins.ca/author/cr-198899/harrison-mooney/>

About the Book



Harrison Mooney was born to a West African mother and adopted as an infant by a white evangelical family. Growing up as a Black child, Harry's racial identity is mocked and derided, while at the same time he is made to participate in the fervour of his family's revivalist church. Confused and crushed by fundamentalist dogma and consistently abused for his colour, Harry must transition from child to young adult while navigating and surviving zealotry, paranoia and prejudice.

After years of internalized anti-Blackness, Harry begins to redefine his terms and reconsider his history. His journey from white cult to Black consciousness culminates in a moving reunion with his biological mother, who waited twenty-five years for the chance to tell her son the truth: she wanted to keep him.

This powerful memoir considers the controversial practice of transracial adoption from the perspective of families that are torn apart and children who are stripped of their culture, all in order to fill evangelical communities' demand for babies. Throughout this most timely tale of race, religion and displacement, Harrison Mooney's wry, evocative prose renders his deeply personal tale of identity accessible and light, giving us a Black coming-of-age narrative set in a world with little love for Black children.

Discussion Questions



1. Did any part of this book strike a particular emotion in you? Which part and what emotion did the book make you feel?
2. Did you highlight or bookmark any passages from the book? Did you have a favorite quote or quotes? If so, share which and why?
3. Did you find the author's writing style easy to read or hard to read? Why? How long did it take you to get into the book?
4. How much did you know about this book before picking it up? What surprised you the most about the book?
5. What were some recurring themes or motifs throughout the book?
6. How did the autobiography make you reflect on your own past or future?
7. Were there parts that you felt the author could have expanded?
8. What are the benefits of this story being told as an autobiography instead of a different form of narrative?
9. What is the significance of the title? Did you find it meaningful, why or why not?
10. If you could talk to the author, what burning question would you want to ask?

Author Interview



What I admire about your writing is what may also be challenging for you as a writer — you’re documenting living history while holding the complexity of the relationships depicted. Can you tell me about the process of interviewing family members, childhood friends and particularly your brother Ben and first girlfriend Ashley as you wrote this book?

This book required some very stressful conversations. Like many adoptees, I’m fearful of conflict, which leads to rejection. Better to reject oneself in private, I have found. I’m a people-pleaser! But my story — and that’s what it is, not my *side* of the story, but *my* story, and thereby mine to tell — is really incendiary, which is why I’ve been so terrified to tell it all this time, not to mention *deeply* reluctant to discuss it with the central players. In the end, though, the choice was clear: be brave or be silent. And fuck that. So really, there was no choice but to make some uncomfortable phone calls.

I tried to be as open and honest with everyone about what I was writing and why. Some people were not pleased, or else they didn’t understand. Some people made the road to publication very difficult. I imagine that I haven’t heard the last of “some people.”

My chats with Ben and Ashley, on the other hand, were wonderful. More than that, they were healing. My childhood was lonely, in large part, because it seemed like no one in my life shared or even witnessed my experience. But my brother did, my first girlfriend did, and they said so, even when corroboration made us all uncomfortable, affirming my reality in a way that was so necessary, and so restorative. I think sometimes about bell hooks’ definition of love: “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” Ben and Ashley received me with that kind of love. I’m grateful.

Your author’s note that prefaces the book closes with this line: “Mine is a story of impact; I write for the millions impacted in similar ways.” Can you describe who these millions are?

I’m writing, first and foremost, for my fellow adoptees, to affirm their complex and confusing experiences, in much the way that Ben and Ashley did for me. Books like mine are rare; stories like mine are not. They’re just so hard to tell.

We are conditioned to reject our history, to never look back, to demonstrate gratitude, always. And if you can manage to cut through the noise, the self-serving narratives others impose, the social and familial pressure, and the fear of abandonment after you point out that stealing a baby is wrong, even if God said you could, you still have to find the words. My hope is that the words are in my book, and that adoptees find a language and a framework for their stories through my own.

Beyond that, however, I write for anyone who lost a family, home or history to white supremacy; anyone displaced or made a stranger by invaders, or invading ideologies; anyone who knows the pain of otherness — the racialized, the marginalized — especially in mostly white communities; anyone who grew up feeling owned instead of loved; anyone afraid to face the truth about their world, about their family, and themselves.

You offer many resonant reflections throughout the book about how parents shape their children’s sense of self. You met your birth mother, Trinika, when you were in your early 20s. You had some very special years together before she died this spring. I am so sorry she’s gone. You’ve credited Trinika for this book and for the life you are living now. Can you tell me more about that?

Meeting my mom changed my life. She had so much love for me. It was undeniable. It didn’t feel like something I had to earn, or something I could lose, and I saw at once the way I’d been held hostage by my adoptive family. I was so used to jumping through hoops for acceptance that I was bowled over by the freedom that came from knowing for a fact that I was loved.

I didn't know how to handle it. I hid from her for years. The next time we spoke, half a decade later, our lives were totally different. Both of us returned home and packed our bags. We got divorced. We moved. We had settled for incomplete lives, and the moment we saw one another, we saw a way back to some semblance of wholeness, and started again as new people.

I'm heartbroken to have lost my mom, but I'm grateful that she got the chance to break my heart at all. I fought like hell to break out of my cage, confront my deepest trauma and recover our relationship. It was worth it. The grief is overwhelming, but knowing her made me feel born again. Missing her means that she made her way into my heart, against all odds. It's strange, but I'm proud of my sorrow.

You're now a parent to two young kids. What is it like to be moving through this deep territory of your life and soul through the book — now that it's out in the world, and people like me are asking you big questions about it — while tending to the daily realities of your children?

I want to say my kids made writing this book almost impossible. My son was born a week before I finished the book proposal. His first birthday came a week after I finished the first draft. For a while there, it was utter chaos. I needed space and quiet to think and to process some pretty messed up memories, but this was during COVID-19, so there was nowhere to go, and we had two kids in diapers who wouldn't sleep and never stopped screaming. It was discombobulating, to say the least.

Truth is, though, my kids made this book what it is. Holding them both in my arms, I was struck by how miraculous it feels to see yourself reflected in your children. It was the same sensation of genetic mirroring I experienced when I first met Trinika, but this was deeper. These were *my kids*. It gave me new insight into what my mother went through to bring me into the world, and what she lost when she was coerced into giving me up for adoption.

I thought about giving my kids to the meanest white lady I know. They didn't deserve that. And beyond that, it gave me a better insight into my own upbringing. I thought about tying my kids to a chair because they wouldn't eat dinner, or mocking their bodies, or spanking them 17 times in a row, and I realized I'd been abused. It was scary to admit, but my kids made me want to be strong and courageous.

Parenthood and memoir share a common ground in that they force you to confront your inner child. My main complaint with parenthood is that your inner child is out, and he's awake again, and he's not happy. You can't ignore him. You have to respond to his call. It was a good lesson. All through the writing process, my kids demanded a level of engagement that I never knew I had, and they left me too sleep-deprived to pull a single punch. Big ups to them.

Do you think there is a connection between what you've drawn from your upbringing (particularly what healing may exist and may be ongoing) and how you parent your kids?

One of the most important things to me has been ensuring that my kids don't grow up in an all-white bubble, like I did. I was delighted that they got the chance to meet my mom and form a relationship with her, and now that she's gone, I'm making a concerted effort to plug into our broader Ghanaian family, and to raise them in community with other Black families and children. I don't want them to lose that connection. In this house, we love Black people, dammit.

Moreover, in this house, we love one another. My adoptive family gave me all kinds of *stuff*. They bought me expensive gifts and paid for things, and that's all well and good. But I never felt *loved*, and my most reactive trait as a parent is my obsession with telling my kids that I love them, and practicing love as I now understand it, embracing their humanity *completely*, for always, and offering them a safe space to be someone new,

every day, without any fear over whether their father loves who they are this time. I do, I do, I do.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

If you have the money to adopt a child, you have the money to support their mother. Adopt families, not children.

Retrieved from: <https://thetyee.ca/Culture/2022/09/20/Harrison-Mooney-Dismantling-White-Supremacy/>

Other Links and Resources



Interview discussing the book: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2076053571638>

Video discussing his residency and his memoir:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYpAqZDYfOU>

Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: