

Book: *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler

At the core of our work is the belief in change—driven by a desire for growth, a more sustainable future, and a deeper understanding of one another. This reading guide was developed as part of the *Seeding Change: Reimagining our Collective Futures* initiative—an education effort led by the Education Team during the **2024–2025 academic year** and inspired by the visionary work of Octavia E. Butler.

Grounded in Afrofuturism, *Seeding Change* invited our campus community to dream beyond the constraints of the present and imagine more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures. Through community reading groups on *Parable of the Sower*, we explored themes of resilience, mutual aid, environmental collapse, gender, faith, and the transformative power of vision. This asynchronous guide is adapted from those discussions—so that anyone can join us in reading and dreaming forward.

SECTION 1: *Awakenings & Warnings*

Chapters 1–6

“All that you touch, You Change.
All that you Change, Changes you.” —Earthseed: The Books of the Living

Themes:

- Climate collapse & social fragmentation
- Hyper-empathy as a gift and burden
- Religion, belief, and power
- Early seeds of Earthseed philosophy

Discussion Prompts:

1. What are your initial impressions of Lauren and the world she inhabits? What resonates—and what disturbs?
 2. How does Butler blur the line between fiction and plausible reality? What elements feel eerily familiar in our own world today?
 3. Lauren’s “hyper-empathy” forces her to feel others’ pain. In what ways is empathy framed as both a strength and a risk in this novel—and in our lives?
 4. Earthseed’s central idea is that “*God is Change*.” How does that differ from dominant religious narratives in the book—and in your own experiences?
 5. Lauren observes: “*To be intelligent is to be adaptable*.” How does that idea challenge our typical definitions of intelligence and success?
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SECTION 2: *Fracture & Flight*

Chapters 7–12

“Embrace diversity. Unite—
Or be divided,
robbed,
ruled,
killed
By those who see you as prey.”

Themes:

- Collapse of home and the illusion of safety
- The politics of preparedness vs. denial
- Gendered vulnerability and survival
- Ideological difference in community building

Discussion Prompts:

1. After the fall of Lauren’s neighborhood, she is forced into migration. How does Butler portray the loss of stability—not just of place, but of identity and relationships?
 2. Jo resists Lauren’s preparations as paranoid. How do we navigate the line between readiness and fear? Where do we see this debate in today’s social or environmental justice work?
 3. Characters like Zahra and Natividad face gendered violence and exploitation. How does Butler revisit the legacy of slavery and control over women’s bodies in her future world?
 4. What makes Earthseed feel radical or compelling compared to other belief systems in the novel? How does it center personal agency amid chaos?
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SECTION 3: *Scars & Seeds*

Chapters 13–20

“She died for all of us.”

Themes:

- Corporatization of public life (KSF, Olivar)
- Violence, performance, and political spectacle
- Trust and betrayal
- Naming, storytelling, and control

Discussion Prompts:

1. KSF and Olivar represent the privatization of entire towns. How does Butler depict the entanglement of capitalism, democracy, and control?
 2. The “painted faces” are some of the most terrifying figures in the novel. What do they symbolize? Can you think of real-world equivalents?
 3. Trust becomes both fragile and essential for survival. What makes someone trustworthy in Butler’s world—and in your own?
 4. From names like “Christmas” to moments of public violence (“*she died for all of us*”), Butler shows how language and spectacle shape collective meaning. What does the novel suggest about who gets remembered, and why?
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SECTION 4: *Becoming Earthseed*

Chapters 21–25 (End)

“The destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars.”

Themes:

- Collective survival and mutual aid
- The ethics of belief formation
- Rootedness, exile, and rebirth
- Sankofa: the role of memory in future-building

Discussion Prompts:

1. Lauren forms a new kind of family—not by blood, but by trust. What makes this community possible in a fractured world?
2. In the face of climate collapse, Lauren dreams of building life beyond Earth. How does this idea of “rooting among the stars” speak to the balance between letting go and carrying forward?
3. Butler once said the purpose of the novel was to ask: “*Where are our current behaviors taking us?*” How do you see this story as a warning—or a roadmap?
4. The African concept of *Sankofa* teaches us to “go back and get it”—to retrieve wisdom from the past. What lessons does *Parable* offer about pain, survival, and imagination?

Optional Reflection Activity:

Inspired by Butler’s poetic scripture, write a short verse that captures your own belief about change, community, or the future.