



Such a Fun Age

BOOK
CLUB KIT

PUTNAM
— EST. 1838 —

KILEY REID

CHARACTER- THEMED COCKTAILS

EMIRA TUCKER

Piña Colada

Strong, sweet, and fruity

- 1 ½ ounces coconut cream (such as Coco Lopez)
- 1 ½ ounces pineapple juice
- 1 ounce aged rum
- 1 ounce coconut rum
- Splash of coconut milk (optional)
- Pineapple wedge, for garnish

Combine all the ingredients in a blender cup. Add 1 cup of ice. Blend on High until smooth. Pour contents into a tiki glass or tall glass. Garnish with the pineapple wedge.

ALIX CHAMBERLAIN

White Wine Spritzer

Classic, fancy, and fresh

- 3 ounces aromatic white wine (such as Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, or Gewürztraminer)
- 1 ounce club soda
- Orange or lemon bitters
- Orange or lemon twist

Pour wine into a wine glass filled with ice; top off with club soda and a dash of bitters. Garnish with orange twist.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Such a Fun Age* is told from the perspectives of two highly different women: Emira and Alix. How did the narration impact your reading experience? Did you relate more to one woman than the other? Did that change as you read the novel?
2. After Kelley takes the video of Emira in the grocery store, she asks him not to release it. Did you understand her request? What would you have done if you were in her position?
3. The question of parental vs. parental-figure relationships is pivotal in this story. How does Briar's relationship with Emira differ from that with her mother? How do Emira and Alix each relate to Briar in turn?
4. While the "age" in the title recalls childhood, the novel is very much about Emira's pivotal age and her experience as a twenty-five-year old learning how to be a grown-up. Talk about some of Emira's challenges, as well as her freedoms. How does her experience compare or differ to your own?
5. An unexpected person links Emira and Alix. What was your reaction when you realized the connection? How did it make you view Alix differently? Emira?
6. Kelley is the first to point out the racist accusations against Emira, but at times, he seems to forget they have very different experiences, whereas Emira is always aware of it. Talk about the moments where they don't seem to communicate well about their specific perspectives.
7. Kelley and Alix have a fraught history. Do you think Alix is right to blame Kelley for many of her issues growing up? Do you think Kelley's perception of Alix as spoiled and privileged is fair?
8. Alix devotes herself to befriending Emira, but Emira only sees Alix as her employer. At the end of the day, did you find their relationship to be anything more than transactional? In what ways do each of the women try to either maintain or disrupt that boundary?
9. Toward the end of the novel, Alix is confronted with the possibility that she had not acted in Emira's best interests. Do you think Alix meant well by getting involved in Emira's situation? Do her intentions ultimately matter?
10. The last chapter follows Emira in the years after the incident at the Chamberlains'. In what way did things change, if at all? Did anything you learned about Kelley, Alix, or Briar surprise you?
11. There are many uncomfortable, but relatable, moments in *Such a Fun Age*. In what ways did you see your own experiences reflected in this story? How did you feel seeing them explored through the characters?



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A CONVERSATION WITH KILEY REID

When did you first know you were a writer/storyteller?

I've been filling notebooks with stories for as long as I can remember. I also carried around a baby-name book to read when I got bored, which I believe is often an indication of a future writer. The simple answer is that I've always been obsessed with storytelling. I knew I was a writer around age 23.

What was it about your own nanny/babysitting experience that encouraged or inspired you to immortalize it in this exciting and deeply moving novel?

Something that inspired me was witnessing how much intelligence and independence children and toddlers have at such a young age. I'm also interested in complicated relationships, and the babysitter/child/mother dynamic is definitely one of them. I think relationships that can't happen without an exchange of goods are fascinating, and I've always been intrigued by emotional labor. And when these types of relationships are set up, especially when children are involved, an immediate pressure cooker of time is placed on them because the children won't need them forever. When will it end, how will it end, who will end it...I love the push that time crunch places on a story.

How much of *Such a Fun Age* is autobiographical?

While none of this novel is autobiographical, I'd like to think the experiences are based in truth of circumstance. All of the characters, especially the children, were crafted from experiencing so many different personalities while I was babysitting. Emira and I are very different (I'm hyper organized in a way she isn't, but she's also many leagues cooler than I am) but we both share a love of taking care of children and treating them like adults.

Like countless victims of non-brutal discrimination that occurs every day, Emira is the victim of racial profiling while on the job caring for her white

boss's two-year-old. It's a pivotal scene that triggers life-altering events. What do you hope readers take away from that scene?

I hope readers take away the feeling of a low-to-the-ground and domestic terror, that it can and does happen everywhere. That these moments aren't self-contained and continue to shape everyone involved, particularly the African Americans who have to mentally carry the event with them to every job and grocery story from that time on.

Like the book's vivid principal players, its supporting characters are indelible, from perceptive little Briar to Emira's tell-it-like-it-is best friend Zara and even Peter Chamberlain's well-meaning co-anchor Laney Thacker. How do you consistently help them leap off the page?

One thing I tell my students to do is something I try to do myself in my writing, which is giving every character a win at some point in the story. To find out what very nice and helpful thing that character would do, and then have them do it. Whether it's paying for someone's coffee or complimenting someone's dress, having empathy for every character humanizes them, and also makes their less perfect moments appear more charged and real.

While earning your Master of Fine Arts degree at the Iowa Writer's Workshop you were awarded the Truman Capote Fellowship. How has this experience changed you?

The Truman Capote Fellowship was vital in the completion of this novel. It definitely changed the way I see the writing process, and further enforced beliefs I held before grad school in that time is always a writer's greatest gift.

Emmy-winning writer/producer Lena Waithe, one of the most influential young voices in Hollywood right now, snapped up the film and TV rights to the book before publication. What was your first reaction? Will you have a creative role moving forward?

I was completely floored and quickly grateful as she and her team are incredibly kind, brilliant, and pro-

tective of both me and my work. I'm currently drafting the film adaptation alongside the producers and it's a wonderful and challenging experience.

As a writer, what's the best advice you've been given?

Jess Walter said to write to your obsessions, which sounds obvious, but I think it is extremely worth exploring and admitting your tendencies as a writer, and using empathy to make readers obsessed with them too.

Are there specific authors you have found particularly inspiring?

Leila Slimani's *The Perfect Nanny* has really stuck with me and I found her very quiet take on class dynamics incredibly inspiring. I keep Joy William's *99 Stories Of God* under my bed because I love it. I also recently enjoyed *Heads of Colored People* by Nafissa Thompson-Spires.

What do you hope readers take away from *Such a Fun Age*?

First, I just hope readers love the story. I hope they forget about whatever they're doing and get wrapped up in the characters and experience that 'what's gonna happen?!' feeling that I love to experience while reading. Second, I hope the novel works as both a gateway and a mirror; that readers can therefore become interested in reading about all types of characters, ones of various races and incomes, and that this book can gently nudge readers to stop, look inward, and say, "Yikes. I do that, too."

What's next for you?

My husband and I recently moved to Philadelphia. I'll continue to work on the film adaptation, and one day, a second novel.

**WHETHER IT'S
PAYING FOR
SOMEONE'S COFFEE
OR COMPLIMENTING
SOMEONE'S DRESS,
HAVING EMPATHY
FOR EVERY
CHARACTER
HUMANIZES THEM.**

COLOR THE COVER

