

akwaeke emezi

# PET



Pet is here to hunt a monster.  
Are you brave enough to look?

discussion guide

## about the book

**Pet is here to hunt a monster.  
Are you brave enough to look?**

There are no monsters anymore, or so the children in the city of Lucille are taught. Jam and her best friend, Redemption, have grown up with this lesson all their lives. But when Jam meets Pet, a creature made of horns and colors and claws who emerges from one of her mother's paintings and a drop of Jam's blood, she must reconsider what she's been told. Pet has come to hunt a monster, and the shadow of something grim lurks in Redemption's house. Jam must fight not only to protect her best friend, but also to uncover the truth, and the answer to the question: *How do you save the world from monsters if no one will admit they exist?*

In their riveting and timely young adult debut, acclaimed novelist Akwaeke Emezi asks difficult questions about what choices you can make when the society around you is in denial.



Grades 7 and up  
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BEOWULF SHEEHAN

## about the author

**Akwaeke Emezi** makes their young adult debut with *Pet* on the inaugural Make Me a World list. An honoree on the National Book Foundation's "5 Under 35" list, a long-list nominee for the Carnegie Medal for Excellence, and a short-list nominee for the Center for Fiction's First Novel Prize, Akwaeke continues to receive accolades for their adult debut, *Freshwater*. The autobiographical novel also received rave reviews from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New Yorker*, and *Los Angeles Times*, among others, as well as starred reviews from *School Library Journal* and *Booklist*. Their sophomore adult novel, *The Death of Vivek Oji*, is forthcoming in 2020 from Riverhead. Learn more about Akwaeke at [Akwaeke.com](http://Akwaeke.com) or on Twitter at [@azemezi](https://twitter.com/azemezi).

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## pre-reading activities

1. What does the title *Pet* in relation to the book's cover make you think about? Brainstorm possible storylines related to the cover.
2. The theme of good vs. evil has been explored in many stories. What books, movies, or songs speak to this theme? Have any been particularly successful in making you think about good vs. evil?
3. What would you do to keep your friends and family safe?
4. Define *monster*. What does a monster look like? How do you know a monster when you see one?
5. Has your community or society ever tried to shield you from the truth? How? Why?

## discussion questions

1. *Pet* examines language and communication, and how listening and speaking are essential to understanding the world. "When Jam was a toddler, she'd refused to speak, which was why they'd taught her to sign instead. She used her hands and body and face for her words but saved her voice for the most important one[s]." (p. 15) Jam uses her voice to tell Redemption about the monsters and about Pet. Why is this important? Jam decides not to tell Redemption there is a monster in his home. Why does she keep this from him? Describe a time when you or someone you know omitted information at a critical moment. Would you have reacted the same way Redemption did when he discovered what Jam had left out? Talk about the role listening plays in the story.
2. The city of Lucille had a revolution to eradicate all the monsters. How does Emezi describe the city prior to the revolution? (pp. 1–3, 78–79) What allusions to current events do you notice?

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## discussion questions

3. Bitter, Jam's mother, taught her daughter that "a lot of things were manageable as long as they were honest. You could see things clearly if they were honest; you could decide what to do next, because you knew exactly what you were dealing with." (p. 7) Give examples of when Jam does not follow this life lesson. What is her rationale for not doing so in each instance?
4. Why doesn't Jam send Pet back into the painting? (pp. 69–70)
5. Reflect on and respond to the following quotations:
  - a. "I could feel how hungry it was to become real." (p. 44)
  - b. "If you do not know there are things you do not see . . . then you will not see them because you do not expect them to be there. You think you see everything, so you think everything you see is all there is to be seen." (pp. 71–72)
  - c. "But the truth does not care about what you want; the truth is what it is. It is not moved by want, it is not a blade of grass to be bent by the wind of your hopes and desires." (p. 95)
  - d. "All knowledge is good knowledge." (p. 102)
  - e. "We should've known. . . . It's not that Lucille failed me, it's more like all of us might have failed Moss, you know?" (p. 149)
  - f. "Masks are useful then; not quite lies, not quite truths. Just decision about what to be and what to show. Curation." (p. 152)
6. The library is a place to gain knowledge. Discuss how the library and Ube, the librarian, helped Jam and Redemption learn about the revolution and the monsters. Reflect on and respond to the ways in which research (inquiry and information gathering) helped Redemption recognize what was happening in his home.



## discussion questions

7. Pet “hissed and crackled when Aloe used the word ‘monster.’” (p. 45) Why do Aloe and Bitter view Pet as a monster? How does the term affect the novel’s tone? Discuss ways in which labels confine and define people. Why do we need to be careful with labels?
8. Redemption, we see, is a fighter. He explains, “[My opponent and I are] alive when we fight. We’re magnificent; we’re testing our aliveness against each other. How fast is your alive? How smooth is your alive? How hard, how resilient? We’re alive because we can be hurt; we’re alive because we can heal. I think it’s beautiful. It’s why I fight.” (p. 57) Discuss his poetic view of fighting. What is something that you do that makes you feel alive? A sport? An artistic pursuit?
9. “You’re the monster, Hibiscus.” (p. 180) How was Hibiscus’s monstrous behavior discovered? What was his ultimate punishment? Do you think he got what he deserved? Why or why not?
10. What did this book teach you about humanity? What resonated and lingered after you finished reading this book?

## beyond the book

1. **Creative Writing:** *Pet* is published by Make Me a World, an imprint dedicated to exploring the vast possibilities of contemporary childhood. It publishes books for readers who ask hard questions and so that readers can see themselves and each other in the stories. *Pet* is Jam and Redemption’s story; they are two friends on a quest to uncover the truth. What is **your** story? What would your book be titled? What would your book question? And who else would see themselves in the story?
2. **Text to Text, Text to Self, Text to World:** In the acknowledgments, author Akwaeke Emezi shares that they “want *Pet* to reach as many readers as nonhumanly possible, so it can do the work it’s meant to do in the world. We are each other.” Think about the story, the message, and this wish; what does “we are each other” mean in the context?
3. **Presentation:** Using *Pet* and various texts (including but not limited to music, film, essays, plays, etc.), analyze and present what is meant by “Forgetting is how the monsters come back.” (p. 20)



## praise

- ★ “Emezi’s direct but tacit story of injustice, unconditional acceptance, and the evil perpetuated by humankind forms a compelling, nuanced tale that fans of speculative horror will quickly devour.” —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review
  - ★ “This soaring novel shoots for the stars and explodes the sky with its bold brilliance.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review
  - ★ “This is a heart-stirring atmospheric page-turner, a terrific and terrible yet quiet adventure. Emezi spins a tale that defies categorization as strikingly as their characters, forcing readers to deeply rethink assumptions about identity, family structure, and justice. A riveting and important read that couldn’t be more well timed to our society’s struggles with its own monsters.” —*School Library Journal*, Starred Review
- “Young readers will enjoy the fantastical story line itself, while older readers will be able to look more deeply into its themes and pull out the social commentary on the hidden evils of our world that Emezi creatively weaves into the story. Just like *Pet* gently encourages Jam to see things unseen, to not be afraid, and to not forget, this book encourages its readers to do the same.” —*Booklist*

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