1. The title of a novel is a deliberate and important choice that any author must make. What might be the significance of Baldwin's title? What is the role of place in the story? Consider the various streets, neighborhoods, and community spaces in the book and how Baldwin treats them in his writing: What do you think he is saying about community, belonging, and identity-building, both personal and national? Which ideals does he reject and which does he seem to embrace? Why do you think part two is titled “zion?”
   a. Saturday night street vs. Sunday morning on the street (p. 20).
   b. West Fourth Street, Bleeker Street, Spanish Harlem, the Village (pp. 53-55), Puerto Rico and the airport (pp. 145, 184-185), church (pp. 23-26), prison, “America” (p 28).

2. When Tish informs different family members about her pregnancy, what can you discern as a reader about Baldwin’s view of what or who is “good” or “bad” in this story? Give examples of specific words, actions, expressions. How is it different or similar to your own sense of morality or immorality? As the book continues, there is a lot of discussion about what makes a “good girl” or a “good boy.” Characters make choices to go against the law or against other established systems (pp. 122-123, 128). What do you notice about the choices characters make and what it says about their values? How did your reaction to their choices make you think about your own systems of morality?

3. How do race, racism, colorism, national and gender identity affect the relationships of characters in the book? What do you notice about the intersections of these identities? Some people have criticized Baldwin’s treatment of certain groups in this book. What do you think? How does your knowledge of Baldwin’s identity as a gay, black, man writing from France inform or affect your view?
4. When Daniel tells the story of his first arrest, “when that man put his handcuffs on me and pushed me down the steps and into the car and then that car started moving, I wanted to scream for my Mama,” what scenes come to mind from recent history? How do Daniel and Fonny’s experiences reflect today’s criminal justice realities? Do you think “Beale Street” is prophetic in nature? Why or why not?

5. What role does religion play in the book? Characters have different relationships with religion, the church, or with God (pp. 14-15, 23-26, 64-65). How do you see your own relationship reflected in theirs, for good or for bad? Why do you think Baldwin chose to use religious imagery or symbolism in certain critical scenes (a rose, a veil, bitter spices, washing of bodies, etc.)? Which characters mirror Jesus? John the Baptist? Mary? Others?

6. Hope and hopelessness are themes in this book. Think about the different relationships different characters have with hope: From what or where did they derive hope? When or where did they lose hope? How did they find it? Is this a hopeful book? In the end, were you left feeling more hopeless or hopeful?

7. Did you see the movie? Did you think it was faithful to Baldwin’s work? Why or why not?