

Suggestions for reading My Grandmother's Hands

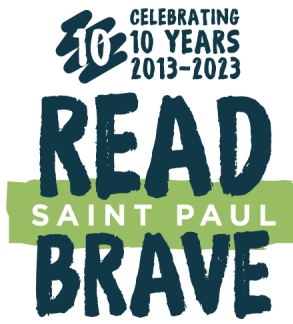
My Grandmother's Hands by Resmaa Menakem is a powerful title to read in partnership or community with others in groups of any size.

Nearly every chapter includes individual and collective somatic (body) practices. More than 40 City of Saint Paul staff, including many library staff, participated in a "slow read" of My Grandmother's Hands during 2021 and 2022. They read one to two chapters each month over a period of 12 months. This format invited participants to reflect on the content at a slower pace and discuss ideas and experiences with co-workers.

Here are some suggestions for experiencing My Grandmother's Hands in community with others.

- This book is about race, racism, undoing white body supremacy, and recognizing how generational trauma shows up in all of our bodies. Commit to keeping the conversation on these topics even when uncomfortable
- Jointly develop shared group values and agreements at the beginning. Commit to holding each other and the space together.
- Rather than reading the entire book before discussing, commit to a longer read, with one to two chapters ahead of each meeting.
- Experience the body practices collectively as a group and commit to listening to your body and supporting others as they do the same. Commit to individual and collective healing.
- Practice listening to understand, not to fix, judge, or offer advice. Speak for yourself, your experiences and your body. Let others do the same.
- As you experience and learn from this book, invite others in your community to read and move beyond reading to action.

Content was sourced from participants in the City of Saint Paul My Grandmother's Hands Equity Book Club as well as other community sources and resources. In offering these tips, we strive to honor everyone who is informing, experimenting, and participating in creating embodied spaces that help undo white body supremacy. If you believe we have used your content without your desired attribution, please email gao.yang@ci.stpaul.mn.us.



My Grandmother's Hands Discussion Questions

1. What does the title of the book mean? How is it a jumping off point for the author?
2. The author writes, "Race is a myth—something made up in the seventeenth century that has been carried forward . . . into the present." (p. 67) When and why was this myth created?
3. Why does the author differentiate between white supremacy and white body supremacy? What are its implications?
4. What is the difference between clean pain and dirty pain? How does the author revisit these concepts (directly and indirectly) throughout the book?
5. What is the vagus or "soul" nerve? How does it contribute to white body supremacy? How can it be used to heal from it?
6. Emotional and historical trauma can be felt physically and can be transmitted generationally. How does that idea impact your understanding of yourself? Your family? Your community?
7. The book involves both reading and somatic body practices throughout. Did you try the somatic practices as you were reading? How did they affect your reading and thinking about the book?