

## Discussion Questions for *Tough Times*

### In the Book:

1. How has Michael's mother changed since Swede's death? Who does she have for support?
2. Michael has a strong sense of responsibility and what is right. Where did he get that from? Nature or nurture?
3. Shenia takes charge while Michael and the kids are in shock. What would have happened if she hadn't been there?
4. Michael is responsible for his younger siblings, but we also see that Jimmy is resourceful. When Michael decides to follow Jimmy's suggestion and swap plates, what is his conflict?
5. What do you think of Michael's reaction to flying off the road? His reaching out for help?
6. What do Michael and his grandfather have in common besides the name?
7. Michael's grandfather feels guilty about throwing out Michael's stocking. Why and how has guilt effected his life?
8. Michael has always believed it's his fault his grandparents disowned his mother. Was it really all about race?
9. Has Michael encountered problems because he's biracial? How much does it rule his life?
10. Michael is not technically savvy. In 2012 the author still had students with limited access at home who dealt with it like Michael, by avoiding computers at school. If the story was moved up to today, would that be an issue for any kid? How does trying to hide lack of this skill work against Michael?
11. Shenia's parents have had some rough times, too. Her mother blames the neighborhood for their son getting into trouble. Is that reasonable? What difference does a neighborhood make? Why?
12. Lester's sister put him into jail once, now she's helping him. Why? How could the system be improved?

## ***Tough Times* by Sheri McGuinn**

### **Additional questions to consider:**

- Michael starts running, then flashes back on his life up until this moment.
  - Does this slow the story too much?
  - Would you care about Michael as much without it?
  - Would you understand his choices?
- How does the phone call on the way to Reno shake his assumption that race is the reason he's never known his grandparents?
- Were Michael and Shenia right or wrong to take off with the kids?
  - Would they really be split up?
  - What other options do they have?
  - How important is Shenia in this decision?
- What about Michael driving without a license? Was that a good decision at the time?
- Which is more mature: taking responsibility for the little kids on the trip or asking for an adult to take charge?
- When Michael's grandfather explains his perspective on how he ended up not knowing his grandchildren, do you believe his version of the story?
  - Why/why not?
  - How often, for what reasons, do families end up with this kind of split?
- Missy knows what happened from the beginning, but doesn't come out and say it.
  - What foreshadowed the possibility she has something to tell?
  - How would the story change if they let her explain at the beginning?
- Who is in charge of the family at the end of the novel?
- What elements has the author included at the end to make you think another story might be in the works?

**My newsletter caters to readers and writers: [sherimcguinn.substack.com](http://sherimcguinn.substack.com)**

**Review links for *Tough Times*:**

**[www.amazon.com/Tough-Times-Sheri-McGuinn/dp/1942069081](http://www.amazon.com/Tough-Times-Sheri-McGuinn/dp/1942069081)**

**[www.goodreads.com/book/show/220619945-tough-times](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/220619945-tough-times)**

**Thanks. Every review helps.**

***Thank you for reading!***

