

James Baldwin's novel If Beale Street Could Talk has gained considerable notice because of its recent Academy Award nominations; however, it can certainly stand on its own merits as fiction.

Set in Harlem, the book centers on 19-year-old Tish, her family and her imprisoned boyfriend, and Baldwin threads into its tapestry many of his recurrent themes: The bias of the American police and justice systems; the hypocrisy and arrogance of organized religion; the inequality of housing and public services; and the failure of black education.

Nevertheless, the darkness and heaviness is lightened by love of family and loyalty of friends. Baldwin also makes clear that Fonny is not alone in his imprisonment, but that all of us are constrained by our own racial fears, blindness and indifference.

The book triggered a host of important observations, and the group discussed in depth how we each can begin to build our own bridges.