

DEATH IN THE JUNGLE

MURDER, BETRAYAL,
AND THE LOST DREAM
OF JONESTOWN

CANDACE FLEMING

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

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Themes: History
& Social Studies,
Nonfiction

ABOUT THE BOOK

Using riveting first-person accounts, award-winning author Candace Fleming reveals the makings of a monster: from Jones’s humble origins as a child of the Depression to his founding of a group whose idealistic promises of equality and justice attracted thousands of followers to his relocation of Temple headquarters from California to an unsettled territory in Guyana, South America, which he dubbed “Jonestown,” to his transformation of Peoples Temple into a nefarious experiment in mind-control.

And Fleming heart-stoppingly depicts Jones’s final act, persuading his followers to swallow fatal doses of cyanide—to “drink the Kool-Aid,” as it became known—as a test of their ultimate devotion.

Here is a sweeping story that traces, step by step, the ways in which one man slowly indoctrinated, then murdered, 900 innocent, well-meaning people. And how a few members, Jones’s own son included, stood up to him . . . but not before it was too late.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Scott Fleming

Candace Fleming is the prolific and versatile award-winning author of many books for children and young adults. *School Library Journal* praised her most recent title, *Murder Among Friends*, which received four starred reviews, as a “chilling page-turner.” Her previous book *The Rise and Fall of Charles Lindbergh* received six starred reviews, was a *Kirkus Reviews*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, and *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and was hailed by *The Wall Street Journal* as a “fascinating chronicle.” Candace’s *The Family Romanov* also received six starred reviews, won the *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* for Nonfiction and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and was recognized as a Sibert Nonfiction Honor Book. Her many acclaimed picture books include include *Narwhal*, which received four starred reviews, and *Giant Squid*, another Sibert Honor Book. Visit her on the web at candacefleming.com.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Jim Jones was born in 1931 and died in 1978. During his lifetime, the United States experienced many historic events including the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement. To understand more about the historical context of this book, research an event, milestone, or time period that occurred during Jones' lifetime. Write a quick synopsis of this historical moment including the key details, names of key players, and relevant vocabulary words. Along with the other students in your class, create a bulletin board display with these write-ups so they can be reviewed as the book is read.
2. In the Prologue, Fleming breaks down the definition of a "cult" and helps the reader instead identify groups as either constructive or destructive. To prepare for reading *Death in the Jungle*, create a chart of the nine characteristics of a destructive group. As you read, collect evidence from the text about Jim Jones and Peoples Temple to prove they are a destructive group.
3. As the synopsis of *Death in the Jungle* explains, "it is a sweeping story that traces, step by step, the ways in which one man slowly indoctrinated, then murdered, 900 innocent, well-meaning people. And how a few members, Jones's own son included, stood up to him . . . but not before it was too late." The book will be a powerful tool to learn about this historic event, but for many readers, this may be a difficult topic to read about. To prepare, design a bookmark with quotes about the importance of studying history, affirmations, mindful breathing techniques, and other gentle reminders to support a reader as they learn about this part of history.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the Prologue, a former member of Peoples Temple reflects, "No one joins a cult, they join a cause." (p. 16) How does this framing help you understand why so many people joined Peoples Temple?
2. How did Jim Jones's early years mold him into the leader he would become?
3. How did Jim Jones use racist policies like redlining to his advantage?
4. Why did Jim Jones make the shift from religion to socialism? How did this shift impact the members of Peoples Temple?
5. As Fleming ends Part One, she writes, "It would be another decade before Stephan learned the truth: His father had been the bogeyman." (p. 75) How does this sentence demonstrate her craft as an author? What other examples of Fleming's craft have you noticed?
6. On page 107, Jones is quoted as saying, "When your world has failed you, I'll be standing, because I am freedom. I am peace. I am justice. *I am God!*" How does this shift in language give Jones even more power?
7. "Jones had long meddled in the family life of his followers, but by 1972 he was routinely breaking up marriages, recommending divorces, and suggesting alternative partners for adults." (p. 131) Why was this strategy effective in controlling members of Peoples Temple? What other steps did Jones take to maintain control?
8. Chapter 24 is called Death and Sacrifice. Why were these powerful themes for Jones?
9. How were journalists able to make the "First Cracks" in Peoples Temple, as Fleming describes in chapter 26?
10. On page 191, Fleming introduces the promotional film Jones made to show members in California. These promotional films are available online. After viewing the film, reflect on your thoughts. Does the film match the description on page 191? What surprises you about the footage? What questions do you have after watching?

11. What was it like to live in Guyana as a member of Peoples Temple? How did things change as more members arrived?
 12. “The timing of these broadcasts was intentional. ‘Hitler did his indoctrination speeches around six to seven p.m. when workers were home eating and their resistance to change was low,’ one inner-circle member had written to Jones in a memo. It was an idea the Führer-admiring Jones seized on.” (p. 219) What other lessons from Hitler did Jones utilize, and how were the members of Peoples Temple impacted?
 13. As Fleming explains, “within the Black community African American members of Peoples Temple were stigmatized as having been duped by a white man.” (p. 312) Why does Sikivu Hutchinson believe that argument is inadequate?
 14. Fleming is aware of the power of words and makes sure to inform the reader about her word choices at the start of the book. How does this framing help the reader better understand the text? What other shifts in language have you encountered in your study of the past, and why was that shift crucial to your understanding of the topic?
3. As Fleming explains, “Thirty-two years after the tragedy, in 2010, four memorial plaques were placed on the grave. The names of every person who perished at Jonestown—as well as those who died in Port Kaituma and Georgetown—were engraved on them.” (pp. 314–315) These plaques have become a place to gather and remember the survivors and the victims. Design your own memorial to honor their memories and to remind us of the lessons we can learn from their experience. Choose a location for your memorial and sketch your design, making sure to describe the reasons for the symbols, words, and details you included in your design.
 4. Create an infographic or one-page on lessons we can learn from Jonestown. Using evidence from the text, show what you’ve learned from *Death in the Jungle* and how a reader can be more aware of the tactics used by people like Jim Jones to control and manipulate.
 5. Candace Fleming is very mindful of her word choices throughout *Death in the Jungle* and tells the story of Jonestown using primary sources and thoughtful research. This is an effective way for a historian to communicate their learning. View a documentary or listen to a podcast on Jonestown. Then analyze how the filmmaker/podcast host told the story of this event. What similarities were there in how they presented the information? How did they present the information differently? Which format was more effective? Why?

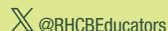
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Using the book, create a timeline or map showcasing the major events. For each event, include the date or location and a brief synopsis of what occurred.
2. Many authors, publishing companies, and readers have been creating playlists to match the time period and elements of the book they are reading. Create your own playlist to correspond to *Death in the Jungle*. List the artist, song title, and reason for choosing each song.

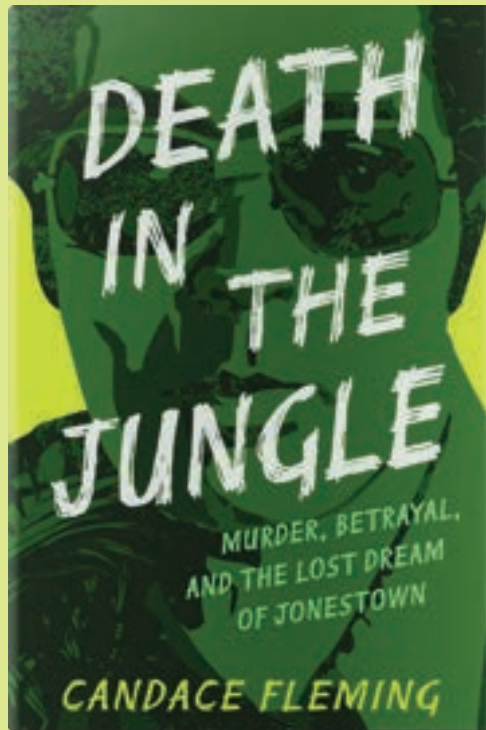
Nicole Woulfe has her bachelor of arts in history and a master of arts in secondary education from the University of New Hampshire. She is currently teaching at Sanborn Regional Middle School.



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PRAISE FOR DEATH IN THE JUNGLE



★ **“Extraordinary and illuminating.”**

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ **“Teens fascinated by cults will find plenty of that here, but they’ll also come away with a more nuanced understanding of a highly sensationalized historical event.”**

—*Booklist*, starred review

★ **“Riveting . . . this fascinating and disturbing work will help readers ‘recognize the destructive groups in their own midst.’”**

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ **“An engrossing exploration of just how easily good intentions can drag people down the wrong path if led by a charismatic speaker with a skill for manipulation.”**

—*The Bulletin*, starred review

★ **“Fleming’s writing is riveting . . . Gripping and wrenching.”**

—*School Library Journal*, starred review