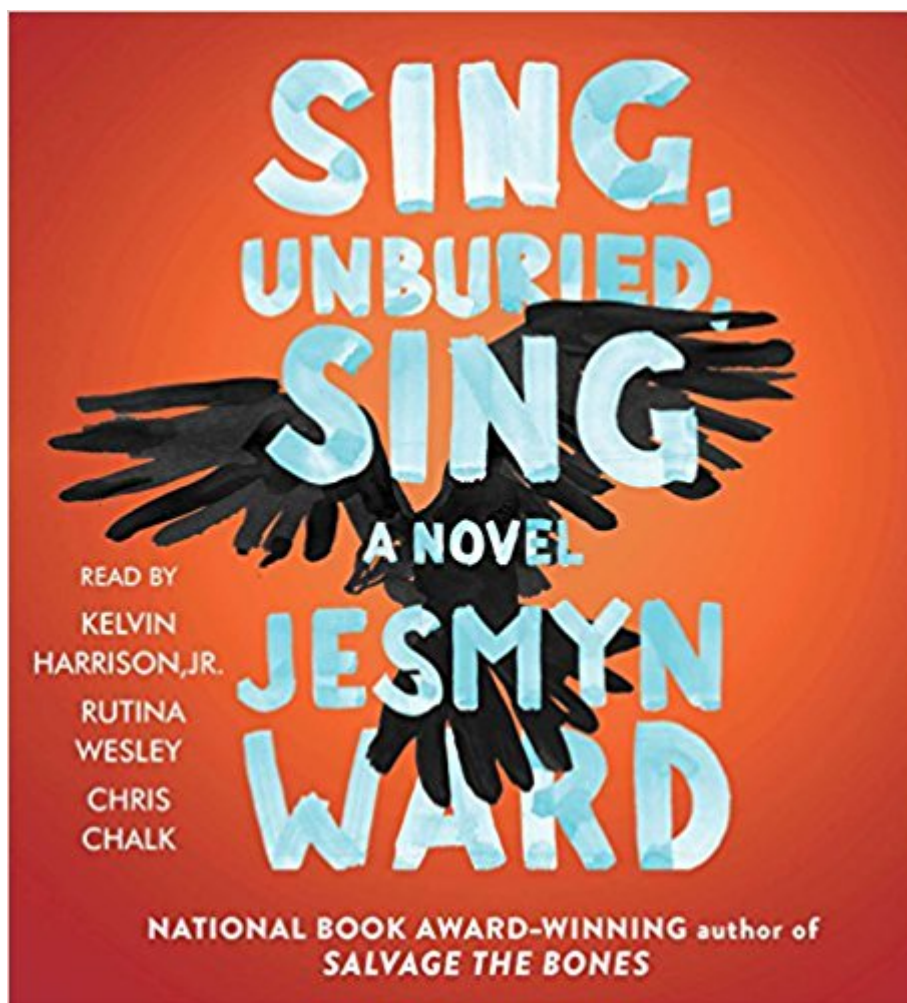




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# Sing, Unburied, Sing: A Novel



## Synopsis

A searing and profound Southern odyssey by National Book Award–winner Jesmyn Ward. In Jesmyn Ward's first novel since her National Book Award–winning *Salvage the Bones*, this singular American writer brings the archetypal road novel into rural twenty-first-century America. Drawing on Morrison and Faulkner, *The Odyssey* and the Old Testament, Ward gives us an epochal story, a journey through Mississippi's past and present that is both an intimate portrait of a family and an epic tale of hope and struggle. Ward is a major American writer, multiply awarded and universally lauded, and in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* she is at the height of her powers. Jojo and his toddler sister, Kayla, live with their grandparents, Mam and Pop, and the occasional presence of their drug-addicted mother, Leonie, on a farm on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Leonie is simultaneously tormented and comforted by visions of her dead brother, which only come to her when she's high; Mam is dying of cancer; and quiet, steady Pop tries to run the household and teach Jojo how to be a man. When the white father of Leonie's children is released from prison, she packs her kids and a friend into her car and sets out across the state for Parchman farm, the Mississippi State Penitentiary, on a journey rife with danger and promise. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* grapples with the ugly truths at the heart of the American story and the power, and limitations, of the bonds of family. Rich with Ward's distinctive, musical language, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is a majestic new work and an essential contribution to American literature.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of September 2017: A slamming, heartbreaker of a novel that is rendered with such stinging beauty and restrained emotion that despite the anguish taking place on the page, you won't want it to end. For her third novel, National Book Award winning Jesmyn Ward, tells the story of Jojo, a young black Mississippi boy raised by his grandparents, who is forced to become a man far before he should because his mother is a drug addict, his father is in jail, and his baby sister needs a guardian. When Jojo's dad is released from prison, Leonie packs Jojo and Kayla in the car, picks up her meth addled friend and drives north. What transpires is a nightmarish journey that weaves in and out of the present & Leonie's meth induced highs, when she dreams of her dead brother who was killed by white hands decades ago, and the past -- when a man named Ritchie served time alongside Jojo's grandfather. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* shimmers with mythic southern memories to tell a story of the drugged and the damned and the fluttering promise of youth. --Al Woodworth

"From the opening pages of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, you know you're in for a unique experience among the pecan trees and dusty roads of rural Mississippi. This intricately layered story combines mystical elements with a brutal view of racial tensions in the modern-day American South. Visitations from dead people, tales of snakes that turn into "scaly birds" whose feathers allow recipients to fly -- this material would have felt mannered in the hands of a lesser writer. But Ward skillfully weaves realistic and supernatural elements into a powerful narrative. The writing, though matter-of-fact in its depiction of prejudice, is poetic throughout -- an important work from an astute observer of race relations in 21st-century America. • *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, her third novel, Jesmyn Ward becomes the standard-bearer for contemporary Southern fiction, its fullest, most forceful, most vibrant, and most electrifying voice ... While Ward, born and raised in a small coastal community near Pass Christian, Mississippi, is operating within the contours of the Southern literary tradition -- in the swampy lilt of her prose, in the scope of her concerns, in the way she entangles setting and character -- she is also expanding it, heaving it forward, and revitalizing it in ways that no writer has done in more than a decade." • *Garden & Gun* "Ward tells the story of three generations of a struggling Mississippi family in this astonishing novel ... Their stories are deeply affecting, in no small part because of Ward's brilliant writing and compassionate eye. • *Publishers Weekly*, starred review "In her follow-up to the National Book Award-winning *Salvage the Bones*, Ward ambitiously fractures the extended family she portrays along race lines and moves her

narrative from the tense realism of Southern rural poverty and prejudice to an African American-rooted magic realism. The narrative sails through to an otherworldly, vividly rendered ending. Lyrical yet tough, Ward's distilled language effectively captures the hard lives, fraught relationships, and spiritual depth of her characters. Library Journal, starred review "In her first novel since the National Book Award-winning *Salvage the Bones* (2011), Ward renders richly drawn characters, a strong sense of place, and a distinctive style that is at once down-to-earth and magical."

Booklist "If *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is proof of anything, it's that when it comes to spinning poetic tales of love and family, and the social metastasis that often takes place but goes unspoken of in marginalized communities—let alone the black American South—Jesmyn Ward is, by far, the best doing it today. Another masterpiece."

Jason Reynolds, author of *Ghost* "The connection between the injustices of the past and the desperation of present are clearly drawn in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, a book that charts the lines between the living and the dead, the loving and the broken. I am a huge fan of Jesmyn Ward's work, and this book proves that she is one of the most important writers in America today."

Ann Patchett, author of *Commonwealth* "Sing, Unburied, Sing is a road novel turned on its head, and a family story with its feet to the fire. Lyric and devastating, Ward's unforgettable characters straddle past and present in this spellbinding return to the rural Mississippi of her first book. You'll never read anything like it."

Ayana Mathis, author of *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* "Read Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and you'll feel the immense weight of history—and the immense strength it takes to persevere in the face of it. This novel is a searing, urgent read for anyone who thinks the shadows of slavery and Jim Crow have passed, and anyone who assumes the ghosts of the past are easy to placate. It's hard to imagine a more necessary book for this political era."

Celeste Ng, author of *Everything I Never Told You*

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