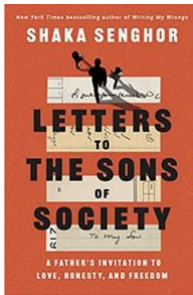


# 'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

Join the '**CliffsNotes' club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



February 2023

## Letters to the Sons of Society

By Shaka Senghor

### Discussion Highlights

Presented by Tommy Zarembka & Joy Zarembka

Shaka Senghor, at the age of 19, went to prison, fuming with anger and despair. He was a drug dealer in Detroit, and one night, he shot and killed a man who showed up on his doorstep. While serving his sentence for second-degree murder, he discovered redemption and responsibility through literature and through his own writing. *"I went to prison at nineteen with a murder conviction; I came out decades later a writer."* His first book, *Writing My Wrongs* was a New York Times best seller.

*Letters to The Sons of Society* is his second book. Shaka Senghor has lived the life of two fathers. With his first son, Jay, born shortly after Senghor was incarcerated for second-degree murder, he experienced the regret of his own mistakes and the disconnection caused by a society that sees Black lives as disposable. With his second, Sekou, born after Senghor's release, he has experienced healing, transformation, intimacy, and the possibilities of a world where men and boys can openly show one another affection, support, and love.

In this collection of nineteen beautifully written letters to Jay and Sekou, **five themes emerge**: fatherhood, racism, incarceration, narrative, and relationships. *"Letters are magical because they can conjure up a world beyond the one you can see."*

### **Fatherhood**

*"My sons are the hope of the world. The greatest power that drives our world is the love we have for our children."*

His relationships with his sons differ greatly.

With Jay, [he] missed all of the bonding moments that take place between children and their father. All I had been was a name, the word "father" without the meaning behind it. When I was released I had created about

who we were, a story filled with hope and optimism. Everything between us was transactional. Stuff was our currency, not love. Our relationship was supposed to flow. I was wanting more than anything for you to be part of the dream I was building while ignoring what you really wanted. I didn't know what that was, because I didn't ask.

Jay still has not read *Letters to the Sons of Society*.

With Sekou, the bond is stronger. *Your morning energy fills me with hope not just for the day at hand but for the years to come. Your mother and I wanted to raise a boy to be free to be whatever he wants to be, just as boys from the privileged part of America take as their birthright.*

*The voice of fathers has been limited to discipline and toughness; rarely do we get to speak honestly about our own fears and mistakes or explore the deeper, softer emotions that are crucial to effective fatherhood. I'm a father...even if the culture doesn't recognize me in those ways. Like transformation, fatherhood can happen anywhere when we create the space for it to blossom.*

### **Racism**

*Black men are seen in a one-dimensional way. It's as though we are, and have always been, America's problem to solve.*

*Encounter racism on a near-daily basis...overwhelming feeling of dread. This constant vigilance is what tires our souls. Continuous pricks at our identity are agonizing. We're constantly being delegitimized.*

*The microtraumas are what really drive the exhaustion. [Example] cleaning puppy's cage can turn into something potentially dangerous (page 30).*

*If given the opportunity they would still hang us from trees...they have never stopped lynching us; they have only refined the way in which it is done. Black people are expected not to resist in all walks of life. Resist the world of idiots telling you who you are, what you can be, and how to live.*

### **Incarceration**

*The Black body is not our own, it is controlled by the state, by correction and police officers and all the other tools of oppressive society. We are still at war against a justice system that seeks to destroy communities rather than build them. I thought back to so many moments when I realized I'd been incarcerated to be broken.*

*For four years straight I woke up every morning inside a 6x9 solitary confinement cell. Isolation comes in many forms. Feelings of isolation become worse if you can't see a way out.*

*The harrowing ordeal faced by fathers of incarcerated people is a story seldom told.*

*Cruel rigidity of the barriers post incarcerated people face every single day. Leaving prison is like Fred Flintstone stepping into an episode of the Jetsons.*

*The great trick of being alive: things change.*

## **Narrative**

*How to create your own universe, your own narrative, your own sense of purpose and solidity in the world that will try to force you into being someone you don't want to be. [Always caught in] storms of other people's opinions. I still find myself fighting a daily battle to write a true and real narrative that honors all of who I am.*

*[Need to] create internal narratives. You need to find the peace inside yourself that comes from knowing who you are and what you stand for and what you want to show to the world.*

*Crucial to realize that what happens inside us is more important than what's happening in the material world around us.*

*Hope is one of the things that I believe we underestimate. When you write your own narrative, write it from a place of hope; fill it with optimism and opportunity and a sense that everything is possible. Imagination to see me beyond my situation then.*

*Forever choos[e] to recognize the magic of our own selves as a way of building a wall against the other narratives that dictate our place in society.*

## **Relationships**

*We are not invited to try out the world as innocents. Being a child generally ends early for Black boys.*

*Young Black men like you have been unable to cry, unwilling to show their sadness, disallowed from the deeper feelings.*

*Only feeling we're allowed to show is anger.*

*My pistol became my therapy. Instead of crying tears, I cried bullets that deeply impacted my community.*

*I find myself thinking about love and how the boys and men with whom I lived in prison displayed such little of it toward themselves.*

*Made it nearly impossible for them to be there for me because they still hadn't worked out how to be there for themselves.*

**About the Book Club** In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).