

The Bean Trees

Study Guide Student Copy

ONE

The One To Get Away

1. “But the day I saw his daddy up there like some old overalls slung over a fence, I had this feeling about what Newt’s whole life was going to amount to, and I felt sorry for him.” (Pg. 1)

What does the above quotation suggest about Newt’s future?

2. Why is the narrator called Missy instead of Marietta?
3. In what ways is Missy’s mother a “good” mother for Missy? What qualities do you think Missy’s mother tries to instill in her daughter?

4. What kind of future, as described in the following quotation, is Missy trying to avoid by staying in school? What figure of speech is used?

“Believe me in those days the girls were dropping by the wayside like seeds of a poppyseed bun and you learned to look at every day as a prize.” (Pg. 3)

5. How does Missy’s after school job at the Pittman County hospital change her life?

6. What two promises does Missy make to herself after finally leaving Pittman Kentucky? Does she keep these promises?

7. What are Missy and her mother's "head rights"?

8. Why do you think Taylor decides to drive away with the child rather than take it back into the bar? In what sense is it ironic that Taylor has a child to care for at this point in her life?

9. What do you think the absence of lights at the bar and on the pick-up truck might represent in this story?

10. Why does Taylor compare the child to a turtle?

11. What is the significance of the name of the motel Taylor and the child stay at their first night together?

12. Why do you think Taylor dresses the child in the "Damn I'm Good" T-shirt? What is Taylor referring to when she writes to her mother "I found my head rights, Mama. They're coming with me"? (Pg. 23)

TWO

New Year's Pig

1. Why do you think Lou Ann and Angel's marriage is in trouble?
2. Barbara Kingsolver is described by critics as a political activist who expresses her ideas about political and social issues in her stories. Cite an incident in this chapter that illustrates Kingsolver's views on racial prejudice. State what you believe she is saying about race in the incident you select.
3. One of the themes in this novel explores a woman's role in society. What do each of the following incidents from the chapter suggest to the reader about the author's views on this issue?

Lou Ann thinks, "it would not be so bad to go through your life as a pregnant lady."
(Pg. 29)

Lee Sing compares feeding a girl baby with feeding the neighbor's New Year pig.

The night club Fanny Heaven has a woman in a bikini painted on its front door.

4. Lou Ann must walk by two large pictures on the walls of the buildings near her home. One is a large picture of Jesus and the other is the bikini-clad woman. How does she feel about each of these displays?
5. What does the last paragraph of this chapter reveal to the reader about Lou Ann's character?

THREE

Jesus Is Lord Used Tires

1. Why does Taylor decide to live in Arizona?
2. Briefly describe Mattie. Why do you think both Taylor and Turtle like Mattie?
3. Why is the tire store called JESUS IS LORD USED TIRES?
4. What is remarkable about the beans in Mattie's backyard? What is the literary term used?
5. "In Tucson, it was clear that there was nobody overlooking us all. We would just have to find our own way." (Pg. 47)

In what ways does the above passage suggest to the reader that life for Taylor in Tucson will be different than life in Kentucky? How do you think Taylor feels about this difference?

6. What is Sandi referring to in the following passage from the story?
" 'She's not really mine.' I said. 'She's just somebody I got stuck with.'
Sandi looked at both of us, her elbow cocked on her hip and the salad tongs frozen in mid air.
'Yeah, I know exactly what you mean.' " (Pg. 52)

FOUR

Tug Fork Water

1. List two reasons Lou Ann decides not to tell her mother that she and Angel are separated.
2. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Even though Lou Ann loves her mother and grandmother she is relieved to see them leave.
3. What do you think the bottle of water from Tug Fork represents in this story?

FIVE

Harmonious Space

1. This novel is rich in amusing and descriptive similes, metaphors, and other literary terms. For example, Taylor describes Tucson's railroad system as "a kind of artery...bringing the city a fresh load of life, like a blood vessel carrying platelets to circulate through the lungs. Nowadays, if you could even call the railroad an artery of Tucson, you would have to say it was a hardened one." (Pg. 65)

Find another example of a simile in this chapter that is both descriptive and amusing.

2. Taylor is also described as being "sassy." For example when she is told there are four different toxins in a hot day, Taylor replies, "I would have guessed seven or eight." (Pg. 70)

Cite another amusing instance in this chapter of Taylor's "sassy" personality.

3. Aside from amusing similes, and sassy conversations, this novel contains physical humor. Why is Snowboots the cat funny?
4. List two fears Lou Ann expresses to Taylor in this chapter. What do Lou Ann's fears suggest about her overall personality?
5. What evidence is there in this chapter that it will be good for Lou Ann to have Taylor move into Lou Ann's house?

SIX

Valentine's Day

1. Explain how the phrase used to describe Turtle fits her: "Turtle's main goal in life...seemed to be to pass unnoticed." (Pg. 78)
2. Taylor says to the priest, "You Are Old Father William." However, she does not know where the quotation comes from. It is an allusion to a famous poem that comes from *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*. How does this allusion help emphasize what happens in Taylor's life?
3. Mattie describes her place as a "sanctuary." What do you think Mattie is doing besides running a tire business?
4. Why does Taylor say the store named " 'New To You' was just like Mama's people, only you had more choice about what you got"? (Pg. 79)
5. State a generalization about life using the following passage from this chapter.
"I had never thought of tire explosions in relative terms, though it stood to reason that some would be worse than others." (Pg. 81)
6. What is the relationship between Lou Ann's belief that she ran off both her husband and the TV and the proverb "Hogs go deaf at harvest time"? (Pg. 87)
7. Find an example of hyperbole on the last page of the chapter.

SEVEN

How They Eat In Heaven

1. Why does Esperanza remind Taylor of Turtle? For what reasons do you think Esperanza is startled when she first sees Turtle?
2. What is Turtle's first uttered sound? Why is Taylor delighted with it? What is the significance of the fact that Turtle's first word is "bean"?
3. Explain the significance of Taylor's (now Turtle's) T-shirt.
4. Why is Mattie on television? What does her appearance on television suggest to the reader about the reasons Esperanza and Estevan are living in Mattie's house?
5. List two ways Edna and Mrs. Parsons illustrate their ignorance and disregard for cultures and customs different from their own.
6. One of the overall themes of this novel is the beauty to be found in appreciating the customs of other cultures. How does the story about heaven that Estevan tells at the end of the chapter relate to this theme?

EIGHT

The Miracle Of Dog Doo Park

1. What is the “miracle of Dog Doo Park?”
2. In what ways is Turtle’s talking unusual?
3. Explain the possible conflict that arises when Virgie brings up Angel’s return. What literary term is used when Taylor asks about Angel?
4. How does Estevan explain Mrs. Parsons’ insensitive comment that “the woman and kid who got shot must have been drug dealers”?
5. Explain why cigarette burns play a part in the novel.
6. Define the term “failure to thrive.”
7. Find an example of a metaphor in this chapter illustrating the theme that life will continue even under horrible and dangerous conditions.
8. Why is Lou Ann upset that Angel is leaving to join a rodeo?

NINE

Ismene

1. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Even though Taylor is attracted to Estevan, she will never allow anything romantic happen between them.
2. How does Taylor try to justify her ignorance concerning the situation in Guatemala? What political statement and personal message do you think Kingsolver is trying to send to her readers in this chapter?
3. Who is Ismene?
4. Define the words “Nutter” and Moon Soup.
5. What important concept does Taylor learn through her conversation with Estevan?

TEN

The Bean Trees

1. A proverb is a short saying that states a basic truth about life. Find an example of a proverb in this chapter and explain its meaning.
2. What does the name Esperanza mean in Spanish? List two pieces of wisdom or advice Taylor offers to Esperanza in hopes of cheering her up.
3. Critics describe this story as one of inspiration, love, and strength. Find an incident in this chapter illustrating that Taylor possesses each of those qualities.

ELEVEN

Dream Angels

1. “Having a job of her own seemed to even out some of Lou Ann’s wrinkled edges.” (Pg. 152) Why do you think Taylor likes Lou Ann better since she began working at Red Hot Mama’s?
2. State a generalization about life based on the following passage from the story:
“You were just looking for a disaster, that’s all. You can’t deny you hunt for them, Lou Ann, even in the paper. If you look hard enough you can always come up with what you want.” (Pg. 155)
3. Taylor believes Lou Ann will eventually decide to follow Angel to Montana. Do you agree or disagree with Taylor’s prediction about Lou Ann? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.
4. What evidence is there in this chapter that Taylor is an optimist? How is her optimism about the world shaken by the plight of Esperanza and Estevan?

TWELVE

Into The Terrible Night

1. When do the Indians celebrate New Year's day?
2. Find an example of personification on page 161.
3. Kingsolver is praised for her vivid descriptions of the Southwest. List two examples of unique natural phenomena Taylor experiences after this first summer rain.
4. Define the following vocabulary words from this chapter.
saguaro -
ocotillo -
cicada -
catatonic -
pedophilia -
maleficent -
5. Why do you think Taylor decides to chase the bird out of the house instead of holding and comforting Turtle?
6. In what way is Taylor's disillusionment about her ability to help Turtle similar to Taylor's disillusionment about the world's unwillingness to help people like Estevan and Esperanza?
7. Assume the last paragraph in the chapter is an example of foreshadowing. What do you think Taylor might do to try and correct Turtle's and Estevan's problems?

THIRTEEN

Night-Blooming Cereus

1. What does the narrator say is the difference between sadness and depression? Kingsolver incorporates important political and social issues into the plot of this novel. What facts does she reveal to the reader about child abuse in this country?
2. Why is the fortune-teller in Pittman a rich woman? State a generalization about life based on the financial success of the fortune teller.
3. In what ways does Cynthia help Taylor look for a way to adopt Turtle? What do you think the cameo brooch Cynthia wears might represent in this story?
4. An idiom is a phrase, which means something different from what the words actually say. For example: "Go fly a kite."
Find an example of an idiom in this chapter.
5. Kingsolver gives the reader a vivid description of a night-blooming cereus. Lou Ann thinks the cereus blooming just before Taylor leaves on her journey is a sign of good luck. Taylor believes it is an omen of good weather. In what ways does the story of the cereus help the reader understand the reasons for the journey Taylor, Turtle, Esperanza, and Estevan are about to undertake?
6. What do you think the dead blackbird mentioned in the last paragraph of this chapter might represent in this story?

FOURTEEN

Guardian Saints

1. What do Estevan and Esperanza have in common with Taylor?
2. Why do you suppose Estevan and Esperanza decide to accompany Taylor on her search for Turtle's relatives instead of going directly to the arranged destination in Oklahoma?
3. When a person believes in providence they are trusting themselves to the care of a higher power, God or nature. What evidence is there in this chapter that Taylor believes in providence?

FIFTEEN

Land O' The Cherokees

1. This novel is written in first person narration. One of the advantages in this style of storytelling is that Taylor adds her own colorful metaphors to help describe feelings. For example, she describes the disappointment she felt on her first trip through Oklahoma with the story of a woman who discovers her diamond necklace is made of rhinestones.

Find another metaphor in this chapter which helps to describe her feelings.

2. How do you think Taylor feels about Turtle's and Esperanza's growing attachment for each other?
3. What two wishes do you think Taylor makes when she and Estevan go for a boat ride? Which one does she think is very unlikely to come true?
4. For what reason does Turtle bury her Shirley Poppy doll in the dirt and want to leave the doll buried?
5. At the end of this chapter, Taylor asks Estevan and Esperanza for a favor, which they quickly grant. What two possibilities might this favor be?

SIXTEEN

Soundness Of Mind and Freedom Of Will

1. What details does Kingsolver include in this chapter that helps the reader to believe that it is so easy for Taylor to legally become Turtle's mother?
2. What is the one moment in this story when Taylor comes close to losing Turtle?
3. After finishing with Mr. Armistead, Taylor, Turtle, Estevan, and Esperanza all leave his office. Taylor says, "I could see the relief across Estevan's back and shoulders. He held Esperanza's hand. She was still drying tears but her face was changed. It shone like a polished thing, something old made new." (Pg. 216)

Why do you suppose Esperanza shines "like a polished thing" after pretending to give Turtle away to Taylor?

4. In what way is it ironic that Estevan and Esperanza are the best equipped people to help Taylor legally adopt Turtle?

SEVENTEEN

Rhizobia

1. State a generalization about life from the following passage in this chapter.
“I don’t think blood’s the only way kids come by things honest. Not even the main way. It’s what you tell them, Taylor. If a person is bad, say, then it makes them feel better to tell their kids that they’re even worse. And then that’s just exactly what they’ll grow up to be.” (Pg. 223)
2. Why is this chapter titled “Rhizobia”? State an overall theme for this novel based on the information Taylor learns about the rhizobia. What is symbolic about rhizobia?
3. What is Lou Ann’s definition of a family?