

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Bean Trees

by Barbara Kingsolver

written by Priscilla Baker

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The Bean Trees

Objectives

By the end of this Unit the student will be able to:

1. explain the significance of the novel title, *The Bean Trees*, and of the chapter titles.
2. discuss the role of narrative voice and analyze Kingsolver's use of point of view.
3. discuss the credibility of the narrator and how that is measured.
4. analyze the use of humor and sarcasm in the novel.
5. discuss the function of setting and the role of nature in the novel.
6. examine the impact of the social and political issues present in the novel on plot, character, and theme.
7. identify, discuss, and support the novel's major themes.
8. trace the development of symbols in the novel and explain their relevance and meaning.
9. explain the effects of the literary and rhetorical devices used in the novel.
10. trace the character development of the novel's protagonist, Taylor, and evaluate in what respects she can be considered a hero.
11. discuss the novel as a feminist piece of literature.
12. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

Introductory Lecture

Barbara Kingsolver was born on April 8, 1955 in Annapolis, Maryland. She spent some of her childhood in Africa where her father was a medical doctor but essentially grew up in eastern Kentucky.

Kingsolver attended DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana on a music scholarship but eventually changed her major to biology. She studied biology and ecology at the University of Arizona in Tucson for graduate school and received a Masters in Science degree. Though she took only one creative writing course while there, Kingsolver decided to pursue a career in writing. She took a job as a science writer for the university which led her to freelance feature writing and journalism.

During her college years, Kingsolver actively protested the Vietnam War, marking the start of many years' dedication to social and political change. Her commitment to socially-conscious literature led her to establish, and personally fund, the Bellwether Prize for Fiction in 2000 for novels that address social justice issues. Winners receive \$25,000 and a publishing contract. She continues to work as both an environmental and human-rights activist.

The Bean Trees, Kingsolver's first novel, was published in 1988 to wide critical acclaim. The novel won the Enoch Pratt Library Youth-to-Youth Books Award, the American Library Association Notable Book, and the *New York Times* Notable Book.

The themes of social, political, cultural, and economic injustice permeate the pages of Kingsolver's poems, short stories, essays, and novels. In *The Bean Trees*, the main character, Taylor, is given an unwanted Indian child in a parking lot while passing through the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. In addition, Taylor meets a family of Guatemalan refugees whose daughter has been taken by their government in a maneuver to get them to speak out against their circle of friends. They escape the potential torture and death of Guatemala yet seem no better off in the United States where they are forced to hide and pretend they do not exist.

In *Animal Dreams* (1990), the protagonist's sister is kidnapped by US-sanctioned Contras while working in Nicaragua promoting sustainable farming practices. In *Pigs in Heaven* (1993), Kingsolver tells the story of a Cherokee child adopted out of her own tribe, thus examining the conflict between individual and community rights. In *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), Kingsolver addresses the role the United States and other countries played in colonial and post-colonial Africa.

In her most recent novel, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007), Kingsolver embarked on a year-long experiment to eat only foods she and her family could grow themselves while exposing the ills of factory-farming and the chemicals and preservatives rampant in processed foods. She has become a vocal advocate for local farming practices.

After spending years living in Tucson, Arizona, Kingsolver has most recently settled on a farm in Emory, Virginia with her husband and two daughters.

Historical Context

There are two events that permeate the entirety of *The Bean Trees*. One is the Cherokee Trail of Tears and the other is the Sanctuary Movement during the Guatemalan Civil War.

THE CHEROKEE TRAIL OF TEARS

In 1791, the United States signed a treaty with the Cherokee Nation guaranteeing the Cherokees land located in northwest Georgia, eastern Tennessee, and southwest North Carolina. The Cherokees established their own government and constitution and lived peacefully until gold was discovered on their land in the late 1820s.

The discovery of gold in Indian Territory led the U.S. government to pass the Indian Removal Act, signed into law by President Andrew Jackson. The Cherokees twice took their case to the Supreme Court—in 1831 and 1832—and the Court eventually ruled to invalidate the removal laws, unless a treaty was signed by both parties.

There were two factions of thought amongst the Cherokee Nation: the majority opposed being removed, while a very small minority (roughly 500) were in favor of being removed, largely for financial reasons. In 1835, those few who supported removal signed the Treaty of New Echota, trading land east of the Mississippi for land in present-day Oklahoma. There was a hefty financial settlement totaling more than five million dollars to be given to the Cherokee Nation and a promise of additional aid from the United States federal government. This treaty served to justify the U.S. government's desire to remove close to 17,000 Cherokees from their land.

The eviction of the Cherokees began in 1838, led by the U.S. Army. Many were taken directly to their new homes but thousands more were forced to march there with very little food or shelter throughout the winter of 1838-39. Almost 4,000 Cherokees died from hunger, disease, and exposure to the elements. The march has come to be known as “The Trail of Tears.”

In response to the forced removal, the Cherokees established the Cherokee Nation in 1839. It is currently the second largest Indian tribe in the United States with 200,000 members, many of whom live in a 7,000 square mile area in northeastern Oklahoma. It has its own democratic government and constitution and is run by a Principal Chief, Deputy Principal Chief, and a tribal Council.

THE GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR AND THE SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

The Guatemalan War lasted from 1960-1996. *The Bean Trees* was written in 1988 prior to the enactment of the Central American Relief Act, which provided benefits and relief to immigrants who had fled from corrupt and dangerous political situations in Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Cuba.

At the time the novel was released, however, Central American refugees were not legally allowed into the United States. The United States was, in fact, supporting the efforts of the rebelling militant groups by providing military and economic aid to the very countries the political refugees were fleeing.

The Sanctuary Movement was a religious and political “underground railroad” born in 1981 in response to the plight of these refugees to help citizens from El Salvador and Guatemala who were attempting to escape the violent tyranny and persecution of their governments. Made up of approximately 500 congregations, the Sanctuary Movement encompassed a widespread representation of religious denominations including Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, Jews, Unitarian Universalists, Mennonites, Quakers, and members of the United Church of Christ.

Refugees received food, shelter, and legal assistance in dealing with the Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The overall goal of the Movement was to help these refugees obtain political asylum so that they could remain legally in the United States.

However, the only way the Central Americans could qualify for asylum was if they provided proof of persecution. Because most refugees had likely traveled on foot through Central America, Mexico, and to the United States’ border, it was highly unlikely for any of them to have brought the appropriate paperwork. If denied political asylum, they were deported and returned to their own country where they faced further brutal persecution—if not death.

Realizing that working within the legal system was proving inadequate, the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, and others in California, declared themselves public sanctuaries for refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador.

For a while, the Sanctuary Movement was protected by the media, who exposed not only the injustice inflicted upon refugees by their own countries but also the United States’ role in sending these “illegal aliens” back home to their deaths.

The Sanctuary Movement received the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award in 1984 from the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, acknowledging the movement’s efforts in advancing the cause of human rights.

Countless sanctuary workers and volunteers have been arrested and charged with crimes of transporting illegal aliens. Despite the United States’ efforts to control the movement, sanctuary workers continue their dedication to aiding political refugees from Central America and other countries.

FEMINIST LITERATURE

It would be almost impossible to discuss Barbara Kingsolver and her works without addressing the concept of Feminism. Kingsolver writes about women's issues: their struggles to survive, their need for feminine connections, their devotion to their children, and their loyalty to one another.

In *The Bean Trees*, with the exception of Estevan, there are no male characters that play a significant role—either in the novel or in these women's lives. The protagonist and all other major and minor players are women: women with children, women who have lost children, women who never had children, married women, separated women, single women. These characters form a community of support and love unparalleled in the male world surrounding them.

Kingsolver raises several critical feminist issues in the novel.

- Taylor's primary reason for leaving Kentucky is that she doesn't want to end up "barefoot and pregnant" and some poor farmer's wife. She wants, and actively seeks, her own *identity*, separate from husbands and fathers. She feels "lucky" that she "didn't have a daddy" and covets only her mother's affections and support.
- Kingsolver addresses the issue of *sexual harassment* when Lou Ann comes to the realization that "it would not be so bad to go through your life as a pregnant lady" to avoid the leering, the gestures, and cat calls of men. The image of the bikini-clad woman on the door at Fanny Heaven beckoning to passersby further exemplifies this sexual demeaning of women.
- Taylor faces struggles common to *mothers*, particularly single mothers, "in a world that could barely be bothered with mothers and children." She tries to get "Turtle and me on two meals a day" because she has no money. She needs to use free childcare at Kid Central Station, despite knowing that it "was not doing Turtle any good," because she has no other options.
- Taylor develops a *loyal support network* with Lou Ann, Virgie Mae, Edna, Esperanza, and Mattie which allows her to begin to survive and thrive in her new surroundings. It is only through these connections with women that she is able to do so, whereas with men, "it hardly made any difference" whether they were there or not.
- Mattie embodies the *capabilities of women* in the traditionally male-centric workplace. She not only owns and operates a tire store but also runs a sort of "underground railroad" for refugees from Guatemala, at significant risk and danger to herself. These are not typically female pursuits and these facts are inspiring to Taylor, who embraces her own share of risks as a result of Mattie's positive influence.
- The central feminist issue raised in the novel is that of the *burden of gender*. When Taylor discovers the abuse inflicted on the young Indian child she has just been given in a parking lot, her immediate reaction is "a girl, poor thing." Not simply "a child" but, significantly, "a girl... That fact had already burdened her short life with a kind of misery I could not imagine."

MYTH AND ARCHETYPE IN *THE BEAN TREES*

Though *The Bean Trees* cannot be considered a traditional mythic story, there are strong archetypal elements in this tale of a young woman on a quest as she ventures westward alone in search of a new identity, a new home, and self-fulfillment. Taylor, the protagonist, encounters a host of new characters, situations, and difficulties along her way to eventual enlightenment.

Not only are elements of Taylor's journey reminiscent of the archetypal quest, but several of Kingsolver's characters conform, in varying degrees, to elements of archetypal characters.

- Taylor, as a *hero*, plays a life-altering role in the lives of Turtle, Estevan, and Esperanza, though she also views herself as an *outcast* in many respects because of her socioeconomic background, her feelings of inadequacy as a mother, and her relocation to a geographic area so different from her own. She eventually does develop several *mother earth* characteristics as the novel progresses, through new experiences, the example of those closest to her, and her growing genuine affection for Turtle.
- Esperanza, Estevan, and Turtle can all be considered *outcasts* as well with the United States and Guatemalan governments, epitomizing the villainous evil that relegates these characters to outcast status.
- Fanny Heaven personifies the *temptress*, the visual representation of men's desire.
- Mama, Lou Ann, and Mattie can all be seen as *mother earth* figures: Mama, a figure of selfless unconditional love; Lou Ann, the ultimate protector from life's dangers; and Mattie, the defender of all who cannot fight for themselves.
- Both Estevan and Mattie exemplify the *sage*—Estevan is, literally, a teacher, and Mattie teaches all those around her what our duty to humanity is, regardless of danger or difficulty.

Similarly, Kingsolver sets Taylor's mythic quest in the clearly archetypal setting of the natural world full of archetypal imagery.

- Taylor is attracted to the bright *colors* worn by the Indians, particularly red and turquoise, which help her to identify with her Cherokee "head rights" and with Turtle. Edna Poppy says, "Red's my color," and Esperanza proudly wears her Guatemalan clothing reminiscent of a "double rainbow."

- References to the *earth, water, gardens and gardening* are prevalent throughout the novel. Mattie's garden behind her tire store is brimming with life as well as the night-blooming cereus and the wisteria vines. Most significantly, Turtle's primary source of communication and entertainment is with regards to plants and gardening, and it is through this interest that Taylor is able to bond with her: "I could see a whole new era arriving in Turtle's and my life." The rains of New Year's Day and the Lake o' the Cherokees provide renewal and rebirth for nature and for the characters.
- Circles are a dominant *shape* in the novel. Taylor is a "round bundle"; the rocks look like "roundish animals and roundish people," and the doctor's office window "looked out onto a garden full of round stones."

Readers can also see archetypal situations in the novel similar to those found in myth.

- Taylor certainly embarks on a *quest* by leaving all that is familiar and loving to her in Kentucky to find a new life, even a new name. She survives numerous *obstacles* along the way including having an unwanted Indian child thrust upon her, parenting that child with food, clothing and love, and delivering Estevan and Esperanza to safety, despite potential danger to herself.
- Many examples of the *renewal of life* are seen in the novel. The title itself suggests growth and rebirth. The "first killing frost of the winter" ravages Mattie's bean vines but she tells Taylor, "That's the cycle of life." The night-blooming cereus has flowers "open for only one night of the year" hanging "in the dark air like a magic mirror." And the rhizobia create the "underground railroad" necessary to keep the wisteria vines alive.
- Taylor's eventual acceptance of what it truly means to be a parent is an *initiation* into motherhood. She initially avoids the reality of Turtle's struggle in Chapter 12 by chasing a bird instead of comforting her daughter and admits that she's "just not up to the job" of parenting. But eventually, Taylor affirms that she "can't give up."
- Examples of *the fall* and *taboo* can be seen in both of Turtle's struggles with sexual predators, once as an infant with "bruises and worse" and then again in the park with the "bad man."
- Taylor, Estevan, Esperanza, and Turtle share a *fellowship* in "Lake o' the Cherokees" where they take the first vacation they've ever had, and Turtle metaphorically buries her mother. They leave the lake invigorated and ready to help Taylor adopt Turtle.

Themes

THE ROLES OF FATE AND PERSONAL CHOICE IN LIFE

Prior to seeing Newt Hardbine's daddy thrown over the Standard Oil sign "like some old overalls slung over a fence," Taylor had given little thought to her future. Because she and Newt were "cut out of basically the same mud," she had "serious intentions" to make something different of her life and started planning how to "get away" from Pittman by getting a job at the hospital, setting aside money, and buying her own car. As much planning as Taylor does, however, she also believes in destiny when choosing her new name and her final destination, relying on signs and the gas tank to determine her future. When talking with Estevan later in the novel, she realizes that her "whole life had been running along on dumb luck" and she "hadn't even noticed."

RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Having been raised by a single mother, Taylor rejects the notion that women need men to survive and leaves Pittman because she is determined not to end up "hogtied to a future as a tobacco farmer's wife." She sees the female gender itself as a liability when she discovers Turtle's "bruises and worse...A girl, poor thing. That fact had already burdened her short life with a kind of misery I could not imagine." Taylor believes that men condescend to women, "making the world out to be such a big dangerous deal" when they "live in the exact same world." She admires Mattie for running a tire store, a traditionally masculine profession. In the episode in which she adopts Turtle, Taylor notes the believable façade concocted by Esperanza and Turtle as "a mother and child—in a world that could barely be bothered with mothers and children." Society is ruled by men, a fact which enables the adoption to occur at all because Mr. Armistead and Mrs. Cleary are unaware of the "astonishing things" occurring in their office that day.

Lou Ann sees the inherent value in going "through your life as a pregnant lady" to avoid the fawning gestures and lewd comments of men. Her pregnancy is a "magic circle" that protects her from the burden of womanhood. When Angel leaves her, Lou Ann significantly notes that "his presence was different from the feeling of women filling up the house. He could be there or not, and it hardly made any difference."

Lee Sing tells Lou Ann that having a daughter is a waste because "Feeding a girl is like feeding the neighbor's New Year pig. All that work. In the end, it goes to some other family."

The "leopard-bikini lady" on the side of Fanny Heaven with the door handle that would "sink into her crotch...like a woman is something you shove on and walk right through" epitomizes this theme in terms of the perceived sexual objectivity of women.

Similarly, the picture in Mattie's calendar of the Aztec man carrying the woman represents this theme of male dominance. Taylor recognizes the absurdity, and the irony, of this theme because in her experience, "it was the other way around, the woman carried the man through the tragedy. The man and the grandma and all the kids."

THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY

The laws of society frequently dictate unjust circumstances for characters in the novel. Taylor discovers that the state of Arizona has a legal claim on Turtle because she has not formally adopted the child and sarcastically tells Cynthia that she had “no more legal claim than the city dump has on your garbage.” Despite Taylor’s rescuing Turtle from a potential life of abuse and giving her a loving and nurturing home, the state has “the right to take her out of a perfectly good home and put her in some creepy orphanage” and views Turtle’s “future and ownership as though she were an item of commerce.”

The other major example of the unjust laws of society is seen in the refugee crisis. There would be no need for Mattie to provide sanctuary for these “illegals” if their own governments were acting justly, or even if the United States were willing to take responsibility for housing and supporting these displaced people instead of funding the war in Central America with guns and materials for torture devices.

THE REALITIES OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SCARS

Angel’s accident leaves him with “an artificial leg below the knee and something else that was harder to pin down.” He can get a prosthesis, but he refuses to get it adjusted, leaving the “faintest jingling sound with every step” as a metaphorical reminder to himself that he will never be “whole.” It’s the same reason that of all the things he does not take from their home, he does take the picture of himself “at a rodeo in 1978.” He cannot let go of his former glory; all he can let go of is his present life with Lou Ann, the only thing he feels he has control over.

After Turtle is attacked in the park, Taylor takes her to the doctor who initially claims that though “we might see behavioral evidence” of abuse “there is no residual physical damage.” However, Turtle’s x-rays prove otherwise—she is a three year-old living in a two year-old’s body, a body that is “carrying around secret scars that would always be there.”

CLASS STRUGGLE

Taylor and her mother had no money or social standing, much like the Hardbines and the other “Nutters” in her town who had to “pick walnuts to earn money for school clothes” but were “marked” with black hands as a result. The women Mama works for “get to thinking they own you.” Taylor remembers “crayon scribbles” in one of her books and notes that the book must have come from one of Mama’s “ladies” because “only a rich child would be allowed to scribble in a hardback book.” Much like Estevan and Esperanza, she “has never had a vacation” because there “was always so much damn work to do.”

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Until Taylor finds Lou Ann, Mattie, Edna, Virgie Mae, and Esperanza to help her with Turtle, she struggles with getting a job, housing, money, and parenting; these women provide her with the network necessary to ensure that she and Taylor begin to cope and even thrive.

The moral lesson of the “How They Eat in Heaven” Indian story exemplifies the need to reach out to our fellow man and foster a sense of community; the only difference between the situation in heaven and hell is that people help one another thrive in heaven.

Mattie’s newscast topically discusses our “obligation to take in people whose lives are in danger” in whatever form people are able to help, whether act[ing] as a “hero and tak[ing] the risks” or working from “behind the scenes.” Taylor ends up driving Estevan and Esperanza to their new sanctuary in Oklahoma, despite potential danger to herself, because she knows they “would get a whole lot worse than prison and a fine” if caught themselves. In turn, Estevan and Esperanza do not even hesitate to help Taylor, despite their own risks and emotional well-being, to ensure that she is able to remain with Turtle.

The rhizobia, though not part of the plant itself, “always live with legumes: a kind of underground railroad moving secretly up and down the roots.” Taylor explains it to Turtle by equating this phenomenon to the people in their own lives—how Virgie Mae and Edna have one another, how they have each other, and how “everybody has Mattie.” The theme of fostering a sense of community is highlighted by this natural concept. On their own, people will “barely get by,” just like the wisteria vines, but put them together with other caring individuals and “they make miracles.”

ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Taylor discovers “bruises and worse” on Turtle’s body when she gives her a bath which is evidently the reason the child’s aunt so willingly gives her niece away—to protect her from years of abuse and neglect. Turtle is later attacked in the park and “won’t talk” as a result. Taylor struggles with how someone even gets “the idea to hurt a child” and views the world as a very dark place where people “pick on people that can’t fight back.” She later learns that this kind of abuse happens to “one out of every four little girls...not just on Indian reservations but in the most everyday-looking white frame houses and even places a lot fancier than that.” Abuse and neglect are not dictated, then, by societal or economic standards but instead cross all boundaries.

REVERING OTHER CULTURES

Kingsolver repeatedly illustrates a fundamental lack of understanding of and reverence for other cultures in the novel. She particularly targets the American viewpoint, as Estevan articulates, that “if something terrible happens to someone, they must have deserved it.” This same American attitude labels the Guatemalan refugees as “illegals.”

Lou Ann’s mother refuses to pronounce Angel’s name or her daughter’s new last name correctly and dislikes Angel for no other reason than that “he was Mexican.” Lou Ann feels the need to mail her mother newspaper clippings and pamphlets showing minorities in positions of respect and power in an attempt to change her mind. Granny Logan is no better, expecting nothing “from a heathern Mexican” and asking if “Eskimos count as human beings” because she “thought they were half animal or something.”

Turtle’s Indian birth ensures that she has “no papers...There isn’t nobody knows it’s alive or cares.” Mr. Armistead’s office is very near the Lake o’ the Cherokees and both he and Mrs. Cleary easily accept Esperanza and Estevan as Indians because all Indians look the same to them. Mrs. Cleary refers to Turtle as an “it” because she is not an actual person. The fact that Turtle was born on “tribal lands” seems to explain their lack of identification because they see it “as some distant, vaguely civilized country.” The only thing the office requires is that they have Taylor, a white “proven citizen” swear “that they were all who they said they were.”

Mrs. Parsons regards Estevan’s chopsticks as “foolishness” and her “illegal aliens and dope peddlers,” comments that exemplify racist hatred bred of ignorance. She, like Lou Ann’s mother and grandmother, are not presented as hateful or evil—just ignorant and unwilling to change. Kingsolver seems to see this attitude as the foundation for the racism and indifference so prevalent in our society.

MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY

Perhaps the most predominant theme in the novel is that of motherhood and the effects of having a supportive, nurturing family.

Taylor’s mother “always expected the best” from her and never judges her actions or decisions. She offers constant and sincere praise and fully supports her daughter’s decision to “get away” and even to get a new name. Though Mama is physically present in only the first chapter of the novel, her presence and parenting model are felt throughout. Though Taylor does struggle with what it means to be a parent to Turtle, especially when faced with the weight of her task and the fear of losing her to the “ugly” world, she ultimately embraces her mother’s wisdom and commits to “trying” and doing the best she can.

Newt Harbine, in contrast, has no familial support and as a result, “nobody expected any better of a Harbine” than to end up penniless and dead. Similarly, his wife Jolene had been called a “slut” her whole life by her dad, so she thinks, “why the hell not?” Because their family’s expectations of them are so low, everyone else’s expectations are equally low.

Lou Ann reads a magazine article about parenting and is convinced that her cat has a “split personality” because she and Angel treated the cat “in real different ways.” Taylor’s mother concurs that “it’s what you tell” a child that matters.

Estevan and Esperanza have to reconcile the fact that though their daughter is alive, she is likely being raised by people who will teach her a set of values entirely at odds with their own. Through the act of “giving” Turtle to Taylor and putting the St. Christopher medallion around Turtle’s neck, Esperanza seems to be able to make peace with losing her own child, who she hopes is “happy and growing with a good heart” just like Turtle will be.

Style and Narrative Perspective

STYLE

In *the Bean Trees*, Kingsolver's style creates a blend of the lyrically poetic and the harshly realistic. Her use of figurative language and imagery, particularly when describing the natural world, provoke feelings in the reader and set a specific atmosphere that parallels the thoughts and moods of her characters. We see the storefront window in *Jesus is Lord Used Tires*: "It looked like cherry bombs blowing up in boxes of wet sand, and the whole just frozen mid-kaboom." We marvel at the wisteria vines in *Night-Blooming Cereus*, a "bouquet of silvery-white balloons...the petals stood out in starry rays...like a pair of cupped hands catching moonlight." We sense the storm brewing in *Into the Terrible Night*, "a huge blue-gray shower curtain being drawn along by the hand of God...nervous white ribbons of lightning jumped between the mountaintops and the clouds." We taste the salsa and feel its sting in *Dream Angels*: "On days when they were packing extra hot, their ankles burned as if they were standing on red ant hills...as pesty and persistent as a chaperone at a high school dance."

Kingsolver's dialogue depicts real, everyday people in both common and extraordinary situations. Her use of Taylor and Lou Ann's southern Kentucky dialect lends further realism to the characters and to the novel as a whole. They use expressions like "ugly as a mud stick fence" and "I'll swan," and Lou Ann, who is from the same area of Kentucky, has no trouble understanding Taylor when she says, "I'm just a hillbilly from East Jesus Nowhere with this adopted child that everybody keeps telling me is dumb as a box of rocks. I've got nothing on you, girl." Mama has her pig sayings, like "even a spotted pig looks black at night," and Lou Ann advises her mother and grandmother not to sit on a bench because it will be "hot as a poker in this sun." The author's use of dialect not only creates very real characters but humor as well.

In addition, Kingsolver uses Taylor's dialectical language as a vehicle to put forth her own political and social agenda. The reader feels Taylor's confusion and pain as she grasps the injustice of a society that would take a daughter away to lure her parents like "a worm on a goddamn hook." Taylor feels like a "foreigner" in her own country, and Kingsolver seems to be telling the reader that we all are foreigners in some respects because we cannot comprehend, or condone, so many of the laws dictated by our society. "I come from a place that's so different from here you would think you'd stepped right off the map into some other country where they use dirt for decoration and the national pastime is having babies. People don't look the same, talk the same, nothing...But nobody asked for my permission, okay?"

And though her novel is clearly driven by topical causes vital to all of humanity, it is also an extremely character-driven novel that skillfully exists quite simply and beautifully on its own level and on its own merits. As a result, the reader cares not just about the issues but about the characters themselves.

POINT OF VIEW

With the exception of two chapters, the novel is told from a first-person narrative perspective through Taylor. The only chapters not told in the first person are Chapters 2 and 4, which are in the third person limited narration through Lou Ann. The author shifts the narration in these two chapters only because Taylor has not yet met Lou Ann and can, therefore, not speak with or about her yet. Starting with Chapter 5, Lou Ann will become another central character whom we see through Taylor's perspective.

Because the author has chosen to tell the story almost exclusively through Taylor's eyes, the reader needs to be aware that her attitude towards events and people will affect how they are interpreted. As a result, in many cases with first-person narration, the narrator can be totally, or at least partially, unreliable as a source of information about themselves and others. However, in this case, we meet a very smart, self-aware protagonist who views herself, and the world around her, through a very honest lens.

The choice to utilize Taylor as the narrator, rather than using another character or an omniscient point-of-view, infuses the novel with humor. Taylor's rural Kentucky dialect, sarcasm, and candid evaluations of herself and those around her serve to balance the socially and politically-charged subject matter in Kingsolver's novel. The resulting contrast in voice and theme creates an overall tone of hopeful optimism and a call to help our fellow man.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What social and political views does the author express? What techniques does she use to reveal those views? How do those issues affect the characters?
2. Discuss the significance of the novel's title and the chapter titles.
3. Analyze the role of men in the novel. What does the author's attitude toward men seem to be? Do you think Kingsolver is unsympathetic toward men?
4. Examine the different forms of "family" in the novel.
5. Evaluate the use of first-person point of view in the novel. What other options might the author have considered for point of view and what would the effects of those alternate choices have been?
6. Discuss the concept of "home" in the novel. How much of it is geography and how much is the people who surround you?
7. Explore the role of religion and spirituality. What is the difference between the two as presented in the novel?
8. Compare and contrast the plight of the Guatemalan refugees and the Cherokee Indians.
9. The imagery of birds is prevalent in the novel. What does each symbolize and what role does each play?
10. Compare and contrast Taylor and Lou Ann – as individuals, as mothers, and as women. How do they complement one another?
11. Speculate about an alternate ending where Esperanza and Estevan take Turtle with them and Taylor returns to Tucson alone.
12. Evaluate *The Bean Trees* as a feminist piece of literature.
13. Does the reader ultimately view Taylor as a heroic character? Why or why not?

Practice Free Response Items

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 1

Read the passage from Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* from the beginning of Chapter 5, "Harmonious Space," through the paragraph that begins, "On other days I would wake up..." Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the function of the extended metaphor in both developing character and establishing setting. Consider such elements as diction, personification, onomatopoeia, simile, and tone.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 2

Read Chapter 3, "Jesus is Lord Used Tires." Then, write a well-reasoned and –supported essay in which you analyze the author's use of figurative language in the scene in which Taylor sees the bean vines in Mattie's garden. What themes are revealed through the use of these devices? Do not merely provide a list of figurative devices.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 3

Read Chapters 12 and 13, "Into the Terrible Night" and "Night-Blooming Cereus". Then, consider the following quotation from Chapter 13:

Outside of town we passed a run-over blackbird in the road, flattened on the center line. As the cars and trucks rolled by, the gusts of wind caused one stiff wing to flap up and down in a pitiful little flagging-down gesture.

Then, write a well-reasoned and –supported essay in which you trace the symbolic significance of the blackbird, especially with respect to Taylor's change in attitude and behavior over the course of these two chapters. Avoid merely restating the plot.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 4

Read the passage towards the end of Chapter 17, "Rhizobia," starting with "But this is the most interesting part" through the paragraph beginning, "The wisteria vines." Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the symbolic nature of the wisteria vines and how that symbol reveals important themes and character relationships in the novel.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 5

In a well-written essay, analyze how the progression of chapter titles in Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* exemplifies significant shifts in the novel's tone. Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 6

Colors and light (or lack thereof) are often important images, frequently with symbolic significance: the lamp of learning, the archetypal values of many colors, etc. In a well-organized essay, analyze Barbara Kingsolver's use of color and/or light in *The Bean Trees* and explain the significance of these motifs to the overall meaning of novel.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 7

A common theme in literature is the role of destiny versus free will or personal choice. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Barbara Kingsolver uses the narratives of her characters in *The Bean Trees* to develop this theme. Do not merely restate the plot and be certain to address the relevance of the theme to the novel as a whole.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 8

Authors often use their novels and plays as a forum to criticize a particular social or political issue. In a well-organized essay, evaluate Kingsolver's attitude toward a particular social or political ill in *The Bean Trees*. Analyze the narrative techniques the author uses to illuminate that attitude and be sure to explain the relevance of the issue to the novel as a whole.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 9

Authors make careful, conscious choices when deciding what point(s) of view to use to tell a story because those choices directly affect how the reader perceives the characters, the plot, the setting, and every other aspect of the novel.

In a well-organized essay, analyze the author's fluctuation in point of view in *The Bean Trees* and explain the effect(s) on the novel as a whole.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 10

Mothers and mother figures play an important role in literature, both in positive and negative ways. In a well-organized essay, examine the role of mothers and mother figures in *The Bean Trees* and how those relationships affect the protagonist's outlook and choices in the novel.

Practice Multiple-choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-5

Carefully read Chapter One of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*. Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

1. The overall tone created by the first-person narration can best be described as
 - A. hopeful.
 - B. honest.
 - C. anxious.
 - D. tragic.
 - E. peaceful.
2. Taylor says that she and Newt Hardbine "were cut out of basically the same mud," which is true in all of the following ways EXCEPT
 - A. educational opportunities.
 - B. financial background.
 - C. social standing.
 - D. familial support.
 - E. innate talent.
3. The main reason Taylor gives for wanting to "get away" from Pittman is that she
 - A. longs to find her father.
 - B. feels stifled by limited career opportunities.
 - C. wants to go to college.
 - D. needs to break away from her mother.
 - E. doesn't want to end up a farmer's pregnant wife.
4. Taylor's discovery while giving the Indian child a bath emphasizes the idea that
 - A. one must respect other cultures.
 - B. prejudicial laws are unjust.
 - C. gender determines a person's lot in life.
 - D. abuse knows no socioeconomic boundary.
 - E. one's destiny is shaped by others' expectations.
5. The main function of including Taylor's "Damn I'm Good" T-shirt is to
 - A. symbolize the benefits of a supportive family.
 - B. illustrate the irony of Taylor's situation.
 - C. highlight Taylor's confidence.
 - D. illustrate Taylor's attitude towards her appearance.
 - E. demonstrate Taylor's affinity for "Indian colors."

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6-10

Read Chapter Three of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, "Jesus is Lord Used Tires." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

6. Taylor's primary reason for deciding to stay in Arizona is that she
 - A. is greatly amused by the rock formations.
 - B. thinks Mattie will teach her to be a better parent.
 - C. wants to live where her car broke down.
 - D. knows she will be able to get work in a city.
 - E. thinks it is fate to be in the Cherokee Nation with Turtle.
7. The bean vines primarily symbolize
 - A. love.
 - B. history.
 - C. survival.
 - D. fate.
 - E. duty.
8. Consider the following quotation: "It looked like cherry bombs blowing up boxes of wet sand, and the whole thing just frozen mid-kaboom." The author employs the use of all of the following literary devices EXCEPT
 - A. alliteration.
 - B. simile.
 - C. onomatopoeia.
 - D. personification.
 - E. hyperbole.
9. The action which most subtly illuminates Mattie's character is when she
 - A. is able to fix Roger's car so easily.
 - B. herds the bugs off the pavement with an air hose.
 - C. says, "It's too early in the morning for bad news."
 - D. brings Turtle a free snack and drink.
 - E. tells Taylor she "wasn't trying to make a sale."
10. The last two paragraphs of Chapter Three are ironic for all of the following reasons EXCEPT
 - A. the reader knows that Sandi does not realize Turtle is not really Taylor's child.
 - B. Sandi thinks she and Taylor are both "stuck" with kids they do not want.
 - C. both women are in the exact same position.
 - D. Sandi thinks she knows "exactly" what Taylor means.
 - E. Taylor does not correct Sandi's misconception.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-15

Carefully read Chapter Seven of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, "How They Eat in Heaven." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions. Then, select the best answers to the following questions.

11. The chapter addresses all of the following themes EXCEPT
 - A. one's need to reach out to others.
 - B. the role of men versus women in society.
 - C. the benefits of having a supportive family.
 - D. the importance of revering other cultures.
 - E. abuse and neglect across socioeconomic boundaries.
12. All of the following illustrate Esperanza's character EXCEPT that she
 - A. "took up almost no space."
 - B. does not interact with the adults.
 - C. reminds Taylor of Turtle.
 - D. "couldn't take her eyes off Turtle."
 - E. wears very colorful clothing.
13. The primary function of the quail is to
 - A. symbolize the frenetic yet loving quality of motherhood.
 - B. juxtapose a serene nature scene with Taylor's car crash.
 - C. hyperbolize Lou Ann's feelings about her husband.
 - D. illuminate the theme of the role of men versus women.
 - E. parallel the chaos of Estevan and Esperanza's situation.
14. Although all of the following statements characterize Lou Ann, the most significant is
 - A. when she thinks "when kids are that little, they don't take much on faith."
 - B. Taylor's belief that "Lou Ann needed a DAMN I'M GOOD mirror."
 - C. her "fear that the things you imagine will turn real."
 - D. that she "fretted that we would never know Turtle's true sign."
 - E. when Turtle "was hanging on to Lou Ann's boob tube for dear life and smiling."
15. Estevan's attitude toward Mrs. Parsons is both
 - A. furious and accepting.
 - B. indifferent and condescending.
 - C. anxious and reverent.
 - D. resigned and bemused.
 - E. contemptuous and sarcastic.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16-20

Carefully read Chapter Nine of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, "Ismene." Then, select the best answers to the following questions.

16. The chapter's function is to reveal all of the following EXCEPT
 - A. more details about the political situation.
 - B. Taylor's hope that she and Estevan can be together.
 - C. Estevan's real feelings about America's attitude.
 - D. why Esperanza tried to kill herself.
 - E. details about Taylor's childhood.
17. The most important realization Taylor makes in this chapter is that she
 - A. is in love with Estevan.
 - B. understands Esperanza.
 - C. empathizes with Estevan.
 - D. cannot change her past.
 - E. feels guilty about Turtle.
18. The thing that most upsets Taylor about her conversation with Estevan is that he
 - A. thinks their situations in life are so different.
 - B. cannot act upon his feelings for her.
 - C. reveals disturbing details about interrogation methods.
 - D. is so angry with the United States for not helping them.
 - E. picked the lives of seventeen people over his daughter.
19. Kingsolver expresses Taylor's understanding of Estevan's lack of tears through
 - A. personification.
 - B. apostrophe.
 - C. onomatopoeia.
 - D. simile.
 - E. oxymoron.
20. The tone of this chapter can best be described as both
 - A. informal and reflective.
 - B. overwrought and optimistic.
 - C. tense and contemplative.
 - D. harsh and analytical.
 - E. angry and bemused.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21-25

Carefully read Chapter Twelve of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, "Into the Terrible Night." Then, select the best answers to the following questions.

21. "They left such an emptiness in the air it hurt your ears" is an example of
 - A. antithesis.
 - B. metonymy.
 - C. oxymoron.
 - D. analogy.
 - E. personification.
22. In the section beginning, "The whole Tucson Valley" through the end of the paragraph starting, "Mattie told us," the author employs all of the following EXCEPT
 - A. personification.
 - B. concrete diction.
 - C. hyperbole.
 - D. onomatopoeia.
 - E. parallel syntax.
23. The structure of this chapter provides a
 - A. movement from the general to the specific.
 - B. comparison of the natural and the unnatural world.
 - C. dramatic contrast in scene and emotional climate.
 - D. chronological rendering of events.
 - E. juxtaposition of differing points of view.
24. The primary function of the bird in this chapter is to
 - A. parallel the chaos of the situation.
 - B. contrast Taylor's emotional paralysis.
 - C. symbolize Lou Ann's guilt in the situation.
 - D. foreshadow Turtle's escape from reality.
 - E. compare the bird's struggle with Turtle's.
25. The emotional climax of this chapter occurs when Taylor says
 - A. "No, you don't understand. She may not talk again at all. Period."
 - B. "Why should she believe me now?"
 - C. "What makes anybody think I can do anything for her?"
 - D. "I'm just not up to the job, Lou Ann."
 - E. "Now I felt like a hollow everything."

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 26-30

Carefully read Chapter Fourteen of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, "Guardian Saints." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

26. Taylor's reaction to people saying Estevan's people are "illegals" suggests that she thinks that label is a/n
- A. hyperbole.
 - B. irony.
 - C. paradox.
 - D. fact.
 - E. oxymoron.
27. In the context of the chapter, entering the Oklahoma flatlands instills all of the following emotions in the travelers EXCEPT
- A. fear.
 - B. apathy.
 - C. tranquility.
 - D. amazement.
 - E. helplessness.
28. The overall tone of this chapter is
- A. didactic.
 - B. anxious.
 - C. serene.
 - D. tragic.
 - E. mocking.
29. Taylor's attitude toward Esperanza in this chapter can best be described as
- A. suspicion.
 - B. devotion.
 - C. aversion.
 - D. apprehension.
 - E. indifference.
30. Given the context, a "snipe hunt" would be the equivalent of a/n
- A. tragic quest.
 - B. fool's errand.
 - C. allegorical journey.
 - D. hunting trip.
 - E. moral lesson.

Multiple-Choice Answers With Explanations

1. Because the author has chosen to tell the story through Taylor's eyes, the reader needs to be aware that Taylor's attitude toward events and people will affect how they are interpreted. As a result, in many cases with first-person narration, the narrator can be totally, or at least partially, unreliable as a source of information about themselves and others. However, in this case, we meet a very smart, self-aware protagonist who views herself, and the world around her, **through a very honest lens (B)**. She is hopeful that she will "get away" from Pittman and start a new life (A) and is certainly anxious (C) about those changes, particularly when Turtle is thrust upon her in the parking lot. In addition, there are elements of tragedy (D) with both Newt Hardbine's death and Turtle's aunt feeling she must give the child away, and even of peace (E) when she is driving on the open road toward her "destiny" and her new name. **But none of these characterize the overall effect of the prevailing honesty Taylor offers in all of these scenarios, so choice (B) would be the best choice.**
2. Taylor confuses the familiar idiomatic expression of being "cut from the same cloth" by using "mud" instead, thus creating an amusing metaphor for how Newt and Taylor are viewed by society. Though Taylor certainly applied herself more in school than Newt, who "was practically going on twenty in sixth grade," there is no indication that they had different educational opportunities (A). Taylor admits that she and her Mama did not have "a dime to our name" and were "no better than Hardbines," so both (B) and (C) would not be correct choices either. There is no evidence that either Taylor or Newt had any particular talents that would make them stand out (E). **The one major difference in their circumstances in life is that Taylor had her mother's unconditional love and unwavering support (D) while "nobody expected any better of a Hardbine."**
3. It is clear that Taylor is desperate to leave Pittman "and never look back." The mere fact of the title of the chapter alone suggests it. She does not just want to "go" away; she wants to "get" away, which has a drastically different connotation. Having told Jolene, "I didn't have a daddy. That I was lucky that way," it is clear that (A) is not the correct choice. Though she did well in school and was a reliable employee at the hospital "for five and a half years," there is no indication that she intended to seek other career opportunities (B) or that she had any desire to attend college (C). Though Taylor may have sought more independence, breaking away from her mother was certainly the hardest part in her decision to leave, so (D) would not be correct either. **Her biggest fear was being "hogtied to a future as a tobacco farmer's wife...barefoot and pregnant" (E).**
4. Though Taylor has been exposed to several facets of the Indian culture thus far, what she learns when she gives Turtle a bath has nothing to do with revering other cultures (A), nor does it speak to the issue of the prejudice and injustice (B). While it is clear that Turtle has been abused with "bruises and worse," Taylor does not attribute that to socioeconomic issues (D). **The key to this scene is when she notes that "the Indian child was a girl...poor thing," and, more significantly, that the mere "fact" of her gender "had already burdened her short life with...misery," so (C) is by far the best choice.** We have seen evidence in the chapter of how other people's expectations can shape lives, but that does not apply here (E).

5. There is no question that Taylor is the product of a loving and supportive upbringing where positive reinforcement was the norm. **The “Damn I’m Good” T-shirt serves as a symbolic representation of Mama’s constructive influence on Taylor’s self-esteem.** Despite her economic, social and educational circumstances, Taylor has a strong sense of herself and “serious intentions” that others in her place would not think possible, so **choice (A) is the best answer.** She has undoubtedly found herself in an ironic situation given that she left Pittman to avoid being “barefoot and pregnant” and is now responsible for a child after barely leaving home (B), but that is not the function of the T-shirt in this scene, and though she obviously has plenty of confidence, there is nothing at this point to indicate that she even wants to raise this child (C). She does admit that she “always looked great in that T-shirt” (D) and that she loves “turquoise and red...Indian colors,” (E) but neither of these explains the full significance of the shirt.
6. Mattie kindly gives Turtle crackers and a juice cup “designed especially for small children” and is “clearly accustomed to dealing with kids.” Taylor could learn a great deal from Mattie about parenting, but this is not why she stays (B). In “The One to Get Away,” Taylor decides to “drive west” and stay wherever her “car stopped running,” but changes her mind in this chapter: “Whether my car conked out or not, I made up my mind to live in Arizona,” so (C) is not the answer. There is no indication that Taylor is concerned with getting work (D), and she is no longer in the Cherokee Nation which was in Oklahoma, so choice (E) is not correct either. **What most influences Taylor’s decision to stay are the “rocks stacked on top of one another like piles of copulating potato bugs” and the idea of “petrified dinosaur turds.”** Taylor, “laughing her head off,” thinks it’s the “best thing” she’s “seen in years” and makes “up her mind to live in Arizona” as a result (A).
7. Though the bean vines could potentially symbolize any number of things, it is important to look closely at the text in this chapter. Mattie and her garden seem to embody the concept of love and how it can nurture life (A) and given that the “Chinese lady next door” brought the seeds with her in 1907, there is certainly a sense of culture and history (B) associated with the beans. The beans, like Taylor “ended up right here,” so there is an element of fate (D) as well, but there is no indication that duty (E) plays a role here. **The key to this question is in the figurative language Kingsolver chooses here with the use of onomatopoeia: “trooping ... marching ... climbing over anything in their path.”** Like the soldiers being personified, survival is the goal and the end result, so choice (C) is the best answer.
8. Alliteration, the repetition of beginning neighboring words with the same sound, is used in “bombs blowing...boxes” (A). The whole phrase “like cherry bombs” functions as a simile (B) and onomatopoeia is used with “bombs,” “blowing,” “frozen,” and “kaboom” (C). To use this kind of language to describe a storefront is definitely a deliberate exaggeration for effect, or hyperbole (E). **The only literary device not employed in this phrase is personification, choice (D).**

9. All of these choices reveal something important about Mattie's character. The key to discerning which choice is the best is by paying particular attention to the word "subtly" in the question. The fact that Mattie can fix cars and is a woman "with this kind of know-how" reveals her skill and independence (A). When it is clear to her that Taylor is struggling financially, she offsets the "bad news" by kindly saying that it's "too early" and offering her coffee and Turtle a snack instead (C) and (D). When Taylor starts to feel guilty about taking advantage of Mattie's kindness, Mattie assures her that she has no ulterior motive in being helpful (E). The reader can see a growing portrait of who Mattie is: capable, kind, knowledgeable, and selfless, but all of these attributes are highlighted through overt and obvious actions. **The only "subtle" action is when Mattie uses the air hose to "chase bugs off the pavement" instead of just killing them outright, and says, "A bug's just got one life to live, after all. Like us," so choice (B) would be the best answer. Through this restrained illustration, the reader sees how Mattie values all life. It also serves to foreshadow all the humanitarian work we will see her doing in future chapters.**
10. In the last two paragraphs of the chapter, Taylor tells Sandi that Turtle is "not really mine...She's just someone I got stuck with," and Sandi replies, "Yeah, I know exactly what you mean." This interchange is ironic on several different levels. From a dramatic irony standpoint, we, the reader, are privy to information that Sandi is not, namely that Turtle is not Taylor's child (A). It is equally ironic that Sandi, a "real" parent, believes that both she and Taylor are "stuck" with kids neither one of them wants (B). Both women, through completely different circumstances, have ironically ended up in the exact same situation with no husbands, low-paying jobs, and "free" childcare (C). Sandi thinks she knows "exactly" what Taylor is talking about because she feels "stuck" as well, but she has no idea that Turtle was, literally, dumped in the front seat of Taylor's car (D). **The only response that is not an illustration of irony is choice (E) then. While it is true that Taylor does not correct Sandi's misconception, it is not ironic; it is likely that Taylor just felt it was too complicated to address and that it, ultimately, really didn't matter how they both ended up in the same situation.**
11. The moral lesson of the chapter's title exemplifies our need to reach out to others; the only difference between the situation in heaven and hell is that people help one another in heaven. Also, Mattie's newscast topically discusses our "obligation to take in people whose lives are in danger" (A). When they pass the quail with the babies in the road, while the reaction of the women is one of awe and sentimentality, Lou Ann professes that if Angel had been there, "he would've given himself two points for every one he could hit," so (B) is not the right answer either. Turtle is beginning to thrive in this chapter, "smiling" and laughing and saying her first word "bean," and Taylor's reactions to these significant milestones are reminiscent of her own mother's parenting style: "You're just about the smartest kid alive" (C). Mattie's newscast also serves to address the issue of needing to respect other cultures, and Mrs. Parsons' "illegal aliens and dope peddlers" comments embody the racist hatred bred of ignorance (D). **Only choice (E), though addressed in other chapters of the novel, is not seen here.**

12. The portrait we get of Esperanza in this chapter is one of quiet despair. Though we do not yet have all the facts about the cause of that sadness, it is clear she has suffered some unspeakable trauma that has “split her in two,” and like Turtle, she metaphorically “took up almost no space,” so choices (A) and (C) would not be correct. The facts that she “couldn’t take her eyes off Turtle” and “fell back...as if she’d been hit with twenty-eight pounds of air” when she saw the children suggest the cause of her grief (D). Yet, despite her internal anguish, she still wears clothes with “twice as many colors as you ever knew existed” to show her pride in the beauty of her heritage and, perhaps, to convince herself that happiness is within her reach, if only outwardly (E). **The only choice which does not illustrate Esperanza’s character would be (B), for though it is true that she does not interact with the adults, it is more likely due to a language barrier rather than a personality trait.**
13. The scene occurs directly after Taylor almost rear-ends Mattie’s car and ends up “stopped dead in the road,” but the author describes it as pure “pandemonium” not a “serene nature scene,” so choice (B) would not be correct. Lou Ann does comment that, had Angel been there, “he would’ve given himself two points for every one he could hit,” and we certainly gain more knowledge of what type of person Angel was; it also speaks to the theme of the role of men versus women in society, but it is unlikely that these were the primary reasons for the scene’s inclusion (C) and (D). We are not yet aware of the details surrounding Estevan and Esperanza’s situation, so choice (E) would not be correct either. **Like the quail, Taylor has symbolically been “dithering back and forth” trying to reach Turtle and protect her, and it is in this chapter where we see Turtle start to thrive—she laughs, smiles, and starts to speak. Despite Taylor’s initial lack of desire to be a parent and her inexperience, the role of motherhood is growing on her as well, and she now sees herself and Turtle as a unit rather than Turtle as someone she “got stuck with”—“I could see a whole new era arriving in Turtle’s and my life.” Choice (A) is, therefore, the best answer.**
14. Despite the first-person narration through Taylor, the reader is gaining a vivid picture of Lou Ann as well. She is a loving mother and understands children, that they “don’t take much on faith (A), and has formed a special relationship with Turtle who “was hanging on” to her “for dear life” (E). She “despised her looks” and is constantly criticizing her appearance to the point where Taylor jokes that she “needed a DAMN I’M GOOD mirror” (B). Lou Ann believes in astrological signs and worries that they would “never know Turtle’s true sign” (D). **But the trait which is most significant is her “fear that the things you imagine will turn real” (C). It infiltrates every aspect of her life—her friendships, her parenting, and her attitude towards the world.**

15. Estevan would undoubtedly be furious with, and contemptuous of, Mrs. Parsons for her attitude and comments about “illegal aliens and dope peddlers,” as if the two were one and the same; but there is nothing to indicate that he is accepting of this (A), and he is not the least bit sarcastic with her (E). He may appear condescending and anxious, as he “looked extra hard at Mrs. Parsons,” but he is definitely not indifferent or reverent of her or her opinions (B) and (C). **Taylor notes that Estevan, instead, “seemed unperturbed;” he seemed, in fact, like “he must hear this kind of thing every day of his life.” And while he is relaying the “wild Indian story ... looking again at Virgie,” he seemed to be “enjoying” teaching Mrs. Parsons this valuable lesson, even knowing that it was likely falling on deaf ears, so that choice (D) is the best answer.**
16. Several pivotal details are revealed in this chapter. Taylor learns about the United States’ role in the Guatemala crisis, especially that they provide the police with the telephones used for torture interrogation (A). Whereas in previous chapters, Estevan has not appeared to be angry specifically with the United States, here we get a much more honest assessment—not only with the telephone detail, but with his attitude that Americans feel it is “easier not to know” what ills surround them (C). Estevan also explains Esperanza’s hopelessness, what she “has had to live through” losing Ismene (D), and Taylor relays details about what it was to be a “Nutter” when she had to “pick walnuts to earn money for school clothes” (E). **While it is clear that Taylor has a “crush” on Estevan, and that he, too, may have feelings for her as they are “curled like spoons on the sofa,” “all of Esperanza’s hurts flamed up” in Taylor’s mind and she “slid off the sofa and went to” her own room. Despite her own desires, Taylor knows what is right and knows that they can never be together, so choice (B) would be the best answer.**
17. Taylor makes several realizations in this chapter. She reflects on her feelings for Estevan, that “in a different world we could have been the Family of Dolls” (A). After learning about Ismene, Taylor understands Esperanza’s reactions to Taylor and why she had tried to kill herself (B). She empathizes with Estevan and Esperanza’s plight, exclaiming that she “sometimes...feel[s] like a foreigner” and that she, too, lives in a “world where people have to make choices like” choosing the lives of others over your own daughter (C). We learn details about Taylor’s childhood as a “Nutter” and how that affected her social standing in life because “it stained your hands black, and then you were marked” (D). **But the most important realization Taylor makes is that her “whole life had been running along on dumb luck,” that she “spent the first half of [her] life avoiding motherhood and tires and now [she’s] counting them as blessings,” and she feels guilty that she has wasted “all this time ... moping around” about “having the responsibility of Turtle” (E). This realization, unlike any of the others, will change the course of her relationship with her daughter.**

18. It is clear that Estevan respects Taylor and reciprocates her feelings for him, but it is she who “slid off the couch,” releasing herself from spooning “on the sofa, his knees against the backs of my knees and his left hand on my ribs, just under my breast,” so (B) would not be the correct choice. The details about the interrogation methods used by the Guatemalan police, who connect wires “to sensitive parts,” as well as the fact that “the telephones are made in the United States” disturb Taylor greatly (C) and (D). The fact that Estevan would pick “the lives of seventeen people over getting [his] daughter back” is something she “can’t even begin to think about” (E). **However, the thing that is most upsetting to Taylor is when Estevan says he can “see that it would be easier not to know” the truth. She defends herself by saying, “That’s not fair, you don’t see at all. You think you’re the foreigner here, and I’m the American, and I just look the other way ... But nobody asked my permission, okay? Sometimes I feel like I’m a foreigner too.”** Choice (A) is, therefore, the best answer.
19. Taylor says that Estevan “wasn’t crying” as he told her about Ismene. “It’s hard to explain but a certain kind of horror is beyond tears. Tears would be like worrying about watermarks on the furniture when the house is burning down.” **Through Kingsolver’s choice of a simple simile, the reader feels the full weight of Estevan’s grief.**
20. Though the chapter certainly reflects on politics, parenting, culture, and socioeconomic boundaries, the tone of this chapter is far more intimate than informal, so choice (A) would not be correct. There are overwrought moments here, but there is nothing overtly optimistic (B). Estevan is quite harsh in his judgment of both the United States and even of Taylor herself, but he is not necessarily condescending (D). They are both angry periodically in this chapter but never are they bemused (E). **What best describes this chapter is that it is both tense with conflict and contemplative of the issues brought up, so choice (C) is the best answer.**
21. Metonymy is the substituting of one word for another that is closely related to it, so (B) is not the correct choice. An analogy compares two similar objects which is not the case here (D), nor does the example personify anything (E). There is a contradiction in meaning here, so an oxymoron might seem like the logical choice here, but an oxymoron is a combination of contradictory terms rather than ideas (C). **The contraction, in this case, can best be explained by the use of antithesis, a contrast of the ideas of “an emptiness” that “hurt your ears” (A).**
22. The Tucson Valley is “resting in its cradle,” the desert plain has a “palm stretched out,” and the saguaros were “so skinny and personlike that you always had the feeling they were looking over your shoulder,” so personification is definitely used (A). The passage is full of concrete images throughout: “white ribbons of lightning...wildly waving weed stalks...flaming orange spike of flower buds” (B). The plain was “like a palm,” the storm “like a huge blue-gray shower curtain,” and the octillos “like candles from hell” (C). There are several instances of onomatopoeia as well: “stretched,” “nervous,” “jumped,” “shivers,” flitting,” “wildly waving,” “spiny,” “split” and ‘clusters” (D). **The only language resource not used here is, then, parallel syntax (E).**

23. This chapter does not move from the general to the specific (A) nor is its function merely a chronology (D). The point of view remains Taylor's throughout, so choice (E) is not correct either. While it does appear to compare the excitement of the first rain in the Tucson Valley, of "all the life it had in it," to the harshness of the unnatural city, this description does not encapsulate the whole purpose. **The New Year scene and the scene at Taylor's home could easily have been split into two chapters. The author made a conscious choice to juxtapose these events to provide a dramatic contrast, not just in location but also in mood. The "flirtatious, marvelous dance with thunder for music" where Taylor "had never felt so happy" contrasts sharply with the abrupt feeling she has as soon as she gets home: "I knew right away something had gone wrong." Choice (C), then, is the best choice.**
24. There is no evidence in the text that the bird symbolizes Lou Ann's guilt over the situation (C). The "terrified bird" does unquestionably parallel the chaos of "the policemen and anatomically accurate dolls" surrounding Taylor (A). The bird eventually flies "through the open screen door into the terrible night" just as Turtle retreats into herself again; she "hadn't spoken once in the days since the incident and was back to her old ways," so either (D) or (E) might initially seem like logical answers as well. **However, the primary function here is to provide a stark contrast to Taylor's inability to cope: "I didn't go to her, because I couldn't. It is that simple." She has lost her confidence that she can "do anything" for Turtle and feels defeated by the world's "ugliness." Her feelings make her immobile and all she can think to do is remove the one problem she actually has a chance of fixing.**
25. This is a highly emotionally-charged chapter in its life-affirming optimism and in its negative cynicism. Taylor panics (A), she questions herself (B and C), and she avoids reality (E), all of which are natural reactions to this kind of situation. **But the emotional peak of this chapter is actually seen in Taylor's resignation: "I'm just not up to the job, Lou Ann" (D). Despite her natural tendency as a fighter—"Nobody picks on you and lives to tell the tale"—Taylor's main reaction is, ultimately, one of "hopeless" defeat, and it leads her to the life-altering conclusion that she cannot handle being a mother.**
26. Calling the label of "illegals" merely an exaggeration would not capture the essence of what bothers Taylor so much about this (A). And while it may, indeed, be ironic that they are calling otherwise law-abiding residents "illegals" just for political reasons, Taylor's reaction is far too impassioned for irony to explain it fully (B). Clearly, it is not a fact (D). The choice becomes one between two literary terms that both deal with the issue of contradiction. The key is that with a paradox, the statement seems contrary to common sense, yet it may in fact, be true, which is not the case here (C). **An oxymoron is simply a combination of contradictory terms either juxtaposed or within a phrase. For Taylor, calling "people...illegal" is a contradiction in terms and, therefore, an oxymoron (E).**

27. Esperanza at first “seemed stunned” (D) and then “a little scared” (A) in the flatlands, while Turtle was totally “unperturbed” (B). Taylor describes it as the “feeling you were stuck out there, rolling your wheels on some trick prairie treadmill” (E). **The only emotion the travelers seem not to feel, then, is choice (C), tranquility.**
28. There is little in this chapter to suggest a feeling of serenity because of the stressful nature of their journey, (D) and there is nothing downright mocking in tone either (E). There are definitely elements of hopelessness and tragedy: Will Taylor really find any of Taylor’s family? Will she get Esperanza and Estevan to their destination safely? Will Taylor end up in jail for helping her friends? will Turtle get taken away from her? However, it is really only the threat of tragedy and lost hope; at this point they are still quite hopeful as Taylor affirms, “I can’t give up” (B) and (C). **The main goal in this chapter is to inform the reader, to teach about the Indian and Mayan cultures and about this period in history. We learn about the Mayan national symbol, their languages and accomplishments. We learn how similar in looks the Cherokees and Mayans are, which will become crucial later. We learn that the Cherokee Nation “isn’t any one place ... It’s people” with their “own government.” Choice (A), didactic, is therefore the best answer.**
29. Taylor is devoted to helping Estevan and Esperanza reach safety in Oklahoma, but her attitude toward Esperanza in this particular chapter is not one of devotion (B). While Taylor does not have an aversion to Esperanza (C), she also clearly is not indifferent to her either (E). **Because the only two choices that would make any sense would be (A) and (D), the reader needs to make a distinction between these two attitudes. Estevan claims to the police officer who stops them that Turtle is their child. This bothers Taylor as does the fact that “Turtle was calling Esperanza ‘Ma.’” She later thinks she hears Esperanza “call Turtle Ismene” and “feels a cold feeling in the bottom of [her] stomach” as a result. The key to discerning her feelings is to ask whether or not Taylor is afraid that Esperanza will try to take Turtle. If the answer is yes, then suspicion would best describe her feelings, since being suspicious of someone has a slightly more negative connotation. However, this is not likely the case. Since Taylor feels uneasy but not necessarily fearful, apprehension would be the better choice (D).**
30. A “snipe hunt” is clearly not a tragic quest since there is no element of tragedy involved (A). It is too short-lived to be an allegorical journey (C), yet it is not merely a hunting trip either (D). **A person could learn a moral lesson as a result of the joke, but the primary purpose of sending someone on a snipe hunt, according to Taylor, is that you want to “see how long it takes him to figure out what a fool he is,” so a fool’s errand would most accurately equate to a snipe hunt (B).**

The Bean Trees

Chapter One: The One to Get Away

1. Explain the significance of the title of the chapter.

Compared with Newt Hardbine, who Taylor says was “cut from the same mud” as she was, Taylor is the “one” of the two to get away, despite their similarities in economic background, social standing, and educational opportunities. It is clear that Taylor is desperate to leave Pittman “and never look back”; the title alone suggests it. She does not just want to “go” away; she wants to “get” away, which has a drastically different connotation. Though breaking away from her mother is certainly the hardest part of her decision to leave, Taylor wants more independence. Her biggest fear is being “hogtied to a future as a tobacco farmer’s wife ... barefoot and pregnant.”

2. What is the narrative perspective in this chapter? Explain the effects of this narrative choice. How reliable is this narration likely to be?

This chapter is written in first-person narration. Because the author has chosen to tell the story through Taylor’s eyes, the reader needs to be aware that her attitude towards events and people will affect how they are interpreted. As a result, in many cases with first-person narration, the narrator can be totally, or at least partially, unreliable as a source of information about herself and others. However, in this case, we meet a very smart, self-aware protagonist who views herself, and the world around her, through a very honest lens and is, consequently, quite reliable.

3. How does Missy feel about her mother? Characterize their relationship and what that relationship says about Mama’s attitude towards motherhood.

Mama is totally and utterly selfless and supportive of her daughter, and Missy has a wonderful sense of herself and confidence as a result, and a genuine respect for her mother’s struggles as a single parent. She says, “Mama always expected the best out of me,” and that no matter what she did, Mama “acted like it was the moon I had just hung up in the sky and plugged in all the stars. Like I was that good.” Mama is caring and provides for her daughter with the hard work of cooking, cleaning, and ironing for others, and she teaches Missy that same work ethic. When Missy buys her car, Mama teaches her that “if you’re going to have an old car you’re going to know how to drive an old car.” Mama has no issues letting go of her daughter and helping her become the best version of herself: “You’ll drive away from here yet.”

4. What is significant about the “two promises” Missy makes to herself when leaving Kentucky?

The first promise she makes is that she will give herself a new name. Missy never liked her name and wants a “clean break” from her old life in Kentucky. Ironically, even though she’s decided to change her name, she says that “a name is not something a person really has the right to pick out, but is something you’re provided with more or less by chance.” Though Missy believes in herself, she is also a firm believer in destiny and so lets “the gas tank decide.” The second promise has to do with where she “would end up,” that she would “drive west” until her “car stopped running.” But she does not count on car issues or the Indian child. Taylor is learning that life is a mix of destiny and planning.

5. Analyze Taylor’s character and her view of the world. How do the choices she makes in this chapter illuminate what kind of person she is?

Taylor is smart, self-aware, and hardworking and she understands people. Having grown up poor in a small rural town, she longs for a different life for herself, and she makes that happen by getting a job and saving up enough money not only selflessly to help Mama with the bills but to buy herself a car so she has the means to leave Pittman. Later, she chooses to keep the baby rather than giving her to the police. She may think there is an element of fate in the “head rights” of the situation, but the fact is that many others in her situation would never have had the generosity or confidence to start their “new life” with a random baby in tow, particularly since she left Pittman to ensure that she wouldn’t end up “barefoot and pregnant.”

6. Discuss the purpose of the following motifs: colors, lightness/darkness, and “head rights.”

Taylor is very attracted to bright colors, and it tells us a lot about her personality that she “decided early on that if I couldn’t dress elegant, I’d dress memorable.” One of the things that makes her feel that she identifies with the Cherokee Nation are the turquoise and red colors she sees on the postcards. She feels entitled to the “head rights” of being Cherokee not just because she is one-eighth Cherokee but because of her affinity for these colors. The lightness and darkness motif is particularly prevalent in the parking lot scene. Unlike the pickup truck where the Indian child lived in darkness and abuse, Taylor “at least...has headlights” and can help her stay safe and warm.

7. In what ways can the “Broken Arrow Motor Lodge” sign be considered a symbol?

The neon sign at the motel has a “pink arrow breaking and unbreaking, over and over” and Turtle clings to the washcloth that has “BROKEN ARROW” written on it. The child, like the Cherokee Nation, is emotionally and physically broken, and meeting Taylor will be the child’s first step to becoming whole again, like the sign.

8. Give examples from this chapter of the theme of (a) people's expectations can hinder our personal growth and (b) the role of women in society.

Newt Hardbine's story is a perfect example of theme (a). "Nobody expected any better of a Hardbine" than to end up penniless and dead. He and Taylor came from identical backgrounds except for one thing: she had the love and support of her mother who had enormously high expectations, and opinions, of her daughter.

Theme (b) is most prevalent in the scene in which Taylor discovers that the Indian child has been physically and sexually abused. Taylor notes that she "was a girl...poor thing," and, more significantly, that the mere "fact" of her gender "had already burdened her short life with...misery."

9. Explain how Kingsolver's use of the Kentucky dialect serves to help the reader better understand Taylor's character in a way that the physical descriptions and plot do not. Is this merely a function of the first-person narration or is it the language itself which contributes to our overall opinion of Taylor?

Certainly the first-person narrative perspective provides the reader with a unique and personal perspective. However, it is also what Taylor says and how she says it which are significant. She uses phrases specific to the Kentucky dialect like "cut out of basically the same mud...in those days girls were dropping by the wayside like seeds off a poppyseed bun...if I couldn't dress elegant, I'd dress memorable" and "I could have had babies coming out my ears by now." We see humor in Taylor's turn of phrase but also a whole socioeconomic culture of the background she comes from.

Chapter Two: New Year's Pig

1. How does the narrative perspective shift in this chapter? How does this shift affect the novel? Speculate why Kingsolver did not choose other narrative options.

In this chapter, the narration shifts from the first-person through Taylor to third-person limited through Lou Ann. A possible reason for this might be that Taylor cannot tell Lou Ann's story because she has not yet met Lou Ann. However, the question remains: Why did Kingsolver not choose to shift to first-person narration through Lou Ann just as she did with Taylor in Chapter 1? The answer may become clearer in future chapters, but the reader can speculate that the novel is really going to be Taylor's story, not Lou Ann's. The double first-person narration would place an unwanted emphasis on someone who is not going to be a protagonist.

2. What theme is introduced with: "It left him with an artificial leg below the knee and something else that was harder to pin down"? Compare and contrast how differently Lou Ann and Angel viewed the accident.

The theme that is introduced here is that physical scars are easier to get over than emotional ones. Angel can get a prosthesis, but he refuses to get it adjusted, leaving the "faintest jingling sound with every step" as a metaphorical reminder to himself that he will never be the same. It's the same reason that of all the things he does not take from their home, he does take the picture of himself "at a rodeo in 1978." Whereas Angel was helpless, morose, and argumentative, Lou Ann viewed the aftermath of the accident as "their best time together" and genuinely could not see why it had to "change his life at all." She was not "repulsed" by the amputation but "fascinated" and then "thought nothing of it at all." But, the wounds were not hers to heal, and Angel felt he had to leave.

3. Explain the important commentary Kingsolver makes on racial prejudice in this chapter.

Lou Ann's mother, Mrs. Logan, refuses to learn how to pronounce Angel's first name, or even her daughter's new last name, correctly. She, tellingly, leaves it at "Ruins" because that's what she thinks her daughter has done with her life by marrying a Mexican. She "disliked him because he was Mexican" even though she had "never seen one" and thinks her daughter is "making up" the fact that they were "doctors, bank clerks," and "TV personalities." Mrs. Logan embodies the theme of racism bred of ignorance.

4. Discuss the metaphorical nature of the "magic circle" around Lou Ann and how it is tied to the theme of the role of women in society. What other examples of this theme do we see in the chapter?

Lou Ann's grandfather had given her a jackknife as a child and told her to "keep a magic circle around her...for safety's sake." The metaphorical "magic circle" of pregnancy makes her feel equally safe because men offer their seat on the bus, and they don't leer at her or make the usual inappropriate remarks. She feels, having dealt for years with men treating her like a sexual object, that it would "not be so bad to go through your life as a pregnant lady."

Lee Sing tells Lou Ann that having a daughter is a waste because "Feeding a girl is like feeding the neighbor's New year pig. All that work. In the end, it goes to some other family."

Lou Ann must walk by the porn shop Fanny Heaven almost daily and is forced to look at images of signs saying "GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS" and "TOTAL NUDITY" and a woman in a "leopard-skin bikini...positioned in such a way that the door handle...would sink into her crotch."

5. The last paragraph of the chapter highlights one of Lou Ann's most pivotal personality traits, and one that is in direct contrast to Taylor. Explain.

Lou Ann is reminded of a time when she and Angel were at the beach; he had warned her to keep her eyes closed in the ocean but she wanted to keep them open: "You never knew what kind of thing could be down there under the water." Lou Ann is a worrier, someone who always needs to be on the lookout for what lies ahead, leaving nothing to chance. In contrast, Taylor leaves much up to chance and feels that her destiny will find her without her having to look for it.

Chapter Three: Jesus is Lord Used Tires

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the chapter and explain the irony of Taylor's ending up at this particular shop.

There are several reasons this title could be considered ironic. First, Taylor tells us in the first sentence of the novel, "I have been afraid of putting air in a tire ever since I saw a tractor tire blow up," yet she ends up at a store exclusively devoted to tires. The "Jesus is Lord" title parallels the "1-800-THE LORD" commercial she kept seeing on television in Oklahoma, and Taylor amusingly speculates that maybe if you called the number, you would get Jesus is Lord Used Tires. Though Mattie does not share her late husband's religious fanaticism, seen when she hands Taylor a mug with rabbits "having sex in a trillion different positions," she is a Christ figure nonetheless.

2. Give examples of Taylor's sense of humor and use of sarcasm. Examine what we learn about her character as a result.

What most influences Taylor's decision to stay in Arizona are the "goofy pink clouds," the "rocks stacked on top of one another like piles of copulating potato bugs," and the idea of "petrified dinosaur turds." Taylor, "laughing her head off," thinks it's the "best thing" she's "seen in years" and decides to stay as a result. Her sense of humor guides her decision despite the fact that the situation she is in would be incredibly stressful for most other people. When asked by a stranger if she is from out of town, she sarcastically replies, "No, I go to Kentucky every year to get my license plate" because she "didn't like his looks." Her sarcasm highlights not only her sense of humor but also her ability to stand on her own and defend herself against men who "thought they could impress a woman by making the world out to be such a big dangerous deal." She seems fearless and poised for whatever life will bring her way.

3. Examine Taylor's emerging motherly instincts and how her own mother's parenting is affecting her attitude toward her situation.

Taylor names the child Turtle, and despite Mrs. Hoge's opinion that the child is "retarded," Taylor adopts her own mother's attitude of letting the child be her own person in her own time without judgment or comment: "I maintained that she had her own ways of doing things and wasn't inclined to be pushed." Even though Turtle was clearly not a part of Taylor's plan for a new life—she, in fact, ran from Pittman to avoid this exact scenario—, she sympathetically determines that Turtle "had already been pushed too far in her lifetime." She is, rightfully, insecure about taking care of Turtle and believes she's "crazy" for thinking she "was doing this child a favor" by keeping her. She has "no job, and no prospects" yet manages to find a job, feed and clothe Turtle, and find childcare, albeit free! And though she views Turtle as "somebody she got stuck with," her actions suggest that her attitude is otherwise.

4. Consider Mattie's actions and words in this chapter. What portrait is the reader given of her nature?

The fact that Mattie can fix cars and is a woman "with this kind of know-how" reveals her skill and independence. When it is clear to her that Taylor is struggling financially, she offsets the "bad news" by kindly saying that it's "too early" and offering her coffee instead and gets Turtle a free snack. When Taylor starts to feel guilty about taking advantage of Mattie's kindness, Mattie assures her that she has no ulterior motive in being helpful. The reader sees a growing portrait of who Mattie is: capable, kind, knowledgeable, and selfless—someone who would rather "chase bugs off the pavement" instead of just killing them outright.

5. Explain the reference to the title of the novel in this chapter and why it is significant both to the novel as a whole and to Taylor personally. Analyze the literary devices used in this reference and how the beans are reminiscent of the ants from earlier in the chapter.

Taylor lists "picking bugs off bean vines" as part of her resume to Mattie. The fact that Mattie has bean vines in her garden serves to make Taylor feel immediately at home and, in some sense, like she belongs there—was destined to be there. Kingsolver's overall language in this scene forms a symbol of survival; the author personifies the beans as soldiers with her use of onomatopoeia: "trooping...marching...climbing over anything in their path." Survival is the goal and the end result for these beans which started in "somebody's garden in China" and ended "up right here." Similarly, earlier in the chapter, Taylor sees ants milling around a cigarette butt, breaking "it into little pieces to take back to their queen." And again, "You just never knew where something was going to end up." Both of these scenes parallel Taylor's own journey to Arizona.

6. Compare and contrast Tucson and Arizona as seen in this chapter. What elements of Taylor's new life in Arizona are most appealing to her?

Taylor felt trapped in Kentucky and thought she would have no real choices for her future other than to marry a farmer and have children. In Tucson, she feels "thrown into the future" because she had been exposed to so little in rural Pittman which was "twenty years behind the nation." In Kentucky she would have had the security and guidance of her mother but "in Tucson, it was clear that there was nobody overlooking us all. We would just have to find our own way." There may be some degree of anxiety associated with that fact, but overall, Taylor seems to welcome it.

7. How is the closing of chapter three ironic?

In the last two paragraphs of the chapter, Taylor tells Sandi that Turtle is "not really mine...She's just someone I got stuck with," and Sandi replies, "Yeah, I know exactly what you mean." This interchange is ironic on several different levels. From a dramatic irony standpoint, we, the reader, are privy to information that Sandi is not, namely that Turtle is not Taylor's child. It is equally ironic that Sandi, a "real" parent, believes that both she and Taylor are "stuck" with kids neither one of them wants. Both women, through completely different circumstances, have ironically ended up in the exact same situation with no husbands, low-paying jobs, and "free" childcare. Sandi thinks she knows "exactly" what Taylor is talking about because she feels "stuck" as well, but she has no idea that Turtle was, literally, dumped in the front seat of Taylor's car.

Chapter Four: Tug Fork Water

1. Why does Angel agree to move back in with Lou Ann while her mother and grandmother are there? What does this say about his character?

Lou Ann says that Angel "might be hard to talk to and unreasonable in every other way, but at least...he knew the power of mothers and grandmothers." Angel agrees because he knows that moving back in would be far easier than dealing with his in-laws in the face of potential divorce. He likely feels genuinely guilty for leaving Lou Ann and Dwayne Ray and thinks he owes Lou Ann this small favor.

2. When asked whether she and her father had ever thought of moving out of Granny Logan's, Ivy tells Lou Ann, "But there was so much work in them days, no time for fun, and besides I'd of been scared to death out someplace all by myself." What implicit judgment is Ivy making? What is ironic about her personal fears?

Ivy's stated reasons for living with her in-laws after marrying Lou Ann's father suggest a certain judgment on her daughter's choices. Ivy claims there was "so much work in them days" and that there was "no time for fun," as if Lou Ann works less and has more fun. Both mother and daughter share a certain fear of life, but Lou Ann's fears involve bad things happening to those around her, whereas Ivy's fears, ironically, are mostly of being "someplace by myself." Though their attitudes and circumstances differ, all of these factors correlate to the theme of the role of women in our society.

3. What important details do we learn about Lou Ann's father and their relationship in this chapter? Is it surprising?

Lou Ann recognizes the belt on her mother's suitcase "as one she had been whipped with years ago when her father was alive." It does seem surprising in some respects because of the contrast to how loving Lou Ann is towards Dwayne Ray. Because she does not seem to react in any visceral way to that memory, perhaps her father was loving at other times.

Later, Lou Ann remembers a time when she had found a pair of her father's work gloves in the barn "still molded to the curved shape of his hands, long after he was dead" which suggests a certain degree of affection and nostalgia.

We can only speculate as to their relationship at this point because the author gives us only these two lines with which to judge him.

4. Discuss the theme of racism and the need to revere other cultures as seen in this chapter.

Granny Logan calls Angel a "heathern Mexican" for working on "the Lord's day." Lou Ann tries to explain to her that he has to work and that he was "born right here in America, same as the rest of us," but Granny is unwilling to accept this explanation and insists "that don't make it right, do it?" He must be a heathen and lazy if he is Mexican.

5. Consider several examples of Lou Ann's homesickness in this chapter. Why do you think she stays despite those feelings?

Lou Ann imagines herself "running after the bus" and sitting "between her mother and grandmother" with Dwayne Ray. She refers to the superior tomatoes "back home" when speaking with Bobby Bingo and "felt her heart do something strange," and she admits that "it still surprised her sometimes to open the window and not see Kentucky." Even though Lou Ann is conflicted, she stays because she has made a life for herself in Tucson separate from the pressure and judgment of her mother and grandmother, especially now with Angel having left her. She is far more open-minded than they are and is not afraid to be alone, and at this point, she is probably unsure what the future holds for her marriage and wants to maintain the façade for the time being.

6. What role does Bobby Bingo play in this chapter?

Bobby Bingo provides Lou Ann with a forum to admit to someone, and to herself, that her marriage is probably over, after she spent weeks "deceiving her own mother and grandmother." He also provides Lou Ann with sage advice, which she contemplates later: "Whatever you want the most, it's going to be the worst thing for you."

7. “Like a bug or a mouse scratching in the cupboards at night—you could get up and chase after it, or just go back to sleep and let it be.” What is Lou Ann referring to here and why is it significant?

Lou Ann is referring to Angel's presence in the house as markedly “different from the feeling of women” being there. Women “fill...up the house,” whereas he “could be there, or not, and it hardly made any difference.” This realization helps her feel better about her new circumstances of being alone: “This was good, she decided.”

8. Explain the symbolic significance of the title of the chapter.

Granny Logan gives Lou Ann a bottle of “Tug Fork water” from home for “baptizing the baby.” Lou Ann, and “practically everybody else” in her family, was baptized in that “crick.” The water represents Lou Ann's past and a piece of home, which she misses. Rather than throw it out, “she thought for a long time about what to do” with it before putting it in her bathroom medicine cabinet; she is putting her past “on the...shelf” but in a place where she can see it every day. Angel, in contrast, has no sense of her home or history, or the sentimentality of the memento,” and “he poured it down the drain.”

Chapter Five: Harmonious Space

1. Explain the significance of the extended metaphor in the opening of Chapter Five.

Kingsolver illustrates the harsh, oppressive heat, landscape, and lifestyle of Tucson by creating the metaphor of a heart compared with the railroad track. Through her use of onomatopoeia, the track “punctured Tucson's old, creaky chest cavity” and the train let out a “long, tired scream.” The juxtaposition of contrasting diction denoting the “old days” when the train would bring “a fresh load of life, like a blood vessel carrying platelets to circulate through the lungs” to “nowadays” when “if you could even call the railroad an artery of Tucson, you would have to say it was a hardened one.” The first comparison, “like a blood vessel,” is a simile; whereas the second “was a hardened one,” is a metaphor.

2. Give several examples of Taylor's humor or sarcasm from this chapter and explain what they reveal about her character. What might another reason be for the author to have Taylor use sarcasm?

Taylor's sarcasm serves several purposes. In terms of character, it shows that Taylor is smart, does not take life, or people, too seriously, and it also serves as a defense mechanism for her. It's likely that Kingsolver uses Taylor's sarcasm as a literary vehicle to lighten the overall tone of the novel and its heavy subject matter. Absent of Taylor's character and rhetorical influence, the novel would consist of a single mother with no job, a widow helping refugees escape the horrors of their governments, and an abandoned Cherokee child.

Examples of Taylor's sarcasm are: when she says she had to give Sandi "credit considering that life had delivered [her] a truckload of manure with no return address;" when talking about the number of "toxins" in hot dogs, she says, "I would have guessed seven or eight;" and when asked about Turtle's heritage, she says, "Her great-great- grandpa was full-blooded Cherokee...on my side. Cherokee skips a generation, like red hair. Didn't you know that?"

3. What role does Snowboots play in the chapter with respect to the theme of parenting and how does the cat parallel Lou Ann's character?

Lou Ann attributes Snowboots' habit of "throwing invisible sand over invisible cat poop" to his "split personality" because he's "from a broken home." This advances the theme of parenting and the value of a supportive, nurturing family. Angel called the cat "Pachuco" or "bad Mexican boy" while Lou Ann lovingly calls him Snowboots, "like one all the time tells the kid it's good and the other one says it's bad. It gives them this idea they have to be both ways at once." The cat's antics also parallel Lou Ann's character in that the cat feels guilty for something he did not actually do, just as Lou Ann feels perpetually guilt-ridden for her abilities as a mother, wife, and friend.

4. Analyze key points in the chapter that illustrate Taylor's growing concern and affection for Turtle.

Taylor has nightmares that a horse is "carrying off Turtle while she hollered bloody murder." Though she's desperate for a job and cannot afford childcare, she knows instinctively that "Kid Central Station was not doing Turtle any good." She is in no rush to name Turtle herself but instead wants to "figure out what her real name is." When Taylor picks Turtle up, she positions her specifically so that Turtle "can reach my braid...she held on to it like a lifeline. This was one of our normal positions."

5. Considering the scene between Taylor and Lou Ann, reflect on ways these future roommates will complement one another.

Taylor and Lou Ann are both from Kentucky “separated by only two counties” and share an immediate rapport from the familiarity of their memories and speech patterns. Lou Ann tells Taylor, “It’s been so long. You talk just like me.” They also share the same sense of humor and “within ten minutes” were “splitting our gussets laughing.” While Lou Ann is quite insecure and fearful, Taylor is a strong, optimistic person. These characteristics will hopefully serve to balance each other out; Lou Ann may help Taylor with parenting issues and her new life in Tucson, and Taylor may help to build up Lou Ann’s self-esteem and encourage her to be less fearful.

6. How does the Kentucky dialect serve to unify Lou Ann and Taylor in this chapter?

Both women use expressions like “ugly as a mud stick fence” and “I’ll swan,” and Lou Ann has no trouble understanding Taylor when she says, “I’m just a hillbilly from East Jesus Nowhere with this adopted child that everybody keeps telling me is dumb as a box of rocks. I’ve got nothing on you, girl.” Their common dialect unites them emotionally and socially, in a town where they both, to a certain extent, feel like foreigners.

Chapter Six: Valentine’s Day

1. Explain the irony of Taylor’s statement that “Turtle’s main goal in life...seemed to be to pass unnoticed.”

This question can be answered literally or figuratively. In a literal sense, Turtle’s anxiety about being “noticed” stems from her childhood of abuse; to avoid further punishment, she chooses to fade into nothingness. You could also look at this on the figurative level of Turtle representing the whole of the Cherokee Indians who also “pass unnoticed,” having been forced to move 200,000 members of their tribe to only 7,000 square miles of land, away from all other cultures and civilizations.

2. Discuss the crucial details we learn about Mattie in this chapter. How do those facts coincide with what we already know about her personality?

We learn that Mattie has Spanish-speaking people living with her upstairs “for various lengths of time” for whom she provides “sanctuary.” She asks Taylor to assure her that she’s not “running from the law” because she’s “got enough of that on [her] hands.” We do not yet know the full details of what Mattie is doing, but do know that she is both a humanitarian and a risk-taker.

3. How does Taylor feel about Mattie? Characterize their relationship and what each woman appears to gain from it?

Taylor says that “you couldn’t ask for better than Mattie. She was patient and kind...like a rock in the road.” Mattie gives her a job and lets her bring Turtle when she needs to. The two women appear to have a genuine affection and respect for one another; Taylor has gained a mother figure and mentor and Mattie has gained a reliable employee and a friend.

4. Analyze the significance of the scene in which Mattie throws tires at Taylor and explain what Taylor learns from this experience.

Taylor confesses that she “has a fear of exploding tires.” To help her overcome her fear, Mattie furtively throws a twenty-eight pound can of water at her to simulate “what it feels like” when a tire “hits you.” Taylor is then able to put “tire explosions in relative terms” and “felt better somehow.”

5. Give examples of the theme of motherhood in this chapter. Cite evidence that Taylor may be floundering in her role as Turtle’s mother.

Instead of being offended when her daughter changes her name to Taylor, Mama thinks the new name fits her “like a pair of washed jeans.” Mama accepts and encourages her daughter’s choices and always looks for the best in her.

Lou Ann is loving and attentive yet “life itself was a life-threatening enterprise.” She is fearful of peas choking the children and obsessively saves “newspaper stories of every imaginable type of freak disaster.”

Taylor’s current parenting style seems to be just to let Turtle find her own way rather than guiding her. Lou Ann reminds her “that you have to play with children to develop their personality.”

6. Compare and contrast Taylor and Lou Ann’s attitudes toward their living situation. What does each woman’s point of view say about her character and her upbringing?

“The idea of Lou Ann reading magazines for child-raising tips and recipes and me coming home grouchy after a hard day’s work...was bugging me.” Taylor battles against the patriarchal family model because she did not grow up with a father and resents society’s definition of the traditional nuclear family, unlike Lou Ann who seems so comfortable with it because she had a more conventional upbringing. Taylor yells, “It’s not like we’re a family, for Christ’s sake,” whereas Lou Ann clearly already considers their unit of four a family. After several beers, an abundance of junk food, and “staying up half the night,” Taylor is no longer angry and sees the humor of the situation. It is likely that in future chapters she will also see the inherent advantages of their living situation as well.

7. Cite examples of Lou Ann's insecurity. How is Mama's "hog saying" tied to Lou Ann's lack of confidence?

Mama had a saying that "Hogs go deaf at harvest time" meaning that "people would only hear what they wanted to hear." Lou Ann, despite any affirmations of her abilities as a friend, mother, and person, believes the worst about herself. Taylor also realizes that Lou Ann does not want to admit that her marriage to Angel might have been a mistake and that she is better off without him; Lou Ann persists in thinking she "ran off both my husband and my TV."

Chapter Seven: How They Eat in Heaven

1. Discuss what new information we learn about Estevan and Esperanza in this chapter and how that information relates to Mattie's television appearance. How has the tone of the novel shifted as a result?

We learn that Estevan had been an English teacher in Guatemala City but now works as a dishwasher at a Chinese restaurant. Though we do not know the specifics of her grief, Esperanza "couldn't take her eyes off Turtle" who looks "like a child they'd known in Guatemala." Mattie is on the news speaking about the Guatemalans and Salvadorans who had applied for asylum and been denied, that "we have a legal obligation to take people in whose lives are in danger." Estevan introduces himself and Esperanza as "Steven and Hope" because they have to hide their true cultural background. It is clear now that Estevan and Esperanza are two Guatemalan refugees living with Mattie and hoping for asylum from their government. The tone of the novel has shifted to one of political and social injustice, but Kingsolver maintains balance in her novel through the strength of her characters. It is still a character-driven story rather than just a means for the author to espouse her political views.

2. Taylor says that Esperanza "reminded me of Turtle." What does she mean by this statement? Contemplate Esperanza's actions and reactions in this chapter. What are the likely possibilities for her attitude and emotions here?

The portrait we get of Esperanza in this chapter is one of quiet despair. Though we do not yet have all the facts about the cause of that sadness, it is clear she has suffered some unspeakable trauma that has "split her in two," and like Turtle, she metaphorically "took up almost no space." The facts that she "couldn't take her eyes off Turtle" and "fell back... as if she'd been hit with twenty-eight pounds of air" when she sees the children suggest the cause of her grief is likely the loss of a child. Yet, despite her internal anguish, she still wears clothes with "twice as many colors as you ever knew existed" to show her pride in the beauty of her heritage and, perhaps, to convince herself that happiness is within her reach, if only outwardly.

3. Explore the function of Turtle's dreams.

In her dreams, Turtle is "desperate" and "active" and "free to do all the things that during her waking life she could only watch."

4. What is the primary function of the quail in this chapter?

Like the quail, Taylor has symbolically been "dithering back and forth" trying to reach Turtle and protect her, and it is in this chapter where we see Turtle start to thrive—she laughs, smiles, and starts to speak. Despite Taylor's initial lack of desire to be a parent and her inexperience, the role of motherhood is growing on her as well, and she now sees herself and Turtle as a unit rather than as someone she "got stuck with"—"I could see a whole new era arriving in Turtle's and my life."

5. What is the significance of Turtle's first sound and first word?

Much to Taylor's "relief," Turtle's first sound is laughter which she interprets as "a sign" that she has not entirely "botch[ed] Turtle's upbringing."

Turtle's first word is "bean." Mattie's bean plants are beautiful and rare descendants of ancient Chinese bean seeds; Turtle is a descendant of the Cherokee Indians and is also beautiful and unusual. The bean plants survive unpredictable weather conditions just as Turtle is surviving her abusive past.

6. How has Taylor and Lou Ann's relationship evolved to this point? What aspects of Lou Ann's character does Taylor readily understand?

Taylor seems much more comfortable with her living situation in this chapter and is "beginning to see the point" of "organizing the household chores." She and Lou Ann have evolved into close friends. Taylor understands that "even compliments were a kind of insult to Lou Ann," that she "needed a DAMN I'M GOOD mirror," that she "measured many things in life...in terms of Before and After Dwayne Ray," and most significantly, she appreciates Lou Ann's "fear that the things you imagine will turn real."

7. Give examples of the following themes in this chapter: one's duty to one's fellow humans and the importance of revering other cultures. How are these two intertwined in this particular chapter?

The moral lesson of the chapter's title exemplifies our need to reach out to our fellow man; the only difference between the situation in heaven and hell is that people help one another thrive in heaven. Also, Mattie's newscast topically discusses our "obligation to take in people whose lives are in danger." The newscast also serves to address the issue of needing to respect other cultures, and Mrs. Parsons's "illegal aliens and dope peddlers" comment embodies the racist hatred bred of ignorance. The chapter's lesson is that if only we would reach out to help all people, regardless of race and culture, we would all prosper.

8. How is this chapter structured? Why has the author chosen to include so many separate sections in this particular chapter? How do they form a cohesive whole?

The first third of the chapter describes Taylor's outing with Lou Ann, Mattie, Esperanza, and Estevan and serves to give the reader essential exposition about Estevan and Esperanza's background. The middle third highlights Taylor and Lou Ann's current relationship with one another. The final third encompasses the newscast and the "wild Indian story," both of which draw attention to essential themes of the novel. The structure provides a contrast in that it shifts from a large group of open-minded and accepting individuals who value diversity, to a couple of friends who are raising a family in an accepting, nurturing environment, to a larger gathering of people, not all of whom are accepting or open-minded. Estevan embraces that teachable moment in the final scene in the hopes of bringing those divisive sentiments to a state of enlightenment.

9. Explain the significance of Estevan's "wild Indian story." What textual clues suggest Estevan's attitude toward Mrs. Parsons throughout his story?

Estevan is trying to teach his audience a moral lesson about the prosperity that comes from helping others. Only by feeding each other in heaven can everyone be "perfectly, magnificently well-fed, and very happy" unlike hell where people only think of themselves and are, therefore, "dying of starvation."

He looked "extra hard" at Mrs. Parsons, but "seemed unperturbed;" he seemed, in fact, like "he must hear this kind of thing every day of his life." And while he is relaying the "wild Indian story...looking again at Virgie," he seemed to be "enjoying" teaching Mrs. Parsons this valuable lesson, even knowing that it was likely falling on deaf ears.

Chapter Eight: The Miracle of Dog Poo Park

1. Explain Taylor's reaction to Mama's news that she is getting married.

Taylor is obviously shocked, and Lou Ann thinks she might be a little jealous. Taylor cannot believe Mama would so suddenly decide to marry—especially someone Taylor seems to believe is common or beneath her mother—without consulting her. Though she is the one who chose to leave Mama and Kentucky, Taylor thought she'd eventually convince her mother to join her in Arizona. Most importantly, Taylor is surprised that her mother, who raised her alone for over twenty years, and seemed to have as low an opinion of men as Taylor herself does, has decided to marry yet again.

2. What does Taylor mean when she claims that it was a “conspiracy” that “everybody behaved as if Turtle was [her] own flesh and blood daughter”?

Everyone, including Taylor's mother, talk about Turtle as if she were Taylor's birth daughter—comparing Turtle to Taylor when she was a child, implying that Turtle takes after Taylor—even though they know that Turtle is not Taylor's birth daughter. The “conspiracy” is that they apparently know what Taylor does not yet know—that it is love and not blood that makes a family.

3. Explain the significance of the allusion Taylor uses to describe the “Miracle at Dog Poo Park” and how it is significant to the novel as a whole.

The ugly “thick, muscly vines” on the “old wooden trellis” bloom into a “shivery coat of pale leaves.” Taylor compares this to Moses in Exodus 17: verses 5-7 in which he strikes a rock and obtains water from it. Like Moses who brought life-affirming nourishment out of nothing, the flowers spring forth from bare dirt. This concept also serves to parallel, and perhaps foreshadow, several characters' lives: Lou Ann, Taylor, and Turtle are all beginning to thrive emotionally and socially in their new circumstances.

4. Explain the importance of the particular words Turtle is beginning to use.

Turtle's words are all vegetables or “Ma something.” She is, metaphorically, thriving like the vegetables she so identifies with and is in constant search of the family connections she has lost.

5. Lou Ann's reaction to Taylor's question about Angel's coming back suggests what about Lou Ann?

Lou Ann's reply suggests that she is holding on to the past and is not yet ready to let go of her marriage; she still sees herself in terms of being someone's wife rather than as a perfectly capable single mother. The fact that he left her and Dwayne Ray to fend for themselves with very little explanation seems inconsequential to her at this point if it means that she can go back to the way things were. She does not yet have enough confidence in herself, or the family she is creating with Taylor and Turtle, to see that going back to him might be a mistake.

6. Describe Estevan's attitude toward Mrs. Parsons's comment that “the woman and the kid who got shot must have been drug dealers”? What does Taylor's reaction suggest?

Estevan feels that Americans have the superior attitude of believing that tragedies befall only people who deserve them. Taylor feels momentarily defensive but admits, defeated, “you're right...I guess it makes us feel safe.” Too many things in Taylor's past, and recently, have proven Estevan's opinion to be right. She knows that Newt Hardbine did nothing to deserve death at the hands of his father. Her mother works countless jobs for unappreciative socialites, yet she still cannot get financially ahead. Turtle, an innocent child, was defenselessly abused by members of her own family. And Lou Ann did nothing but love her husband completely, prosthetic and all, yet has still ended up alone with no financial support from Angel. So though she is offended and defensive at first, Taylor knows that Estevan's assessment of the American attitude might be accurate.

7. Why does the task of folding the men's trousers appear to be so meaningful to Taylor?

The woman at the window represents all of the refugees living in Mattie's "sanctuary." They have so little left of their former lives—they've lost their homes, their jobs, their friends, their families. Simple tasks like folding a pair of pants, then, import special meaning as if it were "the only task ahead...and everything depended on getting it right." These refugees cannot control anything that is happening in their lives, so they exert control wherever they can.

8. Evaluate Turtle's condition of "failure to thrive" as an example of the theme of physical versus emotional scars with specific examples from the chapter. Explain Taylor's reaction to Turtle's condition and why it is significant.

The doctor initially claims that though there might be "behavioral evidence" of abuse, that there is no real physical evidence. When Turtle's x-rays prove otherwise, Taylor is overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for a child whose body would never really ever recover from the abuse she had suffered. The reader wonders whether Taylor will be able to handle emotionally this new set of circumstances and how this will affect their relationship. Taylor had believed Turtle was beginning to thrive and facing the reality that Turtle might always struggle in some respects seems, at this point, to be too intense for Taylor.

9. Compare and contrast the reactions of Lou Ann, Taylor, and Turtle in the scene in which they discover Turtle's real name and how those reactions reveal something important about them.

After a short yet tragic life with her Cherokee relatives, Turtle, tellingly, seems to react to her name only if it is spoken in an angry tone. Lou Ann, who dislikes mystery and unanswered questions, is excited to have discovered Turtle's real name finally. Taylor, who has always understood, and empathized with the root of Turtle's despondency, is much more subdued and astutely notes that the child's own name held no positive associations for her.

Chapter Nine: Ismene

1. Explain the political commentary Kingsolver makes in this chapter. What literary vehicle is most effective in conveying her agenda?

Through the very heated and informative dialogue between Taylor and Estevan, Kingsolver effectively divulges her political agenda on the tenuous, violent, and unjust situation with the Guatemalan government and the United States' role in promoting these atrocities.

2. What upsets Taylor most during her conversation with Estevan and why? How might her reaction relate to the theme of person versus society?

What is most upsetting to Taylor is Estevan's saying that Americans—Taylor included—prefer not to know difficult truths, to maintain their own naive illusions about the world and their nation. She desperately wants to make him understand that she empathizes with his situation, and she wants him to have some respect for the fact that she, personally, had no role in his current circumstances. Their argument highlights Kingsolver's overall platform of social and political injustice in which the laws of society are dictated by a government unsympathetic to the role, and plight of the individual.

3. What is the function of (a) Scotty's character and (b) the discussion of Nutters? How do these two stories relate to one another?

Scotty is the vehicle through which Kingsolver introduces the theme of social bigotry independent of racial prejudice. The Nutters symbolize that class of poor who are blamed for their own hardship despite all evidence to the contrary. Taylor is trying to explain her understanding of that kind of despairing loneliness and exclusion where even the group with the lowest social standing would not accept someone.

4. To what extent are the feelings Taylor has for Estevan reciprocated and what future implications might this relationship have?

It is clear that Taylor has a crush on Estevan, and that he, too, may have feelings for her. He feels comfortable and vulnerable enough to cry in her presence. Taylor has spent a lifetime hating men and now finds herself in the unique position of having genuine feelings, not just for a man, but for a married man. She is also struggling with her loyalty to Esperanza. Despite her own desires, Taylor knows what is right and slides "off the sofa" and out of his embrace to return to her own room. It remains to be seen if her resolve will continue or if their relationship will add future complications, but at least for now, her choice is clear.

5. Analyze the key factual plot points revealed in this chapter.

Several pivotal details are revealed in this chapter. Taylor learns about the United States' role in the Guatemala crisis, especially that the United States provides the telephones used for torture interrogation. Whereas in previous chapters, Estevan has not appeared to be angry specifically with the United States; here we get a much more honest assessment—not only with the telephone detail, but with his attitude that Americans prefer not knowing their own government's role in the suffering of other people. Estevan explains Esperanza's hopelessness, what she "has had to live through" losing Ismene and how they had to choose their friends' lives over that of their daughter. Taylor also relays details about what it was to be a "Nutter" when she had to pick walnuts to earn money for school clothes which "stained your hands black, and then you were marked" with an unavoidable social and economic stigma which lasted far beyond the length it took the "stain" to wear off; it "marked" you not just for those few weeks, but for life.

6. Explore several realizations Taylor makes in this chapter. Which one would you say is the most important and why?

The most important realization Taylor makes is that she feels guilty she has wasted so much time sulking about having the responsibility of Turtle, and it is this realization which may potentially change the course of her relationship with her “daughter.” Thus far, Taylor realizes, she has lived essentially at random, but now she is more inclined to make more conscious and informed decisions with respect to Turtle and, perhaps, in other areas of her life as well.

Taylor also reflects on her feelings for Estevan, and after learning about Ismene, she understands Esperanza’s reactions to Turtle and why she had tried to kill herself. She empathizes with Estevan and Esperanza’s plight, exclaiming that she, too, often feels like a foreigner in a world where people have to make brutal choices like choosing the lives of your friends over that of your daughter.

Chapter Ten: The Bean Trees

1. Explain the symbolic significance of the chapter’s title.

Turtle’s entire vocabulary centers on vegetables, beans in particular. It is she who notices first, that the green pods hanging from the branches of the wisteria tree have gone to seed. Taylor sees the blooming as a miracle that parallels the miracle of Turtle’s own journey from an abused and broken child to the happy and trusting child that she has become.

2. What is the significance of the following quotation: “Turtle woke up in one of those eye-rubbing moods that kids must know by instinct as a means of saving the human species from extinction”?

This is a very sentimental and motherly thing to say. Taylor has truly come to embrace her role as Turtle’s mother, not just circumstantially but emotionally as well.

3. How does Snowboots serve as a reflection of Lou Ann? Give other examples from the chapter of similar behavior. Contrast Taylor’s behavior and attitude to Lou Ann’s as seen in this chapter.

Taylor’s theory is that “Lou Ann suffers from the same disease as Snowboots: feeling guilty for things beyond your wildest imagination.” We have seen this trait in Lou Ann throughout the novel. In this chapter, another example would be when a waiter at a restaurant brings her the wrong dinner and she eats it rather than make trouble. Lou Ann feels guilty walking by the door at Fanny Heaven and tries to ignore it. In contrast, Taylor is inclined to “talk back” and advises Lou Ann to say, “You can’t do that number on me you shit-for-brains.” Taylor doesn’t just “sit there;” she gets “pissed off.” Lou Ann admires these traits in her friend but finds it hard to embrace them herself.

4. Why has the author waited until now to reveal Edna Poppy's blindness? What purpose does this knowledge serve in the novel?

This is an excellent illustration of the theme of appearance versus reality, in a very literal sense. The reader is led to believe, as Taylor is, that Edna Poppy is blind. Kingsolver drops small clues—"Edna buying all her clothes in one color...Virgie's grip on her elbow," but the author's intention is revealed to be situational irony. We are reminded that we cannot always trust our first, or even subsequent, impressions of people and situations but must constantly reevaluate.

5. Examine the significance of (a) the cross above Mattie's fireplace (b) Esperanza's name and (c) the contents of the woman's box.

The cross above Mattie's fireplace is made up of "hundreds of small, brightly glazed pieces of tile, each one shaped like something: a boy, a dog, a house, a palm tree, a bright blue fish." All of these images represent life, love, happiness, and fulfillment with Jesus' love and faith as the outline of all those life forces.

Esperanza's name means "to wait, and also to hope," which is all Esperanza has been doing since she left Guatemala and lost Ismene. She hopes her daughter is safe and in a loving home. She hopes Ismene is alive. She, herself, is waiting to feel safe in the United States just as she hopes to return to her homeland someday in the safety of a new, fairer, and safer, political regime.

The woman Taylor sees in the living room at Mattie's has packed all of her most sacred belongings—a black skirt, a vinyl-covered book, baby shoes—into a single box. Each represents something significant about her life: sustenance, the knowledge and education she craves, the memories of those she has left behind, and the children she may have lost. The magnitude of the items' importance is clear in the way she handles them as she looks at them and then stores them away.

6. Evaluate the advice Taylor gives to Esperanza and what it says about her understanding of the situation.

Taylor, though well-intentioned, exhibits a fundamental lack of understanding of Esperanza's situation. Esperanza's is not a simple case of sadness that has led this woman to yet another attempt at suicide. Because Taylor has never lost someone important to her, she does not understand this kind of grief. She compliments the beauty of Esperanza's name. She compares her to Turtle, a fairly insensitive act considering the root of Esperanza's depression and how fiercely she had reacted to Turtle in "How They Eat in Heaven." And she advises her simply to "think of reasons to stick it out."

Chapter Eleven: Dream Angels

1. What is the primary function of this chapter in terms of character? Point to specific textual examples in support of your answer.

Lou Ann's character, in particular, undergoes a significant change in this chapter. Getting a job at Red Hot Mama's salsa factory seems to offer her some of the confidence she has been lacking, even though, despite her rapid promotion, she still does not fully recognize or appreciate her ability.

Her confidence is also depicted in the overall lessening of her preoccupation with her appearance.

However, it is clear that Lou Ann's fear of disaster is too deep-rooted for a job to cure it entirely. The game she describes to Taylor illustrates her lingering lack of confidence in her future.

2. Analyze Lou Ann's reasons for wanting to go to Angel and her reasons for wanting to stay. What does each suggest about her developing character?

The main reason Lou Ann wants to go, ironically, is that Angel has finally done what she thought he would never do—he has asked for her. It is not that he sent her and Dwayne Ray a beautiful belt, hair clip, and cowboy boots, but that he actually wants her to come. What prevents her from going is the fact that she has a “family,” Taylor and Turtle, and responsibilities, her job at Red Hot Mama's.

The reasons she is tempted to go and the reasons she is tempted to stay both suggest a lingering lack of self-esteem, the need to be needed.

3. Why does Kingsolver include the final scene between Mattie and Taylor in a chapter otherwise devoted exclusively to Taylor and Lou Ann?

Because of Lou Ann's indecision about whether or not to join Angel in Montana, Taylor's future is also in a state of flux. This scene with Mattie illustrates that this is also the case for Estevan and Esperanza because, having left their “file cabinets of evidence” at home, they are unable to prove their lives were “in danger when they left.” Without this proof, they cannot be granted asylum and are, therefore, not safe. Taylor, already feeling that her future is uncertain, is brought back to the reality that her situation could be far worse because “the world could be so unjust.

Chapter Twelve: Into the Terrible Night

1. What effect does Kingsolver achieve by placing two apparently unrelated events into a single chapter?

The New Year scene and the scene at Taylor's home could easily have been split into two chapters. The author made a conscious choice to juxtapose these events to provide a dramatic contrast in both location and mood. The wonderful feeling Taylor experiences at the party stands in sharp contrast to the foreboding and apprehension she feels upon her arrival home.

2. Discuss the variety of literary devices Kingsolver uses in the opening pages of the chapter and the tone created through the use of that imagery.

Kingsolver uses a diverse collection of literary devices to create a tone of life-affirming vibrancy. She uses personification in the opening pages: the Tucson Valley is "resting in its cradle," the desert plain has a "palm stretched out," and the saguaros were "so skinny and personlike that you always had the feeling they were looking over your shoulder." The passage is full of concrete alliterative images: "white ribbons of lightning...wildly waving weed stalks...flaming orange spike of flower buds." She uses several similes: the plain was "like a palm," the storm "like a huge blue-gray shower curtain," and the octillos "like candles from hell." And there are several instances of onomatopoeia as well: "stretched," "nervous," "jumped," "shivers," "flitting," "wildly waving," "spiny," "split" and "clusters." The tone created by these images contrasts sharply to the ones that follow: "medical records...policeman and anatomically accurate dolls."

3. Explain the significance of the bird.

The terrified bird clearly parallels the chaos surrounding Taylor. The bird eventually flies away, but into darkness, paralleling Turtle's "escape" from reality as she retreats into herself again. The primary function of the bird, however, is to provide a contrast to Taylor's inability to cope. She has lost her confidence in her ability to protect and nurture Turtle, and she feels defeated by the world's ugliness. Her feelings paralyze her, and all she can think to do is remove the one problem she actually has a chance of fixing.

4. How do Lou Ann and Taylor trade places in behavior and attitude in this chapter?

Lou Ann, who normally lives in fear, is now that one who takes effective action. In contrast, Taylor, instead of going to Turtle to comfort her, is distracted by meaningless actions—chasing the bird. She has lost her confidence, almost to the point of paralysis.

5. What is the emotional climax of this chapter?

This is a highly emotional chapter in its life-affirming optimism and in its negative cynicism. Taylor panics, she questions herself, and she avoids reality, all of which are natural reactions to this kind of situation. But the emotional peak of this chapter is actually seen in Taylor's resignation: "I'm just not up to the job, Lou Ann." Despite her natural tendency as a fighter, Taylor's main reaction is, ultimately, one of "hopeless" defeat, and it leads her to the life-altering conclusion that she cannot handle being a mother.

Chapter Thirteen: Night-Blooming Cereus

1. Explain the distinction Taylor makes between "sadness" and "depression." How does this distinction help her better understand Esperanza?

Taylor compares sadness to a head cold, a temporary condition that will eventually pass. Depression is more like cancer—very serious requiring extensive treatment. This realization allows her to be more patient with Esperanza, less prone to trying to cheer her up with trivial pep talks.

2. Turtle has given every indication that she has moved on from the attack, so why is Taylor unable to do the same?

Taylor's account of her own "inability" to parent Turtle and the horrible condition of the world more closely resemble Esperanza's depression than a mere sadness.

3. Provide an illustration from this chapter of how abuse and neglect cross socioeconomic boundaries.

Cynthia explains to Taylor that sexual abuse happens not only on Indian reservations but everywhere, even in middle-class suburbs. Taylor is shocked to learn how many of these abused girls are abused by family members.

4. How is Cynthia trying to help Taylor—both overtly and subtly? Reflect on the significance of her cameo brooch.

Cynthia tells Taylor that she can adopt Turtle if she can obtain a legal document from Turtle's nearest relative naming Taylor as her legal guardian. She tries to give Taylor more time before the state will lay claim on Turtle by telling her that it will be "two or three weeks for the paperwork to get to a place where it's going to get noticed."

Cynthia's brooch is from the Salvation Army, an heirloom from some other family to whom she has no relation, just like the families she deals with every day. She wants to have a connection with her clients but must also maintain a safe emotional distance.

5. Analyze the irony of the scenes between Taylor and Lou Ann (a) when they first argue about Turtle being taken away and (b) when Taylor later decides to take action.

When Lou Ann and Taylor first argue about Turtle being taken away, Taylor seems completely resigned to, and comfortable with, the idea that Turtle would be with someone else. Taylor has completely lost the attitude of confidence she's displayed from the beginning of the novel. Lou Ann, however, has gained the confidence and can see the possibility of a solution beyond the present circumstances.

Later in the chapter when Taylor has a change of heart and decides to find Turtle's relatives, Lou Ann backtracks and posits all the negative possibilities. The two continue to complement one another, even as their respective attitudes and moods change.

6. Why does Mattie tell Taylor that she is "asking the wrong question"? How does she help Taylor see how normal her insecurities are?

Taylor's desire to keep Turtle eternally safe is unrealistic, but a typical concern all parents feel for their children. The question Mattie convinces Taylor to ask is whether or not she cares about Turtle and wants to build a life for her. Taylor's new resolve is affirmed when Cynthia admits she had no doubts about Taylor and Turtle's belonging together.

7. Explain the symbolic significance of the picture of the Aztec man and how it relates to one of the novel's themes.

In a calendar on Mattie's wall is a picture of an Aztec man carrying a woman. To Taylor, the image is absurd and ironic because, in her experience, it was the women who carried the men. This is yet another illustration of the theme of the relationships between men and women.

8. Why does Mattie, who devoted her life to helping others, have such reservations about Taylor's decision to help Estevan and Esperanza? What does this say about her character?

Mattie has selflessly committed her own life to her political activism and to helping people, but she does not ask the same of others. Though the risks of helping refugees like Estevan and Esperanza are the same for her, if not worse, as they will be for Taylor, she does not feel comfortable having Taylor risk jail time and a heavy fine. Mattie's fear of the risk Taylor would assume affirms the true concern and compassion she feels for others.

9. Explore the possible meanings of the night-blooming cereus with respect to: character, theme, symbolism, and foreshadowing.

The night-blooming cereus is clearly a symbol for things that are normally plain, unattractive, or downright ugly, and then eventually achieve a degree of beauty—even if that beauty is fleeting. At one point, Estevan and Esperanza's situation and Taylor's hope of finding Turtle's family all appear insurmountably hopeless. However, Taylor's is not unlike the promise of the flower's eventually blooming.

Ironically, it is Edna—the “blind” woman—who first discovers the flower's bloom because she can smell it. Those who rely solely on their sight would have missed it. Again, the theme of appearances versus reality is exemplified here.

The cereus could also represent Turtle's growth and beauty despite her abusive past which addresses the theme of the effects of having a nurturing, supportive family.

There may also be an element of foreshadowing the future of their impending quest to Oklahoma; Lou Ann thinks the bloom is an omen of good things to come.

10. “If the night-blooming cereus was an omen of...good weather,” what does the dead blackbird in the final paragraph represent?

Being dead, and a blackbird, the image is clearly a bad “omen” to balance the positive sign of the blooming cereus.

Chapter Fourteen: Guardian Saints

1. Explain the significance of Guatemala's national symbol.

The national symbol of the Indian people is the quetzal, a beautiful green bird with a long, long tail. When Taylor asks if they are like the macaws at the zoo, Estevan explains that quetzal absolutely cannot live in cages. The quetzal represents the color, spirit, and grace of the Indian people, who are, literally, being “caged” in their homeland and in the United States, where they should be able to wander free. The bird may also foreshadow an imminent death, since, like it, its people cannot survive in their “cages.”

2. What do Estevan and Esperanza have in common with the Cherokee Indians?

Taylor realizes that both Esperanza and Estevan are Mayan. The Mayan people, like the Cherokee, had technology unknown to their conquerors but were nearly decimated by the arrival of Europeans and the takeover of their ancestral lands.

3. What do Estevan, Esperanza, and Taylor have in common? What purpose do those similarities serve?

Both Taylor and Esperanza grew up without fathers. All three of them have taken new names—Taylor because she wants a new identity, and Esperanza and Estevan because they are fugitives. None of them has lived a privileged life or even had a vacation. Their similarities, as well as the risk Taylor is willing to take to help them, help them to forge strong bonds of trust and affection.

6. Discuss Taylor's attitude toward Esperanza in this chapter. What is the probably motivation for this attitude?

Estevan claims to the police officer who stops them that Turtle is their child. This bothers Taylor as does the fact that Turtle has begun calling Esperanza Ma. Taylor later thinks she hears Esperanza call Turtle Ismene and feels sickened by Esperanza's apparent attempts to take Taylor's place. Taylor is probably a little jealous and insecure—still knowing that she is not a “real” mother, and Esperanza is. Taylor is also probably suspicious that Esperanza does indeed want to take Turtle from her.

7. What new information does Taylor learn about the Cherokee Nation that prompts her to think she owes her “great grandpa...an apology”?

Taylor discovers that the Cherokee Nation is not the stereotypical barren desert that she had thought it was. It is lush and green, much of it in the Ozark mountains.

8. In the closing of the chapter, Taylor decides she “can't give up.” How does this reflect the theme of destiny versus personal choice? Where else have we seen Taylor illustrate this theme earlier in the novel?

Taylor is unsure why she wants to go to the Lake o' the Cherokees, but she decides to go there anyway. When she first left Kentucky, the promises she made to herself both relied on “destiny.” She would change her name to the name of the town wherever her car first ran out of gas, and she would settle wherever her car simply stopped running. Taylor also believes that fate had a hand in Turtle coming into her life, and her need for a tire brought her to Mattie's shop.

Chapter Fifteen: Lake o' the Cherokees

1. Analyze the changes—both physical and emotional—that Estevan and Esperanza seem to be undergoing in this chapter. What is suggested by the language Kingsolver uses to describe these changes?

The simple fact that Esperanza and Estevan look like the other Native Americans gives them a new sense of peace, maybe even pride. Taylor mentions that they seem to grow taller—probably they are actually standing erect rather than crouching in fear. Esperanza is also changing emotionally, thawing, becoming happy.

Kingslover uses nature imagery, especially describing a change of seasons and the emergence of life from the dormant earth. Perhaps Kingsolver is suggesting that pain and loss, and then healing are natural phases of life.

Estevan and Esperanza are “transformed in an unexplainable way” once they are surrounded by the people of the Cherokee Nation because “they looked just like everybody else, including the cops.” Taylor observes that “they actually grew taller.” She witnesses an even more substantial change in Esperanza where “something was thawing” like “how spring comes to Alaska.” Kingsolver uses onomatopoeic diction to describe the metaphorical thaw: the ice was “rumbling...shivering...bashing...and breaking up” and this is “how it was with Esperanza. Behind her eyes, or deeper, in the arteries around her heart, something was starting to move...she seemed honestly happy.”

2. Taylor says, “I had changed my own name like a dirty shirt, but I couldn’t help them change theirs.” Explain why Taylor feels this way.

Taylor changed her name because she wanted a new life and a new identity. She left Kentucky to go to her life as much as to flee her old one. Estevan and Esperanza, however, are not embracing a new life, and they did not seek new identities of their own accord. Therefore, Taylor finds it hard to call them “Steve and Hope” and deprive them of the only thing they brought intact from Guatemala.

3. What purposes do Taylor’s growing envy of Esperanza and Turtle’s closeness serve?

Esperanza is clearly growing very attached to Turtle, and Turtle is likewise growing close to Esperanza. Given both characters’ backstories, it is possible that the plotline might develop in which Esperanza—who lost her daughter—and Turtle—who lost her mother—will end up together. Thus, Taylor’s envy builds conflict and suspense. Also, the fact that Taylor is growing jealous of Esperanza and Turtle’s closeness indicates that she has grown as a character and possibly decided to try to keep Turtle in her life.

4. What “two American wishes” did Taylor likely make and which one “had the remotest possibility of coming true”?

Taylor's first wish, and the one she knew would not come true, is probably that Estevan could stay and, perhaps, that they could be together. It's likely that her second wish was that she could find a way to keep Turtle.

5. Examine Taylor's current attitude toward motherhood. How has her confidence evolved since earlier in the novel?

Taylor makes several astute observations about motherhood in this chapter that she never would have made earlier in her relationship with Turtle. She says, “It's funny how people don't give that much thought to what kids want, as long as they're being quiet” and that “it's interesting how it's hard to be depressed around a three-year old.” Mattie had asked her in Chapter Thirteen if she wanted to share her life with Turtle, that the real question to be asked was: “Do you want to try?” It is clear that Taylor has decided that she does.

6. Explain the significance of Turtle's wanting to leave her dolly behind.

Turtle had seen her own dead mother buried in the dirt and she wants to do the same with Shirley Poppy, perhaps as a symbolic way of letting go of her past and moving on with Taylor.

7. How does Taylor's observation, “It was one of the many times in Turtle's and my life together that I was to have no notion of what to do,” challenge the ambiguity of this chapter's closing?

The verb tense and Taylor's admitting that this was simply one of “many times,” suggests that the narrator-Taylor is reflecting on a much longer life together than character-Turtle has had with Turtle through the course of the novel.

Chapter Sixteen: Soundness of Mind and Freedom of Will

1. How does Kingsolver build the dramatic tension in this chapter that leads Taylor to think “that was the only moment in which I really came close to losing Turtle”?

Tension is built in this chapter through Esperanza and the fact that both Esperanza and Taylor love Turtle to the extent that the reader may not actually know what the outcome of this incident will be. Esperanza's attachment to Turtle is tangibly real. The reason her claim to love Turtle is so authentic is that it is true Taylor acknowledges that, if Esperanza had asked to keep Turtle, Taylor would not have been able to deny her. The closest she has come to losing Turtle is, then, her near-willingness to surrender the child out of love.

2. Discuss the effect the scene in Mr. Armistead's office has on both Esperanza and Estevan. What do they gain as a result?

Taylor notes the relief Estevan demonstrates as they leave the office and the absolute renewal of spirit that Esperanza seems to have undergone. "Giving" Turtle away to someone who will love her and provide a nurturing home provides both Estevan and Esperanza with a sense of emotional and psychological closure for having lost their own daughter.

3. Explain the irony of the fact that Estevan and Esperanza are able to help Taylor legally adopt Turtle. What does this irony complete?

Because Estevan and Esperanza are Guatemalan and are in the United States without proper documentation, they have had to live in hiding from the government. However, because of their physical appearance, the American authorities accept them as Cherokees—not demanding any "documentation"—and accepts their testimony in support of Turtle's adoption. This bit of resolution to the plotline of Taylor and Turtle's relationship closes the theme that things are not always the way they appear. Estevan and Esperanza, if dealt with according to the reality of their situation, would have ended up being deported. Because they are dealt with based on their appearance alone, however, they are allowed to intervene in United States legal affairs.

Chapter Seventeen: Rhizobia

1. Analyze Taylor and Estevan's differing opinions of the "catharsis" Esperanza underwent in the previous chapter.

To Taylor, it seems wrong that Esperanza has found happiness by believing in something that isn't true. To her, Esperanza's peace is merely a delusion. Estevan, however, is more attuned to the symbolic nature of the ceremony and is grateful for the fact that his wife has been able to find any peace in the world in which they live.

2. Examine Mama's advice about love and parenting. What details suggest that Taylor has embraced her mother's wisdom?

When Taylor tells her mother about losing Estevan, her mother does not judge or condescend. She does not minimize or moralize. She just quietly accepts her daughter's pain, as she has done throughout the novel. This attitude, once again, motivates Taylor's essential confidence and ability to mother Turtle. Taylor is able to tell Turtle she has only one Ma, and she is honest with the child from the very beginning, giving her the adoption papers so Turtle will always know who she is.

3. What is significant about Esperanza's giving Turtle the St. Christopher medal?

St. Christopher is the patron saint of travelers and refugees. In one sense, throughout the novel, all of them have been refugees of one sort or another, but each of them is now achieving some kind of stability, so Esperanza is able to give the medal up. Also, just as Turtle was a sort of surrogate for Ismene in the parting ceremony that helped Esperanza achieve her catharsis, her giving the medal to Turtle is symbolic of her giving St. Christopher's protection to her own mother.

4. What is Taylor's motivation for calling 1-800 THE LORD. Why does she close the conversation with, "We're even"? What scene from earlier in the novel does this one parallel?

Throughout the novel, the made-up number has been something of a wild card for Taylor. If things ever reached their absolute worst, she could always call on "the Lord." Of course, she had no idea what would be the result of her call. Now, however, she no longer needs this blind security, so she calls the number on an impulse to see what she would have found had she ever been desperate enough.

Taylor's blind trust in this number is reminiscent of the diamond necklace in the safe-deposit box Taylor speaks of in Chapter 15. Had the woman ever been truly desperate enough to have to sell the necklace, she would have found it to be, not diamonds, but worthless rhinestones.

5. Discuss the symbolic significance of the chapter's title. How does it bring a major theme in the novel to fruition?

Rhizobia are microscopic insects that live in the roots of the wisteria vines. They are able to trap nitrogen in the soil and transfer it to the plant, thus helping it thrive in poor soil. While the insects are separate from the plant, they are immensely helpful to the plant's survival. Taylor likens these insects to the people in their own lives—how Virgie and Edna have one another and how "everybody has Mattie." These insects, without which the tree for which the novel is named would not survive, are the culminating symbol of the overall theme of one's need for community and how community works.

The Bean Trees

Chapter One: The One to Get Away

1. Explain the significance of the title of the chapter.

2. What is the narrative perspective in this chapter? Explain the effects of this narrative choice. How reliable is this narration likely to be?

3. How does Missy feel about her mother? Characterize their relationship and what that relationship says about Mama's attitude towards motherhood.

4. What is significant about the "two promises" Missy makes to herself when leaving Kentucky?

5. Analyze Taylor's character and her view of the world. How do the choices she makes in this chapter illuminate what kind of person she is?

6. Discuss the purpose of the following motifs: colors, lightness/darkness, and "head rights."

7. In what ways can the "Broken Arrow Motor Lodge" sign be considered a symbol?

8. Give examples from this chapter of the theme of (a) people's expectations can hinder our personal growth and (b) the role of women in society.

9. Explain how Kingsolver's use of the Kentucky dialect serves to help the reader better understand Taylor's character in a way that the physical descriptions and plot do not. Is this merely a function of the first-person narration or is it the language itself which contributes to our overall opinion of Taylor?

Chapter Two: New Year's Pig

1. How does the narrative perspective shift in this chapter? How does this shift affect the novel? Speculate why Kingsolver did not choose other narrative options.

2. What theme is introduced with: "It left him with an artificial leg below the knee and something else that was harder to pin down"? Compare and contrast how differently Lou Ann and Angel viewed the accident.

3. Explain the important commentary Kingsolver makes on racial prejudice in this chapter.

4. Discuss the metaphorical nature of the "magic circle" around Lou Ann and how it is tied to the theme of the role of women in society. What other examples of this theme do we see in the chapter?

5. The last paragraph of the chapter highlights one of Lou Ann's most pivotal personality traits, and one that is in direct contrast to Taylor. Explain.

Chapter Three: Jesus is Lord Used Tires

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the chapter and explain the irony of Taylor's ending up at this particular shop.

2. Give examples of Taylor's sense of humor and use of sarcasm. Examine what we learn about her character as a result.

3. Examine Taylor's emerging motherly instincts and how her own mother's parenting is affecting her attitude toward her situation.

4. Consider Mattie's actions and words in this chapter. What portrait is the reader given of her nature?

5. Explain the reference to the title of the novel in this chapter and why it is significant both to the novel as a whole and to Taylor personally. Analyze the literary devices used in this reference and how the beans are reminiscent of the ants from earlier in the chapter.

6. Compare and contrast Tucson and Arizona as seen in this chapter. What elements of Taylor's new life in Arizona are most appealing to her?

7. How is the closing of chapter three ironic?

Chapter Four: Tug Fork Water

1. Why does Angel agree to move back in with Lou Ann while her mother and grandmother are there? What does this say about his character?

2. When asked whether she and her father had ever thought of moving out of Granny Logan's, Ivy tells Lou Ann, "But there was so much work in them days, no time for fun, and besides I'd of been scared to death out someplace all by myself." What implicit judgment is Ivy making? What is ironic about her personal fears?

3. What important details do we learn about Lou Ann's father and their relationship in this chapter? Is it surprising?

4. Discuss the theme of racism and the need to revere other cultures as seen in this chapter.

5. Consider several examples of Lou Ann's homesickness in this chapter. Why do you think she stays despite those feelings?

6. What role does Bobby Bingo play in this chapter?

7. "Like a bug or a mouse scratching in the cupboards at night—you could get up and chase after it, or just go back to sleep and let it be." What is Lou Ann referring to here and why is it significant?

8. Explain the symbolic significance of the title of the chapter.

Chapter Five: Harmonious Space

1. Explain the significance of the extended metaphor in the opening of Chapter Five.

2. Give several examples of Taylor's humor or sarcasm from this chapter and explain what they reveal about her character. What might another reason be for the author to have Taylor use sarcasm?

3. What role does Snowboots play in the chapter with respect to the theme of parenting and how does the cat parallel Lou Ann's character?

4. Analyze key points in the chapter that illustrate Taylor's growing concern and affection for Turtle.

5. Considering the scene between Taylor and Lou Ann, reflect on ways these future roommates will complement one another.

6. How does the Kentucky dialect serve to unify Lou Ann and Taylor in this chapter?

Chapter Six: Valentine's Day

1. Explain the irony of Taylor's statement that "Turtle's main goal in life...seemed to be to pass unnoticed."

2. Discuss the crucial details we learn about Mattie in this chapter. How do those facts coincide with what we already know about her personality?

3. How does Taylor feel about Mattie? Characterize their relationship and what each woman appears to gain from it?

4. Analyze the significance of the scene in which Mattie throws tires at Taylor and explain what Taylor learns from this experience.

5. Give examples of the theme of motherhood in this chapter. Cite evidence that Taylor may be floundering in her role as Turtle's mother.

6. Compare and contrast Taylor and Lou Ann's attitudes toward their living situation. What does each woman's point of view say about her character and her upbringing?

7. Cite examples of Lou Ann's insecurity. How is Mama's "hog saying" tied to Lou Ann's lack of confidence?

Chapter Seven: How They Eat in Heaven

1. Discuss what new information we learn about Estevan and Esperanza in this chapter and how that information relates to Mattie's television appearance. How has the tone of the novel shifted as a result?

2. Taylor says that Esperanza "reminded me of Turtle." What does she mean by this statement? Contemplate Esperanza's actions and reactions in this chapter. What are the likely possibilities for her attitude and emotions here?

3. Explore the function of Turtle's dreams.

4. What is the primary function of the quail in this chapter?

5. What is the significance of Turtle's first sound and first word?

6. How has Taylor and Lou Ann's relationship evolved to this point? What aspects of Lou Ann's character does Taylor readily understand?

7. Give examples of the following themes in this chapter: one's duty to one's fellow humans and the importance of revering other cultures. How are these two intertwined in this particular chapter?

8. How is this chapter structured? Why has the author chosen to include so many separate sections in this particular chapter? How do they form a cohesive whole?

9. Explain the significance of Estevan's "wild Indian story." What textual clues suggest Estevan's attitude toward Mrs. Parsons throughout his story?

Chapter Eight: The Miracle of Dog Poo Park

1. Explain Taylor's reaction to Mama's news that she is getting married.

2. What does Taylor mean when she claims that it was a "conspiracy" that "everybody behaved as if Turtle was [her] own flesh and blood daughter"?

3. Explain the significance of the allusion Taylor uses to describe the "Miracle at Dog Poo Park" and how it is significant to the novel as a whole.

4. Explain the importance of the particular words Turtle is beginning to use.

5. Lou Ann's reaction to Taylor's question about Angel's coming back suggests what about Lou Ann?

6. Describe Estevan's attitude toward Mrs. Parsons's comment that "the woman and the kid who got shot must have been drug dealers"? What does Taylor's reaction suggest?

7. Why does the task of folding the men's trousers appear to be so meaningful to Taylor?

8. Evaluate Turtle's condition of "failure to thrive" as an example of the theme of physical versus emotional scars with specific examples from the chapter. Explain Taylor's reaction to Turtle's condition and why it is significant.

9. Compare and contrast the reactions of Lou Ann, Taylor, and Turtle in the scene in which they discover Turtle's real name and how those reactions reveal something important about them.

Chapter Nine: Ismene

1. Explain the political commentary Kingsolver makes in this chapter. What literary vehicle is most effective in conveying her agenda?

2. What upsets Taylor most during her conversation with Estevan and why? How might her reaction relate to the theme of person versus society?

3. What is the function of (a) Scotty's character and (b) the discussion of Nutters? How do these two stories relate to one another?

4. To what extent are the feelings Taylor has for Estevan reciprocated and what future implications might this relationship have?

5. Analyze the key factual plot points revealed in this chapter.

6. Explore several realizations Taylor makes in this chapter. Which one would you say is the most important and why?

Chapter Ten: The Bean Trees

1. Explain the symbolic significance of the chapter's title.

2. What is the significance of the following quotation: "Turtle woke up in one of those eye-rubbing moods that kids must know by instinct as a means of saving the human species from extinction"?

3. How does Snowboots serve as a reflection of Lou Ann? Give other examples from the chapter of similar behavior. Contrast Taylor's behavior and attitude to Lou Ann's as seen in this chapter.

4. Why has the author waited until now to reveal Edna Poppy's blindness? What purpose does this knowledge serve in the novel?

5. Examine the significance of (a) the cross above Mattie's fireplace (b) Esperanza's name and (c) the contents of the woman's box.

6. Evaluate the advice Taylor gives to Esperanza and what it says about her understanding of the situation.

Chapter Eleven: Dream Angels

1. What is the primary function of this chapter in terms of character? Point to specific textual examples in support of your answer.

2. Analyze Lou Ann's reasons for wanting to go to Angel and her reasons for wanting to stay. What does each suggest about her developing character?

3. Why does Kingsolver include the final scene between Mattie and Taylor in a chapter otherwise devoted exclusively to Taylor and Lou Ann?

Chapter Twelve: Into the Terrible Night

1. What effect does Kingsolver achieve by placing two apparently unrelated events into a single chapter?

2. Discuss the variety of literary devices Kingsolver uses in the opening pages of the chapter and the tone created through the use of that imagery.

3. Explain the significance of the bird.

4. How do Lou Ann and Taylor trade places in behavior and attitude in this chapter?

5. What is the emotional climax of this chapter?

Chapter Thirteen: Night-Blooming Cereus

1. Explain the distinction Taylor makes between “sadness” and “depression.” How does this distinction help her better understand Esperanza?

2. Turtle has given every indication that she has moved on from the attack, so why is Taylor unable to do the same?

3. Provide an illustration from this chapter of how abuse and neglect cross socioeconomic boundaries.

4. How is Cynthia trying to help Taylor—both overtly and subtly? Reflect on the significance of her cameo brooch.

5. Analyze the irony of the scenes between Taylor and Lou Ann (a) when they first argue about Turtle being taken away and (b) when Taylor later decides to take action.

6. Why does Mattie tell Taylor that she is “asking the wrong question”? How does she help Taylor see how normal her insecurities are?

7. Explain the symbolic significance of the picture of the Aztec man and how it relates to one of the novel's themes.

8. Why does Mattie, who devoted her life to helping others, have such reservations about Taylor's decision to help Estevan and Esperanza? What does this say about her character?

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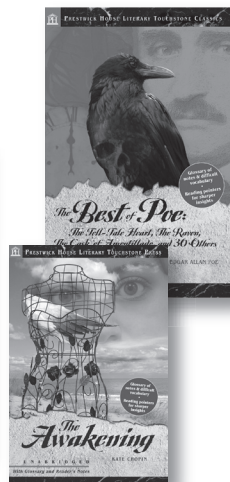
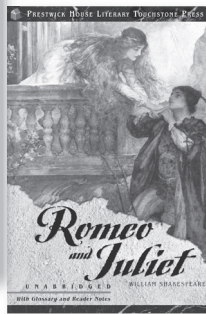
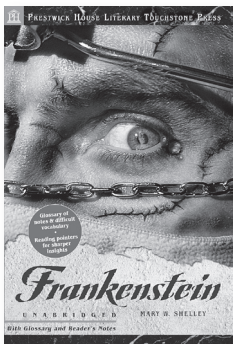
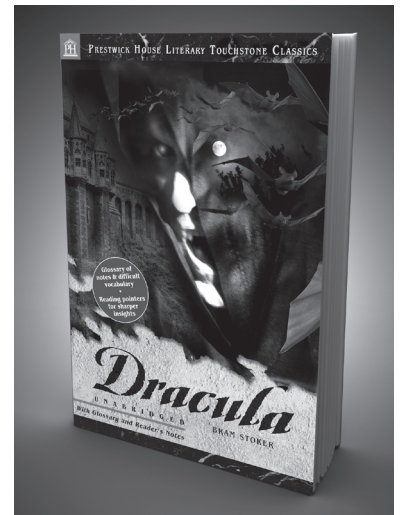
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