

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Poisonwood Bible

by Barbara Kingsolver

written by Jill Clare

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The Poisonwood Bible

Objectives

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

1. analyze the author's use of multiple narrators and explain what this technique contributes to the meaning of the work.
2. analyze the text for evidence of thematic development and explain what the themes contribute to the overall meaning of the text.
3. examine motifs presented in the text and explain how they contribute to the development of characters and themes.
4. analyze various symbols in the text and explain what they contribute to the meaning of the work.
5. examine how characters develop throughout the work and explain how character development helps build thematic meaning.
6. explain how characters function as foils in the text.
7. explain how each character's use of language contributes to his or her characterization.
8. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

Lecture Notes

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The following are brief summaries and explanations of some of the historical events and people in *The Poisonwood Bible*.

THE ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE

This conference was held on February 20, 1960 in Brussels. Tribal chiefs, heads of unions, and party leaders from the Congo attended the conference, along with representatives from Belgium. Patrice Lumumba was released from jail specifically to attend this event, and he proved important in negotiating a date of independence that would occur soon, rather than decades in the future. The Roundtable Conference was the meeting in which the date for the complete independence of the Congo was decided and set. At the close of the meeting, Lumumba gave a statement, in which he said: "The doors of the Congo are wide open to all men of good will wishing to help us. On the other hand, we shall not tolerate any person or power with imperialistic aims. We prefer liberty with poverty to wealth with tyranny." In *The Poisonwood Bible*, the Underdowns deliver the news of this meeting to the Prices during book two.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Congo celebrated its independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960 in Leopoldville. The festivities included speeches from the new president of the Congo, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, and from the king of Belgium, Baudouin I. Lumumba was not scheduled to give a speech that day, but he did so nonetheless following his inauguration as Prime Minister. Lumumba's speech became a diatribe against Belgium's imperialist, immoral, greedy rule and was very well received by the Congolese people attending the ceremony. However, most Western leaders criticized the tone of Lumumba's speech. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Leah and Nathan travel to Leopoldville on Independence Day to witness history in the making. In her account of the festivities, Leah remembers being struck by how popular Lumumba is among the Congolese; she recalls thinking that she would go deaf from the volume of the cheering around her.

KATANGA'S SECESSION

The province of Katanga declared its independence from the Congo on July 11, 1960. Katanga, led by **Moise Tshombe**, was one of the most developed areas in the Congo and contained rich mineral resources like diamonds, cobalt, copper, and zinc. This secession represented a great economic blow to the Congo, as Katanga contained a great deal of its resources. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Leah hears about Katanga's secession from Anatole in book three. Anatole comes to deliver this news to Nathan, in order to impress upon him how dangerous the situation has become for the Price family.

PATRICE LUMUMBA

Patrice Lumumba was the first Prime Minister of the Congo, elected in May 1960 and inaugurated on June 30, 1960. Lumumba was immensely popular with his countrymen, but considered dangerous by Western leaders. Lumumba's greatest dream and goal was a fully independent Congo, free from the influence of the West. However, Lumumba did not live to see this goal achieved.

In the ten weeks that he remained in power, the Congo was devastated with political unrest. Lumumba sought foreign aid from the United Nations and the Soviet Union to subdue the violence in the Congo. The Prime Minister was concerned that the UN's forces were not enough to dispel the violence in his country. As a result, he asked the Soviet Union for assistance, and that country responded with legions of troops and advisors. It was this alliance with the communist Soviet Union that most endangered Lumumba, as any allegiance with a communist country during the Cold War was sure to attract the attention of the United States.

On September 14, 1960, a government coup, led by Joseph Mobutu, led to Lumumba's arrest. He was held under house arrest as Mobutu, backed by Western countries, exercised control over the army. Even in captivity and without power, however, Lumumba was a symbol of hope to his anti-colonialist countrymen. Lumumba managed to escape his house arrest on November 27 and attempted to flee to Stanleyville where he could set up a rival government to Mobutu's. However, his escape was unsuccessful, and he was soon back in the hands of Mobutu's army.

On January 17, 1961, Lumumba was killed in captivity. He was beaten savagely during his time as a prisoner. He was executed by a firing squad that may have been commanded by either Belgian officers or Katanga authorities. Although no Americans or American plans were directly involved in Lumumba's death, the CIA had been involved in Mobutu's rise to power. The CIA also had concocted at least one murder plot to dispose of Lumumba, but these plots were never put into action.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Lumumba is more than just a historical figure. Anatole respects him highly and agrees with his political goals and ideals. Nathan finds Lumumba to be a powerless, irrelevant heathen, despite Lumumba's great influence. The rest of the Price family initially feels intimidated by the idea of a black man in a position of power. However, by the end of the book, it is clear that Orleana, Leah, and Adah have developed the utmost respect for Lumumba and for his idea of an independent Congo. Lumumba is as important a figure in history as he is in the novel.

JOSEPH MOBUTU

Joseph Mobutu was appointed as the Chief of Staff of the Congolese Army when the Congo achieved independence. He was instrumental in starting the coup that deposed Lumumba in September of 1960. Mobutu allowed the president, Kasa-Vubu, to remain in power after the coup. It was, after all, Lumumba who was the primary target of the CIA and the West.

On November 25, 1965, Mobutu started another coup, this time deposing Kasa-Vubu and his administration. Mobutu declared himself the leader of the Congo, and he was, in effect, the absolute dictator of the Congo from that time until his overthrow in 1996.

Mobutu was responsible for the authenticity campaign that renamed the country the Republic of Zaire, and that renamed many of its cities and landmarks. Under this campaign, Africans were ordered to change their names if they reflected any colonial influence. As a result, Joseph Mobutu changed his name to *Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga*, which means “The all-conquering warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake.” Despite his campaign for authenticity and African pride, Mobutu stole from the treasury of his company and amassed great personal wealth. By his death, Mobutu’s personal fortune was nearly four billion dollars.

THE CHURCH COMMITTEE

The United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, better known as The Church Committee, was formed in 1975. The Church Committee was formed at least partly in response to the Watergate Scandal, as it had become clear that illegal activities had been perpetrated by the CIA, FBI, and the executive branch. The Church Committee published fourteen reports, documenting the attempts of the FBI and CIA to assassinate foreign leaders. In the report entitled, “Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders,” the committee made a connection between the attempts to assassinate Lumumba and President Eisenhower himself. The report reads: “The chain of events revealed by the documents and testimony is strong enough to permit a reasonable inference that the plot to assassinate Lumumba was authorized by President Eisenhower.”

Allusions: Biblical Names

The Poisonwood Bible is full of Biblical allusions, from the title of the book itself to the titles of its chapters, the names of its characters, and Nathan's frequent sermons.

NATHAN

The Biblical Nathan was an important prophet during the reign of King David, chronicled in the Old Testament book called 2nd Samuel. One of the acts for which he is most well known was rebuking King David. David had sinned by committing adultery with the beautiful Bathsheba, wife of a soldier in David's army. When Bathsheba revealed that she was pregnant from the affair, David sent her husband, a Hittite named Uriah, to the front lines of the battle and gave instructions for the soldiers around him to withdraw. In accordance with David's plan, Bathsheba's husband was killed. After Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband, David took her as his wife.

Nathan the prophet rebuked David for this sin. Nathan began his rebuke by telling David a parable of two shepherds. In Nathan's parable, there was a rich shepherd who had many sheep. There was also a poor shepherd nearby who owned only one lamb, but the poor shepherd loved this lamb and cared for it like a child. When the rich shepherd received a visitor, instead of slaying one of his own herd to prepare for the visitor, he stole the only lamb that the poor shepherd owned and prepared it for the visitor. When David heard this parable, he grew angry and insisted that the rich shepherd should be punished for his sin. In response, Nathan said,

Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon (2 Samuel 12:7 – 9).

David's punishment from God for this sin was the death of Bathsheba's first child. Nathan delivered this news to David, serving as God's direct emissary to Nathan. The prophet spoke for God, loudly revealing David's sins and revealing to him the punishment that God had chosen for him.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Nathan Price is an unforgiving preacher, quick to point out everything he perceives as sins. On the very night that Nathan and his family arrive in Kilanga, Nathan launches into an impromptu sermon condemning the natives for their sins and nakedness. Nathan Price is quick to pass judgment. Like his biblical counterpart, Nathan does not hesitate to condemn. However, the biblical Nathan is acting under direct orders from God, while Nathan Price operates under his own interpretation of God's authority. How well Nathan Price interprets God's will, as compared to his biblical namesake, is a question that *The Poisonwood Bible* explores through the narration of his daughters.

RACHEL AND LEAH

In the Book of Genesis, both Rachel and Leah were wives of Jacob. The two sisters were quite different. According to the Bible, “Leah was tender eyed, but Rachel was beautiful and well favored” (Genesis 29:17). In the Biblical story, Jacob caught sight of Rachel and immediately fell in love with her. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, and so he agreed to work for her father, Laban, for seven years in exchange for Rachel’s hand in marriage. At the end of Jacob’s years of service, however, Laban deceived him. He switched Rachel for Leah on the wedding night. The following morning, Jacob awoke to find he had married Leah, rather than Rachel, and was angry. The marriage could not be undone, so he went back to Laban and agreed to work another seven years in exchange for Rachel (Polygamy was customary at the time).

Of his two wives, Jacob’s favorite was Rachel; he hated Leah. However, God takes mercy on Leah and allows her to have children. According to Genesis, “... when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb: but Rachel was barren” (Genesis 29:31). Leah had six sons and a daughter with Jacob, while Rachel remained barren. Rachel was jealous of Leah for many years as a result. Only after Leah gave birth to her seventh child did Rachel finally conceive. According to Genesis, “And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son, and said, God hath taken away my reproach” (Genesis 30:22 – 23).

Rachel and Leah Price’s namesakes are well-known matriarchs in the Bible. There are several parallels between the characters in *The Poisonwood Bible* and their biblical namesakes. Like her counterpart, Leah Price is blessed with fertility. Leah has four sons by the end of *The Poisonwood Bible*: Pascal, Patrice, Martin-Lothaire, and Nataniel. Rachel Price, also like her biblical counterpart, is barren. She is unable ever to have children thanks to an infection she got from Eeben Axelroot. Rachel Price’s womb is never opened; that is to say, her reproach is never taken away.

Also significant is the fact that the biblical Rachel is known for her beauty. Rachel Price is the most superficial of the Price sisters, concerned with her physical appearance far more than any of her sisters. The biblical Leah is not as beautiful as Rachel, but she is more highly favored by God, revealing that physical beauty is not as important as internal character.

RUTH

Ruth is one of the most celebrated female Biblical figures. Her story is found in the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament. Ruth is a figure of loyalty and friendship, as she refuses to abandon her mother-in-law, Naomi, even though Ruth’s husband has died and she thus has no obligation to remain with Naomi. Ruth is known for saying to Naomi: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1: 16 – 17).

Ruth May Price's connection with her Biblical namesake is best exemplified through her loyalty and devotion to her mother. Ruth May, like Ruth, is extremely devoted to an older woman in her life. Ruth May even crawls into bed with Orleanna when Nathan leaves to visit Leopoldville, telling Orleanna that she hopes Nathan will never return.

Upon Ruth May's death, Orleanna is overcome with grief. She makes Ruth May's connection with the biblical Ruth explicit when she laments in Book Five, "My baby, my blood, my honest truth: entreat me not to leave thee, for whither thou goest I will go. Where I lodge, we lodge together. Where I die, you'll be buried at last."

ADAH

Adah Price's biblical namesake is more ambiguous than those of her sisters. There are two Adahs in the Bible, both of whom are relatively obscure figures. The first woman named Adah mentioned in the Bible is the wife of Lamech. She gave birth to two sons. According to Genesis, "Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Genesis 4:20–21). The second woman named Adah mentioned in the Bible was a Canaanite who married Esau (Genesis 36:2 – 4), and nothing more is said about her.

All of the Price daughters are named after relatively well-known biblical figures, with the exception of Adah. Adah Price is isolated and apart from her sisters, partly due to her hemiplegic condition and partly by choice. She calls herself a cripple and a freak, and often emphasizes her separateness from the rest of her family during her sections of narration. Her insignificant namesake may reflect how insignificant she feels in her family, especially compared to her healthy twin.

METHUSELAH

Methuselah is a Biblical figure whose name has become synonymous with old age. He is not a major character in the Old Testament, as he is mentioned in only one chapter: "And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died" (Genesis 5:25 – 27). Although Methuselah receives only this brief mention, his name has become culturally synonymous with longevity.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Methuselah the parrot certainly does not live an exceptionally long life, even though parrots are known to have long life spans. An African Grey Parrot like Methuselah has an average life span of 50 to 60 years. Methuselah, however, does not live out his expected life span, much less an exceptionally long one like the biblical Methuselah. Rather, his life is cut suddenly short when he is eaten by a predator in the jungle. Methuselah's name is thus not a predictor of his life span, but an ironic emphasis on the sudden shortening of his life.

Allusions: Biblical Stories

Because of Nathan's profession and his devotion to the Bible, *The Poisonwood Bible* is full of allusions to Bible stories and biblical characters. What follows are brief explanations of some of the more pronounced and recurring allusions in the novel.

DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

At several points in the novel, Nathan makes reference to Daniel, a biblical figure best known for surviving after being thrown into the lion's den. His story is chronicled in the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. According to Daniel,

My God hath sent his angel and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God (Daniel 6:22 – 23).

Adah's brief encounter with the Predator in book two is reminiscent of Daniel's trial with the lions. She makes this allusion herself as she thinks of how Leah allows her to walk alone, thinking, "Leah, who had left me to the lion's den in question."

TOWER OF BABEL

The story of the Tower of Babel is a short but well-known story from Genesis. Following the great flood, all of mankind spoke one language. They gathered together to build a city and a tower to reach heaven, but God was displeased with this. According to Genesis,

The Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:6 – 9)

The characters in *The Poisonwood Bible* mention the Tower of Babel several times. Adah calls the First Baptist Church of Kilanga "a regular Tower of Babel." She uses the plethora of languages spoken to her advantage, as she is able to mouth the words to hymns of her own invention without anyone noticing.

Nathan uses the allusion during his discussion with Frank Underdown about the planned date for the Congo's independence. Nathan says, "Frank, this is not a *nation*, it is the *Tower of Babel* and it *cannot* hold an election. If these people are to be united at all, they will come together as God's lambs in their simple love for Christ. Nothing else will move them forward. Not politics, not a desire for freedom—they don't have the temperament or the intellect for such things." Nathan uses this allusion to express his disdain for the intelligence of the inhabitants of the Congo.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Lot is Abraham's nephew and an inhabitant of Sodom in the Book of Genesis. In the narrative, God has revealed to Abraham that he intends to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. Abraham asks God to spare the cities if he can find ten righteous people within them. God's angels then go down to Sodom, where they meet Lot and his family. As the angels are lodging with Lot, the male inhabitants of Sodom crowd around Lot's house and demand that he hand over his guests so that they may have sex with them. Lot offers his two virgin daughters to the throng of men instead, but they refuse his offer, demanding the angels. In response, the angels smite the crowd with blindness and then hasten to usher Lot and his family out of the city before God destroys it. The angel warns Lot's family: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed" (Genesis 19:17). Lot and his family escape to the mountains, but Lot's wife looks back to see Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed. Because she looks back, she becomes a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).

The impromptu sermon that Nathan preaches on the night of his arrival in the Congo comes from this story in Genesis. Nathan uses the inflammatory language of this story to condemn the natives' nakedness and "darkness of the soul."

Later, Orleanna refers to herself as Lot's wife. In the beginning of the second book, Orleanna is mourning her lack of foresight. She says, "My soul was gathered with sinners and bloody men, and all I was thinking of was how to get Mama Tataba to come back, or what we should have brought from Georgia. I was blinded by the constant looking back: Lot's wife." Orleanna is filled with regret over Ruth May's death and the part she played in allowing her family to stay in the Congo. She conveys this regret with an allusion to a doomed Biblical figure, known for her mistake in looking backward.

Titles of Books

In addition to Biblical names and stories, Barbara Kingsolver uses the Bible as a structural device for her novel. *The Poisonwood Bible* is divided into seven books, and the names of each book except the last come from the Bible (although some of the titles come from the Apocrypha, which is not universally accepted as part of the Judeo-Christian Bible).

GENESIS

Genesis is the first book of the Bible. Genesis tells the story of the creation of the earth—and the beginnings of mankind. Genesis begins with the well-known words, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” The beginning of the book tells the story of Adam and Eve, the first humans in the Garden of Eden, and the sin that drew them away from God. The long book of Genesis goes on to tell the stories of God’s chosen patriarchs—beginning with the important covenant between God and Abraham and Abraham’s descendents. The Book of Genesis is often driven by motifs of opposing forces or people. Light and darkness are in opposition during the creation story; God and the serpent are in opposition during the story of the Garden of Eden; Jacob and Esau are in opposition to receive the blessing of their father; and Rachel and Leah struggle against each other to become Jacob’s most valued wife. At its core, the Book of Genesis is a story of beginnings: the beginning of the earth, the beginning of sin, and the beginning of God’s covenant with man.

The importance of this allusion in *The Poisonwood Bible* is made clear at several points in the text. Of course, just as Genesis is the first book in the Judeo-Christian Bible, it is also the first book in *The Poisonwood Bible*. In describing the goal of her husband’s work in the Congo, Orleanna says in her opening chapter, “We aimed for no more than to have dominion over every creature that moved upon the earth. And so it came to pass that we stepped down there on a place we believed unformed, where only darkness moved on the face of the waters.” Orleanna’s sentiment echoes the quote from Genesis that begins the book:

And God said unto them,
Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,
and subdue it: and have dominion
over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air,
and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

REVELATION

Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. With extraordinary imagery, it predicts the Apocalypse and the final restoration of God’s kingdom on earth. John, the author of Revelation, received visions from God regarding the Apocalypse, which he then recorded into the Book of Revelation. Revelation describes the final battle between good and evil, with the breaking of seven seals that cause great disasters upon the earth. The book also describes the appearance of the Beast, a seven-headed creature who rises from the sea and demands worship. The Beast is finally defeated at Armageddon by none other than Christ himself.

Book Two of *The Poisonwood Bible*, called “The Revelation,” begins with a quote from Revelation about the Beast. The title of the book and the quote accompanying it serve to prepare the reader for a tumultuous event in the Congo: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up ... If any man have an ear, let him hear” (Revelation 13:1, 9).

This event occurs as Belgium withdraws its rule from the Congo, leaving an independent Congo government led by Patrice Lumumba in its place. Leah recalls the significance of this moment as she listens to Lumumba’s speech. Lumumba asserts, “We are going to make the Congo, for all of Africa, the heart of light.” Leah recalls that she thought she would go deaf from the roaring. This is a tumultuous political event in the Congo, an event that leads to a great change in the status of the Price family as missionaries.

In addition, the word revelation itself means a surprising and previously unknown fact, especially one that is made known in a dramatic way. This runs parallel to the subtitle of this book in the novel, “The Things We Learned.” Leah begins to come to a deeper understanding of the world around her in this book, especially during her visit to Leopoldville. She notices the contrast between the Belgians and the Congolese: “Leopoldville is a nice little town of dandy houses with porches and flowery yards on nice paved streets for the whites, and surrounding it, for miles and miles, nothing but dusty run-down shacks for the Congolese.” Leah’s revelation—her sudden understanding—begins in this book, as she starts to see the terrible inequalities and conditions for the Congolese in their own country.

JUDGES

The Book of Judges is the seventh book in the Old Testament. It tells the story of Israel’s continuing cycle of sin and repentance. Although the Israelites knew that they were Jehovah’s chosen people, they continuously fell from grace by allowing rival religions to influence their own.

And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groaning by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way (Judges 2:18 – 19).

Continually, the Israelites turned away from God to serve other gods, and continually they were punished for it. Each time, God chose a great leader—or a judge—to guide the Israelites back to Him. Nonetheless, the people would lose faith again once their leader had died, and the cycle would repeat itself.

The Poisonwood Bible’s Book Three, called “The Judges,” begins with a quote from Judges, in which an angel berates the children of Israel for their faithlessness and their worship of false gods.

Nathan Price has a similarly firm and uncompromising view of the gods of the village of Kilanga. In a heated conversation with Brother Fowles, Nathan dismisses Fowles's idea of learning the hymns of Kilanga, saying, "Hymns to their pagan gods and false idols? I'm afraid I haven't got the time for dabbling in that kind of thing." However, Brother Fowles's ideas about the native Congolese religions stand in stark contrast to Nathan's. Fowles has a deep respect for the Congo way of worship. He explains to Leah: "They're very worshipful. It's a grand way to begin a church service, singing a Congolese hymn to the rainfall on the seed yams. It's quite easy to move from there to the parable of the mustard seed. Many parts of the Bible make good sense here, if only you change a few words ... And a lot of whole chapters, sure, you just have to throw away."

The flexibility and kindness of Brother Fowles's faith calls into question the precise intent of the quotation from the Book of Judges that opens this section of the novel:

And ye shall make no league with the
inhabitants of this land;
ye shall throw down their altars ...
They shall be as thorns in your sides,
and their gods shall be a snare unto you. (Judges 2:2 – 3)

Perhaps it is not the Congolese gods that will be a snare unto Nathan. Rather, perhaps it is Nathan's god that will be a snare unto the Congolese.

In addition to this comparison, Leah's internal journey in this book parallels the cycle of the Israelites in the Book of Judges. She wavers between faith in her father and distrust of his mission and his ideas. "There's a great holy war going on in my father's mind," Leah laments, "in which we're meant to duck and run and obey orders and fight for all the right things, but I can't always make out the orders or even tell which side I am on exactly."

BEL AND THE DRAGON

Bel and the Dragon is a book in the Apocrypha, directly following The Song of the Three Children and preceding The Prayer of Manasseh. There are three brief narratives in the book, all involving Daniel—the same Daniel from the Old Testament Book of Daniel. In the first of the stories, Daniel spread ashes around the base of Bel—a stone idol—to prove that the idol was not actually eating the food left for him. In the second narrative, Daniel told the Babylonian king that he could kill the dragon that the Babylonians were worshipping without the use of a sword or club. He fed cakes of pitch, fat, and hair to the dragon, which burst open after eating them. The Babylonians were indignant that Daniel had discredited Bel and killed the dragon, so they threw him into the lion's den. The third narrative concludes when the Babylonian king went to the lion's den after seven days to find Daniel still alive. He praised Daniel's God and pulled Daniel from the den.

Interestingly, Book Four of *The Poisonwood Bible* is called "Bel and the Serpent," not "Bel and the Dragon." (Some translations of the Apocrypha translate "dragon" as "serpent" instead, but "dragon" is by far the most common translation). The name of the book itself serves to foreshadow the disastrous meeting that Ruth May will have with the green mamba.

Nathan Price is preaching the story of Bel on the morning that Tata Ndu calls for a vote in the middle of the church for or against Jesus as Kilanga's personal god. It is this story that inspires the Price girls to spread ashes around the chicken house later, to set a trap.

The quote beginning this book sets the tone for what follows. The events in Book Four bring the Price family to a hitherto unknown understanding of hunger and death. Adah is most affected by this knowledge, contemplating what the night of the hunt teaches her: "I came to know in the slick center of my bones this one thing: all animals kill to survive, and we are animals ... The death of something living is the price of our own survival, and we pay it again and again."

The quote from the Apocrypha that opens the book sets the stage for this motif of life, death, and hunger.

EXODUS

Exodus is the second book in the Old Testament, and it is divided into two thematic sections. The first 18 chapters tell the story of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. The rest of the book outlines the law that God set down for the nation of Israel. Moses is the hero of Exodus. Acting as God's intermediary, Moses brought down ten plagues upon Egypt. The final and most terrible plague was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt, including the Pharaoh's firstborn son. Only after the Pharaoh's son had died did he allow the Israelites to leave Egypt.

The quote at the opening of Book Five in *The Poisonwood Bible* comes from the thirteenth chapter of Exodus. The Israelites were guided in their long journey across the wilderness by signs from God himself, so that they could travel both by day and night. God used a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire to guide them, and "He took not away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night" (Exodus 13:22).

The exodus of the Price women—from Kilanga, from Nathan, from the tragedy of Ruth May's sudden death—begins with Orleanna. She assuages her grief through motion; in fact, she says, "Motion became my whole purpose. When there was nothing left to move but myself, I walked to the end of our village and kept going, with a whole raft of children strung out behind me." Orleanna's exodus is based in a need to keep moving, and so Orleanna becomes the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire for her children to follow.

THE SONG OF THE THREE CHILDREN

The Song of the Three Children is an apocryphal passage, excluded from most Protestant Bibles, also known as The Song of the Three Holy Children. The passage is entirely a song of praise from three young men who had been cast into a fiery furnace to be executed. Even while within the furnace they praised the Lord because they were walking in the midst of the fire, unharmed and unburned. God had sent an angel to protect them, and the angel “came down into the oven together with Azarias and his fellows, and smote the flame of the fire out of the oven; And made the midst of the furnace as it had been a moist whistling wind, so that the fire touched them not at all, neither hurt nor troubled them.” Their song of praise is a response to God’s mercy in delivering them from the fire.

The title of this book in *The Poisonwood Bible* thus makes another allusion to trial by fire. The three children singing the apocryphal song become, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, the three surviving Price children. The quote from the Apocrypha that opens this book sets a tone of trial and deliverance:

All that you have brought upon us
and all that you have done to us,
You have done in justice ...
Deliver us in your wonderful way.

Book Six is contemplative for all three narrators. Rachel, Leah, and Adah all reflect upon what has been brought upon them and what has been done to them—in effect, the trials of their lives and the trials Nathan heaped upon them. Leah admits, “The sins of my father are not insignificant.”

A motif of deliverance runs through this book, as each living Price daughter reveals her ultimate thoughts and methods of survival, of living with her past and her feelings about Nathan. While the Price daughters’ deliverance is not literal deliverance from a fiery furnace, it is deliverance from Nathan—from his way of thinking, his harsh interpretation of religion, and his inability to compromise. Orleanna demonstrates this when she explains, “Nathan was something that happened to us, as devastating in its way as the burning roof that fell on the family Mwanza; with our fate scarred by hell and brimstone we still had to track our course.” This section of the novel demonstrates how all the surviving Price daughters have tracked their respective courses toward their own understandings of religion and justice and away from Nathan’s.

The Novel's Title

The title of the novel is significant in a religious context and reveals the flaws in Nathan's character. The title comes from a mistake in pronunciation that Nathan makes again and again in his sermons. Nathan tries to declare that Tata Jesus is beloved, using the Kikongo language. Adah describes the effect of Nathan's sermons: "*Bangala* means something precious and dear. But the way he pronounces it, it means the poisonwood tree. Praise the Lord, hallelujah, my friends! For Jesus will make you itch like nobody's business."

Adah, who has a unique relationship with language, is the first to notice this mistake and the first to notice the irony in Nathan's mispronunciation. Nathan is preaching almost exactly the opposite of what he means to preach because he is unable to grasp the subtle differences in the language. The novel's title is indicative of an important and pervasive theme throughout the novel, **the theme of the power and beauty of language.**

The Kikongo language receives a great deal of attention in the novel. Kingsolver explores the intricacies of the language in depth at several points in the text. The word *nzolo* is troublesome to Leah, as it can mean several different, seemingly unconnected things. She explains, "It means *dearly beloved*; or a white grub used for fish bait; or a special fetish against dysentery; or little potatoes." Only when Leah has become fully African herself—married to Anatole, the mother of his children, immersed in the land and the struggle for independence—does she understand how these words are connected.

Adah is fascinated by the Kikongo language, puzzling over her Kikongo name: *benduka*, which means crooked walker. She finds that its parallel *bënduka* means "the sleek bird that dipped in and out of the banks with a crazy ungrace that took your breath."

Even young Ruth May demonstrates this theme, using the power of language to unite. She is the first of the Price sisters to initiate successful contact with the children of Kilanga. She teaches the children to play "Mother May I," despite the fact that the village children have no concept of what the phrase means outside the context of the game.

In contrast to his youngest daughter, Nathan is incapable of using language to unite. Rather, he unintentionally uses language to confuse and divide. His mispronunciation of *bangala* becomes symbolic of the failed nature of his entire mission in the Congo, the errors he is unable to rectify.

Late in the text, Adah reflects upon her impression of her father and his mission, and it is significant that his mispronunciation factors heavily in her impression of him. She says, "We came in stamped with such errors we can never know which ones made a lasting impression. I wonder if they still think of him standing tall before his congregation shouting, 'Tata Jesus is *bāngala*!' I do. I think of him exactly that way... I am born of a man who believed he could tell nothing but the truth, while he set down for all time the Poisonwood Bible."

Characterization through Narration

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver has chosen to tell various parts of the story from different characters' perspectives. The narration changes each chapter, so the reader becomes familiar with five different narrators—and thus five different styles of narration and five different perspectives on the events that occur in the novel. Kingsolver makes use of the changing perspectives to characterize each of the narrators. Each narrator—even the very young Ruth May—has a distinctive narration style that mirrors her personality. Orleanna's sections are markedly different from the narrative sections of her daughters, as she uses the past tense, telling her part of the story after many years have passed. Her daughters often use the present tense, reporting events as they unfold.

ADAH'S PALINDROMES

Adah's narrative style is the most distinctive, filled with palindromes and wordplay. In the second chapter she narrates, Adah explains her unusual method of reading and writing:

When I finish reading a book from front to back, I read it back to front. It is a different book, back to front, and you can learn new things from it. It from things new learn can you and front to back book different a is it? You can agree or not, as you like. This is another way to read it, although I am told a normal brain will not grasp it: *Ti morf sgniht wen nrael nac uoy dna tnorf ot kcab koob tnereffid a si ti*. The normal, I understand, can see words my way only if they are adequately poetic: *Poor Dan is in a droop*.

Adah's frequent use of palindromes and backwards sentences reflects her hemiplegic condition and makes her narrative style quite distinct from the rest of her family. Adah considers herself apart from the rest of her family, and her method of writing backwards is another way to distance herself from them. When she has something secret or impertinent to write, she writes it backwards in her journal. Upon her discovery of the paradise flycatcher, she writes, "NEVAEH NI SEILF FO FOORP WEN .REHCTACYLF ESIDARAP." She often demonstrates her wit using her unusual way of writing.

Adah often uses palindromes to express her cynicism. She has little respect for her father's religion or his preaching, and she demonstrates this to the reader by inventing an insolent palindrome for him. As she watches him preach, she says, "When the Spirit passed through him he groaned, throwing body and soul into this weekly purge. The 'Amen enema,' as I call it. My palindrome for the Reverend."

Adah recognizes the changes that have occurred in her family after they have been in the Congo. To do this, she examines the names of her family members spelled backwards. "Ruth May is not the same Ruth May she was. Yam Htur. None of us is the same: Lehcarr, Hael, Hada, Annaelro. Only Nahtan remains essentially himself, the same man however you look at him." Writing the names of her family members backwards conveys the changes they have undergone, and, more significantly, the lack of change that Nathan has undergone.

Adah invents a palindrome for herself when she loses her faith. Although she was only five years old, Adah recalls the Sunday school class in which she lost her faith. She questions her teacher about salvation and asks how God could condemn someone simply because the person had not been lucky enough to be born within earshot of a preacher. Adah is sent to kneel in the corner on grains of rice as punishment. She recalls, “When I finally got up with sharp grained imbedded in my knees I found, to my surprise, that I no longer believed in God ... From that day I stopped parroting the words of *Oh, God! God’s love!* and began to cant in my own backward tongue: *Evol’s dog! Dog ho!*”

This is the first of the “snmyhymns” that Adah invents. She calls them: “my own perverse hymns that can be sung equally well forward or backward. *Evil, all its sin is still alive!*” Adah often refers to herself as perverse and crippled fairly often throughout the text, and her snmyhymns always contain themes of evil and irreverence toward God. Adah’s invention of palindromes—especially her backwards hymns—is her way of dealing with her status as an outsider. She embraces her unusual characteristics and way of thinking by exaggerating them, setting herself apart from her family and the rest of the world.

As Adah matures, she writes in palindromes less and less often. After she is cured of her condition, thanks to an experimental treatment program, she no longer can read and write backwards. She recalls, “At Mother’s house I recently found my dusty *Complete Emily Dickinson* with its margins littered shockingly by my old palindromes: *Evil deed live!* croaked that other Adah.” The discrepancy between the child Adah’s means of narration and the adult Adah’s serves to underscore her growth and maturation.

RACHEL’S MALAPROPISMS

Rachel’s narration is peppered with malapropisms. A malapropism is the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with unintentionally amusing effect. Rachel’s malapropisms serve to underscore her superficiality and her lack of concern for detail, especially as compared to her brilliant twin sisters.

In the first chapter Rachel narrates, she laments, “Already I was heavy-hearted in my soul for the flush commodes and machine-washed clothes and other simple things in life I have took for granite.” Clearly, Rachel means to say “took for granted,” but instead ends up referring to a very hard kind of rock, granite. While these words sound similar, they have vastly divergent meanings, and this initial use of malapropism signals to the astute reader that Rachel is superficial and perhaps not well educated.

Some of Rachel’s malapropisms have an undeniably comic effect. While listening to her father’s sermon, Rachel thinks, “He was getting that look he gets, oh boy, like Here comes Moses tromping down off of Mount Syanide with ten fresh ways to wreck your life.” Rachel means to say Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. Instead, she ends up using a word that sounds like cyanide, a deadly poison. Later, she says, “Maybe he’s been in Africa so long he has forgotten that we Christians have our own system of marriage, and it is called Monotony.” Again, Rachel surely means monogamy, the practice of being married to one person at a time. However, she uses a word that means tediousness and lack of variety, producing an unintentional comic effect.

Unlike Adah, Rachel's narrative style does not evolve. Rachel uses malapropisms until the very last chapter she narrates, indicating a lack of any real personal changes. As Rachel sits in the Equatorial and broods over her fiftieth birthday, she thinks, "it sure gives you something to compensate upon." The irony is that Rachel is not a contemplative person, not even thoughtful enough to choose the correct word in any given situation.

Postcolonial Genre

Postcolonial literature is a genre of literature that deals with the effects of colonization on the colonized nation and its indigenous peoples. Postcolonial literature, as the name implies, focuses on the aftermath of the colonization of a country. Novels in this genre often focus on themes of individual and cultural identity, and how these identities are changed and shaped by the influences of the colonial countries.

Much of postcolonial literature is a reaction to the destructive and transformative influence of the invading nation. Postcolonial literature seeks to give the oppressed and marginalized a voice. As a result, postcolonial literature often includes protagonists or major characters of non-European descent.

The Poisonwood Bible differs from usual postcolonial literature because Kingsolver, by birth and race, is a member of an imperialist culture. Kingsolver, as a white American, is not the kind of author usually responsible for postcolonial writings. In spite of this, however, *The Poisonwood Bible* is certainly postcolonial in its themes and characters. Leah especially stands out as postcolonial in her choices and way of thinking, and the pervasive themes of cultural and Western arrogance in the novel are postcolonial.

THE THEME OF CULTURAL GUILT

Guilt is one of the most pervasive and important themes of the novel. Cultural guilt, as it functions in the novel, is best exemplified by Leah's adult musings. Late in the novel, Anatole, Leah, and their children move to the newly independent country of Angola, where a new peace agreement has been reached. However, the United States violates the agreement, airlifting guns to an opposition party to destabilize the new government. Leah is devastated. She is "flattened with shame and rage." Her son Patrice comforts her, telling her it is not her fault, nor is it the fault of Orleanna or Adah in America. Leah does not take these words to heart, thinking instead, "But who, if not me, and for how many generations must we be forgiven by our children?"

Despite the fact that Leah has not lived in America for years and has long since ceased calling it her homeland, she is riddled with guilt over the actions the leaders of the U.S. continue to take. Leah's great hope is that she can erase her whiteness, the outward sign of her guilt. She has hope when she looks at her children: "I look at my four boys, who are the colors of silt, loam, dust, and clay, an infinite palette for children of their own, and I understand that time erases whiteness altogether."

Orleanna feels the same guilt as Leah, revealing in her chapters her complex feelings of culpability for the atrocities in the Congo. She implores the reader: "You'll say I walked across Africa with my wrists unshackled, and now I am one more soul walking free in a white skin, wearing some thread of the stolen goods: cotton or diamonds, freedom at the very least, prosperity. Some of us know how we came by our fortune, and some of us don't, but we wear it all the same." The "we" that Orleanna refers to is extremely important, as it relates to the theme of cultural guilt. Orleanna knows that her peers and countrymen have reaped the rewards of America's actions in the Congo, whether they are aware of what those actions were or not. Orleanna implies that even those Americans who are unaware of and uninvolved in crimes in Africa should share some guilt.

This feeling of cultural guilt is devastating for Orleanna, Leah, and Adah. However, even as the oppressive feeling of guilt weighs upon them and colors their lives, it serves a motivating force as well. Leah, plagued with her culpability, devotes her life to Anatole and his revolutionary ideas. She desperately tries to achieve justice, as if to negate the imperialistic forces that the United States represents. She says, "I've been won to the side of schoolteachers and nurses, and lost all allegiance to plastic explosives. No homeland I can claim as mine would blow up a struggling, distant country's hydroelectric dams and water pipes, inventing darkness and dysentery in the service of its ideals, and bury mines in every Angolan road that connected food with a hungry child." Leah's intense guilt over the actions of her native country compels her to fight for justice in Africa. She even goes so far as to deny her heritage, telling her neighbors and students that she comes from a country that no longer exists.

Rachel is Leah's polar opposite in this respect. Even after living in Africa for decades, Rachel proudly tells her sisters that she is proud to be an American, adding, "I have retained my citizenship. I still put up the American flag in the bar and celebrate every single Fourth of July."

The fact that Rachel feels no cultural guilt at all reinforces the postcolonial nature of the novel. Rachel aligns herself with her homeland and its imperialist policies. However, Rachel is superficial and materialistic. It is no coincidence that the most self-centered and scheming of the Price daughters is one who willingly aligns herself with the conquerors. Kingsolver is making a statement about the cruel nature of colonialism as Rachel joins its ranks. Rachel explicitly refuses to feel *any* guilt. She says, "I'd made my mind up all along just to rise above it all ... So I refuse to feel the slightest responsibility. I really do." Her astounding refusal to accept any responsibility at all is indicative of the arrogance underlying colonialism.

Rachel aligns herself most closely with the conquerors during the night of the hunt. She is distraught watching the hunt and horrified when she sees animals killed for food. She goes home by herself and stares at the picture of Eisenhower in the kitchen house, admitting, "I cried like a baby because I wanted him for a father instead of my own parents. I wanted to live under the safe protection of somebody who wore decent clothes, bought meat from the grocery store like the Good Lord intended, and cared about others." Her statement holds irony, although she doesn't know it. Only a few chapters before, Adah discovered Eisenhower's murderous intent for Lumumba and the fledgling Congo government. Rachel, however, aligns herself fully with her imperialistic native country, believing naïvely that her President is a compassionate man.

This theme extends to the reader as well. Kingsolver hints at the idea that all Americans are guilty of the atrocities committed in the Congo. Kingsolver always uses the character of Leah to reveal this burden of guilt. In book five, Leah says, "We are all co-conspirators here. I mean all of us, not just my family." Accepting and dealing with this guilt on a national level is one of the more difficult themes that Kingsolver presents.

THE THEME OF WESTERN ARROGANCE

Another pervasive theme contributes heavily to *The Poisonwood Bible*'s postcolonial nature. The Western world, represented in the novel by Nathan Price, is presented as arrogant, close-minded, and flawed. He believes that his teachings in the Congo will bring nothing but goodness and salvation to the unenlightened, dark, heathen country. He comes without respect for the native culture, language, or religion, believing that his way of thinking is the only correct one.

Tata Ndu explicitly condemns Nathan's way of thinking during the vote for or against Jesus as the savior of Kilanga. He says to Nathan: "You believe we are *mwana*, your children, who knew nothing until you came here. Tata Price, I am an old man who learned from other old men. I could tell you the name of the great chief who instructed my father, and all the ones before him, but you would have to know how to sit down and listen ... Since the time of our *mankulu* we have made our laws without help from white men." When Tata Ndu delivers this stirring condemnation of Nathan's way of thinking, Leah describes his appearance. She says, "His glasses and tall hat did not seem ridiculous. They seemed like the clothes of a chief." This description conveys to the reader Tata Ndu's respectability and wisdom. Earlier in the novel, Leah points out Tata Ndu's odd appearance without respect. Now, however, as Tata Ndu speaks in defense of his village, Leah sees that he is a great chief, not to be treated like a child by her arrogant father.

The theme of Western arrogance extends beyond Nathan halfway through the novel when the political situation in the Congo is brought to the Prices' (and the reader's) attention. Looking back, Orleanna recalls the circumstances that led to Patrice Lumumba's assassination. She imagines the scene between President Eisenhower and his security council: "In their locked room, these men had put their heads together and proclaimed Patrice Lumumba a danger to the safety of the world. The same Patrice Lumumba, mind you, who washed his face each morning from a dented tin bowl, relieved himself in a carefully chosen bush, and went out to seek the faces of his nation." Orleanna is struck by the contrast between what she visualizes as Lumumba's simple intentions and the nefarious intentions of the American leaders. The contrast is made evident to the reader by the simple juxtaposition of a man washing his face from a modest tin bowl, and a man who is a threat to the safety of the world. Orleanna cannot reconcile these two images, making it clear that she finds the actions of her political leaders disproportionate, even corrupt.

Adah comes to this same realization when she overhears Axelroot discussing the plan to assassinate Lumumba. She is initially shocked as she overhears that President Eisenhower has sanctioned Lumumba's murder. Later, she asks herself, "What sort of man would wish to murder the president of another land? None but a barbarian. A man with a bone in his hair." For Adah, it is not the dark Congolese who are the barbarians. It is the elected leaders of her own homeland, arrogant enough to pronounce judgment on another nation in the form of political murder. As the theme of Western arrogance develops—arrogance to the point of violent interference in an autonomous country's political affairs—so too does the postcolonial nature of the novel.

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE NARRATIVE

As the narrative of the novel extends to include the Congo as a whole instead of just the Price family in Kilanga, the dual nature of the story comes to the forefront. *The Poisonwood Bible* is more than just a story of a missionary family in the Congo; it is a story of the destruction of that family against the backdrop of the destruction of a culture. This backdrop certainly makes the novel postcolonial, as it reacts to and condemns the atrocities it describes.

It is no coincidence that Patrice Lumumba and Ruth May Price die on the same day. The final blow in the destruction of the Price family is Ruth May's death. It is Ruth May's sudden death that causes Orleanna to simply leave Kilanga with her living daughters in tow. In fact, Orleanna believes some part of her had been waiting for such a catastrophic event ever since she married Nathan, "... waiting for that ax to fall so I could walk away with no forgiveness in my heart." When the ax does fall, in the form of a green mamba delivering a fatal bite to the youngest Price, it signals the absolute end of Orleanna's attachment to Nathan.

Likewise, the assassination of Lumumba signals the end of the Congo's autonomy. Both Leah and Anatole despise the corrupt man who succeeded Lumumba, Joseph Mobutu. Mobutu is nothing more than a puppet ruler for the West, and Leah laments, "Mobutu makes a show of changing all European-sounding place names to indigenous ones, to rid us of the sound of foreign domination. And what will that change? He'll go on falling over his feet to make deals with the Americans."

Orleanna herself becomes aligned with the plight of the Congo, adding to the dual nature of the narrative. In nearly every chapter she narrates, Orleanna likens her marriage to a conquest. "What is the conqueror's wife," she asks, "if not a conquest herself?" She is often explicit in likening herself to the Congo: "In the end, my lot was cast with the Congo," she says. "Poor Congo, barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom."

Orleanna receives her ultimate forgiveness from Ruth May at the end of the novel, at roughly the same time that the dictator Mobutu leaves the Congo and dies. "After thirty-five years the man Mobutu has run away in the night. Thirty-five years of sleep like death, and now the murdered land draws a breath, moves its fingers, takes up life through its rivers and forests." The Congo regains its hope with Mobutu's death. Likewise for Orleanna, she can regain her hope when she hears the words of forgiveness from Ruth May. Both Orleanna and the Congo are given hope at the end of the novel, again highlighting the dual nature of the novel and aligning Orleanna with the Congo.

Bildungsroman

The term *bildungsroman* refers to a genre of literature in which the main focus of the narrative is the growth of the protagonist. The term comes from two German words: *Bildung*, which means education, and *Roman*, which means novel. A *bildungsroman* tells the story of the psychological, spiritual, moral, or social development of the protagonist from childhood to maturity.

In a *bildungsroman*, there are several narrative and thematic elements that are usually present. The protagonist must grow from childhood or adolescence into adulthood or maturity. What inspires the protagonist to undertake his or her journey of growth is most often an emotional loss early in the story. The loss must be significant enough to motivate the protagonist to leave the comforts and safety of home and family. The protagonist's growth and maturation process forms the bulk of the traditional *bildungsroman*, and the process is gradual and difficult. Often, the protagonist struggles with his or her own needs and desires against the unyielding social order or societal expectations. The *bildungsroman* comes to its conclusion as the protagonist's maturation process is completed. The protagonist has found a place within society and has overcome his earlier loss, allowing the protagonist to find peace. The traditional *bildungsroman* ends with the protagonist evaluating his journey of self-discovery and his new place in society.

The Poisonwood Bible contains many elements of the *bildungsroman*, as it is certainly a coming-of-age story for all of the Price daughters. Leah's process of growth and maturation especially matches the typical journey for the protagonist in a *bildungsroman*. Adah, too, undergoes a journey of identity and self-discovery during the course of the novel. All three girls have to come to terms with their individual guilt and their relationship with their father, as well as their relationship with, and understanding of, Nathan's religion.

LEAH'S MATURATION

Leah begins the novel in awe of her father, likening him to Jesus, singled out for a life of trial. Leah says, "Some people find him overly stern and frightening, but that is only because he was gifted with such keen judgment and purity of heart." Leah's attitude toward her father is drastically different later in the novel. Watching him argue with Tata Ndu, Leah confesses, "It was hard to believe I'd ever wanted to be near him myself. If I had a prayer left in me, it was that this red-faced man shaking with rage would never lay a hand on me again."

This is not the end of Leah's journey, however. At the end of the novel, she feels neither hatred nor fear towards her father. Rather, Leah comes to the conclusion that her father is to be pitied. "Poor father," she says, "who was just one of a million men who never did catch on. He stamped me with a belief in justice, then drenched me in culpability, and I wouldn't wish that torment even on a mosquito." Leah has come to an understanding of the curse of Nathan's way of thinking, and this is a telling example of how her character has evolved. Rather than reaching the conclusion that Nathan is to be hated, Leah comes to the altogether more nuanced conclusion that he has suffered terribly and deserves to be pitied as much as despised.

ADAH'S MATURATION

Adah's journey of maturation takes a much different course than her twin's. Adah begins the novel enamored with her own separateness. She is determined to remain separate so that she can be an observer rather than a participant. When she was born, the doctors told her parents that she would likely never be able to speak. Adah does not mind this expectation. She says, "I am prone to let the doctor's prophecy rest and keep my thoughts to myself. Silence has its many advantages. When you do not speak, other people presume you to be deaf or feeble-minded and promptly make a show of their own limitations." Adah writes in her journal often and uses her backwards code to keep her musing private.

However, Adah does not remain this way throughout the novel. The major turning point for Adah's outlook on life comes during the night of the *nsongonya*. "That night marks my life's dark center, the moment when growing up ended and the long downward slope toward death began," she recalls. "The wonder to me now is that *I* thought myself worth saving." Adah's outlook changes irrevocably this night, and this change is a surprise even to her. She can no longer be content being a wry, detached observer. The shock of her mother's abandonment leaves Adah clinging to life, something she is surprised to see she values. Orleanna's choice to save Ruth May rather than Adah plagues Adah until years later, when she finally understands her mother's motive for doing so.

Looking back on the night of the *nsongonya* from 1962, Adah remembers: "There was room in Adah for naught but pure love and pure hate. Such a life is satisfying and deeply uncomplicated. Since then, my life has become much more difficult. Because later on, she chose *me*."

In a chapter she narrates in Book Five, Adah sums up her feeling of almost reluctant attachment to the world: "In spite of myself I have loved the world a little, and may lose it." This is the great change for Adah: her attachment to the world even though she knows how impersonal and harsh the world can be.

THE THEME OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

A pervasive theme throughout the novel is religious belief and changing religious beliefs. The theme of religious belief also emphasizes themes found in the *bildungsroman* genre. All of the surviving Price women experience a drastic change in the nature of their religious beliefs at some point in the novel. Importantly, by the end of the novel, each woman has evolved away from Nathan's religious teachings into a faith or belief system more suitable for her individual character.

Religious belief factors heavily into the novel. The Christianity that Nathan preaches is unyielding, demanding, and judgmental. Nathan's God will not accept failure, not even from Nathan himself. Orleanna sees the exacting toll that Nathan's beliefs take on him. In Book Two, Orleanna describes Nathan as he is filled with guilt over his failures in Kilanga. She recalls, "I held him in my arms at night and saw parts of his soul turn to ash. Then I saw him reborn, with a stone in place of his heart. Nathan would accept no more compromises ... He would not fail again." Nathan holds himself to unyielding religious standards, the same standards to which he holds his family and the natives of Kilanga.

From the very night of his arrival in the village, Nathan has characterized his religion as one of absolutes. Even though the natives of Kilanga have prepared a feast for his arrival, Nathan does not take even a moment to enjoy it or appreciate the gesture. Rather, he launches immediately into a sermon, condemning the villagers. “*Nakedness . . . and the darkness of the soul!* For we shall *destroy* this place where the *loud clamor* of the *sinner*s is waxen *great* before the *face* of the Lord.” He quotes directly from Genesis, bringing an abrupt end to the celebration and festivities. The natives respond to him accordingly, as “their expressions [fall] in slow motion from joy to confusion to dismay.”

Brother Fowles’s arrival in Kilanga presents an unexpected alternative to the close-minded, condemnatory version of Christianity that Nathan has been preaching. The villagers respond to Brother Fowles’s arrival with excitement, presenting a marked contrast with how the villagers usually respond to Nathan. Brother Fowles preaches a form of Christianity infused with pantheism, a religion that identifies all of creation with God or that sees nature as an expression of the divine. “I’ll tell you a secret,” Brother Fowles says to Leah. “When I want to take God at his word exactly, I take a peep out the window at His Creation. Because *that*, darling, He makes fresh for us every day, without a lot of dubious middle managers.” Brother Fowles’s proclivity toward pantheism and his reluctance to accept the inerrancy of the Bible indicates his thoughtful open-mindedness toward different ideas of religious belief. This receptive, inquisitive nature that Brother Fowles demonstrates stands in direct contrast to Nathan’s absolute certainty.

As the Price girls spend more time in the Congo, their collective faith in the God of their father begins to waver. Each surviving Price daughter comes to a different idea of faith and God by the end of the novel. Leah, in her quest for self-discovery and peace, settles upon the pantheism of Brother Fowles. Nathan’s “exacting, tyrannical God” has left Leah. Instead, she says, she trusts in “Some kin to the passion of Brother Fowles, I guess, who advised me to trust in Creation, which is made fresh daily and doesn’t suffer in translation. This God does not work in especially mysterious ways.” Leah has been through a taxing journey from faith to disbelief, but she arrives back at faith in the end of the novel. This kind of faith—nonjudgmental and undefined—is presented in the novel as the clear superior alternative to Nathan’s brand of faith. Leah’s spiritual journey to reach this kind of belief has taken most of her life, lending further credence to the possibility of reading *The Poisonwood Bible* as a *bildungsroman*.

THE THEME OF INDIVIDUAL GUILT

Another pervasive theme helps to establish *The Poisonwood Bible* as a novel about spiritual and emotional development. The theme of individual guilt and of learning to carry the burden of this guilt relates closely to the theme of cultural guilt. The Price women all feel some burden of individual guilt over Ruth May’s death. The novel serves as an exploration of how the Price women come to terms with the guilt they feel and of what they do to seek absolution and forgiveness.

Orleanna is the character most affected by individual guilt. In fact, it almost paralyzes her. All of her chapters are addressed to Ruth May, whom she calls: “My little beast, my eyes, my favorite stolen egg.” Orleanna lives in a constant state of awaiting Ruth May’s forgiveness. “If you are the eyes in the trees,” she asks in book five, “watching us as we walk away from Kilanga, how will you make your judgment? Lord knows after thirty years I still crave your forgiveness.”

The theme of individual guilt is best exemplified in the text in each of Orleanna's chapters. In her opening chapter, Orleanna hints at the prevalence of this theme and at the weight of her guilt. She describes her family going out into the jungle for a picnic, knowing that they are "bound to appeal to your sympathies. Be careful. Later on you'll have to decide what sympathy they deserve. The mother especially." Orleanna believes that she does not deserve sympathy, that she is to blame for Ruth May's death, even as she desperately attempts to explain the power her husband and her circumstances wielded over her. How was she to escape, how was she to pack up and leave Kilanga with her children when she was so concerned with day-to-day survival? Even years and years after Ruth May's death, Adah knows that Orleanna "talks to Ruth May more or less constantly, begging forgiveness when no one is around."

Orleanna's suffering is alleviated in the final chapter of the novel, when Ruth May's spirit, speaking from the trees, grants her forgiveness. "Mother," she says, "you can still hold on but forgive, forgive and give for long as long as we both shall live I forgive you, Mother ... Think of the vine that curls from the small square plot that was once my heart. That is the only marker you need. Move on. Walk forward into the light."

THE THEME OF THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE

Adah and Leah are consumed with ideas of justice. Leah's concept of justice is deeply rooted in the religion her father taught her. In the beginning of the novel, Leah believes God to be an arbiter of absolute justice; she believes that God rewards good deeds and punishes bad deeds. These simple ideas are broken irrevocably for Leah during the night of the *nsongonya*. Her argument with Anatole exemplifies this. He tells her, "Don't try to make life a mathematics problem with yourself in the center and everything coming out equal. When you are good, bad things can still happen. And if you are bad, you can still be lucky."

After Ruth May's death, Leah and Adah spend years wrestling with the idea of justice and whether it is really attainable. The twins come to the same conclusion by the end of the novel: that absolute, untarnished justice is impossible. Although both women come to this conclusion, their means of accepting this conclusion are different.

Adah studies the global ecosystem, developing a respect for the delicate balance that all organisms achieve, from humans to microscopic viruses. Adah finds comfort in the idea that the world is in balance, even if it is not always just. Reflecting on this balance in her final chapter, Adah says, "In this world, the carrying capacity for humans is limited. History holds all things in the balance, including large hopes and short lives."

Leah also finds comfort in the idea of balance, although her understanding is on a human level, not a global level like Adah's. In her final chapter, Leah reflects:

There is not justice in this world. Father, forgive me wherever you are, but this world has brought one vile abomination after another down on the heads of the gentle, and I'll not live to see the meek inherit anything. What there is in this world, I think, is a tendency for human errors to level themselves like water throughout their sphere of influence. That's pretty much the whole of what I can say, looking back. There's the possibility of balance. Unbearable burdens that the world somehow does bear with a certain grace.

As the twins come to understand their own notions of justice, they reach the spiritual and emotional maturation characteristic of the *bildungsroman*.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In every work of literature, the voice of the narrator significantly affects the tone, theme, and nature of the story. A work of literature that frequently changes narrators presents the reader with several narration styles and viewpoints. Choose a work of literary merit in which there are frequent changes of narrator. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the changing narrators affect the thematic development of the novel.

Note to the student: For this exercise, you must write about The Poisonwood Bible.

2. The use of darkness and light as symbols is commonplace in literature. Darkness often symbolizes doubt, fear, ignorance, and sin, while light commonly represents purity, understanding, and redemption. Choose a work of literature in which darkness and light figure prominently as symbols. Then, in a well-organized essay, explain what these symbols contribute to a theme of the novel. Avoid mere plot summary.

Note to the student: For this exercise, you must write about The Poisonwood Bible.

3. The growth and development of adolescent characters is an extremely familiar theme in literature, best exemplified by coming-of-age-stories. Choose a character from a work of literature who comes of age, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually over the course of the work. Then, in a well-developed essay, analyze how the author conveys this maturation to the reader.

Note to the student: For this exercise, you must write about The Poisonwood Bible.

4. Authors often allude to other works in order to illuminate broad themes or complex ideas. The content of the allusion itself is as important as how the author chooses to make use of the allusion. Choose a work of literature in which frequent allusions are present. Then, in a well-developed essay, analyze how these allusions help to establish the tone of the work.

Note to the student: For this exercise, you must write about The Poisonwood Bible.

5. In literature, a foil is a minor or secondary character who serves to illuminate or emphasize the defining qualities of a major character. Choose a work of literary merit in which a minor character serves as a foil to a major character. Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the minor character serves as a foil and how this comparison illuminates the main character's qualities.

Note to the student: For this exercise, you must write about The Poisonwood Bible.

Practice Free Response Questions

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #1

Carefully read the passage, from book one of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in which Adah describes her special way of reading and thinking. The selected passage is found in the second chapter that Adah narrates, and begins close to the start of the chapter. The passage begins, “Mother is the one who notices ...” and ends, “Ada still has discoveries ahead and behind.” Then, in a well-organized essay, discuss how Adah’s diction and her use of palindromes contribute to her character’s development.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #2

Carefully read the passage, from book five of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in which Orleanna recalls the circumstances after Ruth May’s death. The passage is found in the first chapter of book five. The passage begins, “Plain and simple, that was the source of our exodus ...” and ends, “In perfect stillness, frankly, I’ve only found sorrow. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the imagery in the passage helps convey the complex attitude of the speaker.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #3

Carefully read the passage, from book five of Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*, that begins “What we eat is manioc, manioc, manioc ...” and ends, “Africa has a thousand ways to get under your skin.” The passage is found in the chapter Leah narrates from Kinshasa in 1974 about halfway through book five. Then, in a well-organized essay, discuss how the tone of the passage reveals the speaker’s attitude toward life in Africa. Avoid plot summary.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 5

Carefully read the following passage in book one of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in a chapter narrated by Ruth May Price. The passage is located in the eighth chapter of book one, and begins about halfway through the chapter. The passage begins, “Rachel was Miss Priss and now she is a freak of nature ...” and ends, “Oh, boy. They’ll get it.” Then, select the best answers to the multiple choice questions that follow.

1. The speaker’s stress on Nathan’s size in the doorway
 - A. illustrates the house’s small size.
 - B. likens Nathan to Orleanna.
 - C. demonstrates the house’s darkness.
 - D. likens Nathan to God.
 - E. emphasizes his power.
2. The speaker’s concern with a stranger sitting in her father’s chair indicates all of the following EXCEPT
 - A. naïveté.
 - B. fear of her father.
 - C. youth.
 - D. bravery.
 - E. concern for rules.
3. The speaker’s tone in the passage can best be described as
 - A. curious.
 - B. racist.
 - C. fearful
 - D. ironic.
 - E. fervent.
4. Nathan and Orleanna’s discussion about the natives’ bodies has the *primary* effect of
 - A. casting the natives in a judgmental light.
 - B. emphasizing the wholeness of the speaker’s body.
 - C. contrasting Nathan’s views with his wife’s.
 - D. stirring fear in the speaker.
 - E. establishing the speaker’s rebellious tendencies.
5. The speaker’s memory of a “razor strop” beating contrasts with which of the following?
 - A. Nathan’s belief that the body is precious
 - B. Orleanna’s pleading with the girls not to stare
 - C. The mass of handicapped natives
 - D. Orleanna sewing window curtains
 - E. The image of the worn green rocker

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6 – 10

Carefully read the passage in book two of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in a chapter narrated by Adah Price. The passage is located in the ninth chapter from the beginning of book two. The passage begins, “That other Dearly Beloved who resides in north Georgia ...” and continues to the end of the chapter, concluding with, “Our Baptist ears from Georgia will never understand the difference.” Then select the best answers to the questions that follow.

6. The first two paragraphs of this passage *primarily* serve to indicate the speaker’s understanding of
 - A. the ironic contrast of righteous defecation.
 - B. the importance of hygiene.
 - C. the villagers’ reverence for the stream.
 - D. her family’s ignorance of Kilanga customs.
 - E. her family’s immunity from disease.
7. In context, the speaker’s rhetorical purpose of saying “Bongo Bango Bingo” is to
 - A. mock the uncivilized Congo natives.
 - B. mimic the beating of Congo drums.
 - C. express disdain for the American view of the Congo.
 - D. attempt to speak the native language.
 - E. express respect for the beautiful native tongue.
8. The speaker’s attitude toward the doctor poet in the village can best be described as
 - A. fear.
 - B. respect.
 - C. arrogance.
 - D. love.
 - E. curiosity.
9. When the speaker refers to “those of doubtful righteousness,” she is referring to
 - A. the Reverend.
 - B. the Kilanga natives.
 - C. her own family.
 - D. the Belgians.
 - E. the Americans.
10. The speaker’s tone in this passage can most accurately be called
 - A. ironic.
 - B. reverent.
 - C. humorous.
 - D. devoted.
 - E. indifferent.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11 – 15

Carefully read the following passage in book three of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in a chapter narrated by Orleanna Price. The passage is located in the first chapter of book three, and starts near the end of the chapter. The passage begins, “And where was I, the girl or woman called Orleanna ...” and continues until the end of the chapter. It concludes, “Barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom.” Then, select the best answers to the multiple choice questions that follow.

11. The speaker likens herself to the Congo by referring to herself as
 - A. a conquest.
 - B. idle.
 - C. attractive.
 - D. a heathen.
 - E. cowering.
12. The speaker’s attitude toward Nathan can best be described as
 - A. terrified.
 - B. affectionate.
 - C. intimidated.
 - D. guilt-ridden.
 - E. joyful.
13. “The country once known as Orleanna Wharton” is an allusion to the speaker’s
 - A. internal guilt.
 - B. religion before her marriage.
 - C. devotion to her children.
 - D. freedom before her marriage.
 - E. external beauty.
14. The contrast between God’s constant watching and Nathan’s habitual overlooking serves *primarily* to highlight
 - A. Nathan’s righteousness.
 - B. Orleanna’s oppression.
 - C. Orleanna’s insanity.
 - D. Orleanna’s failure of virtue.
 - E. Nathan’s failure of virtue.
15. In context, the speaker’s phrase “heart of darkness” primarily means
 - A. Africa.
 - B. her state of depression.
 - C. her burden of children.
 - D. Georgia.
 - E. her marriage to Nathan.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16 – 20

Carefully read the passage in book six of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in a chapter narrated by Rachel Price. The passage begins near the middle of the chapter, starting with, “Every so often a group of fellows will stop by in the afternoon ...” and continues through to the end of the chapter. It ends, “You stick out your elbows, and hold yourself up.” Then, select the best answers to the questions that follow.

16. The speaker’s tone in the passage can best be described as
 - A. fearful.
 - B. haughty.
 - C. seductive.
 - D. ironic.
 - E. devout.
17. In context, “Jezebel” most likely means
 - A. a young woman.
 - B. the madam of a whorehouse.
 - C. a prostitute.
 - D. the owner of a hotel.
 - E. a biblical figure.
18. In describing Africa as “not a Christian kind of place,” the speaker does all of the following EXCEPT
 - A. paint Africa as uncivilized.
 - B. explain her father’s failure at his missionary work.
 - C. explain her selfish attitude toward survival.
 - D. illuminate her desire to change Africa.
 - E. explain her un-Christian behavior.
19. In her descriptions throughout the passage, the speaker emphasizes Africa’s
 - A. jungles.
 - B. danger.
 - C. stubbornness.
 - D. evil.
 - E. darkness.
20. The speaker’s attitude toward her father is *primarily*
 - A. nostalgia.
 - B. love.
 - C. pity.
 - D. loathing.
 - E. contempt.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21 – 25

Carefully read the following passage in book six of *The Poisonwood Bible*, in a chapter narrated by Leah Price. The passage is located about halfway through the chapter. It begins, “I teach classes in nutrition, sanitation, and soybeans,” and continues through to the end of the chapter, concluding, “Time erases whiteness altogether.” Then, select the best answers to the multiple choice questions that follow.

21. The speaker uses all of the following to characterize Western society EXCEPT
 - A. “places of moderate clime, hope, and dread.”
 - B. “bread from a bottomless basket.”
 - C. “a temperate zone.”
 - D. “fragile red laterite.”
 - E. “fields of waving grain.”
22. The speaker’s description of herself as “the un-missionary” reveals her
 - A. loss of faith.
 - B. desire to assimilate.
 - C. guilt over her nationality.
 - D. guilt over her skin color.
 - E. loss of family.
23. The speaker describes her father as “just one of a million men who never did catch on.” This description serves primarily to emphasize the
 - A. arrogance of the West.
 - B. rampant overpopulation of Africa.
 - C. countless attempts to change Africa.
 - D. sexism of the missionaries.
 - E. size of Africa’s jungles.
24. In context, “the gentle Kongo” refers to the
 - A. natives that the Portuguese enslaved.
 - B. land that the Portuguese condemned.
 - C. sweetness of frangipani flowers.
 - D. intoxicating jungles.
 - E. natives that the Portuguese killed.
25. The speaker’s assertion that “Time erases whiteness altogether” ends the passage on a note of
 - A. shame.
 - B. hope.
 - C. guilt.
 - D. dread.
 - E. happiness.

Answers with Explanations

1. Nothing in the passage discusses the size of the house, whether it is abnormally small or not (A). Although Ruth May does mention that sunlight is “just squeaking by” him in the doorway, there is no mention of darkness in the house (C). This description seeks to contrast the two adults, rather than point out any similarities (B). While Nathan is a religious man, Ruth May does not compare him to God (D) anywhere in the passage. **Rather, the description is intended to emphasize the power he holds over his family (E), especially as his tall stature contrasts with Orleanna’s seated position. Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**
2. Ruth May is concerned with her father’s chair in Georgia because she remembers clearly the strict rules associated with it (E). She fears her father so much that his rules about his rocker still stand out clearly in her mind (B). She is unable to believe that the rules no longer apply, even while her family is on a different continent, because she is only a child (C) and is still simplistic and naïve (A). **Regardless of whether Ruth May is a brave child, her fixation on the rules of the chair does not indicate any bravery (D). Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
3. Ruth May is fascinated by the natives in this passage; she reveals no racism (B), only interest that they adjust to their disabilities so easily. Ruth May does fear her father’s anger and punishments, but she is not afraid in this passage because his anger is not turned towards her (C). Ruth May’s passing mention of Jesus’ love near the end of the passage comes nowhere near fervor (E), and her language is too simplistic and sincere to hold much irony (D). **Rather, she is very curious about the way her father and mother are speaking to each other (A), wondering how Nathan will react. Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**
4. Nathan’s side of the conversation does cast the natives in a judgmental light, but Orleanna’s retorts attempt to absolve the natives rather than judge them (A). Ruth May’s body is whole, but the conversation between her parents does not mention that (B), nor does Ruth May herself. Ruth May is detached from the conversation and feels no real fear (D) of her father’s potential response. Within this passage, Ruth May is not behaving rebelliously (E); rather, she is thinking about the consequences of talking back and sitting in her father’s chair. **The conversation as a whole sets up a contrast between Nathan’s judgmental views and his wife’s attempts to defend the natives (C). Thus, (C) is the correct answer.**
5. The mass of handicapped or deformed natives bears no relation at all to Ruth May’s memories of her beatings (C). Orleanna pleads with her daughters not to stare out of an attempt at politeness (B), but does not threaten beating if they disobey. She sews curtains for her windows out of an attempt for privacy (D). The rocker (E) does not contrast with Ruth May’s memories of her beatings; rather, Ruth May connects the rocker with her father’s strict rules and punishments. **Rather, the contrast stands between beating a child until she is marked and simultaneously believing that the body is a precious temple (A), as these ideas stand in almost direct opposition to each other. Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**

6. The contrast of righteous defecation serves to entertain Adah's sense of irony (A), but what is far more important in the passage is that the Prices "have offended all the oldest divinities, in every thinkable way." Although the importance of hygienic practices are mentioned in the passage (B), that is not the *primary* purpose of the passage. The villagers do revere the stream, but that is not the primary purpose of the passage (C). Nothing in the passage indicates that the speaker believes her family is immune to disease (E). **The paragraphs serve to underline that the Prices were entirely ignorant of Kilanga customs (D) when it came to the important rules of where to bathe, drink, and defecate. Given the tone of the passage, its primary purpose is to point out the Prices' flaws. Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
7. The speaker's tone throughout this passage has been one of respect for the natives, so she is not seeking to mock them (A) with her alliteration. There is no mention anywhere in the passage of drums or music in the Congo (B). When the speaker uses a native word, it is placed in italics and used within a sentence, so the alliteration is not an attempt to speak the language (D). Likewise, the speaker expresses respect for the language elsewhere in the passage as she describes the many meanings of a word. "Bongo Bango Bingo" serves to oversimplify, not express respect (E). **The speaker uses the alliteration to describe how Americans think of the Congo (C) and to mock them for their incorrect oversimplifications. Thus, (C) is the correct answer.**
8. The speaker's father likely feels superior to the doctor poet, as he calls him a "rare nut," but the speaker does not share this arrogance (C). She does not fear him (A), as she is unafraid to look into his eyes. Nothing in the passage indicates that the speaker feels love for Kuvudundu (D). The speaker feels more than just a curiosity (E), as she knows that great importance hangs on the omens the doctor leaves her family. **Rather, the speaker feels respect toward Kuvudundu (B) as she observes him trying to help her family, to protect them from their own stupidity. Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**
9. The speaker *does* feel that her own family is of doubtful righteousness in the Congo. However, as she refers to "those of doubtful righteousness," she is talking about those who tell the story of the Congo, not those who are present in the Congo (C). Thus, the answer is also neither the Belgians (D) nor the Reverend (A), because the Belgians and her father are not merely storytellers. In the context of the paragraph, the Kilanga natives fall into the category of "the damaged" and cannibals (B), in contrast to the doubtfully righteous. **In context, the speaker is referring to those who are speaking of the Congo in America (E), and talking about the uncivilized Congo makes them feel better about their own sins. Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**

10. The speaker feels contempt for her father, her family's beliefs, and her native country. She feels no reverence (B) for these things, and lacks devotion (D) to anything in the passage as well. She certainly does not use an indifferent tone (E), as she uses phrases signifying importance, such as "so much depends on..." and "the earth shall move." The speaker has a sense of humor about her family's predicament (C), but this is not the *primary* tone of the passage. **The speaker uses images and phrases throughout the passage that underscore how out of place her family is, and how incorrectly Americans view the Congo. The speaker presents these contrasts and discrepancies in a heavily ironic tone (A). Indeed, the passage as a whole is an ironic commentary on how her family fits into the Congo. Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**
11. Orleanna clearly does not consider herself—or the Congo—idle (B); she feels that God is unfairly judging her for enjoying the few moments she is allowed to rest. Her attractiveness (C) draws no particular parallel to the Congo. Orleanna refers to herself as a heathen (D) to emphasize her previous independence and beauty, *not* to emphasize non-Christian religions that the Congo practices. When she says that she "cowered beside [her] cage," (E), she likens herself to Methuselah, not to the Congo itself. **Orleanna sees herself as entirely dominated by Nathan, conquered by him as the Congo was conquered (A) by "men who took her jewels and promised her the kingdom." The fact that she has been conquered—"occupied as if by a foreign power"—is what likens her to the Congo. Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**
12. Although the speaker does fear Nathan, terrified (A) is too strong an emotion to describe her *overall* attitude toward him. Likewise, she does not reveal any affection for him (B) in the passage. She is ridden with guilt in the passage, but she feels the primary source of the guilt to be God, not Nathan (D). Orleanna is far from joyful in this passage (E). The only time she speaks of any kind of happiness is when Nathan is away. **Her attitude toward him is best described as intimidated (C), revealed by her tendency to "pad around" him in order to avoid provoking his anger. Thus, (C) is the best answer.**
13. The speaker uses her maiden name to allude to herself as she was before she married Nathan Price. Before she married Nathan, she had not yet developed his sense of internal guilt (A), nor had she produced any children to warrant her devotion (C). She does not mention the particulars of her religion before she married Nathan (B), and her external beauty (E) did not disappear after her marriage, so that does not define the allusion. **A theme of this passage is how Nathan changed Orleanna's free spirit into one of subservience, so she uses this phrase to refer to her freedom before her marriage (D). Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
14. Orleanna's failure of virtue (D) is not a fact in this passage; rather, it is something she has concocted in her mind out of her guilt. Neither Nathan's righteousness (A) nor his failure of virtue (E) are emphasized by the contrast because Orleanna is the subject of the contrast, not Nathan. Nothing in the passage indicates that Orleanna is insane (C). **Constant scrutiny from God and being ignored by Nathan serves to oppress Orleanna's spirit. The contrast between these two extremes serves to highlight the oppression she faces (B), as she can win approval from neither God nor her husband. Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**

15. The phrase “heart of darkness” does not apply to a physical location in this passage, so the answer is neither Africa (A) nor Georgia (D). In context, the phrase does not refer to Orleanna’s depression (B) because the passage in question is about freedom, not happiness. Orleanna is “thoroughly bent to the shape of marriage” because of Nathan, not because of her children (C). **Rather, the phrase refers to Orleanna’s loss of freedom because of her marriage to Nathan (E). Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**
16. The speaker does have a certain degree of fear for the dangers of Africa, but this is not her primary tone because she feels quite safe within the bounds of her hotel (A). Although the speaker has been mistaken for a prostitute in the past, her tone is not seductive or lustful (C). The speaker is certainly not devout (E), as she realizes she sounds un-Christian but does not care. Her tone is sincere, not at all inflected with irony (D). **The speaker is truly proud of what she has accomplished with her successful hotel, and she reveals her haughty tone as she thinks herself better than the people around her (B). Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**
17. Although the speaker has never “let [her]self go,” she knows that she is no longer a young woman (A), and she knows that she no longer appears young. The speaker is sometimes mistaken for the madam of a whorehouse (B), but this is not what “Jezebel” refers to. She would have no reason to be flattered if strangers think her merely to be the owner of the hotel (D). Jezebel is literally a biblical figure (E), but the speaker does not use the name to refer to a specific historical person. **Rather, she thinks she should be flattered that strangers think she appears attractive enough to be a prostitute (C) despite her age. Thus, (C) is the correct answer.**
18. The speaker equates being Christian with being civilized, so calling Africa un-Christian is tantamount to calling it uncivilized (A). Calling Africa un-Christian does hint at Nathan’s failure to convert Africa (B). She calls Africa un-Christian while she is justifying her un-Christian behavior (E) and while she is speaking of her selfish attitude toward survival (C). **A theme of the passage is the impossibility of changing Africa. The speaker has no desire to try to change Africa (D); she believes that such change is impossible. Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
19. A theme of this passage is the impossibility of changing Africa. The speaker does not emphasize any physical geography of Africa, like its jungles (A). While the speaker does hint at Africa’s danger, danger is not emphasized throughout the passage (B). Although her tone is one of distrust toward Africa, she does not accuse it of being evil (D), merely resistant to change. The speaker calls Africa dark (E) only once in the entire passage. **Africa is stubborn (C); the speaker says, “You can’t just sashay into the jungle aiming to change it all over.” The pervasive theme is Africa’s resistance to change. Thus, (C) is the correct answer.**
20. The speaker reveals no love for her father in the passage (B), demonstrated by her casual speculation about how he was laid to rest. Likewise, she feels no real loathing for him either (D); her tone is too casual to reveal any emotion that intense. Nothing in the passage reveals any nostalgia (A) or pity for him (C), as the speaker is indifferent in her recollections. **The speaker primarily feels contempt for her father (E), scoffing at his misguided ideas that he could convert Africa. She speaks of his mistakes, revealing her contempt that he didn’t learn from them as she has. Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**

21. The speaker characterizes Western society as places of plenty, where the land offers up “bread from a bottomless basket” (B). She uses descriptions of moderation to apply to the West, such as “a temperate zone” (C) and “places of moderate climate, hope, and dread” (A). “Fields of waving grain” (E) exist in the Western world, quite different from Africa. **The speaker uses the phrase “fragile red laterite” to describe African soil, not Western soil (D). Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
22. The speaker has already lost her original faith (A), but her loss of this faith is better indicated later in the passage, when she explains that she no longer believes in her father’s “exacting, tyrannical God.” The speaker has guilt over her nationality (C) and over her skin color (D), but her reference to herself as an “un-missionary” has nothing to do with this guilt. The speaker has not lost her family (E). **Rather, she refers to herself as the un-missionary because she wishes to assimilate flawlessly (B), to learn “a new agriculture, a new sort of planning, a new religion.” Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**
23. The most notable part of this description is the hyperbolic “one of a million.” The speaker’s father does not catch on because of his Western arrogance (A), but this is not the correct answer because the word “million” puts an emphasis on numbers, not on attitudes. The overpopulation of Africa (B) cannot be the correct answer because her father and those millions she likens him to do not come from Africa. Nothing in the passage indicates sexism (D); the speaker uses the word “men” merely as an expression, not a statement on gender. The size of Africa’s jungles (E) has nothing to do with the sentence or the passage. **The primary function is to highlight the sheer number of attempts there have been to change Africa (C). Thus, (C) is the correct answer.**
24. The passage speaks of chaining the Kongo “down in rows, in the dark, for the passage,” obviously referring to the slave trade and the passage across the Atlantic. While the Portuguese did condemn the land (B), the phrase in question refers to its inhabitants. Frangipani flowers (C) cannot be chained down to be sold into slavery, nor can intoxicating jungles (D). The information in the passage does not indicate that the Portuguese *killed* the natives (E); rather, they “chained them down” for the slave trade. **Thus, in context, the “gentle Kongo” must refer to the natives that the Portuguese enslaved (A).**
25. The speaker feels a profound guilt over her whiteness, as she feels it connects her to the sins of her fathers. Her whiteness connects her with guilt (C) and shame (A), but the knowledge that it can be erased instills optimism. The speaker is not precisely happy (E) with this eventual disappearance of her skin color; rather, she is reassured. Dread (D) is the opposite of what the speaker really feels. **The idea that her whiteness will be washed away reveals hope for her future and her children’s future (B). Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**

The Poisonwood Bible

Book One: Genesis

1. What is the title of this book an allusion to? Why do you think it is significant?

Genesis is the title of the first book of the Bible. Genesis tells the story of the beginnings of creation and of mankind. The word “genesis” itself means the origin of mode or formation of something. Thus, the title of this book in The Poisonwood Bible alludes to the important beginnings of an epic narrative. Additionally, dividing the novel into books is a structuring device that likens The Poisonwood Bible to the Judeo-Christian Bible. Just like the Bible, The Poisonwood Bible is divided into books, reinforcing to the reader the idea that this novel is a kind of bible itself.

Chapter One: Orleanna Price

1. Who is the narrator of this section? How does she describe herself?

Orleanna Price narrates this chapter, and she describes herself as “Southern Baptist by marriage, mother of children living and dead.” She begins the chapter by describing herself in the third person as she recalls the scene of the picnic and then reveals: “I was that woman on the stream bank, of course.”

2. What tone does the narrator employ throughout this introduction? Provide examples from the text to illustrate the tone.

Orleanna’s tone is one of extreme guilt. She calls herself “mother of children living and dead,” although the reader does not yet know which of her children are living and which are dead. The most pertinent question Orleanna asks is, “How do we aim to live with it?” Orleanna is consumed with her inadequacy and tells the reader that she had no life of her own, trying to assuage her guilt. When Orleanna says, “Most have no earthly notion of the price of a snow-white conscience,” it is clear that she longs for her conscience to be clean.

3. How does this chapter foreshadow the fate of the Prices?

This chapter is a rather foreboding opening to the novel, hinting to the reader that at least one of Orleanna Price’s children has died. Orleanna also foreshadows the inadequacy and naiveté of the Price family in Africa. She says, “We aimed for no more than to have dominion over every creature that moved upon the earth,” as if this is a reasonable or attainable goal.

4. To whom does the narrator direct this introduction?

Orleanna often uses the pronoun “you” through this chapter. The “you” to whom she refers is ambiguous, although it is clearly one of her children. She says, “Those glassy museum stares have got nothing on you, my uncaptured favorite child, wild as the day is long.” There is no way for the reader to know precisely whom Orleanna is referring to at this point. Eventually, however, it becomes clear that Orleanna is addressing Ruth May—the child who dies in the Congo—during every section she narrates.

The Things We Carried

1. Is there anything significant about the subtitle of this book? Is it an allusion to another text?

The subtitle of book one is an allusion to a collection of short stories written by Tim O’Brien called The Things They Carried. The collection is a fictional account of O’Brien’s experiences during the Vietnam War and deals with themes of morality and the horrors of war. The title story, “The Things They Carried,” is specifically about the physical objects and the emotions that the soldiers bring with them to Vietnam, and about how these things affect them. The well-read reader who notices this connection will watch for discussions of both the objects and emotions that the Prices carry with them to a land in Africa that parallels the foreignness of Tim O’Brien’s Vietnam.

Chapter Two: Leah Price

1. Who is the narrator of this section? What is her relation to the narrator of the previous section?

Leah Price narrates this section. Orleanna Price, the narrator of the previous chapter, is her mother.

2. In what year is this chapter set? How does this differ from the previous chapter?

According to the title page, the year is 1959. The previous chapter did not list a specific year in which it was set, but it was clearly set at a much later date. During the previous chapter, Orleanna was reflecting on her time in the Congo. In the events of this chapter, however, the Price family is still in the Congo.

3. What does Nathan’s attitude toward the Underdowns suggest about his character?

Nathan and his family are arriving in a new country on a new continent, and yet Nathan is quick to reject the help that the Underdowns offer. Although Nathan has absolutely no experience in or knowledge of the Congo, he is angered by the Underdowns’ attempts to help. This suggests that Nathan considers himself self-sufficient and self-reliant to the point of turning away useful information and help.

4. How does this narrator's tone differ from Orleanna's tone?

This chapter and the previous chapter are quite different in tone, due to the difference between the two narrators and the different time periods in which they are set. Leah employs an anticipatory, excited tone throughout this chapter as she looks forward to the wonders of the Congo. Her tone is anticipatory also because she believes her father's missionary work to be important and invigorating. "My heart pounded," she says, "for I expected everything: jungle flowers, wild roaring beasts. God's Kingdom in its pure, unenlightened glory."

Chapter Three: Ruth May Price

1. How does Ruth May's childish sentence structure and vocabulary affect the text?

Ruth May's narrative immediately stands out from Orleanna's and Leah's because of how simplistic it is. Ruth May is obviously young and childish, and her tone reflects her naïve view of the world. "The Underdowns talk French to each other even though they are white people," she says, indicating that she childishly believes that all white people should speak the same language.

2. What is the significance of Ruth May's account of the biblical story of the Tribes of Ham?

Ruth May sees the story as a justification for racism and segregation. In telling it, she reveals the attitude of her family towards the natives of the Congo. They think themselves superior based solely on their religion and skin color. Ruth May also reveals the attitude of the American culture in which she has been raised, speaking of "Jimmy Crow" back in America. Additionally, Ruth May is telling an apocryphal version of the story. The standard Biblical story, Genesis 9:18-27, says that Ham's descendants were cursed to be the slaves of his brothers, but it specifies that Ham is the ancestor of the Canaanites and the Babylonians, not of Africans. Thus, the fact that Kingsolver is putting this apocryphal version of the story into the mouth of the youngest narrator may indicate that she wants to emphasize that this interpretation is a misunderstanding, childish and simple, like Ruth May herself.

Chapter Four: Rachel Price

1. How do Rachel's frequent malapropisms affect the text?

In her narration, Rachel often uses words incorrectly. Meaning to say that she has taken things for granted, she instead says, "took for granite." She also refers to the biblical location Mount Sinai as "Mount Syanide." With each malapropism that Rachel unknowingly employs, her character becomes more and more established as superficial and unintelligent. Additionally, Rachel's narration is full of allusions to popular culture in America. She looks around for her sisters so that she can quote the Dial soap commercial and thinks of the Listerine catchphrase when she finds herself close to the natives. Her fixation with popular culture further establishes her as a superficial character.

2. What does Nathan Price's impromptu sermon foreshadow about his relations with the natives?

Despite the fact that the Kilanga natives have gone to great trouble to prepare a feast for the Price family, Nathan shows no gratitude whatsoever. Rather, he begins a sermon in which he calls the villagers sinners for their singing and their nakedness. Nathan shows so little regard for the effort and happiness of the natives that some of them leave after his short sermon. This foreshadows how Nathan plans to proselytize during his time as missionary to the Congo—with force, fire, and brimstone.

Chapter Five: Adah Price

1. How does Adah's diction and imagery in her narration affect the text?

Adah often uses words for their rhyming qualities, opening this chapter with the phrase, "Sunrise tantalize, evil eyes hypnotize." Her style of narration stands out from the styles of the other narrators because Adah spends more time in description and in wordplay. Her sisters focus on narrating specific events and conversations, while Adah spends more time describing the setting, using detailed imagery to do so. This focus on diction and wordplay, as it relates to the setting, indicates that Adah is concerned with the bigger picture more than the rest of the narrators. Adah is just as interested in the Congo itself as she is in her family's experiences there.

2. How does Adah use her hemiplegic condition to her advantage?

Adah makes a point of remaining silent. Although she can speak, she chooses not to because it allows her to be a more astute observer of the people around her. "When you do not speak," she says, "other people presume you to be deaf or feeble-minded and promptly make a show of their own limitations." By remaining silent, Adah is able to observe these limitations better than if she were an active participant.

3. What is Adah's attitude toward religion?

Unlike the rest of the family, Adah has a pronounced cynicism towards Christianity and also towards her father. She refers to her mother's womb, where her hemiplegia began, as Eden. She calls Nathan "Our Father," an obvious reference to God. By calling Nathan this, she dilutes the holy effect of the phrase and makes it cynical and darkly humorous. Adah has none of the reverence for Nathan or Christianity that her twin, Leah, has.

4. What is the significance of Adah's description of the natives? Why do you think Adah takes time to describe the natives at length when none of the other narrators have done so?

Adah is more observant than any of the other narrators so far in the novel, pointing out details of her surroundings that Leah, Ruth May, and Rachel don't find important enough to comment on. Adah is the first narrator to describe the natives' daily habits and characteristics, and she does so with fascination bordering on respect, calling them "ballet dancers entirely unaware they are on stage." This indicates that Adah is the character most sympathetic to the natives. She does not see them merely as pagans to be converted, but as people with their own interesting customs and beliefs.

Chapter Six: Leah

1. What does Nathan's response to Mama Tataba's warning about the poisonwood and the garden reveal about his character?

Nathan is a stubborn, arrogant man. When Mama Tataba attempts to warn him about the tree, he ignores her in favor of preaching the parable of the mustard seeds. He pays the price for his arrogance the next morning, when his skin is swollen and covered in rash from where he had touched the tree. Nathan's refusal to accept any advice, even from natives who are knowledgeable about the plants and climate, is indicative of his close-mindedness. When Mama Tataba reshapes the garden in the middle of the night, Nathan does not stop to wonder why she has done so, or what purpose hills could serve in the garden. He simply flattens it back out again, showing that he has learned nothing from his mistake with the poisonwood.

2. What is Leah's attitude toward her father? How does her attitude toward Nathan differ from the attitudes of Orleanna and Adah? How do these different viewpoints affect the text?

In short, Leah worships her father. She longs for his approval and longs to spend time with him whenever she can. She believes that he "has been singled out for a life of trial, as Jesus was." Leah's devotion to her father is so great that she does not hesitate to compare her father to the savior. On the other hand, Adah's narrative section treated Nathan with mild contempt, and Orleanna's section referred to him as a conqueror, and as a man who could never love her. Because the narrators all have differing opinions of Nathan, the reader is able to see a more complete picture of the many aspects of Nathan. Additionally, the divergent viewpoints allow the reader to see how Nathan's imposing character has affected each narrator quite differently.

Chapter Seven: Rachel

1. How does Rachel further reveal herself to be very superficial in this chapter?

Rachel obsesses over her appearance, even in the Congo. In addition, she is constantly criticizing the natives for their lack of fashion sense. For Rachel, wearing a red plaid and pink floral print together is as bad as wearing nothing at all. In addition, she reveals that she has no respect for the customs of the natives. Even as they are participating in the Easter pageant, Rachel remarks that she sees no need for them to be so "African" about it.

2. Was the Easter picnic on the riverbank a success for the Prices?

For Nathan Price, the riverbank picnic is a failure because he didn't perform even one baptism. Although Orleanna had slaved over a stove preparing enough fried chicken for the entire village, Nathan is unimpressed with the way Easter Sunday has turned out for his congregation. On the other hand, the village children are very pleased with the picnic and the chicken, and the picnic serves to endear Orleanna to the natives. Nathan, in his contemplation of baptism, fails to notice Orleanna's contribution.

Chapter Eight: Ruth May

1. How have the roles of Rachel and Adah become reversed in the Congo?

Ruth May points out that the natives stare at her and her whole family. But they especially stare at Rachel, with her shockingly blond hair and pale skin. In the Congo, Rachel has become an oddity. Adah, on the other hand, fits in more seamlessly in the Congo than she ever had in America. So many of the natives are disabled or disfigured in some way that Adah does not stand out. The one family member who always used to draw stares has become the only family member who doesn't attract attention.

2. During Nathan and Orleanna's discussion about the natives' bodies, which of the two adults has a more accurate view of life in the Congo?

Nathan and Orleanna's argument is based around whether the natives value their bodies or not. Nathan believes that "they are broken in body and soul," primarily out of ignorance of a proper way of living and working. Orleanna, on the other hand, understands that life in the Congo is exacting and difficult. She understands that the natives work as well as they can with what they have, and that this work takes a hard toll on their bodies. Orleanna's view is less simplistic than Nathan's, revealing that she understands life in the Congo far better than he does.

3. What does Orleanna's disagreement with Nathan reveal about her character?

Orleanna is not merely a pawn for Nathan. As difficult as it is for her, she holds different opinions than Nathan does and voices them very carefully. Although Nathan dominates Orleanna, she is not a completely broken woman, and she sometimes still has the courage to carefully stand up for her own beliefs.

4. Why do you think the reader experiences Orleanna and Nathan's disagreement through the narration of Ruth May? What effect does Ruth May's simple narration have on the tone?

Ruth May, as the youngest of the narrators, always presents events in the most straightforward fashion. Ruth May does not attempt to analyze the impact of Orleanna's disagreement; rather, she thinks only of the punishment she would have gotten if she had talked back like her mother. Ruth May's fear of the "razor strop" serves to indicate her fear of her father, further reinforcing how each member of the family has a different attitude toward Nathan.

Chapter Nine: Adah

1. How does Adah's frequent use of palindromes affect the text?

Adah sees the world differently than the other characters, thanks in part to her brain condition. She discovers new things within books as she reads them back-to-front after reading them in the normal way. From this, the reader learns that Adah has different ways of viewing the world, serving to explain, at least partially, why she thinks of the Congo so differently from the rest of her family. In addition, her palindromes often reveal her inner feelings about people. For example, Adah prefers to spell Leah's name "Lee." This is because that makes her, as Adah says, "From that back-court position from which I generally watch her—the slippery length of muscle that she is." Adah's palindromes drastically set the style of her narration apart from the other narrators.

2. How is the oval white china platter important?

The platter is the only beautiful thing in the Prices' house. Everything else is dirty, mismatched, or rough. The plate's perfection draws attention to it. As Adah says, "If we forget ourselves we might worship it." The plate seems almost holy in the setting of the Congo.

3. What does the destruction of the garden indicate? How does Nathan respond to its destruction?

Planting the garden was Nathan's attempt to civilize the Congo and, eventually, the whole of Africa. The garden in its original, flat state is indicative of Nathan's arrogance. After the deluge, the garden has been completely destroyed by the rushing water. All of the seeds, even those that had already sprouted, had been uprooted and washed away. This indicates the inadequacy of Nathan's knowledge and plans for the Congo. Even his garden cannot survive without bending to the will of the Congo. In response to the deluge, Nathan rebuilds his garden, this time using the flood-proof hills that Mama Tataba suggested in the beginning. Nathan, although arrogant, is not stupid.

4. How does Adah's tone illustrate Nathan's arrogance, even as he is replanting the garden?

In her narration, Adah points out that Nathan has been influenced by Africa. However, Adah does not present this as a redeeming quality. Rather, she employs a scornful tone, saying, "No one can say he does not learn his lesson, though it might take a deluge, and though he might never admit in this lifetime that it was not his own idea in the first place." Even as Adah sees her father bending his will to Africa, she knows that his arrogant attitude will not change.

Chapter Ten: Leah

1. How does Leah's attitude toward Nathan differ from Adah's in the previous chapter?

Leah is still entirely devoted to her father and to his mission, unlike Adah, who ends the previous chapter with a tone of scorn toward Nathan. Leah likens her father to a pure soul and says that he is the anchoring force in her life that summer.

2. Orleanna's devastation over the ruined cake mixes further develops what theme?

Orleanna cries, "We brought all the wrong things," as she laments over the ruined Betty Crocker cake mixes. She now realizes how grossly inappropriate the things she brought are. She, and the rest of her family, had virtually no knowledge of the Congo before they came and set off with items that would have served them well in Georgia, not in Africa. From Nathan's hammer to the seeds for the garden to the Betty Crocker cake mixes, the Prices find that the things they have brought are useless on African soil. This develops the theme of the arrogance of the Prices and of the Western world. The Prices were too arrogant—too convinced of the wisdom of their own culture—to respect Africa as a place not in need of their help.

3. Why do none of the girls betray their mother's profanity to their father?

The girls feel that sometimes their mother needs to be protected from their father. Leah remembers, even as a child, protecting her mother from Nathan's anger. The girls refuse to tell their father that Methuselah learned the profanity from their mother, even when it means punishment for them. Even Leah, who thinks of her father as saintly and holy, recognizes that Orleanna does not deserve punishment from Nathan.

4. Explain the significance of the simile: "My father wears his faith like the bronze breastplate of God's foot soldiers, while our mother's is more like a good cloth coat with a secondhand fit."

Leah uses this simile to describe how Nathan is seemingly immune to damage while Orleanna is more vulnerable. Nathan's faith protects him from damage, like armor would for a soldier. Orleanna's, on the other hand, is not as durable or protective. The simile does indicate that Orleanna's faith suits her well, but Leah thinks that it is not nearly as strong as Nathan's—it cannot protect her.

Chapter Eleven: Adah

1. What theme does Nathan's disastrous fish feast develop?

Nathan's attempt to feed the entire village with fish is successful at first. His use of dynamite killed enough fish to feed the entire village. However, the village ends up with thousands more dead fish than they can possibly eat, and the fish rot along the sides of the riverbank. Adah claims it is a "holiday of waste" rather than of abundance. This further develops the theme of cultural arrogance. Every improvement that Nathan tries to bestow upon the Congo ends up backfiring, demonstrating that his methods do not work in the Congo.

2. What is the significance of Adah's snmyhymns?

Adah writes her own version of hymns, based around palindromes. She calls them her own "perverse hymns that can be sung equally well forward or backward." Like many of Adah's other palindromes, her snmyhymns demonstrate her contempt for her father's religion, as well as her unusual way of thinking backwards. Adah's snmyhymns contain themes that are in opposition to traditional religious themes in hymns, further demonstrating her contempt.

3. Where is the irony in Nathan's parable about the fan belt?

Nathan tells the story of the Mercedes truck with the broken fan belt in an effort to teach his family the importance of adaptability. Since Nathan himself is so rigid and stubborn, the moral of the story is laced with irony. Nathan, for example, is completely unwilling to compromise about baptism for the villagers, even though it is obvious to Adah that the natives recoil when he mentions it.

4. How does this chapter shed light on Nathan's attitude toward women? How is it significant that Adah narrates this chapter?

Adah is the most observant of all the narrators. She describes the apparent attitudes and body language of her family as much as she relates their actual words. Adah emphasizes Nathan's arrogant attitude as he tells his parable about the Mercedes truck. He treats his family like they are morons, speaking to them in a condescending fashion. Most annoying to Adah is his sigh after he tells the parable, "the great sigh of the put-upon male." In every chapter that Adah has narrated so far, she has included at least one reference to Nathan's sexism. Adah has a greater insight than any of the other narrators into how Nathan feels about women. Adah, as an outsider even among her family, is always keenly aware of Nathan's attitude toward the "poor females" surrounding him.

Chapter Twelve: Leah

1. How do the events in this chapter serve to shake Leah's faith?

Leah has been taught to believe in justice. She believes that for hard work, there will be rewards from God. When Nathan realizes why the garden plants are not sprouting anything edible, Leah feels that her faith has been shaken. She says, "We had worked so hard, and for what? I felt confusion and dread. I sensed that the sun was going down on many things I believed in." She is also disturbed to see her father appearing unsure when he has always been confident to the point of arrogance.

2. Why does Nathan release Methuselah? What does this suggest about his character?

Nathan does not release Methuselah out of any lofty notion of the importance of freedom of self-reliance. Rather, Nathan sets Methuselah free out of annoyance and anger. He does not care at all for the safety of the family pet; he only wants the loud, annoying bird out of his house. This emphasizes the fact that Nathan has little tolerance for impertinence or cheekiness and has a potential for violence.

Book Two: The Revelation

Chapter Thirteen: Orleanna

1. What does the title of Book Two foreshadow?

Like the title of Book One, Book Two's title also has an explicit Biblical connection. Revelation, the last book in the Bible, foretells of the end-times, and revelation means "the making known of something previously secret or unknown." Thus, the title of Book Two foreshadows new knowledge for the Price family in the Congo, and perhaps that knowledge will be revolutionary and dangerous, as in the Book of Revelation.

2. How has Orleanna's tone changed from her earlier narration in chapter one?

Orleanna is overwhelmed with guilt, so overwhelmed that even catching a smell of something that reminds her of Africa makes her want to die. She is haunted by memories and her role in them. Her tone has become even more consumed with guilt than it was in the first chapter. She is also consumed with thoughts of her living daughters. She wonders if they manage to live in peace, even though she "remains hounded by judgment."

3. When is this section set? How does it differ from the other chapters?

Like the first section that Orleanna narrates, this section is set after the Prices have left the Congo. Unlike the sections that her daughters narrate, Orleanna is narrating after the events in the Congo have occurred. Thus, she has the benefit (or curse, depending on one's perspective), of hindsight. This hindsight contributes to her immobilizing feelings of guilt and blame.

4. What has Orleanna discovered about the Kikongo language?

Orleanna realizes that Kikongo is not exactly spoken but sung. Small differences in intonation or in the speed with which words are pronounced can change the meaning of a word entirely. For example, "Tata Nzolo," a hymn that the Prices sing in church, can mean either "Father in Heaven" or "Father of Fish Bait."

5. Explain the significance of Orleanna seeing Nathan reborn "with a stone in place of his heart."

Nathan attempts to compromise with Tata Ndu on his doctrine of baptism, suggesting a sprinkling rather than full immersion. The chief accepts this compromise but refuses to abandon polygamy. When Nathan hears this, he believes that compromise has no place in the Congo. For only a few chapters, Nathan showed a small ability to adapt. Following this conversation with the chief, however, Nathan believes that compromise should never be an option during his missionary work. The stone in the place of his heart represents his close-mindedness and his absolute refusal to bend his will to Africa.

The Things We Learned

Chapter Fourteen: Leah

1. How does Leah's opinion about Tata Boanda's two wives and her relationship with Pascal develop her character?

Leah is becoming more religiously confused as the novel progresses. She knows that Tata Boanda has two wives and sees that unambiguously as a sin. However, she is not sure what the correct repentance for this sin is, because she sees that both of the wives would suffer if Tata Boanda were to divorce one of them. Leah came to the Congo with an unambiguous moral high ground. As the novel progresses, the reader sees her certainty and her faith slipping. Leah's character also slowly develops away from her cultural arrogance because of the time she spends with Pascal. Pascal teaches Leah survival skills, disguised as childhood games, and Leah is struck by how much more skilled Pascal is than she. She says, "For the first time ever I felt a stirring of anger against my father for making me a white preacher's child from Georgia."

2. How does Ruth May befriend the children, and how does that develop her character?

Ruth May manages to befriend the children of the village by starting a game of "Mother May I?" in the Prices' front yard. Despite the fact that Ruth May does not speak a word of Kikongo, she brings all the children together in a chant of "Mother May I?" which they mispronounce. Ruth May has been described several times in the novel as fearless and wild. Finally the reader is able to see Ruth May's fearlessness in action. Leah says that Ruth May "appears to be capable of leaping tall buildings with the force of her will." Ruth May's game of "Mother May I?" is an indication of this force.

Chapter Fifteen: Ruth May

1. What does Ruth May find in the back of Mr. Axelroot's plane on the way to Stanleyville? How does Axelroot respond, and what does this reveal about his character?

Ruth May notices diamonds in small cloth bags in the back of the plane. Axelroot threatens Ruth May if she tells anyone what she found, claiming that Orleanna will get sick and die if Ruth tells anyone. Besides revealing that Axelroot is so ruthless a man that he will threaten a child, this discovery also reveals that Axelroot is involved in diamond smuggling.

2. How does the doctor in Stanleyville feel about what the Belgians have done to the Congo, and what theme does this develop?

Although Nathan is attempting to argue that the presence of the Belgians has done good in the Congo, the doctor disagrees. He believes that Belgium—and the Western world as a whole—has done little more than take advantage of the Congo. There is obvious guilt and culpability in the doctor's tone, further developing the theme of the burden of guilt, even on a national level.

3. What does the doctor's mention of Patrice Lumumba foreshadow?

The doctor in Stanleyville speaks of Lumumba as if he presents a real political force, even though Nathan obviously disagrees. Nathan considers Lumumba to be nothing more than another uncivilized African, but the doctor claims that he has the ability to inspire and excite the people of the Congo. The doctor's claim that Lumumba will have a following larger than Jesus foreshadows the impact that Lumumba will have later in the story.

4. This chapter is full of important political facts and foreshadowing. What might the author be suggesting by having Ruth May, the youngest Price daughter, narrate this chapter?

At several points in this chapter, Ruth May boasts, "I was the youngest, but I had something to tell." Ruth May is privy to important information in this chapter that the other Prices know nothing about. By putting important political information in the mouth of the youngest narrator, Kingsolver indicates that even those who don't fully understand such political forces are still affected by them.

Chapter Sixteen: Rachel

1. How does Rachel's description of Anatole further develop her character?

Rachel notices immediately that Anatole is an eligible bachelor, at least compared to the other men in the village. However, Rachel immediately decides that, even if she were Congolese herself, she would not consider Anatole for a husband because of the scars on his face. Despite the fact that Anatole is intelligent and singlehandedly runs the school in the village, all Rachel can think about are the "nerve-jangling scars" on his face. This further emphasizes Rachel's superficiality.

2. What does Nathan's response to Anatole's message suggest about his character?

Although Anatole comes to dinner merely to deliver the Chief's message—not necessarily to endorse it—Nathan treats Anatole as if he agrees absolutely with every part of the Chief's message. Despite Anatole's protestation that he is not Nathan's enemy, Nathan treats him as such. Nathan divides the world into black and white categories, leaving no room for ambiguity or uncertainty. In throwing Anatole out of the house, Nathan further demonstrates his close-mindedness.

3. What role does Tata Kuvudundu play in the village? What role did the Prices think he played in the village?

Tata Kuvudundu is a respected priest in Kilanga. The natives go to him especially for problems related to adultery or barrenness. The Prices, however, believe him to be the town drunk, certainly not a priest, until Anatole informs them otherwise.

4. What is the symbolism behind the oval white china platter in this chapter?

Nathan intentionally breaks the platter after Anatole leaves. The platter is Orleanna's "one pretty thing in this big old mess we have to live in," according to Rachel. For Orleanna, the beauty of the platter serves as a connection to her former home, a place where the artificial beauty of the platter is commonplace. When Nathan breaks it, he breaks Orleanna's hope, leaving her eyes blank. This is also the most violent, cruel, and spiteful act that the reader has seen from Nathan thus far.

Chapter Seventeen: Adah

1. How is Methuselah a symbol for the Congo?

Adah notices that Methuselah never ventures far from the Prices' home. The parrot does not even find food for himself, instead waiting for someone to bring him some. Adah notices that, even though the parrot has been set free, he does not know how to survive on his own. He cannot even fly because his muscles are so atrophied from his lifetime of captivity. The Congo, long dominated and ruled by Western influence, has become as crippled as Methuselah. As the Congo's independence day approaches, the parrot's plight foreshadows the plight the Congo itself will face.

2. How does Adah's escape from the lion develop her doubt about religion?

Interestingly, the fact that the lion chose a yearling bushbuck over Adah as its prey does nothing to develop or strengthen Adah's faith in the God of her father. Rather, Adah sees this chance escape from the predator as a lesson about the transience of religion. She realizes that, because the winds changed and lured the lion away from her, the religion her father professes has gained relevance in the minds of the villagers. Her father's Christian god "draws in the breath of life and rises," while Tata Ndu's gods diminish slightly in comparison, all thanks to a shift in the breeze.

Chapter Eighteen: Leah

1. How does Leah's recollection of Adah's experience with the lion differ from Adah's account in the previous chapter? How is this small difference significant to the novel?

Leah mentions Adah's experience with the lion with a tone of resentment because of the extra attention Adah receives from Nathan as a result. Leah says that Adah is bent on her own destruction. She says, "No one tells her to go off trailing through the jungle all alone. She could have stayed with me." Adah, on the other hand, says in the previous chapter that Leah always moves too fast for her to be able to keep up, especially while carrying the water pail. This difference in recollection is significant because it reveals the subjective nature of the narrators. The reader has no way to be sure which of the two versions is closest to the truth, so the reader must keep an open mind while reading these contradictory versions.

2. How does Nathan use Adah's escape from the lion to his advantage? How does Leah respond to this?

The natives are astounded by Adah's escape from the predator, and as a result, attendance at Nathan's church goes up. Nathan thus bestows more attention on Adah than usual, even going so far as to put his arm around her in public. Although there is no real fatherly love in this action, Leah is nonetheless jealous of the attention, as she is always trying to win favor with her father. Leah says, "something had come between Adah and me for the worse."

3. How do the girls' separate reactions to their hope-chest projects illuminate each of their characters?

Rachel is thrilled by the notion of a hope chest, and she throws herself into her projects. Rachel hopes for nothing more than to return home and lead a normal life, which of course includes marriage. Her devotion to her hope chest reveals her desire to escape Africa unchanged and to find a man who will feed her vanity about her appearance. For Adah's hope chest projects, she does "weird, morbid things," using black to decorate her projects. This reveals Adah's continued indifference toward anything that her parents find desirable. Leah, although she finds the cross-stitch pattern for her project beautiful, has trouble visualizing herself married. She claims to not want a husband, revealing her independent nature in spite of Nathan's sexism.

Chapter Nineteen: Ruth May

1. How does Ruth May interpret Adah's experience with the lion? From whom does this idea originate? How is this significant?

Ruth May believes what Nelson tells her about Adah's experience with the lion. She believes that Jesus turned Adah into a bushbuck just before the lion pounced, and when the lion bit the bushbuck, "the real Adah disappeared from there and turned up okay on our porch." Again, this is significant because it indicates subjectivity and a discrepancy between the narrators' views of the same event. Although the reader will find it fairly obvious that Ruth May's interpretation is not literally what happened, Ruth May demonstrates her childish willingness to believe anything she hears, whether it is about Congolese beliefs or Nathan's religion.

2. What is the significance of Ruth May's claim that she is "scared of Jesus, too?"

Ruth May is still young enough to believe wholeheartedly in all of the Kilanga superstitions that Nelson warns her about. She is only a child and thus relatively simplistic. For her, Jesus is closely related to Nathan, since it is Nathan who is constantly preaching about Jesus. Since Ruth May fears Nathan's violence and anger, she also fears Jesus. Her young mind cannot completely separate the two.

3. In this chapter, does Leah draw closer to or farther from her father? How?

Leah draws away from her father in this chapter. Initially, she thought she had found his approval, as he defended Leah's right to keep her pet owl, despite Congo superstitions. However, as soon as Leah revels in this approval by telling her family that Nathan has stuck up for her, Nathan hits her and punishes her for the sin of pride. Leah is so struck by this hypocrisy and cruelty that she leaves the house for hours, causing Orleanna great anxiety. Even Ruth May's narration reveals Nathan's coldness as he berates the rest of the family for worrying about Leah.

Chapter Twenty: Rachel

1. Explain Nathan's allusion to the Tower of Babel. How is it significant?

The story of the Tower of Babel is found in Genesis. After the great flood, all of mankind spoke one language. They gathered together to build a tower high enough to reach heaven. God was not pleased with this, so he confused their language, making it so that the people suddenly spoke many different languages and thus couldn't understand each other. Nathan likens the Congo to this story because of the sheer amount of different languages spoken within the country. Nathan believes that because of these language barriers, the Congo will not be able to achieve independence; in fact, he believes that the natives of the Congo "don't have the temperament or the intellect for such things." Nathan uses the story as a way to insult the intelligence of the natives and to express his belief that they will never be in control of their own country.

2. How does Nathan's stubborn response to the Underdowns' suggestion that his family leave at once change how the reader views his character?

The Underdowns say, in no uncertain terms, that it would be dangerous for the Prices to remain in the Congo, now that independence is so close. The Underdowns themselves plan to leave, even though they have lived in the Congo for years. Nathan, however, stubbornly refuses to accept the idea that there could even be a successful election in the Congo, much less full independence. Nathan reveals himself here to be much more stubborn and unconcerned with his family than he has ever revealed before. As Rachel observes, "Father would sooner watch us all perish one by one than listen to anybody but himself." This statement is likely not an exaggeration, given Nathan's almost unbelievable disregard for the safety of his family in the Congo.

3. How does Rachel's narration give the Underdowns' news even greater impact?

Rachel's method of narration in this chapter consists largely of transcribing the conversation between the Underdowns and her parents. Rachel is the least perceptive of the narrators. Thus, the reader knows that if Rachel has noticed how distressed Orleanna has become, the situation must be dire. Rachel's simple-minded selfishness also serves this chapter well. She thinks simply, "Home, home, home, home," when she hears of the trouble in the Congo, displaying a single-mindedness borne out of fear. Her fear helps convey to the reader the potential danger of the situation better than the responses of any other narrator would.

Chapter Twenty-One: Adah

1. What theme is emphasized with Adah's interest in Kikongo?

Adah is fascinated with the Kikongo language because she finds it "even more cynical than [her] own." Adah adores the fact that one word can have many different meanings, depending on how it is pronounced. The theme of the power of language is further developed and emphasized as Adah experiments with Kikongo.

2. Who is Adah referring to when she speaks of "those of doubtful righteousness"? What theme does this emphasize?

"Those of doubtful righteousness" refers to those outside of the Congo—Americans specifically, but the whole Western world by association. Adah realizes that Americans consider the Congolese to be entirely uncivilized, unenlightened, and perhaps even evil. Adah, however, is astute enough to recognize that part of the reason the western world condemns the Congo so fiercely is because of its own imperfections, its own doubtful righteousness. Adah's chapters serve to continue to emphasize the cultural arrogance of the Western world.

3. What does the last sentence in this chapter foreshadow?

The foreboding tone of Adah's last sentence serves to foreshadow tragedy for the Prices. Although the Prices have been in Kilanga for months and have attempted to learn the language and understand the customs, Adah realizes that they will never belong. Their "Baptist ears" will always be unable to differentiate subtle differences, which will lead to their destruction.

4. Explain Adah's allusion to the red wheelbarrow.

The Red Wheelbarrow is a poem by William Carlos Williams. The entirety of the poem is reprinted in the first sentence of this chapter. Adah, in her characteristic way, then takes the poem and writes it backwards. The author of the poem is a writer who was also a physician, and Adah calls him a "doctor poet." She also refers to Tata Kuvudundu as a doctor poet, and Adah likens the objects that he leaves outside the Prices' home to the objects in the red wheelbarrow poem.

Chapter Twenty-Two: Rachel

1. What do Rachel's feelings about the newly elected government reveal about her character?

Rachel reveals her racist tendencies in this chapter, as she has elsewhere in the novel. Rachel takes her father at his word when he tells her that Patrice Lumumba has won the election mainly because of his "natural animal magnetism." Neither Rachel nor Nathan can entertain the idea that Lumumba's party has won based on superior political strategies or ideas. Surely, they believe, the only physical attractiveness could explain why the Congolese would vote for someone.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Ruth May

1. Why does Orleanna retreat to her bed after Leah and Nathan leave?

Orleanna has spent several of the preceding chapters pleading with Nathan to allow the family to leave the Congo. She has begged Nathan to let them leave, reminding him that he's putting their very lives in jeopardy. When the charter plane arrives—the plane that was intended to take the family away from the Congo—only Nathan and Leah board, heading to Leopoldville to observe the Independence Day ceremonies. As Orleanna watches the plane leave, her misery overtakes her. She sees plane as her last hope to get out of the Congo to protect her family. Seeing it take off without her family on it is more than she can bear.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Leah

1. When Leah notices the contrast between the splendor of the Underdowns' house and the Congolese shacks, how does she respond? What does this reveal about her character?

Despite having grown up under the rule of Nathan Price, Leah can't help but notice the injustice around her. She is struck by the splendor of the Underdowns' house and the apparent selfishness that she sees Mrs. Underdown exhibit. Leah feels that their houseboy is virtually entitled to steal a kilo of sugar from the house of plenty. Leah is continuing to develop a sense of compassion and understanding for the plight of the Congolese, despite her father's continued judgmental close-mindedness.

2. Where is the irony in Nathan's assertion that Americans would "never stand for this kind of unequal treatment?"

Nathan's statement is ironic because Americans do stand for this sort of treatment, even if Nathan thinks they never would. Segregation and inequality are present in American society, as the reader knows from Ruth May's mention of "Jimmy Crow" and the curse of the Tribes of Ham.

3. What is the significance of Lumumba calling the Congo "the heart of light?"

Lumumba may be alluding to Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, a classic novella about Africa. The novella's title is purposely ambiguous; it can refer to both the center of Africa and the evils lurking within every human being. Lumumba turns the phrase on its end, envisioning an Africa that is free of Western influences and thus free of the darkness that has plagued it.

Chapter Twenty-Five: Adah

1. Why does Adah call the day of Methuselah's death his independence day?

It would be more common to call the day that Nathan released Methuselah from his cage and threw him into the jungle an independence day. Instead, Adah calls the day of his death his independence day. Adah says this to draw a parallel between Methuselah and the Congo. The similarities between Methuselah and the Congo are obvious, as both have been ruled by a foreign power for a long time, and both have been presented with sudden freedom. As Adah further likens the two, she foreshadows the fate of the new Republic of Congo.

2. Given the themes, motifs, and symbols already expressed in the novel, why do you think Nathan is the only Price who does not narrate?

Thus far, the novel has portrayed the story of the Prices and of the Congo from a non-traditional viewpoint. By giving the power of narration to only women, the same story unfolds in a much different way. At the same time, Barbara Kingsolver makes the point that women do have something valuable to say, and that their perspectives do matter. Additionally, each of the Price narrators has expressed how she feels about Nathan and about his influence on her life. Nathan's voice as a narrator would be out of place when the novel is viewed through this lens.

Book Three: The Judges

Chapter Twenty-Six: Orleanna

1. What do you think the title of this book might foreshadow?

Based on the Biblical quote on the title page of book three, this book could foreshadow major problems that Nathan will have in trying to spread Christianity; that is, it may foreshadow that the gods of Kilanga will be thorns in his side. Alternatively, it may foreshadow the inverse: that Nathan's Christian god will be a thorn to the Kilanga natives. Either way, the title and the quote leading this book seem to indicate major conflict between "the inhabitants of this land" and the Price family.

2. Why does Orleanna begin this chapter with reasons women can't throw stones at their husbands? What motif does this exemplify?

Orleanna, again apparently addressing her child or children, and again speaking with a tone of incredible guilt, begins this chapter trying to explain why she did not leave Nathan or the Congo. She claims to have not enough power or influence, and she claims that Nathan's religious fervor influenced her as well. Her lament over the plight of being a woman exemplifies the motif of the struggles that women face.

3. How does Orleanna liken herself to the Congo? Why?

Orleanna refers to herself as "occupied as if by a foreign power." Nathan's will has completely dominated her, conquered her as one country conquers another. By the time her children were born, Orleanna no longer recognized herself as the free spirit she was before she met Nathan Price. Orleanna has ended up with the same lot as the Congo, the "poor Congo, barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom." By linking herself with the Congo, Orleanna tries to absolve herself of some responsibility. Like the Congo, she is a conquest, a victim of a stronger power. Orleanna does not deny all responsibility, obviously, as she is racked with guilt. But by linking herself with the Congo, Orleanna tries to place some of the blame where it belongs: on the arrogant, imperialistic conquerors.

The Things We Didn't Know

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Leah

1. Why is it significant that Leah feels “a throb of dread” when she arrives back in Kilanga?

Leah feels this dread upon her arrival back in Kilanga because she realizes how different her circumstances are now. No one is awaiting her arrival and no great feast has been planned. Now that the Congo is independent, Leah knows that her status in the village could change quickly. Additionally, it is very significant that it is Leah who feels this dread. The other Price family members have been doubting Nathan for a while, and now Leah is beginning to have real, persistent doubts as well.

2. How has life changed for the Prices now that the Congo is independent?

Without their stipend of fifty dollars a month, the Prices now truly have to survive in the Congo just as the natives do. They can no longer buy meat or fish from their neighbors, so daily life has become a great deal more difficult for them.

3. Explain the significance of Nelson misunderstanding the story of Job.

Like everything else the Prices have brought with them, their Bible stories have become changed on African soil. Rather than understanding the story of Job as a story of a test of faith, Nelson understands it is a story of a curse. Leah tries to explain the difference, but Nelson merely shrugs away the explanation. Nelson's understanding of Job's story is just one of countless examples of how Africa has changed what the Prices brought.

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Adah

1. What theme is emphasized as Adah speaks of Nathan's “wildly half-baked Kikongo”?

The power of language is a theme that is receiving more and more attention as the Price family learns more about the language. Of all the Prices, Nathan is the least interested in learning about the language. As a result, his sermons suffer from mispronunciations that change the meaning of the sermon entirely. Adah recognizes the arrogance and tragedy in her father's mispronunciations.

2. How does this chapter further develop the theme of guilt?

In this chapter, Adah explicitly recognizes that she and her family are guilty by association. Although they may not be as arrogant, flawed, and casual with mispronunciations as Nathan is, Adah realizes that they are not innocent. They align themselves too closely with the astoundingly egotistical man to be considered innocent, Adah believes. “We his daughters and wife are not innocent either,” she says. She sees herself and the rest of her family as dominated by Nathan, and she sees no way to escape this guilt by association.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Ruth May

1. What is Ruth May's primary feeling toward her father?

Ruth May fears Nathan. Although she believes that Jesus wants her to love everyone, Ruth May knows that she does not love her father. She voices this fear to Orleanna, whispering, "I hope he never comes back."

2. Why do you think this chapter is so short compared to those around it?

Both Ruth May and Orleanna are bed-ridden at this point in the novel, and this is a chapter that Ruth May narrates. Thus, the abbreviated length of the chapter could be indicative of the difference between the complex situations of those who are active and involved in life and the hazy, imprecise experiences of those who are sick and bed-ridden.

Chapter Thirty: Adah

1. How does Nathan respond to Orleanna and Ruth May's sickness, and what does this say about his character?

Nathan believes that Orleanna simply needs to pull herself together rather than rest or tend to her illness. He seems to believe that Orleanna is disobeying the will of God by capitulating to her illness. Nathan pays no attention to Orleanna whatsoever. Nathan continues to prove himself to be cruel and careless, regardless of what he may preach.

2. Why does Adah claim that the Price girls have lost their childhoods overnight? What does this allude to?

With Orleanna bed-ridden, the Price girls suddenly have the responsibility of caring for the family thrust upon them. Although the girls were more than competent in Georgia, they have virtually no survival skills in the Congo. This harkens back to Leah's revelation in chapter fourteen about childhood: that "the whole idea and business of Childhood was nothing guaranteed," and was likely invented by white people. The children of the Congo do not get to enjoy a childhood, and now neither do the Price girls. They have been forced to suddenly mature in order to survive.

3. How does Adah's wordplay in this chapter challenge Nathan's idea that the Lord works in mysterious ways?

Although Adah keeps her contemptuous ideas about religion to herself, she makes sure the reader is aware of how she feels with her wordplay. When Nathan tells Orleanna that the Lord works in mysterious ways, Adah thinks, "Serious delirious imperious weary us deleterious ways," trying out rhyming words, all with negative connotations. To Adah, Nathan's God is not mysterious, only harmful. Her wordplay expresses her disdain towards a god who would put the Prices in such a predicament.

Chapter Thirty-One: Leah

1. When Leah asks if her country has done something bad, Anatole responds, “Not you, Béene.” How is this significant?

When Leah asks her question, she reveals that she feels complicit—and thus guilty by association—in anything America does. Her use of the pronoun “we” is especially important. She does not know what Anatole is about to accuse America of doing, but she nonetheless asks the question as if she were involved. Anatole’s response, vindicating her (but not her country), pleases her very much. This exchange develops the theme of guilt, and it also establishes Leah’s feelings for Anatole. She does not know why Anatole can make her heart rejoice, but he can.

2. Leah and Anatole’s conversation covers many topics. What theme (or themes) of the novel does the conversation emphasize?

Leah and Anatole speak briefly of cultural guilt (see question above), a key theme of the novel. However, this is not the only theme apparent in their conversation. They speak at length of justice, of what would be fair for the Congo on a global scale. They also speak of justice on a local scale, as they discuss the village children who have died in the recent epidemic. Leah asserts that no child should ever have to die, and that it’s not fair for people to die young. Anatole, on the other hand, informs Leah that if everyone lived to an old age, the village and its resources would be unsustainable. This idea of justice and balance is a prevalent theme throughout the novel.

3. What does the conversation between Leah and Anatole reveal about Leah’s changing attitudes towards the Congolese?

Several times during the conversation, Leah thinks of how few real differences there are between the Congolese and her family. At one point, she even thinks, “People young and old are more or less the same everywhere.” In addition, Leah subtly reveals her tender feelings toward Anatole in this chapter. For Leah to find a native of the Congo attractive reveals a major change from her close-minded stance at the beginning of the novel.

4. Why is the reader presented with news of tumultuous political events through Leah’s narration?

In this chapter, Leah’s narration is again characterized by an interest in people. Specifically, in this chapter, Leah is interested in Anatole, as the chapter recounts a long conversation between the two of them. The author chooses to present the political information in this way to demonstrate Leah’s interest in others, which is becoming one of Leah’s defining characteristics. Although the news that Anatole gives Leah is indicative of danger for whites in the Congo, Leah’s primary feeling after the conversation is not fear. Rather, she is interested in how ordinary Anatole is, and how pleasant her conversation with him was, because she knows this stands in direct contrast to the way most Americans view his race in the Congo.

5. How does the final paragraph of the chapter reveal a change in Leah's characterization?

Leah says that "it's frightening when things you love appear suddenly changed from what you have always known." Though she is referring to the optical illusion that makes Ruth May's "shadow legs" look like those of an antelope, the reader should recognize that she means more than she is saying. Her attitudes on several subjects—the United States' moral standing, her father, wealth and material possessions, and family—are all shown in this chapter to have changed substantially from what they were at the beginning of the novel.

Chapter Thirty-Two: Ruth May

1. Why is the reader presented with news of tumultuous political events through Ruth May's narration this time?

Ruth May receives the same news that Leah does, news of violence in Stanleyville and in other places in the Congo. Ruth May does not respond to this news in the same manner, however. Ruth May feels outright fear when she hears this news, as she is afraid that her family may be next. Kingsolver presents Ruth May's reaction directly following Leah's, demonstrating how differently these two narrators respond to the same information.

2. How do Nathan and Orleanna interpret "The meek shall inherit" differently?

Nathan uses that particular verse of scripture to apply to himself and his family, thinking that if they stay in the Congo to meekly follow God's will, God will protect them. Both Orleanna and Nathan have heard that the Congolese have been attacking whites in the cities. Orleanna understands the verse to apply to the natives of the Congo. She believes that they have been meek for years, under the rule of a foreign power, and that they are about to finally exercise their own power, or "inherit the earth."

3. What is Ruth May's *nkisi*, and what is its function? What might Nelson's giving the *nkisi* to Ruth May foreshadow?

Ruth May's nkisi is a small bone with a hole in the middle; Ruth May blows into it to put her spirit inside of it, and Nelson seals the hole to keep her spirit inside. Ruth May is to think of a safe place so that her spirit will go there if she dies.

Nelson's giving of the nkisi to Ruth May foreshadows that she will die. She has been sick for a long time; this is probably why Nelson gives her the nkisi.

Chapter Thirty-Three: Leah

1. How does Orleanna's newfound voice affect Leah?

Leah says that she is "shocked and frightened" to see Orleanna flout Nathan's authority, but then she confides that she feels something similar toward Nathan herself. Orleanna is voicing things that Leah would never say and is strengthening Leah's doubts as a result.

2. Discuss Leah's doubts about her father. What theme does her doubt develop?

Leah doubts her father more than ever in this chapter. The beginnings of these doubts come as she wonders whether they are really safe in the Congo and why Nathan doesn't protect his family even though he is the one responsible for keeping them in the Congo. Her doubts then expand to include much more than their current situation. She begins to doubt the "clean, simple laws" that Nathan uses to view the world. These laws include everything from his religion to his belief in the proper place of women. As Leah begins to thoroughly doubt one thing about her father, she begins to doubt everything about him and his lessons. Leah's doubts develop the theme of cultural arrogance, as Nathan represents cultural arrogance perfectly. In addition, her struggle to understand how she, as a woman, can fit into Nathan's plan highlights the motif of the plight of women.

Chapter Thirty-Four: Rachel

1. Contrast Brother Fowles's ideas about the Bible with Nathan's.

Brother Fowles looks at the Bible as a non-literal and manmade vessel for God's word. Fowles points out to the Price family that the Bible has been translated time and time again, and that he believes some of it has been lost in translation. He even claims that some parts of the Bible do not apply well in the Congo. Brother Fowles prefers to see God's word through nature, made fresh every day. Nathan, on the other hand, sees the Bible as absolute and flawless. He believes that attempting to dilute or change its message for the Congo is nothing short of sinful.

2. Contrast Brother Fowles's ideas about the Congolese with Nathan's.

Brother Fowles has great respect for the Congolese and for their faith. Even though they are not Christian, Brother Fowles sees how devout the natives are, saying that "Everything they do is with one eye to the spirit." Nathan, on the other hand, sees the Congolese as nothing more than heathens worshipping pagan gods. Brother Fowles has taken on the Congo as his home, embracing the Congo method of shaking hands and even taking a Congolese wife. Nathan would never consider letting the Congo influence him, as he sees everything about the Congo as unchristian and sinful.

3. How does Brother Fowles serve as Nathan's foil?

Brother Fowles, like Nathan, is a Christian missionary to the Congo. Beyond that similarity, Brother Fowles and Nathan serve as opposites to each other. Brother Fowles is flexible, open-minded, and respectful of the natives of the Congo and of their religion. He is willing to allow the Congo to change him, making him into a more effective missionary and a more helpful man. Nathan has none of these traits. Rather, he is rigid, stubborn, and arrogant. It is significant to note that Brother Fowles is very popular in the village, even with Tata Ndu. Nathan is quite unpopular; some of the villagers even hate him.

4. What lasting effect did Brother Fowles have on the doctrine of marriage in Kilanga?

Although Brother Fowles attempted to sell the idea of monogamy to the natives of Kilanga, he failed in that attempt. Nonetheless, Brother Fowles remained on speaking terms with Tata Ndu and ultimately convinced him to stop beating his wives. As a result, many private alters to Jesus appeared in the kitchens of Kilanga.

Chapter Thirty-Five: Adah

1. Why does Tata Ndu want to marry Rachel? What does this suggest about his character?

Although Nathan considers Tata Ndu his archenemy, Tata Ndu is not without compassion for the plight of the Prices. It is obvious that all of the Prices are thin and unhealthy because of the drought, and Tata Ndu wishes to help the Price family make ends meet. Since he knows Nathan is too proud to accept gifts, especially from him, the chief begins bargaining for Rachel's hand in marriage, presenting the Prices with gifts of food. This action reveals that the chief is not without compassion or sympathy, and that he wants to help the Prices survive even though Nathan treats him as if he were evil.

Chapter Thirty-Six: Leah

1. What is peculiar to Leah about the native system of government?

Unlike the system to which she is accustomed, the village of Kilanga does not govern itself on the idea that the majority rules. Rather, the inhabitants of the village argue, make deals, discuss, and debate until everyone is in agreement. The village requires unanimity before any major decision is reached. Leah finds this peculiar because she is unfamiliar with it as a system of governance.

2. What do the Prices find stuck to the wall behind Ruth May's bed?

They discover all of Ruth May's quinine pills, one for every week they have been in the Congo. It becomes obvious to the Prices that Ruth May must have malaria.

Chapter Thirty-Seven: Rachel

1. Look at the last paragraph of the chapter, in which Rachel says, “I prefer to remain anomalous.” How is this particular malapropism significant, and how do Rachel’s continued malapropisms define her character?

Rachel certainly means to say “anonymous” instead of “anomalous.” However, her mistaken use of language reveals a lot about her character. Rachel is obviously vain and not terribly concerned with education. She wishes to return to Georgia and lead a normal, American life, forgetting entirely about Africa. However, anomalous means deviating from what is standard, normal, or expected. This is exactly the opposite of what Rachel wants for her life. The irony inherent in her malapropisms indicates that Rachel is quite oblivious to the world around her. Her self-centered nature has not changed a bit since her arrival in the Congo.

Chapter Thirty-Eight: Ruth May

1. How does circumcision become a point of discussion for the Prices? How do Nathan and Orleanna respond?

In the Congo, it is apparently a requirement before marriage for a woman to undergo circumcision (which Ruth May mistakenly hears as “circus mission”). Both Orleanna and Nathan are horrified by the idea. Tellingly, Nathan uses this practice of circumcision as evidence of how much he still needs to teach the Congolese. Orleanna points out his hypocrisy, as this is the first time he’s demonstrated any concern at all for women. Yet he still neglects his daughters, endangering their lives by choosing to remain in the Congo.

2. In this chapter, Ruth May chooses where she will disappear if she uses her *nkisi*. Where does she choose?

Ruth may has chosen that her spirit will vanish and reappear somewhere in the branches of a tree. Her spirit will not inhabit the tree itself, but whatever she has chosen, she will be the “same color, same everything” as the tree.

Chapter Thirty-Nine: Rachel

1. How do Rachel’s sisters disappoint and anger her on her birthday?

Rachel, in her trademark self-centered fashion, is outraged when she doesn’t receive enough attention on her seventeenth birthday. Ruth May is still very ill, and has a very high fever, Adah gets stung by a scorpion, and Leah ignores her birthday entirely. Rachel assumes, of course, that all of these things have happened just to “detract attention away” from her.

Chapter Forty: Adah

1. What themes are emphasized by Nathan's mispronunciation of *bāngala*?

It is from this mispronunciation that the novel gets its name. Nathan is so oblivious to the complexities of the Kikongo language that, as he tries to declare that Jesus is precious and beloved, he instead declares that Jesus is poisonwood. He makes this meaningful mistake over and over again. This underlines the theme of cultural arrogance, as Nathan is so sure he is preaching the inerrant Truth that he ends up preaching the opposite. This mistake also underlines the theme of the power of language. Just a small error in pronunciation has caused Nathan's message to be threatening rather than redeeming.

2. Why is the fact that Adah is the first narrator to mention Nathan's mispronunciation consistent with her characterization?

Adah has been the narrator most interested in the culture and setting of her new surroundings since the beginning of the novel. In keeping with Adah's expert ability to observe her surroundings and to notice things her family does not, she is the first to point out Nathan's linguistic mistake. Adah remains the character most likely to notice Nathan's many ineptitudes in his interactions with the natives.

3. Discuss Adah's technique of spelling each of her family member's names backwards. What does this reveal?

Adah realizes that the Congo has changed her family. Because of her special relationship with language, Adah illustrates this by spelling their names in reverse, demonstrating the changes in their characters by the changes in the spelling. Tellingly, Nathan's name is virtually the same backwards as it is forwards, illustrating that he has not allowed the Congo to influence him. This demonstrates his inflexibility and close-mindedness, as he is still "the same man however you look at him."

4. What does Leah's growing interest in language reveal about her character?

The theme of the power of language is being more and more developed as the novel continues. Leah is demonstrating a newfound interest in learning languages, thanks to the fact that Anatole is her teacher. Adah recognizes this "strange behavior regarding men," noting the interest that Leah is taking in Anatole.

5. How do the natives feel about Leah's skill with a bow?

*The natives call Leah *bākala*—an insulting term—because they see her behavior as bizarre and unfeminine. This foreshadows future conflicts with the natives over Leah's newfound skill.*

6. Explain Adah's allusion to Hester Prynne.

Hester Prynne is the protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. Hester wears an embroidered scarlet A on her chest as punishment for adultery. Adah likens Leah's bow—which has the shape of the letter D—to Hester's scarlet letter. Just as Hester Prynne's letter advertised her crime to the rest of her town, Leah's bow advertises her breach of social customs in Kilanga.

Chapter Forty-One: Leah

1. How does this chapter emphasize the theme of cultural guilt?

In another of Leah and Anatole's long conversations, they discuss the fact that the schoolboys do not respect Leah's teaching. One of the reasons is that she is a girl, but the reason they discuss more than that is the color of Leah's skin and her nationality. Although Leah has been living in their village for more than a year, the schoolboys still see Leah as representative of a greedy nation. Leah wonders about whether the color of her skin makes Anatole hate her or think less of her. As Leah ponders these questions, the theme of cultural guilt is emphasized. Later in the novel, the theme of how to deal with this guilt will take precedence.

2. How does Leah refer to her father's ideas in this chapter, and how does it reveal the development of her character?

Leah continues to undergo many changes in her way of thinking. While speaking to Anatole, she describes her father's intentions as: "Crazy. It's like he's trying to put rubber tires on a horse." Leah realizes, finally, that what her father is trying to bring to the Congo does not suit the place. Leah is continually developing a sense of cultural understanding, while Nathan remains stubbornly attached to the ideas he brought with him. It is also significant that Leah speaks so candidly to Anatole. She speaks to him about her father's flaws without reservation, revealing the respect and affection she has for Anatole.

Chapter Forty-Two: Rachel

1. Why does Rachel not believe Axelroot's news that Lumumba is to be murdered? Does the reader have any knowledge that Rachel does not?

Rachel believes Axelroot is merely trying to impress her by claiming to have heard about these secret plans via his radio. Rachel believes that no one in the village owns a radio, so she believes he is making it up. However, the reader knows that Axelroot does, in fact, own a radio, thanks to Adah's spying.

2. Explain the significance of having the plot to murder Lumumba revealed during one of Rachel's narrative sections.

Of the five narrators, Rachel is the least concerned with the outside world. Even the six-year old Ruth May is more concerned with events in the Congo than Rachel, who cares about political events only when they directly affect her. Thus, at this point in the novel, it is quite unusual for Rachel to reveal to the reader such an important plan. Tellingly, Rachel is not even aware of the significance of the revelation from Axelroot. Instead of pondering what this revelation could mean, she instead thinks that Axelroot has made it up in order to kiss her again. Kingsolver has perhaps put this information in one of Rachel's sections in order to indicate that even world-changing news can mean nothing to someone so tragically self-centered. Additionally, Rachel is not prepared to believe this information because she is entirely devoted to America and believes that her own government can do no wrong.

Chapter Forty-Three: Adah

1. Discuss Nathan's belief that the Congolese mothers have "a lack of genuine grief." Is his belief correct?

Nathan finds that the mothers who have lost children to the epidemic do not wish to speak of their dead children. Nathan tries to explain to them that if the children had been baptized, they would now be in heaven. The mothers find this to be largely irrelevant, as a dead child, whether in heaven or not, is unable to help with survival in the Congo. Nathan believes the mothers take this tone because they are not attached to their children. In fact, the mothers take this tone because the function of religion in the Congo is quite different from the Christianity Nathan attempts to import. The mothers need their children alive in order to help them survive on a day-to-day basis. The idea of an afterlife matters little to the Congolese when life is so precarious and dangerous.

2. What does Adah's shock at discovering the murder plot reveal about her character?

Adah has always been a cynical, detached girl. Even when her family first arrived in the Congo, it was clear that she did not share the faith of her family, and that she often held them in contempt. However, Adah is genuinely shocked when she hears that the American president has orchestrated a plot to murder Lumumba. This reveals that even Adah had at least a certain amount of trust in her own culture. She had a faith that her own president would not seek to murder anyone. Her shock reveals that even the cynical Adah had a belief in the superiority of her own culture. In addition, her shock stands in direct contrast to Rachel's refusal to believe the same information in the previous chapter. Rachel simply dismisses the news because she finds it implausible; Adah, on the other hand, is intelligent and analytical enough to understand that it is true.

3. Why does Adah's shock wear off so quickly?

Although she was quite shocked to discover Eisenhower's plot, once Adah heard and accepted it, she began to understand it. She realizes it was foolish of her to assume that her own country could be exempt from corruption or wrongdoing. Because Adah is so adaptable and so cynical, it is not difficult for her to see her own president as a barbarian, "a man with a bone in his hair."

Chapter Forty-Four: Leah

1. Why is Leah so wracked with guilt, even as the nsongonya continue to threaten the village?

Leah realizes that in running for her life she has left behind her slow, crooked twin. She feels guilty for leaving her behind, even though she ran from the house out of terror and instinct. Leah feels that she has left Adah behind too many times, from their days in the womb together until this nightmare of ants.

Chapter Forty-Five: Rachel

1. How does Rachel's method of survival in the stampede of people reflect her character?

Rachel has proven herself to be self-centered many times in the novel. By jamming her elbows into the people beside her and allowing herself to be carried along "on everyone else's power," Rachel again reveals this selfishness and self-centeredness. In addition, she reveals a level of shrewdness that she has not revealed before. Although Rachel is not the smartest of the Prices, she exhibits a level of cunning in her survival skills. This newly revealed shrewdness in her character will serve her well later in her adulthood.

Chapter Forty-Six: Ruth May

1. What does Ruth May believe caused the ants to attack?

Ruth May, again revealing her fear of Jesus and her belief in a punishing God, believes that the ants are attacking out of vengeance. She believes that Jesus saw Leah feed the small ant to the ant lion and that this attack is the ants' revenge.

2. How does Ruth May escape the anguish of the nsongonya?

Ruth May imagines herself using the power of her nkisi. She goes to the safe place in her mind by becoming a green mamba snake in a tree, perfectly camouflaged and in a position to watch the whole world.

Chapter Forty-Seven: Adah

1. How does Adah surprise herself during the attack of the ants?

Adah surprises herself merely by wanting to survive. Adah has lived her life quite detached, almost a voluntary exile. She has always been a cynical observer, and that has been how she protects herself against the injustice of her life. This night is surprising for Adah because she finds that she wants to save herself. She finds that she considers her own life precious.

2. How does this event mark Adah's life's "dark center"?

Adah suffers an immense crisis during the attack of the ants. She suddenly realizes that she finds her own life precious, while also seeing Orleanna choose to save Ruth May's life instead of hers. Adah realizes she can no longer be merely a cynical observer—she is now an active participant in her life. This is made especially painful, as she sees her mother abandon her.

Chapter Forty-Eight: Leah

1. How does this chapter mark an abrupt and final change in Leah's faith?

While in the boat with Anatole, Leah describes an extremely important sensation: "I felt the breath of God grow cold on my skin." The nsongonya serves as the breaking point for Leah's belief in a god of justice. Before she came to the Congo, Leah believed in a simple God who rewarded good deeds and faith and punished bad deeds and disbelief. Since her arrival in the Congo, she has seen many things that have caused her to doubt her beliefs. The attack of the ants serves as the event that causes her to reject the clean, simple laws of her father's religion. She describes the night as "the night God turned his back on me."

2. What replaces Leah's faith immediately?

As soon as Leah suffers this final crisis of faith, her love for Anatole fills the void left behind. She repeats his name and describes this repetition as taking the place of prayer. Repeating Anatole's name anchors her and strengthens her, and this is the first time she tells him she loves him.

Book Four: Bel and the Serpent

Chapter Forty-Nine: Orleanna

1. How does this section narrated by Orleanna differ from her earlier sections? What theme is emphasized with this change?

In all of her previous chapters of the novel, Orleanna has focused on her family and personal feelings—most notably, guilt. In this section, however, she goes into detail regarding the national political events in occurring in the Congo when the Prices were in Kilanga. It is years later as she is narrating, and she is able to give details about Lumumba's capture and death because of a committee formed in Congress to investigate the events. Orleanna's tone is still full of guilt, even as she talks about events and decisions in which she took no part. This shift from the personal to the political emphasizes the theme of cultural guilt. Orleanna feels nearly as guilty about the actions her country took in the Congo as she feels about her own actions.

What We Lost

Chapter Fifty: Leah

1. How do the events in this chapter represent a climax in the struggle between Nathan and Tata Ndu?

Nathan has regarded Tata Ndu as his archenemy since their failure to compromise over baptism and polygamy. During the election held in Nathan's church, Tata Ndu allows his people to vote for or against Jesus Christ as God of Kilanga. In effect, this vote was as much a vote between Nathan Price and Tata Ndu as it was for or against Jesus. The villagers overwhelmingly vote against Jesus and, by default, against Nathan as well.

2. Why is Ruth May the only Price to vote in the election?

Ruth May is still young and naive enough to believe that Jesus is watching her every move. Thus, she proudly stands up to vote for the god she has been taught to love and fear. The other Prices do not vote out of a combination of a lack of faith and a fear of Nathan. Nathan finds the election to be blasphemy; thus, the Prices have no desire to participate and invoke Nathan's wrath for their blasphemy. In addition, it is quite possible that Leah or Adah would not want to vote for Jesus, and they are not foolish enough to vote against Christ right under the eyes of their father.

3. Explain the irony inherent in the vote at the church.

The vote against Jesus is ironic primarily because the natives use democracy—a system imported from the West—to depose Christianity—another system imported from the West. It is rather brilliant of Tata Ndu to use these two systems against each other. Americans and Europeans have long been telling the Congolese how wonderful both democracy and Jesus are; using one to discredit the other casts doubt on both.

Chapter Fifty-One: Rachel

1. What theme and motif are developed after the vote to allow Leah to join the hunt?

The vote turns out to be problematic for peace in the village. Although the Congolese have been told that democracy is a good thing, the end results of the vote in the village lead Tata Kuvudundu to declare that their village will be cursed. This enlarges the theme of the cultural arrogance of the West. Democracy may be an effective means of governance there, but in the Congo, it proves to be a source of trouble. In addition, the motif of the hardships and struggles of women is emphasized in this chapter. Even though Leah is excellent with her bow and arrow, the men of the village think it would be wrong for her to break outside of traditional gender roles to join the hunt.

2. Discuss Nathan's response to Leah joining the hunt. How does this develop his character?

Nathan tells Leah that he absolutely forbids her to join the hunt. Leah, for the first time in her life, disobeys Nathan outright and walks off into the jungle. Nathan's response is disquieting for the entire family. He is so overcome with anger that he chases Leah into the jungle, and when he can't find her, he spends an hour thrashing trees with his belt. The other Price women are so afraid of his violent anger that they barricade themselves inside the bedroom. Although supposedly a man of God, Nathan is a man of violence and rage so terrifying that his family must hide from him.

3. In the previous chapter, Leah asserts, "You can't just point to the one most terrible thing and wonder why it happened." Compare this with Rachel's claim, "Leah is the cause of all our problems," in this chapter.

These two opening statements stand in direct opposition to each other. Rachel's attempt to lay blame upon Leah for the tragic events that are unfolding are indicative of her selfish nature. Rachel, because of her limited, selfish way of looking at the world, must find someone to blame. On the other hand, Leah understands that there are too many factors and circumstances to lay blame at any one person's feet. These two statements indicate Rachel and Leah's diametrically opposing view of the world and of guilt.

Chapter Fifty-Two: Adah

1. What understanding about life and death does Adah come to during the hunt? What does this reveal about her character?

Adah has always been an observer of life more than a participant. However, since the night of the ants, Adah has discovered her will to survive. On the night of the hunt, she fully realizes that her will to survive leads inexorably to death for other creatures. She realizes that “the death of something living is the price of our own survival.” Adah is fully aware, more aware than any of the other Prices, of how closely life and death are related. She has an understanding, deeper than anyone else in her family, of her own impact on the living creatures around her, including even the invisible bacteria in her drinking water.

Chapter Fifty-Three: Leah

1. What motif does Nelson’s insult towards Gbenye emphasize?

Nelson calls Gbenye “nkento” to insult his poor aim. Nkento means woman. Despite the fact that both Nelson and Gbenye just saw Leah—a woman—kill an impala with a shot through the neck, Nelson still calls him “woman” as an insult. This emphasizes the motif of the hardships that women face, whether they remain in or step outside of their prescribed gender roles. The irony of this insult does not escape Leah, who feels “sick at heart.”

2. How does Leah’s attitude toward the hunt differ from Adah’s?

Leah, as a hunter herself rather than a forager like Adah, is exhilarated by the hunt. When she kills her first game, a young male impala, she is thrilled, feeling her own heart bursting against her ears. While Adah’s participation in the hunt leads her to a pensive conclusion regarding life and death, Leah is instead struck by her own power, quickly followed by doubts about the role of women when Nelson insults Gbenye. She feels “mixed up, grateful, and sick at heart.”

Chapter Fifty-Four: Rachel

1. How does Rachel feel about Eisenhower’s picture hanging in the kitchen? How do the rest of the Price women feel about it? Discuss this contrast.

Rachel is the only one of the Price women who feels any sense of safety or comfort looking at the picture of the President. In fact, she feels so much comfort from his photograph that she wishes to have Eisenhower for a father instead of Nathan Price. Orleanna, Leah, and Adah, on the other hand, have all revealed a distrust of or even a hatred for this same picture of Eisenhower earlier in the novel. The fact that Rachel still feels comfort from the picture is indicative of how little she has learned from the Congo, and how very self-centered she remains. Her other family members have realized something is wrong with their imperialistic, simplistic worldviews, but Rachel has not.

2. How does Rachel's attitude toward the hunt differ from Leah and Adah's?

Rachel flatly refuses to participate in the hunt in any way after it begins. When she sees the villagers begin to kill and skin the game, she throws up on her shoes, then goes home to take a bath. Rachel is completely disgusted by the lengths she sees the villagers go to in order to procure food. While Leah and Adah are both able to understand that their own survival dictates the death of other creatures, Rachel refuses to accept this. Rachel is so willfully naïve that she believes “the Good Lord intended” meat to be bought from the grocery store. Rachel's feelings about the hunt stand in direct opposition to Adah's. Rachel believes that she can ignore the fact of death by running from the hunt, while Adah accepts that life and death are irrevocably related.

Chapter Fifty-Five: Leah

1. How does the ruined feast symbolize the Congo as a whole?

Though there is plenty of meat for every family, the celebration turns into a war of insults, greediness, and rage. Leah calls the feast “the oldest celebration of all, the sharing of plenty,” but even this most ancient celebration has been ruined. The Prices are not entirely to blame for it, but their presence is symbolic of the presence of the West everywhere in the Congo. Perhaps even as the villagers of Kilanga fight amongst themselves, the forces of the West are kidnapping and murdering Lumumba. The influence and arrogance of the white Westerners has brought the whole of the Congo into conflict.

2. Why does everyone go home feeling hunted?

Tata Kuvudundu's dire proclamations about the animals rising up against the villagers have shaken everyone. Even those who don't believe in such superstition feel hunted, because they know that the fight over the meat is not a good sign for the safety and stability of the village.

Chapter Fifty-Six: Rachel

1. Discuss Orleanna's actions regarding Nelson. What does this reveal about her character?

Orleanna feels sympathy for Nelson, since he is so obviously terrified. However, Nathan forbids her to allow Nelson to sleep in the house, threatening that he will kick her and the girls out of the house if she allows Nelson in. Orleanna obeys Nathan, leaving Nelson to plead outside the door. Although Orleanna has been emerging from Nathan's shadow, especially since she recovered from her sickness, this chapter shows that he still controls her. She has not yet made her final break for independence.

2. How does Rachel feel about the “laughable Congolese superstitions”?

Although Rachel and the other girls keep reminding each other that they do not believe in voodoo spirits, fear has infected Rachel. She imagines seeing dark things under the bed and watching her from outside the windows.

Chapter Fifty-Seven: Adah

1. Since the end of the hunt, the chapters have been very short compared to the rest of the novel. What literary function does this change in structure serve?

The very short chapters build up a sense of anticipation, signaling to the reader that the climax is approaching. Additionally, since the chapters are short and focus on the same night, each narrator has a chance to give her viewpoint on the same events.

2. What do the footprints signify to Adah? What palindrome does she use in connection with these footprints?

The footprints left in the ash in the chicken house are those of Tata Kuvudundu, the village priest. Adah knows this because he has six toes on his left foot, just like the footprints left in the chicken house. Adah uses the palindrome: “Evil deed live.” Adah sees Kuvudundu’s presence as evil, as he attempted to terrify and even kill those who disagreed with him.

Chapter Fifty-Eight: Leah

1. The Price girls look up into the trees when Ruth May cries out. What does this allude to?

The reader knows that Ruth May’s safe destination, using her nkisi, is hiding up in a tree as a green mamba snake. The fact that all of her sisters look up into the treetops when they hear her cry out alludes to this. Leah reinforces this idea, when she notices: “Just for the moment it was as if she’d disappeared, and her voice was thrown into the trees.”

2. What is the significance of Leah saying that Ruth May has no eyes?

Leah says, “No eyes. What I mean is that no one we recognized was looking out through her eyes.” This statement, while emphasizing the fact that Ruth May is dying, also emphasizes the motif of vision. The eyes are the vessel of vision and of the soul, and as Ruth May dies, her eyes become unrecognizable. If Ruth May’s nkisi has worked, then her spirit has left her body and entered a green mamba in the trees.

Chapter Fifty-Nine: Adah

1. What overall image does Adah use to describe Ruth May's death?

Adah uses the overarching image of birth to describe Ruth May's death. Adah describes seeing her die as seeing her birth played in reverse. As Ruth May dies, Adah describes the end as her shrinking back through a passage, evoking the birth canal.

2. How does this image affect the tone of the chapter?

Using the image of childbirth in reverse evokes a tone of innocence. The innocence of a newborn child echoes in this chapter, as Ruth May's death becomes, for Adah, a palindrome of birth. Ruth May's final gulp of air is like a baby's first breath. Adah even sees Ruth May's limbs contract until she becomes impossibly small, like an innocent newborn.

Chapter Sixty: Rachel

1. How does this chapter develop the theme of guilt?

Ruth May's death is a turning point for all of the Prices. Here, when neither Nathan nor Orleanna are yet aware of it, Rachel contemplates how Ruth May's death will change everything. It is here that guilt settles down upon Rachel, and she realizes that nothing will ever be the same again.

2. How does Ruth May's death link the Congolese and the Prices?

The Prices and their native neighbors now share a common tragedy: the death of a child. Rachel had always counted on the tragedies of Africa not being her own, but now their tragedies are the same. Rachel recognizes that she can never be what she once was—carefree and unaffected. Like the Congolese, she and her family are now tragic.

3. The Price women hesitate to wake their mother and tell her about Ruth May. What theme does this emphasize?

This hesitation emphasizes the theme of the power of language. Rachel says that she and her sisters "have the strange idea that if we stood there without moving forever and ever, we could keep our family the way it was." Telling Orleanna that her youngest daughter has died would make the death much more real for the family. Students may remember a chapter from Book Three in which Nelson teaches Adah that nothing has life until it is named. Confessing the fact of Ruth May's death will make it concrete and permanent, so the sisters want to delay their confession in order to "hold back the curse that was going to be our history."

Chapter Sixty-One: Leah

1. Discuss Nathan's response to the news of Ruth May's death and Leah's reaction to his response.

Leah observes that Nathan is unable to grasp what has happened. He remarks that Ruth May was not baptized, and Leah finds this response inadequate, even repulsive. Throughout the novel, Nathan has revealed himself to be an arrogant, violent, sometimes hateful man. However, Ruth May's death brings out a side of Nathan that the reader has not yet seen. All of Nathan's certainty is gone, and he is left with only outright denial, saying, "This can't be." In this chapter, Nathan becomes more of a pitiful and pitiable character for the reader, as it is clear he is so obsessed with religion that he is poorly adjusted to life itself. Leah, on the other hand, is absolutely disgusted and repelled by him, calling him a "simple, ugly man." The reader understands her reaction as well, as Nathan's inability to show any true grief reveals his absolute inadequacy as a father.

2. Why does Orleanna behave as if someone else had already told her the news of Ruth May's death?

Orleanna's greatest fear has been the deaths of her children, and she has been dreaming of their deaths for months. Now that it has actually happened, it is almost as if she is prepared for it, and she immediately busies herself to avoid the grief that will fall onto her if she stands still.

3. How does Leah identify with the women of the Congo?

As their neighbors begin to arrive to mourn Ruth May, Leah finally realizes with absolute certainty that she is no different from them. Her grief and her family's grief are no different from theirs, despite the fact that they are foreign white Christians.

4. How does prayer comfort Leah, even though she doesn't believe in the words?

Even though Leah does not believe in the words of the prayers she is saying, the mere act of reciting the familiar words gives her comfort. Leah even begins reciting Biblical passages that she has memorized, some of which have nothing to do with death or grief. The mere action of reciting the words gives her relief.

5. Why does Leah feel an unspeakable despair as Nathan baptizes the village children?

Leah knows that Nathan knows nothing about the children he is baptizing, not even their names. Nathan's baptisms are perfunctory. Leah sees Nathan's actions as useless and offensive, as he cares nothing for the children. The baptisms he performs are for his own comfort, not for the salvation of the children.

Book Five: Exodus

Chapter Sixty-Two: Orleanna

1. What does the title of this book allude to? What does it foreshadow?

Exodus, the second book of the Bible, begins with the story of the Hebrews' escape from enslavement in Egypt. The word exodus itself means a mass departure of people, perhaps foreshadowing that in this book the Prices will finally escape from the Congo and from Nathan's tyranny.

2. How does Ruth May's death suddenly and irrevocably change Orleanna's character and actions?

At once, from the very moment that she discovers Ruth May has died, Orleanna springs into action. Throughout the novel, Orleanna has been carefully obedient and has never acted against Nathan's authority boldly. Now, however, Orleanna must deal with her grief, and she does so by motion. She has no regard for whether Nathan is moving along with her or not; as a matter of fact, she hardly notices Nathan at all in the immediate aftermath of Ruth May's death. It has taken the death of her youngest daughter for Orleanna to finally move on her own, completely outside of Nathan's influence.

3. To whom is Orleanna speaking in this chapter? What theme does this emphasize?

Now that the reader knows of Ruth May's death, it is clear that Orleanna is addressing her, and has been addressing her in every chapter she has narrated. As Orleanna speaks directly to Ruth May, the theme of guilt and forgiveness is strongly emphasized. Orleanna is still trying to explain her actions, trying to describe why she didn't leave Nathan sooner, trying to gain forgiveness from her youngest daughter.

4. Discuss the power that Orleanna finds in motion in this chapter. What theme or themes does it develop?

Throughout this chapter, Orleanna emphasizes the power she has found in motion. She moves Ruth May's body to the table, moves all the family's possessions outside to give away, and leaves the village on foot. She says, "Motion became my whole purpose." Motion, in effect, becomes the source of Orleanna's strength. In addition, she uses the idea of motion to explain why conquerors fail. Conquerors, like Nathan, arrogantly stand still as their conquest moves underneath them. Thus, this motif of motion serves to emphasize both the themes of arrogance and guilt.

What We Carried Out

Chapter Sixty-Three: Leah Price (1961)

1. Why does Nathan not accompany his family out of Kilanga?

Leah believes that Nathan does not follow them because of his absolute refusal to take any action that could be perceived as cowardly. Nathan's mission in Kilanga has been a failure, and his daughter has died, partly due to his disregard for the dangers of staying in the Congo. Nonetheless, Nathan is too arrogant and too consumed with the idea of an ever-watching God to leave Kilanga, even for his family.

2. Discuss the significance of Leah's statement: "Anatole banished the honey-colored ache of malaria and guilt from my blood."

To Leah, Anatole is much more than just a doctor to nurse her back to health. Anatole's presence serves as Leah's link to forgiveness. Like all the Price women, Leah feels indescribable guilt, but her love for Anatole helps to assuage some of that guilt.

3. Discuss Leah's decision not to return to America. What does that reveal about her character?

After Leah recovers from her bad bout of malaria, she elects to stay in the Congo rather than return to America with Adah and Orleanna. She decides to stay solely because she is in love with Anatole and they plan to be married. This reveals and builds upon the capacity for love within Leah and foreshadows the key role that her ability to love will play in the rest of her life.

Chapter Sixty-Four: Rachel Price Axelroot (1962)

1. Discuss the significance of Rachel's assertion that she was baptized by mud.

Baptism has been an important motif throughout the novel. For Nathan, baptism is an act of purification, redemption, and transformation. Rachel's greatest transformation comes following Ruth May's death, as she trudges through the muddy Congo with her sisters. Thus, Rachel refers to this transformation as a baptism, simultaneously revealing her self-centeredness and her disrespect for her father's religion.

2. What does Rachel's status as Eeben Axelroot's de facto wife suggest about her character and her allegiance in the Congo's struggle for independence?

Although Rachel observed the same inequalities and injustices as her sisters did in Kilanga, she never allowed these experiences to change her worldview. Her de facto marriage to Axelroot establishes Rachel as firmly on the side of the imperialist conquerors, the same people who were responsible for Lumumba's assassination.

Chapter Sixty-Five: Adah Price (1962)

1. What substantial change in her character does Adah reveal at the beginning of the chapter?

Adah has decided to speak; she will no longer pretend to be mute.

2. How is Orleanna's newfound talent for gardening significant?

Orleanna's talent for gardening indicates that she venerates nature. In Orleanna's flashbacks, she indicates that, before she met and married Nathan, she had this worshipful respect for nature. Now that she is finally free of Nathan, this character trait has returned. Additionally, her new talent indicates that she has learned from the Congo, especially illustrated by the way she carries manure in two balanced bushel pails on her shoulders. It also alludes to an emerging pantheism, like that of Brother Fowles.

3. What is Adah's "religion that serves"? What does this indicate about her character?

Adah finds religion in science. She enjoys the order of organic chemistry, invertebrate zoology, and "the inspired symmetry of Mendelian genetics." This reinforces Adah's intelligence as a character, but, more importantly, serves to indicate her need for a religion. Adah has always wholly rejected Nathan's religious teachings. But now, for the first time in her life, Adah finds herself in need of religion—any sort of religion—to answer the new, difficult questions that plague her.

4. What is Adah's debt that she cannot repay?

Adah owes her life to her mother. Orleanna rescued Adah from Africa, choosing to bring Adah home with her instead of Leah. Adah is not accustomed to owing debts. In fact, Adah is used to living in a world that has dealt her an unjust hand, a world that owes her debts.

5. Explain Adah's statement that her family has produced a scientist, penitent, politician, and a ghost.

Adah states that "betrayal is a friend I have known a long time," and that betrayal can breed scientists, "penitents, shrewd minor politicians, and ghosts." Within the Price family, Adah emerges as the scientist, Leah as the penitent, Rachel as the politician, and Ruth May as the ghost. The betrayal that bred all these characteristics in the Prices is Nathan's. He betrayed the safety of his family for his own misguided, selfish ends.

Chapter Sixty-Six: Leah Price (1964)

1. How many years have passed since the Price women left Kilanga? What do you think this sudden change in the pace of the narrative indicates?

The events in this chapter occur three years after Ruth May's death. Ever since the beginning of book five, each chapter has been marked with a year, indicating the passage of time between chapters. Each chapter is not occurring in rapid succession like it did in the first half of the novel. Rather, a long time passes between chapters. This may indicate that as the characters progress in age they are also progressing in how they come to terms with the events in the Congo that they experienced.

2. What is Leah's tone throughout this chapter? What theme does this pervasive tone emphasize?

Leah's tone is very bitter in this chapter, as she laments the injustice that she sees around her and hears about every day. Especially disturbing to Leah is the contrast between the value of white and black lives. She is bitter and jaded, and she believes that if God has a hand in the war, all He is doing is mocking the hope for brotherly love. Leah's bitterness emphasizes the theme of the search for justice, as she has so much trouble believing in any justice at all.

3. Discuss Leah's fixation on her white skin. What theme does this emphasize?

Leah knows that her white skin puts Anatole and everyone around her in great danger. In addition, Leah knows that her white skin places her firmly on the side of the Belgians and Americans, a side she does not wish to be associated with. Leah damns her father and other men for throwing her into a war in which "white skin comes down on the wrong side, pure and simple." Leah's fixation on her skin emphasizes the theme of cultural guilt. Although Leah has nothing to do with the political affairs that surround her, she feels culpable, simply for being a white American.

4. Explain the significance of God's resemblance to Nathan.

When Leah tries to visualize God, she can only visualize her father. This is symbolic of Leah's complete rejection of her childhood faith. Leah no longer has any reverence for her father, who has revealed himself to be a shortsighted, arrogant, cruel man. Likewise, Leah has no reverence for her father's God. Importantly, when Leah tries to picture Jesus, she sees Brother Fowles, alluding to her eventual acceptance of Brother Fowles's version of spirituality.

Chapter Sixty-Seven: Rachel Axelroot (1964)

1. Why does Rachel consider herself an adaptable kind of person? Is she really?

Rachel considers herself adaptable because she has learned bits of Afrikaans, French, and Kikongo, and because she celebrates Christmas in the summertime, virtually without a second thought. However, at her core, Rachel is surprisingly rigid and inflexible. Although her outside appearances suggest that she is open to change, Rachel has undergone strikingly little change during her time in the Congo. She is still shallow, materialistic, and haughty. Especially compared to her sisters and mothers, Rachel has not allowed the Congo to influence her in the least.

2. What does Rachel's intention to marry the First Attaché to the French Ambassador suggest about her character?

Although Rachel is friends with Daniel DuPrée's wife, she begins an affair with DuPrée in order to marry him and escape from Axelroot. Rachel, despite the years that have elapsed since her last section of narration, is as selfish as ever. She is unconcerned with breaking up the marriage of her friend because she has planned a way in which she can benefit from it. Rachel has become more self-sufficient and cunning as the years have passed, rather than more thoughtful or considerate.

Chapter Sixty-Eight: Leah Price Ngemba (1965)

1. What does Leah mean when she calls Anatole "my first prayer to Creation answered"? What does this foreshadow?

While Leah was in the mission, hiding out and waiting for Anatole's freedom, she first began to pray to Creation, inspired by Brother Fowles. Her first prayer to Creation was for Anatole's safety, so Leah considers him an answered prayer. This statement—specifically, the use of the word "first"—foreshadows that Leah will offer up many more prayers to Creation. It foreshadows the emergence of Leah's new faith: a faith in Creation rather than her father's God.

2. Discuss the contrast between Nathan and other missionaries Leah knows.

Leah is struck by how little her missionary friends are like her father. The missionaries who visit her on occasion have risked their lives to remain in Africa, where they can be helpful. Nathan, on the other hand, risked his life to remain in Africa for his own salvation. Nathan is more concerned with the state of his own soul than anything else. Nathan's missionary work is abrasive and divisive, while other missionaries seek to be helpful and bring harmony.

3. What is Leah's attitude toward Rachel? Why?

Leah says that she despises Rachel and could despise her more only if she found out where Rachel is. Leah despises her because she knows that Rachel has aligned herself with the colonialist ideology, using her white skin to secure a place of privilege and luxury. Rachel's desire for comfort at the expense of anything else represents what Leah has grown ashamed of.

4. How does Leah deal with her guilt in this chapter?

Leah feels the same guilt in 1965 that she has for years: a guilt over her role in Ruth May's death, coupled with a guilt over her white skin and nationality. Leah's response to this guilt in this chapter is to rely on Anatole's love. She wants to be convinced that her "white skin is not the standard of offense," and she relies upon him to do so.

Chapter Sixty-Nine: Adah Price (1968)

1. How has the style of Adah's narration changed now that she has lost her "slant"? What does this suggest about her character?

Adah's narration is no longer defined by extensive wordplay, palindromes, or backwards writing. Although Adah's narration is still more pensive than that of her sisters, the most defining aspects of her narration have faded away along with her hemiplegic condition. This change indicates that Adah has become much more active in her own life, no longer just a wry observer. As the aspects that made Adah so obviously separate from the world have almost entirely disappeared, Adah has become an active participant in her surroundings.

2. When Adah can think of "no honorable answer" to Pascal's question, what theme is emphasized?

Adah, even though she continues to live in America, has the same sense of guilt about her nationality that Leah does. Leah can think of no response to questions about the excesses of America because she feels that the excesses are dishonorable, the result of greed and arrogance. This emphasizes the theme of cultural guilt, a guilt that all of the Price women struggle to live with.

3. Discuss the religions of each of the Price women and their significance.

Orleanna marches for civil rights; Adah calls this “a new church of sorts.” Adah claims that Leah’s religion is suffering. Adah claims that Rachel has no religion, besides serving and pleasing herself. Significantly, Adah claims that she may need to find a religion. However, Adah’s religion is developing along with her scientific study. More and more, Adah is developing toward worshipping scientific fact. Adah sees Leah’s religion as suffering because Leah continues to atone for her nationality and her skin color. As she suffers along with her African neighbors, Leah placates her sense of guilt. Adah is completely correct about Rachel’s real religion: the worship of herself. Orleanna’s real religion, however, is more complex than Adah implies. Orleanna is desperate for action, desperate to be doing something that makes a difference. Marching for civil rights is only one manifestation of Orleanna’s religion. Orleanna’s religion is activity, as she blames herself for her passivity under Nathan’s rule, and will never allow herself to be passive again.

4. Explain the significance of Adah’s statement: “In spite of myself I have loved the world a little, and may lose it.” What does this say about her character?

Adah has not been able to be detached from the world and from her life since the night of the ant attack in Kilanga. Her cynical, distant view of the world died that night, when she realized that she valued her own life. Since then, Adah has become more and more involved in the world (albeit in an intellectual, scientific sense). This attachment carries a risk, as the more attached Adah is, the more she stands to lose. Adah is paralyzed by the fear that her mother may choose Leah over her, and this prompts her to finally ask Orleanna why she chose to bring her home from the Congo instead of Leah.

Chapter Seventy: Leah Price Ngemba (1974)

1. Where is the irony in renaming the Congo and its cities?

The Congo is renamed Zaire, and all its cities are given new names as well. These names are meant to erase the colonial influence on the Congo and establish the Congo (now Zaire) as authentically African. However, this “campaign of authenticité” is inauthentic. Mobutu, the president who ordered the name changes, is merely a puppet ruler commanded by Western influences. Mere name changes do not erase that influence.

2. How does Leah see Nathan and Orleanna’s marriage as similar to the Congo?

Anatole likens the Congo to a princess in a fairy tale, born too rich for her own good. As a result of its wealth, the Congo attracted the attention of foreign powers, which dominate it cruelly and steal its resources. Leah likens this to her parents’ marriage, envisioning Nathan as the cruel conqueror and Orleanna as the passive conquest.

3. What does Leah mean when she says, “My pagan mother alone among us understood redemption”?

In this chapter, Leah is still searching for answers to her questions about personal guilt and whether justice is possible, and she is still plagued by guilt over her white skin. Looking back, she believes that her mother is the only one of the Price family who managed to redeem herself, primarily by finally leaving Nathan and taking her living daughters with her. Leah acknowledges that redemption seemed to come to Orleana quickly after Ruth May's death, while “the rest of us are growing into it.”

4. Why does Leah discuss Mobutu's homes and emphasize the project to build the Inga-Shaba power line?

Leah points out the stark contrast between Mobutu's extravagant wealth and the poverty of his country. Leah also tells the treacherous story of the Inga-Shaba power line, which was never intended to function. Its only purpose was to pull the Congo deep into debt, so that it will never really be independent. Both of these serve to emphasize the theme of the search for justice. As Leah sees such injustice all around her, her tone is bitter and sometimes outraged. Her personal search for justice continues.

Chapter Seventy-One: Rachel Axelroot DuPrée Fairley (1978)

1. Why does Rachel think her family has never visited her, and what does this say about her character?

Rachel believes none of her family has visited her at her grand hotel because, if they did, they would have to acknowledge her accomplishments and start to respect her. It never occurs to Rachel that if her family saw the extravagance in which she is living they would feel contempt or shame rather than respect. For Rachel, outside appearances are all that matter. Rachel's ignorance of how her family would feel about her alliance with greed and oppression reveals how little her character has changed and how self-centered she remains.

2. How does Rachel absolve herself of the guilt that the rest of her family feels?

Rachel is by far the shallowest of all the Prices. Instead of accepting guilt and developing a response to it, like her sisters and mother, Rachel strives to convince herself that she need not feel guilty at all. Rachel has no concept of the cultural guilt that her family feels. Rather than respond to the crimes of her country, Rachel aligns herself with the forces of greed and excess. Her only concern is for her own comfort, so she “refuses to feel the slightest responsibility.”

Chapter Seventy-Two: Leah Price Ngemba (1981)

1. Leah realizes she cannot return to America for good. Why? What theme does this emphasize?

Leah knows she cannot move her family to America for good because they will be outsiders. Leah cares little for the idea of being social outcasts; rather, she knows that her husband and sons are full of talent and beauty, and she knows that would never be recognized in America. Her decision emphasizes the theme of the arrogance of the West, as Leah knows that their dark skin will be seen as a blemish in America. Regardless of their talents and characters, the majority of close-minded Americans will see nothing but their differences.

2. Explain Leah's statement: "We are all co-conspirators here. I mean, all of us, not just my family."

This is an extremely important statement relating to the pervasive theme of cultural guilt. Leah's implication is that the guilt for the atrocities committed on African soil does not rest solely on the conspiratorial American government. Rather, every citizen shares some of that burden. Everyone is at least partially to blame for not intervening, not protesting, or for simply not caring. This statement makes it clear that, for Leah, the guilt of being American is not an incidental guilt. Rather, it is one that will plague her forever.

Chapter Seventy-Three: Rachel Price (1984)

1. What is significant about Rachel's choice of last name in this chapter?

Since the beginning of book five, Rachel's name has been different at the heading of every chapter she has narrated. Finally, in 1984, she has apparently decided on dropping all of the last names of her former husbands and going back to her maiden name. Her desire to change back to her original name may indicate the lack of real influence any of her husbands have had on her and the lack of real change she has experienced throughout the novel.

2. How does the news of Nathan's death affect the sisters? How does each sister's response reflect her character?

Leah is the most affected by the news, even though she is the one who presents it. Rachel, characteristically, is reductionistic. She says simply that Nathan was mean as a snake and got what he deserved. Adah responds from her intellect, quoting the Bible to describe Nathan's method of death. Leah is the only sister to cry, reflecting her impressive capacity for love and understanding.

Chapter Seventy-Four: Adah Price (1985)

1. To what does the poem that begins this chapter allude? What is its significance as it relates to Nathan's lasting impact?

This poem is from Shakespeare's The Tempest. It is the second stanza of a song that the character Ariel sings. The poem speaks of Ferdinand's father, who was lost at sea. Adah and Leah relate the themes of the song to their own father. Although Nathan is dead, Adah believes that his influence will not fade away, much like the way the sea has made the body of the father in the poem permanent, changing the body into coral and pearl. Adah knows she will carry his "sea-changed parts rich and strange" along with her.

2. Discuss how Adah equates lameness with dark skin. What theme does this emphasize?

As Adah is lamenting her lost handicap, she wonders over the idea that the able-bodied always assume everyone would like to be able-bodied as well. Adah disagrees with this, deciding that she would rather just be herself, with her handicap and all. She likens this to dark and light skin, equating blackness with lameness. This emphasizes the theme of cultural arrogance, which Adah refers to here as "the arrogance of the able-bodied."

3. How does Adah emphasize the theme of the power and beauty of language in this chapter?

Adah remembers her name in Kilanga: benduka. The two separate meanings of this word help her to define herself, even with her handicap. "I was one-half benduka the crooked walker, and one-half benduka, the sleek bird that dipped in and out of the banks with a crazy ungrace that took your breath. We both had our good points." Despite knowing that most of the world sees her old physical abnormality as a handicap, Adah has great respect for the language that so perfectly defined both aspects of her.

4. Why does Adah insist on talking about Nathan?

Adah disagrees with the idea that choosing not to remember is an option. Orleanna has no desire to discuss Nathan because nothing would change if they did. Adah, on the other hand, believes that she must speak her version of the truth, no matter how painful or despicable.

Chapter Seventy-Five: Leah Price Ngemba (1986)

1. How does Leah continue to respond to unfairness and injustice?

Leah acknowledges that there is too much of her father in her to accept injustice without trying to fix it. In spite of all she has learned and experienced, Leah admits that she still expects rewards for goodness and punishments for evil. Even though she does not see this in action, she still looks at the world as if it could be fair. Leah sees "how much has gone wrong that I need to fix." Despite all she has seen, she yearns for justice.

2. How is the theme of the power of language developed in this chapter?

Leah, thanks to all her years of speaking the delicate, tonal Congolese languages—specifically Kikongo and Lingala—appreciates the complexities of language. As she has learned how all the seemingly contradictory meanings of words can relate to each other, the reader is aware of how well Leah has assimilated. Leah can think like a native now, seeing connections that she could not see before, exemplified by her complete understanding of the meanings of the word nzolo.

Book Six: Song of the Three Children

1. Explain the allusion to the apocryphal “Song of the Three Children” that opens this Book. What might this allusion foreshadow about what will happen in this Book?

The Song of the Three Children, also known as The Song of the Three Holy Children, is an apocryphal account from the Book of Daniel. The passage describes what happens to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego after they are thrown into a fiery furnace for disobeying King Nebuchadnezzar’s decree that all Babylonians are to worship a large golden statue. Although the flames are seven times hotter than usual, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego feel no heat; God has sent an angel to protect them while in the furnace. So, Abednego (whose Hebrew name is Azariah) sings a song in prayer.

Although the Price women have not been thrown into a literal furnace, they have all passed through great trials. Often, these trials have dealt with their treatment while captive in some way. All the women were held captive by Nathan’s domineering nature. Leah was basically a prisoner in the Congo during Mobutu’s rise to power and in its aftermath. Students may think that this Book will deal with each woman’s reaction to the struggles they have endured.

Chapter Seventy-Six: Rachel Price

1. This is the first book so far to open without a section narrated by Orleanna. Explain the significance of this change.

Orleanna’s part in the narrative has finished. At the beginning of the last book, Exodus, she finished telling her story after Ruth May’s death and her exodus from Nathan. This is all of the story that Orleanna cares to tell because her purpose in narrating was to explain her culpability in the events that led to Ruth May’s death and to beg forgiveness for her actions. Since her youngest daughter’s death, Orleanna has been seeking forgiveness, and she has done little else. This entire book will focus on her three living daughters instead, revealing the ways they have found to deal with their guilt and find forgiveness.

2. How has Rachel ultimately dealt with her family's tragedies and guilt?

Rachel has proven to be the daughter least affected by the Congo. At her core, Rachel is the same shallow, materialistic girl that she was when her family started their missionary work. Instead of accept the burden of guilt, as the rest of her sisters have done, Rachel refuses to acknowledge any wrongdoing at all on her part or on the part of her homeland. Instead, she willfully closes her eyes and ignores everything around her that she finds unpleasant.

3. Where is the irony in Rachel deciding to never move back to America?

Rachel has decided to remain in Africa because she is afraid she would not again be able to fit in with her old friends in Georgia. She considers herself too "worldly-wise" to be able to return without being an outsider. This is ironic because Rachel has changed very little, in spite of her extraordinary experiences. Of all the Prices, Rachel would have been the best able to return to America and carry on life as normal; yet, she is the only one who never returned at all.

Chapter Seventy-Seven: Leah Price

1. What conclusion does Leah finally come to regarding her search for justice?

Leah has finally dismissed the possibility of absolute justice. She no longer holds out any hope that life can be an equation with everything coming out equal. Rather, she believes in the possibility of balance, which she describes as "a tendency for human errors to level themselves like water throughout their sphere of influence."

2. Explain the significance of Leah describing herself as an un-missionary. What theme does this emphasize?

Leah wishes to assimilate fully into the African culture. She hopes for her whiteness to be erased altogether. A missionary comes to a strange land hoping to change the land to suit his teaching. Leah calls herself the opposite of that, as she hopes to change herself to suit the land. Leah's desire to assimilate emphasizes the theme of guilt. Her whiteness is a constant reminder of her cultural guilt, of the guilt Americans share for their complicity in the atrocities committed in the Congo. Leah's answer to her guilt is in assimilation and in her love for her family. Her great hope for the ultimate eradication of her guilt comes when she looks at the color of her sons' skin, and realizes that "time erases whiteness altogether."

3. Describe Leah's new religion.

Leah owes her new religion to the pantheism of Brother Fowles. In effect, Leah sees God in Creation and believes that nature is the best expression of the divine. This belief helps her to understand the lack of absolute justice, as the God she now believes in has no direct hand in reward or punishment. Leah trusts in Creation as best she can, and this God proves much more acceptable to her than the God of her father.

Chapter Seventy-Eight: Adah Price

1. Describe Adah's new religion.

Adah's beliefs are similar to Leah's, but Adah's are more scientific and less tender. Adah sees God everywhere, much like Leah, but Adah considers the presence of God even in things that are microscopic, like viruses and parasites. In effect, Adah sees life itself as her religion, from human life to the lives of the viruses she studies so carefully. She believes in a God who is not interested only in humans, but in all organisms on the earth.

2. What conclusions does Adah come to regarding her burden of guilt?

Adah's method of dealing with her burden of guilt, both cultural and individual, is found in her scientific study. In fact, Adah's final ideas on God, justice, and guilt tie very closely into her work with microorganisms. Adah placates her guilt with the scientific study of the world, finding that justice has a global arc, not a human-centric arc. Adah finds her answers in the delicate, astounding balance of all organisms on the earth. "We are the balance of our damage and our transgressions," she decides. "The mistakes are part of the story."

Book Seven: The Eyes in the Trees

Chapter Seventy-Nine

1. Who is the narrator of this chapter? How is her viewpoint significant?

Ruth May narrates this chapter from beyond death. From her unique vantage point, Ruth May has a larger view than any living person, and she has grown mature and pensive in death. Ruth May's large view gives her the chance to explain the effects of even small actions and to grant Orleanna the forgiveness she has been craving for years.

2. How does the title of this book relate to Ruth May?

Ruth May's nkisi of choice was a green mamba snake. In life, Ruth May imagined herself retreating into the safety of a tree as the snake, perfectly camouflaged and in a position to watch the whole world. As Ruth speaks from beyond death, she speaks from the position of the mamba, as from eyes in the trees.

3. Explain the significance of the novel's closing line.

Ruth May ends the novel with the same line that closes book four: "Walk forward into the light." Although the wording is the same, the symbolism is quite different here. Ruth May implores her mother to forgive herself and to walk forward into the light of forgiveness, away from the darkness of guilt and misery. Nathan uses the phrase in book four as he is baptizing the children of Kilanga in the rain. His use of the phrase is, however, quite insignificant, as the children he is baptizing do not understand the significance of his action and do not have any darkness of guilt to leave behind them. Thus, Ruth May's phrase is infinitely more meaningful than Nathan's. As she forgives her mother, she leaves the novel with a sense of hope and light.

The Poisonwood Bible

Book One: Genesis

1. What is the title of this book an allusion to? Why do you think it is significant?

Chapter One: Orleanna Price

1. Who is the narrator of this section? How does she describe herself?

2. What tone does the narrator employ throughout this introduction? Provide examples from the text to illustrate the tone.

3. How does this chapter foreshadow the fate of the Prices?

4. To whom does the narrator direct this introduction?

The Things We Carried

1. Is there anything significant about the subtitle of this book? Is it an allusion to another text?

Chapter Two: Leah Price

1. Who is the narrator of this section? What is her relation to the narrator of the previous section?

2. In what year is this chapter set? How does this differ from the previous chapter?

3. What does Nathan's attitude toward the Underdowns suggest about his character?

4. How does this narrator's tone differ from Orleanna's tone?

Chapter Three: Ruth May Price

1. How does Ruth May's childish sentence structure and vocabulary affect the text?

2. What is the significance of Ruth May's account of the biblical story of the Tribes of Ham?

Chapter Four: Rachel Price

1. How do Rachel's frequent malapropisms affect the text?

2. What does Nathan Price's impromptu sermon foreshadow about his relations with the natives?

Chapter Five: Adah Price

1. How does Adah's diction and imagery in her narration affect the text?

2. How does Adah use her hemiplegic condition to her advantage?

3. What is Adah's attitude toward religion?

4. What is the significance of Adah's description of the natives? Why do you think Adah takes time to describe the natives at length when none of the other narrators have done so?

Chapter Six: Leah

1. What does Nathan's response to Mama Tataba's warning about the poisonwood and the garden reveal about his character?

2. What is Leah's attitude toward her father? How does her attitude toward Nathan differ from the attitudes of Orleanna and Adah? How do these different viewpoints affect the text?

Chapter Seven: Rachel

1. How does Rachel further reveal herself to be very superficial in this chapter?

2. Was the Easter picnic on the riverbank a success for the Prices?

Chapter Eight: Ruth May

1. How have the roles of Rachel and Adah become reversed in the Congo?

2. During Nathan and Orleanna's discussion about the natives' bodies, which of the two adults has a more accurate view of life in the Congo?

3. What does Orleanna's disagreement with Nathan reveal about her character?

4. Why do you think the reader experiences Orleanna and Nathan's disagreement through the narration of Ruth May? What effect does Ruth May's simple narration have on the tone?

Chapter Nine: Adah

1. How does Adah's frequent use of palindromes affect the text?

2. How is the oval white china platter important?

3. What does the destruction of the garden indicate? How does Nathan respond to its destruction?

4. How does Adah's tone illustrate Nathan's arrogance, even as he is replanting the garden?

Chapter Ten: Leah

1. How does Leah's attitude toward Nathan differ from Adah's in the previous chapter?

2. Orleanna's devastation over the ruined cake mixes further develops what theme?

3. Why do none of the girls betray their mother's profanity to their father?

4. Explain the significance of the simile: "My father wears his faith like the bronze breastplate of God's foot soldiers, while our mother's is more like a good cloth coat with a secondhand fit."

Chapter Eleven: Adah

1. What theme does Nathan's disastrous fish feast develop?

2. What is the significance of Adah's *snmyhymns*?

3. Where is the irony in Nathan's parable about the fan belt?

4. How does this chapter shed light on Nathan's attitude toward women? How is it significant that Adah narrates this chapter?

Chapter Twelve: Leah

1. How do the events in this chapter serve to shake Leah's faith?

2. Why does Nathan release Methuselah? What does this suggest about his character?

Book Two: The Revelation**Chapter Thirteen: Orleanna**

1. What does the title of Book Two foreshadow?

2. How has Orleanna's tone changed from her earlier narration in chapter one?

3. When is this section set? How does it differ from the other chapters?

4. What has Orleanna discovered about the Kikongo language?

5. Explain the significance of Orleanna seeing Nathan reborn "with a stone in place of his heart."

The Things We Learned

Chapter Fourteen: Leah

1. How does Leah's opinion about Tata Boanda's two wives and her relationship with Pascal develop her character?

2. How does Ruth May befriend the children, and how does that develop her character?

Chapter Fifteen: Ruth May

1. What does Ruth May find in the back of Mr. Axelroot's plane on the way to Stanleyville? How does Axelroot respond, and what does this reveal about his character?

2. How does the doctor in Stanleyville feel about what the Belgians have done to the Congo, and what theme does this develop?

3. What does the doctor's mention of Patrice Lumumba foreshadow?

4. This chapter is full of important political facts and foreshadowing. What might the author be suggesting by having Ruth May, the youngest Price daughter, narrate this chapter?

Chapter Sixteen: Rachel

1. How does Rachel's description of Anatole further develop her character?

2. What does Nathan's response to Anatole's message suggest about his character?

3. What role does Tata Kuvudundu play in the village? What role did the Prices think he played in the village?

4. What is the symbolism behind the oval white china platter in this chapter?

Chapter Seventeen: Adah

1. How is Methuselah a symbol for the Congo?

2. How does Adah's escape from the lion develop her doubt about religion?

Chapter Eighteen: Leah

1. How does Leah's recollection of Adah's experience with the lion differ from Adah's account in the previous chapter? How is this small difference significant to the novel?

2. How does Nathan use Adah's escape from the lion to his advantage? How does Leah respond to this?

3. How do the girls' separate reactions to their hope-chest projects illuminate each of their characters?

Chapter Nineteen: Ruth May

1. How does Ruth May interpret Adah's experience with the lion? From whom does this idea originate? How is this significant?

2. What is the significance of Ruth May's claim that she is "scared of Jesus, too?"

3. In this chapter, does Leah draw closer to or farther from her father? How?

Chapter Twenty: Rachel

1. Explain Nathan's allusion to the Tower of Babel. How is it significant?

2. How does Nathan's stubborn response to the Underdowns' suggestion that his family leave at once change how the reader views his character?

3. How does Rachel's narration give the Underdowns' news even greater impact?

Chapter Twenty-One: Adah

1. What theme is emphasized with Adah's interest in Kikongo?

2. Who is Adah referring to when she speaks of "those of doubtful righteousness"? What theme does this emphasize?

3. What does the last sentence in this chapter foreshadow?

4. Explain Adah's allusion to the red wheelbarrow.

Chapter Twenty-Two: Rachel

1. What do Rachel's feelings about the newly elected government reveal about her character?

Chapter Twenty-Three: Ruth May

1. Why does Orleanna retreat to her bed after Leah and Nathan leave?

Chapter Twenty-Four: Leah

1. When Leah notices the contrast between the splendor of the Underdowns' house and the Congolese shacks, how does she respond? What does this reveal about her character?

2. Where is the irony in Nathan's assertion that Americans would "never stand for this kind of unequal treatment?"

3. What is the significance of Lumumba calling the Congo "the heart of light?"

Chapter Twenty-Five: Adah

1. Why does Adah call the day of Methuselah's death his independence day?

2. Given the themes, motifs, and symbols already expressed in the novel, why do you think Nathan is the only Price who does not narrate?

Book Three: The Judges**Chapter Twenty-Six: Orleanna**

1. What do you think the title of this book might foreshadow?

2. Why does Orleanna begin this chapter with reasons women can't throw stones at their husbands? What motif does this exemplify?

3. How does Orleanna liken herself to the Congo? Why?

The Things We Didn't Know**Chapter Twenty-Seven: Leah**

1. Why is it significant that Leah feels "a throb of dread" when she arrives back in Kilanga?

2. How has life changed for the Prices now that the Congo is independent?

3. Explain the significance of Nelson misunderstanding the story of Job.

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Adah

1. What theme is emphasized as Adah speaks of Nathan's "wildly half-baked Kikongo"?

2. How does this chapter further develop the theme of guilt?

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Ruth May

1. What is Ruth May's primary feeling toward her father?

2. Why do you think this chapter is so short compared to those around it?

Chapter Thirty: Adah

1. How does Nathan respond to Orleanna and Ruth May's sickness, and what does this say about his character?

2. Why does Adah claim that the Price girls have lost their childhoods overnight? What does this allude to?

3. How does Adah's wordplay in this chapter challenge Nathan's idea that the Lord works in mysterious ways?

Chapter Thirty-One: Leah

1. When Leah asks if her country has done something bad, Anatole responds, “Not *you*, Béene.” How is this significant?

2. Leah and Anatole’s conversation covers many topics. What theme (or themes) of the novel does the conversation emphasize?

3. What does the conversation between Leah and Anatole reveal about Leah’s changing attitudes towards the Congolese?

4. Why is the reader presented with news of tumultuous political events through Leah’s narration?

5. How does the final paragraph of the chapter reveal a change in Leah’s characterization?

Chapter Thirty-Two: Ruth May

1. Why is the reader presented with news of tumultuous political events through Ruth May's narration this time?

2. How do Nathan and Orleanna interpret "The meek shall inherit" differently?

3. What is Ruth May's *nkisi*, and what is its function? What might Nelson's giving the *nkisi* to Ruth May foreshadow?

Chapter Thirty-Three: Leah

1. How does Orleanna's newfound voice affect Leah?

2. Discuss Leah's doubts about her father. What theme does her doubt develop?

Chapter Thirty-Four: Rachel

1. Contrast Brother Fowles's ideas about the Bible with Nathan's.

2. Contrast Brother Fowles's ideas about the Congolese with Nathan's.

3. How does Brother Fowles serve as Nathan's foil?

4. What lasting effect did Brother Fowles have on the doctrine of marriage in Kilanga?

Chapter Thirty-Five: Adah

1. Why does Tata Ndu want to marry Rachel? What does this suggest about his character?

Chapter Thirty-Six: Leah

1. What is peculiar to Leah about the native system of government?

2. What do the Prices find stuck to the wall behind Ruth May's bed?

Chapter Thirty-Seven: Rachel

1. Look at the last paragraph of the chapter, in which Rachel says, "I prefer to remain anomalous." How is this particular malapropism significant, and how do Rachel's continued malapropisms define her character?

Chapter Thirty-Eight: Ruth May

1. How does circumcision become a point of discussion for the Prices? How do Nathan and Orleanna respond?

2. In this chapter, Ruth May chooses where she will disappear if she uses her *nkisi*. Where does she choose?

Chapter Thirty-Nine: Rachel

1. How do Rachel's sisters disappoint and anger her on her birthday?

Chapter Forty: Adah

1. What themes are emphasized by Nathan's mispronunciation of *bāngala*?

2. Why is the fact that Adah is the first narrator to mention Nathan's mispronunciation consistent with her characterization?

3. Discuss Adah's technique of spelling each of her family member's names backwards. What does this reveal?

4. What does Leah's growing interest in language reveal about her character?

5. How do the natives feel about Leah's skill with a bow?

6. Explain Adah's allusion to Hester Prynne.

Chapter Forty-One: Leah

1. How does this chapter emphasize the theme of cultural guilt?

2. How does Leah refer to her father's ideas in this chapter, and how does it reveal the development of her character?

Chapter Forty-Two: Rachel

1. Why does Rachel not believe Axelroot's news that Lumumba is to be murdered? Does the reader have any knowledge that Rachel does not?

2. Explain the significance of having the plot to murder Lumumba revealed during one of Rachel's narrative sections.

Chapter Forty-Three: Adah

1. Discuss Nathan's belief that the Congolese mothers have "a lack of genuine grief." Is his belief correct?

2. What does Adah's shock at discovering the murder plot reveal about her character?

3. Why does Adah's shock wear off so quickly?

Chapter Forty-Four: Leah

1. Why is Leah so wracked with guilt, even as the *nsongonya* continue to threaten the village?

Chapter Forty-Five: Rachel

1. How does Rachel's method of survival in the stampede of people reflect her character?

Chapter Forty-Six: Ruth May

1. What does Ruth May believe caused the ants to attack?

2. How does Ruth May escape the anguish of the *nsongonya*?

Chapter Forty-Seven: Adah

1. How does Adah surprise herself during the attack of the ants?

2. How does this event mark Adah's life's "dark center"?

Chapter Forty-Eight: Leah

1. How does this chapter mark an abrupt and final change in Leah's faith?

2. What replaces Leah's faith immediately?

Book Four: Bel and the Serpent

Chapter Forty-Nine: Orleanna

1. How does this section narrated by Orleanna differ from her earlier sections? What theme is emphasized with this change?

What We Lost

Chapter Fifty: Leah

1. How do the events in this chapter represent a climax in the struggle between Nathan and Tata Ndu?

2. Why is Ruth May the only Price to vote in the election?

3. Explain the irony inherent in the vote at the church.

Chapter Fifty-One: Rachel

1. What theme and motif are developed after the vote to allow Leah to join the hunt?

2. Discuss Nathan's response to Leah joining the hunt. How does this develop his character?

3. In the previous chapter, Leah asserts, "You can't just point to the one most terrible thing and wonder why it happened." Compare this with Rachel's claim, "Leah is the cause of all our problems," in this chapter.

Chapter Fifty-Two: Adah

1. What understanding about life and death does Adah come to during the hunt? What does this reveal about her character?

Chapter Fifty-Three: Leah

1. What motif does Nelson's insult towards Gbenye emphasize?

2. How does Leah's attitude toward the hunt differ from Adah's?

Chapter Fifty-Four: Rachel

1. How does Rachel feel about Eisenhower's picture hanging in the kitchen? How do the rest of the Price women feel about it? Discuss this contrast.

2. How does Rachel's attitude toward the hunt differ from Leah and Adah's?

Chapter Fifty-Five: Leah

1. How does the ruined feast symbolize the Congo as a whole?

2. Why does everyone go home feeling hunted?

Chapter Fifty-Six: Rachel

1. Discuss Orleanna's actions regarding Nelson. What does this reveal about her character?

2. How does Rachel feel about the "laughable Congolese superstitions"?

Chapter Fifty-Seven: Adah

1. Since the end of the hunt, the chapters have been very short compared to the rest of the novel. What literary function does this change in structure serve?

2. What do the footprints signify to Adah? What palindrome does she use in connection with these footprints?

Chapter Fifty-Eight: Leah

1. The Price girls look up into the trees when Ruth May cries out. What does this allude to?

2. What is the significance of Leah saying that Ruth May has no eyes?

Chapter Fifty-Nine: Adah

1. What overall image does Adah use to describe Ruth May's death?

2. How does this image affect the tone of the chapter?

Chapter Sixty: Rachel

1. How does this chapter develop the theme of guilt?

2. How does Ruth May's death link the Congolese and the Prices?

3. The Price women hesitate to wake their mother and tell her about Ruth May. What theme does this emphasize?

Chapter Sixty-One: Leah

1. Discuss Nathan's response to the news of Ruth May's death and Leah's reaction to his response.

2. Why does Orleanna behave as if someone else had already told her the news of Ruth May's death?

3. How does Leah identify with the women of the Congo?

4. How does prayer comfort Leah, even though she doesn't believe in the words?

5. Why does Leah feel an unspeakable despair as Nathan baptizes the village children?

Book Five: Exodus**Chapter Sixty-Two: Orleanna**

1. What does the title of this book allude to? What does it foreshadow?

2. How does Ruth May's death suddenly and irrevocably change Orleanna's character and actions?

3. To whom is Orleanna speaking in this chapter? What theme does this emphasize?

4. Discuss the power that Orleanna finds in motion in this chapter. What theme or themes does it develop?

What We Carried Out

Chapter Sixty-Three: Leah Price (1961)

1. Why does Nathan not accompany his family out of Kilanga?

2. Discuss the significance of Leah's statement: "Anatole banished the honey-colored ache of malaria and guilt from my blood."

3. Discuss Leah's decision not to return to America. What does that reveal about her character?

Chapter Sixty-Four: Rachel Price Axelroot (1962)

1. Discuss the significance of Rachel's assertion that she was baptized by mud.

2. What does Rachel's status as Eeben Axelroot's de facto wife suggest about her character and her allegiance in the Congo's struggle for independence?

Chapter Sixty-Five: Adah Price (1962)

1. What substantial change in her character does Adah reveal at the beginning of the chapter?

2. How is Orleanna's newfound talent for gardening significant?

3. What is Adah's "religion that serves"? What does this indicate about her character?

4. What is Adah's debt that she cannot repay?

5. Explain Adah's statement that her family has produced a scientist, penitent, politician, and a ghost.

Chapter Sixty-Six: Leah Price (1964)

1. How many years have passed since the Price women left Kilanga? What do you think this sudden change in the pace of the narrative indicates?

2. What is Leah's tone throughout this chapter? What theme does this pervasive tone emphasize?

3. Discuss Leah's fixation on her white skin. What theme does this emphasize?

4. Explain the significance of God's resemblance to Nathan.

Chapter Sixty-Seven: Rachel Axelroot (1964)

1. Why does Rachel consider herself an adaptable kind of person? Is she really?

2. What does Rachel's intention to marry the First Attaché to the French Ambassador suggest about her character?

Chapter Sixty-Eight: Leah Price Ngemba (1965)

1. What does Leah mean when she calls Anatole “my first prayer to Creation answered”? What does this foreshadow?

2. Discuss the contrast between Nathan and other missionaries Leah knows.

3. What is Leah’s attitude toward Rachel? Why?

4. How does Leah deal with her guilt in this chapter?

Chapter Sixty-Nine: Adah Price (1968)

1. How has the style of Adah's narration changed now that she has lost her "slant"? What does this suggest about her character?

2. When Adah can think of "no honorable answer" to Pascal's question, what theme is emphasized?

3. Discuss the religions of each of the Price women and their significance.

4. Explain the significance of Adah's statement: "In spite of myself I have loved the world a little, and may lose it." What does this say about her character?

Chapter Seventy: Leah Price Ngemba (1974)

1. Where is the irony in renaming the Congo and its cities?

2. How does Leah see Nathan and Orleanna's marriage as similar to the Congo?

3. What does Leah mean when she says, "My pagan mother alone among us understood redemption"?

4. Why does Leah discuss Mobutu's homes and emphasize the project to build the Inga-Shaba power line?

Chapter Seventy-One: Rachel Axelroot DuPrée Fairley (1978)

1. Why does Rachel think her family has never visited her, and what does this say about her character?

2. How does Rachel absolve herself of the guilt that the rest of her family feels?

Chapter Seventy-Two: Leah Price Ngemba (1981)

1. Leah realizes she cannot return to America for good. Why? What theme does this emphasize?

2. Explain Leah's statement: "We are all co-conspirators here. I mean, all of us, not just my family."

Chapter Seventy-Three: Rachel Price (1984)

1. What is significant about Rachel's choice of last name in this chapter?

2. How does the news of Nathan's death affect the sisters? How does each sister's response reflect her character?

Chapter Seventy-Four: Adah Price (1985)

1. To what does the poem that begins this chapter allude? What is its significance as it relates to Nathan's lasting impact?

2. Discuss how Adah equates lameness with dark skin. What theme does this emphasize?

3. How does Adah emphasize the theme of the power and beauty of language in this chapter?

4. Why does Adah insist on talking about Nathan?

Chapter Seventy-Five: Leah Price Ngemba (1986)

1. How does Leah continue to respond to unfairness and injustice?

2. How is the theme of the power of language developed in this chapter?

Book Six: Song of the Three Children

1. Explain the allusion to the apocryphal “Song of the Three Children” that opens this Book. What might this allusion foreshadow about what will happen in this Book?

Chapter Seventy-Six: Rachel Price

1. This is the first book so far to open without a section narrated by Orleanna. Explain the significance of this change.

2. How has Rachel ultimately dealt with her family’s tragedies and guilt?

3. Where is the irony in Rachel deciding to never move back to America?

Chapter Seventy-Seven: Leah Price

1. What conclusion does Leah finally come to regarding her search for justice?

2. Explain the significance of Leah describing herself as an un-missionary. What theme does this emphasize?

3. Describe Leah's new religion.

Chapter Seventy-Eight: Adah Price

1. Describe Adah's new religion.

2. What conclusions does Adah come to regarding her burden of guilt?

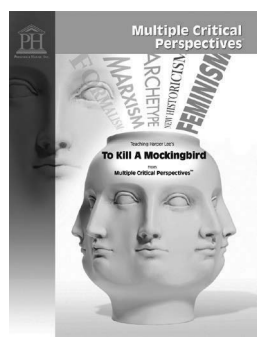
Book Seven: The Eyes in the Trees**Chapter Seventy-Nine**

1. Who is the narrator of this chapter? How is her viewpoint significant?

2. How does the title of this book relate to Ruth May?

3. Explain the significance of the novel's closing line.

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Romeo and Juliet

Activity One

Examining Juliet's Role as Wife and Daughter in A Patriarchal Society

- Have students (independently, in pairs, or in small groups) examine the following scenes:
 - Act I, Scene III
 - Act III, Scene V
 - Act IV, Scene II
- Ask students to take detailed notes on the following ideas:
 - Juliet's attitude and behavior toward her parents before and after meeting Romeo
 - Juliet's attitude toward filial obedience, marriage, honor, and virtue
 - The Capulets' expectations with regard to their daughter
- Use the following questions to generate a classroom discussion:
 - Before meeting Romeo, how does Juliet view the prospect of marriage?
 - Before meeting Romeo, how does Juliet evaluate the right of her parents to choose her husband?
 - How does Capulet expect Juliet will respond upon hearing that her wedding day has been set? Why does he expect this particular response?
 - What language does Capulet use to address Juliet when she expresses her refusal to marry Paris? What does this language indicate about Capulet's attitude toward Juliet? Toward women in general?
 - What is the relationship between disobedience and death as expressed by Capulet and Lady Capulet? What does the connection between disobedience and death as expressed by Juliet's parents reveal about the importance or power of the patriarchal state?
 - Why does Juliet say she would choose death—suicide—over marriage to Paris? What does Juliet's decision to die in case no other solution becomes available reveal about a woman's status in her society? About a woman's power or lack of power?
 - Why does Juliet profess to regret her "disobedient opposition" (IV, II) after visiting Friar Lawrence?
 - Why does Juliet turn to Friar Lawrence for help?

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The Great Gatsby

Mythological/Archetypal Criticism Applied to *The Great Gatsby*

Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach

MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHETYPAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM are all closely related. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud's theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who examine texts from a mythological/archetypal standpoint are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is "a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." He believed that human beings were born innately knowing certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology, created long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe. Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.). Every culture has a creation story, a life-after-death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When reading a work looking for archetypes or myths, critics look for very general recurring themes, characters, and situations. In modern times, the same types of archetypes are used in film, which is why it has been so easy for filmmakers to take a work like Jane Austen's *Emma* and adapt it into the typical Hollywood film *Cluedo*. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern authors allow readers to know the characters in a work with little or no explanation. Imagine how cluttered stories would be if the author had to give every detail about every single minor character that entered the work!

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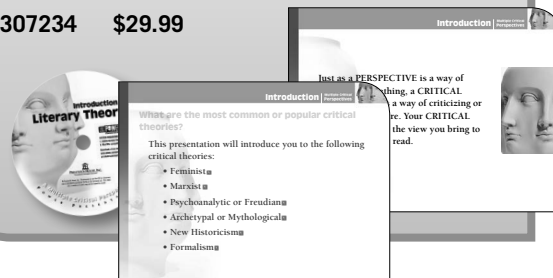
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