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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Bean Trees

by Barbara Kingsolver

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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The Bean Trees

Objectives

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

1. infer meanings about characters and events when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
2. discuss what each of the following might symbolize or represent in the story:
 - The Broken Arrow
 - The Cameo
 - The “Damn I’m Good” T-shirt
 - The Dead Blackbird
3. comment on whether Taylor believes in Providence as a guiding force in her life.
4. discuss the following themes in this story:
 - With a helping hand, an abused child can grow.
 - It is everyone’s duty to be informed about human rights violations and to insist that governments take action against these abuses.
 - If the cause is worthy, sometimes risks must be taken.
5. point out the significance of the novel’s title and the chapter titles in this story.
6. identify examples of sarcastic dialogue and physical humor, and relate these examples to the author’s style.
7. discuss the importance of the names Turtle, Taylor, and Esperanza to the story
8. cite incidents from the story that illustrate the theme that the customs of other cultures need to be appreciated.
9. point out examples of proverbs in the story and comment on how they enhance the reader’s understanding of the narrator’s ideas.
10. find examples of metaphor, simile, and idiom and discuss how they work in the novel.

The Bean Trees

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Comment on the significance of the titles of the chapters in *The Bean Trees*, specifically including “How They Eat in Heaven,” “Soundness of Mind and Freedom of Will,” and “Rhizobia.”
2. Cite two incidents from the story that prove Taylor believes in providence as a guiding force in her life.
3. Why do you think Kingsolver presents the large picture of Jesus on the same street as the large picture of the woman in the bikini? What do you think she is saying about society?
4. List three incidents from the story that support the following theme: The cultures and customs of other people need to be appreciated.
5. Why do Esperanza and Estevan decide to change their names to “Hope” and “Steven”? Why does Taylor use the name “April Turtle Two Two” on the adoption papers?
6. What excuses does Taylor offer to Estevan for her ignorance of the actions of the United States government concerning Guatemalan refugees?
7. In what ways are Turtle and Esperanza alike?
8. Why does Taylor admire Mattie?
9. Compare Lou Ann’s personality with Taylor’s. Why do you think they are good roommates?
10. For what reasons does Taylor decide to fight to keep Turtle? Why does she risk her freedom to help Esperanza and Estevan?
11. Define the following terms from the story: nutter, moon soup, failure to thrive, head rights, saguaro, cicadas, wisteria
12. How does having a job change Lou Ann for the better? In what ways does Taylor mature by the end of the story? State whether or not you believe this is a coming-of-age novel.
13. Why is it ironic that Taylor adopts Turtle? What is ironic about Estevan’s and Esperanza’s ability to help Taylor deceive Mr. Jonas Wilford Armistead?
14. What do you think the Cameo brooch Cynthia wears might represent in the story?

The Bean Trees

ONE: The One to Get Away

Vocabulary

congregated – gathered together
dissect – to cut apart
enraptured – in love with

1. What does the quotation suggest about Newt’s future?

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

2. Why is the narrator called Missy instead of Marietta?

3. In what ways is Missy’s mother a “good” mother? What qualities do you think Missy’s mother tries to instill in her daughter?

TWO: New Year's Pig

Vocabulary

pamphlet – a brochure
pleated – arranged in folds
prenatal – before the birth of a baby
prosthetic – false or artificial

1. Why do you think Lou Ann and Angel's marriage is in trouble?

2. Barbara Kingsolver is described by critics as a political activist who expresses her ideas about political and social issues in her stories. Cite an incident in this chapter that illustrates Kingsolver's views on racial prejudice. State what you believe she is saying about race in the incident you select.

3. One of the themes in this novel explores a woman's role in society. What do these three following incidents from the chapter suggest to you about the author's views on this issue?

- Lou Ann thinks that "it would not be so bad to go through your life as a pregnant lady."

SIX: Valentine's Day

Vocabulary

aptitude – an ability or skill
decapitated – cut off the head of something
flourish – to wave
ottoman – a footstool
petrified – extremely frightened
sanctuary – a place of safety
spew – to throw or toss wildly

1. Explain how the phrase used to describe Turtle fits her: “Turtle’s main goal in life...seemed to be to pass unnoticed.”

2. Taylor says to the priest, “You are old, Father William.” However, she does not know where the quotation comes from. It is an allusion to a famous poem that comes from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. How does this allusion help emphasize what happens in Taylor’s life?

3. Mattie describes her place as a “sanctuary.” What do you think Mattie is doing besides running a tire business?

NINE: Ismene

Vocabulary

conjectured – guessed

1. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Even though Taylor is attracted to Estevan, she will never allow anything romantic to happen between them.

2. How does Taylor try to justify her ignorance concerning the situation in Guatemala? What political statement and personal message do you think Kingsolver is trying to send to her readers in this chapter?

3. Who is Ismene?

4. Define the terms “Nutter” and “Moon Soup.”

5. What important concept does Taylor learn through her conversation with Estevan?
