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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



## Black Boy

by Richard Wright

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



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938  
[www.prestwickhouse.com](http://www.prestwickhouse.com)  
800.932.4593

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# Black Boy

## Objectives

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

1. discuss the author's writing style, including using the following:
  - repetition
  - digression
  - events out of chronological order
2. recognize the dual first-person narration of Richard the character and Richard the author.
3. illustrate with detail from the text the characteristics the protagonist possesses that contribute to his decision to become a writer.
4. recognize the importance of education in discerning oppression.
5. cite incidents from the story to trace Richard's growing dissatisfaction with living in the South during the time of the Jim Crow laws.
6. explain how racial, socio-economic, and political prejudice can shape a person's growth and beliefs.
7. identify the tenets of Communism that attracted so many Americans during the Great Depression.
8. understand the human need to belong to a group and Richard's struggles to achieve an identity.
9. discuss the concept of the American Dream and how prejudice affects it.
10. connect the images of darkness and ignorance that are pervasive in the story.
11. define and cite instances from the book of the following literary terms:
  - flashback
  - epithet
  - sensory images
  - alliteration
  - irony
12. place *Black Boy* in its correct chronological period and understand how outside events helped mold Wright's life.
13. discuss various aspects of Wright's style of writing.

# Black Boy

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Which childhood incidents alert Richard to the existence of prejudice?
2. Trace Richard Wright's educational background. What events inspired him to become a writer?
3. What role does religion play in Richard's upbringing? Why does he consider atheism to be more logical than Christianity?
4. Richard's family migrates from home to home. How does this constant moving shape Richard's view of the South?
5. Analyze Richard's contacts with white employers. What does he learn about social expectations and his own viewpoints with each?
6. Explain the symbolism of the title of part one, "Southern Night."
7. Wright uses a style of commenting on dialogue to convey his emotions in "Southern Night." In "The Horror and the Glory," however, he uses the author's aside in long parenthetical comments for the same purpose. Why do you think this is the more appropriate style for part two?
8. Compare and contrast Richard's expectations of life in Chicago with the reality of actually living there.
9. Analyze Richard's devotion to the Chicago John Reed Club.
10. Why is Richard ousted from the Chicago Communist Party?
11. Analyze Richard's prediction that Communism is the government of the future.
12. Richard is constantly out of place—in his family, among his peers, in his society. If Richard Wright were alive today, would he still struggle to find his place in the world? Explain.
13. Explain Richard Wright's disillusionment with the American Dream.
14. In Chapter Fifteen, Wright describes America as an "adolescent." In what ways has America matured? In what ways is America still in need of growth?
15. Find examples of various literary terms:
  - Foreshadowing
  - Conflict
  - Aside
  - Metaphor
  - Symbol

# Black Boy

## Chapter 1

### Vocabulary

**bewilderment** – confusion  
**chastened** – humbled  
**clamor** – harsh noise  
**doggerel** –poorly written verse  
**enthralled** – thrilled  
**gaunt** – extremely thin  
**gnarled** – twisted, deformed  
**horde** – large number  
**insistent** – firm  
**jauntily** – buoyantly, self-confidently  
**listlessly** – tiredly, without energy  
**nostalgia** – fond memories  
**ramshackle** – broken down  
**replete** – filled  
**tantalizing** – tempting  
**tenement** – cheap apartment  
**vivid** – sharp impression  
**withering** – wasting away

1. What causes Richard's house to catch on fire?

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2. Why does Richard hide under the house?

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4. Find a metaphor in this chapter.

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5. Describe the incident that leads to Ella's moving away from Granny's house.

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6. What is the overall impression of the sensory images Wright uses in Chapter 2?

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7. On the train to Elaine, Arkansas, Richard questions his mother about race. Why does this anger his mother?

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8. Why does Richard steal biscuits from Aunt Maggie's table?

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9. What makes Richard lose his trust in Uncle Hoskins?

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10. Why does Richard's family flee their home in Elaine?

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## Chapter 5

### Vocabulary

acutely -- strongly, pointedly  
blasphemous – anti-religious  
broached – brought up  
doctrine – belief  
extolling – praising highly  
girded – covered, circled  
impending – upcoming, looming  
injunction – law  
mustered out – thrown out, dismissed  
obscure – unclear  
substantiated – proven with evidence

1. Why does Wright say, “suddenly the future loomed tangibly for me”?

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2. Why does Richard willfully avoid eating?

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3. Explain how Richard unwittingly becomes an agent for pro-Ku Klux Klan literature?

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3. What subjects are considered taboo for southern white men to discuss with blacks? Which ones are allowed? Wright provides the following list of taboo topics:

“American white women; the Ku Klux Klan; France, and how Negro soldiers fared while there; French-women; Jack Johnson; the entire northern part of the United States; the Civil War; Abraham Lincoln; U. S. Grant; General Sherman; Catholics; the Pope; Jews; the Republican party; slavery; social equality; Communism; Socialism; the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitutions; or any topic calling for the positive knowledge or manly self-assertion on the part of the Negro.”

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4. Explain how Richard is duped into fighting in a boxing match.

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