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Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Cold Sassy Tree

by Olive Ann Burns

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



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ISBN: 978-1-58049-299-7

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Item No: 300200

Cold Sassy Tree

Objectives

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

1. define vocabulary words from the text.
2. cite incidents from the novel to illustrate that this is a coming-of-age novel.
3. find instances of the following uses of language: metaphor, personification, foreshadowing, allusion, symbol, and theme.
4. recognize the author's use of satire directed toward organized religion.
5. point out instances of verbal irony or sarcasm in the story.
6. discuss the significance of the title as it relates to the conflict between tradition and progress.
7. relate instances of humor in the story and discuss how the humor entertains as well as illustrates the customs, manners, speech, and folklore of the people living in Georgia in the early 1900's.
8. discuss the extent to which Will is a reliable, believable narrator.
9. discuss the old sassafras tree as a symbol in this story.
10. cite incidents from the story to support the following themes:
 - It is important for people to find joy and humor in life.
 - Death is a natural part of life.
 - Ignoring the power of gossip, decisions about life should be based on what one feels is best.
 - The traditions of the past are sometimes destroyed as communities modernize.
 - People must not use appearance, social standing, or unusual behavior as a basis to prejudge others.
11. discuss the role of organized religion in the lives of the people living in Cold Sassy and the extent to which they agree with Grandpa's belief that organized religion fails to serve the needs of the individual.

Cold Sassy Tree

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. For each of the following vocabulary words, describe an incident from the story: lockjaw, trestle, suffragette, gelding, camaraderie, buckeye.
2. Write a dialogue between Grandpa and Will discussing any of the following topics. In the dialogue, Will asks Grandpa to clarify something about the topic and then Grandpa answers Will. If you can, write in dialect and include some of Grandpa's wit and humor in the conversation. Feel free to find specific passages in the story and paraphrase them. Doing this will help you to write the dialogue in dialect.

Topics:

- definition of faith
- how God feels about a person who commits suicide
- God's will
- Grandpa's views on funerals.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

Will: Grandpa, if I have faith and believe in God, will He give me what I pray for?

Grandpa: Having faith does not mean that the Lord is going to do what you want jest cause you ast Him to. The Lord ain't going to gar'ntee healin' of sickness. The Lord gar'ntee a spiritual healin'.

Will:

3. At the end of the story, the name of the town is changed to Progressive City. For what reasons is this or is this not an appropriate name for Cold Sassy, Georgia?
4. What does the sassafras tree symbolize in this story?
5. Cite three incidents in the story illustrating that some people living in Cold Sassy, Georgia, make decisions based on how the gossips might interpret their actions.
6. Bluford, Uncle Camp, Grandma, and Grandpa all die in this novel. Briefly describe what the circumstances are of each character's death and how each death does or does not help to illustrate the theme that death is a natural part of life.
7. List three examples of racism in Cold Sassy, Georgia. Which of the characters in the story sees the existence of racism in Cold Sassy? To what extent does Will recognize the existence of racism in himself and his family?

Cold Sassy Tree

Chapter 1

Vocabulary

genteel – having or showing good taste and refinement
lockjaw – tetanus; an infectious disease which enters the body through a wound
trestle – a bridge for trains

1. Describe the setting for this story. Where does it take place? What year?

2. Briefly identify each of the following characters and discuss their relationship to each other.

• Will Tweedy – _____

• Grandpa Blakeslee – _____

• Mary Willis – _____

• Aunt Loma – _____

• Mary Toy – _____

• Uncle Camp – _____

• T.R. – _____

• Campbell Jr. – _____

• Love Simpson – _____

• Miss Mattie Lou – _____

• Bluford Jackson – _____

Chapter 3

Vocabulary

chifforobe – a dresser for clothing

pottage – a thick soup or stew

privie – an outhouse

1. Will has been hoping that Grandpa will move in with them. Why does his mother dread that possibility?

2. One of the themes of this story is about the influence organized religion has on the lives of the people living in Cold Sassy, Georgia. Why is Mary Willis turned out of the Baptist church?

3. Why is mourning for his Granny difficult for Will?

Chapter 6

Vocabulary

arbor – a place shaded by trees or shrubs

1. What evidence is there in this story that African Americans living in Cold Sassy at the turn of the twentieth century are generally poor?

2. Grandpa prays for Granny to recover:

“Lord, I’m tempted to ast You to make Miss Mattie Lou well, like You was one a-them Atlanta doctors, or maybe Santy Claus and her a Christmas present You could give me if’n You jest would. I know Thou don’t mind me hopin’ she’ll git well, Lord, or wishin’, but hep me not to beg You to spare her....Oh God, You know my sin!”

What “sin” do you think Grandpa is referring to in the above prayer?

3. One of the themes of this novel is that death is a natural part of existence. It is clear to Will that Grandpa loved Miss Mattie Lou. The reader also knows that three weeks after her death, Grandpa decides to marry Love Simpson. What conclusion can you make about Grandpa’s views concerning death based on his actions in this story? How does your opinion fit with this theme?
