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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Learning Tree

by Gordon Parks

- 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: 978-1-58049-227-0

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Item No: 300603

The Learning Tree

Objectives

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

1. recognize examples of foreshadowing; speculate on what each example might be foreshadowing.
2. identify the point of view used by the author and cite examples.
3. using examples from the story, compare and contrast the two different worlds (black and white) of this novel and where they intersect.
4. define important vocabulary words used in the novel and be able to use them correctly in context.
5. explain why *The Learning Tree* is considered a coming of age novel; trace the development of the main character of the novel and be able to argue, based on information from the novel, whether or not this character has successfully “come of age.”
6. recognize examples of dialect and be able to explain why the author would choose to use dialect.
7. explain the importance of word choice; cite several examples where the author uses a particular word or phrasing to create a powerful image or feeling or avoid racially explosive wording.
8. list several symbols used in the novel and be able to explain the symbolism of each.
9. pick out significant events, scenes, or speeches and explain their significance to the novel as a whole.
10. be able to compare different characters who share similar roles.
11. cite several instances of prejudice including examples of other types of prejudice besides racial.
12. recognize crucial events in the novel including important conflicts (rising action) which lead to the climax.
13. explain how the author resolves or does not resolve the various conflicts brought up during the course of the novel.

The Learning Tree

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the title Gordon Parks has chosen for this novel. Explain why it is an appropriate name for the story.
2. During the course of the novel, the reader meets Newt Winger at age twelve and says goodbye to him when he is almost fifteen. A lot has happened to this young man in this time period. Choose what you believe to be the three or four most important events in his life during this time and explain why you have chosen each.
3. Newt's mother, Sarah Winger, is a very important character both in Newt's life and to the novel as a whole. Briefly describe Sarah and discuss her influences on her son and on the town of Cherokee Flats.
4. Each character in this story plays an important role in helping Newt mature and develop into a responsible, honest, young man. Choose one male and one female character (not including anyone in his family) and show how each one is influential in Newt's growth and development.
5. Religion plays an active role in the novel, and although it is more evident in the beginning than toward the end, there are many religious references. Choose several situations or characters that reveal spiritual or religious attitudes and briefly describe each. What type of influence does each character or situation have on Newt?
6. Describe the marriage between Rende and Clint. Include in your discussion a short history of their courtship, their status in the novel, and Sarah's role in keeping the marriage together.
7. Jack Winger is an interesting character. Pick out two or three significant scenes where Jack says or does something seemingly out of character. Briefly address the relationship he has with his wife.
8. There are many times in this novel when people—both black and white—are treated unfairly. Focusing on three instances where there is injustice, explain the situation briefly and state why you believe each situation to be unjust.
9. The Wingers have developed good relationships with nearly everyone in town. Find several examples where it is evident that people think highly of the family in general or its members specifically. How do these positive relationships help the family throughout troubled times?

The Learning Tree

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

demeanor – attitude, behavior, conduct
disconsolately – hopelessly, forlornly, inconsolably
incongruous – incompatible, inappropriate, absurd
listless – lethargic, sluggish, lacking spirit
lope – jog, canter, amble
maliciousness – hatred, spite, malevolence
ominous – forbidding, hopeless, threatening
pious - devout, holy, reverent
shimmied – danced, gyrated, reverberated
terrain – ground, turf, region

1. The novel begins with Newt watching something that later takes on some significance. What is he watching? What does his father compare this to?

2. How old is Newt?

3. Why is everyone looking for him in this chapter? Who finds him?

Chapter 5

VOCABULARY

contemptuously – scornfully, arrogantly, haughtily
droned – chanted, intoned
elated – excited, thrilled, joyful
illusive – possible, apparent, presumable
mackinaw – a kind of a raincoat
spectral – supernatural, otherworldly, mysterious

1. On Saturdays, Newt spends time with a very special person in his life. Who is that person, and why is he so important to Newt?

2. What is Rob's view of "colored" people?

3. What kind of trouble does Newt find when he helps Rob in the white part of town?

4. In a conversation on the way home, Newt tells his uncle what he would like to be when he grows up. What does he say?

6. How does Newt feel about the big boxing match at the circus?

7. So far we have seen Sarah Winger stand up to her son-in-law, her husband, and the school board. Why then are her actions toward Polly surprising?

Chapter 11

VOCABULARY

impudent – rude, disrespectful, insolent
pessimistic – negative, cynical, distrustful

1. Who attracts Arcella’s attention their first day at the white high school?

2. What kind of advice does Newt’s guidance teacher give him?

3. When Newt comes home from school, he finds out two new things. What are they?
