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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



October Sky

by Homer Hickam

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



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Objectives

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

1. identify the predominant motifs of the novel (pursuing a dream; persevering against all odds; the influence of an important person; personal ambition vs. family loyalty)
2. describe and analyze the relationships between the main characters:
 - a. Homer and Elsie
 - b. Sonny and Jim
 - c. Sonny and Elsie
 - d. Sonny and Miss Riley.
3. explain the impact of *Sputnik* on the Cold War and subsequent U.S. educational policies.
4. describe the personalities and explain the motivations of the main characters.
5. explain how Homer can be considered a tragic hero.
6. trace the evolution of Sonny and Homer's relationship, from adversarial to conspiratorial to cooperative.
7. define vocabulary words in context.
8. identify the climax and the significant events that lead to it.
9. describe how the mine is a symbol for Sonny's life.
10. describe how *October Sky* is a coming of age novel.
11. identify examples of metaphor, simile, irony, symbolism, and personification in the novel.
12. evaluate, through analysis of the consequences, the choices made by the protagonist, Sonny.
13. explain how motivation influences character.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the relationship between Homer and Sonny. Why does Homer seem to favor Jim?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Homer and Elsie? Do they have a happy marriage? What are the outstanding features of this marriage?
3. How are Homer and Elsie alike in their values and attitudes? How are they different?
4. Discuss Miss Riley's influence on Sonny's pursuit of his dream.
5. What is the nature of Sonny and Jim's relationship? Cite examples to support your opinion.
6. Choose one of the motifs below and write an essay about it, giving examples from the story to support your opinion.
 - Pursuing a dream
 - Persevering against all odds
 - The influence of an important person
 - Personal ambition vs. loyalty to someone else
7. Compare and contrast Homer and Elsie's feelings about the mine. Cite evidence to support your view.
8. Explain the significance of *Sputnik* to the country, the town of Coalwood, and Big Creek High School?
9. Is Sonny jealous of Jim? Why or why not? Cite evidence. Is Jim jealous of Sonny? Explain.
10. Why is the Big Creek High School football team not eligible to play in the state championship? How does the team feel about this? Why?
11. Sonny has mixed feelings about Coalwood and his place there. Explain why he wants to leave and at the same time wants to stay.
12. Even though Homer punishes Ike Bykovsky for helping Sonny, Ike defends him to Sonny. Explain how and why. How do you feel about this?
13. When Homer says, "I'm a company man, and that makes you a company boy..." what is he telling Sonny? Explain why Sonny already knows the significance of Homer's statement.

All references come from the Dell Edition of *October Sky*, copyright 1998.

October Sky

Chapter I

VOCABULARY

deference – a courteous regard or respect
expansive – characterized by a free and generous nature
sonorous – full, deep, or rich sound

1. Where does the story take place? What is significant about this locale and why does it cause a conflict for Sonny?

2. What does it mean to be “company owned?”

3. How does Sonny feel about his father’s apparent preference for his brother Jim? Does his father’s opinion of him influence him in any way? Explain.

Chapter 5

VOCABULARY

cherubic – angelic

cohesiveness – the state of unity; sticking together

defunct – no longer living or operating

expound – to set forth point by point

gouged – defrauded; swindled

insidious – characterized by treachery or slyness

resolutely – with a fixed, firm purpose; in a determined way

1. What does Sonny learn from Quentin’s point of view about failure?

2. Mr. Dubonnet explains some hard truths to Sonny about Homer and the future of Coalwood. Explain and analyze this conversation.

Chapter 19

VOCABULARY

abomination – anything hateful and disgusting
stolid – having or showing little or no emotion

1. What do you think Sonny means when he says, "...I still saw a gray, ugly crust on everything and everybody that would never come off?"

2. What is the new course Sonny chooses for himself as a result of his guilt over the mine accident?

3. Who finally changes his mind? How?

4. How does Sonny demonstrate his new resolve?
