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Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938

www.prestwickhouse.com

800-932-4593

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1

1. Every family has “characters” in it (people who seem to be slightly abnormal). In this novel, grandpa and his two daughters seem to be the “characters.” Grandpa is the strong head of the family with two daughters spread fourteen years apart in age. Will Tweedy obviously loves his grandfather from the description of him.

In a short paragraph, describe the personality of one of the “characters” in your family: a favored aunt, uncle, or grandparent. Then, explain why you consider this person a favorite.

2. According to the family, Grandfather’s news of his engagement to Miss Love Simpson shocks the family for two very good reasons. First, Mr. Blakeslee’s wife died only three weeks prior to his announcement and the proper time for appropriate mourning is not over, according to their customs. Second, Miss Love is many years younger than he is and very attractive.

In your opinion, explain in a short expository essay whether this would be shocking in today’s society. Do you think Mr. Blakeslee’s action is disrespectful to his deceased wife? Explain.

Chapter 3

5. Because there is so much fuss over Grandpa and Miss Love, Mama becomes extremely irritated and annoyed, taking her frustration out on Will by calling him “no-count and shiftless.” Often when people are angry or upset, they may act out their frustration on an innocent party. Explain a time when you were upset, then took your anger out on someone or something else. How did you feel afterward?
6. Will’s activities are limited because of mourning for Grandma—among other things, he isn’t allowed to play baseball, go fishing, or even ride to Atlanta. Write a letter to a friend as if you are Will, describing your feelings in depth over having to obey these rules.
7. Aunt Loma and Mama are extremely class conscious or at least conscious of family backgrounds or ties. Throughout the novel, you will see references to Blacks keeping their place and the town people not associating with the mill workers. These people were considered to be in a lower class than Will’s family. Also, the girls continue having a difficult time seeing their father married to a woman whose father fought for the Union.

Every small town and city has class distinctions. Make a heading for each class distinction in your town; then list under it what puts the townspeople in each class. Look at the list and explain whether or not you think this is a fair way to judge people.

Chapter 16

27. The sincerity of Grandpa's prayer brings his family together as they all begin to leave Will's home after the accident. At least on the surface, people appear to be kind and accept Miss Love and Mr. Blakeslee's marriage. At some time, every family gets separated or estranged over family concerns. What brings your family together in unity even though people within the family do not agree on issues? Describe a particular incident like the one in the novel that your family was completely in harmony with each other.

28. When Grandpa brings Miss Love to the house, he leaves her alone while he talks to Will about his near-death experience. Miss Love is put in an awkward position since she is among people who frown on her marriage. Think of a time when you were put in an awkward position. What did you do at the time? If you could relive the situation over again, what would you do differently? Prepare your answer as if you were writing an essay to read in class.

Chapter 22

38. Mr. Boop tells Mr. Blakeslee that this “feller wearin’ a Stetson hat and cowboy boots had come...and had asked where did Miss Love Simpson board.” When Mr. Blakeslee arrives home, he discovers this “feller” chatting with Miss Love. Mr. Blakeslee has a choice to make in a difficult situation: should he get angry and kick him out or be cordial? Mr. Blakeslee decides to treat him like company to defuse the situation. In a conversational format, relate to a friend a situation where you had a similar choice. Even if looking back you made the wrong choice, tell your friend what happened.

Chapter 23

39. Motivated by his concern for her and to show her that he really sees her as an important part of his life, Mr. Blakeslee decides to get a horse for Miss Love since the old boyfriend has given her a beautiful saddle. Perhaps he wants to show his appreciation for her choosing him. Think of a person who shows his affection for you by his or her actions. List as many of those kind actions as you can.