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Teaching Unit™

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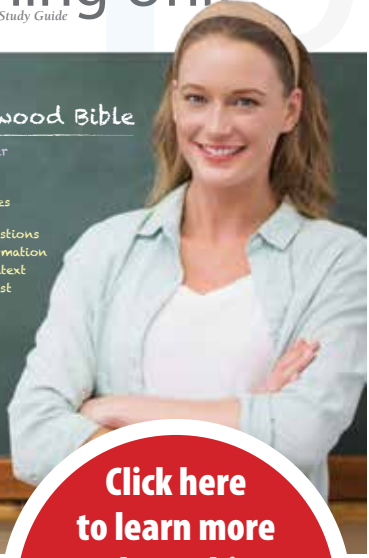
Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Poisonwood Bible

by Barbara Kingsolver

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



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The Poisonwood Bible

Objectives

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

1. find historical and biblical allusions in the story.
2. identify and understand the author's use of foreshadowing.
3. explain a change in one character or in each of the characters.
4. identify essential conflicts and their resolutions.
5. find examples of simile and metaphor in the text.
6. explain the historical context of the Congo at the time the novel is set.
7. map the character development of Nathan as the antagonist.
8. define and identify the literary elements the author employs.
9. explain the style and tone of each of the narrative voices in the novel.
10. identify and explain the significance of motifs in the story.
11. compare and contrast the cultural values of the Price family to the cultural values of their Congolese neighbors.
12. identify and explain ironic elements in the novel.

The Poisonwood Bible

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Find an example of a biblical allusion. How does it function in the novel?
2. Choose one character, and explain how he or she changes throughout the course of the novel using examples from the text.
3. Word play is an important aspect of the novel. Adah is obsessed with rearranging letters and words to create new meaning. Conversely, Rachel appears oblivious to language and continuously uses the wrong words. Ironically, her vocabulary errors create unique insights: “Maybe he’s been in Africa so long he has forgotten that we Christians have our own system of marriage, and it is called Monotony.” Discuss either Adah or Rachel. How does their word play support concepts in the novel?
4. Discuss Rachel’s survival technique: “[S]tick your elbows hard into the ribs of your neighbors to wedge yourself in, then pick up your feet so you won’t get trampled.” What does this technique reveal about her character?
5. What is significant about the recurring snake imagery? In what ways does this motif enhance the overall tone of the novel?
6. In the beginning of the novel, Orleanna says, “But what else could we have thought? Only that it began and ended with *us*. What do we know, even now? Ask the children. Look at what they grew up to be. We can only speak of the things we carried with us, and the things we took away.” To whom do you imagine she is speaking, and why? What events are being foreshadowed here? Use evidence from the text to support this idea.
7. Identify elements of foreshadowing in the text. How effective are these at preparing the reader for the events of the novel?
8. Explore the symbolism of Adah’s crooked posture. What is Kingsolver trying to convey through this character’s deformity and eventual rehabilitation?
9. Orleanna admits once that ultimately a mother loves her children from the bottom up. This is her justification for choosing Ruth May over Adah and Adah over Leah. Do you agree with the logic of this statement? Why or why not?
10. Draw a parallel between the political struggles occurring in the Belgian Congo at the time period of the novel and any one of the personal struggles of any of the Prices. How are the two interconnected?

The Poisonwood Bible

Book One: Genesis

Chapter 1: Orleanna Price – Chapter 2: Leah Price

VOCABULARY

accosting – approaching (someone) in a bold or aggressive manner
apocalypse – the end of the world; a biblical reference
brindled – spotted and gray
claustrophobic – afraid of small spaces
dominion – control
imperious – demanding
iota – a very small amount
missionaries – religious followers who aim to spread their beliefs
okapi – an African animal that resembles a giraffe
plantain – a tropical fruit similar to a banana
progeny – children, offspring
vexed – annoyed, irritated

1. Why does Orleanna describe herself and her daughters from a third-person point of view at the start of the book?

2. When Orleanna says, “She could lose everything: herself, or worse, her children. Worst of all: *you*, her only secret. Her favorite,” to whom is she referring when she says “you”?

3. In your opinion, what does Orleanna mean when she says, “One has only a life of one’s own”? Do you agree with this statement? Explain your opinion.

4. Why does Mama Tataba call the Prices “fufu nsala”?

5. What are the two meanings for the phrase “Tata Nzolo”? Why is the difference between the two meanings important?

6. What frustrates Tata Ndu about the church?

7. According to Orleanna, Nathan’s heart has been hardened. He will refuse to change for Africa a third time. What is your opinion of Nathan’s decision? Predict how Nathan’s stubbornness will play a role in the story.

8. Leah says: “I always believed any sin was easily rectified if only you let Jesus Christ into your heart, but here it gets complicated.” How does this quote signal a change in Leah’s character?

9. Who is the first Price to befriend the villagers? Why do you think this is?

10. With whom does Leah become friends? Describe him.

Book Three: The Judges**Chapter 1: Orleanna Price – Chapter 5: Adah**

VOCABULARY

bedraggled – broken-down, damaged
elucidated – explained
emaciated – extremely thin due to illness or lack of nutrition
ferocity – savagery
flotsam – pieces of wreckage
indignation – justifiable anger
inane – stupid, foolish
jetsam – discarded items washed ashore
paltry – small; unimportant
pallid – pale
petulant – annoying, irritable
prodigious – excessively large
regaled – entertained, amused
wantonness – lewd or reckless behavior

1. Describe Orleanna's childhood.

2. According to Orleanna, what news permanently curled Nathan's heart "like a piece of hard shoe leather" during the war?

3. What does Orleanna feel she has in common with Methuselah?
