

Black Boy

Comprehension Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in the space provided. Provide text support whenever possible. Complete sentences are best when using text support. Make sure you provide citation.

Chapter 1

1. How would you describe Richard's personality?
2. What is Richard's position in the family?
3. Does Richard's mother love him?
4. Why does she beat him so severely?
5. Why does the family move to Memphis? What happens there?
6. How does Richard respond to the one specific command given him by his father?
7. Does this portend (give a hint of what will happen) the future relationships of Richard and his male relatives?
8. Does this portend his relationship with white society?
9. Richard's mother terrorizes him in his punishment. She scares him in God's name. Do you think Richard will be religious?
10. Why is the boy hungry?
11. What does Richard learn to do in order to get to the grocery store?
12. Is this violence something he has already experienced?
13. Why does Richard use quotation marks around the word white when he talks about "white" people?

14. Who in his family is white?
15. How does Richard do in school?
16. Why does he land in an orphanage?
17. Is his father forced by the judge to support the family?
18. Why do society and the courts allow this man to not support his children?
19. What had the white landowners of the antebellum (pre-Civil War) South not handed down to their slaves?

Chapter 2

1. What did Aunt Maggie and Richard's mother do after Uncle Hoskins was killed?
2. What was Richard's response to Uncle Hoskins' murder?
3. What was different about Mother's response to Richard's questions about the soldiers? Why do you think she gave him so much information?
4. How does Richard respond to the chain gang?
5. Why do you think he thinks they are not men, but something else?
6. How did Richard feel about the Jews? Why did he feel this way?
7. Is it significant that he would feel this way about the Jews, when he was, himself, a persecuted member of a minority?
8. How did the adults in Richard's world feel about their (the children's) treatment of the Jews?
9. What was going on in the house next door?

10. Where did Aunt Maggie go, and with whom?
11. Why did they have to run in the middle of the night?
12. What was Richard's reason for not selling Betsy?
13. What brought the airplane into Richard's experience?
14. What did he think the plane was?

Chapter 3

1. No one has ever talked about racial prejudice, yet the hatred of whites by the blacks is now accepted and understood. How did everyone come to the same hatred of white people, when no one talked about it?
2. What were the missing elements that would have kept a race riot from ever happening in the context of this story?
3. Why were so many black people leaving the South?
4. What did they believe about the North?
5. What were the boundaries of the neighborhood for blacks and whites?
6. What happened to the mother?
7. Could she receive the care she needed? Why or why not?
8. Who did Richard go to live with?
9. Who did he want to go to live with?

10. Why did Richard begin to walk in his sleep?
11. Why did Richard choose Uncle Clark's house?
12. What did Richard assume Aunt Jody believed about him?
13. Why did he feel this way?
14. Describe Aunt Jody and Uncle Clark's household and routine.
15. Why were these so alien to Richard?
16. Why did Richard want to go back to Granny's?
17. What was Richard's sense of the world?

Chapters 4 & 5

1. To what church did Granny belong?
2. What dietary restrictions did this church adhere to? Was Granny's adherence in the strictest sense complete and appropriate?
3. What food did Richard dream of?
4. When he went to church, who did he dream of?
5. Who was Aunt Addie and what control did she have over which part of Richard's life?
6. How did they finally come to an understanding?
7. As Aunt Addie no longer called on Richard in school, how did Richard do in school? Why?
8. In order to undo the hurt that he had caused Granny, Richard promised to pray for one hour a day. During that time, what did he discover? How?

9. Aunt Addie and Granny gave Richard up as lost to them. What were some of the restrictions they put on him that affected his ability to go to school?
10. What grade did they put Richard in when he arrived at public school?
11. How quickly did he skip to the next grade?
12. How did he feel about this? What was his response?
13. What was the next confrontation with Granny about? How was it finally settled?
14. What was the content of the paper?
15. How did Richard learn this? Why had he not learned it sooner?
16. What happened on the steps when Richard added his opinion to Aunt Addie's and Granny's discussion?
17. What job did Richard obtain that summer?
18. What did he see in this line of work?
19. What happened to Grandpa's pension? Why did this add to Richard's lack of faith in the government as a solution to the problems of black people?
20. How did Richard finally convince Granny to allow him to work?

Chapter 6

1. Why did Richard "inquire among the students"? What was he looking for?
2. What chores would be required of him? What was the pay?

3. What did the lady ask him?
4. Why did he laugh at her question?
5. What did she give him for breakfast?
6. Why didn't he eat? What did she do with it?
7. Did he return? Why or why not? (Give more examples than just the food)
8. Describe how the second family acted.
9. Why did he keep the job?
10. Why did he join the church?
11. Did he enjoy Sunday school?
12. How did he feel about the Bible stories?
13. Why did Uncle Tom threaten Richard?
14. How did Uncle Tom want Richard to act?
15. Did Richard accept Uncle Tom's instruction? How did he respond?

Chapters 7 & 8

1. Where did Richard get his next job and what was the work?
2. What were all the men, and Richard too, afraid of?
3. What did the boss say about the dog bite?

4. What has he discovered about the nature of his future?
5. What did Richard sell to the newspaper?
6. What did Granny feel about this?
7. Where did Richard dream of going? Why? What did he expect to find there?
8. Why were the summer days “empty...long...bright hot”?
9. What experience in the 9th grade made him feel hopeful?

Chapter 9

1. What did his life depend on? What did he accept?
2. What behavior of the clothing store owner could he not accept? Why?
3. Why did the white boys in the car offer him a drink?
4. Describe the incident that accompanies Richard’s night-time delivery.
5. What did Gregg say Richard’s problem was? What advice did he give Richard?
6. What was Richard’s response?
7. What trade did Richard get a chance to learn?
8. Why didn’t the men ever help Richard learn the trade?
9. Why did Richard quit the job?

10. Explain what Richard meant when he said he was “bracing a wall he would never breach.”
11. Why did Mr. Crane ask Richard the questions he did?

Chapter 10

1. Richard describes Pease and Reynolds, not as individual men, but as part of a “huge, implacable, elemental design.” What does he mean?
2. Describe Richard’s problems at the drugstore.
3. Describe the life Richard sees at the hotel.
4. Who threatened Richard with a gun? Why?
5. “But I...who wanted to talk and act like a man, inspired fear...” In whom? Why?
6. What does stealing signify to Richard?
7. Why did he want money, quickly?
8. How did the “system” at the movie theater work?
9. How did he finally accumulate enough money to leave? Where did he go?

Chapter 11

1. Describe Mrs. Moss. Include her behavior in regards to Bess.
2. Why does Bess’ behavior so completely confound Richard? Be sure to compare his emotional responses in regards to his own family.
3. Why was he so astonished that Bess could accept him so easily?

4. How did Richard get made a fool by the bootleggers?

Chapter 12

1. What type of company did he decide to get a job at? Why?
2. Why did it turn out to be a good idea?
3. What happened that made Richard decide to move out of Mrs. Moss'?
4. What new way did Richard find to spend his money?
5. Describe the exchange between Shorty and Mr. White Man.
6. Why did the white man say Shorty was "all right"?
7. Name 4 topics that southern white men did not discuss with Negroes.
8. What did the white man offer him? Why? Why did he want to refuse? Did he?
9. Describe the "set-up" between Richard and Harrison. Why did the white men do this?

Chapter 13

1. How did Richard learn that there were people other than Negroes who criticized the South?
2. Why didn't Richard just go to the library to get what he wanted?
3. What subterfuge did he have to use to get library books?
4. How did Richard respond to Mencker's work?

5. Name 5 of the people Richard came across in his reading.
6. If the plots and stories did not interest him, what did he do?
7. What did he feel trapped by?
8. What option did he see for his life?

Chapter 14

1. What was the family's plan?
2. What did Richard know that Shorty did not?
3. Explain what Richard meant when he said he was conscious of possibilities.
4. What "kept him alive"?
5. What did he learn from what he read? Can everyone learn it?