

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**The Bean Trees**

by Barbara Kingsolver

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Item No. 200910

# The Bean Trees

## Objectives

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

1. infer meanings about characters and events when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
2. discuss what each of the following might symbolize or represent in the story:
  - The Broken Arrow
  - The Cameo
  - The “Damn I’m Good” T-shirt
  - The Dead Blackbird
3. comment on whether Taylor believes in Providence as a guiding force in her life.
4. discuss the following themes in this story:
  - With a helping hand, an abused child can grow.
  - It is everyone’s duty to be informed about human rights violations and to insist that governments take action against these abuses.
  - If the cause is worthy, sometimes risks must be taken.
5. point out the significance of the novel’s title and the chapter titles in this story.
6. identify examples of sarcastic dialogue and physical humor, and relate these examples to the author’s style.
7. discuss the importance of the names Turtle, Taylor, and Esperanza to the story
8. cite incidents from the story that illustrate the theme that the customs of other cultures need to be appreciated.
9. point out examples of proverbs in the story and comment on how they enhance the reader’s understanding of the narrator’s ideas.
10. find examples of metaphor, simile, and idiom and discuss how they work in the novel.

# The Bean Trees

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Comment on the significance of the titles of the chapters in *The Bean Trees*, specifically including “How They Eat in Heaven,” “Soundness of Mind and Freedom of Will,” and “Rhizobia.”
2. Cite two incidents from the story that prove Taylor believes in providence as a guiding force in her life.
3. Why do you think Kingsolver presents the large picture of Jesus on the same street as the large picture of the woman in the bikini? What do you think she is saying about society?
4. List three incidents from the story that support the following theme: The cultures and customs of other people need to be appreciated.
5. Why do Esperanza and Estevan decide to change their names to “Hope” and “Steven”? Why does Taylor use the name “April Turtle Two Two” on the adoption papers?
6. What excuses does Taylor offer to Estevan for her ignorance of the actions of the United States government concerning Guatemalan refugees?
7. In what ways are Turtle and Esperanza alike?
8. Why does Taylor admire Mattie?
9. Compare Lou Ann’s personality with Taylor’s. Why do you think they are good roommates?
10. For what reasons does Taylor decide to fight to keep Turtle? Why does she risk her freedom to help Esperanza and Estevan?
11. Define the following terms from the story: nutter, moon soup, failure to thrive, head rights, saguaro, cicadas, wisteria
12. How does having a job change Lou Ann for the better? In what ways does Taylor mature by the end of the story? State whether or not you believe this is a coming-of-age novel.
13. Why is it ironic that Taylor adopts Turtle? What is ironic about Estevan’s and Esperanza’s ability to help Taylor deceive Mr. Jonas Wilford Armistead?
14. What do you think the Cameo brooch Cynthia wears might represent in the story?

# The Bean Trees

## ONE: The One to Get Away

### Vocabulary

**congregated** – gathered together  
**dissect** – to cut apart  
**enraptured** – in love with

1. What does the quotation suggest about Newt’s future?

“But the day I saw his daddy up there like some old overalls slung over a fence, I had this feeling about what Newt’s whole life was going to amount to, and I felt sorry for him.”

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2. Why is the narrator called Missy instead of Marietta?

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3. In what ways is Missy’s mother a “good” mother? What qualities do you think Missy’s mother tries to instill in her daughter?

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**FOUR: Tug Fork Water**

Vocabulary

**dilapidated** – run-down, broken; in poor condition  
**meager** – a small amount  
**measly** – small  
**rummaged** – searched through  
**sediment** – something settled at the bottom of a liquid

1. List two reasons Lou Ann decides not to tell her mother that she and Angel are separated.

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2. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Even though Lou Ann loves her mother and grandmother, she is relieved to see them leave.

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3. What do you think the bottle of water from Tug Fork represents in this story?

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**TEN: The Bean Trees**

Vocabulary

**higgledy-piggeldy** – messy, confused-looking  
**transients** – roamers, travelers

1. What new fact is revealed about Edna?

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2. What does the name Esperanza mean in Spanish? List two pieces of wisdom or advice Taylor offers to Esperanza in hopes of cheering her up. Do you think the effort works?

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3. Critics describe this story as one of inspiration, love, and strength. Find an incident in this chapter illustrating that Taylor possesses each of those qualities.

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