

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Bean Trees

by Barbara Kingsolver

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ISBN: 978-1-58049-903-3

Item No. 200889

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Chapter One

The One to Get Away

1. Missy admits, “Before that exact moment I don’t believe I had given much thought to the future.” How much thought have you given to your future? What are your plans after you graduate high school, and where do you see yourself in ten years?
2. Many girls in Missy’s school get pregnant and have to drop out, but the fathers may continue to attend. Do you agree with this situation or do you see it as a double standard? Support your answer.
3. Missy distinguishes herself by wearing bright, bold clothing, and she is proud that she does not fit in with her classmates. What does this behavior tell you about Missy’s personality? Can you compare her to someone you know, and how do you feel about his or her refusal to conform? Do you ever wear clothing, or do things, that are out of the ordinary, just to be different? What are they?
4. Relate a time when you or a friend were scared to do something and had to gather courage to get it done. Describe the circumstance, the outcome, and whether or not it was worth the effort.
5. Imagine you are in Taylor’s situation. You have just left home, you’re in a strange town with no money, and someone drops a baby into your lap and disappears. What would you do?

Chapter Two

New Year's Pig

6. Lou Ann's mother, Mrs. Logan, dislikes Angel because he is Mexican, even though she "lived in eastern Kentucky and had never seen a Mexican." Why do you suppose some people stereotype others by making assumptions of what a particular group is like? List some common stereotypes that are made about your age group.

7. Lou Ann decides that prenatal pamphlets never show pregnant women because they "were put together by men, who in her opinion liked the looks of a mother and baby better than a pregnant woman." Do advertisements aim to attract certain types of people, whether by gender, age, or ethnicity? Give an example of an advertisement from television or radio that focuses on a particular group of people, and explain the methods the advertisers used to try to entice the group to buy the product.

8. Lee Sing says, "Feeding a girl is like feeding the neighbor's New Year pig. All that work. In the end, it goes to some other family." Explain the comment to a classmate who doesn't follow what it means.

Chapter Three

Jesus Is Lord Used Tires

9. Taylor asks about the origin of the name *Jesus Is Lord Used Tires*, and Mattie replies, “It’s something different. Lots of people stop in for curiosity.” Have you ever stopped into a store because you were curious? What was it that caught your attention? Did you buy anything because of the ad? What is the most unique or unusual name you have heard for a store or business?

10. Mattie’s intelligent and independent nature makes Taylor feel proud of her gender: “I had never seen a woman with this kind of know-how.... In Pittman if a woman had tried to have her own tire store she would have been run out of business.” How widespread is feminine and masculine stereotyping in American society today? Are both genders treated equally in the home, school, and work environment?

11. Taylor comes from a place called Pittman. What she thinks about it is indicated by its name. Explain what the name signifies.

12. The gallery attendant treats Taylor in a demeaning and snobbish manner. Have you ever experienced this sort of treatment from a stranger? How did it make you feel, and how did you handle the situation?

Chapter Four

Tug Fork Water

13. Why do you suppose Lou Ann hides the divorce from her mother and grandmother? Is it shame, pride, or something else?

14. We are told, “Ivy and her mother-in-law were not speaking, on account of one thing or another. Lou Ann could never keep track.” Describe two characters from real life, a book, or movie that display this type of hostile relationship. What circumstances lead them to behave in this manner?

15. Lou Ann resists the urge to return to Kentucky to be with her family. Do you think she makes the right decision? What advice would you give her?

16. Bobby Bingo tells Lou Ann, “Whatever you want the most, it’s going to be the worst thing for you.” Explain what this statement means to you.

Chapter Five

Harmonious Space

17. Spending every day at Kid Central Station does not seem to be helping Turtle. In your opinion, what does Turtle need in order to begin recovering from her past negative experiences?

18. Compose an ad in which you are looking for a roommate; be sure to include any requirements or restrictions you have. What problems can you foresee in living with a roommate?

19. Give your reaction to the first house Taylor visits. Do you think this would be a good home for Taylor and Turtle? Why or why not? Do you find Taylor's encounter with the people there humorous or not? Explain.