

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Cold Sassy Tree

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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 2

3. Loma and Mama are sisters, fourteen years apart. As Will Tweedy narrates the conversation, the reader sees how different they are through his viewpoint. Mama has common sense and tries to be fair in evaluating the possibilities of her father's marriage. Mama is humiliated by her father's actions, but she wants Aunt Loma to keep quiet in hopes that things will calm down. On the other hand, Aunt Loma, who is younger, wants to go and just tell Miss Love off for accepting the proposal. Although in the same family, siblings can have different personalities and view life in vastly different ways.

Compare or contrast yourself with one of your own siblings or someone who lives in your household. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What are your relative's strengths and weaknesses? Write these paragraphs as if you were putting them in your family scrapbook to keep along with family pictures.

4. The shock of "Daddy" marrying Miss Love Simpson—a young Yankee—has the family extremely upset. They discuss the possibilities of Miss Simpson marrying Son Black or the guy in Texas that she has dated. Besides the social ramifications of this marriage, the girls both want items from the house, namely a mirror and a piano. Mary Willis and Loma both are afraid of the gossip that might come from their father marrying a woman who works for him and whom he sees daily. This new marriage has the girls in a stressed mental state.

Although times have changed from 1906, how would a similar scenario affect you if either parent decided to marry someone much older or younger, someone of a different race, or from a different country? Explain your answer to a friend.

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 4

8. The novel is written from a child's viewpoint. Will continues to describe his relatives in this chapter, as well as Miss Love. He describes his grandfather as a man who would not allow Abraham Lincoln's name said in his presence. Will gives a short picture of his father and his uncle, and then tells some background of Miss Love. As he grows older, he will see them all in a different light.

List some relatives that as a child you had different opinions about them from what you have now. Next to each name briefly describe what you first thought and then briefly describe what you think of that person now. Have they changed or have you changed?

Chapter 5

9. Will Tweedy describes the loving relationship between his grandfather and grandmother. It appears that he needs to convince himself that his grandfather did not have an attraction for Miss Love before his grandmother died. At the end of the chapter, Will relates how he prays for God to save her. Will concludes from seeing them together that his grandfather genuinely loves his granny. Young people look to adults for guidance and direction in the area of relationships. Sometimes what they see is disappointing and discouraging—but not always. Write about a special relationship in your family that you admire and would want to imitate.

Chapter 6

10. Granny's stroke leaves the entire family sad and devastated. Again, Will relates his grandfather's great grief for his wife as he weeps next to her bed and brings a rose to her. They talk about when they first met and spent time together. Grandpa kneels to pray for the life of his wife, and Miss Mattie Lou rallies. Once more, Will concludes that Miss Love "was nothing more to [Grandpa] at the time than a way to make a profit on ladies' hats."
 - A. Your life has already been filled with joy and sadness. Write a journal entry relating either of these times.
 - B. Do you know anything about your parents' romance? Create a short scene, like the one in the book between Miss Mattie Lou and Mr. Blakeslee, reminiscing about the early days of your parents' relationship.

Chapter 7

11. Although the family thinks Miss Mattie Lou is getting better, she begins seeing people in the room, men with shovels digging a grave, and angels coming and going. Eventually, that day she dies. Watching the reaction of his grandfather, Will is convinced that he never had any intentions on Miss Love until after his grandmother died. Pretend you are Will Tweedy, and send an e-mail to a friend telling what happened the last day of Miss Mattie Lou's life.