

Collected Stories

By William Faulkner

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NOTE TO TEACHERS

This guide explores William Faulkner's novel, *Go Down, Moses*, as well as a selection of some of his best and well-known short fiction. *Go Down, Moses* tells the story of the McCaslins. Through the history of the family as well as the land they inhabit in Faulkner's mythic Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner explores important themes found throughout his novels and short stories: the South before and after the Civil War, the pull and burden of ancestry, the curse of slavery and the resulting relationships between Black people and white people, and finally the connection between the individual and the natural world.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Several of the short stories that appear in *Go Down, Moses* had been previously published in magazines when Faulkner decided to pull them together and rework them into a novel. He had done this once before with the novel *The Unvanquished*. Though the book was originally published as *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories*, in subsequent editions, at Faulkner's insistence, the book was published simply as *Go Down, Moses*. The question as to whether the novel is a collection of short stories or a novel is debated among critics. There is no traditional plot that drives the story forward other than the history of the McCaslin family and there are moments in the book when the McCaslins are not the central focus or even mentioned at all.

Faulkner put the debate to rest when he wrote his editor, Robert Haas, in 1949 and explained, "Moses is indeed a novel. I would not eliminate the story or section titles. Do you think it necessary to number these stories like chapters? Why not reprint exactly, but change the title from *Go Down,*

Teacher's Guide

INCLUDES: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS,
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES,
AND LINKS TO RESOURCES



WILLIAM FAULKNER

Collected Stories

ABOUT THIS BOOK

(CONTINUED)

Moses and Other Stories, to simply: *Go Down, Moses*, with whatever change is necessary in the jacket description. We did *The Unvanquished* in this manner, without either confusion or anticipation of such. . . . Indeed, if you will permit me to say so at this late date, nobody but Random House seemed to labor under the impression that *Go Down, Moses* should be titled, '*and Other Stories*'" (*Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, Joseph Blotner, ed., pp. 284–85).

The book is challenging to read with multiple characters, differing points of view, narrative digressions, and no consistent linear sense of time. Following is a list of characters who appear in the novel, highlighting their relation or connection to the McCaslin family. In addition, brief summaries of each chapter in the book are included to help guide the reader through the maze of Faulkner's fictional familial relationships, time sequences, and story developments.

**LIST OF CHARACTERS
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:****Beauchamp, Henry**

Henry is Lucas and Molly Beauchamp's son. The Beauchamps represent the racially mixed side of the McCaslin family. He appears briefly in the chapter, "The Fire and the Hearth," and is a childhood companion of Roth Edmonds.

Beauchamp, James (Tennie's Jim)

He is the son of Tomey's Turl and Tennie Beauchamp and the grandfather of the unnamed woman who appears in the chapter "Delta Autumn."

Beauchamp, Hubert

He is the owner of a large plantation and appears in the first chapter of the novel, "Was." Tennie is enslaved by him, but she eventually ends up with the McCaslin family, keeping the name of the original family who enslaves her. His sister is Miss Sophonsiba, the woman who eventually marries Buck McCaslin.

Beauchamp, Lucas

Lucas is also a son of Tomey's Turl and Tennie Beauchamp and the grandson of old McCaslin. His wife's name is Molly and he is the only one of the Beauchamp branch of the family to remain on the McCaslin property. His character is featured in "The Fire and the Hearth."

Beauchamp, Molly

Molly is married to Lucas Beauchamp. She appears in the story "The Fire and the Hearth" and reappears as an old woman (now spelled Mollie) in the final chapter of the novel.

Beauchamp, Samuel Worsham (Butch)

Molly and Lucas Beauchamp's grandson. He is forced to leave the McCaslin property after he was caught stealing. He continues to have trouble with the law and is eventually executed for a murder he committed. The last chapter of the novel describes his family's attempt to return his body home for a proper burial.

Beauchamp, Sophonsiba Miss

She is Hubert Beauchamp's sister who marries Buck McCaslin. Their son is Isaac McCaslin.

**LIST OF CHARACTERS
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:
(CONTINUED)**

Beauchamp, Sophonsiba (Fonsiba)

She is the daughter of Tomey's Turl and Tennie Beauchamp. She marries and moves away from the McCaslin land, but she appears briefly in "The Bear" as Isaac McCaslin attempts to do right financially by the Beauchamp heirs.

Beauchamp, Tennie

Tennie is enslaved by the Beauchamps. She eventually ends up with the McCaslin family and marries one of the other people who they enslave, Tomey's Turl. They have three children and they will use the name Beauchamp rather than McCaslin. As Tomey's Turl is a descendant of Old McCaslin, the Beauchamps and the McCaslins are related through their marriage.

De Spain, Major

He is a wealthy landowner on whose property the hunting expeditions take place. He later sells some of the land to a lumber company. De Spain also makes a brief appearance in the story "Barn Burning."

Edmonds, McCaslin (Cass)

Cass is related to old McCaslin through his grandmother, McCaslin's one daughter. When Isaac McCaslin refuses his inheritance, Cass takes over managing the land and the family finances. Cass has a close relationship with the young Isaac and they have several important discussions in "The Old People," and "The Bear."

Edmonds, Carothers (Roth)

Roth is the grandson of Cass Edmonds and the son of Zack Edmonds. He ultimately takes over managing the McCaslin family land and business dealings from his father. Roth is essentially raised by the Black Beauchamp side of the McCaslin family and sees Molly, Lucas's wife, as a mother figure. As an adult, he has an affair with a woman who turns out to be a distant relative of the Beauchamps.

Edmonds, Zack

Roth's father, he appears briefly in "The Fire and the Hearth." He and Lucas Beauchamp have a violent confrontation over Lucas's wife, Molly.

Eunice

She is enslaved and becomes pregnant by old McCaslin and has a daughter named Tomasina. She marries another person who is enslaved, Thucydus. When she finds out that Tomasina is also pregnant by an incestuous relationship with old McCaslin, her own father, Eunice is so distraught that she drowns herself. Isaac learns of her death in the family ledgers.

Fathers, Sam

Sam is the son of Native American chief Ikkemotubbe and an enslaved woman of mixed racial heritage. Sam is part Indian, part white, and part Black. His mother was later married to an enslaved man so Sam Fathers's name comes from his original name, Sam Has-Two-Fathers. A very important person in Isaac's life, Sam is both his teacher in regards to hunting and the wilderness, as well as his spiritual mentor.

Hogganbeck, Boon

Boon works for Major de Spain. Like Sam Fathers, his racial heritage is mixed. Boon is described as being far less adept in the wilderness than Sam. He is the person who cares for Lion, the dog that eventually kills the mythic "bear."

**LIST OF CHARACTERS
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:
(CONTINUED)**

Ikkemotubbe

He is also referred to as “Doom” in the novel and appears in the chapters “Old People,” “The Bear,” and “Delta Autumn.” He is the Indian chief who sells old McCaslin the land that will become the McCaslin plantation. The name, “Doom,” comes from the French name “Du Homme” which he acquired after a trip to New Orleans. He is Sam’s father.

McCaslin, Amodeus (Buddy)

Buddy is one of the sons of Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin (old McCaslin). He appears primarily in the first chapter, “Was.” As a result of his card playing, the McCaslin family acquires another enslaved person by the name of Tennie Beauchamp.

McCaslin, Isaac (Ike)

Isaac is perhaps the central character in the book. It is through Isaac that Faulkner explores some of the most important themes in the novel. He is the son of Buck McCaslin and Sophonsiba Beauchamp and the grandson of old McCaslin. After learning the sordid details of his grandfather’s history, Isaac rejects his inheritance and as a result, the Edmonds branch of the family takes over the ownership and management of the McCaslin property. Isaac eventually marries, but never has any children. He appears as a boy in “The Old People,” as a teenager and young man in “The Bear,” and as an old man in “Delta Autumn.”

McCaslin, Lucius Quintus Carothers

“Old McCaslin,” as he is often referred to in the book, is the family patriarch. While the reader doesn’t directly encounter him, the specter of Lucius and his actions loom large in the generations that follow. He secures the land that will become the McCaslin plantation from a Native American Chickasaw chief by the name of Ikkemotubbe. Lucius is the origin of the three branches of the family—the white McCaslins, the racially mixed Beauchamps, and the Edmonds descendants. Old McCaslin had three children: Theophilus, also known as Buck; Amodeus, also known as Buddy; and a daughter whose name the reader never learns. His daughter marries a man by the last name of Edmonds and it is her descendants that eventually take over the McCaslin land.

McCaslin, Theophilus (Buck)

Buck is the son of old McCaslin and is featured in the first chapter, “Was.” He marries Sophonsiba Beauchamp and their son is Isaac McCaslin. Buck and Buddy’s notes on the family history prove to be vital to Isaac in discovering the secrets of his family.

Rider

He is the central character in the chapter, “Pantaloon in Black.” He is a Black sawmill worker who loses his wife, Mannie. His overwhelming grief causes him to act irrationally, get drunk, and kill a white man in a card game. He is eventually killed for the murder.

Stevens, Gavin

He is an educated, white lawyer who appears in the last chapter, “Go Down, Moses.” He helps Mollie Beauchamp bring her grandson home for a proper burial.

Thucydus

He is enslaved and marries Eunice after she becomes pregnant by old McCaslin. Old McCaslin leaves him ten acres of farmland, which will eventually be passed down to Lucas Beauchamp.

**LIST OF CHARACTERS
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:
(CONTINUED)**

Tomey's Turl

He is the son of old McCaslin and Tomey Tomasina. This makes him a half brother to Buck and Buddy even though he is considered one of the men enslaved by the McCaslins. He falls in love with another enslaved person, Tennie Beauchamp, and they have three children named Jim, Fonsiba, and Lucas. The family uses the Beauchamp name and represents the racially mixed side of the McCaslins.

Wilkins, George

He marries Lucas Beauchamp's daughter, Nat. While his relationship with Lucas was initially contentious, George and Lucas eventually join together to search for buried treasure in "The Fire and the Hearth."

Wilkins, Natalie (Nat) Beauchamp

Referred to as Nat in the story, she is the daughter of Molly and Lucas Beauchamp. She marries George Wilkins. Nat only appears in the chapter, "The Fire and the Hearth."

Worsham, Hamp

Hamp is Molly's brother. As children, they were both enslaved by Miss Belle Worsham and even when slavery ended, Hamp stayed and worked for her for the rest of his life. He appears in the final chapter, "Go Down, Moses."

Worsham, Miss Belle

Miss Worsham is the white woman who at one time owned Hamp and Molly as enslaved people. As she considers them family, she does whatever she can do in the final chapter of the novel to bring home Mollie's estranged grandson.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

William Faulkner was born on September 25, 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi. He moved permanently to Oxford, Mississippi, in 1902. The South of his childhood heavily influenced and shaped the fictional world of Yoknapatawpha County he creates in his novels and short stories. He enlisted in the military in 1918, but was ultimately rejected by the air service. He later joined the Royal Air Force and he was stationed in both Canada and England. He eventually returned to Oxford, and enrolled at the University of Mississippi where he started to write poetry and stories. He published his first book, a collection of poems, entitled *The Marble Faun* in 1924. In addition to writing short stories, Faulkner published several novels including *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), *A Fable* (1954), *The Town* (1957), *The Mansion* (1959), and his final novel *The Reivers* (1962). He won the Pulitzer Prize for the last two novels and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950.

While Faulkner achieved tremendous financial and critical success, he struggled with alcoholism and financial worries. He married Estelle Oldham in 1929, and they settled in Oxford in a house he named Rowan Oak. She had two children from a previous marriage, and she and Faulkner had another daughter together. He also spent some time in Hollywood and collaborated on the screenplays for *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*. He died in Byhalia, Mississippi on July 6, 1962.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

Was**List of Characters:**

Buddy McCaslin
Buck McCaslin
Cass Edmonds

Isaac McCaslin
Tomey's Turl
Tennie Beauchamp

Hubert Beauchamp
Sophonsiba Beauchamp

Summary

The opening chapter introduces one of the book's main characters, Isaac (more commonly known as Ike in the novel) McCaslin. While Ike wasn't present for the events in this chapter, the story that unfolds is one he learns through other family members. The sons of the elder McCaslin, Buck and Buddy, find out that one of the people they enslave, Tomey's Turl, has escaped to go and visit Tennie, an enslaved woman from a neighboring plantation. Buck, along with his nephew Cass Edmonds, venture to retrieve him. To get him back, there are series of card games between the owner of the plantation, Hubert Beauchamp, and the McCaslin brothers. In the end, Tomey's Turl returns to the McCaslin plantation along with Tennie. Another important character is introduced in this chapter, Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp, Hubert Beauchamp's sister. She is clearly looking or "hunting" for a husband. While she doesn't secure Buck in this chapter, she eventually marries him.

Questions

1. In regards to narrative structure, what does Faulkner achieve by introducing us to these important characters with little to no context? We don't know who Isaac is, yet he is the focus of the first line of the book, "Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike,' past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one" (p. 5). We also meet Tomey's Turl, but the reader doesn't know that he is Buddy and Buck's half brother. Why does Faulkner begin the book this way?
2. The life of Isaac McCaslin is essentially summarized in the first four paragraphs of the book. After reading the novel, go back and discuss this first section and its relevance to the rest of the novel.
3. What important themes of the novel appear in these first pages and in the opening chapter as a whole?
4. While Isaac isn't technically in this chapter as the events take place before he is born, how are the events significant to his life?
5. Why did Faulkner start the book with a title suggesting the past, "Was"? In what way is the past or the "old days" important to Faulkner?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING
(CONTINUED)***The Fire and the Hearth*****Characters****Lucas Beauchamp****Nat Beauchamp****Zack Edmonds****Molly Beauchamp****George Wilkins****Roth Edmonds****Summary**

The primary character in this chapter is Lucas Beauchamp. While he doesn't have the McCaslin name, he has McCaslin blood as his father, Tomey's Turl, is the son of old McCaslin. The chapter opens with a conflict between Lucas and his potential son-in-law, George Wilkins, over an illegal whiskey still. Lucas attempts to avoid getting in trouble over the still and manipulates a variety of characters to avoid punishment. In the end, he is caught and his daughter, Nat, ends up marrying the man who frustrates him the most, George Wilkins.

There are a number of digressions in this chapter which provide more details about the characters involved and the complicated family dynamics of the McCaslins. For example, Lucas and his wife, Molly, try to save Zack Edmonds's wife, who dies in childbirth. Molly delivers the orphaned baby, nurses him, and remains at the Edmonds's home for several months, forcing a violent confrontation between Lucas and Zack.

In another section of the chapter, Lucas becomes obsessed with finding a supposed lost treasure of gold on the property. George Wilkins joins him in the search.

Finally, this chapter includes a section detailing Molly's desire for a divorce from Lucas after several years of marriage. Molly believes that Lucas is insane in his relentless search for gold that likely doesn't exist. Lucas finally forsakes this quest and remains with his wife.

The chapter also includes Roth Edmonds's (now the family member in charge of the land) recollections of growing up in the two households that represent the complete McCaslin family and his love for Molly as the only mother he ever knew.

Questions

1. While this chapter doesn't mention Isaac specifically, how do the events that take place link to the other chapters? Are there thematic connections?
2. What image does the reader get of Lucas Beauchamp in this story? How does the image of Lucas as a younger man contrast with the image of the Lucas at the end of the chapter? In thinking about Lucas, Roth Edmonds observes, "it was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood, but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it. He didn't even need to strive with it. He didn't even have to bother to defy it. He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless" (p. 101). Is Lucas truly indifferent to his interracial heritage? How does Roth Edmonds feel about the interracial side of the family embodied by

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

- Lucas? Characterize the relationship between Roth and Lucas. Finally, does Faulkner believe that it is possible in this novel to be “ancestryless”?
3. What is the significance of the end of the story? Why does Lucas give up the search for the buried treasure? Is this detail important in regards to the rest of the book?
 4. Why is this chapter entitled, “The Fire and the Hearth”? What do the hearth and fire in Lucas and Molly’s home signify to Roth Edmonds?
 5. Roth describes Molly as, “the woman who had been the only mother, he, Edmonds (Roth), ever knew, who had raised him, fed him from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child, who had surrounded him always with care for his physical body and for his spirit too.” (p. 113). Is the bond Roth feels with Molly typical of the relationships between the two sides of the family? Does Molly feel the same kinship with Roth? Discuss Molly’s importance as a character in the novel in comparison to the other female characters.
 6. The Beauchamp and the Edmonds families are related, but their relationship is deeply dominated by race. Discuss the dynamic between the races in this chapter. For example, Roth recalls growing up with Lucas’s son, Henry, “He and his foster-brother rode the plantation horses and mules . . . they were sufficient, complete. . . . Then one day the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him” (p. 107). What does Roth realize? What is the “curse of his fathers”? What happens to the relationship between the two boys and why? What happens to Roth’s relationship with Molly?

Pantaloon in Black**Characters**

Rider	Mannie	Birdsong	Deputy
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Summary

Literary critics debate the relevance of this chapter, as it appears to have little or no connection to the rest of the novel. The McCaslin family makes only a brief appearance as the owners of a cabin rented by the central character, Rider, in the chapter. Thematically, however, connections can be made.

Divided into two sections, the story opens at the funeral of Rider’s wife, Mannie. Rather than articulate his deep sense of grief and pain, Rider goes to work at the sawmill and undertakes absurdly heavy tasks. After work, he gets drunk, ends up at a dice game, argues with a white man, Birdsong, and ultimately kills him. In the following section, a local deputy narrates the events as Rider is caught, jailed, and killed.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

Questions

1. Discuss the thematic elements that this chapter shares with the rest of the novel. For example, what does the story reveal about race relations and how does the relationship between the Black and white characters in this story play out in the rest of the novel?
2. After the funeral, Rider sees an image of his wife when he is alone in his cabin, “as soon as he moved she began to fade. He stopped at once, not breathing again, motionless, willing his eyes to see that she had stopped too. But she had not stopped. She was fading, going. ‘Wait,’ he said, talking as sweet as he had ever heard his voice speak to a woman.” (p. 134). Do the other characters, including the deputy, recognize Rider’s grief? Discuss why this recognition or lack thereof is important in regards to the rest of the novel.
3. Why does Faulkner shift the narrative perspectives in the second half of the story? Why doesn’t Faulkner give the deputy a name? What does the deputy think of Rider and the larger Black community?

The Old People

Characters

Isaac McCaslin (Ike)**Ikkemotubbe (also known as Doom)****Sam Fathers****McCaslin Edmonds (Cass)**

Summary

Along with Isaac McCaslin, Sam Fathers is one of the central characters in this chapter. The reader learns Sam’s personal history and his importance as Ike’s teacher and mentor. He is also a symbol in the novel of an individual’s connection to the natural world. Sam is one of the “old people” that Isaac must learn from. “He taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward” (p. 162).

This chapter details young Isaac’s coming-of-age, specifically his initiation into the ways of the wilderness. Sam takes Isaac hunting and teaches him everything there is to know about the woods. Isaac kills his first deer in this chapter and Sam marks Isaac’s face with the deer’s warm blood as if it is a baptism, “So the instant came. He pulled trigger and Sam Fathers marked his face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man” (p. 169). In part two, Isaac hunts with the men of the plantation and the town and he sees another buck, but refrains from killing it. In this moment, as Isaac is confronted with the natural strength and beauty of the animal, he inherits Sam’s knowledge of the natural world, a legacy from his ancestors. He explains, “Sam Fathers had marked him indeed, not as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people” (p. 173).

The chapter concludes with Isaac describing the hunting experience to his cousin, Cass Edmonds.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

Questions

1. How do the events in this chapter relate to the other chapters, particularly “The Bear”?
2. How does this story contribute to the idea that *Go Down, Moses* is essentially a coming-of-age novel about Isaac McCaslin? Discuss the specific events in this chapter that contribute to Isaac’s development as a person.
3. Discuss the scene in which Sam and Isaac see the buck, but don’t kill it: “It was not running, it was walking, tremendous, unhurried, slanting and tilting its head to pass the antlers through the undergrowth, and the boy standing with Sam beside him now instead of behind him as Sam always stood” (p. 175). Discuss the way they are standing and why it is significant. What happens when they finally see the buck together? What is the buck a symbol of for Faulkner?
4. Discuss the character of Sam Fathers. What distinguishes Sam from the other people in Isaac’s life? Why is he so important to him? In what ways is Sam Fathers relevant to the larger themes explored in *Go Down, Moses*?
5. How does the story of Sam’s heritage contribute to the exploration of race relations found throughout the book? The narrator describes, “For, although Sam lived among the negroes, in a cabin among the other cabins in the quarters, and consorted with negroes . . . and dressed like them and talked like them and even went with them to the negro church now and then, he was still the son of that Chickasaw chief and the negroes knew it” (p. 161). Why is Sam different and why is this difference significant?

The Bear

Characters:

Isaac McCaslin (Ike)**Boon Hogganbeck****Sam Fathers****Major De Spain****The Bear (also referred to as Old Ben)****Cass Edmonds****Lion****Eunice**

This is not a list of every character that appears in this story, but they are the most important in terms of the narrative and thematic development.

Summary

The story is divided into five parts. Part one begins when Isaac is sixteen and he recalls an earlier time, when he was too young to join the annual hunting expeditions or had even heard of the elusive bear known as Old Ben. When Isaac is finally old enough, Sam shows him how to track the bear. Isaac then ventures into the woods alone, eventually spotting the mythic beast, “It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon’s hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless” (p. 198).

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

In part two, Isaac continues to learn the ways of the woods. Sam and Isaac actually come close to the bear, but the dog they have with them proves useless. Neither Isaac nor Sam shoots the bear during this encounter. The reader is also introduced to Lion, the dog that will eventually help to bring about the bear's destruction. Sam instinctually knows that this is "the dog." Sam trains the dog and Lion is eventually cared for by another character, Boon. This section ends with Isaac's sense of foreboding, "It was the beginning of the end of something, he didn't know what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too" (p. 214).

The third section details the hunt that ends with the deaths of Old Ben, Lion, and Sam Fathers. In the end, the dog Lion attacks and manages to hold on to the bear while Boon stabs the animal repeatedly, finally killing him. When the bear dies, Sam collapses. The dead bear is dragged back to camp along with a gravely wounded Lion and an ill Sam. They both die. This section also includes a brief description of Isaac and Boon's side trip to get more alcohol for the hunting party.

In the following section, the story jumps in time to when an older Isaac, now twenty-one, reads the family's ledgers regarding the history of the McCaslin land, its business dealings, as well as the details of the lives of its inhabitants including those who they enslaved long ago. In reading these brief entries, Ike realizes something horrible about his grandfather. He not only had a child with one of the people he enslaved, Eunice, but he later went on to have an incestual relationship with that child, Tomasina, who had a baby. Isaac pieces the story together through a series of notes and financial details as well as the documentation of an enslaved woman drowning herself. Isaac surmises that the enslaved woman was Eunice and that she killed herself when she learned that he fathered a child with their daughter. This horror is one of the reasons that Isaac decides he doesn't want the McCaslin land, rejecting it completely along with what he sees as the sordid history of the McCaslin family. He also deeply believes (as did Sam Fathers) that the land can't actually be owned, "the earth was no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were" (p. 5). He also recalls an earlier time when he tried and failed to correct the wrongs done to the racially mixed side of the family by offering them financial compensation.

His refusal of his inheritance leads to a philosophical discussion with his cousin Cass Edmonds, who now takes ownership of the land. Ike also marries in this section. His wife wants him to claim his inheritance, but again, he refuses. As a result, their unhappy marriage is childless.

In the final section of the story, Isaac is now eighteen. He returns for the annual hunt, but Sam, Old Ben, and Lion are gone. In the time that has passed, Major de Spain has sold large portions of the wilderness to a lumber company. Isaac visits their graves and thinks about how things have changed. The chapter concludes as Isaac hears a very loud, persistent noise that turns out to be Boon sitting under a tree while a swarm of squirrels circles above his head.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

Questions

1. What themes does “The Bear” share with other chapters in the novel? For example, how does Faulkner explore the idea of the connection between man and the natural world in this chapter? Identify and discuss this theme and others with examples from throughout the text.
2. How does Isaac try and find the bear when he ventures out on his own? In the end, what must he do to find the bear and why are these actions significant in relation to the rest of the novel? Why does he feel “tainted” (p. 197)?
3. How are the events in “The Bear” a continuation of the coming-of-age story told in “The Old People”? Isaac describes his growing up as: “If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself . . . was his alma mater” (p. 199). In what way does Isaac’s “education” influence the person he becomes and how does it relate to Faulkner’s larger themes in the novel?
4. Discuss the following passage describing Isaac’s thoughts about the bear, “He had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the big old bear. . . . It ran in his knowledge before he ever saw it. It loomed and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it left its crooked print” (pp. 182–83). What does the bear, old Ben, symbolize to Isaac and Sam? What does Isaac actually “inherit”? This passage also suggests a timelessness about the bear and the “unaxed” woods. How is this idea significant to the rest of the novel?
5. Discuss the introduction of the dog, Lion, and how he is described. How does Sam know that this is the dog that will help them kill the bear? Isaac repeats the phrase, “So he should have hated and feared Lion” several times. Why should he have feared Lion?
6. Describe and discuss the moment when they finally kill Old Ben. Is there any significance in the fact that it is Boon who finally kills the bear? What does it mean that Sam collapses at this particular moment in the story? Why does Sam say, “Let me go home”?
7. Ben, Lion, and Sam all die in this story. These deaths are tragic for Isaac and the members of the hunting party, but what do they mean specifically for Isaac? What dies along with these characters?
8. In his analysis of the story, critic Harold Bloom notes that Isaac’s reading of the family history can also be considered part of his coming-of-age story. In what way does reading the ledgers contribute to Isaac’s personal development?
9. In refusing his claim to the McCaslin land, Isaac explains to his cousin, “This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse?” (p. 265). What is the curse and in what way is this theme explored in the rest of the novel?
10. The reader also learns of Isaac’s marriage in this section. Why does Faulkner choose to have Isaac marry and why is it significant that the marriage is essentially a failure? Is there a reason that Faulkner chooses to have Isaac be without children?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

11. Why is section four included in “The Bear” at all? In what ways does it relate to the rest of the story and the rest of the novel? In his analysis of the book, critic Irving Howe argues for the inclusion of part four in the story. “If Section IV were omitted, ‘The Bear’ would profit in several ways: the narrative would flow more evenly toward its climax; there would be a more pleasing unity of tone; and the meaning, never reduced to the brittle terms of Isaac’s political and moral speculations, would be allowed to rest in a fine implication. . . . The loss, however, would also be considerable. What Section IV now does is to give the story social and historical density . . . it provides an abrasive disruption of the idyllic nostalgia previously accumulated; and it keeps Faulkner’s meaning from the confinements of abstract morality” (*William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, p. 257). Discuss.
12. When “The Bear” was published as a short story in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Faulkner revised the ending so that it was more accessible and traditional. Why did Faulkner include the longer, more complex version in the novel? In what way did he need this version to further explore the themes developed in the book?
13. In part five, characterize the difference between this hunt and those of years’ past. What has happened to the land and what does this change signify to Isaac? Contrast the descriptions of the natural world in this final part of the story with the description found at the beginning of “The Old People.”
14. Compare the characters of Boon and Sam. While they both share a similar heritage, Boon is seen as a lesser version of Sam. Why?
15. Why is Boon in the final scene? If he is all that is left, what does that say about the state of the wilderness so revered by Isaac and Sam? In her discussion of the book, writer Eudora Welty describes “The Bear” as an “apocalyptic story of the end of the wilderness.” In what ways does the final scene appear apocalyptic?

Delta Autumn**Characters:****Isaac McCaslin (Uncle Ike)****Unnamed woman****Roth Edmonds****Will Legate****Summary**

Isaac is now an old man, but he still continues to go on the annual hunting trip. Over fifty years have passed since the events of “The Bear” and the natural landscape has dramatically changed. His companions are now “the sons and even the grandsons” of those he traveled with on earlier hunting excursions. The men must drive over two hundred miles on highways to access the once close wilderness, a far cry from the wagon rides into the woods of his early years. While the men still camp and sleep in tents, the feel of the trip differs greatly from the almost spiritual outings Isaac experienced with Sam Fathers. As he tries to sleep once they have set up camp, Isaac recalls the important events of his youth.

The most significant development in this chapter is the arrival of a woman who was once involved with Roth Edmonds. She confronts Roth with their infant son; he wants

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

nothing to do with her and leaves Isaac with an envelope of money to deal with the situation. Isaac meets the woman and, during the course of their conversation, he discovers the sexual nature of her relationship with Roth and to his surprise, the fact that she is the granddaughter of Tennie's Jim, thus related to old McCaslin through the Beauchamp family. Roth Edmonds and the woman are distantly related. For Isaac, he sees the sordid McCaslin family history repeating itself. In addition, he is horrified to discover that the woman is Black despite the fact that she has been passing as white. The woman refuses the money and attempts to make Isaac understand her relationship with Roth. Isaac insists that she take the money and a small gift for the baby, but in the end, he is more shocked and ashamed than sympathetic.

Questions

1. How does the older Isaac compare with the Isaac who went hunting with Sam as a child? Does he still embody the lessons he learned from Sam Fathers? If so, in what ways? If this concludes his coming-of-age story, what kind of man has he become?
2. Discuss Isaac's reaction to the unnamed woman's story. What does Isaac advise her to do? What does this say about Isaac? Why does he give the baby General Compson's horn? What does his reaction to the woman show about his attitude toward Black people?
3. Isaac rejected his inheritance so many years earlier in part because of the curse of slavery in his family. Does his renunciation change the subsequent attitudes toward Black characters in the rest of the novel?
4. While the unnamed woman is still at the mercy of men, she speaks up in ways that other female characters in the novel don't. How does she differ from the other women in the novel? For example, she doesn't hesitate to explain the nature of her relationship with Roth and even blames Isaac and his family for Roth's flaws. Why doesn't Faulkner give her a name? In what ways has the situation for women changed since the days of Eunice, the enslaved woman who kills herself over the actions of old McCaslin?
5. Compare the wilderness of Isaac's youth to the one he sees now on the hunt in this story. How is it different? What does this signify for Faulkner?
6. Discuss the conversation between Roth Edmonds and Isaac. Roth rebukes Isaac for his longing for the hunts and "better men" of the past (p. 328). Isaac responds, "There are good men everywhere, at all times. Most men are. Some are just unlucky, because most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be" (p. 329). What do these thoughts reveal about Isaac and his view of the world?
7. As Isaac drifts off to sleep, his mind wanders and he reiterates virtually his whole life (p. 333). How does it compare with the thoughts that open the novel in "Was"? In the end, what moments are important to Isaac? Do they reflect any of the larger themes of the novel?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING
(CONTINUED)**Go Down, Moses****Characters****Mollie Beauchamp****Gavin Stevens****Samuel Worsham Beauchamp
(Butch)****Hamp Beauchamp
Miss Belle Worsham****Summary**

The final chapter departs from the others in that the connection to the McCaslin family is more distant. Mollie Beauchamp (Isaac's wife and prominent character in "The Fire and the Hearth") is concerned about her grandson, Samuel Beauchamp. This story focuses on the Beauchamp or racially mixed side of the family. Mollie has a feeling that her grandson is in trouble and she seeks out a local lawyer, Gavin Stevens, for help. The reader learns that the boy, Butch, was thrown off the McCaslin plantation several years earlier for stealing. He subsequently had lots of run-ins with the law. Gavin Stevens discovers that the grandson is to be executed for murder.

Miss Worsham, a white woman who has enslaved Mollie and her brother Hamp, offers financial help to Mollie through Gavin Stevens. Money from Miss Worsham, Gavin Stevens, and the townspeople help to return the grandson's body home for a proper burial. The novel concludes with the funeral procession through the town as it heads to the McCaslin family property.

Questions

1. Why does Faulkner choose to end the novel with Mollie and her dead grandson, the Black side of the family instead of the white McCaslins? As the book begins with Isaac, why doesn't it conclude with Isaac at the end of his life in "Delta Autumn"?
2. Mollie repeats the phrase "Done sold my Benjamin . . . sold him in Egypt," several times echoing the spiritual that provides the title of the novel and this chapter. How do the lyrics of the song resonate in both this story and the novel as a whole?
3. Do the efforts of the two white characters, Gavin Stevens and Miss Worsham, show that attitudes in the South have changed? If so, how? Is the land still "cursed" as Isaac describes it earlier in the novel? Slavery no longer exists, but what legacy does it leave for the Beauchamp family?
4. Why does Mollie blame Roth for her grandson's death? How does Samuel's fate relate to how things may or may not have changed for the "free" Black man?
5. Why does Mollie want to bring her grandson home regardless of what he has done?
6. What thematic elements tie this story to the other chapters in the novel?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING
(CONTINUED)

SELECTED SHORT STORIES

Barn Burning**Characters**

Sarty Snopes: the boy in the story

Abner Snopes: Sarty's father and the barn burner of the title

Major de Spain: the landowner who fights with Abner Snopes
(he also appears in *Go Down, Moses*)

Summary

"Barn Burning," the winner of the O'Henry Award for Best Short Story of 1939, details the life of Sarty Snopes, a young boy caught between his loyalty to his father and his desire to do the right thing. The story begins with the interrogation of Sarty's father, Abner Snopes, by a judge in regards to the burning of his landlord's barn. The landlord has no proof and presses the judge to question Sarty, but the judge instead just orders the family out of town. They move on, but Sarty knows the truth and struggles to obey his father when he knows that what he's doing is wrong. The family sets up their next home on the property of a wealthy landowner named Major de Spain. Abner Snopes quickly angers the Major and his wife by purposefully destroying an expensive rug and refusing to repair or replace it. The Snopeses must appear again in front of a judge and the father is ordered to pay for damages. Instead of paying, he plans to seek his usual revenge and burn the Major's barn. The boy finally breaks from his father and tries to warn the Major, but when he hears shots, he runs away. When the story ends, it is unclear what happens to Sarty's father and older brother who went to burn the barn. The story concludes with the boy walking off into "the heart of the late spring night" (p. 25).

Questions

1. As with *Go Down, Moses*, "Barn Burning" can also be read as a coming-of-age story. What must Sarty struggle to overcome and how does he change through the course of the story? Sarty thinks to himself about, "the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events" (p. 9). Does Sarty eventually overcome the obstacle of his youth?
2. Compare and contrast Sarty with the young Isaac in the chapters "The Old People" and "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses*.
3. At one moment in the story, Abner Snopes yells at his son, "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you" (p. 8). What effect do these words have on the young boy? How does this theme of the burden of family blood manifest itself in *Go Down, Moses*?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING (CONTINUED)

4. The boy is impressed as they approach Major de Spain's house, "Hit's big as a courthouse he thought quietly, with a surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought in to words" (p. 10). The boy's father, however, has a far different reaction. Compare the father's words with Sarty's thoughts. What does the father's reaction reveal about his feelings toward society and his place in it? What defines and motivates him as a person?
5. In the end, Sarty breaks from his father and attempts to warn de Spain of his father's intentions, but he is too late. He sees the flames in the sky, hears shots, and runs. He wakes up alone and cold. What remains for Sarty when he no longer sticks to his family's "blood"? As with *Go Down, Moses*, is it possible to be ancestryless? As the boy walks off into the night, is there a sense of promise or foreboding?

That Evening Sun

Characters

Nancy: a Black woman who works as a part-time cook for the Compson family

Jesus: Nancy's husband who disappears during the story and terrifies her with the prospect of his return

Mr. Stovall: a prominent figure in the white community of the town, though he is involved with Nancy and gets her pregnant

Quentin Compson: the narrator of the story (the Compson family also appears in Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*)

Caddy and Jason Compson: Quentin's younger brother and sister

Mr. and Mrs. Compson: the parents of Quentin, Caddy, and Jason

Dilsey: a Black servant for the family

Summary

Quentin Compson looks back to an experience he had as a child involving their servant, Nancy, and his brother and sister. Nancy becomes pregnant by a white man, Mr. Stovall. When she confronts him and demands money, he refuses to help and beats her instead. Nancy is later thrown in jail. Her husband, Jesus, feels powerless to protect his wife in a community run by whites. He disappears, but Nancy fears he will return to hurt her because of her infidelity. She is terrified and enlists the Compsons to walk her home every night. Mrs. Compson has neither sympathy nor patience for her problem, but Mr. Compson tries to help her. With the adults indifferent to her plight, she finally brings the three children home with her in the hope that they will offer her a degree of protection. The children have no idea what is going on and Mr. Compson eventually comes to take them home. At the end of the story, Nancy is left alone, fearing for her life. The reader never learns of her fate.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

Questions

1. As with the stories “The Bear” in *Go Down, Moses* and “Barn Burning,” this story can also be read as a coming-of-age tale. Quentin recounts the story as an adult so that he is able to have a more mature, thoughtful perspective on this childhood incident. What does Quentin finally understand at the end of the story? Compare this story with the coming-of-age theme in “Barn Burning.”
2. What is life like in Jefferson, the town where the story takes place? How have things changed in the town since Quentin was a young man? Discuss the opening of the story. What might these changes in the town signify for Faulkner? While the town physically changes, does the dynamic between the white and Black members of the community change as well?
3. Nancy repeatedly says to Quentin, “I aint nothing but a nigger. . . . It aint none of my fault” (p. 293). Discuss what this statement might mean to Nancy. While Emily in “A Rose for Emily” and Minnie in “Dry September” exist in very different circumstances, is there something that connects these women and their lives?
4. What can be said about the scene with Nancy and the children when she brings them home with her? Are the children aware of her fear? Do they care? What is the point of this scene? Why doesn't the reader learn of Nancy's fate?

Dry September

Characters

Minnie Cooper: a single, middle-aged white woman who lives in the town and accuses a Black man of sexually assaulting her

Will Mayes: the man accused of the attack

Hawkshaw: a local barber who initially tries to defend Will Mayes

Jackson McLendon: a former soldier who initiates the retaliation on the supposed attacker

Summary

The story begins, “Through the bloody September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass—the rumor, the story, whatever it was. Something about Miss Minnie Cooper and a Negro” (p. 169). The alleged sexual assault results in a heated discussion between some of men of the town at the local barbershop. The barber, Hawkshaw, defends the accused Black man, Will Mayes. Louder, angrier voices prevail and the men set out to avenge Miss Minnie Cooper, the supposed victim. The story digresses to give some background on Minnie, but returns to the men who pursue the alleged rapist and kill him.

Questions

1. How does Faulkner use descriptions of the weather to convey the feeling of the town and those who live in it?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING (CONTINUED)

2. In what ways do Minnie's allegation and Will Mayes's innocence encompass the dilemma of the South for both women and Black people?
3. Discuss the character of Hawkshaw. He tries to defend Will Mayes, but in the end, what choice does he make and why?
4. As with the story "A Rose for Emily," what kind of life do women have in these small Southern towns at this particular moment in time? Why is Minnie a subject of curiosity to those in the town? The narrator describes the scene as "her mother kept to her room altogether now; the gaunt aunt ran the house. Against that background Minnie's bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality" (p. 175). At the conclusion of the story, what causes her hysteria at the movie theater?
5. Discuss the character of Jack McClendon. Why is he so intent on seeking revenge and punishing a possibly innocent man? As with Minnie, what societal circumstances create the dynamics of his character? Why is he so cruel to his wife in the closing lines of the story?
6. What if any connection can be made between Will Mayes and characters in *Go Down, Moses*, such as Rider in "Pantaloon in Black"?
7. One critic, John Crane, links the title of the story, "Dry September," to two of the characters, suggesting that the best days of Minnie and McLendon are behind them? Do these characters and their decline and desperation suggest a larger meaning for Faulkner?
8. Do any of the themes that Faulkner explores in *Go Down, Moses* also appear in this story?

A Rose for Emily

Characters

Emily Grierson

Emily's Father

Homer Barron

Summary

This was Faulkner's first published piece of short fiction. The story is composed of five parts, beginning with Emily's death. The following sections detail the events leading up to her demise, the death of her father, her purchase of poison for an unknown purpose, and finally her relationship with a man named Homer Barron. Homer ultimately disappears in the story and in the final moments after Emily's death, the reader learns that Homer's dead body has been in the house for years and that Emily kept the corpse company.

Questions

1. How does society limit Emily? How does Emily respond to these limitations?

DISCUSSION AND WRITING (CONTINUED)

2. In some ways, this story encapsulates a struggle between the past and the present. Discuss ways in which Emily clings to the past and ways in which the present intrudes. What does the character of Emily symbolize for Faulkner? Does the theme of the past versus the present connect this story in any way to *Go Down, Moses*?
3. Discuss the significance of the title of the story as Emily is never actually given any roses.
4. What is the effect of having the narrator be someone from the town as opposed to Emily or Homer?
5. Is there any significance to the end of the story? Why conclude with such a violent, horrible ending? How does Faulkner combine this gothic style, which sounds more like an Edgar Allan Poe tale, with his own specific writing style in this story?

Mountain Victory

Characters

Major Weddell: aristocratic officer of the defeated Confederate army

Jubal: Weddell's servant who travels with him

Vatch: one of the sons in the family of the story and a former soldier for the Union army

Hule: the younger son in the family who desperately tries to get away.

The family also includes a father, mother, and daughter, but their roles are less prominent.

Summary

The story details an encounter between an aristocratic Southern officer in the Confederate army, Major Weddell, and his servant, Jubal, with a desperately poor family living in the mountains of Tennessee. The Major is making his way home after the war and asks the family if he can spend the night on their property. The encounter is very tense as one of the sons in the family, Vatch, fought in the Civil War for the Union army. During the course of their visit, Jubal drinks too much alcohol and the officer feels he must stay until his traveling companion is sober.

In a desperate attempt to change their lives, two of the children in the family try to leave with the officer and his servant to return home with them. They believe that Major Weddell is wealthy and that he offers a more promising life. The longer the Major stays, the angrier the family gets and Weddell is forced to flee. The story ends tragically with the death of Weddell, Hule, and the impending death of Jubal at the hands of Vatch.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

Questions

1. In his analysis, critic Irving Howe notes the story demonstrates one of Faulkner's many great strengths as a writer, "Not only does 'Mountain Victory' dramatize this encounter between aristocrat and mountaineers as they clash in fear and strangeness; it also brings together two sides of Faulkner's imagination, that which cherishes a conventional image and that which digs to the bedrock of realism" (*William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, p. 264). Discuss how Faulkner employs the technique in this story as well as in *Go Down, Moses*, particularly in "The Bear."
2. Describe the relationship between the Major and Jubal. Some critics find Jubal's character problematic because he appears to be nothing more than an offensive stereotype. Is this the case? Why is he loyal to Major Weddell?
3. This story also explores the nature of victory and defeat as it includes characters from both sides of the Civil War. Major Weddell thinks to himself, "Victory. Defeat. Peace. Home. That's why we must do so much to invent meanings for the sounds, so damned much. Especially if you are unfortunate enough to be victorious; so damned much" (p. 766). Is there any such thing as true "victory" for Faulkner? Discuss the question in the context of Isaac's and Cass's conversation regarding the legacy of the Civil War in *Go Down, Moses* (p. 266).
4. Discuss the daughter's reaction to Weddell when he arrives. "'Soshay Weddell,' the girl said. . . . She did not say it aloud. She breathed again, deep and quiet and without haste. 'It's like a music. It's like a singing'" (p. 751). While he represents the losers in the war, why are Hule and his sister so sure that Major Weddell will provide them with a better life?
5. Why do Vatch and his father ultimately ambush the Major and Jubal?

Red Leaves

Characters

Issetibbha: the Chickasaw chief whose name also appears in *Go Down, Moses*. He dies in this story.

Ikkemotubbe (also known as Doom): Issetibbha's father and is mentioned in regard to the burial traditions of the tribe.

Moketubbe: the son of Issetibbha, who will become chief when his father dies. He shows little interest in the tribe and is distant from his father.

Black servant

Summary

According to Chickasaw tradition, when a chief dies, his servant must die along with him. This story follows the pursuit of Issetibbha's Black servant who flees to avoid being killed and buried with the chief. The reader is also introduced to Issetibbha's son, Moketubbe, and it is clear that father and son don't really understand one another.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING (CONTINUED)

The narrative point of view eventually shifts to the hunted servant as he hides and waits for the chief to die, fully aware that tradition will require his death. He observes from a distance and when he sees that the chief has died, he runs. He does not run far, however, and the Indians allow him time to accept his fate. The servant is eventually surrounded and captured and the story ends as he about to be killed.

Questions

1. Does the Black servant accept his death? Why does everyone treat him as if he has already died? Why doesn't he keep running? What is his relationship with the Indians who are chasing him?
2. What attitude do the Native Americans have toward those who are enslaved? Discuss why they see slavery as a burden? Is it because they think it is unjust (p. 314)? In what way do their thoughts contribute to the discussion of race relations that runs through these stories and the novel *Go Down, Moses*?
3. Compare the way the Indians are portrayed in this story to the way they appear in *Go Down, Moses*.

There Was a Queen

Characters

Elnora: the Black servant who runs the house

Saddie: Elnora's daughter and the caretaker of Virginia Du Pre

Isom: Elnora's son

John Sartoris: not in the story as he has died, but his family lives in his house and on his land (he appears in many other Faulkner novels and stories)

Virginia Sartoris Du Pre (also referred to as Jenny): the ninety-year-old wheelchair-bound sister of John Sartoris

Narcissa: the widow of Virginia Du Pre's great-grandnephew

Benbow: Narcissa's son

Summary

The story details three generations of Sartoris women, white and Black, as they live out their years together. Narcissa disrupts the quiet rhythm of the house when she takes off suddenly to go to Memphis, leaving her son at home. When she returns, Narcissa informs Jenny Du Pre that she went to retrieve some letters that were sent to her many years ago that could potentially destroy the reputation of the family. It is clear that she secures the letters through sex as she has no money with which to buy them back. Throughout the story, Elnora, the woman who runs the house, makes it clear that she doesn't like Narcissa. The story concludes with the death of Jenny Du Pre.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

(CONTINUED)

Questions

1. *Go Down, Moses* is a book dominated by the world of men. How does the story differ when it is all about women, “So the quiet was now the quiet of women folks” (p. 727)?
2. Why does Elnora feel so hostile toward Narcissa? How do their racial backgrounds contribute to this hostility? The narrator notes how Elnora feels, “She had not wondered where they were going, nor why, as a white woman would have wondered. But she was half black, and she just watched the white woman with that expression of quiet and grave contempt with which she contemplated or listened to the orders of the wife of the house’s heir even while he was alive” (p. 728). How does the “quiet and grave contempt” pervade the other stories discussed in this guide as well as the novel *Go Down, Moses*?
3. Why didn’t Narcissa get rid of the letters years earlier so that they never would have been stolen in the first place? Why does Narcissa sit with her son, Benbow, in the water?
4. Why does the old woman, Jenny Du Pre, die at that particular moment in the story?

IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION:

1. In *Go Down, Moses*, nature itself is a character. Ike thinks to himself, “He seemed to see the two of them—himself and the wilderness—as coevals” (p. 337). This notion of an untouched or pure “wilderness” becomes even more important to Isaac as the novel progresses. Discuss how Faulkner develops this theme, particularly in the chapters “Old People,” “The Bear,” and “Delta Autumn.” What does this idealized vision of the wilderness signify to Isaac and Sam? In his analysis of the novel, critic Harold Bloom asks if Isaac is the narrative thread that ties these stories together or is it the land? Discuss.
2. Faulkner examines the complexity of race relations in virtually every chapter of the book. How does the interaction between Black individuals and white individuals evolve in the novel as time passes and slavery no longer exists? For example, discuss Isaac’s reaction to the unnamed woman who confronts him in “Delta Autumn.” He was deeply ashamed of his family’s past, yet years later he is sickened to realize that this Black woman had an affair with his white relative. What is the legacy of slavery for the McCaslin family and in general for the South? Discuss this idea in relation to conclusion of the book and the character of Samuel Beauchamp. What is his fate as a “free” Black man? What is the significance of his grandmother’s refrain echoing the spiritual song, “Go Down, Moses” that the book is named for? Earlier in the novel, Isaac proclaims, “Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can—not resist it, not combat it—maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted” (p. 265). Do any of the characters in the novel or the short stories outlast the curse? Is the curse of slavery actually lifted? The theme of slavery can also be discussed in relation to the short stories “That Evening Sun” and “Dry September.”
3. In a novel seemingly dominated by men, who are the important female characters in the novel? For example, discuss the roles of Molly Beauchamp or

IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION:

(CONTINUED)

- the unnamed woman of “Delta Autumn.” How do marriage, societal traditions, and race impact the lives of these women? Do the women in the book play as significant a role as the men in exploring Faulkner’s themes? Are the women found in the short stories, such as Nancy in “That Evening Sun” or Minnie in “Dry September,” portrayed differently than the women in *Go Down, Moses* or are their life experiences similar?
4. In the short story “Barn Burning,” Abner Snopes tells his son, “You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain’t going to have any blood to stick to you” (*Collected Stories*, p. 8). Explore the theme of family and ancestry in *Go Down, Moses*. Blood ties these characters together, but at times it is more a burden than a comfort. In “Delta Autumn,” during his annual hunting trip, Isaac thinks to himself, “these men, some of whom he only saw during these two November weeks and not one of whom even bore any name he used to know . . . were more his kin than any” (p. 335). In rejecting his inheritance, Isaac is attempting to distance himself from his family and their misdeeds. Does Faulkner believe you can ever really escape these ties and be “ancestryless”? The same questions surfaces in the short story “Barn Burning.” Sarty Snopes rejects his father and attempts to right his many wrongs, but can he make a complete break from his family and their shared past? In the end, what does the idea of family mean to these characters, in particular to Isaac?
 5. Faulkner also explores the idea of patrimony throughout *Go Down, Moses*. What is the full extent of Isaac’s inheritance and what is he actually repudiating? Does Isaac still inherit something? If so, what is it? Both the McCaslin and Beauchamp families “inherit” things from previous generations, both literally in regards to land and money, but also figuratively in the relationships resulting from the family’s earlier days of slavery. Faulkner contrasts this traditional notion of inheritance with what Isaac learns from Sam Fathers. He even uses the word “inherit” when referring to what Isaac learns from Sam. If Isaac is “father to no one,” who will inherit what Isaac sees as the most important lessons he has ever learned about the wilderness and the importance of the connection between man and nature? Is Faulkner suggesting that those lessons are lost forever?
 6. Discuss the complex narrative structure of the book. Do all the stories work together to form a novel? Do they need to connect to still work as a novel?
 7. In his discussion of the novel, critic Irving Howe suggests that, “The whole impetus of *Go Down, Moses* moves toward a decisive contrast: Negro and white, Lucas Beauchamp and Isaac McCaslin, a figure of enduring strength and a figure of looming conscience. Both of them descendants of Carothers McCaslin, they represent the division and self-estrangement of the homeland” (*William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, p. 90). Discuss and compare the characters of Isaac and Lucas as representatives of both sides of the family.
 8. Discuss *Go Down, Moses* as a coming-of-age novel. What struggles must Isaac overcome to evolve from the boy of “Old People” to the adolescent of “The Bear” to the man of “Delta Autumn”? Describe the stages of initiation for Isaac. In the end, what does he really learn and what kind of man does he become?

IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION:
(CONTINUED)

9. Faulkner dedicates the novel to Mammy, “Caroline Barr, Mississippi [1840–1940] Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love.” In the review of the novel that appeared in *The New York Times* in 1942, the reviewer notes, “one may read the dedication as a preface to the book itself, and from then onward each successive story weaves a pattern of interrelated stories.” The reviewer suggests that the stories that make up the novel essentially take place during the time of this woman’s life and the dedication touches on one of the most important themes in the novel, the relationship between Black and white characters during these years. Do you agree that the dedication sets the tone for the novel? If so, in what way? Is it significant that he dedicates the book to a woman when the majority of the important characters in the book are men? Does the dedication help tie all the stories together?
10. When the bear dies in the chapter of the same name, Sam Fathers collapses and says “Let me go home” (p. 232). What home is Sam referring to? Faulkner repeatedly questions the notion of “home” in the novel. As Isaac lies in bed in “Delta Autumn” as an old man, he thinks about the past and virtually reiterates his entire life, beginning with the sentence “They had a house once” (pp. 333–35). What begins as an actual house becomes something else, a concept of home not tied to a specific place. In describing this concept, Isaac expands on the annual hunt, “That roof, the two weeks of each November which they spent under it, had become his home. Although since that time they had lived during the two fall weeks in tents and not always in the same place two years in succession and now his companions were the sons and even the grandsons of them with whom he had lived in the house and for almost fifty years now the house itself had not even existed, the conviction, the sense and feeling of home, had been merely transferred into the canvas” (pp. 334–35). What does “home” mean for Isaac? Is it related to the “home” mentioned by Sam Fathers in his final days? How does this theme manifest itself in other chapters such as “The Bear,” or the final chapter, “Go Down, Moses.”

BEYOND THE BOOK

WILLIAM FAULKNER RESOURCES ONLINE

Center for Faulkner Studies, SE Missouri State University<http://www.semo.edu/cfs/>

This site includes listings of Faulkner papers, suggestions for teaching Faulkner, as well as details about academic conferences related to the study of Faulkner.

The Mississippi Writer's pagehttp://www.olemiss.edu/mwp/dir/faulkner_william/

This site provides a basic overview of Faulkner's life and works.

New York Times, Times Topicshttp://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/f/william_faulkner/index.html

A collection of recent articles on Faulkner that appeared in the paper and links to the original reviews of many of his novels.

The Paris Review, Interviews<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4954/the-art-of-fiction-no-12-william-faulkner>

An interesting interview with Faulkner from 1956, commenting on his writing and criticism of his work, particularly *The Sound and the Fury*.

Nobelprize.orghttp://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html

Includes the text of Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech as well as an audio clip.

OTHER TITLES OF INTEREST

The Marble Faun (1924)*The Sound and the Fury* (1929)*As I Lay Dying* (1930)*Sanctuary* (1931)*Light in August* (1932)*Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)*The Unvanquished* (1938)*The Hamlet* (1940)*Intruder in the Dust* (1948)*Requiem for a Nun* (1954)*A Fable* (1954)*Big Woods* (1955)*The Town* (1957)*The Mansion* (1959)*The Reivers* (1962)*Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner* (1979, Posthumous)

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