

Black Boy—Chapter 1 Questions

Name _____ Per. _____

1. Who is the narrator? How do you know?
2. Why does Richard set the house on fire?
3. What happened to Richard as punishment for setting the fire?
4. How and why does Richard kill the kitten?
5. Why does Richard's mother make him go to the store even though she knew the risk was that he might be beaten again?
6. Why is Richard always hungry?
7. What does Richard do to kill time when he is six years old?
8. How does Richard learn to count, and what does he learn on his first day in school?
9. What happens in court, and what effect does it have on Richard's attitude towards his father?
10. Why does Richard have to go to an orphans' home?
11. Why do Mrs. Wright and Richard go to see Mr. Wright? What happens in this scene?
12. How does Richard describe his father at the end of the chapter, in retrospect?

1. Why doesn't Granny want Richard to read storybooks?
2. Why does Granny strike Richard with a wet towel? Why does his punishment seem unfair to him?
3. On the trip to Arkansas, Richard becomes more aware of the separations between blacks and whites. How does Richard's mother react when Richard asks about racial differences?
4. What happened to Uncle Hoskins? Why?
5. What two groups of men does Richard see when he, his mother, and aunt return to Granny's?
6. Why do the Wrights have to move again soon after they arrive in West Helena?
7. Why are Aunt Maggie and "uncle" forced to leave?
8. What is ironic about Betsy's death?

1. What religion does Granny practice?
2. Why doesn't Richard share her faith?
3. What makes Richard's position in the household a "delicate one"?
4. Who is Granny's religious ally?
5. Why is Richard's teacher bitter and antagonistic toward him?
6. Describe the differences between the kids at the religious school and the public school.
7. What conflict causes Richard to get into trouble in school?
8. Why does Richard react to the whipping by continuing to hold out his hand?
9. What does Richard do to defend himself against his aunt at home?
10. What causes Richard's aunt to laugh "on God's holy ground"?
11. What religious rules govern Richard's life?
12. How does Richard keep himself occupied during the prayer services?
13. Why do Richard's classmates worry about him?
14. What does Richard tell his Granny that gets her excited?
15. Describe the first "story" Richard writes.
16. What is his neighbor's reaction when he shares it?
17. Why does that reaction make Richard smile?

1. What did Richard do in the previous chapter to allow him to be “no longer set apart for being sinful”?
2. What is Richard’s first “test” on the schoolyard? What is the outcome?
3. What gives Richard hope that he could “study medicine, engage in research, make discoveries”?
4. Describe Richard’s difficulty in getting a job.
5. Why does Richard’s job selling newspapers end?
6. How does Granny get hurt?
7. What causes Aunt Addie’s renewed hatred toward Richard?
8. What is the role of religion in Richard’s life?
9. What does Richard see when he helps Brother Mance sell insurance?
10. Why doesn’t Richard’s grandfather get his Civil War pension?
11. What is the final conflict in chapter five?
12. How is it resolved?

1. What is so funny about the question the white woman asks Richard?
2. Describe how question shows whites' attitudes toward blacks?
3. When Richard tells the white woman about his ambitions to be a writer, how does she respond? What does her answer show?
4. What does Richard find shocking about the next white family he works for?
5. What effect does that job have on Richard?
6. What does the preacher in the church do to trap Richard into getting baptized?
7. How does Richard get into a conflict with his Uncle Tom? Describe the conflict and its resolution.
8. What does Richard say to Uncle Tom to defeat him?

1. What year is it at the beginning of this chapter?
2. What physical attribute of Richard's prevents him from getting some jobs?
3. Describe his first job at the brickyard.
4. Describe the accident.
5. How does the white boss react when Richard reports the accident?
6. Why does Richard hate golf?
7. Summarize the conversation between the newspaper editor and Richard.
8. How did his classmates react when they read the story?
9. Describe how his family members react:
 - a. Granny
 - b. Mom
 - c. Addie
10. How did Richard feel about the general response to his story?
11. What does the North mean/symbolize to Richard?
12. How is the educational system in the South "rigged" against him?
13. Explain the metaphor he uses in the last paragraph of the chapter.

1. On the first page of the chapter, Richard describes the way whites and blacks in the South communicate with each other. What does he say?
2. What changes Richard's mind about working at the mill?
3. Who is Bob? What effect does Bob's death have on Richard?
4. What makes Richard "definitely decided upon leaving home"?
5. What honor does Mrs. Bibbs confer upon Richard?
6. Why does the principal want Richard to read the speech that the principal wrote? How does the principal coerce Richard into reading the speech?
7. Describe how the principal's attitude is shown as typical of Blacks who are in positions of power in the South?
8. Discuss how the principal's speech and Richard's speech are different.
9. What does Richard buy for his speech?

1. What viciousness does Richard witness at the clothing store?
2. What does Richard do that causes him to get hit between the eyes with a bottle?
3. Why does Richard get fired from the clothing store?
4. What does Griggs notice about Richard that makes Richard have trouble in the white world?
5. How is the optical job different from what Richard expected?
6. Describe the dilemma that Reynolds and Pease use to trap Richard into quitting.
7. Mr. Crane, a Northerner, tries to treat RW with respect. Why won't this work in the South, as seen with the episode with Reynolds and Pease?

1. Summarize Richard's feelings in the first two paragraphs.
2. What according to Richard, is "wrong" with him?
3. Why is it difficult to correct this "wrong"?
4. What does Richard wonder at while working with other blacks in the hotel?
5. What do the white night watchman's actions show about racial attitudes toward black women?
6. How do whites encourage "black deceit" and "irresponsibility"?
7. Why do white women not feel ashamed of nakedness around Richard?
8. How does Richard justify stealing from the Jewish proprietor of the movie house?
9. Describe the method used to steal money from the movie house.

1. How is Mrs. Moss different from any person Richard has ever met?
2. What does Mrs. Moss want from Richard?
3. Why about Richard does Mrs. Moss like?
4. Describe the “peasant mentality” of Mrs. Moss and Bess.
5. What does love mean to Bess?
6. How does Richard unwittingly become a liquor smuggler? Is this expected or surprising? Why?

Chapter 12

7. How is RW’s new job at the optical factory in Memphis different from the previous optical factory job?
8. Describe Shorty’s way of getting quarters. Why is this significant?
9. What about this method disgusts Richard?
10. Why can’t Richard take money from the white Northerner in the department store?
11. Why does Richard consider him his “enemy”?
12. How do the whites create bad feelings between Richard and Harrison?
13. Describe the boxing match.

1. What about Mencken does Richard find so appealing?
2. How does Richard check out books?
3. How did the following people react to discovering these books?
 - Mr. Falk
 - White men Richard worked with
 - Mrs. Moss
4. How did reading change Richard's life?

Chapter 14

5. What happens to Aunt Maggie after she leaves with the "professor" who gave the poodle to Richard?
6. What comments do whites make to Richard when they find out he's going North?
7. What comments does Richard make about the importance of books?
8. What does he say the South represents?
9. What does it mean that Richard can't really "leave the South"?