

Mississippi Trial, 1955 - Review Questions by: Chris Crowe

Do not write on the study guide. Submit your numbered answers on lined writing paper.

Chapter 1

- 1) Hiram's father lectured him often about the evils of hatred and prejudice. How did those lectures "backfire" on his father?
- 2) The story goes back and forth in time. What year is it when Hiram begins the narrative?
- 3) Hiram says, "It was strange, but you know how sometimes when you get what you think you always wanted, it turns out to be nothing like you expected?" Describe a time in your life when this has happened to you.
- 4) Who raised Hiram and why?
- 5) Where did Hiram's grandparents live?
- 6) Who is Mr. Paul and what does he have in common with Hiram's dad?
- 7) How does Grampa Hilburn make his money?
- 8) Describe what happens when Hiram picks up a worker's hoe.
- 9) What does Hiram's grampa tell him about why "God made Negroes"?

Chapter 2

- 1) Hiram describes his grandparent's home in detail. Describe 3 things; something he sees, something he hears, and something he smells.
- 2) Why doesn't Grampa "care much for the rest of the world"?
- 3) Who are Ralph and Ronnie Remington? Describe one of them.
- 4) Why did Hiram have "a bad taste in his mouth"?
- 5) Who is Naomi and why does Hiram's gramma call her a "poor little thing"?
- 6) Briefly describe R.C. Use one example of his behavior in this chapter to support your description.

- 7) Hiram waits a long time before stepping in and doing anything about the catfish. Why do you think he waits so long?

Chapter 3

- 1) When people came to pay their respects, how did most of them describe Hiram's Gramma?
- 2) Compare and contrast Ronnie and Ralph Remington in their mannerisms.
- 3) Why did Naomi go to her mother's funeral even though it was the hardest thing she had ever done?
- 4) Describe what Naomi does on Fulton Street Bridge and why she tells Hiram "It can be our place."
- 5) Why doesn't Hiram's dad want to move back to Mississippi and live near his father?
- 6) Who did Grampa hire to help around the house?
- 7) Where does Hiram have to move and why?

Chapter 4

- 1) Briefly describe Hiram's life after moving.
- 2) What do Hiram and Harlan (his father) argue about on a regular basis and why is it an issue?
- 3) In April of 1955 things had changed for Grampa. What changed and how did that change the outcome of Hiram's and Harlan's annual argument?
- 4) How did Harlan stall Hiram's trip?

Chapter 5

- 1) Describe some of Hiram's feelings as the train entered Mississippi.
- 2) What was "another big difference between Greenwood and Tempe?"
Explain why Harlan moving to Tempe to avoid racism is a rather pointless gesture.
Why do you think people tended to be more racist in the south than in the north?
- 3) Who is Bobo and why is he there at the station?
- 4) Ruthanne insists that Bobo carries Hiram's bags. Why do you think she does that?
- 5) Explain how Bobo "tricks" Hiram into carrying his own bag.

- 6) What is different about the way Bobo speaks?
- 7) What is Naomi's life like when Hiram returns?
- 8) What does Ruthanne do to help manage Grampa's diabetes?
- 9) Based on what you have read so far, describe the best and worst qualities of ONE of these characters: a) Harlan B) Grampa C) Hiram D) Ruthanne

Chapter 6

- 1) Describe Ralph's conversation with Hiram. How is Ralph now a little more like Ronnie?
- 2) Why did Hiram head out of town and north of Money to go fishing?
- 3) How does Hiram help Emmett at the river?
- 4) Why was Emmett at the river by himself?
- 5) What is Grampa busy doing at all the council meetings and why is it so important to him?

Chapter 7

- 1) Why does Grampa get a little sad when they go to look at the fields?
- 2) How much money does Grampa give Hiram for the concession stand now? Why has the amount changed?
- 3) Summarize the problems with segregated schools according to Mr. Paul.
- 4) Why do you think that in Tempe, segregation "wasn't such a big deal?" Think about the time period and geographical location.
- 5) Hiram stayed up thinking for quite a while, weighing the words of Mr. Paul, his father, and his grandfather, struggling to decide what his feelings were. This is an example of what type of conflict?

Chapter 8

- 1) Why is Hiram hesitant to spend time with R.C.?
- 2) Why does Hiram decide to go fishing with R.C.?
- 3) What cruel thing had R.C. done to Ralph Remington?

- 4) Why did it matter so much for Hiram to know if his dad and grampa ever fished together?
- 5) Why were Emmett's cousins so wary of Hiram when Emmett wasn't?
- 6) Briefly describe the scene when R.C. wakes up to find Hiram sharing his food with Emmett.
- 7) Hiram wants to stop R.C. yet he doesn't. Why? What has happened earlier in the book to foreshadow this event?
- 8) How old is Emmett and how old is R.C.?
- 9) If someone witnesses a crime and doesn't do anything to try and stop it, do you think they should be punished? Are they responsible in any way? Why or why not?

Chapter 9

- 1) What does Hiram say was "the worst thing" about the incident at the river?
- 2) Briefly describe how Grampa responds after hearing what R.C. had done.
- 3) Hiram thinks about other examples of racial and religious hatred. Name one of them.
- 4) Hiram says that maybe his father realized "that bullies would always find somebody else to pick on, if not the Negroes, then somebody else." Do you believe that is true? Are most hate crimes based on a true conflict, or is there always a victim and a bully? Support your answer with an example, even if it is a theoretical one.
- 5) Where does Hiram finally see and speak to Naomi? Explain why Naomi hasn't left Greenwood even though she is "dying to leave."
- 6) What is the "trouble up in Money" R.C. describes?
- 7) Why does Hiram call the Sheriff's office and how does the deputy respond?

Chapter 10

- 1) Briefly describe Hiram's dream at the beginning of Chapter 10. Why do you think the author added this dream to the text? It doesn't move the plot along. What purpose do *you* think it serves?
- 2) How does Ruthanne respond when Hiram mentions the whistling incident?
- 3) Grampa says he's conducting council business when he sends Hiram off to bed, but he does something he normally doesn't do, what is it?

- 4) Briefly describe the conversation Hiram and his Grandfather had about their respective relationships with Harlan. What does Grampa say has to happen for Harlan and Hiram to “connect”?
- 5) The note from Ruthanne explaining her absence due to a “tragedy in her extended family” should have been their first hint that something had happened to Emmett. When one event in a novel hints towards a future event it is called _____
- 6) Why does Sherriff Smith tell Hiram to stay around town?

Chapter 11

- 1) What thought made Hiram want to get out of Greenwood?
- 2) While on the phone with his mother what does Hiram do to “reach out” to his father?
- 3) Based on the condition of the body, how did Emmett die and why did it take so long to find the body?
- 4) Why did Grampa’s reaction to the murder bother Hiram?
- 5) Naomi imagines what Emmett must have felt and thought during his last few hours. Being able to imagine an experience from someone else’s perspective is called _____
- 6) Re-read the editorial “A Just Appraisal”. Respond with your own short editorial as if YOU are living in America during 1955. Do you agree or disagree with the writer? Questions to consider as you write: Is the entire community somewhat responsible for the intolerance that led to the murder, or are the 2 men the only ones who should pay the consequences? Is it likely in this community that the 2 men *will* pay the consequences?

Chapter 12

- 1) What does the deputy give Hiram?
- 2) What does Grampa say about what the judge can and cannot do?
- 3) Briefly describe Hiram’s argument *for* testifying and Grampa’s argument *against* testifying. What type of conflict is this?
- 4) Why is Naomi’s dad so angry that the sheriff keeps coming by to look for R.C.?
- 5) Why doesn’t Naomi want Hiram to testify?

Chapter 13

- 1) How does Hiram respond when Naomi asks him to promise he won't testify?
- 2) Even though it didn't change anything in Greenwood, talking to his father made Hiram feel better. Why do you think it made him feel better?
- 3) Why do you think it surprised so many that the Grand Jury indicted the men? After all the men *had* confessed to the kidnapping.
- 4) What advice does Mr. Paul give Hiram about seeing clearly what he should do?
- 5) What does Hiram mean when he says "What they had in common is what kept them apart"?
- 6) Name a few of the "positives" for leaving Greenwood and avoiding the trial. Explain why Hiram decides to stay even though the positives outweighed the negatives.

Chapter 14

- 1) Briefly describe the scene at the courthouse in Sumner.
- 2) How do the deputies treat the congressman from Michigan and why do you think he lets them treat him that way?
- 3) Why do you suppose the state prosecutor did not seek the death penalty in this case? His job *is* to seek justice and a boy *had* been murdered.
- 4) Why didn't the lawyers interview women for the jury?
- 5) Grampa is mysterious about his "good reasons" for wanting to be at the trial and it makes Hiram wonder what those reasons are. Speculate two reasons why Grampa wants to be at the trial.
- 6) Why do you think Moses is so calm and sure on the witness stand with so much chaos around him?
- 7) What argument does Breland use to discredit Moses' testimony?
- 8) Why did the judge rule that the Sherriff's testimony was irrelevant to this case?
- 9) What outlandish story does Sherriff Strider come up with to explain the body in the river?
- 10) Why is the ring such an important piece of evidence?

- 11) Describe Willie Reed's testimony, what did he see and hear?
- 12) What does Grampa do during Willie's testimony?

Chapter 15

- 1) Before the defense rests they call up defense witnesses. What do the witnesses say about Milam and Bryant?
- 2) What does Mr. Chatham say was the worst punishment Emmett should have received for whistling? Do you think that punishment would be appropriate or not?
- 3) How is it that Mr. Breland can claim there was no motive for the defendants to kill Emmett Till?
- 4) What outlandish claim does Breland make about the NAACP and their motives?
- 5) How long did the jury take to reach their verdict and what was it?
- 6) What gesture did Milam send to Grampa after the verdict was delivered?

Chapter 16

- 1) How did Grampa respond when Hiram wanted to keep talking about the trial? What does he tell Hiram about his Elders?
- 2) Who was the only person Hiram would miss from Greenwood and how has that changed over this summer?
- 3) Where has RC been and what did he reveal about the night of the kidnapping?
- 4) Briefly describe what happened between RC and his dad? Why is he leaving for good?
- 5) What does Grampa do with his pickup truck after the trial?
- 6) How does Grampa respond when Hiram tells him RC couldn't have been the 3rd man in the vehicle?
- 7) Ronnie Remington rambles on and on to Hiram. Through his rambling, what does he accidentally reveal?
- 8) Why couldn't Hiram just forget what Ronnie told him and enjoy the cozy home and the love he felt from his grandfather?
- 9) What does Grampa say when Hiram confronts him about "being there"?

10) Think back to Grampa's reactions about Emmett's kidnapping and murder. With this new information, why did Grampa react the way he did?

Chapter 17

- 1) Why did Hiram go looking for Naomi on his last Sunday in Greenwood?
- 2) How does Ruthanne "misread" Grampa's mood and the fact that he is basically hiding in his bedroom? Why is he really up there?
- 3) When Ruthanne does realize there is tension between Hiram and Grampa, what does Hiram tell her?
- 4) What does Mr. Paul say about the trial in general and what does he say that gives Hiram something to think about?
- 5) What has changed for Naomi?
- 6) Who met Hiram at the train station in Arizona?
- 7) Describe how or why the good relationship Harlan had with his dad started to change.
- 8) What is Harlan asking when he says "What about you?"