

The River Between Us

Richard Peck

Teacher's Guide

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CLASSROOM
FAVORITES

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Synopsis

Chapter One

The novel opens in 1916. The narrator, fifteen-year Howard Leland Hutchings, is the son of a well-respected doctor in St. Louis. Howard recounts the preparations for his family trip in a Model T to visit his father's childhood home in Grand Tower, IL. They are going to visit Dr. Hutchings' parents, the senior Dr. Hutchings and Tilly.

Chapter Two

When he and his younger brothers meet the four elderly people who raised their father, the novel shifts to 1861, and the narrator shifts to 15-year-old Tilly Pruitt, the boys' grandmother. Abraham Lincoln has just been inaugurated as president and the country is poised on the brink of the Civil War. The whole country is changing in 1861—even the folks who live in a muddy little Illinois settlement on the banks of the Mississippi River. Tilly frets over the fact that her twin brother Noah yearns to be a soldier and trains in military maneuvers with other village boys. Just as upsetting, Tilly's sister Cass has eerie supernatural visions. The neighbors call her "moony."

Chapter Three

Mama and Tilly become even more afraid for Noah when Lincoln calls for 75,000 volunteers to fight in the war. The village has a square dance. Mama sits on the widows' bench, even though her husband, a river man, is very much alive. Away for years, he has apparently deserted the family. Tilly is interested in Curry Marshall, a young man her age. The square dance breaks up when the *Rob Roy*, a steamboat from New Orleans, docks at the landing. Everyone hurries down to the dock. Two remarkable figures step off the boat: Delphine Duval, a vibrant, commanding young lady in a rustling hoop skirt; and Calinda, a dark, silent woman in a plain cloak, with

a bandanna wrapped around her head. Everyone wonders who these two fascinating strangers could be. The townspeople are also concerned about the darker woman's background: is she a slave, standing now on the free soil of Illinois? When Tilly's mother invites the two women to board at her house, the whole world shifts for the Pruitts and their visitors as well.

Chapter Four

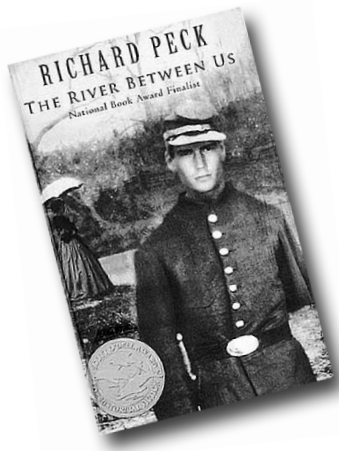
Fair and beautiful Delphine Duval, with her fancy dresses and high-society ways, fascinates the family. In a humorous interlude, Tilly assumes that Calinda is killing Delphine because of Delphine's screams. It emerges that Calinda is merely tightening Delphine's corset. Everyone tries to please the captivating Delphine, who has soon strewn her tiny room in the family's humble cabin with her magnificent clothing, exotic scents, and glittery accessories. Delphine tells a compelling story of her privileged life in New Orleans. Noah is especially taken by her charms.

Chapter Five

The next morning, Tilly takes the two women on a tour of the town. Delphine has a powerful effect on the men. She orders many luxuries for the family, including lamps and matches. They also cook delicious foods, including jambalaya. Although Mama has warned Tilly to be circumspect around Delphine and Calinda, Tilly finds herself blurting out all the family secrets. For their magical ways, Tilly dubs the two women "light-bringers." She notes that they seem very settled in, not like the birds of passage they claimed to be.

Chapter Six

Delphine's mother, Madame Duval, sends Mama a magnificent dress, which Mama saves for her burial. The dress is never worn, not even for that purpose. Calinda makes praline candy, which she sells on the docks to make money. Calinda and Cass bond, seeming to speak a secret language of divination together. Curry leaves the village to join the



Civil War. Tilly never hears from his again. When Delphine sees that Cass has put a kerchief like Delphine's on her head, she rips it off in a fury. Delphine says, "She has not earned the tignon (head wrap)." News comes of the Battle of Bull Run. From that day forth, all the people in Grand Tower are firmly on the Union side. Nonetheless, the townspeople don't pull together.

Chapter Seven

Every day Delphine parades down the main street, Front Street, and everyone comes out to see her: the men to ogle her; the women, to ogle her clothes. Three prominent women in town come to tell Mama that Delphine and Calinda are enemy spies and must be ejected. The preacher's wife, Mrs. Breeze, refuses to take them in. Mrs. T.W. Jenkins complains about Delphine's strolls into town, all gussied up, with the men staring. The meeting breaks up when Mrs. Jenkins insults Mama by saying that she couldn't hold on to her husband. While Mama is worried about retribution, she is glad that Delphine has come to live with them because Mama has learned from her how to stand up for herself. That night, Noah says that the men have echoed the women's complaints: they say the family is signaling the South with the new lamps.

Chapter Eight

When a showboat lands at the dock, Calinda and Delphine dress Cassie up, revealing her great beauty. They do the same for Tilly. The entire town turns out for the show. At the end of the extravaganza, Noah invites Delphine to waltz with him. The entire town stares, big-eyed. Tilly dances with Dr. Hutchings. The joy evaporates when the fiddler calls to Calinda, who performs wildly, dancing herself into a tearful frenzy. On the eve of his 16th birthday, Noah leaves to join the Union troops at Camp Defiance. He sneaks away at night.

Chapter Nine

The soldiers endure very rough conditions. When Noah writes about dysentery at camp, Calinda pours her blackberry wine cure into bottles for the men. Mama has a terrible premonition that Noah is very ill, and she sends Tilly to get Noah to come home. She is willing to sacrifice Tilly for Noah. Calinda sends Delphine with Tilly.

Chapter Ten

Delphine and Tilly take the train to Cairo and then to Camp Defiance. Tilly is shocked to learn that Delphine is only fifteen; Calinda, seventeen. They are younger than Tilly. Dr. Hutchings, who has joined the soldiers as camp doctor, meets the two girls. The doctor reveals that Noah had indeed been very ill with dysentery. The camp is a filthy quagmire. Delphine forces her way into the tent so Tilly can see Noah. He cries to see them and they give him food.

Chapter Eleven

Delphine works surprisingly hard and lambastes Dr. Hutchings into getting them the passes and supplies (especially food) they need to help the soldiers. The girls live in the widow Hanrahan's summer kitchen during the summer they spend nursing the soldiers, who recover quickly under their care. Now that Noah is well, Colonel White takes him off to train for combat.

Chapter Twelve

Mrs. Hanrahan finally pays a call on her borders. Mrs. Hanrahan says, "Ah declare, Doctor, just see what you have brought me. A colored girl." It emerges that Delphine is a quadroon, the daughter of a black mistress and a rich married white man. Calinda is her sister, darker in color. Delphine's mother had sent her daughters away from New Orleans, hoping that Delphine could pass for white. The "tignon" is the word for having some black blood.

Chapter Thirteen

Tilly has a picture taken of herself, Noah, and Delphine. On November 6, Noah and Dr. Hutchings ship out to fight in the Battle of Belmont, Missouri. Tilly realizes that Delphine returns Noah's love for her. The next morning, 300 wounded soldiers return, Noah badly injured, his arm amputated. Delphine and Tilly nurse him in the summer kitchen. They do not send word home about his condition. Delphine says that Calinda read in the Tarot cards that Noah died.

Chapter Fourteen

Delphine reveals that her father has five white children and several black children. He has sent Delphine's half-black brother Andre to France, because there he will be accepted. Calinda does not have to marry because she has the gift of prophecy. Noah recovers and they take him home.

At home, they are shocked to learn that Paw is dead, having died while fighting in Polk's army. Noah unknowingly fought against his own father. Assuming that Noah rather than her husband is in the coffin, Mama commits suicide, drowning herself in the river.

Chapter Fifteen

The action returns to the summer of 1916. Howard discovers another reason for the visit: Aunt Delphine is dying. Howard's younger brothers trail one-armed Uncle Noah, who capably performs his chores while aged Dr. Hutchings naps. Grandma Tilly, however, is a whirlwind of activity. She won't let anyone but herself tend to Delphine. She reveals that Cass died in 1866, age seventeen, of diphtheria. Afraid that her darker color would give her sister Delphine away, Calinda set off for California, where she could pass for Spanish. They never heard from her again. Delphine and Noah never married, but lived as husband and wife. Symbolically, Howard's father lets Howard drive the car on the way home and explains that if the country enters World War I, he is going to enlist as a doctor.

Dr. Hutchings reveals the secret at the heart of the book: his parents are Delphine and Noah, not Dr. Hutchings and Tilly. The white couple, who never had any children of their own, raised the child as their own and gave him their name. Young Howard is proud of his racially-mixed blood line.

Timeline

November 6, 1860	Abraham Lincoln elected president
December 20	South Carolina secedes from the Union
February	Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas secede from the Union
February 9, 1861	The Confederate States of America is formed
March 4	Abraham Lincoln is sworn in as 16th President
April 12	Fort Sumter attacked. The Civil War begins.
April 14	President Lincoln issues a Proclamation calling for 75,000 militiamen, and summoning a special session of Congress for July 4.
April 17	Virginia secedes, soon followed by Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina, thus forming an eleven state Confederacy
April 19	President Lincoln issues a Proclamation of Blockade against Southern ports.
July 21	Battle of Bull Run
February 6, 1862	General Ulysses S. Grant captures Fort Henry.
March 8-9	The <i>Merrimac/Monitor</i> battle
April 6-7	Battle of Shiloh
May 31	The Battle of Seven Pines
August 29-30	Second Battle of Bull Run
September 17	Battle at Antietam, the bloodiest day in U.S. military history.
September 22	Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation
December 13	Battle of Fredericksburg

January 1, 1863	President Lincoln issues the final Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in territories held by Confederates.
May 1-4	Battle of Chancellorsville
May 10	Stonewall Jackson dies.
July 1-3	Battle of Gettysburg; war turns against the Confederates.
July 4	Battle of Vicksburg
September 19-20	Battle of Chickamauga
November 19	Lincoln's Gettysburg Address
November 23-25	Battle of Chattanooga
June 15, 1864	Union forces miss an opportunity to capture Petersburg and cut the Confederate rail lines.
September 2	Atlanta captured
October 19	Battles in Shenandoah Valley
November 8	Abraham Lincoln is re-elected president.
November 15	Sherman begins his March to the Sea.
December 21	Sherman reaches Savannah, Georgia
January 1, 1865	13th Amendment introduced
March 25	Battle at Petersburg
April 9	General Robert E. Lee surrenders his Confederate Army to General Ulysses S. Grant.
April 14	Lincoln shot by John Wilkes Booth.
April 15	Lincoln dies.
April 18	Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston surrenders to Sherman.
April 26	John Wilkes Booth is shot and killed in a tobacco barn in Virginia.
May	Remaining Confederate forces surrender; Civil War ends. Over 620,000 Americans died in the war, with disease killing twice as many as those lost in battle. 50,000 survivors return home as amputees.
January 31	13th Amendment is finally ratified and slavery is abolished.

Author Sketch

Richard Peck was born in 1934, in Decatur, IL, the son of a merchant and a homemaker. He began his education at the University of Exeter, where he stayed a year, from 1955 to 1956. Then he transferred to DePauw University, where he earned his B.A. Peck's education was then interrupted by a two-year stint in the Army, where he served in Stuttgart, Germany. Upon his discharge, Peck enrolled at Southern Illinois University, earning his M.A. in 1959. He later completed further graduate study at Washington University.

Peck began his career as an English teacher at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. From 1961-1963, he taught English at Glenbrook North High School, Northbrook, IL. He left education that year to become a textbook editor at Scott, Foresman, a job he kept for two years. From 1965-1971, Peck returned to teaching, moving to New York and working at Hunter College of the City University of New York and Hunter College High School. When he was 37 years old, Peck published his first young adult novel and made writing his full-time career.

When asked what he hopes to accomplish in his books for young adults, Peck told an interviewer: "I don't know what books can do, except one point is that I wish every kid knew that fiction can be truer than fact, that it isn't a frivolous pastime unless your reading taste is for the frivolous. I wish they knew that being literate is a way of being successful in any field.... So that's the hope I have."

Critic's Corner

Richard Peck is a highly regarded young adult author. In a survey of members of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN) conducted in 1988, Peck was voted the third most important YA writer—only S. E. Hinton and Paul Zindel received more votes. *The River Between Us* was nominated for the National Book Award for young people's literature and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction. Not surprisingly, given the high quality of Peck's writing, the reviews for *The River Between Us* were excellent.



For example, Connie Tyrrell Burns, writing in *School Library Journal*, notes: "In this thoroughly researched novel, Peck masterfully describes the female Civil War experience, the subtle and not-too-subtle ways the country was changing, and the split in loyalty that separated towns and even families. Although the book deals with some weighty themes, it is not without humor." Hazel Rochman, reviewing the novel for the *American Library Association*, wrote: "It's a riveting story that shows racism everywhere and young people facing war, not sure what side to be on or why."

Peck's Other Works

Works for Young Adults

Don't Look and It Won't Hurt (1972)
Dreamland Lake (1973)
Through a Brief Darkness (1973)
Representing Superdoll (1974)
The Ghost Belonged to Me (1975)
Are You in the House Alone? (1976)
Ghosts I Have Been (1977)
Father Figure (1978)
Secrets of the Shopping Mall (1979)
Amanda/Miranda (1980)
Close Enough to Touch (1981)
The Dreadful Future of Blossom Culp (1983)
This Family of Women (1983)
Remembering the Good Times (1985)
Blossom Culp and the Sleep of Death (1986)
Princess Ashley (1987)
Those Summer Girls I Never Met (1988)
Voices After Midnight (1989)
Unfinished Portrait of Jessica (1991)
Bel-Air Bambi and the Mall Rats (1993)
The Last Safe Place on Earth (1995)
Lost in Cyberspace (1995)
The Great Interactive Dream Machine: Another Adventure in Cyberspace (1996)
A Long Way from Chicago: A Novel in Stories (1998)
Strays Like Us (1998)
A Year Down Yonder (2000)
Fair Weather (2001)
Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts (2004)
Past Perfect, Present Tense: New and Collected Stories (2004)
Here Lies the Librarian (2006)
On the Wings of Heroes (2007)

Further Readings About Peck

Booklist, September 15, 2003, review of *The River Between Us*, p. 239.
Children's Literature Review, Volume 15, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1988, pp. 146-166.
Contemporary Literary Criticism, Volume 21, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1982.
 Commire, Anne, ed. *Something About the Author*, 18. Detroit: Gale Research, 1980, pp. 242-244.
 Donelson, Kenneth L. and Nilsen Alleen Pace, *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. Glenview, Ill., Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980.
 Gallo, Donald R., ed. *Speaking for Ourselves: Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults*, Urbana, Ill.: National Council for Teachers of English, 1990, pp. 165-167.
 Gallo, Donald R. Who Are the Most Important YA Authors? *The ALAN Review*, vol. 16, no., 3 Spring 1989, pp. 18-20.
 Gunton, Sharon R., ed. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 21. Detroit: Gale Research, 1982, pp. 295-301.
Horn Book, Peter D. Sieruta, review of *The River Between Us*, p. 616.
 Locher, Frances Carol, ed. *Contemporary Authors*, 85-88. Detroit: Gale Research, 1980, pp. 458-459.
Publishers Weekly, November 10, 2003, review of *The River Between Us*, p. 38.
 Sarkassian, Adele, ed. *Something About the Author Autobiography Series*, Detroit: Gale Research, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 175-186.
 Scheler, Curt. Peck Is the Author Whose Dreams Came True. *Grand Rapids Press*, 25 July 1982.
 Schwartz, Sheila. *Teaching Adolescent Literature: A Humanistic Approach*. Rochelle Park, N.J.: Hayden Book Company, 1979.
School Library Journal, Connie Tyrrell Burns, review of *The River Between Us*, p. 218.
Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Volume 2, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1986, pp. 175-186.
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 2nd edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1999.
Twentieth Century Children's Writers, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1989.
Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers, first edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1994.
Writers for Young Adults, Scribner (New York, NY), 1997.

General Objectives

1. To appreciate the novel's suspense
2. To understand the novel's title
3. To recognize the importance of setting
4. To assess each character's personality
5. To recognize the novel's theme and lessons that it teaches
6. To understand why people feel prejudice and hatred
7. To explore the ways that kindness can be shown
8. To find examples of bravery and courage
9. To trace the effect of the Civil War on everyday people
10. To describe the novel's mood or atmosphere

Specific Objectives

1. To understand the shifts in chronology, especially the flashback
2. To discover the mystery at the novel's heart
3. To understand why Dr. Hutchings keeps his parentage a secret
4. To compare and contrast the characters of Tilly and Delphine
5. To analyze why Dr. Hutchings takes a trip to his family and hometown and why he brings his sons along
6. To probe the relationship between Noah and Delphine
7. To understand why Calinda leaves town at the end of the novel
8. To trace the plot structure
9. To consider the lessons the book teaches about the past
10. To understand how the racism in the small town echoes the racism the nation battled in the Civil War

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Richard Peck's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

description a word picture of what something or someone is like. Description is made up of sensory details that help readers form pictures in their minds. Peck's style in *The River Between Us* is highly descriptive, as this excerpt from page 28 shows: "Oh, you can't picture how we lived back then. There wasn't but a strong latch on the door. And

we didn't have a stove of any description. I'd never seen one. We kindled fires with flint and steel and cooked over an open flame in the kitchen. We baked in a Dutch oven set into the bricks beside the hearth. In the winter we lived in this kitchen to keep warm." Notice how the description appeals to touch and smell as well as sight.

dialect the way people speak in a certain region or area. In a dialect, certain words are spelled and pronounced differently. Writers use dialects to describe their characters and setting more fully. One of the most well-known modern examples of dialect is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Peck uses some dialect in *The River Between Us* to help readers visualize the setting and characters. For example: "Long before people began hollering war, Mama was already afraid she'd lose Noah. Most boys hankered to go on the river." The words "hollering" and "hankered" are examples of dialect.

point of view the position from which a story is told. In *The River Between Us*, Peck uses the first-person point of view to give the events a personal and immediate slant. In the opening and closing chapters, Howard tells the story in his own words. Tilly narrates the rest of the book. This helps readers get the flavor of the different eras.

The Importance of Setting

Peck cleverly juxtaposes two settings: the big city of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1916 and the tiny hamlet of Grand Tower, Illinois, in 1861. Although 55 years and the Mississippi River (and 100 miles) separate the two settings, they have a great deal in common. In fact, they are strikingly similar: both settings are poised on the eve of a terrible war (the first, the Civil War; the second, World War I) and both still support prejudice and even racism. Delphine and Calinda have left their home in New Orleans as the Civil War is about to break out. They head north because if the South loses the war, they would be considered nothing more than freed slaves. If the Yankees take New Orleans, their elegant life will come crashing down. In the North, Delphine is fair enough to pass as white and make a life for herself. However, as readers soon learn, St. Louis in 1916 is far from racially blind. Dr. Hutchings, Howard's father, will not reveal that he is Delphine's son and thus partially black. Although more than 50 years have passed in the novel, prejudiced attitudes still linger.



Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

- Elaine Marie Alphin, *Ghost Soldier*
Jennifer Armstrong, *The Dreams of Mairhe Mehan*
Henry Louis Gates, *Li'l Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*
Jim Murphy, *The Journal of James Edmond Pease, A Civil War Union Solider, Virginia, 1963*
Ann Rinaldi, *Girl in Blue*
Susan Sinnot, *Welcome to Addie's World, 1864: Growing Up During America's Civil War*

Nonfiction

- Catherine Clinton, *Scholastic Encyclopedia of the Civil War*
Carin T. Ford, *Daring Women of the Civil War*
Joy Hakin, *War, Terrible War*
Janis Herbert, *The Civil War for Kids: A History with 21 Activities*
Kevin Hillstrom, *American Civil War Biographies*
Kay Moore, *If You Lived During the Time of the Civil War*
John Stanchack, *Eyewitness: Civil War*

Audio Books

The River Between Us, read by Lina Patel (2004), unabridged

DVDs, Videos

The Civil War, A Film by Ken Burns
Civil War Combat: America's Bloodiest Battles
Civil War Diary
Civil War Battlefields
Civil War Journal
Songs of the Civil War

Internet

Richard Peck, Featured Author
www.carolhurst.com/authors/rpeck.html
Richard Peck
www.tallmania.com/peck.html
Richard Peck biography
www.car.org/mae/peck/peck.htm

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Richard Peck's *The River Between Us* should include these aspects:

Themes

- courage
- battlefield suffering
- family love
- fear
- friendship
- mysteries
- prejudice
- life in the 1860s
- suffering and death
- truth about one's heritage

Motifs

- showing bravery in battle and after
- nursing the wounded in horrific conditions
- holding a family together in difficult times
- exploring the civilian Civil War experience
- probing the lifelong impact that one person can have on another
- understanding a framing device in a novel
- understanding prejudice during the Civil War
- exploring frontier life in the 1860s
- being brave in terrifying situations
- analyzing the interweaving of fact and fiction in an historical novel

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "Tilly!" Mama called out to me from the kitchen. "Go find Cass." (Chap. Two, p.19) *(When Howard and his younger brothers meet the four elderly people who raised their father, the novel shifts to 1861. In addition, the first-person narrator changes from Howard to 15-year-old Tilly Pruitt, the boys' grandmother. This flashback comprises nearly all the novel.)*
2. "You-uns can come stay with me. It's plain, but they's room." (Chap. Three, p. 38) *(This is dialect. The phrases "young-uns" would be "young ones" and the word "they's" would be "there is" in Standard Written English. The author uses dialect to convey the flavor of the time and place. In addition, readers see that Mama is generous and daring to open her home to strangers.)*
3. Calinda was the sister Cass needed. (Chap. Six, p. 65) *(Calinda and Cass share a gift for prophecy. Both have knowledge of cures and visions of the future. Prior to Calinda's arrival, Cass was isolated by her abilities, considered strange by the rest of the villagers. Indeed, she was often called "mooney," an allusion to the moon's legendary ability to bring out madness. After Calinda abruptly leaves town, Cass sickens and dies.)*
4. "She has not earned the tignon, your sister." (Chap. Six, p. 72) *(The "tignon" is the word for the kerchief that Calinda and other African-American women wore at this time instead of a hat. When Delphine sees Cass wearing a tignon like Calinda, she rips it off her head. We find out later that this headgear is a sign of pride for African-American women.)*
5. In our ignorance, we still couldn't believe they'd send boys unprepared into battle. (Chap. Nine, p. 98) *(Tilly and Delphine are shocked at how ill-clothed, ill-trained, and ill-fed the young soldiers*

are. As a result of poor living conditions, thousands of Civil War soldiers on both sides died of diseases that could easily have been prevented, even in the 1860s.)

6. It wasn't Mama at all. The floor yawned at my feet. (Chap. Nine, p. 100)
(In this dramatic scene, Mama has a vision, just as Cass does, that Noah is deathly ill. In her otherworldly state, Mama orders Tilly to go after Noah and bring him back—even if it costs Tilly her own life.)
7. "And you're one of his colored family, ain't you?" (Chap. Twelve, p. 126)
(In the Civil War era and for decades after, African-Americans were referred to as "colored." The term included anyone with any African-American heritage. Here, the bigoted Mrs. Hanrahan discovers Delphine's secret: she is the daughter of a single black woman and a married white man.)
8. "I fought against him and didn't know." (Chap. 14, p. 144)
(When he sees the insignia on his father's corpse, Noah realizes that his father had enlisted in the Civil War on the Confederate side. Unknowingly, father and son had fought against each other in the battle. This was not unknown in real life as well, as the war pitted father against son, brother against brother.)
9. He was letting me drive. (Time and the Mississippi River, p. 156)
(On the way home from the visit, Dr. Hutchings lets Howard drive the Model-T, a symbol that he considers his son an adult. A few minutes later, in recognition of this, Dr. Hutchinson tells Howard the truth about his heritage.)
10. "My father isn't Dr. Hutchings," Dad said. (Time and the Mississippi River, p. 157)
(In this dramatic scene, Dr. Hutchings reveals that he is the son of Noah and Delphine, raised by Tilly and old Dr. Hutchings to prevent being subjected to racism for being partly black.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the story take place?
(The story opens and closes in St. Louis in 1916 on the eve of World War I. The rest of the book takes place in 1861 in Grand Tower and Cairo.)
2. How many narrators does this story have?
(The novel has two narrators, Howard and Tilly. The prologue and epilogue are narrated by Howard. The rest of the book, the numbered chapters, are narrated by Tilly. Both are first-person narrators.)
3. What is the relationship between Delphine and Calinda?
(They are sisters.)
4. Who won't Delphine marry Noah?
(The illegitimate offspring of an unmarried black woman and a married white man, Delphine believes that she would bring shame to Noah by marrying him. That does not prevent her from loving him very much, however.)
5. Why does Dr. Hutchings bring his children to his hometown?
(His mother—Delphine—is dying and he wants to say goodbye. He also wants his children to know the truth about their heritage.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why does Mrs. Hanrahan break all the dishes when Delphine and Tilly leave her home?
(A racist, Mrs. Hanrahan refuses to eat from any dishes that a black person used. She serves in the book a symbol of all the racist people that Delphine, Tilly, and even Dr. Hutchinson so wisely fear.)
7. How does Cass change as a result of knowing Calinda?
(Cass becomes less fragile and comes to accept her gift of prophecy. Just knowing that she is not the only one with these abilities makes her stronger.)
8. How do the neighbors react to Delphine? Why do they act this way?

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(The men are transfixed by her beauty, elegance, and flirtatious manner. The women are envious of her beauty, elegance, and hold on to their men. The men merely fall all over themselves to be near Delphine, but the women react with venom, visiting Mama and slurring her reputation.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Did you like the form of this novel? Why or why not?
(Answers will vary, depending on students' feelings about frame stories. Some will find the flashback fascinating, while others are likely to be confused by the shift in chronology.)
10. Who or what is the "river between us"?
(Possible responses: Literally, it is the Mississippi River, which separates St. Louis from Grand Tower. Symbolically, it is the African-American heritage that unites the generations in both pride and secrecy.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Write a journal entry from Howard's point of view that describes his life ten years in the future.
12. Working with a small group of classmates, make a mural showing the main events in this novel.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music/Physical Education

1. Working with three other classmates, demonstrate some classic square dancing sequences. Invite the class to join the fun.
2. Sing one of the songs in the book, such as the square dance songs in Chapter Three or the Army song in Chapter Thirteen.
3. Draw a portrait of Delphine as she looked when she stepped off the dock.
4. Tilly is shocked when she hears Calinda strapping Delphine into her corset. Explain the ill-effects of corsets.
5. Sketch the town of Grand Tower, as it is described in the novel.

Speech

1. In a speech, trace the life and accomplishments of Ulysses S. Grant.
2. Deliver the *Gettysburg Address* to the class.
3. Speaking as Paw, explain where you have been for the years that you have been away from your family.
4. Enact a scene between Noah and Delphine, in which Noah proposes, Delphine refuses, and they explain their reasons for their actions.

Language Arts

1. When writing for any age group, Peck told Jean F. Mercier in *Publishers Weekly*, he tries to "give readers leading characters they can look up to and reasons to believe that problems can be solved." Explain how he accomplished his aim in *The River Between Us*.
2. Explain what the "river" in the book's title symbolizes. It may have more than one meaning.
3. People call Cass "moony," after the belief that the full moon makes people act in odd ways. Find at least three more superstitions about the moon. Share them with your classmates.
4. In an essay, explain why no one ever wore the beautiful dress that Delphine gave to Mama.
5. Hold a spelling bee, like the ones that Curry Marshall kept winning.

History/Social Studies

1. Write a fantasy story in which you explain how America would be different if the South had won the Civil War.
2. Research the role of women in the Civil War.
3. Learn more about the Lewis and Clark expedition. Share your findings on a web page or report.
4. Tilly isn't sure if she would call Ma an "abolitionist" or not. Argue that Ma is or is not an abolitionist, based on the standard definition.

5. Compare and contrast the film version of *Gone with the Wind* to *The River Between Us*.
6. Make pralines or jambalaya for the class. Distribute the recipes.

Teacher's Notes

Science and Math

1. Find out how many miles per hour the Model T could travel. Then calculate how long it would take to drive from St. Louis, MO, to Grand Tower, IL, in a Model T and in a modern car. How much longer did the trip take in 1916?
2. Plan a car trip to take your family on vacation about 100 miles from your home. Calculate the cost, including meals, gas, and admissions to attractions.
3. Make a poster or display showing some of the herbs and plants native in your region.
4. Make a chart showing the number of enslaved people and freed slaves in 1861, the eve of the Civil War.

Alternate Assessment

1. Brainstorm some ways in which people can overcome prejudice and learn to live together in harmony.
2. In your own words, state the novel's theme or message.
3. Make a character list and describe each character.
4. Write a critical review of the novel for the school newspaper.

Vocabulary Test

Match each word to its meaning. Write the letter of your choice in the space provided.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| ___ 1. expedition | A. attack |
| ___ 2. meager | B. sticky |
| ___ 3. fowl | C. heavy-set |
| ___ 4. threadbare | D. trip |
| ___ 5. stout | E. begin |
| ___ 6. kin | F. pants |
| ___ 7. riffraff | G. relatives |
| ___ 8. solemn | H. chickens and turkeys |
| ___ 9. britches | I. fine wool |
| ___ 10. bolt | J. serious |
| ___ 11. clammy | K. worn out |
| ___ 12. rant | L. run fast |
| ___ 13. maul | M. rage |
| ___ 14. alpaca | N. scanty |
| ___ 15. commence | O. trash, lowlife |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Supply a term to complete each of the following statements. Place your answers in the blanks provided in the sentences.

1. The novel opens in the year _____.
2. The narrator, the fifteen-year Howard Leland Hutchings, is the son of a well-respected doctor in the town of _____.
3. When Howard and his younger brothers meet the four elderly people who raised their father, the novel shifts to the year _____.
4. Tilly Pruitt is upset because her twin brother _____ yearns to be a soldier and trains with other village boys.
5. The village entertainment, a(n) _____, breaks up when a steamboat from New Orleans docks at the landing.
6. Tilly assumes that Calinda is killing Delphine because of Delphine's screams. It emerges that Calinda is merely tightening Delphine's _____.
7. Delphine tells a compelling story of her privileged life in the town of _____.
8. Delphine's mother, Madame Duval, sends Mama a magnificent _____, which Mama says that she is saving for her burial.
9. Calinda makes a food called _____, which she sells on the docks to make money.
10. Noah has his _____ amputated, but he survives.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| A. Noah Pruitt | F. Delphine Duval |
| B. Cass Pruitt | G. Calinda |
| C. Tilly | H. Howard |
| D. Dr. William Hutchinson | I. Raymond and Earl |
| E. Curry Marshall | J. Mrs. Hanrahan |

- ____ 1. The son of Delphine and Noah
- ____ 2. Howard's younger twin brothers
- ____ 3. A dark woman in a plain cloak, with a bandanna wrapped around her head.
- ____ 4. The young man who wins the spelling bee
- ____ 5. The man who has a crush on Delphine
- ____ 6. The bigoted woman in whose summer kitchen Delphine and Tilly live
- ____ 7. Dr. William Hutchinson's teenage son
- ____ 8. Tilly's sister; she has eerie supernatural visions
- ____ 9. The commanding young lady in a rustling hoop skirt
- ____ 10. The narrator of the middle part of the novel; Noah's twin sister

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Write T if the statement is true or F if the statement is false.

- ___ 1. When the novel opens, Howard recounts the preparations for his family trip in a Model T to visit his father's childhood home in St. Louis, Missouri.
- ___ 2. In Chapter One, when Tilly is the narrator, Lincoln has just been inaugurated as president and the country is poised on the brink of the Civil War.
- ___ 3. Everyone tries to please the captivating Delphine, who has soon strewn her tiny room in the family's humble cabin with her magnificent clothing.
- ___ 4. Curry leaves the village to join the Civil War, but he and Tilly are reunited after the war and get married.
- ___ 5. Three prominent women in town come to tell Mama that Delphine and Calinda are enemy spies and must be ejected.
- ___ 6. Mama is sorry that she has let Delphine and Calinda stay and tries to find a way to get rid of them.
- ___ 7. On the eve of his 16th birthday, Noah, leaves to join the Union troops at Camp Defiance.
- ___ 8. Mama has a terrible feeling that Noah is very ill, and she goes on her own to the Army camp to bring him home.
- ___ 9. Tilly is shocked to learn that Delphine is only fifteen years old and Calinda is thirty-five years old.
- ___ 10. Calinda is Delphine's mother.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

- 1. Describe how Howard changes as a result of his experiences in Grand Tower.
- 2. Analyze the relationship between Delphine and Tilly.
- 3. Describe Delphine's secret. Explain what it is so important in the novel's time and place.
- 4. Analyze what the title means and tell why it fits the novel's theme.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each and explain why it is important in the novel.

1. St. Louis
2. the tignon
3. twins
4. the Civil War
5. Grand Tower

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of speakers from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| ___ 1. The narrator of the opening and closing chapters | A. Mrs. Hanrahan |
| ___ 2. Tilly's first love; he dies in the war | B. Tilly |
| ___ 3. The young soldier who loses an arm in the war | C. Howard Hutchings |
| ___ 4. The pastor's wife, a bigoted woman | D. Calinda |
| ___ 5. The "conjure" woman | E. Mama |
| ___ 6. She discovers Delphine's secret | F. Delphine |
| ___ 7. Calinda's beautiful, exotic sister | G. Curry Marshall |
| ___ 8. Delphine's father, a wealthy white man | H. Mrs. Breeze |
| ___ 9. Noah's twin; the narrator of the plot | I. Jules Duval |
| ___ 10. She drowns herself in the river | J. Noah Pruitt |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each statement below with a reason or explanation.

1. Howard, his father, and his brothers go to Grand Tower because
2. Delphine and Calinda come to Grand Tower because
3. Calinda and Cass become close like sisters because
4. Three women from the town visit Mama one afternoon because
5. Delphine and Tilly go to Cairo to
6. Noah recovers from his injuries because
7. When Delphine leaves the army camp, Mrs. Hanrahan breaks all the pottery because
8. Dr. Hutchings brings his children to his hometown because
9. Delphine won't raise her own son because
10. Calinda leaves town at the end of the novel because

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Analyze what role Calinda plays in Cass's life.
2. Analyze what the title means and tell why it fits the novel's theme.
3. Describe the novel's setting and explain its importance to the story.
4. Explain why Delphine and Calinda come to Grand Tower.

Answer Key

Vocabulary Test

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. G | 11. B |
| 2. N | 7. O | 12. M |
| 3. H | 8. J | 13. A |
| 4. K | 9. F | 14. I |
| 5. C | 10. L | 15. E |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. 1916 | 6. corset |
| 2. St. Louis | 7. New Orleans |
| 3. 1861 | 8. dress |
| 4. Noah | 9. praline candy |
| 5. square dance | 10. arm |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. J |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. G | 8. B |
| 4. E | 9. F |
| 5. A | 10. C |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

- The novel begins and ends in St. Louis. It serves as the framing device and ironically shows that despite such modern inventions as the Model T, attitudes toward mixed race people had not changed much at all in the 55 years since the Civil War.
- The tignon is the kerchief that Calinda wears on her head. Cass puts one on when she is working with Calinda. In a fury, Delphine rips it off her head, saying that she had not earned it. As readers learn in the "A Note on the Story, in 1786, Don Esteban Miro forbade women of color to wear hats. Instead, they wore kerchiefs—"tignons"—on which they flaunted elegant trimmings. Thus, the tignon becomes a symbol of defiance against prejudice and repression.
- There are two parallel sets of twins in the

novel: the eldest are Noah and Tilly Pruitt, the youngest, Raymond and Earl Hutchings. This parallelism is another unifying device in the novel, showing the tie of family.

- The Civil War runs through the novel, both unifying the family and tearing it apart. On one hand, Tilly and Delphine rescue Noah, nursing him back to health. On the other hand, Noah and his father "Paw" fought on different sides of the war in the same battle: Paw died.
- Grand Tower is the setting for the main action in the novel. It is astride the Devil's Backbone, a geographic feature. The townspeople do not pull together when in the face of tragedy; in fact, just the opposite happens as they try to expel Delphine and Calinda.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

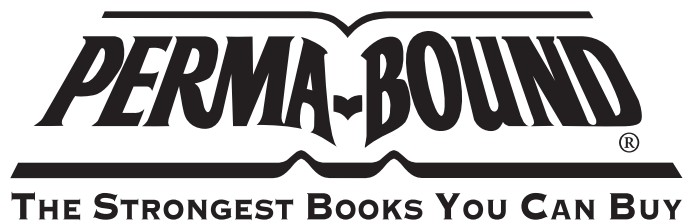
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A |
| 2. G | 7. F |
| 3. J | 8. I |
| 4. H | 9. B |
| 5. D | 10. E |

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

- Dr. Hutchings wants to say goodbye to his mother Delphine, who is dying, and tell Howard about his true heritage.
- Delphine's mother wants her daughter to be in a Northern state with the Civil War looming. As a woman with a mixed-race heritage, Delphine will become a slave in the South if the Confederacy wins the war.
- they both have second sight, visions about the future.
- they want to force her to kick Delphine and Calinda out of her house.
- find Noah and nurse him, if need be. If not, they plan to bring his body back home.
- he receives such good food and skilled nursing from Tilly and Delphine.
- she is prejudiced and will not use any dishes that a black person has used.
- he wants them to learn the truth about their mixed heritage.
- she didn't trust the world; she knew that if people found out that her son was part black, he would face a great deal of prejudice.
- she does not want anyone to find out that she and her sister are black; she wants to make it easy for her sister to "pass" as white.

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



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