

Homeless Bird

by Gloria Whelan

Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

A Perma-Bound Production

SYNOPSIS

Chap. 1 The story takes place in India. At 13, Koly is ready to be a bride, so her maa (mother) and baap (father), arrange her marriage, as is their custom. Koly's family is very poor, so Koly's dowry presents a significant problem for them. Baap, a scribe, sits in the marketplace stall hoping to make a few rupees (cents) writing letters for illiterate people. Even though he is a learned man, the work pays poorly. Koly's older brother Gopal and her younger brother Ram tease her about her upcoming marriage. Both boys go to school, but Maa thinks school is wasted on a girl. Maa works embroidering saris (a length of cloth worn as a dress). Koly has her mother's talent with a needle and thread. Maa gives Koly her one treasure: her silver earrings. At great personal sacrifice, the family scrapes together enough money for Koly's wedding. The match is considered very good because the 16-year-old groom Hari Mehta is a Brahman, a member of the highest Hindu caste. At the Mehtas' home, Koly and her parents realize that the Mehtas are far more interested in Koly's dowry than the marriage. During the wedding, Koly sees that Hari is quite young, perhaps even younger than she is, and very ill. Koly is to live with her in-laws, according to custom. After the wedding, Koly shares a bedroom with her new sister-in-law, Chandra, rather than with her husband. Koly realizes that nothing is what she and her parents had been promised.

Chap. 2 Koly does not see her husband. Instead, she spends her days doing chores, hard physical labor. Sass, her mother-in-law, treats her cruelly. Koly finally gets to see her new husband, who is dying of tuberculosis. Koly amuses him with stories but he is spoiled and petulant. Koly realizes that the marriage was arranged solely for the dowry, the money to be used to bring Hari to Varanasi on the Ganges River. The doctors have exhausted all hope of helping Hari and many devout Hindus as well as other religious groups in India believe that the Ganges River has magical curative powers. The doctors warn Sass and Sassur (Koly's father-in-law) that Hari is too weak to withstand the journey to the Ganges River, but Sass is obdurate. Soon, the family sets off on their journey.

Chap. 3 The journey is far more difficult than Koly had imagined. The sun beats down fiercely and the road is dusty and dry. The railway is even worse, people crushed together in the stifling heat. The city is mobbed with desperate supplicants. The next day, Hari, his maa and baap, and Koly begin their pilgrimage to the Golden Temple through the throngs of people from all over India. To Koly's pleasure, Hari seems to revive in the water, even splashing about a bit. Tragically, Hari's liveliness does not last, and he dies a few hours later. At 13, Koly is a widow.

Before they leave Varanasi, Sass buys Koly a cheap white cotton sari, the clothing that widows wear.

Chap. 4 Back home, Koly is treated even worse. Hari's mother steals Koly's widow's pension; Hari's father ignores her. Only Chandra provides some friendship. Koly works from dawn to dusk maintaining the house. Sass screams at Koly and scolds her constantly. Koly finds some relief in making a quilt and convincing her father-in-law Sassur, a teacher, to teach her to read and write. She catches on quickly. They especially enjoy reading Sassur's signed copy of the poems of the Nobel-prize winning Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore. Koly begins to get a bit mischievous. Two years pass. A husband is found for Chandra.

Chap. 5 Chandra's bridegroom, Raman, is an educated and handsome computer programmer. Sass takes Koly's wedding sari for Chandra and tries to bully Koly out of her silver earrings, but Koly refuses to relinquish them. Koly learns that her widow's pension has been used to help fund Chandra's dowry. This is the first Koly has heard of her widow's pension. More than ever, Koly is determined to keep her silver earrings, for they can buy her a railroad ticket out of her misery. She tries to get her pension from Sass, but the older woman claims it is being used for Koly's upkeep. Nonetheless, Koly makes Chandra a beautiful quilt for her wedding. Unlike Koly's wedding, this occasion is lavish and joyous. Koly feels her last bit of happiness leaving as Chandra and her new husband depart.

Chap. 6 Life gets even harder for Koly. Her in-laws still want no part of her, even though she tries to be a daughter to Sass and treats her with great kindness. Koly gets the courage to go to the official office and ask about her pension, but it must be mailed, not given in person. A year passes. Koly is nearly starved of food and love. Her life changes when Sassur quietly dies.

Chap. 7 Chandra is called home for the funeral and Koly sees that she is prospering in her new life. However, it never dawns on the self-centered young woman to help Koly. Sass blackmails Koly into giving up her earrings in exchange for the precious book of poetry. Koly knows it was foolish to give up her one valuable possession, but she cannot bear to see the book sold. Soon after, Sass tells Koly they are going to live with Sass's brother in Delhi. They travel a long distance to the holy city of Vrindavan, where many widows live. Sass takes Koly on a rickshaw ride to a temple and leaves her there. Hours later, the trusting young woman makes her way back to the station and realizes that she has been deserted. The rickshaw boy sees her and reveals that Sass left hours ago.

Chap. 8 The boy suggests she go to the temple, where monks feed widows in exchange for their holy chanting. Desperate,

Koly begs some food and sleeps on a doorstep for a week. Raji, the rickshaw boy, returns. He helps Koly by taking her a kindly woman who runs a home for widows. The woman, Kamala, finds jobs for the girls, helps them establish independent lives, and recovers their pensions. A rich lady from town supports the house and the widows pay a bit for their room and board. Koly works stringing marigold garlands.

Chap. 9 Despite her precarious position, Koly feels fortunate. She quickly learns to string the flowers and even gets another job making bead bracelets. Raji and Koly become friends and she teaches him to read and write. They take a trip to a temple together and enjoy the peace and quiet, away from the bustling city. Raji reveals his plan to earn enough money to rebuild his family's home and farm the land. Koly thinks that a woman would be very lucky to be married to the kind, clever, and ambitious Raji. One day, Mrs. Devi, the rich lady who owns the house, comes for a visit. Mrs. Devi notices a beautiful quilt that Koly made, realizes Koly's talent, and takes Koly to a maker of fine saris, Mr. Das.

Chap. 10 Mr. Das is equally impressed with Koly and gives her a job designing original embroidery on saris. She loves the work. Mr. Devi is a kind and generous boss. Things go well until Koly takes up with Mala, a dishonest fellow worker. At a party at Mala's home, Koly realizes that Mala has stolen a valuable wedding veil from Mr. Devi. When she refuses to let the artist Kajal have his way with her, Kajal drugs Koly with marijuana. With the help of her friend Tanu, Koly gets back to Maa Kamala's house. Koly is disconsolate at her innocence and Mala's betrayal, but the next day Raji returns from an extended absence so she feels better.

Chap. 11 To Koly's astonishment, Raji proposes to her. Delighted but not willing to give up her hard-fought independence, Koly agrees to marry him in a little time. Meanwhile, Mala steals gold thread from the sari shop and is fired. Raji builds a special room on his home where Koly can embroider, Mr. Das agrees to give her as much work as she wants, and the wedding is arranged. Mr. Das gives Koly her wedding sari; Mrs. Devi asks Koly to embroider something from Tagore's poems on the first sari she makes as a wife.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gloria Whelan was born in 1923, in Detroit, Michigan. "I've been writing stories as long as I can remember," as she told Kathleen T. Isaacs in a *School Library Journal* interview. "I used to dictate stories to my baby-sitter and she would type them up. When I got to elementary school I began writing poetry. In high school I edited the school paper. I never stopped writing."

Whelan's love of books and writing continued through high school. As a student at the University of Michigan, she aimed to write "the great American novel," but after earning her degree, Whelan married Joseph L. Whelan, a doctor, and had a son and a daughter. Whelan worked as a social worker in Detroit. In 1977, she and her husband resettled on a quiet lake in northern Michigan. The nearest house is a mile away. On her website, Whelan writes: "I have to walk half a mile to get the mail. In the winter the lake is a big white circle and the snow piles up from the ground and hangs down from the roof until you can hardly see out the window." This new setting sparked her imagination and her first book, *A Clearing in the Forest*. She was 55 years old at its publication!

Homeless Bird won the National Book Award in 2000 in addition to bountiful critical acclaim. But for Whelan, nothing has changed regarding her writing. Her ambition still is summed up in the Latin phrase "nulla dies sine linea"—"no day without a line." "The Greek Pythagoras could draw a perfect line," Whelan told Isaacs, "but he said if he didn't draw it every day, he would lose the skill. So on my computer I have 'no day without a line,' and I really make myself write every day. It's what I like best to do, and it's what I do."

CRITIC'S CORNER

A versatile author of historical and contemporary fiction for children and young adults, as well as short stories and poetry for adults, Whelan is, according to Liz Rosenberg in the *Chicago Tribune*, "an accomplished, graceful, and intelligent writer." However, nothing in Whelan's repertoire quite prepared her or her readers for *Homeless Bird*. Inspired by a newspaper article Whelan read about an Indian city where widows as young as 13 are abandoned by their in-laws, the novel tells the story of young Koly who is simply an extra mouth to feed in her own family.

Alice Stern, reviewing the book in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, called the novel "beautifully written" with all the elements of a great read: "a strong, empathic heroine, a fascinating culture, triumph over adversity . . . romance, and hope for the future." Other reviewers followed in such high praise. Shelle Rosenfeld, for example, writing in *Booklist*, called *Homeless Bird* a "beautifully told, inspiring story" that takes readers on "a fascinating journey through modern India." Rosenfeld also pointed out for commendation Whelan's "lyrical, poetic prose, interwoven with Hindi words and terms." An accompanying glossary helps readers to find their way through such terminology and is just one more sign of the prodigious amount of research Whelan did for the book. "Whelan has enhanced a simple but satisfying story with loving detail," noted Isaacs in a review of the novel. Isaacs concludes: "Readers with a curiosity about other worlds and other ways will find Koly's story fascinating."

OTHER BOOKS BY GLORIA WHELAN

Angel on the Square (2001)
Are There Bears in Starvation Lake? (2002)
Bringing the Farmhouse Home (1992)
A Clearing in the Forest (1978)
Farewell to the Island (1998)
Forgive the River, Forgive the Sky (1998)
Goodbye, Vietnam (1992)
Hannah (1991)
The Indian School (1996)
The Miracle of Saint Nicholas (1997)
Miranda's Last Stand (1999)
Next Spring an Oriole (1987)
Night of the Full Moon (1993)
Once on This Island (1995)
Playing with Shadows (1988)
The President's Mother (1996)
Return to the Island (2000)
Rich and Famous in Starvation Lake (2001)
The Secret Keeper (1990)
Silver (1988)
A Time to Keep Silent (1979)
The Wanigan: A Life on the River (2002)
A Week of Raccoons (1988)

Welcome to Starvation Lake (2000)

That Wild Berries Should Grow: The Diary of a Summer (1994)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Book Report, January-February, 1993, pp. 49-50; March-April, 1996, p. 39; November-December, 2000, p. 64.

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, October, 1987

Christian Science Monitor, Dec.14, 2000, p. 21.

Five Owls, September-October 1994, p. 5.

Horn Book, January-February 1993.

Horn Book Guide, July-December 1993.

Kirkus Reviews, Nov. 1, 1987.

Publishers Weekly, June 24, 1988, p. 95.

Reading Teacher, January 1998, pp. 333-334.

Voice of Youth Advocates, August 1990, p. 164; February 2001,

Alice Stern, review of *Homeless Bird*, pp. 428-429; April 2001

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze life in India
2. To explore how people act during times of extreme stress
3. To recognize the theme of independence
4. To understand the importance of family
5. To explore different cultures
6. To explore the ways that people become empowered
7. To find examples of women being mistreated
8. To understand how people can be motivated by determination
9. To describe the novel's mood or atmosphere
10. To predict what the future holds for Koly

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explore why Koly was married in an arranged marriage
2. To analyze Koly's desire to fit in with her new family
3. To probe the relationship between Koly and Raji
4. To understand the hardships caused by poverty
5. To see how people live in India
6. To trace Koly's growing courage and indomitable spirit
7. To understand the story's pathos and pain
8. To compare and contrast Koly and Chandra
9. To learn more about India and its culture
10. To identify the novel's structure, especially its climax

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

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

description is painting vivid pictures with words. The following description, for example, draws on the sense of smell, sight, and touch to evoke the scene: "We were surrounded by heaps of orange flowers. The smell of marigolds was so strong, I could hardly breathe. Now I knew what Tanu smelled like. It was the spicy, sharp odor of the marigolds." (page 124)

figurative language uses words in fresh, new ways to appeal to the imagination. Figures of speech include *similes*, *metaphors*, and *personification*. For example, Whelan uses the following simile to evoke Koly's feelings about words: "I watched as the spoken words were written down to become like caged birds, caught forever by my clever baap" (p. 2) Whelan's style is especially rich in similes and metaphors.

point of view is the position from which a story is told. In *Homeless Bird*, Whelan uses the first-person point of view. The narrator is one of the characters in the story and explains the events through her own eyes, using the pronouns *I* and *me*. This

first-person narrator, Koly, gives the story a freshness and immediacy. Readers experience events through Koly's eyes, which makes the story more dramatic.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about *Homeless Bird* and Indian culture, consult the following sources.

Novels

Maxim Antinori, *Hunting Mowgli*

Joseph Gaer, *The Fables of India*

Maira Kalman, *Swami on Rye: Max in India*

Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*

Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*

Katherine Lasky, *Jahanara: Princess of Princesses, India, 1627*

Vayu Naidu, *Stories from India*

Caroline Ness, *The Ocean of Story: Fairy Tales from India*

Jerry Pickney, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*

Aaron Shepard, *Savitri: A Tale of Ancient India*

Suzanna Fisher Staples, *Shiva's Fire*

E. J. Stapleton, *The Calico Butterfly*

Jyotsna Sreenivasan, *Aruna's Journeys*

Rabindranath Tagore, *Paper Boats*

David Weitzman, *Rama and Sita: A Tale of Ancient Java*

Ed Young, *Seven Blind Mice*

Nonfiction

Manini Chatterjee, *India* (Eyewitness Books)

Anuradha Chaturvedi, *Eyewitness Travel Guide to Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur*

Anita Ganeri, *Journey Through India*

William Goodwin, *India*

Bobbie Kalman, *India: The Land*

Elaine Landau, *India* (True Books)

AudioCassettes

Rudyard Kipling, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*

Videos

Dances of India

Families of India

India: Splendor of Rajasthan

India: Kingdom of the Tiger

Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India

Touring India

Websites

"About Gloria Whelan" <bethlehembooks.com/authors_illustrators/whelan.htm>

"Welcome to GloriaWhelan.com!" <www.gloriawhelan.com/>

"Gloria Whelan" <www.quesper.com/rcacontent/Homeless_files/gloria_whelan.htm>

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Gloria Whelan's *Homeless Bird* should include these aspects:

Themes

- culture
- arranged marriages
- poverty
- friendship
- grief and loss
- friendship
- dislocation
- rebuilding your life
- believing in yourself
- self-reliance

Motifs

- coping with unfairness
- dealing with cultural norms
- using your talents
- the importance of literacy
- learning to become independent
- the importance of hard work
- overcoming fear
- surviving against seemingly insurmountable odds
- being torn from your home
- remaining optimistic

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. "Koly, you are thirteen and growing every day," Maa said to me. "It's time for you to have a husband." (Chap. 1, p. 1)
(Although no exact figures are available, some 95 percent of all marriages in India are arranged, even among those in the educated middle class. Many Indians contend that arranged marriages are more successful than marriages in the West. With most unions between individuals from the same background, the arranged marriage reflects and reinforces the social, economic, geographic and historical diversity of India itself.)
2. My baap like all fathers with a daughter to marry off, had to find a dowry for me. (Chap. 1, p. 1)
(In India, many young women must have huge dowries attached to them to ensure marriage. Many fathers go heavily into debt, even bankruptcy, trying to pay for the dowry. In villages, dowries are given in the form of cattle, land, and jewelry. In the towns and cities, dowries are given in the form of hundreds of thousands of rupees (Indian currency), furniture, jewelry, and expensive household items and even homes.)
3. His tuberculosis is of a new kind that does not respond to medication. (Chap. 2, p. 33)
(Koly's new husband Hari is dying of tuberculosis, an infectious disease that often attacks the lungs. Until the 1940s, there were no treatments for the disease; as a result, it was often fatal. Today, in developed countries, the disease is commonly treated successfully with antibiotics. People in other countries often still die of the disease.)
4. Now that I could read, he often took out a book of poems by the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (Chap.4, p. 65)
(Tagore, 1861-1941, won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913. Altogether, he wrote about 1,000 poems, 24 plays, and 8 novels. He is especially respected for his poetry.)
5. I knew that I could not bear to see the book that meant so much to Sassur sold. (Chap.7, p. 93)
(Koly reveres the book of Tagore's poems not only for their beauty but also because through them, Sassur unlocked the mysteries of print to her.)
6. When his day had been successful and he had received generous tips, he would bring me some little thing ... (Chap. 9, p. 132)
(Raji begins to court Koly, but she is unaware of his intentions because romantic love and marriage are uncommon in India. In addition, she is young and innocent.)

7. "Such artists must be difficult to find." (Chap. 9, p. 143)
(Koly is a talented artist, skilled at embroidery, but she does not realize her skill. Mrs. Devi provides Koly with the break that helps her build a good life as an artist and wife.)
8. "That is what I want. It is not just a heron; it is *your* heron." (Chap. 10, p. 150)
(Mr. Das recognizes Koly's creativity and originality. The job he gives her brings her great joy as well as financial security.)
9. Gazing down, Raji mumbled, "You would be my wife, of course." (Chap. 11, p. 167)
(Koly marries Raji when she is ready, showing her independence—the direct opposite of her situation in the beginning in the novel, when she was forced into marriage.)
10. Immediately, I knew that it would be the homeless bird, flying at last to its home. (Chap. 11, p. 182)
(The homeless bird symbolizes Koly, who at last has found her place with Raji, her creative artistic work, and her friends.)

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 novel is set in India in the present. Koly comes from a poor peasant family.)
2. What is Koly's special talent?
(She is very skilled at embroidery, an artist with a needle.)
3. Why do Hari's parents lie about his age?
(They need Koly's dowry to pay for the trip to the Ganges; if Koly and her parents knew Hari's real age, they would never have consented to the marriage.)
4. How does Koly end up at the temple all alone, without Sass?
(Her mother-in-law cruelly tricks her and leaves her there, wanting to be free of her.)
5. What happens to Koly in the end of the novel?
(She will marry Raji, live with him in their house in the country, and embroider saris.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. How would you describe Hari's character?
(Because he is so ill and has been indulged, he is spoiled, immature, and petulant.)
7. Why does Koly's mother-in-law dislike her so much?
(Sass resents having another mouth to feed; she is a hard, cruel woman.)
8. How does Koly feel about reading? Why does she feel this way?
(Reading provides her with beauty and escape, like her embroidery.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What do Koly's quilts symbolize?
(The quilts symbolize key events in her life and serve as touchstones of love.)
10. Raji builds Koly a special room. What meaning does the room have for Koly?
(It symbolizes his support of her art and her continued economic independence.)

Questions 11 and 12 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss some ways that you might have coped with Koly's situation had you been in her place.
12. Write a brief sequel to the story in which explain what happens to the main characters.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

History and Geography

1. Find out more about the Ganges River and the temples in the region. Explain the role the Ganges plays in Indian life and belief systems.
2. Write a report about India. Include information about the country's geography and history.
3. Koly strings marigolds for weddings. Find out about marriage customs in India. Compare and contrast them to marriage customs from your culture.
4. Make a map showing the major cities described in the novel. Then trace the route Koly takes as the novel progresses.
5. Koly makes a pet out of a bandicoot. Find out more about these creatures. Do they make good pets? Why or why not?

Language Arts

1. Read several poems by Rabindranath Tagore. In an essay, analyze their meaning and appeal. Describe why Koly would like them so much.
2. List at least 10 books that Koly would like to own. Explain your choices.
3. In your own words, state the novel's theme or message. Provide supporting details.
4. Analyze Gloria Whelan's writing style in this novel, focusing on word choice, sentence structure, and figures of speech.
5. Read another book by Gloria Whelan. Compare and contrast it to *Homeless Bird*.
6. Analyze Koly's character. How can she say as she does in Chapter 9 that "no one was more fortunate than I" when she is on her own in the widow's shelter in Vrindavan?
7. Write a ballad about Koly's life. Include the main events and match the tone to her feelings about each event.
8. In an essay, argue that Koly would or would not be a good role model for young American women.
9. Help someone learn to read and write, as Sassur teaches Koly and Koly teaches Raji.

Music/Art

1. Using key scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main themes.
2. Design a poster for a movie version of *Homeless Bird*.
3. Select an especially dramatic scene from the novel, such as the scene describing Koly all alone in the temple. Then select some background music that captures the scene's mood. Read the scene to the class, playing the music in the background. After your reading, poll the class to determine how the music changed the scene's impact.
4. Create a three-dimensional model of Koly's birth village. Label each part with appropriate quotations from the novel.
5. Make a quilt or an embroidery of your own. Show a scene from your life, as Koly does.

Science/Mathematics

1. Koly receives a small widow's pension. Find out how much money a young American widow would receive from the Social Security Administration.

2. Make a chart showing the conversion rate between the American dollar and the Indian rupee.
3. Make a graph showing the average salary of a poor person, a middle-class person, and a wealthy person in India today.
4. Koly and her parents eat very little meat because they cannot afford it. Find out the advantages and disadvantages of a vegetarian diet.

Speech/Drama

1. Working with a group of classmates, teach the class about contemporary Indian culture.
2. With a partner, debate whether arranged or love matches are better marriages.
3. Role-play the first meeting between Koly and Raji. Try to capture each character's personality with your body language and gestures as well as words.
4. Working with a group of classmates, dramatize the wedding between Chandra Mehta and Raman. Play a recording of a traditional Indian song as background music.
5. Speaking as Koly, share your philosophy of life with the class.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List all the difficulties that Koly faced. Then rank these hardships on a scale from most to least difficult.
2. Retell the events in this novel from another character's point of view.
3. Make a character list and describe each character.
4. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.

VOCABULARY TEST

Complete the following chart by writing a synonym and an antonym for each of these vocabulary words from *Homeless Bird*. After you have completed the chart, see how many more synonyms and antonyms you can find. Add them to the chart as well.

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. auspicious	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
2. unruly	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
3. stately	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
4. impudent	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
5. sullen	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
6. mischievous	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
7. elegance	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
8. envious	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
9. pacify	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
10. seemly	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
11. lingering	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
12. fast (not eat)	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: 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 blanks provided.

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| ___ 1. the rickshaw driver who falls in love with Koly | A. Mr. Das |
| ___ 2. a dishonest worker who steals gold thread | B. Mrs. Devi |
| ___ 3. Koly's mother-in-law, a cruel and nasty woman | C. Tanu |
| ___ 4. the rich lady who supports the widows' house | D. Hari Mehta |
| ___ 5. Koly's sister-in-law, a sweet but selfish young woman | E. Koly |
| ___ 6. Koly's friend, another widow | F. Chandra Mehta |
| ___ 7. The kindly woman who runs the widows' house | G. Raji |
| ___ 8. The narrator of the novel, widowed at age 13 | H. Maa Kamala |
| ___ 9. Koly's first husband | I. Mala |
| ___ 10. The owner of the sari shop | J. Sass |

Part II: Motivation (30 points)

Complete each line below with a reason or explanation.

1. Koly's dowry presents a significant problem for her family because
2. The marriage Koly's parents arrange for her is considered very good because
3. After the wedding, Koly shares a bedroom with her new sister-in-law, Chandra, rather than with her husband because
4. Hari's parents take him to the Ganges River because
5. Sass buys Koly a cheap white cotton sari because
6. Hari's mother steals Koly's widow's pension to
7. Sass tries to bully Koly out of her silver earrings because
8. The rickshaw boy suggests that Koly go to the temple because
9. Raji works so hard because
10. Raji proposes to Koly because

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- ___ 1. Koly is 13 years old when she is married.
- ___ 2. Koly's mother wants her daughter to attend school, but Koly has no interest in learning to read and write.
- ___ 3. During the wedding, Koly realizes that Hari is quite old, perhaps even older than her father, and very ill.
- ___ 4. Koly realizes that the marriage was arranged solely for the dowry, the money to be used to bring Hari to Varanasi on the Ganges River.
- ___ 5. Koly's husband dies in an accident after they have been married for 5 years.
- ___ 6. After Hari dies, Hari's mother treats Koly even worse than before.
- ___ 7. Chandra's wedding is as poor and sad as Koly's wedding had been because her husband is as old and sick.
- ___ 8. Sass deserts Koly in the holy city of Vrindavan, where many widows live.
- ___ 9. At first, Koly works stringing marigold garlands.
- ___ 10. At a party at Mala's home, Koly realizes that Mala has stolen a very valuable wedding veil from her employer.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Compare and contrast Koly's life with her parents to her life with her in-laws.
- 2. Explain how Koly changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.
- 3. Describe the meeting between Raji and Koly.
- 4. Why is the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore so important to Koly?

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the correct word or phrase to complete each of the following statements.

1. At (twenty, 13), Koly is ready to be a bride, so her parents arrange her marriage, as is their custom.
2. Maa gives Koly her one treasure: her (silver earrings, wedding dress).
3. Koly finally gets to see her new husband, who dying of (an injury, tuberculosis).
4. Hari's parents take him to be cured to the (Ganges River, America).
5. Sassur teaches Koly how to (embroider, read).
6. Koly makes Chandra a beautiful (bracelet, quilt) for her wedding.
7. Koly's life changes when (Sass, Sassur) quietly dies.
8. One day, Sass tells Koly they are going to live with Sass's brother in (America, Delhi).
9. Koly works (making gold jewelry, stringing marigold garlands).
10. When she refuses to let the artist Kajal have his way with her, Kajal drugs Koly with (alcohol, marijuana).

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.

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| _____ 1. The rickshaw boy who falls in love with Koly | A. Mr. Das |
| _____ 2. The dishonest worker in the sari workshop | B. Mrs. Devi |
| _____ 3. Koly's mother-in-law | C. Tanu |
| _____ 4. The wealthy woman who helps widows | D. Hari Mehta |
| _____ 5. Hari's sister | E. Koly |
| _____ 6. Koly's friend, another young widow | F. Chandra Mehta |
| _____ 7. An artist who drugs Koly | G. Raji |
| _____ 8. The narrator, a talented, determined young widow | H. Kajal |
| _____ 9. Koly's first husband | I. Mala |
| _____ 10. The kindly man who owns the sari shop | J. Sass |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the story.

1. Sassur's book of poetry

2. the silver earrings

3. the widow's pension

4. the homeless bird

5. embroidery

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Who is the novel's main character? Why?
2. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and denouement.
3. Is Mala a good friend to Koly ? Why or why not?
4. Compare Koly at the beginning and end of the novel.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

Possible responses:

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. auspicious	favorable	unfavorable
2. unruly	undisciplined	well-behaved
3. stately	majestic	pitiful
4. impudent	rude, fresh	polite
5. sullen	moody	cheerful
6. mischievous	naughty, playful	obedient
7. elegance	dignity	incorrectness
8. envious	covetous, greedy	contented
9. pacify	mollify	antagonize
10. seemly	appropriate	improper, rude
11. lingering	constant	briefly
12. fast (not eat)	starve	gorge

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Motivation (20 points)

1. they are very poor but must raise the money somehow
2. the sixteen-year-old groom Hari Mehta is a Brahman, a member of the highest Hindu caste
3. her new husband is dying
4. they believe that the Ganges River has magical curative powers
5. that is the clothing that widows wear.
6. use the money for her daughter Chandra's dowry
7. she wants to use the money for Chandra's wedding
8. the monks feed widows in exchange for their holy chanting
9. he plans to rebuild his family's home and farm the land
10. he loves her

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

1. 13
2. silver earrings
3. tuberculosis
4. Ganges River
5. read
6. quilt
7. Sassur
8. Delhi
9. stringing marigold garlands
10. marijuana

Part II: Matching (20 points)

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

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. Sassur's book of poetry is meaningful to Koly because of its beauty and because it was cherished by Sassur, a kindly man beaten down by his wife and his hard life.
2. The silver earrings represent the possibility of freedom for Koly, since she can use them to buy a railroad ticket away from Sass.
3. The widow's pension will help Koly support herself as she strives to become independent.
4. The homeless bird is a symbol for Koly, who finds a home with Raji at the end of the novel.
5. Embroidery is the manifestation of Koly's great artistic gift.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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