

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

JEAN RHYS

Teacher's Guide

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LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND Production

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SYNOPSIS

PART ONE

A white pariah in Jamaica, Antoinette Cosway, daughter of the deceased Mr. Cosway and Annette Cosway from Martinique, lives outside Spanish Town at Coulibri Estate. Since the Emancipation Act of 1834, pressures on white Creoles stress neighbor Luttrell into drowning himself. Because his house is said to be haunted, people avoid the area. Menace approaches the Cosways after Annette's horse is poisoned. The diagnosis of retardation in Antoinette's brother Pierre leaves Annette sad, isolated, and unable to love her daughter. Without slaves to tend the grounds, Coulibri grows wild. For mothering, Antoinette turns to Christophine, the housekeeper, a wedding gift to Annette. Christophine terrifies island girls with her skill at obeah, another name for voodoo. The only other servants are male, Godfrey the butler and Sass the houseboy.

The Cosways suffer the hatred of blacks, who call them white cockroaches. Antoinette befriends Tia, a black child, and plays with her near the bathing pool until they quarrel about race. Tia takes Antoinette's dress and leaves her own. Christophine blames Annette for letting her daughter grow up wild. The child begins suffering from insecurity and bad dreams. Annette sells her last ring to buy muslin for two new dresses and begins staying out all night. After five years of lonely widowhood, she marries an Englishman, Mr. Mason, owner of land in Trinidad and Antigua. The couple honeymoon in Trinidad, leaving the children in Spanish Town with Aunt Cora.

On return to Coulibri, Antoinette senses that the family has more money than before. A year later, in 1839, Annette asks to leave to avoid the envy of free blacks. Mason expresses racism by accusing blacks of laziness. On return from Bertrand Bay, the family finds Coulibri deserted. Annette insists that it is not safe at Coulibri and demands some time away from the estate. Antoinette admits to herself that her stepfather saved Annette by marrying her.

That night, angry blacks assemble at Coulibri and set fire to the back of the house. While rescuing Pierre from his crib, Annette's hair is burned. She blames Mason for ignoring her warnings and resists him while trying to return for Coco the parrot. The crowd's taunting halts when Mason prays. Coco's burning death strikes terror in the superstitious blacks. Aunt Cora defends Pierre. Tia throws a rock at Antoinette, who leaves and never sees the estate again.

The Luttrells aid the family's flight. Pierre dies on the way; Antoinette goes to the country to rest and to mourn Coco. Antoinette awakens in Spanish Town with Aunt Cora, who has cared for her during six weeks of illness. Antoinette visits her mother, who bends low, squeezes her daughter, and hurls her against a partition. On entry to Mount Calvary Convent school, blacks tease Antoinette and claim that her mother tried to kill Mr. Mason and her daughter. Annette's cousin Sandi Cosway comes to her rescue. A nun washes her face. Louise de Plana introduces Antoinette to the new school, where she envies the beauty of black students.

Antoinette feels deserted after Christophine, Mr. Mason, and Aunt Cora leave Jamaica. For eighteen months, convent prayers and enforced modesty depress Antoinette, who embroiders silk roses in bright colors. At age seventeen, she receives gifts from Mason, who offers to take her to England. He promises that English friends will arrive next winter. She dreams of walking to a garden with a man and recalls her mother's funeral a year before.

PART TWO

After suffering fever for three weeks of his first month in Jamaica the unnamed groom escorts Antoinette from Spanish Town, Jamaica, to their honeymoon house, Granbois, near Massacre, Dominica. The small estate once belonged to Annette. He feels out of place among the bright colors, black faces, and spicy aromas. He admits that he earned thirty thousand pounds for marrying Antoinette. She introduces the black servants and singles out her nurse, Christophine. He steps on the wedding wreath and examines his dressing room.

In a letter to his father, the husband narrates the last few days and the death of Mr. Mason soon after the husband set out from England. During three weeks' confinement with fever, he stayed with the Frasers. Antoinette receives his courtship, but is strangely aloof. The morning before the wedding, Richard reports that Antoinette won't marry the husband. His pride hurt at being jilted by an island girl, he promises to take care of her.

Antoinette's wedding dress comes from St. Pierre, Martinique. The husband confesses that the island is dreamlike to him. During an evening walk, she starts to tell a story and pauses at the emergence of bad memories. Late the next morning, Christophine serves bull's blood, a breakfast drink. While Antoinette lies in bed, the husband goes to the bathing pool, where she joins him in late afternoon. She explains that Granbois had gone wild when Mason arrived. The family hired a butler, Baptiste, from St. Kitts. The husband is disturbed that Antoinette is cheerful by day and obsessed with death by night. They merge in pleasurable sex, which he recognizes as lust rather than love.

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An urgent letter from Daniel Boyd Cosway, Antoinette's illegitimate half brother who lives near Massacre, Dominica, informs the husband that the Masons deceived him about Antoinette, a member of the slave-owning Cosways. Daniel claims that her grandfather, father, and mother were insane and her brother retarded. Mason left Antoinette half his money in his will. Daniel admits that he learned to read in Barbados and that he became a preacher. He needed a week to write the letter.

The husband is shaken by the letter and overhears Antoinette quarrel with Amélie about Christophine's intent to leave. Christophine threatens to hex Amélie with bellyache. Antoinette complains that she doesn't belong anywhere. At 2:55 P. M., the husband walks into the forest to the ruined house of Father Lilièvre. The husband ponders the trickery of his father, brother, and Richard Mason that has plunged him into an unhappy marriage. Baptiste leads the husband back to Granbois, where he eats dinner and reads about obeah.

One morning, Antoinette rides to Christophine's house to ask advice about the husband's loss of love for his bride. Christophine advises Antoinette to leave him. Because the marriage arrangement cost Antoinette her inheritance, she has no money or property. She dreams a fantasy of England and asks for a love potion to recover her husband's love. She fears that he hates her, especially after he begins calling her Bertha. Christophine warns her that gossip has reached the husband and confused him as to the history of the Cosways. Antoinette recalls hearing Aunt Cora defend her niece from Richard's plotting. Cora is outraged at the theft of the inheritance to buy Antoinette a husband.

That afternoon, the husband receives a second letter from Daniel, who threatens to spread Antoinette's history for everybody to hear. Amélie warns that Daniel is a troublemaker and that Antoinette was once engaged to her cousin Sandi. At Daniel's residence, the husband learns that, at age sixteen, Daniel confronted his white father at Coulibri and that Christophine left Jamaica under a charge of practicing voodoo. The husband refuses to pay the five hundred pounds in blackmail and leaves in disgust.

That night, Antoinette tries to discern why the husband avoids her and to refute Daniel's story. He escorts her to bed and notices white powder on the floor. He realizes that she offers him drugged wine and flees to Father Lilièvre's ruined house in the woods. On his return, Amélie feeds him dinner and spends the night in his bed. With the money he pays her, she wants to visit her sister in Demara, Guyana, and to settle in Rio. Antoinette rides her horse away from the house. Baptiste announces that the cook is leaving.

The husband retreats to a hammock. After three days of Antoinette's absence, he writes Mr. Fraser about obeah. Fraser replies that Christophine Dubois was jailed for sorcery. Fraser reports that he warned Hill, the white police inspector, that she lives near Granbois.

Antoinette returns at dusk and locks her door so she can drink rum in private. When he refuses her more rum, she accuses him of liking

brown girls and of hexing her by calling her Bertha. She threatens to retaliate before she dies. She bites him and smashes a bottle. Christophine quiets her, then quarrels with the husband over his mistreatment of Antoinette. Christophine predicts that estrangement will destroy Antoinette just as it did her mother Annette. By promising that Antoinette will marry again and be happy if he lets her go, Christophine incites the husband's pride and jealousy. He admits that he would undo his marriage if he could.

In a letter to his father, the husband charges him with planning a loveless marriage. The husband plans to leave for Jamaica and asks his father to keep quiet about the couple's difficulties. After renting a house with two suites of rooms outside Spanish Town, the husband longs for an English summer and regrets being wed to a lunatic. Believing her promiscuous, he vows to give her no love and to deprive her of sun, pretty clothes, and a mirror. As the rainy season begins, the couple sets out for Massacre, Dominica. Antoinette comforts a black child who weeps because he can't accompany them.

PART THREE

Grace Poole remarks that the husband was in Jamaica when he inherited the family fortune at the deaths of his father and older brother. On interviewing with Mrs. Eff for the job of caretaker of Antoinette, Grace sees that the patient is young, thin, and shivering. Paid double wages, Grace agrees to keep secret the job of caring for an insane wife.

Antoinette observes Grace's drinking and plots a way to escape while her keeper is asleep. Because her husband calls her Bertha, Antoinette misses her name, her mirror, and window on the outside world. She believes that the ship lost its way upon departure from Jamaica and arrives in a cold land that doesn't fit her fantasy of England. Grace informs Antoinette that her brother Richard came to see her, but didn't recognize her. Antoinette threatened him with a knife and bit his arm, but doesn't remember any of the events.

Antoinette retrieves her red dress from the wardrobe and recalls wearing it when Sandi came and offered to take her away. The husband learned of their meetings and called her immodest. In three dreams, Antoinette flees the locked chamber and sets the house aflame. On the battlements, as the husband tries to save her, she envisions memories of the island and of Tia. Antoinette jumps to her death. Grace awakens her, then returns to sleep. Antoinette sets out to do what the dreams suggested.

TIMELINE

during slave times

ca. 1824

ca. 1832

Cosway, a Jamaican slave owner, keeps a black mistress and breeds biracial children. Christophine is jailed in Martinique for practicing obeah. Upon marrying Cosway, Annette receives Christophine as a wedding present.

Antoinette Cosway is born.

Annette is widowed after Cosway dies drunk and raving; she has no employees to tend Coulibri.

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- 1834** The Emancipation Act ends slavery in the islands.
- after freeing of the slaves** Lutrell drowns himself. After Pierre is diagnosed as retarded, Annette withdraws and lets Antoinette run wild.
- 1838** Annette marries Mr. Mason and honeymoons in Trinidad. Antoinette befriends Tia. Annette's horse is poisoned.
- 1839** After blacks burn Coulibri and Tia throws a rock at Antoinette, Annette goes insane because of the deaths of Pierre and the parrot Coco.
- six weeks later** Antoinette recovers from fever at Aunt Cora's house in Spanish Town and visits her mother, who is violent. Sandi Cosway rescues his cousin Antoinette from hecklers on the day that she enters Mount Calvary Convent school.
- six months later** Annette dies of unknown cause.
- ca. 1841** After the future husband sets out from England, Mason dies. Richard bargains with the husband before the wedding, promising him Antoinette's inheritance from Mr. Mason. Aunt Cora Cosway warns Antoinette that the husband is stiff and selfish.
- next three weeks** The husband recuperates from fever at the Frasers' house.
- day before the wedding** Antoinette doesn't want to marry.
- after the wedding** Antoinette says good-bye to Aunt Cora, who is too ill to attend the ceremony and who gives her two rings as security. The couple travel to Granbois near Massacre, Dominica, where the husband meets his wife's nanny, Christophine.
- a few days later** He writes to his father about disturbing events.
- one evening** Antoinette starts to tell her husband about bad memories.
- next morning** He husband goes to the bathing pool.
- late afternoon** She joins him.
- later** A letter from Daniel Boyd Cosway informs the husband that the Masons deceived him about Antoinette's family history.
- meanwhile** Sandi Cosway offers to take Antoinette away from her misery.
- 2:55 P. M.** The husband gets lost in the forest near the ruined house of Father Lilièvre.
- dusk** Baptiste retrieves the husband from the forest.
- one morning** Antoinette rides to Christophine's house to ask advice about the husband's disinterest in her.
- that afternoon** He receives a second letter from Daniel.

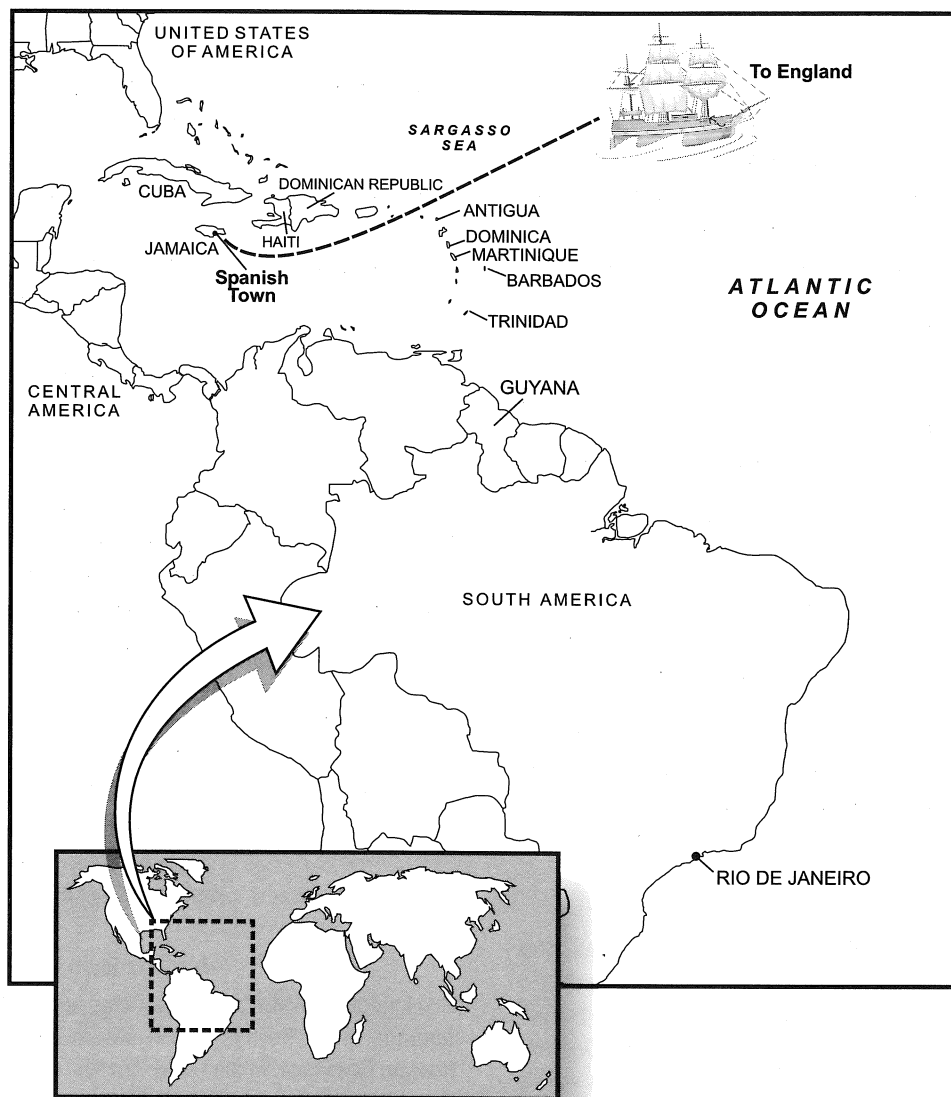
- that night** Antoinette tries to discern why her husband avoids her and to refute Daniel's story. She drugs her husband.
- next morning** He vomits up the drugged wine.
- next night** Amélie spends the night in the husband's bed.
- next morning** The cook leaves. Antoinette departs on horseback.
- three days later** The husband writes Mr. Fraser about obeah and learns that Christophine Dubois was jailed for practicing voodoo.
- at dusk** Antoinette locks herself in her room and gets drunk on rum. Christophine quiets her after a tantrum and predicts that estrangement will destroy Antoinette just as it did her mother Annette.
- later** The husband rents a house outside Spanish Town and vows to give his wife no love.
- rainy season** The couple sets out for Massacre, Dominica.
- later** The husband inherits the family fortune at the deaths of his father and older brother.
- on the voyage** Antoinette tries to convince a cabin steward to help her.
- in England** Grace Poole takes care of Antoinette.
- later** Antoinette bites Richard Mason when he comes to see her. She dreams of burning the house and leaping from the battlements.

AUTHOR SKETCH

Dominican-Welsh author Jean Rhys emerged late in life as a major feminist voice. Born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams in 1890 in Roseau, Dominica, in the Lesser Antilles, she was the grandchild of a slave-owner and child of a Scottish-Dominican mother, Minna Lockhart, and a Welsh physician, William Rees Williams. As a member of the white minority, she envied the freedom and gaiety of black islanders. She attended a convent academy during a period rife with racist concern for liberty and racial equality and, at age sixteen, entered Perse School, Cambridge, followed by brief study at the Academy of Dramatic Art to prepare her for a stage career.

After Rhys's father's death, she supported herself as a model, actor, and dancer in musical comedy before marrying Dutch-French newspaperman and lyricist Jean Lenglet, with whom she lived in Paris, Budapest, and Vienna. While her husband was imprisoned for embezzlement, she met author Ford Madox Ford, who admired her West Indian vignettes. With his help, she published her early works in *Transatlantic Review* and anthologized them as *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927). She followed with four novels—*Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), all tinged with autobiographical elements. For nearly two decades, she disappeared until discovered by the BBC in 1958 in Cornwall.

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During World War II, Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a psychological novel of marriage and madness drawn from elements of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The story accounts for the pathetic condition of the crazed wife of the husband, Edward Rochester, who renames his wife Bertha. A major work of female Gothic literature, the text justifies her rage at being married off to a selfish Englishman, an outsider who dislikes the Caribbean isles. Spurned and degraded, she lapses into insanity, the condition of her mother, Annette Cosway, at the time of her death. Rhys died in Exeter in 1979, leaving a scrap of autobiography to fill in details of her difficult life.

CRITICS CORNER

Critics were late to appreciate Jean Rhys, who found her most vocal champions in feminists. Depicting autobiographical protagonists at different times of their lives, she wrote hypnotically on the themes of patriarchy, female dependence on men, sexual predators, and the paradox of loving and losing. At the heart of her works are the insecur-

ity, despair, solitude, alcoholism, and suicidal urges that she battled during her own troubled life. Her settings and historical milieus recreate the tense social era following the emancipation of slaves, when black islanders throughout the Caribbean carried out hidden and overt vengeance against their former white overlords.

The publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and presentation of the Royal Society of Literature Award, the W. H. Smith Award, Arts Council Bursary, Commander of the British Empire, and fellowship in the Royal Society of Literature cinched Rhys's reputation as a master of feminist themes and motifs. Merchant-Ivory filmed *Quartet* in 1981, featuring a screenplay by Ruth Praver Jhabvala and starring Isabelle Adjani, Maggie Smith, and Alan Bates. A Dutch film version of *Wide Sargasso Sea* appeared in 1992, starring Nathaniel Parker, Rachel Ward, and Michael York.

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OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

The Left Bank and Other Stories (1927)
Perversity (translator, 1928)
Postures (1928); reissued as *Quartet* (1929)
After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie (1930)
Voyage in the Dark (1934)
Good Morning, Midnight (1939)
Winter's Tales (contributor, 1960)
Voices (contributor, 1963)
Wide Sargasso Sea (1966)
Tigers Are Better-Looking (1968)
Penguin Modern Stories (contributor, 1969)
My Day (1975)
Sleep It Off, Lady (1976)
Smile, Please: An Unfinished Autobiography (1979)
Collected Short Stories of Jean Rhys (1983)
Early Novels of Jean Rhys (1984)
Letters of Jean Rhys, 1931-1966 (1984)
The Complete Novels of Jean Rhys (1985)
Tales of the Wide Caribbean (1985)
Let Them Call It Jazz and Other Stories (1995)

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Staley, Thomas F. *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.

Sternlicht, Sanford. *Jean Rhys*. New York: Twayne, 1997.

Su, John J., "'Once I Would Have Gone Back . . . But Not Any Longer': Nostalgia and Narrative Ethics in 'Wide Sargasso Sea,'" *CRITIQUE: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Winter 2003, pp. 157-174.

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Uraizee, Joy, "'She Walked Away without Looking Back': Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's 'Wide Sargasso Sea,'" *CLIO*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Spring 1999, p. 261.

"Wide Sargasso Sea,"
<http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/worldlit/caribbean/rhys.htm>.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the impact of violence on a family
2. To account for the decline of colonialism
3. To interpret cultural and religious customs
4. To contrast reality with madness
5. To discuss the themes of repression and prejudice
6. To explain the main events in time order
7. To analyze the importance of matrilineage
8. To describe attitudes toward women and their choices
9. To describe elements of atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the roles of facts and rumors

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain how Annette loses a son and a home
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To summarize the roles of various speakers, particularly that of Daniel, Christophine, Baptiste, and Grace Poole
4. To account for the madness of mother and daughter
5. To justify Antoinette's last-minute refusal to marry
6. To predict how the husband will suffer for brutalizing his bride
7. To summarize the mothering of Annette, Aunt Cora, and Christophine
8. To discuss the implications of an islander living in England
9. To describe the husband's loss of love
10. To list family events caused by suspicion, abandonment, and revenge
11. To cite examples of powerlessness in the lives of Christophine, Annette, Aunt Cora, Pierre, Daniel, and Antoinette
12. To account for the use of fire as a symbol of rage

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Jean Rhys's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

alternating first-person point of view a group of first-person recitations that presents key parts of the action as a means of creating contrast or correcting erroneous details. By opening the story with Antoinette's memories of the fire and her mother's illness, then switching to the impressions of an outsider, the author prepares for the misunderstandings of Antoinette and her husband and for the wife's rage at losing her fortune and her freedom. The return of the story to the wife and her keeper, Grace Poole, reveals how cruelly the husband

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mistreats his wife by withdrawing from her the elements of island life that once delighted her, especially beauty and sunshine.

anti-hero a protagonist or central figure who lacks the usual heroic qualities of an admirable person or leader, particularly skill, grace, honesty, courage, and truth. Antoinette, who is incapacitated from childhood by the burning of Coulibri, spends the rest of her life fighting the depression, nightmares, and terror of black violence against her white Creole family and the death of Pierre from fire in his crib. She watches the parrot Coco burn to death and visits her mother at the house where she is kept prisoner as her trauma turns into mania. Although Antoinette rejects betrothal, she agrees to the wedding. She attends the ritual like a zombie and exits the church with cold hands. Her powerlessness builds into rage that threatens to burst into violence at her husband's English mansion and burn the house to the ground. The only way she can achieve vengeance is by killing herself, a death that she welcomes.

double entendre a ribald form of pun containing a deliberate ambiguity implying risqué or sexual meaning. In the sixteenth century, the English verb "die" referred to the physical collapse that follows orgasm. The husband ridicules Antoinette's abnormal fear by remarking, "I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers. In sunlight, in shadow, by moonlight, by candlelight. In the long afternoons when the house was empty." The comment expresses his enjoyment of coitus with his bride, when they both feel "most lost and drowned afterwards."

paradox a surprising or intriguing statement of truth through contradiction, for example, the paradox of a sweet girl marrying a man who promises his betrothed to keep her safe and make her happy. The story illustrates why these empty words foretoken despair and misery for Antoinette. After gossip creates disillusion, he quickly loses his love for her on the basis of one man's lies. Antoinette applies the only power she knows, Christophine's obeah, which further angers the husband and ends their intimacy and trust.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a brutal contrast beginning with sweet island breezes, sea view, and warm sunshine and concluding with a nightmarish incarceration in a windowless upstairs room in a stately, cold English manor. The settings are symbolic of the before and after marital state of Antoinette Cosway Mason, an orphaned girl bargained away by her stepbrother to a stranger from England against the advice of Aunt Cora. At Coulibri, her original home, she enjoys freedom of movement in the Edenic world of Jamaica. Rhys pictures her playing happily with Tia and flourishing under double mother love from Annette and Christophine, the stately islander who keeps house.

Trouble arises after the Emancipation Act, which ends the use of slaves to assure manicured lawns and punctual table service. Grumbling and verbal taunts precede threats. After the attack by disgruntled blacks on the Mason family and the torching of Coulibri, they escape into the night by carriage. Following six weeks of illness, Antoinette awakens at Aunt Cora's house in Spanish Town, a famous Caribbean

seaport that once welcomed pirates. Antoinette loses a sense of place and of belonging as her mother slips away into madness, leaving the child in the hands of relatives. Eighteen months at Mount Calvary Convent school separate Antoinette from her carefree life in the country and ready her for a major change in her life, betrothal and marriage.

The arrival of Antoinette and her English husband to Massacre, Dominica, prefaces a new Eden, where she rides horseback and dallies in bed at Granbois, a small estate that belonged to Annette. The alluring Caribbean breezes and flowered fragrances alarm the husband, who enjoys an island setting for its pleasures, but detests service by a black house staff. From days of lounging at the bathing pool and on the veranda, rambling the woods, and lying in a hammock slung between cedars, he chooses to resituate his new household at a suite of rooms outside Spanish Town and from there to England. When the point of view shifts back to Antoinette, she has crossed the cold ocean into a chill climate and lives a nightmarish existence on the upper floor of her husband's country manor, where no sunlight penetrates the gloom and the only warmth comes from the fireplace.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about Jean Rhys, colonialism, the Caribbean, plantation economy, racism, emancipation of slaves, family tensions, obeah, sexism, and other subjects and issues deriving from the book, consult these sources:

Audiocassette

Ordinary People, Recorded Books

Books

The Crimson Petal and the White, by Michel Faber

Daughter of Fortune, Isabel Allende

The Grandissimes, by George Washington Cable

Heat and Dust, Ruth Praver Jhabvala

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë

Queen, by Alex Haley

Essay

"As Others See Us," by Nadine Gordimer

Filmstrip

Self-Fulfillment, Guidance Associates

Internet

"History and Literature of the Caribbean,"

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/en/imperial/carib/carib.htm>.

Map

The Caribbean, National Geographic

Memoir

"How It Feels to Be Colored Me," by Zora Neale Hurston

Multimedia Kit

Writing about Family Roots, Interact

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Play

The Piano Lesson, by August Wilson

Poems

"If I Am Too Brown or Too White for You," by Wendy Rose
"I Hate and I Love" and "To Me He Seems Like a God," by Catullus
Now Sheba Sings the Song, by Maya Angelou
"Our Gardener," by Jean Rhys

Reference Books

Beyond Slavery, Frederick Cooper
Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World, Hilary Beckles
Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar, Walton Look Lai
Race and Prejudice in America Today, Knowledge Unlimited
Sugar Island Slavery, Arthur L. Stinchcombe

Short Stories

"The Anaconda," by Matthew Gregory Lewis
"Bras Coupé," by George Washington Cable
"Girl," by Jamaica Kincaid
"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,"
by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," by Katherine Anne Porter
"The Yellow Wallpaper," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
"Yellow Woman," by Leslie Marmon Silko

Slides

Characters in Crisis, Center for Humanities

Videos/DVDs

Anna and the King of Siam
Heat and Dust
Jane Eyre
Madame Butterfly
Ordinary People
The Piano
Queen
Snow Falling on Cedars

MEDIA VERSIONS OF RHYS'S WORKS

Audiocassette

Wide Sargasso Sea, Books on Tape, 1993

Critical Edition

Wide Sargasso Sea, W. W. Norton, 1998

DVD

Wide Sargasso Sea, Warner, 2003

Large Print

Wide Sargasso Sea, Thorndike, 1994

Paperback

The Collected Short Stories, Norton, 1992
Tales of the Wide Caribbean, Heinemann, 1985

Video

Wide Sargasso Sea, New Line Studios, 1993

RELATED READING

Isabel Allende, *Daughter of Fortune* and *The House of the Spirits*
Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*
Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*
Pearl Buck, *The Good Earth and the Woman*
Michael Dorris, *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*
Ernest Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and
A Lesson Before Dying
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*
David Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*
Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust*
Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl" and *Annie John*
Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* and *The Bean Trees*
Ruthann Lum McCunn, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*
Terry McMillan, *Mama*
Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Diane Oliver, *Neighbors*
Jean Rhys, *Our Gardener*
Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Joy Luck Club*
Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *Wide Sargasso Sea* should include these aspects:

Themes

- colonialism
- repression
- patriarchy
- racism
- violence
- labor
- family
- powerlessness
- marriage
- silence
- rebellion
- insanity

Motifs

- perceiving with island attitudes toward race and sex
- understanding the island mentality
- explaining the power of obeah
- assuming the role of rescuer
- coping with patriarchy and sexism

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MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Part and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed. (Part One, p. 17)
(After the British government abolished slave dealing in 1807, they waited thirty years before freeing all slaves. The alteration in the labor market reduced planters' profits. Former slaves preferred moving into the hill country to work their own farms. The government compensated planters with £19 per freed slave.)
2. It's evidently useful to keep a Martinique obeah woman on the premises. (Part One, p. 30)
(Obeah, a traditional Yoruban sorcery, originated in Nigeria and involved drumming, ecstatic dance, prophecy, and rhythm chants and clapping. Priests sacrificed chickens, doves, goats, pigeons, and turtles to agricultural gods as thanksgiving for the harvest. Worshippers propitiated guardian spirits. Rituals pleased the deities and brought luck, purification, and forgiveness of sins. Evil sorcerers controlled believers by threatening to cast spells that could disrupt love matches, sicken, cripple, or kill.)
3. It's time for your arrowroot. (Part One, p. 46)
(Aunt Cora feeds Antoinette an arrowroot concoction made from a West Indian starchy root. The flour is used in gruel, jelly, or pudding that infants and invalids can easily digest. The starch combines well with sugar, wine, herbs, spice, milk, and eggs to produce a variety of nourishing and appetite-tempting dishes.)
4. We are cross-stitching silk roses on a pale background. (Part One, p. 53)
(Antoinette receives a proper education for a young lady by learning cross-stitching. The rose, a dominant motif in Catholic art, symbolizes the virginity, integrity, and purity of the Virgin Mary. Antoinette's choice of "green, blue and purple . . . my name in fire red" anticipates her colorful island dress and fiery passion that leads her husband to believe Daniel's allegations that she is crazed and promiscuous.)
5. Her eyelashes flickered, she turned away, too polite to say the obvious thing. (Part One, p. 54)
(Antoinette's interest in the hair-styling of H el ene de Plana illustrates the girl's innocence. Antoinette tries to emulate the natural waves, but is unaware that Caucasian hair has a different shape that causes it to fall straight.)
6. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but [her eyes] are not English or European either. (Part Two, p. 67)
(From the beginning, the husband is suspicious of the cultural mix in Antoinette's expatriate background. Although she is dressed English style, in riding habit and tricorne hat, her "alien eyes" are large, sad, and disconcerting, a suggestion that the husband is already treating his bride like an alien.)
7. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to). (Part Two, p. 70)
(At the outset, marriage to Antoinette is essentially a business deal that passes the girl and her inheritance from her stepbrother, Richard Mason, into the husband's hands. No one involved has seen to her security, a necessity that the husband appears to think necessary, but not vital enough to have been negotiated before the wedding. To him, Antoinette's future is a casual afterthought.)
8. But why should they pity me. I who have done so well for myself? (Part Two, p. 77)
(At the reception, the husband meets an aunt and cousins who look alike to him. He is curious about the pity in their eyes and wonders how anyone can feel sorry for a stranger from England who nets a beautiful heiress along with her ample inheritance.)
9. She said it is very bad to sleep in the moonlight when the moon is full. (Part Two, p. 83)
(The term "lunatic" derives from folklore based on beliefs in the power of the moon to craze or derange a person. Christophine's comment foreshadows Antoinette's eventual decline.)
10. Next day Mrs. Eff wanted to see me and she complained about gossip. (Part Three, p. 177)
(Mrs. Alice Fairfax, housekeeper at Thornfield, Edward Rochester's mansion, is prim and proper, particularly about speculation and gossip. In hiring Grace Poole, she agrees to double the usual pay in exchange for complete discretion about the insane woman, Bertha Antoinette Mason Rochester, the crazed demon in Charlotte Bront e's Jane Eyre.)

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 with quotations from the novella.

Foreshadowing

1. What images foretell the burning of the husband's home and the death of the crazed arsonist?
(One of the most memorable moments of the housefire at Coulibri is the death of Coco, Annette Cosway Mason's green parrot. Because her second husband, Mr. Mason, clipped the bird's wings, he becomes ill-tempered and threatens visitors by pecking their feet. The attacks suggest his jealousy that guests can move about freely, but he is limited to his perch. His behavior prefigures that of both Annette and Antoinette after their mental decline from despair and powerlessness. When the bird attempts to fly from the railing, he is unable to escape the fire that already enflames his body. Ironically, the sacrifice of the bird creates a martyrdom by terrifying superstitious blacks from the property.)

The fiery scenario returns in miniature form after the newlyweds arrive at Granbois in Dominica. On the verandah, fireflies and a moth add to the outdoor atmosphere. After a large moth flies into

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a candle flame, he puts out the fire and collapses to the floor. Colored in soft pastels, he wings away from the porch railing, but Antoinette knows the nature of the insect to return to the candle flame. Both instances suggest three dreams in which she escapes from her cell at her husband's English mansion and sets fire to the residence. After retreating to the battlements, like a warrior who has completed the task, she leaps to the ground below toward an illusion of Tia, the traitorous Jamaican friend who struck her on the head with a rock. In each case, doom is unavoidable.)

Setting

2. Describe island life after the Emancipation Act of 1834. *(The end of slavery in the Caribbean upsets the economic balance for foreign investors in the cane sugar and rum trade. Former slaves, who choose to live on their own and work private land, refuse to labor on sugar plantations. Thus, expatriate English no longer depend on huge profits from their colonial holdings and begin plans of importing Indian coolie labor. As whites and blacks experience hard times from lapses in trade, the ex-slaves grow bitter about the past and threaten Creole whites, who consider themselves islanders, but who maintain elements of European culture.*

Jamaica's social agitation singles out the Masons because Annette's husband and father were former slave owners and her father fathered numerous biracial bastards. As her lifestyle declines to obvious poverty, blacks call her "white nigger" and "white cockroach." They threaten her house and family through taunts and gestures that her new husband misreads as harmless. The fire levels the country mansion at Coulibri, removing another reminder of white superiority at the expense of black labor.)

Character Development

3. What does Antoinette gain from mothering? *(Antoinette grows up free and wild on Coulibri as her mother, Annette Cosway Mason, ponders how to survive advancing poverty. Because the mother is more concerned with Pierre's retardation than with Antoinette's unsupervised play, the child turns to Christophine, her black nanny from Martinique. From the two women, Antoinette learns to be independent and to love island life for its beauty. After the fire, Antoinette sinks into unconsciousness and remains in bed for six weeks under the care of Aunt Cora, another white islander who was once married to a white Englishman. When the child awakens with a bandage on her head, she realizes how much care she has required, which includes hand-feeding of arrowroot. After Antoinette enters Mount Calvary Convent school, the nuns turn to Aunt Cora to protect her charge from harassment by envious blacks on her way to class. Eighteen months later, it is Aunt Cora who speaks against Richard Mason's plan to negotiate a bridal package with the English suitor, who will receive both the seventeen-year-old girl and her inheritance of thirty thousand pounds. Cora is the only person to remind the men that the deal leaves Antoinette powerless and penniless. After Annette dies in custody and Cora turns her face to the wall, Antoinette has one remaining*

mother to turn to, Christophine, who can offer only advice about ending the marriage by leaving the husband. At Antoinette's insistence, Christophine supplies obeah cures for lost love. In Antoinette's fateful revenge dream in England, she realizes that fire will wreak vengeance as well as death. In her last moments, she calls, "Help me Christophine help me.")

Historical Milieu

4. What is the status of psychology in the 1840s? *(At the time of Annette's decline and Antoinette's incarceration in England, psychology was not a formal science. Decades before Sigmund Freud mapped the subconscious mind and invented the talk therapy called psychoanalysis, people locked away relatives who were odd, eccentric, handicapped, senile, or merely bothersome. Because of the unhappiness of women in hopeless, powerless situations, the majority of mental patients were female. Males wrongly deduced that, because of their large number of mental breakdowns, women must be less stable than men.*

Female mental patients, particularly the poor and elderly, were at the mercy of the male medical establishment. Quacks subjected them to perverse treatments, e. g., immersion in freezing water and chaining to the wall. For conniving husbands, the asylum was also a handy means of ending a failed marriage and of relieving men of depressed, unfulfilled, rebellious wives, mothers, and female dependents. The obvious connection between powerlessness and women's mental ills leaves open to question whether nineteenth-century asylums were treatment centers, torture chambers, prisons, or death sentences.)

Theme

5. How does racism affect the marriage? *(From the beginning, Antoinette's husband declares that he is uncomfortable about a black house staff, especially Christophine, the outspoken housekeeper who is tall and forbidding. During her life with stepfather Mason, Antoinette learned that English visitors to the island are alarmed to hear her speak of black cousins like Sandi Cosway, with whom she later shares a "life and death kiss." She tries to convince her husband that he has nothing to fear from such harmless black people, but he remains wary. After Daniel destroys the husband's trust in Antoinette, thoughts of her family's secret past and the cause of their madness ruins the marriage.*

Ironically, the husband makes a gesture of ill-will toward Antoinette by leaving her bed and taking Amélie as a short-term lover. Like Mr. Cosway and other white colonial exploiters, the husband does not mind sexual liaisons with the black maid Amélie, but gives little thought to the future of half-breed children resulting from white-on-black promiscuity. The husband's callousness contrasts the genuine love of Sandi Cosway, Antoinette's mulatto cousin, who meets her regularly and offers to rescue her from a dead-end marriage to a snobbish English racist.)

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Interpretation

6. What does the title signify?

(The title names a part of the Atlantic Ocean that the ship crosses as it navigates from Spanish Town, Jamaica, to England. Because Antoinette is drugged during part of the passage, she believes that the ship has taken a faulty route into some cold sea and that the couple arrive in a dismal climate that bears little resemblance to her fantasy of England. Like the weedy Sargasso Sea, Antoinette's life sails into a broad entanglement that shackles her forever under the power of a cruel husband. His pride damaged, he refuses Christophine's suggestion that he let Antoinette end the marriage and move on to some other part of the islands and a more promising love match. Like a swimmer floundering in a tangle of seaweed, Antoinette has no means of extricating herself from the marriage that has cost her a sizeable inheritance, freedom, and sanity. The fire that levels her English cage is the antithesis of the sea, a power that ends her life in a fit of revenge that destroys her husband's residence.)

Conflict

7. Why does Daniel deliberately spread lies?

(Daniel Boyd Cosway, the illegitimate son of Mr. Cosway's black mistress, has ambitions to rise in society by learning English and becoming a minister. Filled with hate for his white sire, he challenges the old colonial exploiter by prophesying that Cosway will not last long married to the young Annette. Daniel's request is small, a one-time allotment of five hundred pounds to rectify a situation he describes as "the most unfortunate and poverty stricken" of Cosway's bastard offspring. Toward Antoinette's English husband, Daniel redirects his anger at the high-handedness of the white father and sends two letters threatening exposure of the family's embarrassing history.

Daniel cloaks his malice in "Christian duty." Piously, he declares that "the Lord put . . . on my shoulders and that it is I [who] must speak the truth to you." He rationalizes his situation as poor, black, and deserving of more of the Cosway fortune. He claims to be a daily Bible reader and speaks sanctimoniously of Pierre's heinous death from a burning crib as "God mercifully [took] him early on." As a racial taunt and slur on the white husband's pride, Daniel ends the acrimonious meeting with the husband by sending his "love to your wife—my sister.")

Atmosphere

8. How does the atmosphere change in Part Three?

(As Jean Rhys connects her novella to Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, she moves the husband back to England, where Mrs. Eff (Fairfax) has hired Grace Poole to look after Antoinette. To the sunny islander, the upstairs room is cold and ill-heated with paper, sticks, and coal. To her consternation, the husband does not return to see her or allow her a chance to improve their relationship.

The room, stripped of most of its furnishing, has a window high up. Daily, Antoinette, dressed in a gray wrapper, spends her time with her keeper and dreams of home. She watches at night as

Grace drinks whisky and counts gold pieces before falling asleep. The uncongenial atmosphere makes Antoinette comment about her keeper: "Her name oughtn't to be Grace.")

Author Purpose

9. Why does the novel appeal to feminists?

(Jean Rhys's prequel to Jane Eyre retrieves from fictional ignominy the madwoman in the attic at Thornfield Hall. By taking the point of view of the wronged island Creole, the author explains how patriarchal marriage isolates and confines a woman like Antoinette, who has no control over her life, property, inheritance, even her first name. Her suitor, who is the second son of a wealthy man, falls into the standard pattern of the disinherited son who foresees that his older brother will gain all. To assure himself of a livelihood, he agrees to Richard Mason's deal that grants him both a beautiful bride and all she owns.

Feminists interpret Antoinette's resultant madness as a normal rage turned manic because of the bride's incarceration and misery in England. The burning of Thornfield, which results in the death of Bertha Antoinette Mason Rochester, costs Edward Rochester his residence as well as the use of one eye and one hand, a suitable punishment for his crimes against women. Chastened, he weds Brontë's heroine, Jane Eyre, a professional-class woman who is capable of controlling her own inheritance and of making her own living by operating a school. The author allows Edward to survive on less money than he once had and to establish a more equitable wedlock with Jane than he established with Antoinette.)

Structure

10. How does the shifting of point of view impact the novella?

(Antoinette's dreamy, often indistinct memories of the terrible housefire at Coulibri and her little brother Pierre's death suggest an innocence that ill prepares her for the loss of a beloved Jamaican home and of her mother. From the Mount Calvary Convent school, she passes to the man of her stepbrother's choice, thus ending Richard's bother with the Cosway family. Rhys shifts to the husband's point of view concerning the negotiations, reception, and wedding. After recovering from three weeks of fever, he is eager to take Antoinette to Granbois near Massacre, Dominica, an ominous name suggesting both male dominion over females and a place of violent death, which decimates the Cosway family. Similarly naive, the husband adores his beautiful wife out of lust rather than love. He recalls her last-minute refusal of the marriage and promises "that when you are my wife there would not be any more reason to be afraid." He vows even-handedly, "I'll trust you if you'll trust me." Antoinette, her confidence only partially restored, can only nod.

The last points of view quickly attest to the irony of the groom's promises. Christophine's warnings to Antoinette to get away while she still can suggests a womanly wisdom based on experience and observation of other mismatched couples. Daniel's letters and accusations about the Cosway family illustrate the stored spite of half-breed Jamaicans who seek ways of repaying slave-

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owning families for forcing bondage on black Africans. The brief commentary of Grace Poole about her employment by Mrs. Eff and the promise to keep family secrets precedes the secret itself—the vicious incarceration of the bride on the upper story of a cold, cheerless English manor house. The final point of view is a different Antoinette, one confused by her confinement and by drugging on the long passage from the Caribbean. For good reason, she stores up rage and works out in dreams the details of her revenge, a fire to cleanse the estate of its cruel cell.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Crucial to the novella are assertions of characters about past family history:

1. From Antoinette's girlhood memories of the emancipation era comes her assessment of the family's straitened means: "All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery—why should anybody work?" In childish reflection, she adds, "This never saddened me."
2. Annette reminisces to her daughter that Christophine "was your father's wedding present to me—one of his presents." The statement trivializes the importance of Antoinette's nanny to the family.
3. Venturing off the pleasant estate into island society shocks Antoinette, who hears a black girl sing, "White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away."
4. Growing out of racial hatred, the first signs of dissociative mental illness begin to take hold of Antoinette: "Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it is as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer."
5. Antoinette acknowledges that the butler adds his prophecy of doom: "Godfrey said that we were not righteous . . . we were all damned and no use praying."
6. Fleeing from the housefire toward her black friend Tia, Antoinette experiences a sense of duality with the black world: "We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass."
7. The first letter from Daniel Boyd Cosway precipitates the end for Antoinette's future as an Englishman's bride: "There is madness in that family. Old Cosway die raving like his father before him."
8. The one-sided allegations introduce Antoinette to her destiny of being silenced by a tyrannical husband. She retorts, "You have no right to ask questions about my mother and then refuse to listen to my answer."
9. Intent on vengeance to compensate for powerlessness and manipulation by her husband, Antoinette promises, "Before I die I will show you how much I hate you."
10. In a state of madness, Antoinette sees herself as a bearer of justice and vengeance: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do."

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Music

1. Select mood music for a film or stage version of the book. Cover the elegiac atmosphere of the months at Mount Calvary Convent as well as spirited tunes for happy family times at Coulibri, dreamy music for relaxation in a hammock or in the summer house, and intense background for the burning of the estate and for the newlyweds' departure to Massacre, Dominica, from Spanish Town.
2. Post sketches or photocopies of instruments common to Caribbean dance and village singing, including various types of drums and rhythm instruments. Describe the difference between island rhythms and lyrics and the songs of England in the 1840s.
3. Using recorded music, present the history of Spanish Town from the time of the indigenous Arawaks through colonization, the pirate trade, emancipation, and current times. Include sea chancies, reels, jigs, juba dance, hymns, and national anthems.

Religion

1. Characterize the Caribbean religions, including fundamentalism, Catholicism, Anglicanism, obeah, and voodoo practices. Explain why blood sacrifice is important to obeah followers. In what way are Annette and Antoinette the equivalent of blood sacrifices?
2. Compose a graveside service for Annette Cosway Mason. Note her role in the preservation of Coulibri and in trying to rescue her children and the parrot Coco. Contrast the causes and nature of her insanity with anomalies in the behavior of her father and Antoinette.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of bathing in the pool, finding the poisoned horse, being drugged in the cabin on the voyage to England, rescuing Pierre from a burning crib, visiting Christophine's house, receiving Daniel's threats in person, entering the convent school the first day, removing a red dress from the wardrobe and enjoying its scent, and waking up with a bandaged head at Aunt Cora's house in Spanish Town. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as a red dress, the wardrobe, moths flying into candles, school books, white powder on the floor, keys, gin, rum, letters, hammocks on the veranda, blankets, crib, parrot, white dress, nuns' habits, and trays of food.
2. Create a storyboard account of Antoinette's years in England. Indicate why she loses track of time and why she attacks Richard Mason with knife and teeth. Discuss whether she receives sympathy from Mrs. Eff, Leah, or Grace Poole and why her husband avoids her.

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3. Discuss the creation of a stage play from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Explain why the incarceration of the patient parallels the debilitation and demise of Annette Cosway Mason and Antoinette Cosway Mason.

Education

1. Role-play the job of a housekeeper instructing an errand boy, maid, cook, or butler. Demonstrate methods of welcoming newcomers with a sea view, candles, table settings, food, drink, comfortable rooms, fresh flowers, and cool hammocks on the veranda or horseback rides over the property.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle identifiable groups, especially women, the retarded or mentally ill, children, or members of a minority race? What is a white Creole or white nigger? How does silence help the speaker survive tense situations and overt forms of ridicule? Why does she wish she were black? How do editorials, speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, and other forms of creativity help quell hatred, vengeance, and prejudice?
2. Compose a tour guide of Rio, Guyana, Jamaica, Dominica, Trinidad, St. Kitts, Barbados, Antigua, Martinique, and surrounding islands, particularly the beaches, old sugar plantations, fortresses, public squares, and marketplaces. Express the unusual aspects that make Antoinette's husband feel like an outsider, for example, the sea view, black servants, fragrant spices and flowers, rum and island foods, peepers and insects, and rain at night followed by sunny, dry mornings.

Cinema

1. View films about Caribbean settings, such as *Thunderball*, *The Tamarind Seed*, *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, *Cool Running*, and *Islands In The Stream*. Compare the movies' characters, themes, and dialogue to those of the novella. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and professional backgrounds.
2. Map out the action of a three-part television series on *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Follow the pattern of the three-part novella. Suggest the best way to handle violence in the burning of Coulibri, Antoinette's visit to Annette, the husband's mistreatment of Antoinette, and Antoinette's attack on Richard Mason in England.

Science and Health

1. Compose a lecture on mental illness. List some diagnoses, crises, complications, and treatment for severe traumatic illness, depression, alcoholism, and delusions. Account for the importance to the story of Aunt Cora's frail health and recuperation in England, Cosway's outbursts, Annette's deterioration, and her daughter's mania in England. Explain why Pierre's mental retardation is not related to these illnesses.

2. Explain why depriving Antoinette of pretty clothes, mirror, island flowers and spices, and sunlight increases her mental fragmentation. Discuss activities, treatments, and technology that help the mentally ill to lead normal lives. Include occupational therapy, field trips outdoors, group homes, medication, hypnosis, and halfway houses.

Geography and Culture

1. Create a mural or web site on the Caribbean islands. Note the locations of Jamaica, Trinidad, St. Kitts, Martinique, and Dominica and their major cities and seaports. Explain why the latter island is called a windward island.
2. Make a web site or bulletin board character web explaining attitudes of black islanders toward Creole whites and visiting English. Discuss why the liberation of blacks caused pockets of violence and long-term ridicule and baiting of whites like Antoinette on her way to the convent school, the husband with his bride at Granbois, and Annette on her horse.
3. Divide the class into small groups to brainstorm ways to improve community relations with visiting English. List strategies for suppressing stereotyping, rumor, victimization, and racial agitation against men like Mr. Mason, Richard Mason, Luttrell, Mr. Fraser, the police, and Antoinette's husband.

Art

1. Make an illustrated notebook of touches of Caribbean life in world art and in everyday illustration, notably, island currency. Include island imagery, spices, fruit, parrots, cool verandas, hammocks, bathing pools, and long flowing dresses. Discuss the types of imagery that hint at obeh.

Law

1. Read aloud nineteenth-century English laws governing the rights and responsibilities of husbands over wives and their property. Explain why husbands have the right to confine insane wives. Note any avenues of redress open to either Annette or Antoinette. Explain how Antoinette's situation would have changed if Aunt Cora had negotiated the betrothal or if Richard Mason had been an older stepsister rather than stepbrother.
2. Explain how nineteenth-century law favors white male planters and slave owners over common laborers. Make a chart of advice to Daniel concerning his right to property and part of the inheritance of Cosway. Characterize the legal position of his mother, Cosway's black mistress. Propose a method of pleading Daniel's case.

Psychology

1. Describe aloud the drive for survival that deserts Annette after the destruction of Coulibri, the death of Pierre, and the burning of Coco the parrot. Explain how the Luttrells gain custody of Annette and treat her like a sex slave.

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2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of alienation. Account for Annette's withdrawal from parental duties, Antoinette's bad dreams, Christophine's mothering of her, and Antoinette's failure to show enthusiasm for a suitor or marriage.
3. Using incidents from the book, comment on gradual changes in Antoinette's husband, including three weeks of fever, his response to a black house staff at Granbois, the visit to Daniel's residence to discuss two blackmail letters, discovery of white powder on Antoinette's floor, vomiting from the drugged wine, a day of lying in a hammock, and his preference for Amélie over Antoinette. Discuss what Antoinette expects out of his promises before marriage and what she anticipates out of her arrival in England.
4. Characterize the courage and cleverness of Christophine and her influence over Antoinette and the underlings on the house staff. Summarize physical, spiritual, and personal traits that cause people to fear Christophine and her practice of obeah, for example, the cook, who quits the day after Antoinette puts the white powder on the floor and drugs the wine.

Mathematics, Economics, and Computers

1. Using American and British English, French, or Caribbean patois dictionaries and desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: béké, melodramatic, obeah, père, wold, calabash, soucriant, Judas, sly-boots, insolent, protuberant, oleander, adieu, cutlass, machete, sangoree, Magdalene, press, vetivert, stephanotis, jasmine, frangipani, glacis, patois, Creole, counterpane, sideboard, tamarind, Qui est là, mounting stone, jumby, arrowroot, sans culottes, relics, martyrs, disdainful, transcendent, tricorne, disconcerting, giddy, cassava, guava, fer de lance, ajoupa, foulard, madras, servile, cypher, nancy stories, zombie, to the nines, and plantain.
2. Based on your understanding of the book, lead a panel discussion of the effects of white and black immigration, slavery, arranged marriage, and sex slaves on the action. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and historical and economic surveys about the 1830s and 1840s in the Caribbean.
3. Discuss with a small group family patterns of behavior and expectations after serious financial setbacks. Explain why the Cosways desert Coulibri and why the act of arson obsesses Annette and Antoinette.
4. Discuss Aunt Cora's intrusion on Richard Mason's wedding arrangements with Antoinette's future husband. Why does Aunt Cora worry about Antoinette's impoverishment? Why does Aunt Cora turn her face to the wall and choose not to attend the wedding?

Language and Speech

1. Prepare a dialogue dramatizing the departure from Spanish Town, Jamaica, across the Sargasso Sea and into cold waters. Why does Antoinette think that the ship was diverted from England? Express answers from her husband or from Mrs. Eff or Grace Poole to her misconceptions.
2. Lead a debate about feminism and its role in championing Jean Rhys, a neglected author. Explain why the sufferings of Aunt Cora, Pierre, Annette, and Antoinette have universal significance.
3. Make an historical timeline of Caribbean history that explains the emergence of patois. Note the absence of native American vocabulary and place names. Explain why the Caribe and Arawak appear to have dropped out of Caribbean history long before the novella opens.

Literature

1. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe racism, female repression, and injustice. Include Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck," Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," Isabel Allende's *Daughter of Fortune* and *The House of the Spirits*, David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Michael Dorris's *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Joy Luck Club*, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* and *Animal Dreams*, Diane Oliver's "Neighbors," Jean Rhys's "Our Gardener," Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," Terry McMillan's *Mama*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Toni Cade Bambara's "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird," Ruthann Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.
2. Explain in a theme the significance of the title *Wide Sargasso Sea*, particularly its reference to a thick, tangled mass of seaweed in a warm eddy alongside the Gulf Stream. Propose other titles that express the entanglement and powerlessness of women like Aunt Cora, Annette, and Antoinette Cosway, who rely on a stepfather, stepbrother, stepson, or husband to conduct their business. Explain the intrusion and dominance of Daniel, Sandi, Baptiste, Godfrey, Pierre, Mr. Mason, the husband's father and older brother, and old Mr. Cosway in the three women's future.
3. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor female character, such as nuns, Cosway's black mistress, Amélie, Louise de Plana, Tia, Maillotte, Caroline, Hilda, Miss Germaine, Sister Marie Augustine, and Mother St. Justine. Determine which male characters express fair and realistic attitudes toward these women.

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4. Explain in an impromptu chalk talk how anonymity affects the description of unnamed characters, particularly Daniel Boyd Cosway's parents, Antoinette's husband, and his father and older brother. What does the author accomplish by omitting the husband's name? by altering Antoinette's name to Bertha? Why would Daniel's name have been changed from Esau?
5. Explain the tie between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the downfall of Edward Rochester and Thornfield in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Justify Jean Rhys's interest in the Caribbean side of the novel and her sympathy for Bertha Antoinette Mason Rochester. Why is it significant that Antoinette intends to burn the mansion before killing herself? Why is fire a crucial symbol in the novella?

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of lawlessness and violence in the lives of the characters, for example, the rock that strikes Antoinette's head, the husband's drugged wine, Coco's flaming death, the jailing of Christophine, Luttrell's drowning, the immurement of Antoinette in the English residence, Daniel's blackmail letter, stalking of Antoinette on her way to Mount Calvary Convent school, Christophine's threats of a bellyache for Amélie, and angry ex-slaves who torch Coulibri and burn Pierre in his crib.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate racism in Spanish Town, at Coulibri, between white planters and their illegitimate children, among police, at Granbois, in the street on the way to Mount Calvary Convent school, in letters, and among all the Caribbean isles.
3. Compose a scene in which Richard Mason returns to visit Antoinette and hear about her three bad dreams of a fire at the English mansion. List questions he can ask without upsetting her, for example, about her health, her needs, bad memories about Coulibri and Annette's death, the reason for the drugs that make her sleep on the voyage to England, and the cause of her incarceration.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including the husband's pride and stubbornness, Antoinette's diffidence, the retarded boy's sleepiness, Daniel Boyd Cosway's duplicity, the adultery of Cosway's black mistress, the groom's father's favoritism toward the older son, Annette's disinterest in her daughter, Richard Mason's willingness to sell his stepsister to a stranger, Aunt Cora's weak health and despair, Grace Poole's alcoholism, Mrs. Eff's worry about gossip, the cabin steward's inability to help a distressed passenger, and Christophine's threats of bellyache against Amélie.
5. Account for the recurrence of warnings of danger: the burning parrot, Pierre's death from fire in his crib, Annette's attempts to kill Mr. Mason, the rock that Tia throws against Antoinette's head, the keepers who constrain Annette, the moth in the candle flame, the poisoned horse, Luttrell's drowning, news of Christophine's jailing for practicing obeah, the husband's racist remarks about black house staff at Granbois, white powder near the bed, a bitter taste in the wine cup, jeering and ridicule from the ex-slaves outside Coulibri and from the children who follow Antoinette to Mount Calvary Convent school, the collapse of Father Lilièvre's house, and the three dreams picturing Antoinette setting fire to her husband's English house.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below.
You will have answers left over when you finish.

1. Another one knew about Heaven and the attributes of the blessed, of which the least is _____ beauty.
2. Had she given way to that man Richard's arguments, threats probably, I wouldn't trust him far, or to my half-serious _____ and promises?
3. She'd be silent, or angry for no reason, and chatter to Christophine in _____.
4. He seemed surprised and _____ when he saw me.
5. His wide leather belt was polished, so was the handle of his sheathed _____, and his blue cotton shirt and trousers were spotless.
6. I foresee gifts of _____ in syrup and ginger sweets tomorrow.
7. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be _____.
8. Not the end of the world, only the last stage of our _____ journey from Jamaica, the start of our sweet honeymoon.
9. We boiled green bananas in an old iron pot and ate them with our fingers out of a _____.
10. You would not listen, you sneered at me, you grinning _____, you ought not to live either, you know so much, don't you?
11. This remark is made in a casual and _____ voice and she slides on to order and chastity.
12. I feel better already and my next letter will be longer and more _____.
13. Marble memorial tablets on the walls _____ the virtues of the last generation of planters.
14. Have all beautiful things sad _____?
15. I do not hate you, I am most distressed about you, I am _____.

arrowroot

blandishments

calabash

cassava

chemise

commemorating

creole

cutlass

cypher

destinies

disconcerting

disdainful

distraught

explicit

flambeaux

giddy

hypocrite

inquisitive

insolent

interminable

jumby

machete

martyrs

melodramatic

obeah

oleander

patois

perfunctory

plantain

protuberant

relics

sangoree

servile

sideboard

stephanotis

tamarind

transcendent

tricorn

vetivert

wold

zombi

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Description Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the novella with a character. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. Some of the answers will be used more than once and some not at all.

- _____ 1. returns to the house for Coco.
- _____ 2. offers to rescue Antoinette from a loveless marriage.
- _____ 3. promises pretty things and dancing lessons.
- _____ 4. drowns in the sea.
- _____ 5. drinks and counts gold coins.
- _____ 6. preaches in Barbados.
- _____ 7. falls silent after Pierre's diagnosis.
- _____ 8. advises Antoinette to go away from her husband.
- _____ 9. thinks the islands are strange and alien.
- _____ 10. feeds the husband like a child.
- _____ 11. insists that Antoinette not be left penniless.
- _____ 12. throws a jagged rock.
- _____ 13. runs weeping into Mount Calvary Convent school.
- _____ 14. treats a niece's head wound.
- _____ 15. laughs at Daniel's demands for money and recognition as a son.

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|
| A. Christophine | D. Tia | G. Antoinette | J. Amélie | M. Aunt Cora |
| B. Annette | E. Richard | H. Sandi | K. Old Cosway | N. Mr. Mason |
| C. Grace Poole | F. Daniel | I. Pierre | L. English husband | O. Luttrell |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

- _____ 1. Antoinette is dismayed by her new name.
- _____ 2. The cabin steward is surprised that Antoinette pleads for his help.
- _____ 3. Richard Mason looks into the crazy woman's face, but doesn't recognize her.
- _____ 4. Without a mother's care, Antoinette rides away from Coulibri each day to meet Sandi.
- _____ 5. Mother St. Justine promises to punish the boy and girl who taunt her new pupil.
- _____ 6. Amélie explains away the white powder as insecticide.
- _____ 7. After the trip from Jamaica to Massacre, Dominica, Antoinette sleeps locked in her room.
- _____ 8. Fraser knows about Christophine's jailing for practicing obeah.
- _____ 9. Antoinette nurtures a fantasy about England's beauty.
- _____ 10. Baptiste enters the priest's house in search of Antoinette's husband.

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

- _____ 1. The diagnosis of _____'s retardation leaves Annette sad, isolated, and unable to love _____.
- _____ 2. At age seventeen, Antoinette receives gifts from _____, who offers to take her to _____ and promises that English friends will arrive next winter.
- _____ 3. The husband admits that he earned _____ from _____ for marrying Antoinette.
- _____ 4. _____ threatens to punish _____ with bellyache
- _____ 5. After renting a house outside _____, the husband longs for a cool _____ summer and regrets being wed to a lunatic.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Analyze the ominous meaning of these terms: Massacre, Mount Calvary, obeah, white Creole, and Sargasso Sea.
2. Explain why the husband is unable to love Antoinette.
3. Discuss Sandi's importance to his white cousin.
4. Account for the value of Christophine to Antoinette and Annette.
5. Summarize events that acquaint Antoinette with her suitor.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following terms with names of places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. You will use some answers more than once and some not at all.

- ___ 1. Annette sees white chicken feathers and is afraid.
- ___ 2. Christophine goes to jail.
- ___ 3. Luttrell commits suicide.
- ___ 4. The honeymooners sail from Spanish Town to another port.
- ___ 5. Antoinette begs a steward to help her.
- ___ 6. A crab threatens.
- ___ 7. In a dream, Antoinette looks down on Tia.
- ___ 8. The husband rents two suites of rooms.
- ___ 9. Daniel begins preaching.
- ___ 10. Girls embroider silk roses.
- ___ 11. Daniel buys a small house outside of town.
- ___ 12. In Spanish Town, the patient awakens with a bandaged head.
- ___ 13. The husband has a private dressing room.
- ___ 14. Coco suffers clipped wings.
- ___ 15. The elder Cosway turns to the wall.

- | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| A. Mount Calvary | F. Coulibri | K. battlements |
| B. Granbois | G. bathing pool | L. Spanish Town |
| C. Martinique | H. Sargasso Sea | M. Barbados |
| D. Massacre | I. Aunt Cora's house | N. sea |
| E. cabin | J. Trinidad | O. Christophine's house |

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. In Spanish Town, Antoinette receives help from her
A. friend H el ene de Plana.
B. maid Carolina.
C. Cousin Sandi.
D. neighbors, the Frasers.
E. mother.
- _____ 2. The police chief promises to
A. watch for signs of obeah.
B. punish the former slaves who burned Coulibri.
C. deliver news of Mr. Mason's death.
D. transmit the letter from Daniel to Granbois.
E. report on Christophine's jailing in Spanish Town.
- _____ 3. The arsonist looks into Aunt Cora's eyes and calls her a
A. slave owner.
B. jumbo.
C. relic.
D. practitioner of obeah.
E. martyr.
- _____ 4. In three dreams, Antoinette looks below and sees
A. the summer house.
B. the road through the forest.
C. Annette's death in the arms of Luttrell.
D. white powder.
E. Tia.
- _____ 5. Grace promises to halt
A. the waste of money on Antoinette's care.
B. drugs that make the madwoman sleep.
C. drinking.
D. gossip.
E. the storage of the red dress.
- _____ 6. Aunt Cora warns that
A. Pierre may die.
B. Coco is a bad omen.
C. an Englishman is coming to court her niece.
D. Annette can never love Mr. Mason.
E. the nuns will not protect the nine girls.
- _____ 7. On the way from Spanish Town,
A. the suitor contracts fever.
B. Christophine keeps family secrets from Jo-jo.
C. Daniel delivers a blackmail letter demanding five hundred pounds.
D. Antoinette fears the ship has lost its way.
E. Annette's horse is poisoned.
- _____ 8. Antoinette is hesitant to explain
A. her memory of Old Cosway and his slaves.
B. why there is no road through the forest.
C. what frightens her each night.
D. why her husband vomits up the wine.
E. why she wears Tia's soiled dress.
- _____ 9. Am elie asks for
A. obeah power to make a man love her.
B. Christophine's place in the kitchen at Granbois.
C. a hammock between two cedar trees.
D. the truth about Sandi and Antoinette.
E. money to take her to Rio.
- _____ 10. Richard Mason is unable to
A. escape Aunt Cora's complaints about the stolen inheritance.
B. identify the madwoman.
C. claim all of the credit for the betrothal.
D. inherit the right of the eldest son.
E. deny that the suitor's father owned slaves.

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. How long is the suitor in the islands before his wedding?
- _____ 2. Who dies immediately after the suitor leaves England?
- _____ 3. Who interviews Grace Poole?
- _____ 4. By what surnames is Daniel known?
- _____ 5. Who claims to have sold his soul?
- _____ 6. Who tries to kill Mr. Mason?
- _____ 7. What creature does Antoinette find at the bottom of the bathing pool?
- _____ 8. Who locates the key to the upstairs room?
- _____ 9. Who blames Mr. Mason for failing to take warning about angry ex-slaves?
- _____ 10. Which slave was a wedding gift?

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Antoinette tries to win back her husband's love.
2. Contrast Christophine, Annette, and Aunt Cora as mother figures.
3. Differentiate among former slaves, house staff, illegitimate children of white planters, and white Creoles.
4. Summarize the changes in Antoinette after the fire destroys Coulibri.
5. Describe the marriage market by which Antoinette becomes a wife.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. transcendent | 6. tamarind | 11. perfunctory |
| 2. blandishments | 7. disconcerting | 12. explicit |
| 3. patois | 8. interminable | 13. commemorating |
| 4. inquisitive | 9. calabash | 14. destinies |
| 5. cutlass | 10. hypocrite | 15. distraught |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Description Identification (30 points)

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

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Pierre, Antoinette
2. Mr. Mason, England
3. thirty thousand pounds, Richard Mason
4. Christophine, Amélie
5. Spanish Town, English

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

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

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A |
| 2. A | 7. D |
| 3. B | 8. C |
| 4. E | 9. E |
| 5. D | 10. B |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. one month | 6. Annette |
| 2. Mr. Mason | 7. crab |
| 3. Mrs. Eff | 8. Antoinette |
| 4. Boyd, Cosway | 9. Annette |
| 5. the husband | 10. Christophine |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

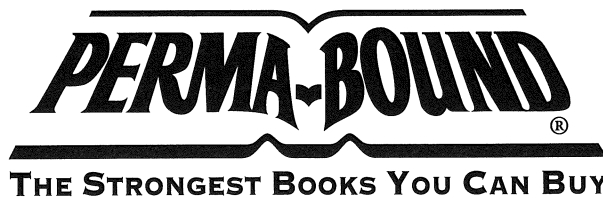
Answers will vary.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

TEACHER'S NOTES

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