

Study Guide for *The Bean Trees*, Barbara Kingsolver

1. Describe the "voice" or tone of the narrator.
2. How does Alice Greer compare to/contrast with Mr. Hardbine or Mr. Shanks in terms of parenting skills?
3. Why does Taylor leave Kentucky?
4. Describe Taylor's reaction to the Cherokee Nation.
5. What is a "home"? How does Taylor's definition of "home" change in Chapter One? (Think in terms of the comment she made in the letter to her mother about taking her "head rights" with her.)
6. How are women (or girls) treated in Chapter One?
7. Describe the shift in narration in Chapter Two. Who is telling the story now?
8. Why is it relevant that Lou Ann came from Kentucky?
9. How is Lou Ann different from Taylor?
10. Describe Angel.
11. How did Taylor react to Arizona? What made her decide to stay there?
12. Why does Taylor find "Jesus Is Lord Used Tires" and "1-800-THE-LORD" so humorous?
13. Compare/contrast Mattie's garden to the Garden of Eden.
14. What is Lou Ann's conflict in Chapter Four? How does she resolve it? What does this say about her character?
15. What does Chapter Four say about the bonds between women?
16. What does the Tug Fork water symbolize?
17. Describe Fei, La-Isha, and Timothy. How are they different from Lou Ann? Why does Taylor choose to live with Lou Ann instead of the others?
18. What does the description of Mattie's garden in Chapter Six suggest?
19. Describe the attitude toward men on the part of the characters and author in Chapter Six.
20. How is Estevan different from the other male characters we've seen?
21. What does Mattie do for people like Estevan and Esperanza? What clues earlier in the story hinted at her activities?
22. What does the "Miracle of Dog Doo Park" refer to?
23. What does Taylor learn about Estevan and Esperanza's past? How does this affect Taylor?
24. How does Taylor feel about Estevan?
25. How does Lou Ann demonstrate more confidence in herself in Chapters Ten and Eleven?
26. What does the snake symbolize in Chapter Twelve? Think about what is going on at home with Turtle...

27. What does the trapped bird symbolize?
28. What does Taylor learn about Turtle from the doctor?
29. What does the bird outside the window represent?
30. How does Taylor respond to the news that she has no legal claim over Turtle? How does Lou Ann respond? What perspective does Mattie bring to Taylor about parenting?
31. What does the Night-Blooming Cereus symbolize?
32. Describe what happens at the routine immigration check in Chapter Fourteen.
33. What changes have taken place at the Broken Arrow Motor Lodge?
34. What does Taylor discover about the Cherokee Nation in Chapter Fifteen that changes her impression of the area?
35. Why does Turtle bury her doll?
36. Describe what happens in Chapter Sixteen. What does this moment represent for Esperanza? What does Taylor mean when she says all of them buried someone they loved in Oklahoma?
37. Why does Taylor decide to call 1-800-THE-LORD? How does she feel about the conversation she has?
38. What does Taylor discover about wisteria? How is this discovery related to the theme of the novel?
39. What is a "family"? How does this novel ask you to question your definition of "family"?
40. How is "home" defined in terms of geography? How is it defined in terms of people?

In addition to these questions, we will also discuss several important quotations.

Themes we will discuss:

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

1. The Shared Burden of Womanhood
2. The Plight of Illegal Immigrants
3. Respect for the Environment

Motifs we will discuss:

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

1. Rebirth
2. Motherhood

Symbols we will discuss:

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

1. Beans and Bean Trees
2. Ismene
3. Birds

Vocabulary:

1. presume
2. ornery
3. indelible
4. repulse
5. transient
6. connoisseur
7. ascendant
8. reticent
9. apoplectic
10. meager
11. dilapidated
12. reverence
13. aptitude
14. pandemonium
15. picaresque
16. invocation
17. perturbed
18. prudish
19. compulsion
20. gumption
21. deprivation
22. incarnate
23. dormant
24. pungent
25. noncommittal
26. befuddled
27. cantankerous
28. meandering
29. catharsis
30. rigamarole