

Belle Prater's Boy Study Guide

Belle Prater's Boy by Ruth White

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Plot Summary

Belle's Prater's Boy by Ruth White is the story of Gypsy Leemaster and Woodrow Prater, two cousins separated by money and lifestyle, who help one another find the strength to confront their pasts. Both wounded by the actions of their parents, these two cousins help one another learn the value of friendship, and learn that beauty comes from within.

Woodrow Prater is twelve years old when his mother disappears from their shack in the mountains. Unable to cope, his father begins to drink, and Woodrow is sent to live with his mother's parents. Next door to them lives his cousin, Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster, her mother, Love, and her stepfather, Porter Dotson. Gypsy's family is wealthy and privileged, whereas Woodrow's is impoverished and of a lower class. From the beginning, however, Gypsy and Woodrow seem to forge a friendship based on commonality neither thought was possible. Gypsy is beautiful but finds her beauty a burden, making most people look past the true person inside. Woodrow, on the other hand, is cross eyed and finds that people often look past his personality, as well.

Gypsy learns that Woodrow believes his mother is trapped between two worlds, and she longs to believe him, but questions his theory. Gypsy herself understands the loss of a parent, as her father was killed when she was only five years of age. Gypsy is unable to accept her stepfather and often finds herself either ignoring him or hating him, but she adored her father. Through the summer, Gypsy continues to push Woodrow for answers as the two become close friends. Woodrow befriends a local homeless man, Blind Benny, who turns out to have known and traveled with Gypsy's father. Born without eyes, Blind Benny is not attractive, but both Woodrow and Gypsy learn to see beyond his features to find a loving, caring human being.

When at school one day the following fall, Gypsy is telling a new teacher of her father's accidental death, when someone blurts out that Gypsy's father committed suicide. Gypsy is forced to face her true past. As she remembers her father, she recalls being the person to find his lifeless, bloody body after he shot himself in the head. He had been disfigured following his attempt to save a baby from a burning house, and he could not live with his looks. In retaliation against his selfish act, Gypsy cuts off all her hair and grieves in anger. Over time, however, she is able to forgive her father, as well as to accept Porter as her stepfather. Woodrow follows suit, and admits to Gypsy that he knows his mother simply walked away from her life to begin a new one somewhere else. Together, the two cousins are able to face their pasts, accept them, and move into the future as young adults.



Chapter One through Chapter Two

Chapter One through Chapter Two Summary

In chapter one, twelve-year-old Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster explains the disappearance of her Aunt Belle. Aunt Belle, mother of Woodrow and wife of Everett, disappeared without a trace at dawn one morning and did not return. Everett explained that he heard her wake and walk out to use the privy, but that he went back to sleep. When he awoke and she had not returned, he looked for her, but she was missing. No one in the mountain area they lived heard or saw anything, and she took no clothing or shoes. Gypsy's mother, Love Ball Dotson, is the sister of Belle, and was terribly distraught. After six months, Everett was drinking a lot, and Woodrow was moved to live with his grandparents, who live next door to Gypsy and her mother and stepfather, Porter Dotson. Porter is the editor of the newspaper for Coal Station, Virginia, where they live. Coal Station is a small town, mostly of middle class workers, but Gypsy and her family live on a fairly lucrative estate in town.

Gypsy is a beautiful young girl, as is her mother, and the family is known for their prosperity, as well as their lovely home and grounds. When Woodrow comes to stay, Gypsy is reminded that she is privileged and that not everyone has led a rich life. Gypsy reflects that she is aware of her lucky status, but that she has horrible nightmares. However, she also notes that her twelve-year-old cousin, Woodrow, has led a much less privileged life, in that their shack in the mountains has no indoor plumbing or refrigeration, and Woodrow often wears dirty, ill fitting hand-me-downs. He is also very cross-eyed.

The first night Woodrow comes to stay, Gypsy waits impatiently for her mother to put her long, Rapunzel-like hair into pigtails so she can go visit Woodrow in her grandparents' home next door. Once she arrives, she hands him a cherry jawbreaker, and he reacts as though it were gold. She tells him a joke, and carefully asks what he knows about his mother's disappearance. He admits he does know something, but will tell her only if she promises to be her best friend. She happily agrees, and Woodrow shows her a book of poetry his mother read often. He reads one particular poem she loved, and points out it has to do with waking in the morning at dawn, and finding what one really seeks through the door sill where people are going back and forth. Woodrow believes the key to his mother's disappearance is within the poem.

In chapter two, Gypsy questions her grandmother about her aunt Belle, and discovers that Belle was often overlooked, because her own mother, Love, was the town beauty. Her grandmother tells her that her father, Amos, was originally Belle's beau, but that when Amos met Love, he left Belle, which crushed her. Amos came from Cold Mountain, Kentucky, to open a hardware store, but he also started a volunteer fire department and a Civic League. Gypsy wishes she had known Belle better. When Grandma asks if Gypsy purchased a gift for Porter's birthday, she reacts angrily that he isn't her father. Grandma replies that Amos is dead, and that being cruel to Porter won't



change that. Gypsy admits to herself that she treats Porter badly, but attributes that to his consistently being in places her father should normally be. She generally ignores everything he says, which she knows hurts both Porter and her mother.

Chapter One through Chapter Two Analysis

In chapter one, several of the main themes of the story are introduced, as well as many of the main characters. Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster is a twelve-year-old privileged young girl who lives in a small mining town in Virginia. She is pretty, well liked, and well cared for. Her cousin, Woodrow, on the other hand, is clearly poor, as indicated by a lack of indoor plumbing, hand-me-down clothing, and his living environment. He is also cross-eyed. From the beginning, it appears these two have little in common. When Belle disappears, however, and Woodrow comes to live with them, the two seem to hit it off almost immediately, foreshadowing the friendship that develops over the course of the novel.

In addition the introduction of these characters and the theme of friendship, chapter one also foreshadows several events later in the novel. First, the fact that Gypsy has a stepfather introduces the concept that something happened to her real father. Also, the nightmares mentioned briefly in this chapter show there are things troubling her, even in spite of her clear upper class environment. Gypsy's own beauty, as well as the beauty of her mother, are mentioned here, but already, readers can see Gypsy is not in love with her own hair, as she seems annoyed to constantly have to wait for her mother to finish working with it. Also, the apparent rift between Belle and Love, as noted by Gypsy, foreshadows information about their relationship later in the novel.

Woodrow's responses to Gypsy show him to be a shy, sensitive character from a very different background. It is clear from his reaction to her giving him candy that Woodrow is not used to having nice things, foreshadowing his own character development through the novel as he adapts to his new surroundings. Also, his exchange of information about his mother for friendship show him to be longing for companionship. Conversely, Gypsy's reactions to Woodrow, with a lack of judgment and a sense of friendship, show her to be unconcerned about looks or social class. Finally, the information Woodrow gives about the poem his mother loved foreshadows his story later in the novel about the place where two worlds meet.

In chapter two, more information is learned about the relationship between Belle and Love. When Gypsy learns that Belle was often overlooked for Love, she is suddenly faced with the knowledge that her mother was cherished for her beauty. Again, one can see a strong emphasis placed by others on the beauty of one of the characters, and a lack of interest in people as a result of their lack of beauty. This theme runs throughout the novel, and ties together most of the characters in the story, and the tragic events. The knowledge that Amos was originally Belle's love foreshadows the story later in the novel of Belle's eventual distancing from her family as a result of her pain. While Amos' actions in leaving Belle for Love originally make him seem cruel, the information about all the things he did for the community help to soften his character, and make him



likable. The knowledge that he is dead, as foreshadowed by Gypsy's stepfather's existence, explains why Gypsy resents Porter so much. It is clear she dislikes Porter not because of anything he does, but simply because he is not her father. This resentment foreshadows several confrontations throughout the novel.



Chapter Three and Chapter Four

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Summary

In chapter three, Woodrow returns from a shopping trip with Grandpa, elated with all the nice, new things he has been given. He excitedly shows Gypsy new comic books and clothing, and the two read aloud to one another, laughing. After lunch, Gypsy takes Woodrow for his first haircut. He admits that previously, his father would just hold a bowl on his head and cut around it. The two walk down Residence Street, smelling the lilacs and fruit trees of the beautiful neighboring homes. At Akers's Barbershop, Clint Akers, Jake Stiltner, Easu Ward, and Clarence Sparks are sitting around, joking together, when the two walk in, but as soon as Woodrow is introduced, conversation turns to the disappearance of his mother. When Esau asks if Woodrow has heard from Belle, she chastises him, and the mood in the room lightens. As Clint cuts Woodrow's hair, he reminisces about Amos and the close relationship he and Gypsy had with one another. When another customer comes in and begins to question if Belle was cross-eyed, Gypsy comes to the rescue, questioning the men about their children to keep the topic off Woodrow. When one of the men unintentionally insults women, Gypsy realizes that Woodrow would never insult her, as the two of them respect one another.

In chapter four, Gypsy explains that she hates the amount of time she has to spend on her long hair. Brushing it, washing it, and rolling it takes hours of her day, and while she knows her mother is proud of her hair, she herself would rather cut it. Before Porter's party, she is to wash it and practice piano. When Gypsy explains to Woodrow that she has taken piano lessons from Grandma for years, he admits his mother, too, used to play. When Gypsy asks if they had a piano in their "shack", Woodrow notes that Belle played at the church.

Later, at Porter's party, Woodrow and Gypsy giggle together as the adults break open homemade wine. Doc Dot, Porter's brother, tells several jokes, and Woodrow happily asks if they can have a party on his birthday as well. He immediately is again shy, however, and ducks, blushing and ashamed to have asked, but everyone enthusiastically agrees. Woodrow reveals he is unsure as to whether his birthday is December 31 or January 1, as he was born at midnight. He tells the story of his birth, as told by Belle. When she passed out from the pain of birth, she found herself outside her body, looking down. She felt a presence, and met someone whom she had known thousands of years before. When the person was ready, she came back into her body, and Woodrow was born. Woodrow believes her mother met him right before his birth.

The family is fascinated by the story, but the party soon breaks up. Later, Woodrow tells Gypsy that his mother believed that when someone dies, he or she is able to choose one day to live over and over again, and he tells her today would be his day. Gypsy is surprised, in that the day was only slightly special to her, and she wonders how bad Woodrow's previous home could have been. At the end of the night, Woodrow wonders



aloud why his mother would have ever moved away, as the house is filled with everything one could want, and nothing can hurt someone there.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Analysis

Chapter three hints at the true depth of Woodrow's poverty, as his excitement about simple things such as comic books and new pants is overwhelming. It is clear Woodrow is not used to having nice things. When he is taken for a haircut, this becomes more clear, as he explains how his previous haircuts have gone. The family laughs, but they are not laughing meanly. They are excited for Woodrow as he experiences his new surroundings.

The scene at Akers' shows the already deepening friendship growing between Woodrow and Gypsy, as well as the nature of small town life. The adults, who should know better, cannot help themselves as they ask Woodrow about his mother, and it is Gypsy, the child, who helps to spare him the pain of having to answer. These individuals clearly do not stop to think of the pain Woodrow feels, but simply are used to gossiping. Gypsy's quick turn of conversation helps redirect the conversation. Additionally, readers learn that Amos and his daughter were extremely close, furthering an understanding of why Gypsy is so resentful of Porter. Woodrow's interruption of Clint just as he is talking about what happened to Amos foreshadows again the knowledge that something other than a natural death happened to Gypsy's father. Finally, the mutual respect shown at the end of the chapter between Gypsy and Woodrow show that both children are able to put their looks and social class aside, and are able to accept one another without judgment.

In chapter four, readers learn just how much Gypsy hates having long hair. It is clear the hair is a huge burden to her, but her comments also point to Love as the reason she keeps it. This foreshadows information later in the novel that Amos is actually the reason Love keeps Gypsy's hair long. This chapter also shows Gypsy does make mistakes, as she accidentally calls Woodrow's previous home a shack. While she does immediately catch her fault, and while Woodrow seems not to hear it, it is clear that Gypsy knows she has made a mistake. While she does not intentionally judge Woodrow on his social class, this comment shows that she does notice his poor living circumstances, and does think of those living conditions as lower than her own.

The dinner party for Porter's birthday serves a few purposes in the novel. First, it is clear that Gypsy does not really dislike Porter, but that she simply resents him. She is able to enjoy his company, as long as she isn't thinking about her father. Also, the dinner serves to remind readers of Woodrow's shy, self-conscious personality. Able to feel as though he fits in, Woodrow is confident enough to ask for a party, but the minute others pay attention to him, he reverts back to a self-conscious shyness. It is clear this reaction stems from a lifetime of asking for little, and receiving little attention, and the reader instantly feels pity for Woodrow. The family's quick response, however, shows that they care deeply for Woodrow, and plan to care for him as long as necessary. Finally, Woodrow's story at the dinner party shows he and his mother often swapped "tall tales",

foreshadowing both Woodrow's own ability to tell stories and his mother's use of stories to help her escape her own reality.

The final scene of the chapter also serves several purposes. First, Woodrow's choice of today as the day to relive shows his own life was not a happy one. Gypsy understands this instantly, and again realizes she is lucky to have her life. However, Woodrow's belief that pain could never happen in such a happy place foreshadows information about the suffering Gypsy and her family have endured.



Chapter Five through Chapter Six

Chapter Five through Chapter Six Summary

In chapter five, Gypsy confronts her mother about Belle's relationship with Amos that evening, as Love rolls Gypsy's hair. Love admits they didn't understand what they were feeling, and that she hurt Belle pretty badly, as did Amos. Love admits that Belle confined herself to her room, lost weight, cried a lot, and generally kept to herself following the incident. Love also notes that she has thought often of those events, and wishes she could do them over, so she could be kinder to Belle. She recalls when Belle came out of her room, dressed to kill, announcing that she was going to find herself a beau. She fled the house, ran off with Everett Prater, was married in a week, and came to get her things two weeks later. The family was shocked, but Love admits she now understands that Belle had to leave to avoid the pain of seeing her and Amos together. Gypsy asks if Love thinks Belle has taken off again, but Love doesn't think Belle would have left her child. Love puts Gypsy to bed, but that night, Gypsy has a dream, one she has had for years. In the dream, there is a suffering animal in a pool of blood, and Gypsy can never see its face. As Love soothes her, Gypsy notes that it is clear her mother knows what the animal is, but cannot bear to speak it.

In chapter six, Woodrow and Gypsy set off to church, as Woodrow wears a tie for the first time. The Sunday school class has ten children in it, ages eleven and twelve, and Gypsy notes that none of them fit with the children, or with the teenagers. Some are more mature, and others have yet to grow. The kids question Woodrow, as he is new, and he tells them several jokes. During class, Woodrow tells a story of a man named Buck Coleman, who choked and died on a tapeworm as they tried to lure it out. Gypsy knows Woodrow is telling tall tales, but also admits he is good at it. After class, the school principle's wife, Mrs. Cooper, openly insults Woodrow's looks to his face, but again, Gypsy saves him by pulling him away. After vacuuming the family dog, named Dawg, the two climb to Gypsy's tree house. Built for her by her father, the tree house was two stories. Inside, the two talk of what they want most, and Woodrow admits he wants his eyes corrected. When pressed, Gypsy admits she would like to cut off her hair. She tries to explain that she feels invisible underneath her hair, but Woodrow fails to understand. The two talk about whether Belle asked for what she wanted the morning she disappeared, and Woodrow notes that what she likely wanted most was to get out of her life. Pressing for more, Woodrow convinces Gypsy to come back to the tree house after her parents have gone to bed, and she agrees.

Chapter Five through Chapter Six Analysis

Chapter five gives more information about the situation between Love, Belle, and Amos. It is clear from Love's comments that she feels incredibly guilty for what she and Amos did to Belle, and that she blames herself, in part, for Belle's decision to flee with Everett. Belle's behavior at the time showed she was deeply depressed and hurt, and that her



actions were done impulsively, and not rationally. She simply could no longer bear the pain of seeing her love with her sister every day. Gypsy begins to understand her mother on a different level in this chapter, as she understands more about her life as a teenager. The information that Belle has fled to avoid her problems before foreshadows the knowledge that she did not merely disappear, although Love's comments that Belle wouldn't leave her child turn out to be incorrect. Additionally, Gypsy's horrifying dream at the end of the chapter, combined with her comments that Love knows what the dream is really about, foreshadow again the knowledge about Gypsy's father's suicide later in the novel.

Chapter six serves to give more insight into Woodrow's character. From his jokes in Sunday School, it is clear that Woodrow is bright, with a good sense of humor. His story of Buck Coleman again shows his natural knack for telling stories, as well as shows his open willingness to get into a little bit of trouble, unlike Gypsy. Mrs. Cooper's terrible comments toward Woodrow foreshadow the story later in the novel as to the history behind Cooper's relationship with Belle Prater. Additionally, Woodrow's clear anger foreshadows his revenge toward her later in the novel.

In the tree house, Gypsy and Woodrow's conversation says a lot about their characters. Although he doesn't say much about it, Woodrow openly admits in this section he does wish his mother would return. Further, he notes his desire to correct his eyes. Although Woodrow seems not to care about his looks, this conversation shows that in reality, he does care what others think. Gypsy feels the same way, only in her case, she feels her beautiful hair hides who she really is. Both individuals feel that their looks hinder them. Finally, Woodrow's comments about his mother's wishes to escape her life show that he knows more than he pretends to.



Chapter Seven through Chapter Eight

Chapter Seven through Chapter Eight Summary

In chapter seven, the two sneak out at night to the tree house. Woodrow notes that behind his shack at home, there is a place where the air is thick, and it vibrates. It is warm, and within it, you can hear voices. He compares the voices to those heard when one speaks through a fan. Gypsy has difficulty understanding what Woodrow is saying, but he notes that this place is where two worlds touch, like in the poem his mother read. Woodrow claims his mother knew about the place too, and that right before her disappearance, she practically lived near the spot. He believes Belle has gone through the spot to another world. He tried to tell Everett after Belle's disappearance, but he refused to listen.

Woodrow huddles closer to Gypsy when he hears singing outside, but Gypsy notes the singer is only a man named Blind Benny, a local drifter who comes out at night to go through trash. She notes that he has hardly any eyes, and that as a result of people teasing him about his looks, he chooses to come out only at night. She notes she doesn't know where he lives. Continuing with their conversation, Woodrow tells Gypsy of a story Belle told him, where a man in prison used to leave his body to escape for a while. Belle reported she knew the trapped feeling the man was escaping from. Gypsy wonders aloud as to whether Belle thought at all about the consequences for her family. On the way home, Woodrow claims he hears Belle's voice sometimes, crying.

When Gypsy reaches her house, she begins to climb in her window when Porter asks her for a light. She is startled, but he notes that Love will not let him smoke, so he has to sneak out, as Gypsy has done. He makes a deal with her that if she fetches him a light, he won't tell of her escapades. She agrees, and as she falls asleep, she hears Benny's song, and thinks of how often she had heard it without even paying attention. She notes that Woodrow is making her see things differently.

In chapter eight, Woodrow begins attending school with Gypsy. He is instantly famous, but lets everyone know he does not want to talk about his mother. Gypsy notices he is particularly nice to those who look differently, such as an overweight girl, and she is proud of him. In class, he impresses the teacher, and tells a story about a man named Floyd Collins, who got stuck in a crevice in a cave and died. Next, he gives the class an arithmetic puzzle to solve, and after lunch, he gives them another. Gypsy admits it was her most fun day at school, and tells Woodrow he should be a teacher. Instead, he wants to make movies, but he does note that the puzzles are all his mother's. At home, Woodrow begins to receive more phone calls as his popularity increases.



Chapter Seven through Chapter Eight Analysis

Chapter seven reveals Woodrow's story about what he believes happened to his mother. His tale of the place behind his shack is far fetched, and considering his propensity for tall tales, one assumes Woodrow is simply fantasizing, but his assertions to Gypsy that he is being honest seem legitimate. When combined with his story of the man in prison, and Belle's own admittance that she felt trapped and wanted to leave her life, foreshadow the truth later in the novel of Belle's abandonment of her family. The fact that Woodrow claims to hear his mother's voice trying to contact him foreshadows his admittance later that he was seeking contact from his mother through the newspaper personal ads.

The first mention of Blind Benny is in this chapter as well. Bind Benny's appearance, according to Gypsy, has led him to living a life at night, to avoid the teasing of locals. Again, the theme of beauty as a cause for mockery is present, and once can sense from Gypsy that Benny is not a bad person. Woodrow's immediate reaction to Benny, that he sings well, again shows he cares little for appearances, and foreshadows his eventual friendship with Benny, as he can relate to Benny's eye issues, being cross-eyed himself. Gypsy's own lack of knowledge about Benny is a shock later in the novel, as it is revealed that Benny is a good friend of the family.

Gypsy's encounter with her stepfather shows that Porter is not a bad person. He cares about his daughter, but he also understands that she is a child who is testing her boundaries. He understands her anger and resentment, but he does manage to seal a deal with her, giving hope that perhaps Gypsy can learn to love him.

Chapter eight helps to further show Woodrow's character. From the start, Woodrow shows compassion for those who, like him, are less than beautiful. It is clear that Woodrow does notice beauty, but that to him, it is found within people, instead of in how they look. Also, it is clear that Woodrow is not only intelligent, but also charming. His puzzles and stories help others to get to know him, and his stories make him a local legend. His ending comments, however, show that no matter how popular Woodrow becomes, he still thinks of his mother daily.



Chapter Nine through Chapter Ten

Chapter Nine through Chapter Ten Summary

In chapter nine, Gypsy and Woodrow are discussing plastic surgery when Everett arrives to see Woodrow. It is clear Everett is uncomfortable in such wealthy surroundings, but he comes in and talks with Woodrow in spite of his discomfort. He asks about school, and whether Woodrow is being well cared for. After speaking briefly with Gypsy, and more small talk, Everett leaves. As Gypsy and Woodrow watch his car drive away, Gypsy notices a woman with blond hair in the passenger seat. She notices Woodrow's knuckles turn white on the windowsill, but neither mentions the woman.

In chapter ten, Gypsy and Woodrow plan to see the movie "Rear Window", since the day is rainy. Porter, too, decides he wants to see the film, and agrees to take the kids, although Gypsy is angry, and doesn't want Porter to attend. Woodrow, on the other hand, is thrilled, and he and Porter begin to talk about Hitchcock films, leaving Gypsy out of the conversation. Gypsy blames her headache and flushed feeling on Porter, but as they arrive at the theater, Gypsy becomes aware she is feverish. She finds herself unable to follow the film, and as her mind goes into a fog, she begins screaming for the woman in the film not to look in the window. Porter picks her up and rushes her from the theater, screaming at the attendant to call the doctor. Gypsy slips out of consciousness, and awakens in her bed. The room is dark, and her mother is cooling her head. When asked, Love gently tells Gypsy she has a severe case of the measles. She also reports that Porter is in bed too, as he was so frightened by Gypsy's delirium that he was given a sedative. Gypsy has a night full of nightmares, and can hear her mother mention them to the doctor, as he mentions something about her father. That evening, Woodrow comes to visit, and wonders aloud why he wasn't given rum when he had the measles, as Gypsy is being given some by her mother. Woodrow leaves, and Gypsy begins to recuperate.

Chapter Nine through Chapter Ten Analysis

Chapter nine serves to show the strained relationship between Woodrow and his father. It is clear from Everett's visit both that he feels highly uncomfortable around the Balls, and also that he is uncomfortable even with his own son. Everett loves his son, as is shown by his concern for his well being. On the other hand, Everett is not a father figure, and knows Woodrow is better left with the Ball's. He is poor, and his poverty is even more obvious in a home such as the Balls'. The fact that a woman is with Everett also shows that he does not believe Belle will return. Woodrow's anger at this is understandable, but his denial of the entire situation results in silence by both he and Gypsy.

Chapter ten further hints at the secrets that plague Gypsy. Her resentment at Porter is again clear in this chapter, even as he attempts to do something nice for her and for



Woodrow. Again, it is clear Gypsy is unable to accept Porter as her stepfather, although she does acknowledge that her own father is dead. Her feverish start to the film foreshadows her diagnosis of measles at the end of the chapter. Her reaction to the film in her fever fog again hints that there is some association for Gypsy between windows and the secret she refuses to face, and the comment from the doctor as he discusses her nightmares with Love indicate that there is something linking windows to nightmares to her father, all of which foreshadow events later in the novel as Amos' suicide is discussed. Porter's need for a sedative after his ordeal again shows that he cares deeply for Gypsy, even if she refuses to accept him. At the end of the chapter, Woodrow again appears to comfort Gypsy, showing his friendship.



Chapter Eleven through Chapter Twelve

Chapter Eleven through Chapter Twelve Summary

In chapter eleven, Woodrow comes to Gypsy's window the following night, with Blind Benny in tow. Gypsy nearly shrieks at his eyes, as they are barely even there, but she stops herself. Calling her "Miss Beauty", Blind Benny is extremely polite and caring, showing sympathy and compassion. Benny tells Gypsy that Woodrow has promised to teach him about chiggers, so he can stop being bitten by so many of them, and that he explained to Benny that Gypsy wouldn't be frightened of his looks. As Benny talks, he recalls that he used to hear Amos singing to Gypsy when she was young, and he notes that he and Amos were friends back in Coal Valley. He also explains that he calls Gypsy "Beauty", as that was Amos' name for her. Benny sings to Gypsy softly, and as he finishes, he reminds her it was Amos' favorite song. Gypsy tells her visitors she is tired, and she sleeps.

The following day, Porter runs a fan into Gypsy's room to help cool her, and Gypsy is again short with him. She thinks of her tree house, and of how her father used to go in it with her, as she was too small to climb the ladder. After he died, Gypsy didn't enter the tree house for nearly five years, but succumbed on the day Porter and Love married. She remembers finding a button that day from one of her father's volunteer fireman uniforms, but she decides she doesn't want to think of that anymore. After telling her mother she wants to go to the tree house, she lashes out, asking why Love married Porter, and angrily noting she hates him. Love, hurt, leaves the room. By Saturday, Gypsy is better, and she and Woodrow play throughout the day. Woodrow claims he still hears his mother's voice through the hole between the worlds, but he also notes she may try to contact him another way. After a fight following Gypsy's question of if he expects Belle to call, Gypsy tells him that when she is better, they will have a wienie roast down by the river.

In chapter twelve, the wienie roast has arrived, and Gypsy, Woodrow, and their friends are gathered around a fire. Buzz, the local bully, tells a story of a woman who finds a finger in canned tomatoes, and everyone politely listens, although they have heard the story before. Woodrow then tells a story about his Aunt Millie, who is accidentally buried alive. His other aunts dig up her corpse to steal her jewels. When they were unable to pull a ring off her finger, they cut it off, only to find that Millie was not dead. Millie returned home, and frightened everyone, but she lived through the ordeal. The other two aunts' hair turned white. Buzz attempts to one-up Woodrow's story, but the crowd is disinterested. Annoyed, Buzz begins to make fun of Woodrow's eyes, but Woodrow shrugs it off. Later, Gypsy apologizes for Buzz, but Woodrow notes that Buzz will get his, as he was sitting in a nest of chiggers.



Chapter Eleven through Chapter Twelve Analysis

In chapter eleven, the theme of beauty is again brought up, with the live introduction of Blind Benny. Benny's eyes are difficult to look at, as Gypsy discovers, but Woodrow's reassurances to Benny show that he knows that Gypsy, once she gets over the shock, will not judge Benny, because she doesn't judge Woodrow. The fact that Woodrow sought out Benny also shows his lack of concern for how others look. Benny turns out to be a caring, kind, compassionate person, and it is difficult not to feel sorry for the poor man. Once Benny reveals that he and Amos were friends, it becomes clear that there is more to the story of Benny than what Gypsy knows. Gypsy's sadness to the mention of her father, and her following days' outburst hint again that Gypsy has emotions toward her father's death that she hides. Her reaction to Porter as he tries to help is typical, and her violent reaction to her mother shows that even her occasional thoughts of her father tend to make Gypsy angry and depressed. Her pushing away of the memory of her father's button in the tree house again suggests there is more to his death than meets the eye. Finally, Woodrow's comments at the end of this chapter foreshadow his revelation later that he was looking through personal ads for his mother to contact him.

The wienie roast in chapter twelve serves several purposes in the novel. First, Woodrow proves again to be a great storyteller, with a knack for charisma and charm. When faced with a bully who teases him and others about their looks, Woodrow chooses to make light of the situation, again showing his maturity. He also reassures others who are being teased, proving himself to be a loyal and caring person. Again, beauty in this chapter is used as a weapon against those who possess less of it, but in this case, the victims turn the situation into a joke, easing the pain. However, when Woodrow admits he allowed Buzz to sit in a nest of chiggers, it is equally clear that Woodrow is not immune to the words of his classmates, and that he is emotionally effected by their teasing.



Chapter Thirteen through Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Thirteen through Chapter Fifteen Summary

In chapter thirteen, Grandpa Ball and Gypsy are fixing the porch stairs, talking, while Woodrow and Grandma are shopping. Gypsy asks why looks are so important to some, and Grandpa admits he doesn't know, but that it does seem to matter to some. Gypsy notes that her mother cares more about Gypsy's looks and hair than Gypsy herself, and her Grandpa informs her that it was Amos who extracted a promise from Love before he died that Love would never cut Gypsy's hair. Therefore, Love will never allow it to be cut. He goes on to explain that, when he was a teacher, he knew many pretty girls who were ugly inside, and unattractive ones who were gorgeous inside. When Gypsy asks, then, why anyone even notices Woodrow's eyes, since he is so wonderful inside, Grandpa notes that Woodrow is a lot like Belle. He is sensitive and kind, but not as pretty as some. Belle, he says, never got over her envy of Love. He notes that Belle left the family and moved into the mountains in an effort to get out from under the shadow of Love, but that in reality, it simply made her more depressed. Ashamed of her poverty, she nearly stopped communicating with the family all together. Gypsy wonders, when Grandpa tells her Belle played piano beautifully, what it would be like to be known for something other than prettiness, but it occurs to her that Belle was known for a lack of prettiness. When Gypsy asks if Grandpa thinks Everett may have been involved in Belle's disappearance, she and Grandpa are both startled to hear Woodrow yell "No!", as he has returned from the store, and has heard their conversation. He storms away.

In chapter fourteen, Gypsy finds Woodrow after washing her hair, as he is in the tree house, looking through personal ads. Gypsy and Woodrow read through several, as Woodrow notes that sometimes people send each other messages through the paper. He and his mother used to read through the ads together. Gypsy asks if his mother might have meant, when she talked about being between two worlds, being between the upper class of her parents and the lower class of the Prater family. Woodrow notes that his mother was always fascinated with any place two things come together. Gypsy now knows that Woodrow, despite his insisting, believes his mother is alive and in this world, and that she will contact him through the ads.

In chapter fifteen, it is midsummer, and all the fruit trees are in beautiful bloom. It is time for the Ball family summer social garden party, and Gypsy looks forward to it, as Woodrow is making her see things with new eyes. The party consists of fifty of the town socialites, including five debutantes, who are eighteen-year-old girls of marriageable age. Woodrow and Gypsy serve refreshments, and the young girls fawn over Woodrow, making him blush. Mrs. Cooper is in attendance, and asks Woodrow what he has heard from his mother when Love isn't listening. Woodrow replies that he had heard nothing, and Mrs. Cooper replies that Belle was impulsive. When Woodrow walks away, she also notes that Belle once called her a cow in front of her boyfriend, and Gypsy finally knows



that Mrs. Cooper is resentful and simply taking it out on Woodrow. Gypsy becomes busy with guests, but does notice that Woodrow is spending a lot of time with Mrs. Cooper, in spite of her treatment of him. Soon, Mrs. Cooper becomes louder and happier, as she remembers her childhood, and compliments everyone she meets. Later, she walks straight into the creek, and Grandma whispers that the woman is acting drunk. Soon, several other women join her in the creek, and Gypsy wonders if Woodrow was spiking Mrs. Cooper's drinks. When asked, Woodrow admits that while he told Mrs. Cooper there was rum in her drink, there really was not. She simply believed it so much that her mind made her intoxicated.

Chapter Thirteen through Chapter Fifteen Analysis

The conversation between Grandpa and Gypsy in chapter thirteen serves to show the depression of Belle following her loss of Amos, as well as to again address the concept of beauty. Gypsy knows that looks should not matter, but she is also aware enough to know that in her world, they do matter. When she learns that it is not her mother who wanted her hair, but her father, Gypsy begins to see things slightly differently. For many years, she has assumed that it was her mother who pushed for her to be beautiful, but she is beginning to realize it was her father who placed emphasis on looks. This foreshadows the knowledge later that Amos could not tolerate his own disfigurement following his accident. Additionally, Grandpa's information about Belle help to show that her departure from the family was an escape to get away from the shadow of her sister. Constantly overlooked, Belle simply wanted to be seen, but Grandpa notes that even her escape to Everett didn't amount to a life she was happy with. One is left again to wonder if she disappeared this time to again try to find a better life for herself. Gypsy's revelations about looks also proves another point, in that whereas Gypsy and Love were known for their good looks, Woodrow and Belle are known for their lack of good looks. In both cases, outward appearances are the focus. Finally, Woodrow's strong comment at the end of the chapter that his father was not involved in his mother's disappearance suggests he knows more about the situation than he appears to.

Woodrow shows in chapter fourteen that he really does know his mother is still alive, and not in another world. Gypsy has suspected all along that Woodrow simply cannot face the truth, and in this chapter, one learns this is correct. Woodrow's watching of the personal ads shows he is searching for a message from his mother. The fact that none arrive again suggest that Belle has no intention of returning. Woodrow's quick forgiveness of Gypsy for her thoughts in the previous chapter that Everett was involved in Belle's disappearance show again his friendship with Gypsy.

In chapter fifteen, more is learned both about Woodrow's character as well as Mrs. Cooper's reasons behind her cruel treatment of Woodrow. First, it is clear from the entire party that the Ball's are considered to be on the high end of the social scale. Woodrow, somewhat out of his element, appears nonetheless to enjoy himself, at least until Mrs. Cooper questions him about his mother. The knowledge that Mrs. Cooper is cruel because of something Belle once said to her shows how shallow and mean she really is. When Woodrow convinces Mrs. Cooper she is drinking, and she reacts to it, he



is essentially getting even. This not only shows Mrs. Coopers own susceptibility to outward influence, but also shows the other girls' susceptibility as well, as they follow suit. In addition, the fact that Mrs. Cooper was loose and social and almost kind when she believed she was drunk shows that the woman is capable of such emotions, but is often restrained in the social eye.



Chapter Sixteen through Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Sixteen through Chapter Seventeen Summary

In chapter sixteen, Doc, Porter, Love, Grandpa and Grandma are giving Woodrow the third degree about what happened with Mrs. Cooper. He explains that he and Belle had read an article once about the power of suggestion and decided to try it on Mrs. Cooper. Although the adults try to hide it, they eventually can't, and begin laughing. Gypsy is annoyed that Woodrow is not in trouble, knowing that she herself would be if she had been the one to play a trick on Mrs. Cooper. One afternoon, Woodrow and Gypsy argue about pretty people, as Woodrow thinks pretty people can do anything, and get away with it. Gypsy notes that Woodrow must be pretty, since he gets away with everything. After watching the news about a hospital in New York, Woodrow admits he and his mother were saving money to purchase an operation that would correct his eyes. When Gypsy asks what happened to the money, Woodrow becomes very defensive. Later, as Gypsy tries to make conversation in the tense silence, she mentions not liking a song on television, and Woodrow accuses her of not liking it because it reminds her of her father. She claims it is Porter's favorite song, and Woodrow notes that she is angry at Porter, but it wasn't him who left her. Angry, Gypsy reminds Woodrow that her father is dead, and although he starts to say something else, he stops, and Gypsy is relieved. Later, when friends stop by, Woodrow tells a story of a young woman with golden hair who is killed by a farmer. When buried, her hair begins to grow above the ground, showing police where her body is located. When police arrive, they find the farmer strangled by the hair. Woodrow notes that the moral of the story is to never get caught up with a girl with golden hair.

Furious, Gypsy stomps home, swearing a little, only to find Porter on the porch. Gypsy angrily talks to him about Woodrow, wondering why he is never in trouble, and why she can't behave badly, as well. Porter notes that behaving badly isn't something she does, but she reminds him that she doesn't always have to be a good girl. Porter tells her, leaning close, that he can see her, even under all her hair, and that he sees a talented musician, who reminds him of Belle. He also notes that she is creative and imaginative, like Belle, but that they both are mad at the world for not being someone else. Belle wanted to be Love, and Gypsy wants to be Woodrow, but Porter reminds her she is perfect as herself. When Gypsy asks what Porter thinks happened to Belle, he notes that she disappeared a long time ago and is out in the world trying to find herself.

In chapter seventeen, Gypsy admits that things were not the same between her and Woodrow for the rest of the summer. Things change around the town, but Belle does not come home. Gypsy's nightmares are more frequent but less horrifying, as through her secret is ready to come out. On the first day of school in fall, Gypsy and Woodrow discover they have a male teacher for their homeroom, and he is new to the town. When he asks to know more about the families and the town, Woodrow volunteers his



information. Buzz, the bully, tells him to talk of his mother's disappearance. Woodrow responds cheerfully that his mother discovered invisibility by ordering the recipe and combining ingredients she had to hunt for. She drank a little of the resulting potion, to show Woodrow, and then he claims she drank the rest, and hasn't been seen since. When Gypsy volunteers to speak, she is bombarded by her classmates, who exclaim to the new teacher about her beauty. Stuttering, Gypsy tries to explain that there is more to her. When flustered about her stepfather, Porter, she blurts out that her real father died in an accident when she was five. She claims he went into a building to save a baby, but was burned badly, and then perished. Buzz angrily notes that Gypsy is lying. He explains, over Woodrow's fierce attempts to quiet him, that Amos was burned beyond recognition in that fire. Unable to deal with his ugliness, particularly when married to Love, he shot himself in the head. Gypsy thinks to herself that the ugly thing is finally out.

Chapter Sixteen through Chapter Seventeen Analysis

In chapter sixteen, we see a rift begin between Gypsy and Woodrow, as Gypsy begins to experience jealousy on a number of levels. Although the adults find humor in Woodrow's actions, Gypsy is angry that he is not in trouble. In reality, Gypsy is jealous of Woodrow's abilities to act out, as is shown by her comments to Porter later in the chapter. The fact that Gypsy wants out from under her beauty and wants to be naughty shows she is changing and growing. Porter seems to understand this, as is shown through his comments at the end of the chapter. Porter, who has been hated throughout the novel, always seems to know when Gypsy needs to talk, and seems to tell her the truth, which happen to be things she wants to hear. One gets the sense that if Gypsy could get over her resentment toward him, the two could have a relationship. Additionally, Porter's comments about Belle suggest that he believes she has simply move on, to try to find happiness.

Gypsy and Woodrow's argument serves a few different purposes. First, again, we see the theme of beauty, as they argue about what beauty allows people to do. In this argument, Woodrow's anger at Gypsy's simple question about the money suggests that the topic is a sore one for Woodrow, foreshadowing the knowledge later that his mother used his operation money for her own needs. Additionally, Woodrow's comments about Gypsy and her father again suggest a deeper story, foreshadowing the idea that Amos not only committed suicide, but abandoned his family. Gypsy's relief at Woodrow's lack of comment shows her own reluctance to think about her father.

The truth about Gypsy's father is finally revealed in chapter seventeen. The increase in her nightmares as well as her willingness in class to even discuss her father shows that Gypsy is ready to confront her reality. It is her cruel classmate, however, who finally forces her to deal with the truth. As Gypsy struggles to show her classmates and her new teacher that there is more to her life than her looks, Buzz cruelly reminds her that, for her father, looks were everything. The revelation that Amos committed suicide after suffering a disfigurement brings together several aspects of the novel. He clearly cherished good looks, which explains not only his name for Gypsy but also his need for



Love to promise not to cut Gypsy's hair, as well as his own suicide. The reference at the end of the novel to the ugly thing, as is mentioned in Gypsy's dream, suggests that her nightmares are related to her father's suicide. Woodrow's attempts to quiet Buzz, as well as his comment that people do not speak of the suicide in front of Gypsy, show that people have continuously tiptoed around the topic, as Gypsy used denial to take away her pain.

On the other hand, this chapter also shows that Woodrow is still unable to face his own truth. When pressed about his mother's disappearance, Woodrow again makes up a wild story to cover for his clear discomfort. Whereas Gypsy has used denial throughout the book to hide her sorrow, Woodrow uses fantastic tales, but in both cases, they choose to escape the truth. The fact that Gypsy is being forced to confront hers suggests that soon, Woodrow may have to do the same.



Chapter Eighteen through Chapter Twenty

Chapter Eighteen through Chapter Twenty Summary

In chapter eighteen, Gypsy walks home as Woodrow beats up Buzz in the classroom. She thinks of the fact that she knew all along what happened, but refused to acknowledge it, and others around her never spoke of it in front of her. She remembers being told to go get her father, who rarely left the house after the fire, for Sunday dinner. She went to her house and looked everywhere but her parent's bedroom, but the door was locked. Thinking he might be napping, Gypsy walked around to the bedroom window, and looked in, where she saw her father's head in a pool of blood. Back at home, Gypsy now questions in her head why her father would do such a thing. Rage rises within her, and, finding scissors nearby, Gypsy begins cutting off all of her hair, screaming at her father that she hates him, that she wishes to kill him and hurt him the way he hurt his family. Exhausted, she throws herself on her bed after covering her mirror, not wanting to see her beauty. Porter comes home, noting that her mother had sent him, as she heard what happened at school. Calmly, Porter questions Gypsy as to her feelings, and why she cut off all her hair. When she reveals she is getting back at Amos, and that she wants to be ugly and evil, Porter notes she is not ugly and evil, but she is wounded. Hearing the word, Gypsy begins to choke on her tears, and although Porter agrees to leave, he reminds her that her grief needs to come. Gypsy, now alone, begins to weep for her years of misery, and falls asleep.

In chapter nineteen, Porter speaks to Love before she is allowed to see Gypsy, and Gypsy hears Porter talking to her, defending Gypsy. When she finally enters the room, she only hugs her daughter, promising that they will fix her hair. Gypsy responds by telling Love that she wants to talk about Amos, as they never have. Love admits they kept quiet about it, because Gypsy couldn't bear to face the truth. Her nightmares were the only symbol that she remembered finding her father. Love explains that Amos was in a deep depression following the accident, and that his depression caused him to give up his life. Gypsy admits that while anger at him was part of her rash decision to cut her hair, it was also because she felt invisible underneath it. When questioned, Love explains that she doesn't know why looks were so vital to Amos, and that Gypsy will, in time, learn to forgive him. Woodrow is grounded for his thrashing of Buzz, although everyone is also proud of him. A few days later, after Gypsy calms a bit, Porter takes her to Clint to have her hair re-cut into a very short pixie style. The three laugh and joke with one another, and Gypsy forms a plan in her head to avoid questions about why she cut off her hair. She finds she likes her hair shorter, and discovers that now she seems to be able to accept Porter.

In chapter twenty, Woodrow apologizes to Gypsy as they walk to school, noting that he was originally jealous of her and all she had, because he didn't know how much pain she had been through. Gypsy changes the subject, noting that she heard Woodrow beat



Buzz soundly. Woodrow proudly agrees, but points out that while everyone was sorry Buzz had been mean to Gypsy, they did not know about her hair. At that moment, a friend arrives, and is stunned at Gypsy's short hair. Gypsy, initiating her plan, begins gushing about it, noting that only a qualified barber like Clint can do such a stylish cut, since it is so popular in New York., and he is "up" on the latest. Soon, other girls get in on the conversation, and within days, several girls have their hair cut in a similar style. Gypsy realizes she is becoming a different person, both inside and out.

Chapter Eighteen through Chapter Twenty Analysis

Chapter eighteen reveals the final truth of Amos' death, in that readers learn that five-year-old Gypsy not only knew of her father's suicide, but that she was the one who found his body. This fact explains not only Gypsy's recurring nightmares, but also her mother's reactions to them, as well as everyone's reactions to Gypsy in general. The anger, sadness, and rage that rises within Gypsy stems from years of pushing away the anger she felt at her father for what she thought of as a betrayal. Taking her anger out on herself, particularly her hair, shows that she is visualizing her hair as a symbol of her father. The mention that her scars are now visible indicate that Gypsy has known she was broken inside, but simply didn't have the strength to face it. Covering the mirror also symbolizes that Gypsy relates her own looks to a standard held by her father, which eventually caused him to take his own life.

Porter's reaction to Gypsy in this chapter proves a few things about Porter. First, it is very clear that Porter loves and understands his stepdaughter. His years of tolerating her silence and her anger have not been spent in frustration, but in understanding. Porter knows that Gypsy is, as he puts it, wounded. He understands the anger she feels, and that her pent up grief is part of her problem. Although Gypsy cannot yet see it, Porter is already becoming closer to her, foreshadowing their budding relationship.

Porter's love and care for his stepdaughter are further shown in chapter nineteen, in two ways. First, it is Porter who calms Love down, and who appears to protect Gypsy from her anger. Whatever he says to Love has the effect not only of calming her, but of helping her to see that Gypsy needs to be her own person, and needs answers. Secondly, it is Porter who takes Gypsy to see Clint for a haircut. This time, his attempts to joke and laugh with Gypsy are not batted aside, which indicate that Gypsy is already beginning to be able to see Porter not as an enemy, but as a friend.

Chapter nineteen also shows the conversation between Love and Gypsy that was inevitable, sooner or later. Once Gypsy is able to accept her father's actions, she can speak to her mother about it, as they both have anger, and feelings of betrayal. Love admits she was angry, but has been able to forgive Amos over the years. She explains to Gypsy that Amos was depressed, and that because he was so focused on looks, he could not see past them to see he still had many wonderful qualities.

Finally, chapter nineteen shows a new Gypsy beginning to emerge. She is surprised at her new short hair, but also relieved in a way. She almost immediately begins to create a



story, much as Woodrow would have done, to explain her hair, showing that she is learning some skills from Woodrow. Also, her conversations with her mother, Porter, and her new reactions to Porter show she is beginning to gain a maturity not seen at the beginning of the novel.

Chapter twenty shows that Woodrow, too, is beginning to change. As he admits to Gypsy about his jealousy, he begins to see that pain and suffering occur everywhere, regardless of social status or beauty. As Gypsy's plan about her hair works, Woodrow simply adds on to her story, again showing he is a true friend. Finally, at the end of the chapter, Gypsy again notes she is beginning to notice a change within herself. She is becoming more social, and more outgoing, and strongly believes she is no longer invisible.



Chapter Twenty One through Chapter Twenty Three

Chapter Twenty One through Chapter Twenty Three Summary

In chapter twenty-one, Woodrow comes to Gypsy's window at night, and the two sneak out to travel the night with Blind Benny. Gypsy asks Benny to call her Gypsy, and he happily agrees, as Gypsy notes Benny's face is peaceful and pleasant, even without eyes. As Benny shows off his new shoes, purchased by the employees at the hardware store, he informs the children that he lives above the store, and has Love and Amos to thank for it. He reports that he and Amos were friends in Cold Valley, Kentucky. Benny was born without eyes, and when his parents died when he was twelve, he became a sin eater. He explains that a sin eater eats food placed on the caskets of the dead. The sins of the deceased are said to move to the food, and thus, by the sin eater feasting, the person's sins are removed. Benny lived this way for fifteen years, until Amos convinced him to come to Coal Station with him. Benny helped Amos as much as possible, and in return, he was given a home and food. When Amos passed away and Love sold the store, she wrote into the contact that Benny was to always have a home above the store.

As the group travels along, Gypsy realizes that many people leave things such as used clothing or food purposefully for Benny, while other things he locates in the trash. Dogs tend to follow Benny, and as they walk, several join them. Gypsy tells a joke, and discovers she is truly happy out at night with good friends. She is reminded, as Benny begins to sing, that her Sunday school teacher once noted that Jesus could appear disguised, in rags and impoverished. He sings another song, and Woodrow notes he is reminded of his mother. Benny explains that the song reminds him of Amos, and that he misses Amos dearly, as he was his best friend. Woodrow reminds Benny that he and Gypsy are his friends, as well, and that he can call on them whenever he needs something. On returning home, Benny asks if Gypsy has had fun, and she impulsively kisses him on the cheek. She explains that, when she is allowed to choose one day to relive, this day will be considered. When they leave him, Benny is rubbing the spot where Gypsy kissed him, and Gypsy notes that perhaps sometimes, impulsive is okay.

In chapter twenty-two, Woodrow is reading his English assignment to the family, about Benny and his ability to see clearly, because he can see beyond appearance. It is Grandma's birthday, and they are having the usual birthday celebration. First, Porter toasts Grandma Ball, and then announces that the family is going to hold a recital in which Gypsy will play piano. Gypsy, happily surprised, realizes she can show off her talents to others, and is pleased as they announce the recital will be for her thirteenth birthday. Doc Porter also announces that the family is going pay to have a doctor look at correcting Woodrow's crossed eyes. Woodrow is happily surprised.



In chapter twenty-three, Gypsy and Woodrow rise at dawn on the one year anniversary of Belle's disappearance. On the way to the tree house, Woodrow admits that appearances can be deceiving, as he once thought this beautiful house and land could save people from harm, but he now knows harm can happen anywhere. Once in the tree house, Woodrow admits he and his mother made up the place between worlds that he talks about. He knows his mother is alive in this world, as she took some of his clothing, as well as the money they had saved for his operation. Woodrow believes she traveled across the mountain dressed as a boy, and hitched a ride with the carnival. He explains that he will tell Grandpa and Grandma that Belle is okay, but he claims his father won't care, as he wasn't always good to Belle. Woodrow admits his mother knew he would be watching those personal ads, and that should could have sent a message, but that she didn't, and he now knows that she won't. He believes she will never return for him. Gypsy realizes that both she and Woodrow's parent abandoned them, but they did so out of pain, not a lack of love. Woodrow notes they are in the in-between place, between being young adults and children, between summer and winter, and between dawn and day. Gypsy herself finds she is between sleep and wakefulness, as she finds herself daydreaming of her father.

Chapter Twenty One through Chapter Twenty Three Analysis

Chapter twenty-one reveals a few pieces of information hinted at throughout the novel. First, Gypsy's note that Blind Benny's face is calm and happy is a much different reaction from her previous one earlier in the book. This shows that Gypsy, too, is changing, and is better able to see others for what they are, and not what they appear to be. Benny's information about his link to Amos helps to clear up their friendship, and his story of how he came to Coal Station helps to show not only his unfortunate upbringing, but also to show both Amos' and Love's extreme compassion. The knowledge that many people leave things out for Benny show too that the town is full of compassionate people. Gypsy's note about Jesus as an ordinary man is a strong point to readers that even the most unlikely of persons is worth helping. Woodrow's assurances to Benny that he and Gypsy are his friends, combined with Gypsy's kiss on the man's cheek, show that both genuinely care for Benny. Gypsy's comment about reliving the day shows that she not only enjoyed her time with her new friends, but enjoyed it to the point where it is considered one of her most perfect, memorable days.

Chapter twenty-two reveals a bit of information about Gypsy and Woodrow's future. First, Gypsy is being asked to prepare a recital for friends and family. Although she is nervous, Gypsy realizes that this is her way of becoming known for her musical talent. The fact that Porter is pushing the idea shows that he truly does understand his daughter's wish to be known for something other than her beauty, and that he is seeking to find a way to provide her that chance. On the other hand, Woodrow is being treated to an operation that may correct his eyes, making him more beautiful. This duality of beauty is finally brought to light in this chapter, as one cousin is given an opportunity to show her inner beauty, while the other cousin is given an opportunity to know outer



beauty. This, when combined with Woodrow's essay, bring home the theme of beauty as both a blessing and a curse, and of truly being in the eyes of the beholder.

The mystery of Belle Prater is finally solved in chapter twenty-three. Woodrow, like Gypsy, is now able to confront the fact that his mother betrayed him, and left him behind. He admits that her lack of care for him hurts, and that her lack of communication with him hurts even more. As he explains how she escaped, the knowledge that she stole his operation money explains his angry behavior earlier in the novel when asked about the money. He also confirms to Gypsy that he has looked through the personal ads, hoping for a sign from her. Gypsy's comments that both Belle and Amos' pain were too great for them to bear show she is maturing, and Woodrow's comments about their place in between childhood and young adulthood, along with his ability to now face his abandonment, show he is, as well.



Characters

Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster

Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster is the narrator of the story, and one of the main characters throughout the novel. Gypsy is twelve years old, and has a mane of beautiful long hair that her mother refuses to allow her to cut. She is lovely, smart, kind, and caring, but she is also lonely, and wishes people could see her for who she is, instead of simply for her lovely hair or her beauty. Nicknamed Beauty by her father, Gypsy struggles with bad dreams about her father's death, and harsh feelings toward her stepfather. When Gypsy's cousin moves in with her grandparents, Gypsy is able to befriend Woodrow, who cares little about her looks. His own mother disappeared, and Gypsy finds she is able to talk to Woodrow about the loss of a parent, and about his own experiences with his mother, whom he claims to believe is trapped between two worlds. In him, Gypsy discovers a true friend. Both characters share inner secrets, and it is through her friendship with Woodrow that Gypsy is eventually able to confront her father's suicide, and also through this friendship that Woodrow is able to face his own mother's abandonment of the family. Gypsy's anger at her father's selfish suicide, once confronted, also pushes her to cutting off her hair, freeing her from the stigma of beauty she has carried her entire life. This realization also allows her to accept her stepfather, and allows her to forgive her mother.

Woodrow Prater

Woodrow Prater is a twelve-year-old boy from the mountains, whose family is poor and less educated than others in his extended family. When Woodrow's mother disappears one night, he is sent to live with his grandparents, as his father becomes an alcoholic who is unable to care for his son. Woodrow's eyes are crossed, he wears thick glasses, and he is much less refined than those he is sent to live with. However, Gypsy, his beautiful cousin, soon befriends him, and the two become inseparable. Woodrow is often telling stories his mother told to him, or telling jokes, and soon becomes well liked in school and within the family. He plays several tricks on people, and Gypsy finds herself a little jealous at all the attention Woodrow draws, and wonders how he can accept his mother's disappearance so easily. Woodrow claims he knows his mother is trapped between two worlds, and that he is planning to free her. Over time, however, after Gypsy confronts her own family's secret, Woodrow is able to admit that his mother simply abandoned him, as she was extremely unhappy. He recognizes that his new life is one that he can learn to appreciate, and he learns to accept that he has to move on, without his mother. Woodrow learns through the novel, that looks are unimportant, and that family and friendships are more valuable than anything else.



Belle Prater

Belle Prater is the mother of Woodrow Prater, the sister of Love Ball Dotson, and the wife of Everette Prater. Belle grew up as the less attractive sister of Love, who was one of the most gorgeous women in the county, and she often found herself taking a back seat to her sister. As a young woman, Belle fell in love with a man named Amos Leemaster, a newcomer in town, and he loved her in return. When Amos met Love, however, he fell for her instead, and left Belle. Destroyed and hurt, Belle immediately went out, found the first man to pay her attention, and married him. She moved away from her family into the mountains, and lived a life of squalor in an effort to avoid the hurt her family had caused. Eventually, however, Belle can no longer take the life she has chosen, and abandons her husband and child. Her son, Woodrow, pretends for nearly a year that he believes she is trapped between two worlds, but even Woodrow eventually accepts that his mother selfishly left him to begin a new life for herself. Belle's behaviors show her to be a selfish character, but also as a character who responds to negative situations in her life by running away from her problems.

Love Ball Dotson

Love Ball Dotson is the mother of Gypsy, and the sister of Belle. Love is a beautiful woman who has spent her life being known not for her mind or her inner personality, but for her looks. As a young woman, Love was sought after by most of the boys in town, often leaving her sister Belle behind. When a newcomer to town, Amos Leemaster, falls for her sister, Love is surprised to find herself attracted to him, as well. Amos leaves Belle for Love, driving her sister to a series of bad decisions. Love and Amos have a wonderful life until Amos, a fire fighter, is scarred by fire. Unable to deal with his ugliness, being married to such a beautiful woman, Amos commits suicide. Following his death, Love falls in love with Porter Dotson, a local newspaper editor. The two marry, but Love is forever haunted by her husband's actions, and Gypsy resents her stepfather. When her sister disappears, Love is further stricken by guilt, as she has lost both her husband and the woman she hurt in her choice to marry Amos in the first place. When Gypsy cuts her hair in reaction to finally confronting her father's death, Love is finally able to let her daughter free herself from the same burden of beauty she herself carried for so long. Love's character shows that beauty is not the only trait with value, and also that being beautiful can be a blessing as well as a curse.

Porter Dotson

Porter Dotson is the husband of Love Bell, and the stepfather of Gypsy. Porter is a kind, caring man who loves his wife and step daughter, even though she resents him. Porter knows Gypsy dislikes him simply because she is angry with her own father for his suicide. Porter is never mean, and accepts the abuse Gypsy gives to him without comment, knowing that Gypsy is wounded over her father's suicide. In fact, Porter often tries to gain Gypsy's trust and love, but often to no avail. When Gypsy breaks down and cuts off all her hair following her confrontation of her father's suicide, it is Porter who



sees her first. It is Porter who reassures Gypsy that her actions are acceptable, and it is Porter who calms Love down before she is allowed to see Gypsy. It is also Porter who takes Gypsy to the local barber to fix her hair. This, combined with her acceptance of her father's death, allows Gypsy to finally accept Porter as her stepfather, and allows her to show him the love and respect he deserves.

Grandma Ball

Grandma Ball is a kind, older woman who takes in her grandson when his mother disappears. Grandma Ball is hard of hearing, and the family often shouts to be heard. A piano teacher for many years, Grandma now only teaches Gypsy. Grandma knows Belle consistently felt plain and less beautiful than her sister, and she also knows it was Love and Amos' relationship that drove Belle away. Grandma feels badly for Woodrow, but also knows Belle left to begin a new life.

Grandpa Ball

Grandpa Ball is a hard-of-hearing older man who is the father of Love and Belle. It is Grandpa who explains to Gypsy that her mother's focus on her hair is as a result of a promise she made to Amos before he died. Grandpa agrees that looks shouldn't matter, but he also explains to Gypsy that they do matter to most in society. He does tell her, however, that to him, looks are just the outside of a person, and that what is on the inside matters most. Grandpa explains to Gypsy that Belle left the family because she was hurt by Amos and Love, and also because she was embarrassed about her living conditions. Grandpa admits Belle was never happy in her marriage and was too proud to admit it.

Everette Prater

Everette Prater is the father of Woodrow and the husband of Belle. Everette is an uneducated man who is not wealthy. After marrying Belle, he takes her to live in the mountains with his family, living what Grandpa Ball calls the old time life. Everette is, as Woodrow says, not as fond of Belle as he pretended to be, and he wasn't always kind to her. Shortly after Belle leaves, Everette is seen with another woman, indicating he has already found a lover. Everette's descent into alcoholism and his free release of Woodrow to his mother and father-in-law show he is not a proper father to Woodrow. Also, Woodrow's comments suggest Everette was abusive.

Amos Leemaster

Amos Leemaster is the deceased father of Gypsy and the first husband of Love. Amos came into town to open a hardware store, and also started a Civic League to feed the homeless and started the volunteer fire department. He was a good man with a good heart. When he first arrived in town, he came to care for Belle Ball, but after meeting



Love, he rejected Belle and married Love. Both lived happily, and had Gypsy, but Amos was injured while trying to save a baby from a house fire. Amos was severely scarred, and as a result, went into a deep depression. His depression, combined with the beauty of his wife, led him to the decision that he could no longer live with his looks. Amos shot himself in the head, and Gypsy found his body. Amos' character shows the dangers of placing looks before all other characteristics.

Blind Benny

Blind Benny is a poor blind man who wanders the streets of the city. Born without eyes, Benny became a "sin eater" at age twelve when his parents both passed away. A sin eater, he explains, is a person who comes to funerals and eats food placed on the casket of the deceased. The food is said to be the sins of the deceased, and the sin eater frees the dead by eating their sins. Benny began to worry about his own state of affairs, and it was Amos who took him in. The two came to Coal Station, Virginia, to begin a new life. Benny helped Amos as much as he could, and in return, Benny was given room and board above the hardware store. When Amos died and Love sold the store, she placed a clause in the paperwork that guaranteed a home for Benny above the store. In addition, the new owners of the store help him by giving him food and clothing. Benny's character is the perfect example of a person whose outside appearance masks a beautiful inside.



Objects/Places

Coal Station, Virginia

This is a small town in Virginia where the story takes place.

Mountain Echo

The 'Mountain Echo' is the name of the local newspaper, of which Porter Dotson, Gypsy's stepfather, is editor.

One Thousand Beautiful Poems

'One Thousand Beautiful Poems' is the name of the book of poetry Belle received from her father on graduation, and the book she read several times immediately before she disappeared.

Crooked Ridge

Crooked Ridge is the area in which Woodrow was raised, near the Appalachian mountains.

Cold Valley, Kentucky

Cold Valley Kentucky is where Amos and Blind Benny were friends, before coming to Coal Station.

Chiggers

Chiggers are small bugs that burrow under the skin, causing severe itching.

Dixie Pixie

The Dixie Pixie is the name Gypsy gives to the pixie hair style the barber gives her, following her cutting of her own hair.

Akers' Barbershop

Akers' Barbershop is the hair dressing salon, owned by Clint Akers, where Gypsy goes to have her hair fixed after she cuts it all off in a rage.

Residence Street

The street in Coal Station where Gypsy and her family live.

Main Street

The street in Coal Station where most of the businesses are located.



Themes

Friendship

One of the primary themes in the novel is that of the friendship between Gypsy and Woodrow. In the beginning, these characters are worlds apart, in that Gypsy is somewhat privileged, whereas Woodrow's family is a working class family, or lower. Gypsy has nice clothing, television, a two story lovely home, proper education, and she lives in town with her mother, grandparents, and stepfather. She is also beautiful. Woodrow, on the other hand, lives in a scarcely populated holler outside of town with only his lonely mother and his coal mining father. They are poor, living in a one room shack with no indoor plumbing, and Woodrow often wears hand-me-downs from his father or uncle. He is also cross eyed. The two are an unlikely pair of friends.

However, when Woodrow moves in, Gypsy finds that the two of them, despite their differences, have a lot in common, and their talents compliment one another nicely. Gypsy is great at music and telling jokes, whereas Woodrow is a wonderful storyteller. Additionally, they both have experienced the loss of a loved one, and they find themselves able to confide in and rely on one another. Socioeconomic status, Gypsy learns, means nothing in terms of whether one is worthy of friendship. In Woodrow, Gypsy finds someone who is patient, kind, reliable, honest, and a good listener. It is through his sorrow and experiences that Gypsy learns to confront her own past. Woodrow, too, learns through Gypsy's friendship that even the wealthy or well off have problems, and that socioeconomic status cannot protect someone from pain and heartache.

The Importance of Beauty

Beauty is another common theme throughout the novel, and it is used in a variety of different ways. First, from the beginning Gypsy expresses a dislike for her looks, noting that she feels invisible as a person since everyone looks only at her hair and her beauty. Even her nickname is Beauty. Through the novel, the reader learns that Belle often felt the same, only her invisibility was due to her sister, Love, and her sister's good looks. It is only when Gypsy strips away her hair that she feels she is able to be seen for her own personality, just as Belle felt she had to escape from Love and the rest of the family to become a real person. This lesson shows that beauty can be a burden, as well as a blessing.

Some in the novel place so much emphasis on beauty that they are willing to sacrifice much for it. Amos, Gypsy's father, valued beauty over almost everything. He hurt his first love, Belle, to court the more beautiful Love. When he was injured in a fire, his own lack of beauty pushed him to commit suicide, as he could not stand to be so deformed when married to such a lovely woman. His extraction of a promise from Love not to cut Gypsy's hair shows his appreciation and need for beauty. Whereas Gypsy knows that



beauty is unimportant, she also understands that some, like her father, valued beauty highly.

Blind Benny and Woodrow are other examples of how beauty, or lack thereof, is used as a theme in the novel. Woodrow is extremely cross eyed, and several characters in the novel make fun of him for his looks. Blind Benny, a man born nearly without eyes, has struggled his entire life against a society who finds him hideous. However, both Woodrow and Benny are loving, kind, caring characters who prove Grandpa's theory that the most beautiful can be ugly, and the ugly can be beautiful on the inside.

Denial

Denial is another theme used throughout the novel. Gypsy knows, deep inside, that her father is dead, and that he committed suicide. She found his body when she was five. However, since the incident, Gypsy has denied the truth, choosing instead to forget the details of her father's death. While she recognizes that he is no longer alive, she refuses to face that he, in a way, abandoned her and her mother. The anger, frustration, and resentment she feels toward her father are all buried, and although these emotions certainly affect her, and her dreams, she is able to function with these deep emotions, and to continue to love her father. It is only when she is forced to face her denial, and her father's actions, that she deals with the rage and anger she has at her father. When she does this, however, she finds she is better able to accept things in her life such as her step father, and is better able to understand herself. Once she can get rid of the burden of her denial, she can freely move forward.

Woodrow, too, is in denial for much of the novel. Woodrow knows the depths of his mothers' unhappiness, and he knows she has abandoned him to find a new life. Unable to face that, however, Woodrow forces himself to at least pretend to believe that she is trapped between two worlds that she often spoke of. Woodrow's looking through the personal ads for a sign of his mother shows that he cannot bring himself to believe she would completely abandon him. Once Gypsy is able to confront her own father's abandonment, however, Woodrow finds the courage to face his sadness and anger at his own mother for leaving him behind.

Belle, too, appears to have been a victim of denial. Although readers never meet Belle, it is clear she spent much of her time in jealousy of her sister. Once given the chance, Belle fled her family home to marry a near stranger. She rarely came home, and seemed to want nothing to do with her old life. This, too, can be seen as denial, in that Belle was trying to convince herself she was happy in her situation. Over time, however, even Belle was able to admit to herself that her misery was too great to keep enduring. She abandoned her life, and her child, once she faced the denial she had been living in, not in anger, but as the only means of escape she could think of.

In all three cases, denial caused the characters to trap themselves in lives or situations they were unhappy with. Gypsy was unable to forgive her father, or learn to love her stepfather, until she let go of her denial. Woodrow, too, was unable to forgive his mother

and let go of his resentment until he let go of his denial. Belle was unable to even attempt to find herself until she was rid of the denial that her life was happy. Once these characters could find the strength to overcome, they could move forward, and let go of the past.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in this novel is first person, with the story being narrated by Gypsy Leemaster, the main character of the story. This view is reliable, in that much of the focus of the book is on Gypsy's own reaction to her world around her and her reactions to those individuals around her. She reports on her own feelings, as well as the perceived feelings of others. As one of the most important themes in the novel is the friendship between Gypsy and Woodrow, this point of view is necessary, in that without it, Gypsy's own strong feelings for Woodrow as a friend would not be as clear. Additionally, Gypsy's perception of beauty is vital to the story, both in terms of her own beauty and the beauty, or lack thereof, of those around her. Without the use of first person point of view, Gypsy's strong reaction to beauty, and against beauty, would be missed, thereby missing one of the key points to the story. Further, how Gypsy views her own father's death is a key to understanding Gypsy as a character, and without a first person point of view, readers would not be able to see the denial that Gypsy overcomes through the novel.

Setting

The novel is set in Coal Station, Virginia. Coal Station is a small coal mining town in the midst of coal fields, near the Appalachian mountains. Built where Black River and Slag Creek converge, the town is placed directly by the train yards, which carry the coal to all parts of the country. The town has two main roads, those of Main Street, where most of the businesses reside, and Residence Street, where many of the residents live. The town has a newspaper, the 'Mountain Echo', a few hair salons, a local tavern called the 'Busy Bee', and both an elementary school and a high school. Nearby, Woodrow and his family lived in a holler called Crooked Ridge near the town. Roads between the two are steep and rugged, and most of the inhabitants around the town are miners with little education. The dialect in the novel is that of a working class town, with little care for grammatical errors, although some, such as Gypsy's family, are well educated. The novel is set in the 1950s, based on the pop culture references listed in the novel, such as references to popular Hitchcock films, and television shows such as 'I Led Three Lives'. The novel also mentions the town from which Blind Benny and Amos Leemaster are from, that of Cold Valley, Kentucky.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel tends to be highly informal and easy to read, as the novel is written for a younger audience. The sentences are written as though a twelve-year-old child were speaking them, since the novel is dictated through the eyes of twelve-year-old Gypsy Leemaster. As a twelve-year-old, Gypsy's descriptions of emotions are often



difficult to explain and filled with contradictions, which helps to show the true emotional turmoil of a young girl.

At times, the language of the novel is used to indicate the social status of the speaker. For example, Woodrow's father, Everett, speaks using language that is more informal than some, indicating a lower educational background. On the other hand, Gypsy's grandfather uses language more formally, as he was once a schoolteacher. The novel even pokes fun at this, however, as Grandpa often "allows" himself to slip into what he calls his "everyday voice", in which he lets his grammar slip. The point that Grandpa grew up in the mountains and therefore learned to speak improperly again indicates that the locals of the area are working class, and often receive little education. All characters use words more commonly heard in the south, adhering to the setting of the novel. This helps to add a depth to the characters that would otherwise be absent.

Structure

Belle Prater's Boy is made up of twenty-three chapters, each of unequal length. Each chapter is named by number only. The chapters tend to cover both short amounts of time, and longer time spans, but in total, the time span of the novel is only a little over a year. The plot of the novel is simple, although there are several themes throughout. The novel is about a young woman coming to terms with the suicide of her father with the help of her cousin, who also experiences the abandonment of a parent. The beautiful young girl and the cross-eyed boy are opposites in almost every way, and both harbor inner denial about their parents. Gypsy, the young woman, refuses to face her memory of her father's suicide, while Woodrow refuses to face the fact that his mother voluntarily left him and left his father. Together, the two find the strength to face their resentment, and find peace within themselves. The pace of the novel is fairly rapid, and is quite easy to read. The author succeeds in making the readers care for the characters as they struggle to come to terms with their feelings. The story is touching and heartfelt, without being overly sensitive, and although it touches on such harsh topics as death, resentment, suicide, and betrayal, it also contains such themes as a reflection of the value of beauty and acceptance.



Quotes

"Funny thing was, I used to like Porter Dotson fine when he was just the feller down the street who ran the newspaper. He was funny and friendly. Then he married my mama two years ago, and I stopped liking him."

Chap. 2, p. 21

"I thought I was the only one in the room who detected that disguised insult to the whole female gender, but no, there was Woodrow peeping around the side of his glasses at me. He never missed a thing. And it occurred to me that Woodrow would never say anything like that. he did not think of me as "just a girl" any more than I thought of his as a cross-eyed boy."

Chap. 3, p. 30

"It was near dawn that the nightmare came. Just like the ones before it, there was an animal, limp and lifeless, in a puddle of blood. Was it a deer? A dog? A kitten? An ugly, ugly thing was in that animal's face. The ugly thing that I could not see."

Chap. 5, p. 45

"While everybody was turning to page 36, Woodrow glanced at me and winked so quick I don't think anybody else saw him. I ducked my head to hide the smile that had to come. That's when I knew for sure that Woodrow wasn't as backward as he let on, but he had a bit of the devil in him."

Chap. 6, p. 51

"Beauty? Don't you remember? It wuz his name for you! He always called you Beauty - short for Arbutus. He named you hissef - Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster."

Chap. 11, p. 94

"I recall it was one day during his last few weeks that he said to your momma, 'Love, promise me you'll never cut my Beauty's hair. And Love promised. So that's why she won't hear of cutting it.'"

Chap. 13, p. 114

"Appearances are just that, Gypsy - appearances, and not the genuine self. When I was teaching school, I noticed the best looking girls and boys could be mean as copperheads, and the ugliest ones could be as good hearted as they come...it's only what's in the heart that counts."

Chap. 13, p. 114

"So that was it! As a young girl, Aunt Belle had embarrassed her in front of her boyfriend. And Mrs. Cooper had carried that anger with her all these years, so that now it was a bitter acid she was spraying on Woodrow in retaliation."

Chap. 15, p. 129



"Wounded? It was a word that touched a chord. I felt something give in my throat. A great choking sound came up from my chest."

Chap. 18, p. 161

"He shot himself in the face. What more is there to say? We didn't walk about it because we couldn't bear to. Take those nightmare's of yours...remember how you would say 'Why can't I see its face?' You just couldn't stand to look truth in the face, that's why."

Chap. 18, p. 164

"Impulsive - that was the word Mrs. Cooper had used for Aunt Belle. Yeah, you could say I had done an impulsive thing."

Chap. 19, p. 168

"When I first came here, the trees were all in bloom. I never had seen anything so pretty, and I thought nothing could ever hurt people who lived in such a beautiful place. Now the summer is gone. The apples are ripe and I have learned....well, I have learned a beautiful place can't shelter you from hurt any more than a shack can."

Chap. 22, p. 192

"It was a moment, I reckon, when we both faced the truth. Aunt Belle had left Woodrow on purpose just like my daddy left me. Not because they didn't love us. They did. But their pain was bigger than their love."

Chap. 23, p. 195



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Belle Prater and Amos Leemaster. What are their similarities? What are their differences? How are these characteristics portrayed in the novel? What do their actions in the novel say about them as parents, and as human beings? Do you blame them for their abandonment of their families? Why or why not?

Gypsy's relationship with Porter Dotson changes throughout the novel. How does this relationship change, and why? Why does Gypsy treat Porter as she does in the beginning of the novel? How does Porter react, and why? What changes Gypsy's feelings about Porter? What does Porter mean in the novel when he says Gypsy isn't ugly or evil, but is simply wounded? Why does this strike such a chord with Gypsy? What does this show about Porter's understanding of his stepdaughter's plight?

Based on information gleaned throughout the novel, describe the life of Belle Prater. What was her childhood like? Her teenage years? Her life as a wife and mother? Do you think she was happy? Why or why not? Why do you think she disappeared in the novel? Why do you think she left her only child behind? What do you think of her actions?

Throughout the novel, the theme of beauty is prevalent. Gypsy feels invisible as a result of her beautiful hair, her father committed suicide as a result of his own disfigured looks, her aunt was heartbroken due to her own looks, and Blind Benny has spent a lifetime teased and tormented for his own looks. What do you think the book says about beauty? Is it necessary? What does beauty really mean in the book? Who turns out to be beautiful and why? Is beauty important? Why or why not?

At the end of the novel, Woodrow notes that he and Gypsy are both in the in-between place between being kids and grown ups. What does he mean by this? What areas in the novel point to this point of maturation for the children? How does their new ability to face their fears and problems lend to the idea that they are growing up?

Blind Benny's character in the novel is a perfect representation of beauty from within. Describe Gypsy's initial reaction to Blind Benny, and her reaction later in the novel. What changes her perception of Benny? What caused her original reaction? Why do you think Woodrow seeks out and meets Blind Benny, whereas Gypsy was content simply hearing him in the night? What does this say about Woodrow?

Compare and contrast Gypsy's life with Woodrow's before he came to live with his grandparents. How do their two worlds differ? How are they the same? Does this difference have an effect on their friendship? Why or why not? What aspect of life do they share? How does this help them to bond throughout the story?