

The Broken Bridge Study Guide

The Broken Bridge by Philip Pullman

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Plot Summary

The Broken Bridge by Philip Pullman is a mysterious coming of age tale whereby sixteen-year-old Ginny Howard launches her own personal investigation into her family's background after clues and inconsistencies arise that create more questions for her than answers. She begins her journey as an innocent and sheltered adolescent who is protected by her father from a darker side of the world. Ginny's strong personality and her growing knowledge of her rare artistic talent work to keep her grounded and secure during her quest for the shocking truths she is about to uncover in her family's history.

An introductory childhood flashback returns Ginny to a time and place where she hears the playground children saying, "Eeny, meeny, miney, Mo', Catch a nigger by his toe" (p. 3). When Ginny thinks she desires to be more like them, her father assures her she is fine as herself. The children mysteriously stop calling her Eeny Meeny.

A lady named Wendy Stevens, of Social Services in Liverpool, visits the Howards. Ginny feels scared that the woman may take her away from her father because she may erroneously think her father abusive.

Ginny roams her kingdom, the land between the sea and the hills, when she sees Andy, the only other black person growing up white in their town. Gangster Joe Chicago enters her kingdom and Andy hides. Andy soon asks Ginny if she wants a job at the Yacht Club. After Ginny speaks with her best friend Rhiannon, she also gets a summer job at the Dragon Café, which is owned by Rhiannon's parents.

Ginny soon discovers that Rhiannon has an estranged sister named Helen. Ginny cannot believe that an argument between family members can end in estrangement. Helen phones Rhiannon to ask if Ginny's father has ever been in prison. Ginny calls on Helen to find out more about the rumors.

Ginny helps Andy with his trailer on the beach when she meets Andy's friend Stuart, who has been to Haiti on business. The two talk about voodoo. After Stuart leaves, Ginny and Andy confide in one another about their feelings of being different from the others in town due to their skin color and their white education. They feel as if they do not fit in anywhere.

Another childhood flashback brings memories to Ginny of her artistic talent and the stupid people who thought she was good even when she tried to be bad. Ginny also remembers the little boy she thought would die of a cat scratch and the little girl who refused to hold Ginny's hand on the way to the playground. Another memory includes the time when some girls refused to tell Ginny their secret unless she swore on her mother's deathbed.

A telephone call from Wendy Stevens allays any fear Ginny has regarding Social Services removing Ginny from her father's care. Soon after, Ginny's father discloses



that she has a half-brother who will be coming to live with them due to his mother's imminent death from cancer.

Another flashback brings to mind the happiest day in Ginny's life. It is a time when she is on her father's shoulders and she feels as if she is flying. The sun shines brilliantly, the wind blows the white clouds and sheets hanging out to dry, and the sky is an infinite blue.

When their shifts are complete at the Café, Ginny and Rhiannon ride to Gwynant valley on their bicycles. Ginny asks why the bridge over the river is newer than the remainder of the road. Rhiannon talks about what little she knows regarding a car accident on the bridge a long time ago. The bridge was broken.

The next childhood flashback carries memories of Ginny's grandparents whom she visited once, she thinks. The elderly couple is odd in some indescribable way to Ginny. These grandparents are relatives of both Ginny and Robert, her new brother.

After Robert's mother dies, Ginny's father heads to Liverpool. Ginny's father only vaguely answers Ginny's growing list of questions regarding her family. When Ginny asks Rhiannon how her father could have a child with another woman, Rhiannon simply tells her that her father is sexy. According to Rhiannon, sexy and kind do not exist in one person.

Ginny's friends Andy and Dafydd invite her to the fair, where Andy runs into Joe Chicago. After the two men talk and Joe punches Andy in the shoulder, Andy hands money over to the gangster. Ginny and Dafydd ride the Ghost Train, which is Ginny's favorite carnival ride. Dafydd discloses more details to Ginny regarding the car accident on the broken bridge. According to Dafydd, a baby freezes to death in the car after someone steals the fur-lined jacket that cradled the baby while the man who was driving goes for help.

Another childhood flashback reveals a time when Ginny is in a trailer with a woman named Maeve and a girl named Dawn. A faint memory of a murder in the woods surrounding the trailer lingers in Ginny's mind. Ginny remembers one of Maeve's stories where another little girl touched the stove and got burned. The only part of her finger left was the bone, like a skeleton.

Ginny visits Stuart, who lives at her favorite house near the Yacht Club. They discuss her mother, painters, Haiti and voodoo. Stuart teaches Ginny about the Haitian gods. Ghede, or Baron Samedi, is her favorite because his ghost is twofold. One part of him is a comedian and the other is the lord of death. Ginny gets an idea to search for her mother's paintings from Stuart.

When Ginny inquires about her mother's paintings, her father says they were probably returned to Haiti. As this does not make sense to Ginny, she pushes her father until he tells her he was never married to Maman. Rather, he was married to Janet, Robert's mother. He explains that he met and fell in love with Ginny's mother when he was



married to Janet. Ginny is livid when she realizes she is illegitimate. She runs to her kingdom.

When Robert arrives, he and Ginny are silently hostile to one another. Ginny feels pushed away from her father and Robert; she wants to get closer to her mother. Ginny's next childhood flashback is a time when she goes camping with her father. She feels like a queen and she thinks he is the king.

The next time Ginny sees Andy and Dafydd, she lets them know her suspicions about Joe Chicago being the man who stole the jacket which killed the baby so many years ago. Ginny wants Dafydd to pick her up after she goes to Helen's to talk with Joe.

After Ginny's shift at the Yacht Club, she heads home to pick up Robert for the beach barbecue that Glyn Williams invited her to. At the party, Ginny enjoys champagne and she dances with Andy. When she kisses his neck, the onlookers comment jokingly. When Ginny finds out from Robert that Andy is gay, she can hardly contain her embarrassment. She runs to the ancient Saint Cynog church and cries.

Ginny and Rhiannon visit Stuart. He lets Ginny have an art magazine called Modern Painters and Ginny finds an exhibition at the L'Ouverture Gallery that will honor a painter named Anielle Baptiste. Ginny delightedly draws a story picture of The Broken Bridge.

Ginny is on three urgent missions. First, she will finish her broken bridge painting. Second, she plans to view her mother's paintings and not tell anyone about them. Finally, she will get the truth out of Joe Chicago.

When Helen calls to tell her Joe is coming to her house, Ginny takes the next train to Porthafon. At Helen's house, Ginny waits in an upstairs bedroom until Joe Chicago appears. When Joe enters, the ghost of Baron Samedi possesses Ginny's body and asks for the jacket. In a panic, Joe rips off his jacket and throws it at Ginny's feet.

Back at home, Ginny bickers with Robert. He bitterly tells her that she is arrogant and sticks her nose up at people she thinks untalented. Ginny broods the remainder of the day.

The next day, Wendy Stevens calls to let Ginny know that she was a foster child of Maeve Sullivan's almost fifteen years ago. There was a murder investigation in the woods near her home in Staunton Chase. Ginny rushes to get Robert so they can pay their grandparents in Chester a visit.

Their grandparents disclose that Robert's maternal grandparents are great friends with Dorothy and Ken Howard, his paternal grandparents. This relationship prompts the marriage between Janet and Tony, the siblings' father.

Tony has an affair with Anielle Baptiste, who bears their child Ginny. When Tony asks his wife Janet if she will adopt Ginny, Janet refuses and leaves Tony. According to Grandma, Ginny's mother is a black whore who uses sex to steal another woman's



husband. She gets pregnant so that she can end her cycle of poverty. Ginny is devastated by this story and she leaves Robert so she can go off and think.

Ginny thinks her mother is still alive, so she calls the art gallery. The owner of the gallery invites Ginny to a private viewing of Anielle's artwork. Ginny thinks her mother's art is brilliant, especially *The Death of Colonel Paul*. When Ginny meets her mother, Anielle rejects the idea that Ginny is her daughter.

Ginny sees things more clearly after she wanders around all night. Her decision to return Joe's jacket and apologize to him brings forth a bigger revelation. When Ginny arrives at Joe's house, she sees the dangerous Joe Chicago tenderly caring for his elderly, senile mother. Joe enlightens Ginny regarding her father's prison sentence. Ginny's father kidnapped her, and until he could get everything sorted out, he was in jail. Ginny's father fought to get her back.

When Ginny telephones her father, he comes to pick her up immediately. As Ginny confides to Robert over the phone, the two siblings feel a closeness that previously eluded them. When Ginny's father picks her up, she tells him that she met her mother. After a silence, Ginny's father exposes all of his secrets and fears.

Ginny returns to her kingdom by the sea. She views the land and seascape as an artist would. She views the scenery as the newly enlightened adult she has recently become. She still wonders if she is likable. Then, Glyn Williams appears and asks her to go horseback riding. Ginny accepts the invitation and then heads home. The porter at the train station, the news dealer, and Harry Lime all wave and say good morning to her.



Introductory Flashback and Chapter 1, The Visitor

Introductory Flashback and Chapter 1, The Visitor Summary

Sixteen-year-old Ginny Howard embarks upon a private investigation in the country of Wales and its surrounding territories, to discover the truth about her family ties and her true character. In an attempt to shelter Ginny from negative events ending in broken family relations, her father Tony Howard conceals much of his upbringing, her mother's circumstances and his daughter's true identity. Ginny feels the discovery of a convergence between her white paternal English roots and her black maternal Haitian roots will help her distinguish who she is as an artist and beyond.

In the introductory flashback, Ginny notices she is different through the eyes of the playground children, when they say, "Eeny, meeny, miney, Mo,' Catch a nigger by his toe ..." (p. 3). The kids nickname her Eeny Meeny. After Ginny tells her father that she wants to be like them, her father tells her she is just fine the way she is. The kids cease calling her Eeny Meeny.

In Chapter 1, The Visitor, sixteen-year-old Ginny arrives home to find her father talking to a woman named Wendy Stevens, from Social Services in Liverpool. Ginny is suspicious that Social Services may be investigating her father for child abuse. He is the only surviving parent who raises her after her Haitian mother dies when Ginny is only one week old. Ginny's father never remarries after the death of his wife, although he has many girlfriends, all of them white. It is difficult to find black people in the country of Wales, Ginny reasons.

Ginny considers her kingdom to be the land between the sea and the hills. She draws and paints the scenery, roams the land and holds the intimate details of the landscape deep in her heart.

Ginny sees her friend, Andy, the only other black person besides herself who is growing up looking black but feeling white in the town. Andy returns home from catering college after he drops out; his strict, elderly parents do not know he is back. On the dunes, Andy hides from gangster Joe Chicago, yet Ginny hardly believes Andy's tale. When Andy tells Ginny about a kitchen staff position open at the Yacht Club (Harbor Restaurant), she delightedly tells her father, who gives her his blessing.



Introductory Flashback and Chapter 1, The Visitor Analysis

In the introductory flashback, young Ginny has a challenging road ahead of her, as she tries to break free of racial stereotypes, gain a healthy amount of self-esteem and come of age while living in a geographical location and time period when the color of a person's skin seems to matter. This early memory foreshadows the many contrasts which appear in Ginny's life along her journey toward a convergence of her paternal white English and maternal black Haitian roots, to her ultimate destination of finding her place in the world. The black and white contrast of skin tone is the first major difference that Ginny needs to overcome during her journey to discover her true identity. In reality, she is both black and white. This early memory is also a foreshadowing of her father as protector in their relationship, for it is implicit that he is the one responsible for getting the kids to stop verbally abusing Ginny.

In Chapter 1, The Visitor, Ginny begins to come to terms with her differences from her father. While she loves him and wants to protect him, Wendy Stevens creates doubt in Ginny's mind regarding how well she knows her father. Ginny begins to realize a slow end to her innocence when it comes to the family ties she thinks she has and she realizes the power of her rare artistic gift, given to her by a mother she never knew. Ginny feels the urge to paint a more complete picture of the people in her life; she seeks the truth about her family and eventually herself.

The land halfway between the sea and the hills is a symbol of escape for Ginny. It is also a symbol of her rare artistic talent, as she paints and draws the scenery until she knows it better than she knows herself. Ginny says she has trouble painting people; it is too difficult to capture the nuances of shadow on people. The fact that she has no trouble portraying the land in her artwork makes sense, as the land does not discriminate; it does not lie to her. People discriminate and people lie.

On page 15, the sun descending in a blood-red sky is an ominous image which foreshadows danger for both Ginny and Andy. The gangster Joe Chicago is introduced here and Andy's fearful reaction further foreshadows danger. Ginny, who grows up sheltered from danger, is innocent and disbelieving in her reaction.

The French language, which Ginny masters, is a symbol of the mother Ginny never knows. It is also the only bridge Ginny has to her earthly mother. Ginny is born with the bridge to her mother broken, as her mother dies when she is a newborn.



Chapters 2, Rhiannon's Sister through Chapter 4, A Phone Call

Chapters 2, Rhiannon's Sister through Chapter 4, A Phone Call Summary

In Chapter 2, Rhiannon's Sister, Ginny and her best friend Rhiannon go to the beach on the first day of summer break from school. Rhiannon tells her that her estranged sister named Helen called to ask if Ginny's father had been imprisoned.

The conversation leaves Ginny in disbelief. First, Ginny cannot imagine an argument so hateful between parents and a daughter that the young woman is forced into estrangement. Second, Ginny cannot imagine what crime her father may have committed to initiate such rumors.

Ginny goes to work at the Yacht Club that Monday evening and finds she loves the job, the kitchen atmosphere and Harry and Angie Lime, the restaurant's owners. The conversation turns to Mr. and Mrs. Calvert, owners of the Dragon Café. Mr. Calvert hangs his own paintings up in his restaurant to sell them; this intrigues Harry Lime.

Andy gets fired from the Castle and begins work at the Yacht Club, to Ginny's delight. The next day, Ginny works for Mr. Calvert at the Dragon Café. After her shift, she takes off to visit Rhiannon's sister, Helen Meredith, to get more information regarding the prison rumors.

In Chapter 3, The Mobile Home, Ginny cannot wait for her father to leave the house on Sunday, so she can call Rhiannon to tell her about meeting her sister. When she does, Ginny senses that she has upset her best friend. The next day, at the Dragon Café, Ginny feels proud of herself when she exercises tact in dealing with her good friend. Ginny decides to let her friend go to meet her sister on her own.

On Wednesday, Ginny helps Andy with his mobile home on the beach. Andy and Stuart, driving a BMW, pull up with Andy's battered-looking trailer. They proceed to play a game with the motorists lining up behind them near the parking lot. After the long line of motorists get angry enough, Andy and his entourage solve their "problem" of how to maneuver the trailer successfully out of the traffic congestion.

Ginny feels shy sitting next to Stuart, a self-proclaimed playboy with shocking good looks and expensive clothes. Andy tells Ginny that Stuart lives in her favorite house—the one that looks like a boat on stilts near the Yacht Club. It is located within Ginny's kingdom; therefore, she makes a mental note to pay it a visit.

Stuart later reveals his occupation as an anthropologist as they sip coffee after settling the trailer into its new home. The conversation turns toward Haiti and Stuart talks about



learning voodoo magic there when he visited on business. Ginny immediately inquires about lessons from Stuart, to which he agrees. Ginny mentions that Stuart should work voodoo on the gangster Joe Chicago. Andy warns the duo to stay away from the dangerous man.

After Stuart leaves, Ginny and Andy talk about how they feel different from other people because of their skin color, their education as white children and their feelings that they do not belong anywhere. Andy seems to embrace his freedom; he is free to do anything he would like. No one has a hold on him. Ginny is not sure she agrees. They search for crabs on the beach, only to come up empty-handed.

Ginny's childhood flashback between Chapters 3 and 4 reveals pieces of the puzzle regarding her early talent as an artist, the boy who Ginny thought would die of a cat scratch, the little girl who kept withdrawing her hand from Ginny's when they walked across the street to the playground, and the other girls who would not tell Ginny their secret until she swore on her mother's deathbed.

Chapter 4, A Phone Call, reveals information that relieves Ginny's prior fear that the Social Services department is investigating her father for child abuse. Wendy Stevens telephones the Howard home and tells Ginny that she needs to visit her Dad again. The visit pertains to Mr. Howard but Wendy is not at liberty to disclose the details to Ginny. Mr. Howard must tell Ginny, if he so chooses.

After Ginny's shift at the Dragon, she anxiously heads home to see her father. He tells her that she has a white half-brother who is coming to live with them because his mother is dying of cancer.

Another flashback brings to mind the happiest day in Ginny's life. The sun shines brightly, the wind blows the white clouds and the white sheets and the sky is a vast blue in which Ginny can lose herself.

Chapters 2, Rhiannon's Sister through Chapter 4, A Phone Call Analysis

The prison rumor opens a disturbing door for Ginny; her curiosity propels her forward, through the door, in a search for validity to the story. The event foreshadows the unexpected journey upon which the young lady will embark regarding her family ties. In a sense, Ginny is imprisoned, unbeknownst to herself, by her father, who may have some dark secrets. Ginny is sheltered from these secrets.

Rhiannon's sister, Helen, is estranged after an argument with her parents; this is a broken bridge in familial relations. Ginny envies that Rhiannon has a nice sister like Helen. Both of the foregoing foreshadow the truth of a family life Ginny begins to uncover.



The black and white contrasts persist in Chapter 2. Ginny thinks she has a clear vision of her father, yet she is about to discover the many shades of gray in between her life as she knows it and the truth. Ginny slowly begins to uncover the shadows cast by people; the landscape casts shadows with which she is already familiar.

In Chapter 3, *The Mobile Home*, the title itself signifies a lack of roots. Andy seems to embrace this freedom of movement, this lack of roots because no one person or place can hold him down. While Ginny and Andy seek similarity in each other, a contrast stems from the way they decide to handle their feelings of differentness. Ginny eagerly wants to discover why and how her black (or white) art differs from other culture's art. She seeks to paint a complete and comfortable picture of her heritage.

Irony arises as Ginny aims to feel more comfortable with herself and her background, yet the challenges ahead can possibly make her even more uncomfortable. Nevertheless, Ginny's spirit seeks closure regarding that unknown element that plagues her.

Ginny's journey is one which seeks truth and clarity. As the couple seeks crabs on the beach, they come up empty-handed. This is a metaphor for their lives in the present tense; the answers to their complicated questions regarding their identities are simply out of reach in the current day.

The flashback between Chapters 3 and 4 sheds light upon events in which people either disappoint or hurt Ginny. These events encompass common childhood fears and leave an indelible mark upon Ginny's young mind; they prove to be either untrue, unkind, or both, later in life.

In Chapter 4, *A Phone Call*, Ginny is at once relieved to discover she will not be taken away from her father, and later left with a surreal feeling regarding the addition of a new family member coming to live with them.

The flashback after Chapter 4 takes Ginny's childhood back to a bright, sunny day with the wind blowing the white clouds and white sheets hung out to dry. It is a day marked by her feeling that she can fly. This feeling of lightness or flying is a symbol of happiness. The white of the clouds and sheets symbolize the pure innocence of a small child. The blue of the sky symbolizes a calm, relaxed and peaceful state of mind. Ginny's mind travels back to a time and place where she has her father to herself. Things are about to change.



Chapter 5, Gwynant and a Childhood Flashback

Chapter 5, Gwynant and a Childhood Flashback Summary

After their shifts at the Dragon Café, Ginny and Rhiannon head to the Gwynant valley on their bikes. When they reach a narrow bridge, they take a swim in the river to cool off. As they dry off and warm up in the sun, they talk about the discovery of a brother and sister. Rhiannon tells Ginny about her visit to see her sister. They talk about Rhiannon's brother-in-law and how Benny is jealous of Ginny's father; Benny's wife Helen is fond of Ginny's father. Rhiannon and her sister think that Benny told his wife about Ginny's father being in prison because of his jealousy and his desire to sabotage any feelings she might have for the other man. Rhiannon tells Ginny that the prison rumor really came from the gangster Joe Chicago, who told Benny he was imprisoned with Mr. Howard himself. Ginny blows this off as nonsense and loses herself in the blue sky as she watches an airplane flying by.

The girls get silly and giddy with each other before crossing the river to head back home. Ginny asks why the narrow, one-lane bridge is newer than the rest of the road. Rhiannon tells her, "It's the broken bridge. Pont Doredig" (p. 58). Ginny translates this into French, "... Le Pont Casse. ..." (p. 58). There was an accident a long time ago on the bridge involving a car but the girls do not know the details.

Ginny concludes that her new brother is a threat to her because he is her own age and he is invading her own home. On the other hand, Rhiannon's new sister, who lives twenty miles away, is married with a job and worldly wisdom, is a blessing.

The flashback that follows Chapter 5 brings memories of Ginny's grandparents whom she visited one time. The elderly couple was quiet and strict. Ginny and Robert, her new brother, share these same grandparents.

Chapter 5, Gwynant and a Childhood Flashback Analysis

After receiving the shocking news that she has a white half-brother who is coming to live with her and her father, Ginny and Rhiannon head to the great outdoors for escape and clarity of mind. The difference between the river near the Yacht Club and the part of the river near the bridge is great. In front of the Club, the river is wide, whereas under the bridge, it is very narrow. Ginny's journey takes her one step closer to the truth, in that Rhiannon discloses the bridge was broken and subsequently repaired. There is a symbolism here that is not yet apparent.



As Ginny seeks the truth regarding her family, the reader gets the chance to seek with her; no more information is divulged to the reader than what Ginny receives throughout the novel.

In the flashback, Ginny remembers her granddad's eyes; they never looked directly at her. They looked sideways, around her. Her white grandparents seemed to feel uncomfortable with her. She was never allowed to sit and read books on the floor. "... we don't have dirty little girls who sit on floors in this house ...," (p. 60). Here again, there is a meaning that is not quite yet apparent.



Chapter 6, The Ghost Train and a Childhood Flashback

Chapter 6, The Ghost Train and a Childhood Flashback Summary

Wendy Stevens telephones on Saturday with the news that Robert's mother died the previous night; Ginny's father heads to Liverpool. When Ginny asks her father if he loved Robert's mother, he brushes her aside, telling her has to move quickly. When Ginny asks why she never sees her grandparents, once again, he brushes her question aside.

Ginny meets with Rhiannon and feels quite ashamed when her friend expresses sympathy for poor Robert. Ginny realizes she had been too full of self-pity to sympathize with poor Robert. Yet, Ginny asks Rhiannon how her father could do something like this. " ... how could he have a child with one woman and then go off and marry another one and never mention the first one? All this time I thought I was the only child, and then suddenly, bang, there's another one ... how could he do it?" (p. 64). According to Rhiannon's theory, Ginny's father is sexy; sexy and kind are two traits that do not share space in the same human body.

Later that afternoon, Ginny goes to see Andy and is invited to the fair with him and Dafydd. At the fair, they run into Joe Chicago, who has words with Andy, and a punch in the shoulder, until Andy pulls money out of his pocket to hand to the gangster. Ginny and Dafydd hop on the Ghost Train ride, which they missed the first time they went around the ride circuit. The Ghost Train is Ginny's favorite ride.

During the ride, the machine loses power and the couple sits in the darkness. Ginny asks Dafydd if Andy is in trouble, if Joe Chicago was ever imprisoned and what happened at Pont Doredig. Dafydd tells her that a man and his infant child had a car accident on the snow-covered bridge ten or fifteen years ago. The man left the baby, wrapped in a heavy fur-lined jacket, in the car while he went for help. When the man returned, his jacket was gone and the baby was dead. Power is restored to the ride and the three friends head for home.

In Ginny's flashback, she vaguely remembers an eerie time when she is in a trailer and someone has been murdered in the woods. The rain is blood dripping. The hissing gaslight stove is so hot that Maeve tells Ginny another little girl touched it and her skin came off, so that her finger was only bone, like a skeleton.



Chapter 6, The Ghost Train and a Childhood Flashback Analysis

The Ghost Train ride acts as a metaphor for the skeletons in Ginny's closet, only one of which she currently realizes ... her half-brother Robert. When the train ride loses power, Dafydd recounts the story about the infant dying on the broken bridge. Ginny feels the foreshadowing of a connection to the infant who died in the car. "Deep inside her, something had been changed, and she knew that the story was part of her now, part of what made her what she was" (p. 72) .

The idea that sexy and kind cannot be two character traits in one person is another instance of the contrasts apparent in the novel. This notion reflects the way a youthful mind may work; it is commonly referred to as a black and white type of thinking. Either one thing happens or another happens. As Ginny grows into a young woman, she observes that life is much more complicated than this basic notion.

The Ghost Train ride and the story about the broken bridge bring Ginny's mind back to a vague memory in her childhood when someone is murdered in the woods near a trailer that she, a girl named Dawn, and a woman named Maeve share. The flashback represents a haunting childhood mystery and a correlation to the mysterious story about the broken bridge. Slowly, Ginny pieces together the puzzle of her existence.



Chapter 7, The White Cuckoo

Chapter 7, The White Cuckoo Summary

Ginny's father returns home from Liverpool alone and Ginny wants desperately to ask him a long list of questions. Her father is tired; Ginny does not ask. The next day, Ginny tries to make sense of her memories of the deliciously scary trailer. The horror surrounding the trailer evokes no real fear in Ginny because she knows it is only a story that she can enjoy. Her one visit with her paternal grandparents, on the other hand, is quite disturbing to her. Ginny laments having to share her father with this new half-brother; she also cries for her lack of empathy for poor Robert. She cannot understand how her father could do something like this.

She visits Stuart at her favorite house. They talk about her mother, painting, Haiti and voodoo. Stuart helps Ginny figure out that she cannot pretend to be a Haitian primitive artist; rather, Ginny needs to move forward in her life, using all of what she knows about her English and African ancestors. Stuart teaches Ginny about the Haitian gods. Ghede, or Baron Samedi, catches her attention, as he has two sides; one is the joker and the other is the lord of death. Stuart puts the idea of looking for some of her mother's paintings into Ginny's head.

Back at home, Ginny asks her father if he kept any of her mother's paintings. Her father tells her that the paintings must have gone back to Haiti. Ginny presses on until her father tells her the truth about his never being married to Maman. He was married to Janet, Robert's mother, when he met Anielle, Ginny's mother—the woman he truly loved and should have married in the first place. Ginny is so angry to find out that she is the illegitimate daughter that she runs away from the house.

Chapter 7, The White Cuckoo Analysis

Ginny's disturbing memories of her grandparents starkly contrast with her recall of the horror of the trailer. These details are extremely telling in Ginny's coming of age tale. An adult can distinguish between childhood fears and a thrilling story; an adult can also try to make sense of the reasons for her uncomfortable feelings with her relatives. The child Ginny uses her intuition to understand her world; the adult Ginny uses her mind to understand the mysteries of her newly unfolding world.

Stuart is a key character in Ginny's journey toward discovering herself. Ginny figures out, through her conversation with this young man, that she does not need to be English or African in her artwork. She needs to move forward and use all knowledge she possesses. Ginny still needs to find her own tradition; this is up to her.

A cuckoo is a European bird which lays its eggs in other birds' nests. The other birds hatch the eggs and raise the babies. Ginny considers Robert a white cuckoo, as the title of the chapter states. "She was being shoved aside by this invisible cuckoo, this white



son and heir of a proper marriage, while she was the result of something like an affair with a breakfast lady ..." (p. 86). Robert, this white cuckoo, leeches off of her father, according to Ginny.



Chapter 8, Robert and Childhood Flashback

Chapter 8, Robert and Childhood Flashback Summary

"Finding out something about yourself that other people have known and haven't told you makes you feel stupid, as if they were laughing at you for being so naïve" (p. 88). Ginny feels sorry for herself out on the dunes until it is time for her to go to work at the Yacht Club. After her shift at the restaurant, she returns home to tension in the air between her father and herself.

Saying nothing, she goes outside to sketch the road. Ginny thinks that working is the best thing for her right now. "Even better than knowing who you were was knowing what you had to do" (p. 90). Ginny's mind is taken back to thoughts of her mother; she wonders if her mother ever felt the same way about her work. Ginny wants to find her mother's paintings so she can work on a solution to her problem of discovering a tradition for herself.

Ginny and her father come to a partial truce so that anger will not fill the air when Robert arrives. His arrival is delayed another day; Wendy Stevens will bring him down the following day. Ginny's imagination runs the length of the spectrum regarding her new brother. Her best friend Rhiannon holds very romantic ideas about this long-lost brother and how Ginny is a child of passion, not one of duty.

Thursday, Robert is to arrive. Ginny and Rhiannon set up the table for tea. Ginny fills Rhiannon in on the broken bridge story relayed to her by Dafydd. The two girls plan to visit Rhiannon's sister Helen again to ask what she knows about the reason Joe Chicago did prison time. Was it because he stole the jacket that cradled the infant in the car on the bridge in the midst of a snow storm?

Robert finally arrives and there is a mutual kind of hatred between the siblings. Ginny takes a walk with Wendy Stevens and vents her frustrations. Ginny feels pushed away from her father, his legitimate son and her former family. She now wants to get closer to her mother and her paintings. Ginny feels as if she has nothing left, except her mother.

In her childhood flashback, Ginny remembers going camping with her father. She remembers going to a black tie affair and feeling like a queen, instead of her father's daughter. He is the king and she is the queen.

Chapter 8, Robert and Childhood Flashback Analysis

Ginny still feels as if she does not know who she is and she is not sure how to act around Robert. Wendy tells her to be herself, to be an artist. Ginny asks Wendy how she can find out if she is adopted and how she can find her mother.



She also asks Wendy what she thinks about her early childhood memories without her father. Wendy validates that it makes sense to think that Ginny's father may have been in prison because this explains the length of time he is not in her childhood memories. The broken bridge is in the process of being rebuilt in Ginny's mind. Pieces are coming together, slowly but surely.

In the flashback, Ginny remembers happy times with her father. She remembers the happy times when she is the only child of her father. The two of them travel a lot. The black tie affair resembles the fairy tales of her childhood; these fairy tales are beginning to end. Ginny is coming of age; she enters adulthood as the reality of her life opens up before her. Childhood fairy tales take on a more realistic meaning in this coming of age tale by Philip Pullman.



Chapter 9, The Barbecue

Chapter 9, The Barbecue Summary

Ginny speaks with Robert about his mother because this is the only topic she can think of. Robert gets angry and stalks off. Ginny then visits her pals Andy and Dafydd to relay what has happened between her and her brother and to tell them about her suspicions regarding Joe Chicago stealing the fur-lined jacket.

On her walk to the Yacht Club, Ginny runs into a boy named Glyn Williams; he invites her to the barbecue on the beach. Ginny does not know Glyn very well but she has nothing against him. Glyn's father runs the greengrocer and writes poetry on the side.

Ginny works her shift at the Yacht Club and heads home to shower up and get ready for the beach barbecue. She and Robert head off together; their father seems pleased. Brother and sister walk past the ancient church called Saint Cynog and the graves there. Rhiannon greets them as they reach the edge of the barbecue.

Ginny drinks and listens to Andy's fictional stories. A drunken Ginny dances with her friend Andy with whom she thinks she is falling in love. Robert asks Ginny who the gay pair are. Ginny is baffled until she realizes Robert is talking about Andy and Dafydd; she remembers all the comments, looks and jokes made in the past and it all makes sense. Everyone knows except for Ginny, once again. She runs to the dunes and cries and cries. She goes to Saint Cynog's and draws the vevers sign for the goddess of love, Erzulie. Ginny identifies with the dark side here; she thinks she may not see things in broad daylight, yet she can see things in the dark.

She finds Robert waiting for her and they walk back home together. Before Ginny falls asleep, her last thought is of Joe Chicago and how she is getting closer to solving her mysteries.

Chapter 9, The Barbecue Analysis

Robert is a person in Ginny's life who is very confusing to her. She makes an attempt to speak with her brother; however, it ends badly. Ginny is learning by trial and error. She will make many mistakes and she will learn from those same mistakes, as most people do on their life's journey.

When Ginny meets Glyn on her walk, she feels terribly embarrassed because she thinks less of shop assistants or shopkeepers than she does artists. She is growing up and observing how complex life can be. She sees the shadows in between the black and white thought processes.

Ginny is delighted at Andy's fictional tales; she knows they are not true and this does not bother her. The fictional tale of her life with her father to this point is a different story,



for his lies have a serious effect upon her. On the surface, this appears ironic because both males are lying; however, Ginny is coming of age and learning the nuances of life.

Young Ginny is kept in the dark, or sheltered, for most of her life. Her father keeps her in the dark until now. On the other side of the spectrum, Andy does not necessarily keep her in the dark for personal purposes. It is Ginny's own innocence and naivete that keeps her in the dark regarding Andy. Ginny learns this lesson the hard way.

Ginny feels the darkness and thinks she thrives better in such an atmosphere. Her young intuition seems to know that she is kept in the dark; yet, she also identifies the dark side with her mother. She exaggerates the need to find her mother's paintings, as a person her age might do. Ginny embraces the darkness, meaning that she will seek that part of her that belongs to her mother. She welcomes her new endeavor with much fervor.



Chapter 10, The Only Thing to Do

Chapter 10, The Only Thing to Do Summary

On Sunday, Ginny boards the train to Porthafon to visit Rhiannon's sister Helen. Ginny tells her that her father told her about his not being married to her mother; instead, he was married to Janet, Robert's mother. Helen knows this information and Ginny becomes a bit angry. Ginny asks Helen if she is having an affair with her father. Just then, Helen's husband Benny comes into the room. Ginny excuses herself and Helen says she will go with her. They go to Davy Jones's Locker, a café.

Ginny tells Helen the story behind the broken bridge and she connects Joe Chicago with the stolen jacket. Since Benny knows Joe Chicago, Ginny asks Helen if she can help her talk to the gangster. Ginny wants to get him to leave Andy alone and she wants to find out about her father. In Ginny's mind, she will call upon the voodoo god Baron Samedi to help her with the dangerous man. Helen agrees to help her.

The next afternoon, Ginny meets with Rhiannon on the beach to discuss the incident with Andy. Stuart is outside and the girls visit him. Stuart gives Rhiannon an art magazine entitled *Modern Painters*. Inside the magazine, Ginny finds an advertisement for an exhibition called "Les Mysteres: Haitian Painting of the Past Twenty Years." One of the painters is Anielle Baptiste. Ginny gleefully works on her story picture of *The Broken Bridge*.

Chapter 10, The Only Thing to Do Analysis

"'Have some carrot cake,' said Helen. 'Help you see in the dark'" (p. 126). "Ginny decided that she liked her a lot" (p. 126). The language and dialogue mimic the coincidences and relationship interactions in real life. Ginny feels a positive connection with Helen because of Helen's apparent vision into Ginny's world. Helen understands and validates Ginny's mission to find out more about her real family.

Ginny also witnesses the similarities and differences between Helen and her sister Rhiannon. This opens up the world of siblings for Ginny.

Ginny begins work on her picture story of *The Broken Bridge*. By painting this picture, Ginny works to paint a clear picture of her family and herself. This act of painting is parallel to the detective work she does to solve her family mysteries.



Chapter 11, Baron Samedi

Chapter 11, Baron Samedi Summary

Ginny is on a three-pronged mission. First, she wants to finish painting The Broken Bridge. Second, she wants to see her mother's paintings and keep them a secret. Third, she wants to find out the truth from Joe Chicago.

Helen calls with the message that Joe is coming over this evening and Ginny hops on the train headed for Porthafon. She makes arrangements for Dafydd to pick her up later that night. At Helen's house, Ginny waits in an upstairs bedroom for Joe Chicago to come up and use the bathroom. In the room, Helen confides to Ginny that Benny does not treat her very well; Helen cries passionately, yet quietly. Ginny is reminded of the goddess Erzulie and she wants to paint the scene.

Joe Chicago comes up the stairs, uses the lavatory and Ginny opens the bedroom door. When Joe enters the bedroom, the ghost of Baron Samedi makes his presence known, asking for the return of the jacket to the dead baby girl. Joe throws the jacket down at Ginny's feet in a panic. Ginny quietly leaves and meets Dafydd in the parking lot. They drive home.

Chapter 11, Baron Samedi Analysis

Ginny thinks art is a disease because she only thinks how she will paint the picture of Helen passionately crying, like Erzulie; she does not feel for Helen's unhappiness. In a grown-up fashion, Ginny contemplates the unfairness and selfishness of this phenomenon. Ginny is on her way to finding herself, for it is through these thought processes that she will come of age and find comfort in herself.

Irony arises when Baron Samedi temporarily possesses Ginny's mind, body and soul. The god takes away Ginny's personality momentarily, at a time when she strives to find out more about her personality and who she is.



Chapter 12, A Journey

Chapter 12, A Journey Summary

Ginny analyzes and draws the jacket from every angle. The greatest source of confusion for her is her Freudian slip. What does it mean? Is the jacket a symbol of her mother if she is the baby? Ginny does not know what to do with the jacket and she does not understand what Baron Samedi wants with it.

Later in the day, Ginny bickers with Robert. Ginny thinks Robert rude for rolling his eyes at their father's suggestion they go boating. "As soon as Dad had left, she turned on Robert like a tiger" (p. 147). She admonishes Robert because their Dad is only thinking of his son when he invites them for activities. The two argue vehemently, saying hateful things to one another. Ginny broods the remainder of the day.

The next day, Wendy Stevens calls to tell Ginny that she was fostered out about twelve to fourteen years ago. Mrs. Maeve Sullivan was the foster mother in a wooded place called Staunton Chase where a murder investigation occurred fifteen years ago. Ginny cannot bring herself to ask her father about her fostering; instead, she runs to get Robert. They take a trip to Chester to visit their grandparents.

Chapter 12, A Journey Analysis

The jacket, which is meant to bring some kind of closure to Ginny's issues, has a reverse, ironic effect. The jacket now becomes the source of more questions than answers for the teenager.

Further irony arises when Ginny picks a fight with her brother. Ginny tells herself she does not care about Robert, yet she invests so much emotion into an argument that the truth finally comes out. She cares; Robert cares. By fighting, they inadvertently begin a new relationship. They air the issues that bother them and this communication opens the door to new opportunities.

When Ginny gets the news of her past fostering, she decides to take Robert with her to Chester to ask their grandparents the details of their backgrounds. The journey is a metaphor for all that the siblings have in common.

"And, briefly, a flicker of understanding passed between them, and what they understood was that this journey was a time out of battle, a time of truce" (p. 156). The nonverbal communication between the siblings is more powerful than the heated words of the battle begun the day before. They are both now adult enough to place their differences aside and get on with the task at hand.



Chapter 13, Golden Years

Chapter 13, Golden Years Summary

Their grandmother opens the door. No one seems to know how to act but eventually the siblings are invited in. Ginny and Robert discover the details behind their backgrounds from both of their paternal grandparents. Robert finds out that his maternal grandparents are the best of friends with Dorothy and Ken Howard, his paternal grandparents. Through this relationship, the children—Janet and Tony—meet and marry.

When Tony, Ginny and Robert's father, asks his wife Janet if she will adopt his other child born out of wedlock, Janet adamantly refuses. She then leaves her husband Tony, never to look back again. Ginny's mother, according to Grandma, is a black whore who uses her sexual powers to steal another woman's husband and get pregnant so that she can end her cycle of poverty. Ginny is so upset by the news that she leaves her grandparents house without waiting for Robert.

Ginny has a question in her mind that her mother may still be alive. She telephones the art gallery. The owner of the L'Ouverture Gallery, Paul Chalmers, invites Ginny to a private viewing that evening, before the formal opening of the show the following day. Ginny discovers that her mother may make an appearance at the private showing.

Chapter 13, Golden Years Analysis

Ginny finds out a devastating version of the truth about who she is from her father's grandparents. Ginny's coming of age journey is set in motion, propelled forward, and she simply cannot stop her search for the truth at the end of this chapter. Emotions move her forward. Ginny thinks like an adult, in that she is continuing to get all sides to the story. Unlike the child she used to be, she does not accept that which is told to her, on the surface.

It is ironic that the elderly Howards consider their golden years to be the time period of their friendship with the Weavers. The Golden Years are typically associated with the age of retirement. Here, retirement means complacency, obsessive cleanliness, solitude, and quiet. The actions of their child Tony seem to have been the impetus for such widespread unhappiness.



Chapter 14, The Death of Colonel Paul

Chapter 14, The Death of Colonel Paul Summary

Ginny arrives at the art gallery and meets Mr. Chalmers, who is black like herself. Ginny feels inwardly embarrassed because the white part of her assumed he was a white Scotsman when she spoke to him on the phone. She helps him prepare for the private viewing.

Ginny views her mother's paintings in the large room. She thinks the Death of Colonel Paul is brilliant, as are the others hanging on the wall. There is even a picture of a broken bridge, of which Ginny takes note. When Anielle Baptiste arrives at the gallery, Ginny shows her the only picture she has of her mother. When Ginny asks her if she is her mother, Anielle denies any involvement. She simply says that she is an artist; she is not a mother.

Chapter 14, The Death of Colonel Paul Analysis

Ginny lies to Mr. Chalmers about being a student who wants to see Anielle Baptiste's work. Irony rears its head again as Ginny tells her own lies. Once, Ginny marked her father and his whole family as liars. Now, she finds her own reasons to fib.

Anielle Baptiste's reaction to Ginny as a daughter is the most telling event of all. Ginny discovers the truth about her mother. Anielle is a strong, powerful woman who identifies herself as an artist. Anielle never desires motherhood, and so the events of Ginny's life take their respective places.

In the end, Ginny comes of age. She is neither her mother's daughter nor her father's child. She is her own person; she makes her own decisions and creates her own heritage. What is once so important to Ginny, discovering who she is, can now rest comfortably in the background of her life. The background can stay right there, in the background.

The Death of Colonel Paul is a symbol of human suffering, injustice and greed. Ginny deals with all of these issues throughout her short life. The difference between her childhood and now is that she can sort the feelings out on a more mature level.



Chapter 15, Arrangement in Pink and Yellow

Chapter 15, Arrangement in Pink and Yellow Summary

After wandering around all night, Ginny thinks she is finally able to see things clearly. She decides to return the jacket to Joe Chicago and apologize for her behavior. When Ginny gets to his house, she sees his elderly, senile mother. She sees Joe Chicago, the feared gangster, gently taking care of his mother, who is dressed in a pink, stained nightgown and yellow Garfield slippers. Ginny is touched by Joe's behavior.

Joe tells Ginny that her father was in prison for kidnapping her. The legal system originally charged him with kidnapping and his fellow prisoners thought he was a child molester. In reality, Tony fought until the truth came out about his taking back his own daughter.

Ginny calls her father, who immediately leaves the house to go pick her up. Ginny relays the whole story about where she has been, what she has been doing and what she has been thinking. The conversation brings the siblings closer on a new level. Ginny tells Robert that she met her mother and she is really not a mother after all. She is a brilliant artist. Ginny now knows how she should paint after seeing her mother's paintings.

Chapter 15, Arrangement in Pink and Yellow Analysis

Returning Joe Chicago's jacket to him is symbolic of Ginny's growth throughout the novel. While the jacket and the baby in the broken bridge story resemble the foreshadowing of real-life events that occur in Ginny's young life, the events are not what Ginny may have guessed. Ginny realizes that she is wrong for taking the jacket and she acts like more of an adult when she returns the coat and admits her wrongdoing. She also apologizes.

Ginny desires to paint Joe Chicago's mother, just as Whistler did his mother. Ginny's arrangement in pink and yellow would tell a much different story, however. Here are the contrasts of dangerous man on the outside and tender man on the inside.

The color pink symbolizes childlike innocence. The nightgown that Joe's mother wears represents how a woman regresses as she ages; Joe takes care of his mother like he would a child because she can no longer take care of herself. Pink can also symbolize health and life. There is irony found in the elderly woman wearing pink. She is not in good health and she is closer to death than to life. As Ginny sees pink, her life is just beginning and she is gaining healthy closure on the issues that once plagued her.



The color yellow is a symbol of two contrasting meanings. The yellow Garfield slippers represent the illness that the old woman suffers. For Ginny, the yellow may represent the joy that she finds in herself when she stops searching for who she is and starts being who she is. Ginny is an artist; Ginny now knows how to paint, after seeing her mother's paintings and thinking about everything clearly, and she knows which direction to take in her life.

It is important to note that Ginny no longer thinks in the black and white fashion of her childhood. Ginny now sees color and the many shades and nuances of each color in everyday life. In her artwork and in her daily interaction with people, including her brother Robert, the shadows are clearly visible to her.



Chapter 16, Golden Years, Part Two

Chapter 16, Golden Years, Part Two Summary

Ginny and her father greet each other as she gets in his car. When Ginny tells her father that she met her mother the night before, he is silent. Her father pulls the car over and he tells her the stories of his childhood. The abuse he suffers at the hands of his mother Dorothy and how his father Ken plays the enabler in the relationship shows Ginny that her father's fear kept him from telling her about her relatives and her background. Her father verifies that fear was his prevailing motivation.

Chapter 16, Golden Years, Part Two Analysis

It is ironic that what the elderly Howards think are their golden years, their son Tony think are the years of fear. Part Two of this title is Tony's version of what happened when he was growing up with Ken and Dorothy Howard. Ginny learns the reasons why her father keeps the secrets of his tangled life away from her. The adult Ginny is understanding and kind; she cannot feel anger toward her father—he was trying to protect her innocence. He tries to keep her innocent of such an evil, tangled web.

Ginny sees that her father is so unlike his parents. He has broken the cycle of abuse. Tony Howard's idea of love toward his daughter is a gentle one. As is the case in the beginning of the novel, when Tony stops the verbal abuse by the schoolyard children chanting "Eeny, meeny, miney, 'Mo, Catch a Nigger by the toe," Ginny's father is her one protector and supporter.



Chapter 17, The Morning Train

Chapter 17, The Morning Train Summary

Ginny is excited to visit the beach again, her kingdom by the sea. She likens the look of her kingdom on this day to the beaches painted by Salvador Dali. She uses her imagination to visualize the calm sea extending all the way to Haiti. She realizes the gods of voodoo are real, even if they are sometimes wrong about things. Ginny reflects on her own character. Is she likable? Is she sexy, as in sex? She reflects on her connection to her mother, brother and father.

Glyn Williams appears on the beach and asks Ginny if she would like to go horseback riding. Ginny feels shy, wondering if he is asking her on a date. She asks him if he sails. She will take him sailing in exchange for the horseback riding lessons. They share kiwi fruit, see the morning train pulling into the station, and Glyn, realizing the time, excuses himself. He asks her to meet him at the stables at two o'clock that afternoon. Ginny is delighted.

She mentally plans all the things that she needs to do. From wondering whether she and her father and Robert are strong enough to rekindle the broken relations with the elderly Howards, to speaking to Stuart about her mother's paintings, Ginny realizes that *The Death of Colonel Paul* painting "... was the way a person could paint and be faithful to everything she knew, to Europe and to Africa, to academic discipline and to voodoo" (p. 218).

Ginny heads home, waving to the porter at the station, the news dealer, and Harry Lime, whose voices ring in a chorus of good mornings.

Chapter 17, The Morning Train Analysis

In the end, Ginny finds closure on the burning family issues that once plague her. As she stares out to a calm sea, there is calmness in her, her thoughts and her imagination, which stretches all the way to Haiti.

Ginny concludes that, "If her mother's absence all these years had made it possible for her to show Ginny that [how to paint and include everything she knew], then it had been worth it, ..." (p. 218). Ginny has found herself. She is an artist. She is an artist whose imagination is strong enough to think that all things are possible. She finds a comfortable place in herself amongst all the contrasting information, emotions, and behaviors of people and activities in the world. She finds her own personal truth.

The plethora of good morning greetings from neighbors represent the fact that Ginny is indeed likeable. A new day begins; a new adult is born with a new life.



Characters

Ginny Howard

Ginny is the sixteen-year-old main character of this coming of age novel set in the country of Wales and its surrounding territories. She is born of mixed race, her father English and her mother Haitian, and she strives to calm the uneasiness she feels regarding her lack of a tradition or heritage all her own. When clues that her father may not be who he says he is are unveiled, Ginny is motivated to open up her own private investigation into the truth.

Ginny begins her journey with a strong sense of self-esteem and confidence partially attained by her loving protective father and her realization of an artistic talent that is quite rare. Ginny's relationship with her half-brother completes her in a sense; she takes to heart his harsh criticisms of her arrogant personality. She is motivated to come to terms with some of her own character flaws, which she never really knew she possessed until Robert shed light upon them.

As more of her father's lies are exposed, Ginny grows stronger. She suffers on a psychological level and she learns to deal with the newly discovered injustices of her father's past actions in a mature manner. Ginny also learns that she makes mistakes, just as her mother does in her painting, *The Death of Colonel Paul*. In the artwork, her mother paints the vever of Erzulie on the wall. In reality, the signs of the Haitian gods and goddesses are drawn on the ground.

After seeing her mother's paintings, Ginny now understands how she is supposed to paint. *The Death of Colonel Paul* is symbolic of the human experiences of suffering, injustice and greed. Ginny has experienced first-hand the pain and suffering and certain injustices in life. However, she comes away from all of them relatively unscathed; Ginny grows into a young woman with a mature outlook and once she learns how to paint the clear truthful picture of her family history, she is free. She becomes free to paint in a manner that is true to her own identity.

Tony Howard

Throughout the novel, Tony Howard is referred to as Ginny's father or Dad. In Chapter 13, *The Golden Years*, Tony Howard is referred to as Tony by his parents. The author does this to stay true to the many roles the character plays in his novel life and to show how Ginny's train of thought regarding her father progresses. She sees him as father in the beginning; she sees him as a human being who is closer to her level of thinking in the end.

Ginny's father shelters and protects his daughter from having to suffer the same abuses that he suffered growing up. He is abused as a child and wants to protect his daughter Ginny from all types of abuse, verbal and physical. Ginny's father is motivated by his



deep-seated fear and lack of confidence in himself when he covers up the former events of his life. He realizes he makes a mistake by not telling Ginny about his lie that her mother is dead. He lives in fear all of his life, first fearing his mother, then his wife, then he fears that Ginny will find out about her abusive grandparents. Finally, he fears Ginny will find out the truth before he has the chance to tell her himself. He attempts to protect Ginny with lies. In the end of the novel, his fear disappears when he is able to tell Ginny the truth about the who, what, when, where, why and how of both of their backgrounds.

Wendy Stevens

Wendy Stevens works for Social Services in Liverpool. She is at first seen by Ginny as a threat. As the truth about Ginny's family is revealed, Wendy becomes a confidant and a good female role model for Ginny. Wendy helps Ginny get used to her new half-brother and she is also instrumental in verifying that Ginny is fostered out to Maeve Sullivan during the time Tony Howard is in prison. Wendy acts as a friend and mother figure to Ginny.

Helen Meredith

Helen Meredith is Ginny's best friend Rhiannon's estranged sister who lives in Porthafon. She has a job, worldly knowledge and lives far enough away so as not to be a threat to Rhiannon. This is unlike Ginny's half-brother Robert who invades Ginny's territory when he moves in with her and her father. Helen is like an older sister to Ginny; Ginny runs to Helen first for clarification of the prison rumors, then to her for help in getting the truth out of Joe Chicago. Helen is fond of Ginny and vice versa.

Andy Evans

Andy Evans is the only other black in the town of Llangynog besides Ginny. The friends find similarities and comfort in one another, although they still have different ideas regarding how to deal with their feelings that they do not belong. Ginny and Andy identify with each other in that they are the only black adolescents growing up in a white town. Ginny thinks she is falling in love with Andy until she finds out he is gay.

Rhiannon Calvert

Rhiannon is Ginny's best girlfriend. Ginny confides in Rhiannon on many occasions, to get her friend's opinion. Rhiannon introduces Ginny to the basic story behind the broken bridge, which defines Ginny's mission for herself more narrowly. Ginny's friendship with Rhiannon is one of acceptance and genuine affection.



Joe Chicago

Joe Chicago is the dangerous man who, rumor has it, is someone to stay away from. Ginny discovers the truth behind Joe Chicago; indeed, he is the very epitome of art. Looks can be deceiving with Joe. On the outside, he is feared by many; on the inside, he is a gentle, tender man caring for his elderly, senile mother.

Anielle Baptiste

Anielle is Ginny's black Haitian mother. She is an artist and only an artist. Anielle realizes early on that she is not mother material and she leaves Ginny in the Catholic home after she is born. Anielle actually teaches Ginny the greatest lesson in all her young life: she teaches Ginny how to paint the human experience versus how to paint in a black or white manner. Anielle also teaches Ginny that even adults make mistakes.

Dafydd

Dafydd is Andy Evans's gay roommate and partner. Dafydd is also very well liked by Ginny. In fact, the comic books he lets her read when they are children show her how to draw in some respects. Dafydd also reveals a more complete version of the story behind the broken bridge.

Robert

Robert is Ginny's white half-brother, born to Janet, the woman to whom Ginny's father is married. Robert helps Ginny work on some of her character flaws, those he perceives.

Ken and Dorothy Howard

These are Ginny and Robert's paternal grandparents, who live in Chester, near Liverpool. Dorothy Howard is mentally ill and Ken Howard acts as the enabler when his wife abuses their only son Tony. These are Tony's parents, yet he has broken his ties with them. Tony never becomes like his parents in life.

Arthur and Kitty Weaver

Arthur and Kitty Weaver are Robert's maternal grandparents, Janet's mother and father. Kitty is superficial and greedy; she and Arthur are the best of friends with Tony's parents while Tony and Janet are growing up. After Tony gets Anielle pregnant, the relationships crumble.



Mr. and Mrs. Calvert

These are Rhiannon's parents and the owners of the Dragon Café.

Harry and Angie Lime

This couple owns the Yacht Club (Harbor Restaurant).

Benny Meredith

This is Helen's jealous and abusive husband.

Peter

This is the kind teenager who dates Rhiannon.

Glyn Williams

This is Ginny's potential love interest at the end of the novel. He invites Ginny horseback riding and she invites him sailing. He helps Ginny realize that she is indeed likable, in a sexy kind of way.



Objects/Places

Land halfway between the sea and hills

Ginny considers this land her kingdom, her escape, her sanctuary. She has not only roamed its length and width, she has drawn and painted its beauty. Everyone who enters her kingdom becomes one of her subjects. She may draw or paint them any way she likes. The land symbolizes freedom.

The Broken Bridge

The Broken Bridge is not only the title of the novel; it is a symbol for broken family ties. The story behind the broken bridge symbolizes much more to Ginny. Ginny believes she is the baby who dies in the car; this symbolizes the loss of her innocence. She believes the jacket is her mother; Anielle is stolen from her shortly after birth. Joe Chicago, Ginny thinks, is the epitome of art; outer appearances do not always reflect what is on the inside, and further, what one person sees and thinks may be completely different than what another may see and think.

Joe Chicago's jacket

Ginny believes the jacket is a symbol of her mother; Anielle is stolen from her shortly after birth.

The mobile home

This represents a lack of roots. Ginny feels as if she does not truly know who she is; she is not grounded in any one culture.

Llangynog

This is the city in Wales where Ginny lives with her father.

Saint Cynog

This is the ancient church and graveyard on the beach. Ginny draws the sign of Erzulie, the Haitian goddess of love, here.

Chester

This is the hometown of Ginny's paternal grandparents, Ken and Dorothy Howard.



Wales

This is the country in which Ginny and her father live.

Haiti

This is the country from which Ginny's mother, Anielle Baptiste, hails.

Liverpool

This is the hometown of Robert and his deceased mother Janet.

L'Ouverture Gallery

Ginny meets her mother in this art gallery; her mother rejects any involvement in motherhood.

The Death of Colonel Paul

This is the famous painting by Ginny's mother, Anielle Baptiste. It symbolizes the human experiences of suffering, justice and greed. It is the bridge that Ginny needs to cross in order to understand how she can now paint with everything she knows about her heritage.

Porthafon

This is the hometown of Rhiannon's estranged sister Helen and her husband Benny Meredith.

Staunton Chase

This is the location where Ginny is a foster child with Mrs. Maeve Sullivan.



Themes

Coming of Age

Ginny begins her journey with less mature thought processes, a black and white type of thinking, a proud yet arrogant sense of herself and her talents, and the uneasy feeling that she does not know where she fits into the world. When her life with her father suddenly becomes something other than what she thought it was for the past sixteen years, she races to find out the truth. As she flashes back to telling moments in her childhood, she strives to fit the pieces of the puzzle of her life together. She learns how to take the small pieces and put them together to form a coherent whole of who she is as a young adult.

Ginny suffers much pain, anguish and confusion as she travels on her journey from childhood to young adulthood. When she is finally able to meet her mother, and when her father confesses the truth, Ginny acquires a sense of overall peace. After she sees her mother's paintings, Ginny is no longer confused over the manner in which she should paint. She can now take everything that she knows about who she is—half white English and half black Haitian—and inject them into her artwork. Ginny comes to the realization that it is the human experience that she will portray in her art, not one race or the other. In the end, Ginny abolishes any distinction between race and color of skin; she sees that human beings are vulnerable, strong, passionate and likable. Ginny learns that she is likable; she even likes herself.

Similarities and Contrasts

Ginny opens her eyes, ears and mind to the world around her. When she does, she observes a multitude of contrasts and differences in people: the way they think, the way they speak, the way they act and the way they look. In the beginning, the black and white of skin color is the first difference she notices, with the help of the school playground children. As a young child, Ginny craves to be like the white children who represent her father. Later in the novel, Ginny desires to be like her black mother because she feels pushed away from her white family. In the end, she realizes it is not black and white that matter, it is the person she becomes on her own terms. Toward the end of the novel, Ginny sees that her father is entirely different from his own parents; this works to solidify her new findings that family ties are not one hundred percent indicative of a child's true identity. Her old way of thinking is too simple. At the end of her journey, she becomes the person she is meant to be; she has broken the family "ties" that do not work for her as an individual.

Other contrasts apparent in the novel include: Rhiannon's theory of kind and sexy, Joe Chicago's inner and outer personas, her father's life as he originally describes it and the many clues pointing in another direction, and so many more.



For all of the contrasts abundant in the story, there are as many similarities between people, places and events. Ginny realizes that just because she is the child of a mother and father, she does not necessarily have to be like them; however, some similarities are bound to exist. Ginny has a certain amount of choice in whose similarities she adopts. Some similarities, like the artistic talent inherited from her mother, are innate. Others are chosen. When Ginny's half-brother Robert opens up about his sister's flaws, Ginny takes this to heart. Ginny chooses to be more similar to her father, in that he is kinder and gentler.

Other similarities in the novel include: Rhiannon and Helen's resemblances to one another; the parallel between art and the human experience; the connections of family members one to another; and many others.

The one constant in life is that there will always exist these similarities and differences. The way to think about them is not in an either, or manner; Ginny finds the way to ponder them is through her art.

Family Ties

Family is especially important in life and in the novel. In the beginning, Ginny thinks that family is the most important thing; she especially wants the truth about her family because she thinks that truth will reveal her proper identity. She later discovers that she has some say in who she becomes. She later discovers that her rich imagination, intelligence and kind heart may be strong enough to mend the broken family ties between her father and his parents. Ginny discovers that she may never be able to mend the broken bridge between her mother and herself; this does not become a problem for her in life because to Ginny, the artist, her mother shows her how to paint and be true to herself.

It is interesting to note that Ginny's mother says to her that art is not the most important thing; rather, it will have to do until they figure out what is. Ginny seems to know the most important thing: family. Ginny's mother, even though she is an adult, does not know the most important thing, as seen in her snubbing her daughter. Regardless of one's age, people make mistakes and do not always know how to rectify the ill effects of their mistakes. Ginny sees this phenomenon and chooses to become more of a problem solver; she desires to rebuild and traverse those broken bridges in her families past. Family ties can be complex, just as life is more complicated than the basic simple notions of childhood.



Style

Point of View

The Broken Bridge by Philip Pullman is written in a third person limited narrative subjective mode. What does this mean? The third person is a narrator who tells Ginny's story; he knows all of Ginny's thoughts and feelings. The point of view is limited in that the narrator only discloses one character's feelings and thoughts, those of Ginny. Subjective narration means that thoughts and feelings are known and disclosed as the story unfolds. This is different from an omniscient point of view, whereby the narrator has knowledge of time, people, places and events, but no feelings and thoughts. This point of view is a common one used in novels of this type; it is significant because Ginny's character grows psychologically. Through the point of view, the reader is better able to understand Ginny's emotional journey toward adulthood.

In this particular novel, Ginny is on a mysterious journey. Each clue that Ginny finds is analyzed by her mind and the narrator does not disclose any additional thoughts and feelings other than what is directly apparent as the mystery unfurls. This keeps the reader in as much suspense as the main character; in essence, the reader works to solve Ginny's mystery in the same time and place as Ginny. The narrator is not a character in the story; he is simply relaying discoveries, information, thoughts and feelings. The reader is, in essence, traveling the coming of age journey with Ginny.

Setting

Ginny's coming of age tale is set mainly in the country of Wales, the city of Llangynog. The setting is one where the majority of inhabitants are white. Within the setting, Ginny feels uneasy with herself and those people surrounding her. Ginny is of mixed race, half white and half black, and this juxtaposition poses problems for Ginny regarding her true identity. Ginny's main priority seems to be how to understand the manner in which she should paint. She desires the truth in herself before she can feel comfortable painting. Painting means everything to Ginny.

Outside of Ginny's home, the reader finds Ginny's kingdom, her escape from the inconsistencies that trouble her. The land between the sea and hills is Ginny's kingdom because she knows the landscape better than she does herself. Any people who enter her sanctuary become her subjects and she has control over the way in which she paints them. This setting feeds Ginny's sense of confidence and self-esteem.

Ginny travels to the cities of Porthafon, Helen's hometown; Chester, her paternal grandparents' hometown; and Liverpool, the location of L'Ouverture Gallery. Ginny and Rhiannon also travel to the Gwynant Valley where the broken bridge is located. Her travels through the various settings parallel her coming of age journey. Each place



represents a different meaning to Ginny and her story; each place is a source for more clues to who Ginny becomes.

Language and Meaning

Since Wales is a country within the United Kingdom—it is located between to England and the Atlantic Ocean and Irish Sea on the other—a British accent and manner of speech is apparent in the dialogue of the novel. The author uses British slang, such as the words "bloody," and "duw annwyl" in the teenagers' conversations. When reading the book, there is an British accent to the words the characters speak; the reader can actually hear the accent.

The language and meaning within the novel is simple, straightforward and easy to understand. While the language and diction may be simple, the story created by the words is much more complex than the diction suggests. Symbolism, foreshadowing, parallels and other literary devices that pack a tremendous amount of meaning emerge from the language used. The author weaves an intricately complex tale of what it is like to solve the mysteries of childhood and put the pieces of this puzzle together to form a complete story and have a more adult Ginny emerge.

Structure

The Broken Bridge by Philip Pullman is made up of seventeen short chapters that span approximately ten pages each. The chapters are aptly named with important distinguishing people, places or events that parallel, symbolize or foreshadow a central literary meaning. The brief chapters mimic the manner of Ginny's investigation; each chapter gives small clues that Ginny is to analyze, until she comes up with a complete rational understanding of her true identity.

The plot is straightforward. Ginny opens her own personal investigation into past and present inconsistencies that arise regarding her family's private history. The author uses flashbacks as part of the structure of the novel, enlightening the reader about certain key memories in Ginny's childhood. Through a convergence of past memories, present knowledge and ongoing findings, Ginny is able to discover her family's truth by fitting together the pieces of the puzzle. In the end, she comes to terms with who she is and where she needs to go in her life. She plans for the future of herself and the future of her family.

In the second to last chapter, Ginny's father exposes his lies and motivation for those lies to his daughter. Ginny makes up her mind to do something, and she follows through until she discovers the truth. In the end, her father's fear and lack of self-confidence keep him from telling Ginny the truth sooner. No matter, in the end, Ginny gains a deeper understanding of life, all on her own.



Quotes

"Everything was good suddenly, everything was fun, everything was as it should be in her mile-wide kingdom by the sea, as the last visitors trudged up through the soft sand toward their cars and the waves kept falling neatly and the sun sank toward the edge of the world in a welter of blood-red sky." (p. 15)

"Unlike memories of people, memories of things came easily to her; she had only to think of an object or a place to find it before her, correctly textured, three-dimensional, casting shadows." (p. 17)

"There were a lot of things about herself she didn't know, and one was how rare this gift was, though she was beginning to sense it." (p. 17)

"Families were strange to quarrel so bitterly." (p. 31)

"I'm just a white kid with a black face, that's what I am. Don't belong anywhere." (p. 41)

"Ginny sat with her book on the sofa in the endless cold silence that smelled of furniture polish, the silence that was sliced into regular little pieces by the tick of the tall clock behind the door." (p. 61)

"She suddenly seemed to have looked into a pit of dark and strange behavior of which that punch was only a symbol, a pit that had opened for a moment and then closed again, leaving the sunny surface of the world shadowy and insubstantial." (p. 68)

"A siren howled beside them, the carriage lurched forward, one final skeleton sat up in its coffin, and then they were outside, blinking and shielding their eyes from the bright day." (p. 71)

"The windows were open because of the heat, and behind the music she could hear the wide silence of the night, different from the narrow silence of the house." (p. 75)

"She knew they were lies, knew that the incredible Carlos had probably never existed, but it didn't matter a bit. Listening to Andy was like sitting under a fountain of champagne." (p. 117)

"It wouldn't make sense anyway, 'cause I'm not dead, am I?" (p. 127)

"Painting isn't the most important thing, but it'll have to do till we find out what is." (p. 185)

"The soft neon strip light above her in the narrow corridor gave her figure the look of the dying Colonel Paul—weightless, without a fixed position, either floating or sinking but in any case out of human reach." (p. 185)



"Or was concealing it from Robert no better than Dad's concealing things from her for so long? It was hard to say. She hoped she could get it right." (p. 213)

"Maybe you could be an artist and have a boyfriend. Anything was possible, really. Even being kind as well as sexy." (p. 218)



Topics for Discussion

Trace the abundant use of contrasts and similarities in the novel. What do they all mean?

Is there any validity to Rhiannon's notion that kind and sexy cannot exist in one and the same people, places or things? What does Ginny conclude?

Ginny thinks about the broken bridge story in the last chapter of the novel. In reference to her thoughts, what does the following quote mean, "She was the baby, the warm fur-lined jacket was her mother, and Joe Chicago ... Joe Chicago wasn't death; he was art." (p. 211)

What does the painting, The Death of Colonel Paul, symbolize?

What does Ginny mean when she says she can see in the dark?

In your opinion, do you think Ginny's father is justified in how he chooses to protect his child? What should he have done differently, if anything?

Compare and contrast Ginny at the beginning and end of her quest for the truth. How has she changed?

Discuss why the book is titled The Broken Bridge.