A Cure for Dreams: A Novel Study Guide

A Cure for Dreams: A Novel by Kaye Gibbons

Contents

Plot Summary

A Cure for Dreams is the story of a mother-daughter relationship. It covers four generations of women, and it centers on the relationship between Betty, the narrator, and Lottie, her mother with a great deal of compassion for all people in need. The story begins in the early twentieth century in rural Kentucky.

Betty tells of her mother's family in Kentucky. Lottie is first generation Irish. Her family emigrates from Galway in western Ireland and settles in rural Kentucky. The men in the family are alcoholics and incapable of reliably providing for the family, so Lottie's mother, Bridget, has to take charge, and her methods are often rough. As a young teen, Lottie has recurring fantasies about meeting the man of her dreams. The man Lottie actually meets and marries comes from a Quaker family, and he thinks hard work is the single-most important thing in life. In order to escape the turmoil in her own family, Lottie marries young and moves with Charles to North Carolina.

Early in the marriage, Lottie and Charles realize that they have differing views on the purpose and value of work. Charles believes work is rewarding in its own right, but Lottie is not interested in a life of drudgery with no added benefits. The two soon lose affection for each other but not before a daughter is born. The daughter, Betty, and her mother soon develop a close bond. At times they are as much friends as they are mother and daughter. Lottie becomes well liked and admired by the other women in the area, and she does all she can to help make her friends' lives happier.

As the Great Depression progresses, life becomes increasingly difficult for all the families in the area known as Milk Farm Road. Lottie refuses to let unfortunate economic circumstances dampen her spirits, and she goes out of her way to help others and show them that they can be happy even if they cannot afford all the material things they want or even need. Charles, on the other hand, begins to become more and more irrational. He often speaks of financial devastation. One day he departs the house and does not return. The following day he is found dead in the river, the apparent victim of suicide.

Lottie and Betty manage to get by without Charles, but soon Betty begins to wonder about life away from Milk Farm Road. Lottie tries to discourage Betty from leaving, but eventually Betty's curiosity about a different life triumphs and Betty moves to Richmond, Virginia to study and work. After a few months and an unfortunate encounter with a young man with bad habits, Betty decides to return home. She soon meets another young man, and the two begin dating. Shortly after the United States's entry into World War II, Betty marries.

As they have always done, the women take care of each other, and like her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Betty gives birth to a daughter.

Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2

Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2 Summary

A Cure for Dreams presents the story of four generations of women as told by a mother to a daughter. The story begins in Bell County, Kentucky in the early twentieth century.

Introduction

In an introduction dated December 15, 1989, Marjorie Polly Randolph says that her mother Betty Davies Randolph died the previous month. She says that she, her mother, and her grandmother, Lottie O' Cadhain Davies always looked younger than their actual age. Marjorie states that her mother loved to talk, and she loved listening to her mother.

Chapter 1

Betty begins telling the story of her mother, Lottie. As a girl, Lottie has a recurring fantasy about meeting a man who approaches her on horseback, tells her she is beautiful, and impresses her with his mastery of firearms before he rides away. The man Lottie actually marries is far more ordinary and she meets him at a wedding in 1917. The young man, Charles Davies, comes from a Quaker family.

Lottie's Irish mother, Bridget O'Cadhain, is prejudiced against Quakers and she believes that everyone is determined to persecute Irish Catholics and the O'Cadhain family in particular. Lottie's family is from Galway and they arrive in Bell County, Kentucky before any of the more recent Protestant families. Betty and Charles begin dating in secret.

Lottie asks Charles's opinion on what her family attributes to persecution or bad luck and Charles replies that neither case is true. He says that Lottie's family's hardships are due to her father being a lazy alcoholic. Bridget discovers that Lottie is dating Charles and she responds by smashing Lottie's hands with firewood.

There are many alcoholics in Lottie's family. The men drink all day, every day. They often yell for the daughters to cook for them. The daughters comply and then they are punished by Bridget for catering to lazy drunk men. Lottie gives a physical description of Bridget and also says that Bridget refused to learn English.

Betty says she understands why her mother married at sixteen in order to get away from the family.

Chapter 2

Lottie's husband, Charles, decides to move the couple from Kentucky to North Carolina. Charles is much more interested in work than Lottie is. He finds something noble in the activity, whereas Lottie sees it as drudgery. Lottie speculates that Charles probably got

the wrong impression about her attitude toward work because many times when he passed by the O'Cadhain house the sisters were working.

Lottie loses affection for Charles, but she has a child, Betty, in 1920. The following year Lottie gives birth to a boy, but he dies in infancy, and Lottie can no longer have children. Lottie dotes on Betty, and she gets out of work by telling Charles that Betty's frail health will not endure being taken into the fields. Even as a baby Betty does not care much for Charles.

After harvests, Charles gives a meager amount of money to Lottie. Lottie loves fabric. She buys expensive fabric and tells Charles it is actually cheap fabric. The women at the fabric store think highly of Lottie and Bettie.

Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2 Analysis

Introduction

This is a work of fiction posing as a memoir or family history. Even before the story begins, Marjorie demonstrates a great deal of affection for her recently departed mother.

Chapter 1

Some of the punctuation gives clues that the story is a transcription of an oral history. The entire text is within quotation marks. This means that Marjorie is writing the text as it is told to her by her mother, Betty. The italicized passages are the direct quotes or exact words spoken by Betty's mother, Lottie.

In these early chapters it might be difficult for some readers to keep the characters separate. For now it is helpful to think of Marjorie as "author," Betty as "narrator," and Lottie as "main character." In later chapters Betty will become more of an active character, but by then readers will be more accustomed to distinguishing between the two most significant characters.

Lottie's romantic vision is interesting in that it seems to be the rural Kentucky version of a chivalrous knight. The man that Lottie later marries, a pacifist Quaker, is the opposite of the firearm shooting man of fantasy.

Chapter 2

Lottie and Charles seem to illustrate opposite personality types. Charles is single-mindedly focused on work, and Lottie is full of life and more of a social extrovert. They marry at such a young age, an age before they could make accurate character assessments. Lottie displays both a strong will and a creative nature in finding ways to pursue her interests rather than submit to the will of her husband.

Chapters 3 & 4

Chapters 3 & 4 Summary

Chapter 3

At the age of twelve Betty develops a finicky appetite and will eat only cornbread. Charles objects and says that is not healthy, but Lottie says it is fine so long as Betty eats enough to remain full. After a time of eating nothing but cornbread Betty begins to experience constant fatigue and skin ailments. The doctor says that Betty is suffering from pellagra, and criticizes Lottie for not providing better meals for Betty. He also says he intends to stop by the mill and tells Charles what the problem is with his daughter.

Charles uses the news as an occasion to ridicule Lottie and Lottie is understandably ashamed.

Lottie has beautiful handwriting, but it is so ornate that she is the only person who can read it easily. She often assists neighbors that cannot read with composing letters or filing out paperwork. Lottie is especially fond of her literacy since she had to leave school at the age of fifteen.

Chapter 4

Though remaining in the same home, Lottie and Charles continue to grow apart emotionally. In order to find more time to dedicate to leisure, Lottie finds a way to serve leftover lunch for dinner. Lottie is an outgoing and social person, and she is so often at others' houses that she rarely knocks before entering.

Lottie organizes a woman's social club that meets in the back of a local store. At the first meeting there is too much talk of politics and Lottie knows that they must find another focus if the club is to remain together. Lottie decides that the club should be a forum for card playing and she even promotes the idea of gambling in meager amounts. Betty becomes an excellent player. Charles hates gambling and Lottie alternates between saying she goes only to watch and promising to stop going at all.

Lottie instructs Betty in how to recognize a happy marriage by using other women in the club as examples. While most of the women are in marriages that serve to illustrate unhappy marriages, there is one that Lottie identifies as an example of a healthy, happy relationship. Amanda and Richard Bethune enjoy a marriage unlike others in Lottie's community. Richard enjoys buying gifts for Amanda, but Lottie tells Betty that the gifts are not the true measure of how much Richard adores his wife. Lottie says that one can tell how a man feels about his wife by the way that he addresses her in public. Some men do not use names or addresses at all. They simply voice commands. Some men have pet names, and these are better than no name at all, but according to Lottie the true indicator of a man that holds his wife in high esteem is when he addresses her simply by her name.

Chapters 3 & 4 Analysis

Chapter 3

Betty's picky appetite leads her to develop an illness common to people who have only corn to eat. This is a source of embarrassment for Lottie, who prides herself on being both a good mother and a knowledgeable person.

Lottie's habit of showing off her handwriting means that she indulges in a little vanity, but it is a forgivable and charming type of vanity.

Chapter 4

This chapter provides more insight into the fun loving character of Lottie. Lottie shows continued creativity in presenting information to Charles in such a way as to allow her to pursue her desires. Of all the activities she could have chosen for her women's club, she chooses one that is sure to start controversy.

Lottie's ideas on a man's manner of addressing his wife say a great deal about her thoughts on gender relationships. A man who uses nothing but pet names for his wife or a man who simply voices commands regards his wife as little better than property. Men who arrive at the store and simply order their wives to come along view their wives as having as much free will as a subordinate animal such as a dog. By contrast, men who address their wives by their names view the woman as equals and as individuals.

Chapters 5 & 6

Chapters 5 & 6 Summary

Chapter 5

As the Depression continues more rumors of husbands being unfaithful to wives circulate. Betty sees a connection between economic hardship and infidelity. One such situation involves Lottie's friend, Sade Dupin. After Sade goes through menopause, her husband, Roy, loses interest in her and begins an affair with another woman. Sade endures quietly, but she also confides in Lottie. Lottie asks Sade what she plans to do and Sade says there is nothing she can do. Lottie cannot sit by and watch her friend suffer, so she begins thinking of a way to stop the situation.

Though she never tells Sade that she has intervened, Lottie spreads a rumor about the woman Roy has been seeing. In a short amount of time, the rumor gets back to Roy and he stops seeing the woman. For a while Roy stays home and stops philandering.

The following year Roy is murdered. No one is surprised because Roy is universally disliked. Lottie hears about the murder on a Friday evening when part-time sheriff deputy John Carroll comes to find Lottie at a birthday party and tells her that Sade has asked for her. John Carroll and Lottie arrive at Sade's. While John examines the area around Roy's body in the yard, Lottie goes inside to find Sade crying. Lottie also notices many other things, such as that only one person has eaten a meal and Sade has done an uncharacteristically poor job of sewing her quilt that evening.

Without explaining herself, Lottie removes all of Sade's bad stitching in the quit and re-sews it.

At the funeral, the sound of Sade's crying helps create an image in her mind, and she believes she knows what happened the evening Roy died. She sees how Sade, tired of being mistreated and taken for granted, killed Roy.

When questioned by John Carroll, Sade says that perhaps a tramp committed the murder because Roy had recently been rude to one. No one mounts a serious search for the tramp because most believe that Roy deserved to die regardless of who committed the murder. Sade begins to recover over time, and eventually she is far happier than she was in all the years she was married to Roy. Her children even start visiting again.

Lottie and Sade remain good friends for the rest of their lives, but they never once speak of the incident.

Chapter 6

Lottie does not let economic conditions stop her and Betty from trying to look their best. Amanda, unaccustomed to hard times, lets her appearance go after she and Richard suffer from the Depression, but Lottie intervenes and shows Amanda how to take care of herself and her clothes without spending any money.

Betty begins school. She fits in well enough, though she still prefers the company of her mother. Even in her teen years she is not as interested in boys as are the other girls her age. Betty still prefers the company of her mother and her mother's friends. Betty does develop a mild crush on a particular boy, but Lottie does not like that and takes the opportunity to point out all of the boy's flaws.

Chapters 5 & 6 Analysis

Chapter 5

Lottie cares about others, especially her friends. She cannot stand by and let what she sees as unfairness or injustice pass. She must do something, even if that means her intervention breaks social norms or laws.

Lottie's solution to Roy's philandering is devilishly creative. The "Wasserman test" is a test commonly used to diagnose the venereal disease syphilis. By starting the rumor Lottie has punished the woman willing have inappropriate relations with another man's wife, but more importantly she has terrified Roy into believing that his immoral ways have exposed him to a disease.

In addition to being a good friend, Lottie is also an astute analyst of clues. Based on what she sees at Sade's home, she knows that Sade has committed the murder, and Lottie's idea of justice does not include the punishment of her friend. In fact, according to Lottie, justice has already been served with the shooting of Roy. Lottie does not hesitate to tamper with evidence at the crime scene.

Chapter 6

Betty has spent so much time in the company of adults that she prefers them to children her own age. Lottie too demonstrates that she enjoys her daughter's attention and is not willing to share it, taking an opportunity to point out a boy's flaws.

Betty's narrative also gives some flavor of the times. The Lum and Abner she mentions refers to a popular radio comedy of the time and the Bing she swoons over is Bing Crosby, the most popular singer of the time.

Chapters 7 & 8

Chapters 7 & 8 Summary

Chapter 7

Betty has no close friends until 1937 when she becomes friends with Trudy Woodlief despite the age difference. Trudy arrives at Milk Farm Road and immediately demands credit at Porter's store. When refused, she flies into a public rage.

Lottie and Betty take a meal to welcome the new family and see that Trudy has five children, three of which are young toddlers covered in dirt and playing in the yard. When they arrive at the house, Lottie and Betty see that Trudy is shaving her legs with a straight razor. Even while she has guests, Trudy is not at all modest and continues shaving her legs. Trudy shows no evidence of being grateful for the meal or the visit, and she does not seem interested in making polite conversation with Lottie. After learning that Trudy has come to North Carolina from Louisiana, Lottie asks questions about Louisiana. Lottie is shocked that Trudy answers only a few questions and then asks her and Betty to leave.

As Lottie and Betty leave, they see Trudy's children in the kitchen making faces at the meal she has brought. Trudy explains that the family hates ham.

Lottie, thoroughly offended, takes back all the food.

Chapter 8

Despite Lottie's dislike for Trudy, Betty is drawn to the newcomer. Trudy's children are notorious thieves and so is her husband Tommy. First he steals dogs and then he begins stealing copper. Tommy sells the copper and then abandons the family. Lottie is troubled that a woman with so many children has been abandoned by her husband and her concern over the welfare of Trudy and the children exceeds her dislike for them. She begins to try to think of ways to help Trudy.

One day Trudy arrives in Porter's store and again asks for credit. When she is denied, she turns loose her children who begin stealing. Lottie and the other women playing cards take the opportunity to say nice things to Trudy about the fact that she is expecting twins. When Trudy leaves, the women take up a collection and give it to Porter. They tell him they will do so periodically and he is to tell Trudy she has credit in whatever amount the woman are able to collect.

Chapters 7 & 8 Analysis

Chapter 7

Lottie's reaction to hearing that Trudy is from Louisiana provides some humor. It seems that no matter how rustic a person's environment, there is always some more rural and backward environment that the person can look on with condescension.

In listing things that people associate with Louisiana, Betty mentions the politician Huey Long. Long, governor of Louisiana and then U.S. senator, was known for his far-reaching social programs.

Chapter 8

Trudy is so unusual compared to the people Betty knows at Milk Farm Road that to Betty she is exotic. It is no wonder that a teenage girl full of curiosity would be drawn to Trudy.

This chapter reveals much about Lottie's character. Despite her dislike for Trudy, Lottie cannot stand by and see a woman alone struggle to provide for her children. Lottie takes charge of the situation and finds a way to help Trudy without Trudy knowing she is being helped.

When Betty mentions "Mr. Roosevelt," she is referring to President Roosevelt and his programs known as the New Deal.

Chapters 9 & 10

Chapters 9 & 10 Summary

Chapter 9

Charles's business at the mill slows, and he is home much more often than usual. This creates friction between him and Lottie. Despite his constant claims of being financially destitute, Lottie knows exactly how much they have in assets and she knows that they are far better off than many other families. Lottie and Betty hear Charles complain of being ruined and broke so often that they no longer notice.

Charles is determined that 1938 will be a good year financially, but Lottie tries to temper his expectations in order to avert later disappointment. She tells him that if none of his customers have money, he cannot expect to be paid.

When a boy is killed at the mill, Charles refuses to halt production. Everyone, including Lottie and Betty, see this as a callous act. When a sister of the victim comes to the house and expresses outrage, Lottie gives the woman money for the funeral.

That evening Lottie prepares dinner as usual, but when Charles sits down at the table to eat, Lottie takes her plate outside and calls the neighbor's dogs. The dogs are aggressive and do not like anyone but their owners and Lottie. Lottie puts her plate on the ground and allows the dogs to eat. Charles comes outside to criticize Lottie for wasting food on dogs and the dogs lunge at Charles. Charles flees into the house, out the back of the house, into his car, and away from the property.

Chapter 10

Charles grows more and more irrational. When Lottie takes up fishing, Charles denies her the ability to buy fishhooks. Once when Lottie wants to go into town to window shop, Charles refuses to take her and says some hateful things to Betty. Partly out of anger, Betty responds by buying expensive dresses. Lottie does the same and Charles is furious. Lottie says that the spending spree is his fault. He does not respond but instead walks out of the house.

Two weeks after the dress incident, Charles leaves home and does not return. The following day he is found dead in the river. Lottie does not grieve. Instead she is angry. The death is an obvious suicide, in part because Charles is wearing a suit and hads no fishing gear. The suicide cancels the life insurance policy that Charles carried.

Lottie rents the land and the mill, so that she and Betty can get by financially.

Chapters 9 & 10 Analysis

Chapter 9

The boll weevil that Betty mentions is a pest that feeds on cotton crops, and it causes financial devastation in the American cotton producing regions during the time the novel is set.

Lottie knows what will happen when she takes the plate of food outside. She knows there is no point in discussing Charles's actions at the mill, but her anger must be released and Lottie is often creative in her expression of emotion.

Betty makes a vague reference to Charles beginning to loose reason.

Chapter 10

Betty's mention of Charles losing reason finds fulfillment, first in Charles's irrational exertion of control over Lottie and Betty and then in his suicide. Charles demonstrates that all he ever cares about is business. When it begins to fail, he has nothing he enjoys living for.

Several times and in various chapters, Betty mentions Herbert Hoover. Hoover is the U.S. President at the beginning of the Great Depression, and many Americans blame Hoover for the crisis.

Chapters 11 & 12

Chapters 11 & 12 Summary

Chapter 11

Trudy's twin boys are born. Betty has turned eighteen, and though she has no prospective suitors, she finds that she is interested in babies. Betty observes that Trudy returns to her normal weight soon after having the babies and Trudy says that she does it by smoking a lot of cigarettes but not eating. Betty is surprised at how small the twins are. Betty and Trudy's talking wakes the babies and so Trudy can take a break, Betty gets the babies back to sleep.

Chapter 12

Betty helps Trudy to retain her house. Lottie begins being more kind to Trudy's children despite her dislike for Trudy's lack of manners. Despite her closeness to Trudy, Betty cannot remember the names of all seven of Trudy's children. In an effort to help the family, Lottie tells Betty she should help Trudy with laundry. Lottie also decides to give Trudy a nice chest of drawers that she and Charles brought from Kentucky. Trudy does not use the drawers to store clothes because she lacks a baby bed, and she uses the drawers to fashion beds for the twins.

During one of Betty and Trudy's conversations, Betty asks Trudy if she thinks she will have more children. Trudy says that will not happen since she does not have a husband. Trudy then tells Betty that that is the best part of being abandoned and left alone; without a husband, she does not have to worry about getting pregnant.

The local health department official enlists Lottie's help in convincing Trudy to let her children be vaccinated. While Lottie is at Trudy's house, she sees how Trudy is using the chest of drawers. She appears angry, but Betty later notices that Lottie has taken an old baby crib out of storage and has it delivered to Trudy's house. She also sends Betty to Trudy's with a hammer and nails so she can make places to hang the clothes that clutter Trudy's house.

Chapters 11 & 12 Analysis

Chapter 11

The "Dionne quints" that Betty mentions refers to the Dionne quintuplets born in Canada in 1934. They were the first known quintuplets to survive infancy, and they quickly become a media sensation and tourist attraction.

Despite Trudy's unhealthy nutritional practices, Betty learns a great deal about child care from Trudy, and the experience provides her with an opportunity to see first-hand the demands on a parent in caring for children.

Chapter 12

The "Gregg course" that Betty mentions refers to a course in Gregg shorthand. Shorthand was a method of writing that used far fewer characters than regular handwritten text. It was an important part of business and legal proceedings before the advent of recording devices and word processing programs on computers.

Betty continues to learn much from Trudy about marriage and pregnancy. Betty seems to think being married and avoiding having children is a simple matter, but Trudy's situation shows that the matter is more complex than Betty realizes.

Lottie's comment that "Anytime somebody's not looking after themselves it becomes your business" explains much about Lottie's views on community. Lottie truly cares for the people around her.

Chapters 13 & 14

Chapters 13 & 14 Summary

Chapter 13

Women often ask Lottie if she will ever remarry. Lottie is blunt in her answer and says there are no suitable men locally. Betty asks Lottie about the possibility of moving to another area, and Lottie is against the idea. Betty then realizes that Lottie is fond of her status at Milk Farm Road and knows that elsewhere she would not enjoy the same popularity. Betty wants to leave the area and this leads to arguments. After so many years of being in alliance against Charles, Lottie had come to believe that Betty had no ideas of her own, and she is surprised to discover that Betty would even think of moving away from home.

Betty confides her desire to experience new places to Trudy. Trudy says she has lived many places and she encourages Betty to get out and experience the world. Trudy suggests New York, but Betty dislikes that idea.

News arrives from Lottie's family in Kentucky that Lottie's mother, Bridget, believes she will die soon and she wants to do so back in Ireland. Lottie's sisters decide that Lottie should be the person to accompany Bridget back to Galway and they make the arrangements without asking Lottie. Betty and Lottie travel back to Kentucky. Betty will stay with the relatives in Kentucky while Lottie takes Bridget to Ireland.

Betty enjoys the train journey to Kentucky. She finds the O'Cadhain family odd at first and unpleasant later. Many of the relatives ask how Charles died. Lottie invents a story about how Charles died saving the life of another. The only similarity to the truth is that both stories involve a river.

Bridget is not at all troubled about leaving her family, but Betty has never been away from Lottie and she experiences anxiety when Lottie leaves. While Lottie is away in Ireland, Betty tries to find people who might have known Charles's family, but all of Charles's family moved away to Tennessee long ago.

During the trip to Ireland Bridget is a constant embarrassment to Lottie, and Bridget's behavior becomes even worse at the family's house in Galway. She makes all sorts of unreasonable demands, including having the women perform a deathwatch. Unable to endure her mother's awful behavior, Lottie takes a room at a nearby inn.

Lottie and Bridget return to the United States, and Bridget outlives almost everyone she has ever known.

Chapter 14

After returning to Milk Farm Road from Kentucky, Betty soon has the desire to leave again. She worries that she will not find a husband if she stays at home. Lottie is not at all understanding of Betty's concerns. Betty confides in Trudy again, but this time Trudy is not much more understanding than Lottie. Trudy tells Betty to either do something or be content with her current situation.

One evening while playing cards with Lottie and their group of friends, Betty announces that she plans to leave Milk Farm Road but she does not yet know where. Lottie takes the news in a nonchalant manner.

Betty applies to various schools and work programs, and she decides to move to Richmond, Virginia. Before leaving, Betty convinces Polly Deal to move into the house so Lottie will not be alone.

Lottie tells Betty that no decent young woman travels without a nice hat and though she has no nice hat to give to Betty, Lottie tells Betty she should take a hatbox so that people will think she has a nice hat. Betty uses the box to pack undergarments and while on the train to Virginia, a woman asks Betty if she can see her hat. Betty is so embarrassed that she moves to another train car.

Chapters 13 & 14 Analysis

Chapter 13

Betty is beginning to understand Lottie more as a peer than as a superior. Betty is also beginning to assert more of her own ideas and opinions. It is little wonder that Lottie did not notice that Betty had a mind of her own previously; the two were allied in a constant struggle against Charles, and so it seemed that all Betty did was follow Lottie's ideas.

Lottie and Bridget's relationship is not at all similar to the relationship that Betty and Lottie share. No two pairs of mothers and daughters could have more dissimilar relationships.

Chapter 14

The W.P.A that Betty mentions is the Works Projects Administration. The W.P.A. is the largest of the New Deal programs, and it employs millions during the Great Depression. Many of the structures built during the programs, such as bridges, roads, and buildings still stand today.

The fact that Betty decides to make her announcement to the entire card playing women's group shows that she is afraid to tell Lottie individually because she knows that Lottie does not want her to move away from home.

The hatbox incident on the train provides humor. The moral of the story seems to be that no good can come of pretending to be someone other than yourself.

Chapters 15 & 16

Chapters 15 & 16 Summary

Chapter 15

In Richmond, Betty moves into a rooming house with other young women and takes classes. Betty's first job is as a clerk at a candy manufacturer but she does not like the job. In time she meets another young woman who helps her get a job at a department store called Kresge's. While there she often buys gifts for Lottie, Polly and others. Rather than spend time with young women her age, Betty spends time with the older women that work at the department store.

Betty meets a frequent customer named Stanton. Soon Stanton becomes interested in Betty and the two begin to date. Stanton is fond of the social scene and Betty accompanies him to parties. Unlike almost everyone else at the parties, Betty does not drink, but the late hours cause her to feel tired at work and school, so Stanton gives her pep pills.

Three months pass since Betty's last visit home, and one Saturday Stanton and Betty drive to Milk Farm Road. Upon meeting Stanton, Lottie stares and says she needs to speak to Betty alone. Once alone, Lottie asks Betty questions about Stanton, including asking why Stanton's lips are blue. Betty says she had not noticed that trait before. When Betty and Stanton are about to leave, Lottie tells Betty to drive by Amanda and Sade's houses and wave but not to get out of the car and talk. She would like for her friends to know that Betty is doing well, but she does not want them to see Stanton's condition.

On the drive home Betty is curious about Stanton's blue lips and his nervous shaking, but she does not know how to inquire. After they return to Richmond, Betty does not hear from Stanton for a week. At first she is concerned about Stanton, but then her worry turns to anger. One day Betty receives a telephone call from a woman who says she is a nurse. She says that Stanton is in the hospital and he would like for Betty to bring him a carton of cigarettes.

Betty arrives at the hospital, and she talks with the nurse before visiting Stanton. The nurse informs Betty that Stanton is in the hospital for drug addictions and he comes to the hospital two or three times per year. When Betty steps into Stanton's room, she angrily tells him her opinion. Upon leaving, Betty notices for the first time that Stanton addresses her as "girlie."

Betty writes to Lottie and tells her the truth. Lottie responds in a letter that she believes that Betty should return home. Betty immediately replies in a letter that she will stay in Richmond, but soon after mailing the letter she begins packing and is soon on her way back to Milk Farm Road.

Betty notices that Polly is not acting as her usual self and when she asks Lottie, Betty discovers that Polly recently had a dispute with a wealthy woman in town and the woman slapped Polly. Soon after arriving home Betty receives a letter from a coworker describing Stanton's poor condition and behavior. Three months later she receives another letter informing her that Stanton has died from drug abuse.

Though Betty is still angry at Stanton, she is sorry to hear that he has died. Lottie tries to console Betty and she says that soon someone will be returning to Milk Farm Road, and Betty will be interested in meeting the person.

Chapter 16

The person that Lottie refers to is Herman Randolph, the son of the man who leased the mill and farm after Charles died. One day Betty is working with her mother and Herman arrives. Betty finds him attractive and the two take a walk. They agree to see a movie together and soon begin dating. When Lottie and Polly see how much time Betty and Herman spend together they caution her about getting pregnant.

Chapters 15 & 16 Analysis

Chapter 15

Betty's naivety puts her in a dangerous situation. She knows nothing about the dangers of using drugs in a recreational manner, nor does she know how to recognize the symptoms of one who has abused them to the point of suffering ill effects. Lottie, however, notices immediately upon meeting Stanton. It is unclear how Lottie knows. Likely she has never been around those that abuse pharmaceutical medication. Perhaps Lottie recognizes Stanton's ill health because of her family history of alcoholism, or perhaps this incident is simply another example of Lottie's acute powers of observation.

With Betty's visit to the hospital comes the abrupt and painful revelation that Stanton is a drug abuser, but more importantly comes the revelation of the lack of regard that Stanton has for Betty. For the first time Betty notices that Stanton addresses her as "girlie" and the lesson her mother tried to teach her years ago about how men address women begins to make sense.

The store Betty works for, Krege's, is S.S. Krege Company, which later becomes KMART.

Chapter 16

Betty and Herman find they like each other immediately. It is interesting how they have known each other for their entire lives, yet they seem new to each other.

Chapters 17 & 18

Chapters 17 & 18 Summary

Chapter 17

With the outbreak of war, Herman wants to join the military. He could get out of service because of being a farmer. Betty worries about Herman and wishes he would not join. Betty hears from someone else that Herman has decided to join the navy, and she is angry. She tries to write a letter to Herman but has difficulty. Lottie steps in and completes the letter.

Betty delivers the letter to Herman and receives a prompt reply. He has indeed joined he navy. Betty asks Lottie what to do, and Lottie advises marrying Herman before he departs and continuing to live with her and Polly while Herman is away.

Chapter 18

Betty works quickly to make a wedding dress. Herman's mother hosts a wedding shower and all of the women bring gifts. A quilt from Sade and gifts from Trudy's children bring Betty to tears. Betty and Herman's plan calls for him to live in Lottie's house after returning from the military and adding to the house after a baby is born.

Betty and Herman have their wedding in Lottie's house. Lottie worries that she is losing Betty, but Betty reminds her that she is getting married but not moving away.

Betty is disappointed with the location of the honeymoon and at times she has to remind Herman to enjoy the honeymoon and stop talking about how eager he is to go to war. After the honeymoon Betty and Herman return to Milk Farm Road. Many people come to the train station to say goodbye as Herman leaves for war.

Chapters 17 & 18 Analysis

Chapter 17

Lottie's taking over the letter writing seems at first to be an example of a mother being too intrusive into a daughter's affairs, but it later shows the bond and trust these women shares. Betty sends the letter because she believes that Lottie has said what she would have liked to say had she been able to complete the letter on her own.

It is not completely clear why Lottie advises Betty to marry Herman before he departs for war. The most likely explanation is that Lottie knows that marrying Herman will ensure that Betty remains at home even while Herman is away.

Chapter 18

Upon seeing her daughter get married, Lottie has to be reminded that Betty is not going anywhere. She is getting married, but she is remaining at home. Perhaps Lottie remembers how her own marriage was a means for her to escape her family.

Herman's eagerness to go to war illustrates his youth and naivety.

Chapter 19 and Postscript

Chapter 19 and Postscript Summary

Chapter 19

When Betty becomes pregnant she decides to have the baby at the hospital. This offends Polly Deal. Polly says that maternity wards are just a way to trick people out of money. Betty requests that her baby shower be more modest than her wedding shower.

Letters from Herman often aggravate Betty's anxiety level. Herman writes about the dangers of war and according to his letters he is constantly facing impending death.

Two days after Thanksgiving Betty goes into labor. She is home alone and she cannot reach anyone on the telephone. Betty is well into labor when Polly arrives. Polly immediately takes charge. She says Betty should have been making preparations in case she had to give birth alone instead of waiting by the telephone and crying. Betty says that someone should get Lottie, but Polly advises that it will be better to wait until after the delivery to inform Lottie. Betty agrees.

Betty gives birth to a girl a few minutes before six in the evening. She names the girl Marjorie Polly. Polly tends to both the baby and the mother and once Betty and baby Marjorie are in good shape, Polly leaves to find Lottie.

Postscript

Lottie returns home, and she is not happy about the name Betty chose, but the name sticks. Marjorie is two years old by the time Herman returns from war.

Chapter 19 and Postscript Analysis

Chapter 19

The "Twilight Sleep" that Betty mentions was a method of relieving pain during medical procedures. It entailed morphine and other drugs. In addition to blocking the perception of pain, the drugs produced a state of temporary amnesia and other complications.

Herman continues to be insensitive to Betty's worries concerning his welfare. This is not a matter of him being intentionally uncaring so much as it is a matter of him being youthful and unable to see things from Betty's perspective.

It is charming how Polly and Betty decide to wait until after the birth to inform Lottie. These two women hold Lottie in high regard, but they know that her assertive personality, especially when worried about her daughter, will not be the best addition to the situation.

Postscript

Betty says that her earliest memories are of the sounds of women talking. It is a tradition she carries on well.

Characters

Lottie O'Cadhain Davies

Born just after the turn of the century in southeastern Kentucky, Lottie is the main subject of Betty's narrative. Despite coming from a family plagued with the problem of alcoholism and despite being raised by a mother with a temperamental nature and brutal methods of communication, Lottie has a zest for life and a sociable personality. She truly cares about those around her and she will often go out of her way to help others. Though she marries too early, possibly to the wrong man, Lottie takes what is available to her and makes a good life for her and her daughter.

Lottie has a quick mind and the ability to observe details and draw conclusions. On the humorous side, Lottie has the ability to create elaborate stories in order to get what she wants from her husband. In other ways, Lottie's powers of observation make her something of a detective, such as in the case of Sade's murdered husband or Betty's boyfriend with blue lips. Lottie uses these abilities to help others. She helps Sade escape prosecution for murder, she helps Amanda cope with economic hardship and she helps Trudy's family in a multitude of ways, often without the family knowing she is the source of the help.

Perhaps Lottie can best be understood by her own words. She once says to Betty, "Anytime somebody's not looking after themselves it becomes your business." Those are words that Lottie lives by. Anytime anyone in her small community cannot look after themselves, Lottie does what she can to look after them.

Betty Davies Randolph

Betty is very much Lottie's daughter. After a lifetime of being Lottie's main confidant and cohort, it stands to reason that Betty would share similar opinions to Lottie. However, the similarity goes further. Betty's desire leave and experience life beyond Milk Farm Road, though a source of stress for Lottie, is a direct result of inheriting Lottie's inquisitive nature.

As the story's narrator, Betty is a great storyteller. Her expressions are unforgettable and they capture the way people speak and think on Milk Farm Road. Even in the introduction, Marjorie says that Betty loves to talk and this shows in the way Betty relates stories about others, particularly her mother, Lottie. Betty's admiration for Lottie is unmistakable. Betty also shares Lottie's concern about her neighbors' welfare and happiness.

Betty is more than a mere carbon copy of her mother, Lottie. Betty shares similar traits, but she also has the capacity to hold opinions that are sometimes opposed to Lottie's opinions. After the first encounter with Trudy Woodlief, Lottie has no desire to be around the woman ever again, but Betty is irresistibly drawn to the exotic newcomer. Trudy is

unlike any of the other people on Milk Farm Road and her lack of manners and seven children do not stop Betty from working to build a friendship.

Having spent all of her childhood in the company of adults, Betty has little interest in the typical childhood or teenage passions. It is not until those her age mature that Betty begins to take an interest in them.

Trudy Woodlief

This woman arrives from out of town and immediately demands credit at the local store. She is lacking in common manners, but Betty is drawn to Trudy and they become close friends. Trudy is from Louisiana, and she has five children when she arrives at Milk Farm Road and soon has two more.

Polly Deal

This black woman is one of Lottie's closest friends. She is also the local midwife. Betty names her daughter after this woman.

Charles Davies

This man comes from a Quaker family. He marries Lottie and moves with her from Kentucky to North Carolina.

Bridget O'Cadhain

This is Lottie's cantankerous mother. Despite living almost all her life in America, she never learns English.

Sade Dupin

This close friend of Lottie kills her husband and relies on Lottie to cover up the clues.

Amanda Bethune

This is a close friend of Lottie. She enjoys a happy marriage.

Richard Bethune

This is Amanda's husband. According to Lottie, he treats his wife the way that all men should treat their wives.

John Carroll

This man is a part-time deputy sheriff.

Tommy Woodlief

This man steals dogs and copper and then abandons his wife and children.

Stanton

This well-dressed young man takes Betty to many parties while she lives in Richmond, Virginia. He is a drug user.

Herman Randolph

After leaving to work on W.P.A. projects, this man returns to Milk Farm Road and begins dating Betty. Eventually they get married.

Gordon Randolph

This man asks to rent the mill and the farmland after Charles dies.

Marjorie Polly Randolph

This is the daughter of Betty and Herman Randolph.

Objects/Places

Bell County

This area in southeastern Kentucky is where Lottie and Charles are from.

Quaker

This Protestant variety of Christianity is the religion of Charles's family. Charles is able to avoid service in World War I because Quakers are known for pacifism.

Galway

This is the name for a city and county located in western Ireland where Lottie's parents are from.

The Great Depression

This economic depression begins in the United States in 1929. At its worst, nearly one fourth of the workforce in America is unemployed.

Milk Farm Road

This is the name of the rural area where Lottie and Betty live in North Carolina.

Porter's Store

This general store in Milk Farm Road also serves as a social center. The women play cards here.

W.P.A.

The Works Projects Administration provides jobs for millions of people during the Great Depression. The government employs workers to perform a variety of tasks, but the projects that the program is most remembered for are the many construction projects, including roads, bridges and buildings. Both Betty and Herman leave Milk Farm Road to work on W.P.A. projects.

Richmond

This city is the capital of Virginia. It is where Betty goes to take classes and work.

Kresge's

This is the name of the store Betty works for in Richmond. S.S. Krege Company later becomes KMART.

Boll Weevil

This type of beetle eats and destroys cotton crops. It causes millions of dollars in damages to America's cotton crops.

Themes

Good Neighbors and a Healthy Community

Lottie once says to Betty, "Anytime somebody's not looking out for themselves it becomes your business." This expresses a code that Lottie lives by. She cannot sit by and let anyone needlessly suffer, and whether her help is wanted or appreciated, she often intervenes for the benefit of others.

Once when a friend has a wayward husband, Lottie circulates a rumor that convinces the husband to immediately return home and stop his philandering ways for a time. Later, when this same friend, after years of abuse, kills her husband, Lottie steps in and alters the evidence because she does not believe that justice will be served by prosecuting her friend. When Trudy Woodlief moves to town and displays an utter lack of manners, Lottie puts aside her distaste for the woman for the benefit of Trudy's many needy children. Lottie does this in such a way that means that Trudy will not know that Lottie and other women of the community are the source of the assistance. Lottie believes that a community must look out for its members.

Sometimes Lottie's assistance to others can be little more than being a friend and finding ways to improve others' emotional outlook. Lottie organizes a weekly card game so the women of the community can have some fun without having to spend money that is not available and when her friend Amanda is shocked by the effects of the Great Depression, Lottie steps in and shows her how to combat her own depression.

Perhaps Betty says it best in describing Lottie's view of society: "Mr. Roosevelt's programs were very helpful, but I'm sure he never realized how much women like my mother were doing to help him pick up after Mr. Hoover."

Independence versus Family Unity

Lottie rushes into marriage at a young age as a means to escape an unhappy family life and once Charles has married and moved away, he no longer stays in contact with his family. In both cases, these two individuals find their family lives unsatisfactory and they embark on a life away from familial influences and obligations in search of greater independence. Lottie does so because of what Betty refers to as the "alcoholic misery" of her childhood. Charles's reason for wanting to be away from his family are less clear, but in both instances the individuals are unable to find an acceptable balance between family and independence so they opt for cutting ties.

When Betty enters her late teens, she too begins to experience a longing to attempt a life away from home, but in Betty's instance the longing is not rooted in an unhealthy family life. Betty shares a close bond with her mother, Lottie, and the two have always had a tight camaraderie. Ironically, it is the qualities of curiosity and need for adventure that Betty inherits from Lottie that lead her to try living away from home and family.

Of these three individuals, only Betty is able to find the right balance between independence and family unity. Perhaps because of the healthy and nurturing life that Betty has had under Lottie's care, Betty chooses a life of minimal independence. In fact, she chooses to return to her mother's house and even continues to live there after marriage.

Marriage as Equal Partnership or Entry into Servitude

Betty learns a great deal about relations between men and women from her mother Lottie. She sees the example of her own parents' marriage and Betty also learns a great deal about marriage from the stories Lottie tells her. Lottie tells Betty so much about the nature of matrimony that it becomes a significant theme of the novel.

Many of Betty's lessons, directed by Lottie, concern the other women in the community. Unfortunately most of the marriages are lacking happiness for the women, but some, such as the marriage between Amanda and Richard Bethune, serve as examples for what all men and women should strive for in terms of how to treat each other. Betty has seen how Charles expects Lottie to work and often complains that she does not work enough. Betty has heard stories about how Lottie's mother had to run the entire house because the men were incapacitated by alcoholism. Betty understands the servitude aspect of marriage well.

Perhaps the most important and memorable lesson Lottie teaches Betty about relations between men and women occurs when Lottie tells Betty to pay attention to the way a man addresses his wife. Some men simply voice commands the way a master commands a dog. Other men use pet names the way people might address animals. The men that truly regard women as valued peers refer to their wives by name. This is a lesson that serves Betty well while she is living in Richmond.

Style

Point of View

The point of view is an interesting and at first seemingly complex aspect of A Cure for Dreams. The narrative voice is in first person and comes from one of the daughters that make up the focus of the novel. The entire story consists of Marjorie's retelling of stories told by her mother, Betty. The main topic and focus of most of Betty's stories is her mother Lottie.

Marjorie never has a significant role in the action of the novel and is a mere two years old at the closing of the story. Thus, Betty can be viewed as the narrator.

The point of view is further complicated in that in the opening chapters of the novel Betty is either not yet born or a young child. In this way, the protagonist is Lottie, Betty's mother. In fact, while Betty is the chief narrator, the majority of the novel is the story of Lottie.

The simplest way to think of the novel is to see it as the story of four generations of women. The focus on a particular character is dictated by physical setting and time. In the early part of the novel, the physical setting is Kentucky, and the perspective is that of Lottie. Once the setting shifts to North Carolina, the main perspective is still that of Lottie, but as Betty ages, her perspective becomes more dominant. Once Betty moves to Richmond and later returns to North Carolina, Lottie remains a principle character, but the perspective is entirely Betty's.

Setting

With few exceptions, the setting is the Depression era rural environs of the American south. The novel begins in southeastern Kentucky, but the majority of the story takes place in rural North Carolina. The lifestyle and economy is agrarian and this has a significant impact on the plot. In an economy such as farming where the people are already in a state of lacking cash assets, the onset of the Great Depression adds new hardships to the lives of those in the rural communities. In this way, time is as much an important part of the setting as physical location.

References to the conditions common to the Depression appear throughout the novel. An already miserly man, Charles becomes even more tight-fisted with money as the Depression progresses. When a murder occurs in the small community of Milk Farm Road, rovers or tramps are suspected. Betty's narrative contains frequent references to the important politicians of the time, such as Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt. When Betty leaves to pursue work and education she does so by applying to government sponsored programs set up in response to current economic conditions. When Betty meets her future husband, he has just returned from working on Works Projects Administration jobs.

The few exceptions to the rural environments are brief, and they include Betty's time in Richmond, Virginia and Lottie's time in traveling to and from Ireland. The do not have any significant impact on the plot and serve merely to emphasize that the primary setting is rural, specifically the environs of Milk Farm Road.

Language and Meaning

The language of A Cure for Dreams is one of the most delightful aspects of the novel. Betty is a colorful storyteller and her use of the common expressions of the day provide vivid insights into the way people think and interact. Some of her expressions are quaintly amusing, some are unforgettable and some are confusing to us today.

In telling of Trudy's children she refers to the toddlers as "yardbabies." This brings to mind the image of half-creature-like children left in the yard in front of a house to play in the dirt. In describing the number of children Trudy has, Betty says that Trudy has "enough kids to bait a trotline." This may not make sense to some modern readers, especially those raised in urban environments, but through understanding that a trotline is a fishing device with multiple lines and hooks, the humor of the expression becomes evident. Once again Betty is both drawing attention to the unusually large number of children and at the same time referring to them as less than fully human.

Once when mentioning a traveling photographer, Betty describes a man that is "Kodaking." In today's world of digital imagery, this expression may make little sense. At one time in the United States, the most common cameras used by non-professionals and certainly almost all of the photographic film was manufactured by Eastman Kodak Company. By using a brand name when referring to the occupation of photographer, Betty illustrates the important influence of the brand on the people of the day.

Structure

A Cure for Dreams consists of an introduction, nineteen chapters, and a postscript. The fictional narrative consists of stories told by Betty and written by her daughter, Marjorie. With the exception of the introduction and postscript, the narrative is linear and chronological. In fact it is nearly seamless. There are no instances of flashback in the novel because by virtue of being a fictional memoir or oral history, the entire book is a flashback. The timeline covers about two and a half decades, roughly 1917 to the mid 1940s, with the majority of the action taking place during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The most notable thing about the individual chapters is that they can also be described as vignettes. Each chapter, while being a part of an ongoing narrative, also functions well as a stand-alone mini short story. The chapters are short, usually ten pages or less, and they tend to focus on a particular event or situation. Some of them cover multi-year periods, like Lottie's childhood in Kentucky or her early years of marriage in North Carolina, but some can focus on specific events like the murder of Sade Dupin's husband, Roy. Both the introduction and postscript are notably short, each just a few

paragraphs. The introduction serves merely to say that the story will be about the author's mother and the message of the postscript reinforces the idea that the main theme of the book centers on the lives and conversations of women.

Quotes

There was so much alcoholic misery in Bridget's life that you would think she'd have been thrilled to work in a Quaker here or Lutheran there to more of less water down this trait. My grandfather, Sheamus, drank fairly all day every day. He was something to behold. (Chapter 1, p. 8)

Like other mothers at this time, she wasn't born knowing about vitamins or taught nutrition at school, so she honestly believed that as long as I was full I was fine. The way you're trained is the way you're trained, and so ill-eating habits passed with ease through generations. (Chapter 3, p. 22)

Listen and hear what the men call their wives when they come to fetch them . . . Rarely, rarely though you will hear a woman called from the store by her name, which is best, So listen for each time Richard Bethune comes to the door and calls, Amanda! so nicely. And watch how she gladly goes to him. A woman's name will always suffice, but if you'll keep your ears open in a room with men and woman, you'll hear it's the call used least often. (Chapter 4, p. 34)

The only thing cheaper than a next-to-free tart was talk, so my mother decided Sade's interests could best be served by passing about a very nasty story of this Willfordtown girl's negative Wasserman reaction. And in two nights Roy was home before dark, no doubt tortured over the prospects of his own health, probably scouring the insides of his cheeks for white patches and making up reasons why Sade couldn't sleep next to him, which she must have lost her taste for doing the minute he put his foot wrong. (Chapter 5, p. 39)

Even if our mothers didn't tell us everything outright, we had learned to read some signs about young men for ourselves. We knew what would be in store if we courted or married a boy whose father liked to drink more than a little . . . And all this information was traded freely between women with daughters, like meringue secrets or geranium cuttings. (Chapter 6, p. 53)

Rarely did I witness a tantrum or public fight of any nature. Maybe it had something to do with the heat and our desire not to stir up the temperature. But Trudy apparently swung her arms and stomped and what-have-you, thus early on making a wild name for herself. (Chapter 7, p. 56)

Before Jon Carroll could think through the copper problem, Tommy loaded it up and sold it and off he went. He just took his foot in his hand and left his wife six months along with twins, with already enough kids to bait a trotline. (Chapter 8, p. 63)

My mother developed the same stern face she had thinking up the Wasserman solution, the same look as when she yanked the crying, newly poor Amanda Bethune up from her table and restored her self-regard, and certainly the same look as when she explained betting to women so they could have a little thrill on Saturday afternoon. Mr. Roosevelt's

plans were very helpful, but I'm sure he never realized how much women like my mother were doing to help him pick up after Mr. Hoover. (Chapter 8, p. 64)

Here was Odessa with news that my mother automatically qualified for a small bit of widow's aid, despite the suspicious circumstances. And she also bore food, a huge brick of government cheese and a beautiful roast beef, which we sliced and enjoyed that very night. I had felt like it all along, but that's when I knew that Mr. Roosevelt had the love of God in his heart. (Chapter 10, p. 82)

The children weren't unschooled from lack of shoes and clothes, though these things were lacking. Trudy simply fell into the sticks getting them all up and dressed in the morning, and even something as easy as throwing a sweet potato into a lunch bucket was a trial for her. She woke up every morning behind from the night before. (Chapter 12, p. 92)

Once I found the woman's stone, I stood and stood and tried to feel either joy that she had been my grandmother or sorrow that she was dead. But all I could do was read her stone and wonder how they afforded it, it was large and beautiful, and what possessed someone to write that they marvel in the finished work of the Lord. (Chapter 13, p. 108)

Your grandmother made me miserable. I couldn't understand her and I'd become nervous, which seemed to thrill her because she'd push at me stronger. But though I can't say she would've cried had I fallen overboard, I also can't say she was a bad woman. She'd hardened herself to live with my father, and this would've made the best of us mean-spirited. (Chapter 13. p. 109)

Topics for Discussion

What might the title A Cure for Dreams mean?

Many of the references to things and people might be unfamiliar to the modern reader. In your opinion, how important is recognizing references to popular radio programs of the 1930s to understanding the overall plot? Do you think that taking the time to research these references enriches the reader's experience?

A Cure for Dreams is a work of historical fiction. While the main characters are fictional, many of the events mentioned in the novel are real. How does knowing that much of the novel is based on accurate historical detail affect your enjoyment of the story?

Herman displays a great deal of enthusiasm about going to war, but Betty sees nothing positive in the event. How do their differing reactions to the same event, the outbreak of war, illustrate their differing levels of maturity?

Some of the language of the novel, especially the common expressions, might be as unfamiliar to the modern reader as our everyday language would be to a person from the 1930s. Were there any particular expressions that you found amusing or memorable? What would someone today think if you used the expression "polite as a basket of chips" in a conversation?

Most of the action of the novel takes place in the 1930s. Though A Cure for Dreams is a work of fiction, did you learn anything new about the history of the decade?