

The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural Study Guide

**The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural
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The Legend of Pin Oak

The Legend of Pin Oak Summary

Harper McAvoy announces to his slaves the sale of Henri, the young overseer of the plantation. Harper is the son of the former owner of Pin Oak, Amos McAvoy. Harper's mother died on the day he was born. Amos named his son and then handed him over to his mother-in-law to raise when he ran away from the memory of his wife. When Harper was still a child, his father returned and took him back to Pin Oak. Amos also brought to Pin Oak Henri, his son by a free slave in New Orleans. Although Amos never admitted publicly that Henri was his son, Amos always treated him with compassion and gave him special privileges around the plantation, including making him overseer. Henri had always had more love and interest in the plantation than Harper, anyway.

Upon his father's passing, Harper was left with a deep, jealous rage toward Henri and the favor his father always showed him. Due to this fact, Harper decided to sell Henri and rid himself of the memory that his father had loved this young man more than Harper. However, shortly after making his announcement, Harper learns that Henri was born to a freed slave; therefore, he is free as well. When the slave dealers come, Harper plans to give them Henri's wife, Charlemae, and his infant son instead. However, it is quickly discovered that Henri and his family have run away. Harper and the slave dealers chase them to a cliff above the Topps River. As they watch, Henri, Charlemae, and their son fall to their deaths to the river below. Moments later, three birds fly up out of the river.

Harper, having watched Henri fall, rushes to the cliff to see if it might have been some kind of trick, if they might have escaped anyway. As Harper stands on the edge of the cliff, it crumbles and he falls to his death in the river below. Several decades later, while doing research for a paper about the underground railroad, Olive Hill researches Henri and Charlemae, convinced they escaped through a hidden cave. However, a book tells Olive that Henri and Charlemae never made contact with the underground railroad conductor.

The Legend of Pin Oak Analysis

This story is about two brothers, one a slave and one a plantation owner's son. The plantation owner's son grew up in the shadow of his brother because his brother enjoyed work on the plantation and wanted to see it prosper. The other brother, however, was spoiled, and he enjoyed indulging in other pastimes that had little to do with the plantation. In fact, Harper preferred spending the money the plantation made, but not doing the work that helped generate that money. When Harper's unfortunate spending habits got him into trouble, he decided to sell his brother. This way Harper could kill two birds with one stone, ridding himself of his brother and gaining the money



he needs to save the plantation. Unfortunately, Henri is not a slave, but has chosen to remain on the plantation to be with his wife who is.

This is a common story of the Old South that has been given a paranormal effect when Henri and his wife, who fell to their deaths, appeared to become birds that fly off to their freedom. The symbolism of the birds touches on the need for free will over one's own destiny, touching on a common theme of this type of story. Henri and his family have moved on to a better place, escaped the past and left it behind them. At the same time, Harper dies because his soul has never truly understood what it means to be free and to be compassionate. It is similar to a story of heaven and hell, of pitting Cane and Abel against one another only to have won triumph spiritually while the other fails.

We Organized

We Organized Summary

Ajax is a slave living on a plantation. Ajax is very good with the whip, but he refuses to knock a wasps nest off a tree. He knows the wasps will attack, but the master of the plantation wants him to do it to prove his ability with the whip. The master is a cruel man who grows even more cruel over time, beating the slaves for simple offenses, including just a desire to lash out. Then one day the master of the plantation offends a woman from the Congo. That night the slaves organize, taking a button from the master's jacket and pinning it to a doll that they hang from a tree and chant to. Soon the master begins hearing music in his head that causes him great fright. The master frees all the slaves and sends them away.

We Organized Analysis

We Organized is a poem that is based on the oral histories documented in the Slave Narratives in the 1930s. This poem is about a group of slaves that rise up against their owner and force him to free them by casting a type of spell on him. The slaves came together, organized themselves, and force the owner to free them. This is a story based on some of the traditional beliefs of the slaves who came to America at the height of the slave trade, a story that more than likely was not based completely in fact but was passed from slave to slave as a story of hope.



Justice

Justice Summary

Riley Holt, the richest and most powerful man in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, has been found beaten to death. Hoop Granger watches the investigation unfold from his gas station a few yards from the site of the murder. Hoop Granger says that he saw Alvin Tinsley, a local veterinarian, go to Holt's ranch in anger. The police bring Alvin in to question him, a situation that is reminiscent of a time some twenty years ago when Hoop accused Alvin of killing a cat and Alvin confessed. This time, however, Alvin swears to his innocence.

The police let Alvin go, much to Hoop's chagrin. For this reason, Hoop gathers his KKK brothers and they steal Alvin out of his house. The KKK accuses Alvin of murder, trying him and meeting out his punishment themselves. As Alvin swears he will prove his innocence, he is beaten and hung. The mayor announces that Alvin killed himself over guilt in killing Riley Holt.

Over the next few days Hoop, although exhilarated by his own actions, begins having nightmares. In the glass of his shop, Hoop begins to see etches of his crimes. In time, it is clear that Hoop killed Riley Holt in a fit of anger when Holt tried to take Hoop's gas station to pay off a debt. The entire incident is in the glass of Hoop's gas station. The more Hoop tries to clean the windows, the more the pictures show. Finally, Hoop decides to turn himself in in the hope that the torment will stop. In his confession, Hoop tells about the etches in his windows, but when a cop goes to check it out, the gas station goes up in flames.

Justice Analysis

In *Justice*, an innocent black man is accused of a crime he did not commit. Twenty years ago, the same man took the guilt for another crime he did not commit in order to keep his white tormentor from getting in trouble. However, this black man has grown up to be a respectable veterinarian and refuses to allow his tormentor from destroying him again.

The black man is attacked by the KKK and hung for a crime he did not commit. He told them he would get revenge and prove who committed the crime. To this effect, the black man somehow comes back from the grave and causes etchings on the windows of the gas station to show the man's crimes, tormenting him so much he confesses. However, no else ever sees the etchings; therefore, the reader wonders if the etchings were ever really there or if they were a figment of the white tormentor's own guilty conscience.



The 11:59

The 11:59 Summary

Lester Simmons is a retired Pullman car porter. Lester often goes to the porter house to tell old stories to the rookie porters who know little about life as a porter before the union was formed. One night, after telling one such story, Lester leaves the house and hears a train whistle. Due to the fact that he knows the whistle cannot be from a scheduled train, Lester looks at his ring and realizes that he has heard the fabled 11:59, anyone who hears this whistle will die within twenty-four hours.

Lester tries to fight the inevitable by locking himself in his apartment, but when 11:59 comes around again, the train comes through the wall of his apartment and the voice of an old friend calls out to Lester. Lester admits to trying to escape the 11:59, but his friend tells him it is okay because everyone does. Lester is found two days later, dead of a heart attack. His gold watch that he got upon retirement is stopped at exactly 11:59.

The 11:59 Analysis

In this short story, Lester Simmons is a Pullman porter, a legendary porter of the first sleeping cars on trains. These porters were often black men, and they were the first black workers in the United States to form a union.

Lester Simmons tells new porters stories about his years on the trains, including stories of how the union came to be as well as other types of stories such as the legend of the 11:59 train. The 11:59 is the death train, a train that supposedly comes for old train workers when their time comes. Lester hears this whistle and tries to fight the inevitable but ends up climbing aboard the 11:59 anyway.



The Sight

The Sight Summary

When a baby is born with a piece of the amniotic sac on its head, it is said to be born with a veil. When this happens, it is said that the child will have special psychic abilities. Esau Mayes is born with this veil that leaves him with what his mother calls the sight, an ability to see into the future. Esau's mother tries to make her son hide his sight. However, when his father returns home for the first time in years, Esau cannot help but warn him that the men he borrowed money from are coming to hurt him. Esau's father decides to take advantage of Esau's sight to help him win money at the track. This works from a time until Esau feels pressure and cannot use his sight anymore. A short time later, Esau's father is beaten by the men to whom he owes money.

Esau grows up and marries. Esau has forgotten about the sight because it stopped coming to him after his father's misuse. However, when Esau announces at a birthday party that he could not be happier in his life, his sight comes back and begins haunting him with nightmares of a fire in his home that places his wife and children in danger. Esau sends his wife and children to his mother's house so that he can focus on the sight and get details that might save his family. When he does, Esau realizes the fire will take place that night in his mother's house. Esau quickly jumps in his truck and rushes to his mother's, screaming out psychically to his wife to get out of the house. Esau, in his fear, runs his truck off the road and cuts his leg. Esau runs to his mother's house on foot only to find it in flames. However, Esau learns that his family got out because of his psychic warning.

The Sight Analysis

The Sight is based on another set of superstitious stories that have passed down for many generations among black families. This one is about the ability to see the future and other such psychic phenomenon. In this story, Esau loses the ability because he misused it because of pressure from his absentee father. However, it comes back and allows Esau the opportunity to save his family.

The Sight is a fascinating story of psychic ability brought on by love of one man for his family. It turns out Esau's powers go much deeper than he ever suspected. Due to this, Esau is able to save his wife and children by psychically urging his wife to leave his mother's house before the gas heater can burn the house down.



The Woman in the Snow

The Woman in the Snow Summary

Grady Bishop gets the most undesirable route on a November afternoon in his job as a bus driver. To add to his troubles, a bad snowstorm is expected. Grady gets into a disagreement with a passenger and is therefore glad when the snowstorm forces him to close down the route. However, as Grady begins to carefully drive back to the bus depot, he sees a young woman on the street with her baby clutched to her chest. Grady opens the door and tells the woman to go home, that he is closing the route down for the night. The young woman tells him that her husband is out of town and the baby is sick. The woman needs a ride to the hospital. Grady reluctantly agrees. However, when the young woman tells him she does not have the fare, he leaves her alone on the side of the road. The next day Grady learns the woman and her child froze to death. A year later, Grady takes the same route and another storm arrives. Grady sees the same woman and runs his bus into a tree.

Twenty-five years later, the first black bus driver, Ray Hammond, is given the same route Grady disliked, on a cold November afternoon. Just as Ray decides to close down the route due to a bad snowstorm, he sees a woman clutching her baby by the side of the road. Ray has heard rumors about this young woman, stories of her haunting the route. Ray opens the door to his bus and listens to her story just as Grady did all those years ago. Ray offers to give her a ride. The woman confesses that she does not have any money, so Ray pays her fare out of his own pocket. Ray drives the young woman to the hospital and lets her out. The woman disappears and no one ever sees her again.

The Woman in the Snow Analysis

The Woman in the Snow is a classic ghost story that incorporates some of the history of the civil rights struggle in the South. It was policy that the blacks had to ride in the back of the bus and were to give up their seats should a white person need one, despite the fact that everyone paid the same fare. This policy led to a boycott of the buses after a woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat. At the beginning of this story, the boycott had yet to happen, and Grady was acting as many white bus drivers did at the time, following policy rather than going with a more empathetic approach. When Ray is given a bus driver's job, he is one of the first blacks to hold the job after the boycotts.

The woman in the snow is a young mother who needs a ride to the hospital, but she has no money. If Grady had been more sympathetic to her plight, he might have paid the fare for her or waved it without telling his supervisor. However, Grady ignores her need and leaves her in the snow to die. Grady appears to feel little guilt for this action until the following year when seeing the ghost of this woman causes him to run his bus into a

tree. Years later, Ray sees the woman and gives her the ride she so desperately needed, allowing her soul to rest in peace.



The Conjure Brother

The Conjure Brother Summary

Josie wants a little brother. When she overhears her mother and her friends discussing a new conjure woman in town, Josie goes to see her. Josie asks for a new baby brother. The conjure woman tells Josie to place a peach tree twig under her bed and to go to sleep right at midnight. In the morning she will have a baby brother. Josie does this, but she falls asleep at ten instead of midnight. When she wakes, she discovers that she has a brother named Adam, but that he is older rather than younger. At first Josie is happy, but she quickly discovers that having an older brother is not as fun as she thought it might be. Adam is domineering and he argues with Josie and gets into her things. Adam keeps Josie from watching her favorite show. Josie then gets in trouble for having her friends frighten Adam after a scary movie.

Josie goes back to the conjure woman and complains about Adam. The woman suggests dozens of things she could do to Adam to punish him for his actions. Josie does not want that, however. The conjure woman tells Josie she will have a younger brother soon and she should remember what it was like to be teased by an older sibling and to have patience with the baby. When Josie wakes the next day, Adam is gone and her life is back to the way it was before. However, her mother announces that she is expecting a new baby. Josie rushes off to tell the conjure woman, but she is not there and the mail man says no one has lived there in a long time.

The Conjure Brother Analysis

In the Conjure Brother, Josie wants a little brother and she goes to a conjure woman to help her get one. This story touches once again on some of the traditional beliefs of the African American community. A conjure woman is like a diviner, someone who can tell fortunes and heal what ails with herbs and other natural remedies. Josie wants this new conjure woman to give her a baby brother, but instead the woman gives her an older brother to teach her how to be kind to a younger sibling.

This story not only touches on traditions, but it also plays with the classic story of sibling rivalry. Josie discovers that it is unfair to have to share with an older sibling, especially when the older sibling appears to get everything good while Josie ends up with scraps. In the end, Josie has been given a lesson that should help her to be a really good big sister, a big sister who understands the needs of the younger sibling.



Boo Mama

Boo Mama Summary

After the death of Robert Kennedy, civil rights activist Leddy decides to drop out of society and to find some peace in the mountains of eastern Tennessee with her two-year-old son, Nealy. One afternoon, Leddy is hanging out the wash and Nealy disappears. There is a huge search for the child, but nothing but his teddy bear, Boo, is ever found. Leddy never gives up, and a year later the boy is found sitting on the steps of a church. The child, even though his bones show extensive injuries that have healed, is in excellent physical condition. Nealy speaks gibberish, but otherwise seems fine. Leddy allows the hospital to conduct some tests, but then decides to take Nealy home where he can readjust to her and their lives together.

Leddy tries to communicate with her son by reading to him, but Nealy loses patience and will not always listen. Then one day Leddy shows Nealy some pictures and he names each one with a strange word she has never heard. Leddy writes down the words and takes them to a university to ask them to identify them for her. Then one night Leddy notices that Nealy is growing hair on his spine and the backs of his hands. That same night, Leddy smells a scent that is similar to how Nealy smelled when he was found. Leddy rushes out to chase the person or animal away. However, the next day the smell comes again while she and Nealy are in the backyard. A woman who is extremely tall and covered in hair comes out of the woods. Leddy pulls a gun on the creature and demands to know what she wants. The woman tells Leddy that she found Nealy a year ago after he fell off of a ledge and infused him with some of her blood to save his life. The woman then brought Nealy back to Leddy because she missed him so much, but now that Nealy is transforming into a Sasquatch like her, she must take him back. Leddy refuses until the woman tells her that she may go too.

Leddy and Nealy disappear. Leddy's friends come in search of her, but they never find any clues to her whereabouts. They do find a piece of paper with Boo Mama written on it, but have no clue what it means. The university also comes back with a report on the words Leddy gave to them, but they could not identify them.

Boo Mama Analysis

This story drifts a little from the others. Although the background of this story is during the end of the civil rights era and it is the death of Robert Kennedy that propels Leddy to slip away from society, the struggles for equal rights does not feature directly in this story.

Leddy is a single mother of a two-year-old child, all she has left of a life that was filled with violence in the struggle for equality. When the child disappears in the woods, having wandered off and fallen from a ledge, Leddy is determined to find her son. When



the child is returned to her a year later, he is changed. The child speaks a foreign language and he has physical differences that will soon become overwhelmingly obvious. For this reason, Leddy is forced to make the choice between giving up her son or leaving society completely.

During the time period in which this story is set it was not uncommon for women like Leddy to disappear either from choice or force. Joining a tribe of Sasquatch as Leddy does in this story is extreme, but it symbolizes a lesser of two evils. Leddy's choices are to remain in a society where she and her child will be treated as subordinates, lesser than their white peers, or to become a part of a secret society that no one has ever seen let alone can say without a doubt exists.



The Gingi

The Gingi Summary

Laura goes into the Mother Africa Shop attracted to a statue that sits in the window. When Laura asks to buy it, the woman at the store, Mrs. Aswadi, claims she has never seen it before and that it should not be purchased. Mrs. Aswadi claims the statue is a Dabobo and that it seeks invitation into a home to bring evil there. Laura laughs and insists on buying the statue anyway. The woman takes the money, but insists Laura also take a small doll that looks like a monkey.

Laura takes the statue into the house and immediately her four-year-old daughter reacts oddly to it, insisting it is evil. Laura gives the girl the monkey as well which she immediately makes her favorite toy. A week later, the daughter is playing outside with the family cat and the monkey doll when a dog comes into the yard and threatens to attack. Laura goes out to protect her child, but it is the cat that comes between Laura and the dog.

Over the next few weeks multiple odd things occur, such as pictures falling mysteriously off the wall. Laura's daughter tells her repeatedly that it is the statue causing these problems and the child begins to refuse to go into the living room where the statue sits. Then one afternoon Laura's husband is working on the dryer when the power is mysteriously reattached and he is nearly electrocuted. Laura goes to Mrs. Aswadi, who tells Laura the story of the Dabobo women and the evil anger they wish to inflict others with. Laura goes home and burns both the statue and the monkey doll.

That night, Laura's son, who is extremely allergic to bees, is stung, but Laura cannot find his medicine. As Laura goes downstairs to find the medicine, she is attacked by a strange woman on the stairs who tells her that burning the statue was not enough to get rid of her. The cat once again comes to Laura's rescue. The family flees the house, leaving the cat, who has been overtaken by the gingi's spirit, fighting the Dabobo.

The Gingi Analysis

The Gingi is a story that once again touches on old African traditions and beliefs. In this story, a woman buys a statue that is possessed by the spirit of a woman who once stole the secret of immortality but forgot to steal the secret to eternal youth. The woman lived a horrifying life and is filled with such anger that she has become evil and tries to bring this evil onto young, beautiful women. Laura, a modern Black woman who does not fully believe in and understand the mysterious of the spiritual side of her culture, buys a statue possessed by one of these Dabobo women.

Laura fails to believe the woman in the African store when she warns her to be careful of such spiritual items. Laura believes in what she can see. However, when terrible things begin happening in her home, Laura comes to believe, but it is too late. Only a

cat possessed by the spirit of a gingi can save her family. This is a ghost story that is unique in its source of spirituality that takes one family from modern comforts into an ancient world they will quickly come to believe in.



The Chicken-Coop Monster

The Chicken-Coop Monster Summary

A nine-year-old girl is sent to stay with her grandparents the summer her parents decide to divorce. The girl, who is the founding member of Monster Watchers of America in her home town, comes to believe there is a monster in her grandmother's chicken coop. The girl refuses to go anywhere near the coop. The girl is given a chick to raise by herself from her grandmother and the girl swears not to let the chick near the coop. However, one day the chick wanders in that direction and the girl must quickly save it before the monster can get either of them. A few days later, a neighboring girl comes to play. When the neighbor girl goes to hide in the chicken coop during a game of hide and seek, she is quickly injured. The girl's grandparents claim a nail caught the girl's arm, but the girl knows it was the monster.

One night, the girl's grandfather takes her for a walk and tells her how he once had a monster in a crawlspace under his house. One night the grandfather called the monster out, confronted it, and sent it running away. For this reason, the girl decides to face her own monster. The girl tells the monster that she is loved by her grandfather and that makes her stronger than any monster. It was then the girl knew the monster was gone.

The Chicken-Coop Monster Analysis

This story is a classic child's story of the monster under the bed based on actual experiences of the writer in her childhood. In this case the monster is in a chicken coop. The girl is frightened, but over time she faces her fear because her grandfather tells her how he faced his own fear once. In reality, the reader must wonder if the girl's fear, if her monster, is really her fear over her future in the light of the divorce her parents are about to go through. The girl must be frightened by the idea of losing one or the other of her parents and the life she has known up to this point. She focuses that fear on a monster in the chicken coop and then faces it when she feels the security of her grandfather's love.



Characters

Henri appears in The Legend of Pin Oak

Henri is the son of a black woman from New Orleans and the white owner of Pin Oak. When Henri is just a small boy, his mother dies. Henri's father takes him to Pin Oak where he raises him alongside his son from his white wife. Although the father never publicly acknowledges that Henri is his son, he does not deny the child either. When Henri becomes an adult, the father tells him he is free because his mother was free and that he can leave if he would like. Henri, however, chooses to remain on Pin Oak to be with his wife, Charlemae, a slave. Henri makes a deal with his father to work for Charlemae's freedom.

When the old father dies, he leaves Pin Oak to his legitimate son, Harper. Harper immediately gets Pin Oak into financial trouble and decides to sell Henri to solve that problem and to also rid himself of his illegitimate brother. However, when Harper learns that Henri is free, he decides to sell Charlemae instead. Henri and Charlemae run away with their infant child only to be forced to jump into the river when cornered by Harper and the slave dealers.

Harper McAvoy appears in The Legend of Pin Oak

Harper McAvoy is the new owner of Pin Oak. Harper inherited the plantation upon his father's death and has gotten it into financial trouble because he has refused to accept the overseer's opinions as to how the plantation should be run. This is because the overseer is Harper's half brother, Henri, a man born to a free black woman as well as Harper's father. Harper has grown up aware of the parentage of this boy and he is deeply ashamed of it. Not only this, but Harper is jealous that his father was closer to his half brother and would have left Pin Oak to him if he could have.

Harper has gotten Pin Oak into deep financial trouble and decides to sell Henri to fix the problem. However, after selling Henri, Harper learns that Henri is a free man. Harper decides then to sell Henri's wife and child instead. This causes Henri to run away. Harper goes after him, but falls into the river to his death when he tries to stop them.

Hoop Granger appears in Justice

Hoop Granger is a white man in Tennessee who runs a gas station that has been in his family for several generations. When a rich white man is killed down the street from the gas station, Hoop is questioned by police. Immediately, Hoop points the finger at Alvin Tinsley, a black veterinarian who worked for the dead man. Hoop is disappointed when the police do not arrest Alvin, and he decides to take matters into his own hands. Hoop, as part of the KKK, kidnaps and hangs Alvin for the crime.



After Alvin's death, Hoop is exhilarated by his actions. However, when he begins seeing etchings appear in the glass of his gas station windows, he begins to become panicked. The pictures become clearer as each day passes, even though Hoop washes them each morning. Finally the windows show the murder Hoop committed. Hoop had borrowed money from the rich man but failed to pay it back. The man came to collect and Hoop panicked, killing him. Hoop goes to the police and confesses to both crimes.

Alvin Tinsley appears in Justice

Alvin Tinsley is a black veterinarian living in Tennessee. Alvin was once punished for killing a cat twenty years before because Hoop forced him to make the connection. Alvin refuses to allow Hoop to pin another murder on him now as he tries to do when a local rich man is murdered. Alvin stands up for himself, even when the KKK comes and hangs Alvin for a crime he did not commit. Alvin warns Hoop that he will come back and prove who the real killer is. It seems Alvin has when each morning Hoop wakes to find the details of his crime etched on the glass of the windows in his gas station.

Lester Simmons appears in The 11:59

Lester Simmons is a retired porter for the Pullman train cars. Lester likes to hang out with the rookie porters and talk about the exciting times when the porters formed the first black union. However, after telling one such story, Lester hears a train whistle at exactly 11:59. Lester knows this is the whistle of the fabled death train and he decides to fight it. Lester locks himself in his apartment and hides, but the train still finds him. In the end, Lester dies of a heart attack and his body is found in the apartment with a gold watch that has stopped at exactly 11:59.

Esau Mayes appears in The Sight

Esau is born with a veil on his head, marking him as someone who will have psychic gifts. Esau has the gift of sight, an ability to see into the future. When Esau's father finds out about this gift, he forces Esau to use it to help him win money at horse racing. However, Esau feels guilty and pushed to use his gift, causing it to leave him. The gift comes back when Esau is a happily married man with two children. Esau begins to have nightmares about a house fire that endangers his wife and children.

Esau ignores the nightmares at first, but then realizes how important they are. Esau sends his wife and children to stay with his mother for a time. While they are gone, Esau concentrates on the images of his sight and realizes the fire will take place at his mother's house that night. Esau rushes to save his wife and children only to discover his powers saved them because his wife could hear him calling psychically to him to get out of the house.



Eula Mae Daniels appears in The Woman in the Snow

Eula Mae Daniels is a young black woman whose child becomes ill the night of a terrible snow storm. Eula Mae asks the white bus driver to take her to the hospital, but he refuses when he realizes she does not have the money for the fare. Eula Mae and her child freeze to death in the snow. Eula Mae haunts the street where she died and can be seen each November night when a snow storm comes. Twenty-six years after her death, Eula Mae boards the bus because the first black bus driver of the route drives down her street. The new bus driver pays her fare and drops her off at the hospital. Eula Mae is never seen again.

Josie appears in The Conjure Brother

Josie is a young girl who wants a younger brother. When Josie goes to a conjure woman to ask for a little brother, she discovers that she has been given an older brother instead. Josie is tortured by her older brother for weeks, but when given the option to have him tortured by the conjure woman, she refuses. Later, Josie wakes up to discover that her older brother is gone and her mother is expecting a younger child. Josie has learned how to treat a younger sibling in her experiences with her conjure brother and feels prepared for the new baby.

Leddy appears in Boo Mama

Leddy is a young civil rights activist who has lost her husband and finally her will to keep fighting when Robert Kennedy is shot. Leddy decides to drop out of civilization and live in a house in the mountains of Tennessee. However, Leddy's son wanders into the mountains and is lost. A year later, Leddy discovers that her son was saved by a group of Sasquatch and that he must return to them because he is becoming physically one of them. Leddy chooses to continue her drop out of society and join this mysterious group of Sasquatch.

Laura appears in The Gingi

Laura is a modern woman who no longer believes in the religious and spiritualism of her culture. One day Laura buys a statue that has hidden inside it a woman of the Dabobo. Laura is warned that she should not invite such an object into her home, but she ignores the warnings. Almost immediately, terrible things begin happening in her home. A rabid dog goes after Laura's daughter and her husband is nearly electrocuted. When Laura tries to rid the house of the bad spirit, things only get worse, and she and her family are soon driven from their home.



Objects/Places

Button appears in **We Organized**

The slaves in the poem, *We Organized*, use a button belonging to their master to curse him and force him to allow them their freedom.

Windows appears in **Justice**

Hoop's windows all become fogged and etched with images of the murder of Riley Holt, forcing him to give in and confess to the crime.

Oil Heater appears in **The Sight**

Esau Mayes sees from his psychic gift that his family is going to be trapped in a house fire started by an oil heater; therefore, he replaces the nearly new heater in his house to prevent the tragedy. However, it turns out the fire will be in his mother's house, not his own.

Boo Mama appears in **Boo Mama**

Boo Mama is a bear belonging to Nealy. Later Leddy comes to realize that Nealy also calls the Sasquatch woman Boo Mama.

Ebony Sculpture appears in **The Gingi**

Laura buys an ebony sculpture from the Mother Africa Shop that turns out to be a sculpture that contains a Dabobo entity that tortures and torments Laura's family.

Chicken-Coop appears in **The Chicken-Coop Monster**

A young girl becomes convinced that there is a monster in her grandmother's chicken coop that she eventually forces to leave by invoking her grandfather's love.

Hall Street Express appears in **The Woman in the Snow**

The Hall Street Express is a route for the Metro Bus Service that caters predominantly to black workers going to and from the homes in which they serve as domestics.



Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters appears in The 11:59

A union for the porters of Pullman cars organized in 1926. Due to the fact that Pullman porters were traditionally all black, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was the first all black union formed in the United States.

Pullman Train Cars appears in The 11:59

Pullman train cars were luxury sleeping cars on trains that traditionally had black porters to make up the beds and to tend to the needs of passengers.

Metro Bus Service appears in The Woman in the Snow

The Metro Bus Service is a bus service in Montgomery. The buses have rules that force the black riders to sit in the back and to give up their seats for white passengers even when they pay the same fare. This leads to a boycott that brings about change.

The 11:59 appears in The 11:59

The 11:59 is railroad language for the phantom Death Train said to come for the souls of railroad workers at the end of their lives.

Topps River appears in The Legend of Pin Oak

The Topps River is a river that runs near Pin Oak plantation. Henri and his wife and child appear to fall into the river, but their bodies are never found. Harper McAvoy, however, is killed when he falls to the river.

Pin Oak appears in The Legend of Pin Oak

Pin Oak is a plantation that is owned by the McAvoy family. When Amos McAvoy dies, he leaves the plantation to his son Harper McAvoy, but his illegitimate son, Henri, is overseer.



Themes

Inequality

Many of the stories in this collection are filled with struggles of blacks during the time of slavery or during the civil rights struggle. In *The Legend of Pin Oak*, Harper McAvoy sells his own brother into slavery. Not only this, but when Harper learns his brother is free, he decides to sell his brother's wife instead. This leads to a man hunt that ends with all of them in the river. In *Justice*, Alvin Tinsley has taken the fall for a white man once and he is set up to do it again. Alvin manages to escape the law, but he is killed by the KKK in an act of vigilante justice. In *The Woman in the Snow*, a woman is denied a ride to the hospital because she does not have the money to pay the fare.

These stories not only tell an entertaining story, they also tell a little bit of history. During slavery, family members could be sold at any time. After slavery, blacks were treated as though they were still slaves, treated as though they lacked souls. For this reason, a white man could easily put his own crimes off on a black man just by pointing a finger and death at the hands of the KKK was common. In the fifties, it was common practice for blacks to be forced to the back of the bus or to give up a seat for a white passenger. However, the arrest of Rosa Parks and the subsequent boycott changed that. All these things are the backdrop for several of the stories in this collection making inequality a theme of these stories.

Spirituality

There are many cultures that have a strong belief system in spirituality. African Americans brought with them to this country a strong belief in psychic abilities as well as curses and the ability to heal with herbs and other natural resources. In *We Organized*, a group of slaves curse their master, forcing him to free them after years of abuse. In *The Conjure Brother*, a little girl goes to a conjure woman to ask for help in having a little brother. In *The Sight*, a young man is born with the ability to see the future. In *The Gingi*, a woman and her family are terrorized by a mysterious spirit.

Spirituality is a strong aspect to black culture. In these stories, the author plays on these beliefs and creates stories to both entertain and to educate new generations of this spirituality. In her own way, the author of this book is continuing a tradition of passing on stories from generation to generation. Traditionally, these stories are passed on through word of mouth. These stories takes some of the superstition of the past and move them into a modern world where the reader can learn from them.

Family

Family is a strong theme in some of these stories. In *The Conjure Brother*, Josie wants a baby brother and she goes to a conjure woman to help her. In *The Gingi*, Laura places



her family in danger only to pull them close in her attempts to save them. In the Chicken-Coop Monster, it is the love of her grandfather that saves the young girl from the monster.

Family is often an important theme in stories. In these stories, family becomes a unit of people to be relied on by the main character. Josie finds herself learning a lesson from an older brother a conjure woman materialized for her. Laura finds her family is the only thing that truly matters to her when she accidentally introduces an evil spirit into the family. It is the final story, however, that really touches on the theme of family. Even as her parents are divorcing, the young girl in this story discovers that it is family that matters above all else. In fact, the young girl uses the love she knows her grandfather has for her to destroy the monster that she believes is living in her grandmother's chicken coop. For this reason, family is a strong theme in this story.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in all but one of the stories is third person omniscient. As is common with short stories, the author's voice comes through in some of the stories, particularly in the beginning of the story to introduce the premise. In *The Chicken-Coop Monster*, the author writes in the first person point of view. This story is closer to the author's heart because it is based on events that happened to her as a child, therefore she writes it in the first person point of view.

The point of view of these stories is typical of most modern popular writing. The third person point of view allows the reader to see the events of the story through the mind of the main character, but it also allows the writer to hop into other mind's in order to tell the reader things the main character might not be fully aware of. In some of the stories, the author uses this point of view to allow the reader to become quite close to the character, but in others, the author uses it to introduce a mild amount of distance between reader and character. In the final story, however, the reader becomes quite close to the character because of the first person point of view that allows a deep sense of intimacy and prevents mind hopping. All of these points of view work well with their stories.

Setting

The stories have various settings. The early stories are set during the time of slavery in America. Most of the middle stories are set before and during the civil rights movement. *The Gingi* is set in modern times, while *The Chicken-Coop Monster* takes the reader back to the sixties or seventies. All the stories are set in the South.

The settings of the stories are such that each one is set in a time or place that is appropriate to its subject matter. For example, *The Legend of Pin Oak* is set on a southern plantation during slavery. This is appropriate because the characters are a couple of brothers, one a white man and the other a mulatto married to a slave. This setting makes the idea of one brother selling the other into slavery appropriate. In *The Woman in the Snow*, the boycott will take place in the background between events in the story allowing for the arrival of the first black bus driver just in time to rescue a spirit who has haunted one of the bus routes for many years.

The settings of the stories, while all vastly different from the others, create a common thread that pulls the stories together. Each story has a setting that is somehow related to slavery, the civil rights movement, or African American traditions. For this reason, all the settings work well to create a congruous set of stories about life as an African American over the years.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The author uses very little in the way of slang or foreign language. The author also does not use strange grammatical usage to help the reader visualize the language of slaves. The language of the novel is simple enough for even the youngest readers to understand.

The language of this novel is appropriate to the young audience for whom it is intended. The author has used language that is simple, but intelligent enough to get across the message she intends for her young readers. The author does not include any language that a child might not be able to understand except for the unique language in *Boo Mama*, but this is a language that no one understands because it is of a group of life forms no one knows or understands. For this reason, the language of the stories work well and should pose no trouble for the young readers it is intended for.

Structure

The book is a collection of ten short stories. Each story has a title of its own and a tone of its own. The author tells all her stories in a straightforward, linear style that allows the reader to follow the story fairly easily. The author tells her stories in both exposition and dialogue. Each story begins with a short paragraph written by the author that describes some aspect of the story or its history.

The stories all have similar themes that are based in southern and African American culture. The stories begin in the time of slavery, describing how one brother attempted to sell another. This story leads into others, including one that describes the attack of the KKK against an innocent man. The stories describe vital moments in the civil rights movement and tell small stories of how those moments changed people's lives. Finally, the stories move into modern stories of children and adults who use or misuse their culture to varying results.



Quotes

"Harper had lived at Pin Oak for about a month when his father announced that he was going to New Orleans. He returned several weeks later with Henri, a mulatto child about two years younger than Harper."

The Legend of Pin Oak, p. 5

"Nobody could remember a murder ever taking place in Tyre, unless you count Miz Jasper's cat Sidney many years earlier. Folk didn't know quite what to say or do about a real homicide."

Justice, p. 23

"Seconds after Hoop signed a full confession, an officer radioed from his patrol car that Hoop's station and adjoining house had exploded in fire, shattering every window in the place."

Justice, p. 34

"He had an idea, and there wasn't a moment to waste. But his own words haunted him. Ain't no way to escape the final ride on the 11:59."

The 11:59, p. 39

"His eyes were fixed on something quite amazing—his gold watch, stopped at exactly 11:59."

The 11:59, p. 42

"The sight would come to Esau at two times in his life—the first when he was only six years old."

The Sight, p. 45

"Most Metro drivers didn't like the Hall Street assignment in the best weather, because the road twisted and turned back on itself like a retreating snake. When slick with ice and snow, it was even more hazardous."

The Woman in the Snow, p. 56

"As he drifted into the final darkness he heard a woman's sobs, a baby wailing—or was it just the wind?"

The Woman in the Snow, p. 61

"All the next week Josie tried to make the best of a bad situation. No matter what Adam did, Josie went along with it. But the harder she tried, the worse Adam got."

The Conjure Brother, p. 73

"Over the next few weeks all kinds of unsettling events took place. Laura watched as family pictures mysteriously fell off the stairway wall one after the other. Then things



started disappearing and showing up in the oddest places, like her keys, which she found in the freezer."

The Gingi, p. 103

"In the pale moonlight she saw two shadows locked in combat—the Dabobo trying to free itself from the grip of the gingi."

The Gingi, p. 110

"Breaking every rule in the monster manual and trusting my grandfather completely, I went to face the creature within."

The Chicken-Coop Monster, p. 121



Topics for Discussion

Who is Harper McAvoy? How did he come to have a mulatto brother? Why is he ashamed of this brother? Why does he dislike this brother? Why does Harper not take more of an interest in Pin Oak? What happens to Pin Oak under Harper's care? Why does Harper attempt to sell Henri? What happens when he threatens to sell Henri's wife? Why? What is the symbolism of the birds coming out of the river after Henri and his family fall into it? What happens to Harper?

Why does Hoop accuse Alvin of killing Riley Holt? Why does Hoop take matters into his own hands? What is the KKK? Why does Hoop use them to kill Alvin? How does Hoop feel about his actions afterward? Why does Hoop eventually confess to the crime of killing Riley Holt and Alvin Tinsley? Why does Hoop's gas station explode at the end of the story?

What is the 11:59? What does Lester tell the rookie porters about it? Why does Lester resist the 11:59 when he hears the whistle? Who speaks to Lester when the train comes for him? How does Lester's friend find his body? What is unusual about the reading on his watch?

How does Esau come to be born with the sight? Who warns Esau not to misuse his gift? What happens when he does? Who forces Esau to misuse his gift? Why? When does the gift come back? What does it predict? How does Esau save his family? Explain. Why did Esau not see the details of his gift sooner?

Who is the woman in the snow? Why does the bus driver refuse to give her a ride? Why does the woman die? How long does the woman haunt the bus route? Who finally gives the woman a ride to the hospital? Why does she disappear then? Why did the first bus driver die? What might have happened differently if he had given the woman a ride in the first place? Why didn't he?

In the Conjure Brother, Josie discovers that the conjure woman never existed. Who was she? What lesson did she want to teach Josie? Did she? Why was this lesson important? What gift does Josie receive from this woman? How is Josie's life changed by this woman?

What is Boo Mama? Why does Leddy decide to drop out of society? What happens when she does? Why does Leddy refuse to give up on her child? What is wrong with the boy when he is finally found and brought back to Leddy? Why does Leddy talk to the creature that saved her child? Why does Leddy decide to go with the creature that wants to take her child back? What do Leddy's friends think of that?

What is a Gingi? Why does Laura ignore the advice of Mrs. Aswadi? What has Laura invited into her house? How does it make itself known? What does Laura do to stop it? Does it work? Why does Laura run from her house? What creature does she leave behind to stop the evil? How did this creature become the savior of the family?