

# **Home (Robinson) Study Guide**

**Home (Robinson) by Marilynne Robinson**

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# Plot Summary

Home is a novel written by a Pulitzer Prize winning author, Marilynne Robinson. When the story opens, a middle aged woman named Glory has returned to her home town to take care of her aging father, the Reverend Robert Boughton. Glory, a former middle school English teacher, has determined that as the only unmarried child of eight children it is her duty to come home.

Most of the family members live within a day's drive of their childhood home; however, Jack, the black sheep of the family, has been gone far away for twenty years. No one has heard from him during all that time. Glory thinks of Jack as she wanders through the old home once again. As a preacher's son, Jack had been allowed to get by with many things for which other boys would have suffered the consequences. Glory wonders if the entire town of Gilead had not done him a disservice.

The Boughton farm is located outside of town. It is bordered on one side by Ames and his new wife and family. Ames is a longtime friend and fellow pastor. On the other side of the farmstead is a family that the Boughtons called the Trotskys, though that is not their real name. The Trotskys make a point, as Glory recalls, of reminding both preachers that they are agnostic Russians. To allow a large tract of land to lie fallow is a sin in their book. Glory remembers a long running argument between her father and Mr. Trotsky who kept claiming that the field behind the Boughton house belonged to him. Despite papers to prove otherwise, Mr. Trotsky had continued to farm it. Deciding that keeping the peace is preferable to war, her father had allowed him to continue to think it was his.

Reverend Boughton is very old, and his health is declining. He sleeps most of the time and is often confused with what day of the week or time of day it is. Though his wife has been long dead, having died a dozen years previously, he sometimes believes that she is still alive. Various historical clues set the story's time period in the late fifties. For example, there are mostly radio programs because televisions are new appliances that not everyone owns. Quite a few people have a telephone; but, an operator assists in making a call. Civil unrest is in the news constantly.

Glory's father receives a letter from Jack, the long lost son. The Reverend tells Glory that Jack wants to come and visit, if it is convenient. The Reverend immediately sends out a letter with a check in it to help Jack pay for traveling expenses. Glory goes to the grocery and purchases all of Jack's favorite foods and plans a great welcome home dinner. Jack doesn't show up on schedule. It is four days past his arrival time when he calls on the phone to say that he will be there the next day. It is a week later when he finally shows up, and Glory is very angry with him. She's angry because he has gotten the Reverend's hopes up for at least three weeks. She was also afraid that Jack might never show up and would further cause their father's decline. She welcomes him to the house, anyway, and they have a nice dinner.



The reason that Jack left home so many years before was that he had gotten a local girl pregnant. Not wanting to bring any further shame on anyone, he just disappeared. Glory realizes that she has secrets of her own that are just as dark. For years she told her family that she had a fiance, but she didn't. She had a long term boyfriend, who appeared with her at family functions. In the end, she learned he was married and using her for her money. Ashamed, she never told anyone about it.

Jack tells Glory that he would like to stay around for a bit longer, if everyone is willing. Everyone agrees, and a routine sets in. Jack helps to fix up the many neglected things around the place, including an old DeSoto car in the barn. He goes to visit with Ames, whom he's named after, but Ames seems to still be holding a grudge against Jack for all of the trouble he put his family through. While he's gone, a phone call comes for Jack from a woman who doesn't identify herself. When Glory tells Jack about the call, he tells her that the woman's name is Della. The relationship between him and Della had not worked out.

Glory hears that there have been some burglaries around town. Jack says that when he went into town that people were looking at him and staring, as if he were the culprit. Glory tells him that it is nonsense, but she also wonders. Later, she orders a television set for them to enjoy at the house. It is a luxury that they both feel their father deserves. When their father falls asleep, Jack tells Glory that he has a drinking problem and asks for her help in keeping sober. Jack says that he's been sober for many months, but that lately he's been feeling the urge to go back to his old ways. Glory vows to help him.

Jack spends his time reading books to his father, as well as helping Glory take care of him. He also begins to grow a garden and cleans out many of the overgrown shrubs around the house. He begins playing games of catch with some of the neighbor's boys, and for once in many years, Jack believes that maybe he can start over and make a clean start in Gilead. Jack learns that the baby he had fathered died shortly after it was born. Jack had not known about the baby's death until now, and the news saddens him.

Jack tells his father that when he was living in St. Louis he used to play piano for a church there. This makes his father very happy to know that he continued to attend church. However, his father is less enthused when he learns that it was a black church. His father has very definite ideas about the 'mixing' of races. Jack decides that the time has come for him to attempt attending his childhood church. He arranges for Glory to stay home with their father, and he goes by himself. However, he returns shortly after he leaves, saying that he's just not ready, yet.

The next week he attempts to go to church and stays through most of the sermon. But, when Glory goes looking for him in the barn, she finds him sitting in the car, and he's drunk. He confesses to her that Ames' sermon seemed to be pointed at him. It dealt with the sins of the father resting on the children, and all he could think of was the death of the child he had fathered with Annie. He tells Glory that he has many bottles of alcohol stashed around the barn. She finds all of them and dumps them for him.



In the mail the next day there are four letters marked 'return to sender.' They are letters that Jack has written to Della in St. Louis. Glory argues that maybe he should send the letter through a mutual friend because it might not be Della who sent the letters back. Jack has hope and does as she suggests. He also goes to have another talk with Ames, but it goes badly. The next morning, when Glory can't find him, she goes to the barn and finds that Jack has tried to kill himself by sitting in the car after plugging the tailpipe. He's only partially ill from the carbon monoxide, and she pulls him out of the barn and cleans him up.

Teddy, one of the Reverend's other children, comes to visit the next day. He is now a doctor, and he drops in from time to time to check on the Reverend's health. He Teddy is surprised to see Jack there. Glory is equally surprised when she learns that Teddy had spent much time and effort tracking Jack down after he had left years ago. When Teddy located Jack in St. Louis, Jack had told him to leave him alone and not to come back. Teddy had given him some money and stayed away for many years. After examining their father, Teddy tells both Glory and Jack that he doesn't have much longer to live. It is time to call in the family, he says. Jack tells Glory that he doesn't want to be there when all of the other kids arrive. If he doesn't hear from Della in another week or so, he will leave for good. Glory argues with him, but it does no good.

Jack goes to check on their father the next day, and the Reverend doesn't seem to recognize him or anyone else. Jack decides that it is for the best if he just leaves. He calls Teddy and tells him about the situation. Glory argues that he needs to wait for a letter from Della. Jack says that she doesn't understand anything and that even if a letter came from Della that it wouldn't change anything.

Jack leaves, and Teddy arrives. Then, some unexpected guests arrive, too. Two black women with a young boy pull into the driveway asking for Jack. Glory tells him that they've just missed him and asks if the woman's name is Della. She says that it is and introduces Glory to her son, Robert. Glory knows that this must be Jack's son. Glory understands why Jack has said that they can't be together and that it wouldn't matter if she wanted him back or not. Glory knows that with the racial unrest at the time that their marriage would never have been recognized. She feels terrible for both of them. They leave.

The Reverend dies, and Glory decides that she will stay on in the house, making as few changes as she can so that everyone's childhood memories are still preserved.



# Chapter 1-2

## Summary

### HOME TO STAY, GLORY! YES

In Chapter 1, Glory has come home to live with her father for a short while. She is one of eight children. The focus turns to a brother named Jack, who is the black sheep of the family. Glory remembers, as she walks through the rooms in her childhood home, how Jack had so often gotten off with a warning because he was the local preacher's son. Jack has been gone for many years without ever coming home to visit. The family doesn't really know where he is or what he is doing with himself, though a situation is alluded to in which there was a girlfriend and a baby that caused some upheaval in the family. Glory does not dwell on this as she continues to walk through the house.

The family's home is situated in a small town named Gilead. For decades they have farmed the land, and Mr. Boughton was the area's pastor. His neighbor was an agnostic man named Mr. Trotsky, an immigrant from Russia. He and his wife encroach on the Boughton pastureland, cultivating all sorts of crops. Pastor Boughton spoke to them on occasion about it, Glory recalls, but all the Trotsky's said over the years was the if the land was just going to sit fallow that it was a sin and was just to keep honest people from farming it. Then, they went right ahead and continued to farm it the rest of the years, even 'giving' the land to their son who eventually built a house on the property. Glory wonders why her father never did anything about it.

### WITHIN WEEKS OF HER RETURN

In Chapter 2, the story continues with Glory being home to take care of her father. Her mother had passed away several years earlier and her father had continued to grow frailer. The children had all pitched in to hire a housekeeper, Mrs. Blank. With Glory's return, Mrs. Blank is let go. Glory jumps in to get the house back into shape but finds that it is already very clean. There is no television, and Glory is making do with the limited entertainment that's available. She listens to the radio programs and thinks she might take up knitting. A bit more about Gloria is revealed in this chapter. She is 38 and unmarried. She taught high school English for thirteen years before returning home to take care of her father.

Glory thinks back to when she was sixteen and she had first learned that Jack was having a child by a girl who was a year or so younger than she. Back then, Glory was too young to understand why her parents would be so upset when every Sunday her father would christen a baby and declare it a miraculous gift from God.

Glory shifts her thinking to her former fiancé. Just before they'd called off their engagement, he'd told her that he had kept a ledger of the money that he owed her and that he would pay her back. It strikes her now, as she thinks about it, how hurtful that



had been, to think that he had been keeping tabs all those many years that they were engaged. In the end, he had told her that he was sorry to have misled her about his intentions to marry her.

The mail arrives, jolting her out of her memories. There is a letter from Jack, which she hands to her father. He looks at it and begins to cry. Glory asks if she might read what it says, and he says that he should most likely read it first in case it is of a private nature. He reads the letter which says that Jack is coming to visit after all of these years. Reverend Boughton is ecstatic, but Glory is guarded. Her father's frail state cannot take a large shock or disappointment. She's afraid that Jack's visit will be both.

With Jack's letter in his hand, Glory's father lies down to take a nap. Glory walks across the pasture to visit their longtime neighbor, Mr. Ames. Mr. Ames had also been a pastor in a local church. He is Reverend Boughton's best friend. Glory tells him about the letter, and Mr. Ames says that, if her father is up for it, he might come over for a visit later. Glory tells him that it is a great idea and leaves.

## Analysis

These first two chapters serve to set the tone for the rest of the book. The central conflict is that of Jack and why he left the family for more than 20 years and how his return will affect the family. Through Glory's memories and internal thoughts about Jack, the reader learns that Jack was a highly intelligent, but sensitive, young man. He wanted to be a musician or artist, but his parents didn't think he could earn a good living or raise a family doing that.

The family is depicted as caring, loving, yet strict and narrow minded when it comes to accepting change. The father, since he is a Reverend, is particularly careful about image and examples. He believed that his family, when they were all still living in Gilead, should be the example to the community for how a family should conduct itself and the children raised. Jack threw a wrench into this plan at every chance he could, and Glory shares with the reader that there were numerous instances where the town's leaders had let Jack off with just a warning.

Glory has skeletons of her own, too. She has come back to live with her father after a disastrous relationship ended. There is a little foreshadowing as Glory remembers that her fiance (who is never given a name) had kept a ledger of all the money she had 'lent' him over the years.

The Reverend Boughton is depicted as a caring individual. His character underscores the theme of family in the story. He was much respected in the community where he and his wife had lived and nurtured their children in a comfortable home. The family unit is shown to be security from the world's greater troubles.



## Discussion Question 1

Describe Glory as a character and what her function is in relation to the book.

## Discussion Question 2

How does the author describe the home and Reverend Boughton? What is representative of the home in respect to the Reverend?

## Discussion Question 3

Why might it be a bad thing for Jack to be returning home after all these years?

## Vocabulary

amazement, recklessly, manifest, indisputable, rationalization, inclined, urgent, misinformed





# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

### WHEN SHE CAME HOME SHE FOUND THAT HER FATHER

Though it is not stated directly, Chapter 3 gives evidence that the time of the setting for the story is in the 50's or early 60's. This time period is logical because Glory listens to radio programs instead of watching television, and most homes during that era did not have a television. Also, in the story, telephone calls are made with the assistance of an operator, which was commonplace for the mid-20th Century.

As the story continues in Chapter 3, the Reverend has written a quick letter back to let Jack know that it is all right for him to come for a visit. Glory gets ready to take the letter to the post office in town. About that time, Rev. Ames from next door stops by, and Glory leaves her father and Rev. Ames as they are getting ready to play some checkers.

### WHAT FOLLOWED WERE WEEKS OF TROUBLE

In Chapter 4, Glory laments the fact that they have stocked up on all of Jack's favorite foods and he hasn't shown up. They had not known for certain what day or time he would arrive, just that he would be coming. Now, much of the food is going to waste. Rev. Broughton sends Jack another check to cover traveling expenses (totaling two checks at this point) and still no word. Finally, two weeks after the Great Letter arrived, they receive a phone call from Jack. The Reverend talks to him and says that Jack will be there the day after tomorrow. However, another week passes and another phone call to say that it will be in a couple of days. Four more days pass before Jack finally arrives.

When Jack sees that Glory is there, it is obvious that he hadn't thought that anyone but his father would be in the house. He is not happy to see Glory after twenty years. Glory says that their father is sleeping, and Jack says that he might go lie down as well because he is not feeling well. But, by that time the Reverend has heard him and is making his way down the stairs to greet his long lost son. They embrace and then the Reverend hurries off to get his clothes on so they can sit on the porch together. While he is gone he asks Glory if any mail has arrived for him.

Glory tells him no, and they sit to have coffee while they wait for the Reverend. Glory notes that Jack's hands are shaking as he holds his coffee cup. They both are extremely polite with one another even though Glory continues to tell him how glad they are that he is there. She thinks he is ill at ease because it had been Glory who had been home back when all of the trouble started.

Jack goes upstairs to put his things away and to shave and get into some better clothes. When he comes down the stairs they eat lunch together. They eat and then part ways so that Jack can go upstairs to rest after his long bus trip. She goes to take him some towels a little later, but he isn't in his room. She feels obliged to snoop and is startled



when she turns to find him standing there. She remembers that he was always quiet and able to sneak up on people when he lived at home.

## Analysis

Chapters 3-4 share more of Jack's character, or at least the Jack that Glory knew from before. The fact that he is late and puts them to great inconvenience and expense indicates that Jack has not changed his ways in all of this time. Glory is worried that Jack's visit will cause their father so much stress that he will die from it all. Glory's worries foreshadow the Reverend's congestive heart failure much later in the novel. The episode is particularly poignant because at one point he tells Glory that his heart has been broken by Jack's departure so many years before.

Glory is furious when Jack finally arrives, but she notices that her father beams from ear to ear. Jack looks worn and frazzled, but other than that, he seems the same as he did when he left, just older. Glory continues to have grave misgivings and becomes particularly worried when one of the first things Jack asks her is if he's had any mail delivered to the house.

Of particular note are the checkers and checker games that Ames and the Reverend play. They are not so much a game as a vehicle for discussion. It is a way for them to safely offer pause or quiet while one considers a statement before speaking. It also allows for a diversion if a person is uncomfortable with a topic of conversation. It is apparent that Ames also has misgivings about Jack coming back. Both Ames and Glory feel very protective of the Reverend where Jack is concerned.

## Discussion Question 1

What is Glory's motive in snooping in Jack's room after he arrives?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the trembling hand, the disheveled appearance, and the questions about the mail seem to suggest about Jack and his current situation?

## Discussion Question 3

Of what importance might it be to have situated the book during the late 1950's and early 60's?

## Vocabulary

uninhabited, appease, obsession, rancid, tonic, compulsively, distinguished, tact, stalwart



# Chapters 5

## Summary

STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN, SHE MADE A DINNER

It is Sunday, and Glory decides that she will fix an old fashioned Sunday dinner like they used to have when they were growing up. Everyone dresses nicely for the dinner. Despite the Reverend's long winded prayer at the beginning, everyone gets along during the meal.

Their days turn into a routine with Jack waiting until the Reverend awakens for the day before emerging from his own room. The rest of the day is spent with Jack waiting on their father, while Glory focused on keeping the house running. Glory finds herself wanting to take comfort from this, but she keeps waiting for Jack's ulterior motives to emerge. She notes that he does seem changed for the better, though he never discusses what has gone on for the last 20 years. He offers her money to help defray the costs of groceries. Glory accepts the money but tells him that their father has money and that the church family also send things from time to time.

Jack asks if the church members know that he is back, and Glory tells him that they do know. Jack asks her not to invite the members over to visit just yet, and she agrees.

## Analysis

In Chapters 3-4, Glory is trying to recapture some fond memories for both Jack and the Reverend by fixing Sunday dinner like they used to have when they were younger. The Reverend's prayer is long and ardent. Eventually, Glory has to help him end it. He sheepishly remarks to them that he always loved a good sermon.

Despite the rocky beginnings, Glory believes that possibly Jack has turned over a new leaf. Her father has brightened considerably and isn't sleeping as much. In fact, his health seems improved now that Jack has returned. Glory wants to bring in the rest of the family to let them know that Jack has come back, but Jack doesn't want that, yet. The theme of family is continued in this chapter when Jack does not see the rest of the family as a supportive unit, but rather one of judgment and alienation. He does not feel that way with the Reverend and Glory because they were still living at home when all of the 'trouble' began he tells Glory.

There is still an air of mystery surrounding Jack as he is tight-lipped about where he's been for the last 20 years and what he has been doing. He writes a letter daily and takes it personally to the post office to mail. These letters represent his connection to something or someone outside of Gilead.



## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the symbolism of the letters that Jack writes each day and his obsession with receiving mail.

## Discussion Question 2

Compare the theme of family as it has changed from chapter to chapter. What does family mean to Glory, and how does it differ with Jack?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the Reverend seem in better health since Jack's return?

## Vocabulary

wariness, inviolable, assumed, exasperation, sufferance, ecclesiastical, prohibitions, creeds, synods



# Chapters 6

## Summary

AFTER A FEW DAYS SHE MIGHT FIND HIM SITTING IN THE PORCH

Jack continues to watch the mail obsessively. Finally, one morning, the mail is delivered earlier than usual, and Glory goes to the mailbox. There is a small envelope, like a card. The writing on the front looks as if a child's hand has printed the address. Still, Glory takes it up to Jack and does not ask questions. He seems embarrassed that she has seen the card, but he does not say anything.

Glory thinks back to a time when she was living away from home with a woman named Hope who was a piano teacher. She had a habit of smacking her hands whenever she made a mistake. Her sister, Grace, had also taken lessons and excelled in them so much so that she was offered to come and play at a church in Minneapolis. They were all very proud of her achievement.

Glory recalls that when Jack had gotten the freckle faced girl pregnant that her father had gone to the girl's house and offered money to her parents. Glory had ridden along and watched as the girl's father was mean to the Reverend, but the mother had come out later and accepted the money. Glory had written a series of letters to Jack, while he was still living at the house. She had urged Jack to do the right thing and marry the girl. Jack had simply said that it wasn't possible. Then, he got on a train and left their lives for 20 years.

## Analysis

This chapter offers the reader more information about the events surrounding Jack's departure when he was a teenager. Glory, though loving and kind, only has the perspective that she had when she first observed the events 20 years ago, as a very young girl. Her lack of understanding then is still evident in the present. It is evident, at least to the reader, that the freckle faced girl's family was understandably angry at the Boughton family and resented the offer of money, though the offer was well intentioned. It also shows that the family was not as well off as the Boughton family.

There is a letter that arrives for Jack in this chapter, which is the first letter to have arrived since his own arrival. The writing on the envelope is done as if by someone who has just learned to write, or someone who's health has impaired their ability to write well. The reader is not told any more about it, as Jack does not share with Glory anything about the letter or the sender. There is no return address on the envelope, so Glory (along with the reader) is left in the dark. These letters seem to mean a great deal to Jack and they are clearly a connection to the outside world and his former life.



Gracie is mentioned in this chapter and it is important that the reader understand that as it unfolds, Gracie was very talented at playing the piano, as were many of the Boughton children. However, the Boughtons encouraged Gracie to pursue her career as a church pianist, while the others, Jack and Glory included, were encouraged to find other things. As Glory remembers is, it was she, not Gracie, whom the piano teacher praised more.

## Discussion Question 1

Why might Jack not want to share the name of the person who wrote the letters with Glory?

## Discussion Question 2

Why would the Boughton parents encourage Gracie to continue her lessons, while they discouraged Jack and Glory?

## Discussion Question 3

How did the Reverend try to ease the burden placed on the girl's family after he learned of the pregnancy? Why was his help not welcomed?

## Vocabulary

porcelain, courtesy, perpetual, presume, tentative, suppressed, compote, garment, mulling



# Chapters 7

## Summary

### THE BOYS CALLED THEIR FATHER SIR

Glory watches Jack get dressed one evening to go out. He doesn't say where he is going, but that he will be back shortly. The entire time Jack is gone the Reverend is worried that Jack won't come back. It upsets Glory to see how agitated he gets. He finally returns and the Reverend, exhausted from worry, settles in for a nap. Jack asks Glory what kind of work a person can get in town. She doesn't know.

Early the next morning, around 3am, Glory can't sleep and thinks that she will go ahead and get breakfast started. Her father generally had a habit of waking around five o'clock so this wouldn't be that much of a stretch. In a half hour he makes his way to the kitchen, but before he can begin to eat, falls back to sleep sitting in the chair. Jack comes down to see what is going on and asks Glory why she fixed breakfast so early. She says she doesn't want to talk about it. Jack carries their father up the stairs and puts him back in bed. Glory is left in the kitchen to her own thoughts.

## Analysis

Jack is not the only Boughton child who is haunted by their past. Glory, too, is beginning to see with new eyes her relationship with her boyfriend of many years. As it has caused her to question the events as they unfolded, so too does she begin questioning other things that happened in her past. She is beginning to question and revisit earlier events in her childhood, particularly surrounding Jack and his departure, as well as her own role in the household and how she was raised.

Though she loves her family and her father devotedly, she also begins to see that perhaps not everything was as idyllic as she'd like to remember it. She begins to see that she, and most notably Jack, were often steered away from the hobbies or career paths that their parents didn't approve of. The theme of family is demonstrated in a new way in this chapter. Just as family can be a supportive and nurturing association, it can also be destructive. All of these things combine to make Glory restless, unhappy, and unable to sleep. When Jack picks their father up in his arms, as one would carry a child, Glory is almost moved to tears. She hopes that at this point there is potential for forgiveness and redemption, which are two other key themes in the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

What sorts of things must Glory be thinking of to keep her from being able to sleep?





## Discussion Question 2

What did the simple gesture of carrying his father back to bed mean to Glory?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the differing definitions of Family as it has been presented thus far.

## Vocabulary

soothed, distinction, axis, knuckle, inevitable, pronounced, vocations, gleeful, soundness, deliberation, abode, cranium, tenant



## Chapters 8-9

### Summary

#### THAT WAS THE DAY A PHONE CALL CAME

A woman calls the house for Jack, but he's out in the barn working. By the time he comes to the phone, she's hung up. Glory tells him that all she would say was that she was calling from St. Louis. Jack waits to see if the woman will call back, and in a couple of hours, she does. Her name is Mrs. Johnson. From the conversation, Glory can only piece together that something was lost and not found and that Jack is desperate that whatever it is be found. He tells Glory that the 'thing' that was lost is a dog, but Glory doesn't believe him.

The woman doesn't call again, and Jack takes to spending most of his free time working on the old car in the barn. Each day, Glory notes, he writes a letter and walks to the post office to mail it. He never tells her what is in the letter or who it is for. Jack bites the bullet and goes next door to visit Mr. Ames and his new wife. He comes back and reports that Mr. Ames still dislikes him as much as he used to. Glory thinks that this cannot be so after so many years, but Jack says that it was obvious.

Glory rummages about in the attic to find some old work clothes for Jack since he's only brought dress slacks and clothing. She finds some of her father's older clothes from before he started to lose weight that she thinks will fit Jack.

#### SHE DECIDED TO WALK TO THE GROCERY STORE

Glory goes to the grocery store. When she comes out, she notices that Jack is across the street looking at television sets on display in the hardware store's window. Glory asks if they should get one for their father and Jack enthusiastically agrees. Glory goes in and orders one to be sent up to the house.

That night they watch the news and view race riots happening in one of the larger cities. African Americans are being attacked by the police and the dogs are set on them. Jack and Glory are appalled, but their father says that it is obvious that they were breaking the law. Their father apologizes for upsetting them, and states that old people don't like change and young people are all about it. All they should both do is forgive one another.

### Analysis

These two chapters present a lot of information to the reader. First, there is the continued mailing of the letters, but no more than that is still known. A woman calls from St. Louis, but doesn't leave her name. Since Jack has been talking about her, Glory believes that the woman that called must be Della, Jack's former girlfriend, and the one that he's been writing. When she calls back a few hours later, Glory eavesdrops and



hears that something has been lost. Whatever it was that was lost upsets Jack greatly. When Glory confronts him, he tells her that it was a dog that he was fond of. Later, in the novel (spoiler alert) the reader learns that he was upset because his son had gotten lost. However, at this point in the story, the reader does not know this. Glory doesn't buy that it was a dog, but she doesn't push him any further.

Jack has taken to working on an old DeSoto car that he found derelict in the barn. When he's not fixing something around the house or working on the yard/garden, he works on the car. In many ways the car represents Jack. Both have been stuck away and forgotten for many years. Now, both Jack and the car are attempting new starts at a new life. He attempts to crank it up in this chapter, but it doesn't quite turn over. Likewise, Jack has tried to find work all over town, but no one is hiring.

The theme of Race is introduced in this chapter as Glory, Jack, and the Reverend watch the evening news and the race riots going on in various large cities throughout the country. The Reverend's statement seems to echo the sentiments of those in his generation who can't understand why things can't stay the same as they always were. However, Jack and Glory, who have lived outside of Gilead and have witnessed prejudice first hand, are appalled. Glory is upset that her father would think that the African Americans were deserving of the treatment, since all they were asking for was their God given rights as human beings. The Reverend doesn't see it that way but doesn't want to argue with them. Jack remains particularly quiet during most of this exchange. However, when their father goes up to bed he mentions that he attended a colored church when he lived in St. Louis. This foreshadows much of the information that will be revealed at the end of the book.

It is symbolic that Glory goes into the attic and retrieves the Reverend's old clothing for Jack to use to work in. In many ways, by doing this, she is attempting to help Jack slip back into a new life, a new skin, a new way of acting. However, this is short lived, as Jack doesn't seem to fill out his father's clothing, nor really prefer them.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Compare the way the Reverend views Race and the way Glory and Jack view it.

## **Discussion Question 2**

How is the old DeSoto car representative of Jack?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is symbolic about Jack accepting his father's old work clothes?

## Vocabulary

decree, predisposition, affable, exertion, turbulence, deference, unguarded, unfailing, shun



# Chapter 10

## Summary

### GLORY MADE UP A BATCH OF BREAD DOUGH

Glory fixes a big meal and bakes a loaf of her father's favorite bread. Jack has gotten a new baseball mitt and is planning to go and see if Ames's teen son wants to throw the baseball around a bit. He starts out the door with the mitt, but then returns shortly after leaving, telling Glory that he forgets that he's still viewed as 'disreputable'.

Later, Jack asks if Glory is trying to save his soul. She asks him why he would think that. They dance around the subject of the things he believes he's done that will keep him from redemption. From this point on, Glory keeps her Bible out of sight and only reads it when she knows Jack won't be around. She is uncomfortable with his insinuation that she is somehow holier than he is.

Her father asks her to go and find Jack to play some of his favorite hymns on the piano. Glory goes out to the barn and gets him. Jack gladly comes up to the house and begins to play. After he's played a few songs, his father calls him up to his bedroom and asks him to take a seat. He needs to say something to Jack.

He apologizes to Jack for not being a better father, which shocks Jack. Jack assures him that he was a great father, but that he was a lousy son. The Reverend says that he never knew a child that didn't feel happy in his own home growing up and that he feels badly about that.

After his father goes to sleep, Jack comes down into the kitchen and asks if Glory will sit with him for a few hours, just until the bars close. Glory says she doesn't have anything pressing, so they begin to talk. Glory confesses to Jack that she deceived the family into believing that she was engaged all of those years, when in reality, she never was. Jack laughs at her big reveal, hinting that he has done much worse.

Jack tells her that he played piano at church in St. Louis. He'd dropped in there to hear the choir practice and sometimes when their piano player couldn't make it, he would sit in and play for them. They'd let him come in and play on the piano sometimes after hours as long as the music wasn't too 'worldly'. He had met Della outside her apartment building one day. She was an English teacher and had dropped her papers. He helped her pick them up. They began dating.

He stops abruptly, and Glory admits that she fell for her fiancé rather fast. From speaking with Jack she had just realized that most likely her fiancé had been staking out the church looking for vulnerable women and she'd been an easy target. It made sense to her now. She thanks Jack even though she tells him it is a bitter revelation. It becomes awkward again, and Jack excuses himself to go back out to the barn to work.



## Analysis

The theme of redemption is demonstrated in this chapter with the Reverend's discussion with Jack. The Reverend's apology comes as a shock to Jack because never in his mind did he hold his father responsible for his trouble as a teen. Realizing his father's need to apologize, he accepts the apology, though he still doesn't believe that it was warranted. He apologizes for not being a better son. They seem to reconcile. Both have been redeemed in the other one's perspective at this point.

Still a bit shaken by his father's revelation, Jack comes down to speak with Glory about it. It is the first time that Jack has really let his guard down, and Glory does the same. She shares her darkest secret with him and just about the point where the reader thinks that he might let everyone in on what he is hiding in St. Louis, he shuts down and does not discuss himself any longer. However, he offers that Glory might have been taken in by her supposed fiancé, because it is a well known trick of the con man to prey on vulnerable and alone church women. Glory feels ashamed, though she also realizes that she must face the truth about what she allowed to happen, and then move on. The theme of Sin and Redemption go hand in hand in this chapter. All of the three main characters believe that they have sinned in some way, and all of them make a confession of their 'sin'. All of them are forgiven in one way or another and thus find some semblance of redemption.

The fact that Jack accuses Glory of trying to save his soul also underscores the theme of redemption, in that Jack has a guilty conscience and the reader doesn't exactly know why. After his talk with Glory it is evident that he knows about how men prey on women outside of churches because he alludes to the fact that he has done the same thing for money. Interestingly, he is quick to mention that he didn't exactly meet Della that way, but rather knew her from the church in St. Louis, and then happened to run into her in town.

Glory realizes that she has been taken in by the man she considered her fiancé and admits that she did fall for him rather fast. While it is hurtful to face the truth about her situation, she also finds it a bit freeing as she experiences a type of redemption. All along she'd been thinking that he didn't want to marry her because of something she did or said. Now, seeing the situation plainly, she realizes that he was never going to marry her, even if she had been the most perfect woman in the world.

### Discussion Question 1

How does Glory experience redemption in this chapter?

### Discussion Question 2

Why would the Reverend feel compelled to apologize to Jack?



## Discussion Question 3

What sort of circumstance must Jack have found himself in that he felt the need to prey on vulnerable and lonely church women in St. Louis?

## Vocabulary

communist, awry, civilized, insurmountable, concede, deeds, clapboard, abbreviated, spire, costlier, monumental, dilapidation, remnant, grandeur, capitulation



# Chapter 11

## Summary

### SHE SAW HIM COMING UP THE ROAD AGAIN

Jack comes back from mailing one of his letters and asks where their father is. Glory tells him that the Reverend didn't sleep well. Jack says that he probably kept him awake because he couldn't sleep, himself. The newspaper is lying on the table and Jack reads the main headline that says that there have been a rash of burglaries in town. Jack is angry because everywhere he went in town people would stop talking when he walked in, as if he'd done something. Now, looking at the paper, he knows what they all think he has done. He is also upset to think that the Reverend must have read the paper, too.

They have breakfast, and the Reverend tells Glory and Jack that he's going to give them both the right of attorney over his bank accounts, that he's too feeble to keep up with it any more. After he eats and goes back to bed, Jack cites this as evidence that the old man thinks that he's been behind the robberies in town. Glory tells him he is reading more into it than he should. He asks her if she could in all reality vouch for his whereabouts on those nights and Glory hesitates. He says that she knows that he can't sleep and that he takes long walks outside because he doesn't want to wake their father, but even with that, there's no one to give him an alibi. He says that in times past, when confronted with bad situations, his tendency had been to drink himself into a stupor. He begs her to help him not go down that road again. She agrees.

She sends him on an errand to the grocery and when he returns he shows her a book he picked up at the library. She notices that he hasn't actually checked it out as the card is still located in the back of the book. She tells him that people will start to think that he really is the burglar if he does things like this. Jack says he just didn't think about it and will return it the next day. Glory says not to worry about it, that she'll just read the book, then return it without incident.

They learn the next day that the robberies were committed by some high school students who had a bought of conscience and confessed. Jack seems glad that they have caught the real culprits. Glory asks Jack about the books he's been reading. He shows her a book that he says a friend loaned to him by WEB DuBois.

## Analysis

The newspaper is a significant object in this chapter as the headline talks about a rash of burglaries that have taken place in the area. Jack doesn't see the headlines or hear about the robberies until he returns from the post office before breakfast. When he sees the newspaper on the kitchen table he is very upset. He is sure that this is why everyone in the town had been whispering and pointing at him. They think that he's up to his old tricks again. Jack is furious, and it upsets him to think that the Reverend might





have read the newspaper and thought the same thing. Glory assures him that he most likely hasn't read it. She quickly removes the paper from the table.

Later, after it is discovered that some high school boys were responsible for the thefts, Jack relaxes again. He shows Glory a book that he's been reading by WEB DuBois (the title is never given). He says that it talks about social reform, something that is sorely needed in the country. Glory asks him about the ideas in the book and he loans it to her to read. This is a device that the author is using to give a bit of foreshadowing toward the grand revelation at the end of the novel. WEB DuBois was one of the foremost authors of color who wrote about civil rights and the need for reform.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Jack upset when he sees the newspaper?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the WEB DuBois novel?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Jack's feelings of being upset about the newspaper tell the reader about his feelings for his father?

## Vocabulary

delegation, reconciliation, emissary, plagiarism, cordiality, parsing, gravity, condescension, domestication, affronted



# Chapter 12

## Summary

### THE DAY SEEMED TO BE PASSING

Jack reads to the Reverend from a book about Africa. Glory loves to hear Jack read because he does so very well and makes the characters come to life. At one point, the Reverend speaks about the African people and states that it just never works out when the races mix, that there's always bloodshed. Jack stops reading, and they move on to another story.

Jack has decided to put out a garden, and Glory notes that it brings their father particular pleasure whenever something was ready for harvest and Jack would bring it in for him to see. On one occasion, after he'd come in for the evening after working in the garden, the Reverend asks Jack to sit down. He tells Jack that he thinks that what is wearing on Jack is the fact that he doesn't know what happened to the girl that he'd gotten pregnant and the little girl that she'd had all those years ago. He tells Jack that the baby died not shortly after birth and that he blames himself for never baptizing the baby.

Both Jack and Glory are quick to assure him that the baby went to Heaven and that as Presbyterians baptizing wasn't as necessary. They all settle down to watch television and there are stories about racial unrest. The Reverend wishes that everything would just go back to the way it was. Jack argues that 'the way it was' was wrong. He talks about the case of Emmett Till who was executed for whistling at a white woman. His father asks him if he kept company with Negroes when he was living in St. Louis. Jack says that he has found a number of them to be his friends and that they were quite respectable toward him. His father tells him that part of his problem is that he has been keeping low company. They change the channel. After his father falls asleep, Jack goes to his room.

## Analysis

The theme of race is demonstrated, again, in this chapter. This is particularly notable when Jack reads to the Reverend from a book about Africa. The author is foreshadowing events that will unfold later when he has the Reverend speak about the 'mixing of the races'. Jack is particularly upset at this statement and puts the book away.

Additionally, Jack has started a garden. This is an important object in the novel. It acts much like the car does as a representation of Jack and his relationship with his father. He carefully watches over the garden by keeping the weeds out diligently watering it. He is doing the same thing with his father, and, in some ways, with his sister. Still, he has not asked that any of the rest of his family be told that he is there.



The themes of sin and redemption are demonstrated in this chapter as well. The Reverend thinks that what is weighing on Jack's mind is that he has unfinished business in Gilead. He believes that Jack doesn't know and doesn't want to ask what happened to Annie Wheeler and the baby she'd had with Jack. He tells Jack that the baby died just before her second birthday. The Reverend blames himself, saying that he didn't baptize the baby when he should have. Jack is appalled that his father would think that a child would be denied entrance into heaven because it wasn't christened, but he doesn't say so. Glory is there when their father tells Jack this. Both Jack and Glory are quick to assure the Reverend that the child went to heaven. The Reverend just needed to confess about how terrible he felt about not taking in the young mother and her child, especially since they were, in essence, family at that point. He has been ashamed all of these years. He finds redemption in telling them both about it.

The theme of race is demonstrated in this chapter, as well. Watching the news, the Reverend muses that there is too much upheaval in the world and wonders why it cannot just go back to the way it was. Jack reacts vehemently and states that the way things were was wrong. Jack asks his father if he is acquainted with the case of Emmett Till who was executed for whistling at a white girl. As he is very emotional at this point, Jack reveals more than he has up to this point. He reveals that he has been 'keeping company' with 'Negroes' while in St. Louis and that they were kind, good, decent people. When his father tells him that part of his problem is that he can never seem to keep good company, Jack knows that he can never tell his father the truth about his life the last 20 years. Glory, who is quite observant, has begun to put two and two together, but she doesn't confront Jack at this point.

## Discussion Question 1

From the clues that have been offered to the reader, what do you think Jack has been doing for the last 20 years in St. Louis?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the need for the Reverend to confess to his attitude toward Annie Wheeler and Jack's baby?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism of Jack starting a garden.

## Vocabulary

fringe, commemorated, mutually, providence, prosperous, coincident, sanctification, plume, nosegays, rambunctious



# Chapter 13

## Summary

### WHEN GLORY CAME DOWNSTAIRS

The next morning Jack beats Glory to the kitchen and fixes breakfast for everyone. He tells Glory that he's going to try going to church and see if it sticks this time. He decides that he'll also speak with Ames and try to clear the air with him. Glory asks him to invite Ames and the family over for Sunday dinner, then. He agrees. Since it is Saturday, still, Jack goes out to the barn to work on the car. Later, Glory hears the car trying to start. Then it finally does start and it pulls out of the barn. It is a deep plum color and Jack has cleaned it up until it looks brand new.

They all go for a ride around town, and when they return, Jack gives the car to Glory. She is flabbergasted and doesn't know what to say.

Sunday morning Jack goes to church. He takes a couple of dollars from the stash drawer to put into the offering plate, then leaves. When the Reverend wakes he learns that Jack has gone to church and he is ecstatic. He'd been worrying that he'd turned Jack against it for sure. Shortly afterwards, while Glory is trimming the Reverend's hair, Jack returns. He sadly tells them that he couldn't bring himself to walk into the church. He'd gotten there late and it just made it too hard to walk in. The Reverend tells him that it just means that going meant something to him and that he can try again the following week. Jack nods.

The evening meal commences and Jack greets Ames and his wife. Jack offers to say grace, and pulls out a written prayer from his pocket. He reads it and the Reverend smiles. Ames seems unconvinced in Jack's conversion, but does not say anything. They all discuss politics, baseball, and local gossip.

Jack excuses himself and comes back with a baseball which he gives to Ames's son, Robby. They eat pie and talk about the old days. Later, Jack plays the piano and they all join in singing. However, Robby discovers all of the money in the piano bench and immediately Ames believes that Jack has taken money and stashed it there. Quickly, Glory tells them that she has put it there out of the household allowance because she hadn't wanted to spend it all. She swears on a Bible to it and everyone goes on about their business. Jack thanks her for standing up for him, but Glory can tell that he is embarrassed and hurt.

## Analysis

The theme of Redemption is demonstrated in this chapter, but not in the way that it has been presented in other chapters. In this chapter, the act of Redemption is shown to be elusive. Redemption for oneself is easy, redemption coming from others is not easy at



all. Jack realizes that Ames is representative of what everyone in town must think of him. At this point in the story he still feels very much the outsider, and Ames's accusation widens the gulf for Jack. Later, when he is able to start the car and it sputters into life, he is unable to take much joy in his accomplishment because of the earlier event. He's decided that a fresh start isn't possible, and most likely isn't worth it if he has to do so alone. By giving Glory the car, it is a signal that he is giving up on himself. He's come to some conclusion about his situation.

Jack's attempt to create a prayer that is heartfelt, and reading it at the table seems to affront Ames, whose reaction seems to suggest that Jack's prayer is like Jack...all pretense. He is unconvinced that Jack has turned himself around, and this is why, when he sees the money in the piano bench, he is quick to judge. On the one hand, he feels protective of his friend, the Reverend, and on the other hand, Ames remembers who Jack was as a young man and the trouble he put everyone through. It is obvious that he is of the belief that a person's basic temperament and proclivities cannot be changed, which is ironic considering that he is a preacher, the very profession that urges change.

Glory comes to Jack's defense when the money is discovered, even going overboard and swearing on a Bible. While Jack is appreciative of Glory's defense, it embarrasses him and makes him realize that he has most likely just been fooling himself. The fact that he can't manage to step foot into the church is also another telling fact where Jack is concerned. Symbolically, he is trying to reconnect, to start over, but he can't seem to bring himself to do it. He is also trying to please his father, to be the son that his father can be proud of. The reader sees Jack falling into old patterns of behavior, which is trying to please everyone but himself, going against his own nature or conscience in order to fit in or please everyone around him.

## Discussion Question 1

Why might Ames be slow to forgive and forget Jack's past?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Jack give Glory the car?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Redemption as it is presented in this chapter and compare it to other chapters where it appears.

## Vocabulary

pedagogical, exacted, tedious, emerged, foundling, tousled, disheveled, apologetically, diffidently, nuzzled, desolate



# Chapter 14

## Summary

THE NEXT DAY GLORY WENT TO THE HARDWARE STORE

Glory buys Jack some real work clothes that fit him instead of her father's old hand me downs. He is grateful and asks her if she was ever able to forgive the fiancé. Glory says that she doubts it, that she had learned that he was really already married, and so he had lied to her and used her to get all of her money. Jack shares that he doesn't see how Della could forgive him, but when Glory presses him for details he clams up.

Jack plays ball with Ames's boy, Robby, in Ame's front yard so that they can keep an eye on them both. A few days later when he goes back to play catch with Robby, Lila, the Reverend's wife, asks him to stay for dinner, but he declines. Later, Glory tells him that he should have stayed if he was really trying to mend fences with them.

Jack attempts to go to church again and actually makes it into the church. He ends up leaving half way through because Ames preaches on a topic that seems directly pointed at him. The topic was about fathers who abandon their children. When Glory finds Jack he is sitting in the car in the barn. He tells her what happened and she is upset and moved to tears. Though they had planned to keep it from their father, he finds out and is angry and hurt.

Many weeks pass and they all decide that they must come to some sort of reconciliation since Ames has been like a brother to the Reverend and a father to all of the Boughton family. Glory takes an old magazine over to them to see if they'd like to read it. She speaks with Ames. He comes over to the house the next day with Robby.

The men sit on the porch and begin to engage on a theological and philosophical debate on the nature of sin and whether a person can be born evil without chance of redemption. Mrs. Ames argues that people can change. Change is always possible when the idea of redemption enters into the picture.

## Analysis

The act of purchasing Jack his own clothes is more than a matter of necessity for Glory. It is also a symbolic act. Jack is not his father, and Jack needs to fit into his own life, and his own clothes. He is touched by her generosity and he asks Glory about her fiance, if she was ever able to forgive him for hurting her so badly. Glory says that she doubts that she will ever be able to forgive that, because now, at last, she sees the entire relationship for what it was. She had been robbed and deluded by this man who cared nothing for her, who had used her up and set her loose when she had nothing more to give.



Jack asks about Glory's being able to forgive her fiance because he's missing Della and wondering if she could forgive him. Glory tells Jack that their situations are different. From all accounts, Della loved Jack, and she still loves him. Jack isn't sure, but he listens. Later, he goes up to Ames's house to play catch with Robby. He has determined that he will continue to present an alternate version of himself until that is able to possibly erase the earlier memories of himself. Hope has come back to Jack. This is further exemplified when he is able to actually go to church and walk in. Unfortunately, Ames is the preacher at the church and the topic of the sermon seems pointedly directed at him, so much so, that Jack can't stay for the entire sermon. He comes back more wounded and confused than when he left.

Though they've tried to keep upsetting things from their father, he gets wind of what Ames did from the pulpit. The Reverend is angry beyond words. It is all Glory and Jack can do to try and keep him from going next door or calling Ames on the phone. The reader sees how ferociously the Reverend loves his son. This is something that has never changed, and it is a touching gesture that Jack does notice. Glory decides that if anyone should go and talk to Ames that it must be her, that a more gentle approach is needed. Her words reach Ames who offers that he had selected the topic that he spoke on weeks prior to Jack even being in town, and that it was just providence that he walked in that Sunday to hear that sermon. He seems genuinely sad that he's hurt Jack, who has obviously made the attempt to come to church, and is doubly upset to learn how it angered the Reverend. He comes over later with Robby, and this acts as a peace offering, of sorts.

While Jack plays catch with Robby, Ames and the Reverend sit out on the porch and drag out the checkers. They engage in a deep debate about whether a person can really change their stripes, if someone can be born bad, or if circumstances make them bad. They don't come to any conclusions, but much is made of the topic of forgiveness, demonstrating this theme in the chapter. Glory overhears part of the conversation. Her father states that the old adage 'to understand is to forgive' is wrong. He says that in order to understand something fully, one must forgive first. Refusing to forgive first defends a person against the possibility of understanding. He goes on to say that the posture of grace is forgiving. Even if a person didn't initially understand, being willing to understand is the true meaning of grace. Grace and forgiveness, he says, often go hand in hand.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the Reverend saying when he tells Ames that one must understand in order to forgive?

## Discussion Question 2

What is Ames's motivation in bringing Robby over to play catch with Jack?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the differing definitions of 'forgiveness' as it is offered in this chapter.

## Vocabulary

exertion, paragons, diligent, turbulence, concealment, dutiful, reckoning, spaded





# Chapter 15

## Summary

### THE NEXT MORNING THE MAIL

Glory goes out the next morning to get the mail and finds four of Jack's letters to Della marked Return to Sender. She knows that he will be devastated. He eventually sees the letters, and it is as if all of the air goes out of him. Glory says that he seems lost. He tells her that if any others come back marked like this that she should just burn them.

The Reverend figures out that Jack's change in demeanor is due to a woman, and he corners Glory about it. She tells him what she can, and he tries to talk to Jack about it. Jack refuses, saying that his problems are his own. The next day the Reverend asks Glory to take him to visit Ames. She drives them over in the car. They talk for a long while, and Glory takes Lila and the kids to a movie. No one had thought to tell Jack where they all were; so, he runs over to the Ames' house worried that something that happened to his father. They apologize, and he stays for a while. When Glory moves to take the Reverend home, Jack opts to stay behind for a while. Lila comes with Glory, and they fix dinner. When Ames walks over later for dinner, Jack is not with him.

The next morning, when Glory goes out to the barn to get into the car she finds Jack. He's been out all night drinking and is only half sober in the morning light. She helps him get into the house and get cleaned up. Glory feels sure that her father must know what has happened, but he doesn't say anything.

When she goes into Jack's room to get some clean clothes, she finds many half emptied bottles of alcohol. She goes back out to the barn to retrieve Jack's old clothes from the barn to wash them and finds that he's stuffed them into the tailpipe in an attempt to kill himself. She cries.

## Analysis

The act of telling Glory to burn the letters represents Jack's loss of hope at a re-connection with Della and the outside world. It seems as if he is literally burning bridges. The Reverend notices Jack's mood and is able to get Glory to tell him as much as she knows about Della and the situation. The Reverend reaches out to Ames to see what can be done about Jack and helping him reconnect with the town.

Jack reaches the bottom of the barrel when he tries to kill himself. He has lost all hope and believes that neither forgiveness or redemption are possible. He attempts to erase himself from everyone's life. The fact that he uses the car to attempt this act is symbolic as well. The very thing he'd spent time trying to fix, to make as good as new, to offer back to his family, he uses as the literal vehicle for his death.



The fact that he's gone back to drinking also signals that he's given up. Jack has decided that he is too old and it is too late to change. However, Glory finds him. Ironically, it is her care and her concern that show him that he matters. Her literal name, GLORY, shows that in his hour of need and crisis, Glory was there. She was there all along. Though he is battered and bruised, emotionally and spiritually, he does recover. However, he also realizes that he can't stay any longer.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Jack decide to attempt suicide?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the irony of using the car he repaired to try and kill himself? Why did he choose that instead of some other way?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does receiving Della's letters back, marked 'Return to Sender' send Jack over the edge?

## **Vocabulary**

scrutiny, purposive, solicitude, fruitful, insinuating, commencement, cicada



# Chapter 16

## Summary

### SHE HAD SAT BY THE SPUTTERING RADIO

One of the other brothers breaks down and comes over to visit. Teddy shows up on the doorstep saying that he tried to respect Jack's need for privacy but that he'd just given in and wanted to see him too much. The reader learns that Teddy has become a doctor and is very successful. He asks to see Jack. Glory goes to get him. The reader learns that many years ago Teddy had come to St. Louis looking for Jack and had found him. He'd given him some money and tried to get him to come home, but Jack wouldn't leave. He asked Teddy to never look for him again, and he hadn't.

They only spend a brief time together, and the Reverend enjoys seeing everyone together. He goes back to sleep, and Jack asks to speak to Teddy privately. He tells Teddy that he's decided to take Glory's suggestion and lie to their father about the state of his soul. The problem is that he can't figure out how to tell their father that his soul is now safe. Teddy gives him some ideas of how to go about figuring it out, but in the end, says that it might be a necessary thing, to give the older man some comfort.

After Teddy leaves, Jack tells Glory that their father doesn't have long to live, according to Teddy. He also says that he will only stay for another couple of weeks. He's going to try and send a letter through a mutual friend to Della one last time. Whether or not he returns to St. Louis depends on hearing back from Della.

## Analysis

In this chapter the reader sees Jack reconciling and coming to terms with his own spiritual state. He feels that he has a long way to go towards finding any peace for his soul, but he also knows that his father doesn't have the time to wait for him to 'find himself'. He's determined to do the right thing for the wrong reasons, which has been a pattern for him all along. His brother, Teddy, has reiterated the fact that their father hasn't long to live. In an act of reconciliation between the two brothers, they conspire as to how they might make their father believe that Jack has been redeemed.

The theme of Redemption is demonstrated in this chapter, in that Jack believes that one can fake it. As he will learn in the next chapter, the Reverend was very good at his job at one time. He recognizes sincere conversion when he sees it. However, in this chapter the reader only sees a son trying desperately to please his father one last time, and to try and make an attempt to make his father proud of him.

The decision to try and connect with Della through a mutual friend indicates that Jack is willing to try, one more time, to have the life he'd like to have. Glory has had something to do with this because it is at her urging that he realizes that he needs to make certain



that it is her that is returning the letters and not her father. That Jack considers this a viable scenario indicates that Della's father doesn't think much of Jack.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why would Jack tell Teddy to leave St. Louis and not tell anyone where he was?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How is redemption discussed in this chapter as compared to other chapters?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What seems to be emerging as a behavioral pattern for Jack when things become stressful?

## **Vocabulary**

irksome, strolling, recruited, fathoms, gallant, offensive, gauze, sufficient, certainty



# Chapter 17

## Summary

### JACK WAS SITTING ON THE FRONT STEP

Glory goes with Jack to the barn where he shows her the rest of his liquor cache. She gathers the bottles and empties them. They begin to talk about the nature of the soul. He says that he is beyond redemption, though not without hope, sometimes. He talks about their mother's death. Jack says that when their mother died he had only been out of prison for a couple of days. He used their father's check to get some clothes, and then he drank the rest. He said that he couldn't come home after having just gotten out of jail.

Glory starts to cry, but she doesn't ask him why he was in jail. Jack says he's very tired and goes up for a nap. It lasts longer than he'd planned. When he comes back down, it is supper time. Glory leaves him setting the table while she goes to wake their father. When she wakes him, she can tell that something has happened. He is disoriented and doesn't even remember that Jack has been living with them for a while. When she gets him down into the front room, Jack is playing the piano, but the Reverend doesn't even recognize him.

They sit down to eat, and it is apparent that the Reverend is in and out of coherence. At first he recognizes Jack, and then he doesn't, speaking about Jack as if he weren't there. What emerges from his ramblings is that he never stopped loving Jack and never stopped being hurt by Jack's choices. In a lucid moment he backs Jack into a corner by telling him that he is just saying that he's found religion to give him comfort before he dies. He sets the record straight that it was never for his own comfort that he had wanted to hear it in the first place. He tells them that when he is gone he is leaving the house and some money to Glory and that there is another allotment of money to be divided between all of the children. Glory is appalled because she had fully intended to leave Gilead as fast and as soon as possible after her father's death.

## Analysis

Though this chapter is heart-rending in the fact that the Reverend is dying, it is also cathartic. The Reverend rambles in his mind, and as there are no filters, Jack gets a glimpse into the deepest thoughts that his father held for him all these years. He learns that his father never stopped loving him, never stopped being proud of him, despite his life choices. This means a lot of Jack and it helps him to let go of a lot of baggage he'd been carrying with him for the last two decades.

The theme of family is demonstrated in this scene in that it is shown to be a place of support and understanding. Also, forgiveness is more readily given here than anywhere else. The themes of forgiveness and redemption are also demonstrated in this chapter



in that the Reverend, in a moment or two of lucidity, recognizes that Jack's attempt to tell his father about the status of his soul is disingenuous. This clarity shocks Jack and it makes him realize that redemption is a personal business, not something that is done for someone else, or because someone else wants you to do it, or duty calls for it. Redemption, then, is demonstrated to be that which a person chooses and allows to happen as it will, and in its own good time. For a brief moment, Jack knows peace.

Forgiveness is also demonstrated when Jack begins down the path to forgiving himself for many things. He confesses to Glory that he missed their mother's funeral because he was ashamed to come. Newly released from prison, he just couldn't face everyone. It was easier, then, to just stay gone, and run. He realizes, after speaking with Glory, that forgiveness doesn't have to be a two way street, with one asking for, or deserving, forgiveness, and then another person accepting the apology and extending forgiveness. What he realizes is that the person asking for forgiveness has fulfilled their part of the bargain by simply regretting an action and apologizing for it. In this respect, a person can forgive themselves, even if the offended party can't extend the forgiveness on their part. He shares this realization with Glory, and they both benefit from this revelation.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How have both Glory and Jack benefited from a new understanding of forgiveness?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does the Reverend tell Jack about redemption that he didn't know before?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How is the theme of family demonstrated in this chapter?

## **Vocabulary**

admiration, refuge, reflective, emphasized, indefinite, callous, turpitude



# Chapter 18

## Summary

### JACK HAD BROUGHT IN HIS SUIT

Jack cooks breakfast and when Glory comes down she finds him packing. She asks him what he is doing since he'd said he was going to wait for a response from Della. He tells her that when he went in to check in on their father that he was worse, that he didn't recognize Jack, where he was, or even who he was. Jack says that he's put in a call to Teddy who will be there in a couple of days. Jack says he will stay until then, and then he will leave. Glory argues that he needs to stay, but Jack says that it would be the worst thing he could do.

Glory goes to see Ames and tells him that the family has been called in to pay last respects. He says he will come by later as well. When Glory gets back to the house Jack is dressed in his best suit. He says that he's going to speak with Ames one last time. Glory tells him that he has just left to go to the church. Jack says that he will go speak with him there. When he returns he says that incredibly the talk with Ames went well and that Ames had told him that deep down, Jack was a good person. Jack believes him and Glory agrees.

Jack goes to church the next day, out of respect, he says, for Ames. The reader learns that Glory had given a great deal of money to her fiancé over the years that they were together, and in hindsight she sees how naïve she had been and how stupid. She tries to fight the bitterness, but is not able. She goes to the mailbox and finds an assortment of letters there for her father. And there, in the middle of them, is a letter to Jack from Della.

She takes it to Jack, terrified of what it might say. Jack asks for some privacy. He tells Glory that what it said made no difference, that he would still be leaving. He gathers his things and leans down to give his father a kiss. His father turns from him telling him that he is tired of all of this. Jack agrees, and leaves.

Teddy arrives shortly after Jack's departure and helps Glory take care of the Reverend. One day when she is out in the yard a car drives slowly by. There is a black woman driving and a young child in the backseat. The woman gets out and asks if Jack is there. Glory knows that this woman must be Della. She tells Della that Jack has left and she doesn't know where he has gone. Glory puts it all together and asks Della if she is Jack's wife. Glory hasn't missed the fact that the young boy's name is Robert, after their father. Della says that she is his wife and had been writing those letters. They leave.

Later, Glory sits on the steps of her father's house and declares that she will not change anything at the old place because she wants it to remain the same for that time and occasion when Jack, or Jack's child, might come home again.



## Analysis

The reader sees some additional catharsis for Jack when he goes to visit Ames at the church one last time. For Ames to tell him that he is basically a good person deep down, it changes Jack. The notion or idea that he is the black sheep, the derelict child, is now lifted from him, and he believes that possibly he can find a place to call home in the world.

The letter from Della, Jack's connection to his former life, does not change things for Jack. In fact, he's already determined a course of action for himself. The reader isn't told why, but Jack suggests that Della will be safer and better off without him. He realizes that his father is within days of dying and he can't bring himself to stay, nor confront all of his brothers and sisters and their questions. He tells his father that he is leaving and when his father tells him that he is tired of it all, Jack understands. Jack gets only too well that saying goodbye and having to leave is painful, no matter how often one does it, or under what circumstance.

The reader learns that Della is African American and that she and Jack were married and had a son, whom he named Robert, after the Reverend. This explains much to Glory (and the reader) in that during this era (1950-1960s) civil rights tensions were high and racial inequities were such that a mixed marriage would never have been tolerated. Many would have viewed it as unlawful and immoral. Jack understands this and distances himself on purpose.

Of all the characters in the novel, the one that hasn't been able to move past her bitterness and anger about her past is Glory. She still hurts from how she was used and abandoned by the man she was seeing for so many years in St. Louis. She does come to terms with what happened, and the reader is lead to believe that she will eventually work past it, but that it may take more time for that to happen. That she chooses to remain at the home and keep it as much the same as she can demonstrates, one last time, the theme of family.

In this last chapter, the theme of family is underscored in that while the patriarch of the family has passed away, the things that he stood for, the best parts of who he was, will be remembered, honored, and held in trust by all of the family members, and especially by Glory. Family is shown to be a place that offers support, honor, education, history, examples, honesty, and guidance, when possible. Each member agrees to an unwritten rule that everyone belongs, no matter how far they roam, or how long it has been between visits. The door is always open, always welcoming, and always there.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Jack leave?





## **Discussion Question 2**

How has Glory changed over the course of the novel?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How is the theme of family demonstrated in this final chapter?

## **Vocabulary**

banter, astride, delved, flippant, cavalier, grievances, contribute, limbo, collapse, hoard



# Characters

## Reverend Boughton

Reverend Robert Boughton is the patriarch of the family. The era is the mid to late 1950's when racial tensions and civil rights movements have become contentious. Living in the small town of Gilead, the Reverend Boughton doesn't think that what happens in the outside world has much impact on his small town, his family, or his congregation. However, he is quite mistaken.

As the story opens he has been a widower for many years. His children, all eight of them, have left Gilead long ago to start their own lives. The reader doesn't learn about each child, but only those that seem to stick in his memory the most. One of those would be his son, Jack, whom he named after his best friend Jack Ames, his neighbor and fellow pastor in the town. Jack has been one of those children that tested every boundary and rule, and often disgraced and embarrassed the Reverend. However, the reader learns that Jack left the family and has been gone for more than 20 years. The Reverend was hurt by Jack's sudden disappearance and has worried all of the intervening years about Jack's health and well being. When he receives a letter from Jack, the Reverend is moved to tears.

The Reverend is a kind and compassionate person, as evidenced by the memories that the reader shares with him, as well as those memories of his daughter, Glory, who has come home to take care of him. He is not a man without regrets, however, as he feels badly about the way that he and the family treated Annie, the girl that Jack got pregnant and abandoned. The Reverend believes that he should have done more to help the family. As the novel opens, the Reverend is fairly frail and feeble, and his health is declining rapidly. It frustrates him to not be able to go and do as he used to, but he is grateful for Glory, and later, Jack, for helping him and taking care of him.

## Glory Boughton

Glory has returned from further upstate where she was an English teacher in the high school, there. The reader learns that she is fastidious about the house, and as soon as she comes to live with her father sets about cleaning the house from the top to the bottom. She likes things orderly and organized, finding comfort in predictability. This characteristic places her squarely at odds with her brother Jack, who is chaos personified, in many respects.

Glory has come to live with her father because as the spinster sister of the family she feels that she is the best candidate for the job. She guards a secret, one that she only shares with Jack later in the novel. At one point she told the family that she was engaged to be married. However, she and the man were never truly engaged. Later, she finds out that he had been using her for her money, and that he was, in fact,



married. She was crippled from the embarrassment and with most of her savings depleted, she needed to come home as much as her father needed her to help out.

Glory loves her family ferociously, even if they don't always agree with one another. She often felt invisible growing up, and felt as if she didn't have any true talent. However, after Jack comes to stay, she is able to speak to him about their childhood and many old wounds are healed, for them both. Glory is stubborn, caring, and adheres to society's rules, worrying about appearances and image in the community. She often does things that she might not really enjoy, simply because it is what her father or someone else would want her to do, or expect her to do.

## Jack Boughton

Jack Boughton was the middle child in the Boughton family, and can be considered the wayward or black sheep of the family. From an early age, the reader learns, he was asking questions about everything, pushing boundaries, and taking every opportunity to challenge convention. This placed him at odds with his father, the community, and his family on many occasions. This included public intoxication, theft, and other misdemeanors, which the community overlooks because of who his father is. Finally, he crosses the line when he gets a local girl pregnant, then runs away.

Jack will later tell Glory that he loved Annie and would have married her but that Annie's father, nor theirs, would hear of it. Realizing that no one would ever let him have a fresh start in Gilead, he left town vowing never to shame them again. At one point, the reader learns, his brother had come looking for him in St. Louis, and had actually tracked him down. He was a full blown alcoholic at the time and made his brother swear not to say that he'd seen him.

Later, the reader learns that Jack did something that landed him in jail, and that he was in jail for several years. The day after his release he received word that his mother had died, but he didn't have the money to make it home for the funeral. He contacts his father twenty years later to ask to come home. The reader learns that he has come home because he has run away from his family obligations, but not for the reason the reader is lead to believe. For ten years he had been married, in secret, to an African American woman. They had a child, whom he named Robert. With the growing racial unrest, Jack had feared for their safety if they stayed with him. So, he'd left them, hoping to hit the rest button in Gilead. He does mend fences with his father and Ames, as well as Glory. However, in many respects, he leaves just as damaged as he arrived.

## Grace

Grace is one of the Boughton daughters. She was very fair and delicate, and she could play the piano extremely well. Glory talks about how Gracie was sent to study with a woman many counties away.



## **Mrs. Blanks**

Mrs. Blanks is the housekeeper that the children hired to keep the house for their father after their mother passed away. After Glory arrives, they dismiss her.

## **Della**

The reader doesn't learn much about Della first hand, but rather through stories pieced together from Jack and Glory's musings. The reader knows that Jack loves Della and that Della's father is against the couple's continued relationship. Glory figures out that Della must still care for Jack and insists that Jack try to reach Della through a mutual friend, rather than sending his letters to her directly. When a letter from Della does come through for Jack, it is too late. The racial riots in Chicago and other major cities cause Jack to determine that he needs to keep his distance. It is only after Jack has left and Della has driven up to the house in Gilead that Glory learns that Della is African American and that Jack has a child.

## **Robby**

Robby is Pastor Ames's son that Jack plays catch with sometimes. He seems to admire Jack which upsets the Pastor since the Pastor remembers Jack as a young man and doesn't want his son to be influenced negatively.

## **Lila**

Lila is Pastor Ames's much younger wife. Ames waited until much later in life to marry. Now, ten years or so younger than the Reverend, Ames has two younger children. Lila is kind, intuitive, and seems attracted to Jack, though she never acts upon it.

## **Annie Wheeler**

Annie Wheeler was the freckle-faced girl that Jack got pregnant when they were teenagers. Glory recalls visiting Annie and the baby a few times and that the baby was a beautiful child. The baby catches pneumonia its first winter and dies. The Boughton family feel guilty about the baby's death, believing that they should have done more.

## **Robert**

This is the name of Jack's son with Della. He is about nine years old when Glory meets him. He is named after Jack and Glory's father, Robert.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Boughton House

The Boughton house is the family home that was built by the Reverend's father at the turn of the century. The Reverend Robert Boughton raised eight children there. Symbolically, this home represents the family's relationship, and even more particularly, the Reverend Boughton, himself. He and the house are both suffering from failing physical structures, as well as internal parts corroding and not working. Once the house was immaculate, much like the Reverend. Toward the end of his lifetime and the house's lifetime, the attention to details, grooming, landscaping, and so forth goes by the wayside. Both look unkempt.

Once the children return (Jack and Glory) the Reverend seems to rally, as does the house. Both start looking better, and the Reverend seems to be feeling better, too. However, at the end, when he dies, it is Glory who determines that she will continue to live in the home and keep it as a memorial to her mother and father and their lives there.

As far as the family relationship goes, it parallels the condition of the home as well. It was once a well kept home, frequently visited, and bustling with activity and music. When the children leave the yard begins to grow over, shrubs go untrimmed, and much of the exterior of the home starts to suffer from lack of proper maintenance. What this signifies is that the children left home and didn't both to continue to visit their home or their roots, let alone their family. Once Glory and Jack return and begin to take care of the place once more and reconnect with their father, the home begins to return to its former solid state, just like the relationship.

## Checkers

Checkers is a game that Ames and the Reverend play when Ames comes over to visit. It is more than just a game, however, as they use it as a way to talk about serious issues, without seeming to discuss them.

## WEB DuBois book

This is one of the first clues as to what and whom Jack has been involved with during his 20 years away. WEB DuBois was extremely active in the civil rights movement.

## DeSoto Car

The DeSoto car is an old car that Jack's father put in the barn. No one can remember how they came to have the car, only that they have it and that it's never been driven.



Jack goes out to try and get it to run again. This is symbolic of Jack, himself. He has returned to Gilead hoping to have a fresh start, to restart his life again, much like the old car. As he works on the car he is also working on himself, making positive strides toward turning his life around.

## Prometheus

Prometheus, in Greek Mythology, disobeyed the gods and gave fire to mankind. As a punishment the gods decreed that he would be chained to a mountain where eagles would eat out his liver while he remained alive, during the day, and then at night, he would heal. With the sunrise the process would continually repeat itself. Jack references this (an allusion) when he's discussing his life with Glory. She doesn't understand how he could relate to Prometheus. However, by the end of the novel, the reader and Glory understand. He married a woman of color during a time when it was forbidden. As a result, he can't live openly with the woman he loves and child she bore for him. He drinks excessively, which damages the liver.

## Television

Jack talks Glory into purchasing a Philco television set from the hardware store for their father. This is the television that the Reverend watches and sees the racial riots occurring.

## Della's Letters

Jack writes Della every day and walks out each morning to mail the letters. Four of them return marked 'Return to Sender.' This affects Jack badly. He goes back to drinking and tries to kill himself. Later, Glory tells him that Della most likely didn't mark them, but rather Della's father. She suggests that he write to Della through a mutual friend, which he does. At the end of the story, he does receive a letter from Della; but, he tells Glory that at this late date it doesn't matter any more. He leaves before Della can get there.

## Newspaper

The newspaper is left on the breakfast table, as usual, but Glory tries to take a particular issue off of the table before their father can see it. It has a large article on the front page of a robbery in town. She doesn't want the Reverend to see it and think that Jack has been up to his old tricks.

## Garden

Jack decides that he's going to start a garden, just like they used to have when they were children. He spends many hours planting and cultivating the fields. This is also



symbolic of his attempting to reconnect to his roots and regain some of his childhood, to do it over again.

## **Snowflake**

Snowflake was an old white plow horse that the children had growing up. He was kind and patient and very, very big as Glory remembers. They still keep old Snowflake's halter in the barn.



# Settings

## Boughton House

This is the childhood home of Jack, Teddy, and Glory, as well as an assortment of 8 children in the Boughton family. The farm has many acres. One neighbor is another preacher, and the other neighbor is an agnostic Russian. The family hasn't changed much at the old farmstead over the years. As the Reverend aged, many things could not be repaired. When Glory moves in she begins repairing the interior of the home. When Jack arrives, he begins to fix the exterior of the home.

## Hardware Store

The hardware store is where Jack first hears people talking about him behind his back. This is also where Glory comes to order their new television.

## Church

The church is the original church where Reverend Boughton served as preacher for many years and where his family grew up attending. This is where Ames, his neighbor, now preaches. It is also where Jack goes to see if he might begin again in Gilead.

## St. Louis

Located in Missouri, St. Louis is a two hour drive from Gilead. This is where Jack ended up after he ran away 20 years previously and where Teddy tracked him down.

## Library

Jack borrows a book from the library without checking it out first. He checks out numerous books for Glory on social unrest, equality, and civil rights. The reader doesn't know why until the very end.





# Themes and Motifs

## Forgiveness

The theme of forgiveness runs throughout the novel, *Home*, by Marilyn Robison. Of the three main characters, Glory, Jack, and the Reverend, each has something that they need, or feel they need, forgiveness for.

The Reverend, shortly after Jack arrives, pulls his son aside and apologizes, to Jack's horror and shock, for not being a better father. Jack tries to protest at his father's apology, but his father silences him, saying that he needs to say what he has to say. He tells Jack that in hindsight he shouldn't have justified all of the things that Jack was doing, and that he shouldn't have tried to force Jack into being someone and something he was not. He said that he should have allowed you to experience the consequences of his actions earlier on, and then perhaps he wouldn't have felt it necessary to run away and stay gone for so many years. He tells Jack that he had never forgiven himself for failing him. Jack accepts his apology, but does not believe that his father owes him one.

Jack, himself, has much to be sorry for. He deserted the girl that he got pregnant when he was a teenager, and then he deserted his wife and child of ten years in St. Louis. He has become an alcoholic and was, for a short while, in jail. He did not come to his mother's funeral and did not keep in contact with anyone from the family after he left. He did speak with Teddy one time after his older brother tracked him down in St. Louis, but he made his brother swear to keep his whereabouts secret. This was because he was ashamed of who he had become. In the end, it is clear that Jack is sorry and that he needed to be forgiven for the many things he had done. However, as the story unfolds, the reader learns that circumstances seemed to compel Jack to take the actions that he did. He was imprisoned as a result of his participation in a civil rights march. He married an African American and then realized that he'd put both her and their son in jeopardy by marrying them. The reader feels badly for Jack, but also frustrated with him for not figuring out a way to make things work. That he wants to change and needs someone to believe that he can change is evident.

Glory also has a need for forgiveness. She has kept a secret for many years, telling everyone in her family that she was engaged to be married, when in reality she was not. In fact, she was with a gentleman for several years (a long engagement she would tell them) but they had never really made plans to get married. Later, Glory found out that he was conning her for her money and had no intention of marrying her, ever. She realizes that she was being used and was vulnerable because of who she was and what she felt like she needed for her life. She has to forgive herself for being so naive, which is difficult for her since she likes to be the one in control.



## Family

The theme of family is explored in the story, *Home*, by Marilyn Robinson. The central unifying theme of family is introduced in the first chapter when the reader learns that a middle aged woman, named Glory, has returned to her childhood home to take care of her father, a retired minister. The family is painted as a large and boisterous family. As a typical family in the late fifties the boys and girls in the family were expected to adhere to fairly strict rules for behavior. Jack, the black sheep of the family, did not adhere to those rules and causes a great deal of trouble and heartache for the family.

The idea of family shifts and changes throughout the novel. First, it is portrayed as a mandate by God to fulfill the directive to go forth and be fruitful, according to the Reverend Boughton. However, later on in the story, family is shown to be a support mechanism whereby those who are injured or weak are supported or made stronger by the group. This is particularly true when it is learned that Jack has gotten a local girl pregnant. His father goes to the girl's home to see what they can do to help. Later, they invite the girl to the house and attempt to help her with the child. Later, the same support is extended to Jack when he returns home, as well as Glory.

Lastly, family is shown to act as an anchor for its members in that it serves as a reminder of who they are, what they believe, and where they come from. Glory realizes this when she decides to keep the home after it was willed to her by her father. She understands the value of having a childhood home to come back to, not only for her, but for the rest of her family. It is a way to remember the ideals that their family had and how they should behave in the larger world.

## Race

The book begins with a subtle theme surrounding race that blossoms and takes center stage at the end of the novel. At the beginning of the novel there are subtle mentions about race in the way that the characters speak about the racial unrest in the larger cities. Jack, himself, says numerous times that when in St. Louis he'd attended an all black church and that it was a lovely place to be. He also reads books by civil rights leaders, such as WEB DuBois, and discusses civil rights with Glory.

At one point, when they are watching television, Jack asks his father what he thinks about the race riots that are occurring and are being shown on the evening news. His father says that the mixing of the races should be forgotten, that he believed that it was God's will that they stay separate. This upsets Jack, though the reader doesn't learn why until the end of the novel. It is ironic that a minister, whose sole responsibility is to preach the love of God, should be adamant about the destructive institution of segregation.

Lastly, at the end of the novel, it is revealed that Della was not only Jack's secret wife, but that they had a son together. More importantly, it is disclosed to the reader, as well as Glory, that Della is African American. Then, of course, everything that has come



before makes sense. The reader understands that Jack has kept his distance because he fears for his wife and son's safety if the larger society should learn that they are a couple.

## Redemption

Many of the characters in the novel wish for redemption of some kind or another. Of course, the one that is seeking redemption the most is Jack. Having left home when he was in his late teens, and having stayed gone for more than 20 years, he knows that he hurt his family by not contacting them for so long. He is ashamed of not coming to his mother's funeral, and ashamed for causing so much trouble and embarrassment to his family when he was younger. He is hopeful, at least for a short while, when he returns to Gilead, that he will be able to restart his life, to start fresh, and maybe be forgiven by the town.

However, when the robberies happen and immediately everyone starts pointing the finger at him, Jack realizes that there will be no redemption possible for him. However, he and his father make their peace, and in that respect, there is a certain amount of redemption that Jack feels as a result. Jack wants to be redeemed in the eyes of Glory, as well, but doesn't know how.

Though Jack has already left by the end of the novel, he is redeemed in Glory's eyes when she learns the truth about Della. She realizes that Jack did learn how to make sacrifices for the good of others, to put others before himself, and in this regard, he is redeemed in her mind. Though he never could find it in his heart to embrace his father's religion, he does try to please his father, before his death, by going to their old church. However, he understands after attending that the redemption he is seeking won't come from God, but from his family, and from himself.

## Sin

Sin is an interesting theme that is depicted in this novel. At first the definition is discussed as being very black and white. However, as the story progresses, it becomes evident that most sin does not come as neatly packaged as is thought. For example, Jack would appear to be doing the wrong thing by leaving his wife and child. However, at the end of the story, he hasn't committed any sin, but rather has acted selflessly in order to protect them.

The Reverend recognizes his own shortcomings at the end of the novel, and believes that he sinned in not raising Jack better. He believes that if he had just done a better job then Jack might not have turned out as he did. None of this children believe that it is a sin, but what comes out of this scene is the fact that a sin is a perceived wrong against someone else, or against God, or both. To the Reverend, then, he sinned against both God and Jack by not being a better father.



Jack's sin is that of rebelling against the establishment, which the reader learns he has been doing since he was a young boy. In his eyes, especially as an older man, he doesn't believe that he has sinned as far as marrying his wife. The sin he believes he has committed was leaving town and not letting them know where he was, not attending his mother's funeral, and giving in to drinking.

Glory believes that she has sinned because she allowed herself to be taken in and conned by a nice talking man, one who took all of her money and left her. Her embarrassment and shame were the punishment, in her estimation, for her sin.

All of these characters allow their perception of their own personal sins to dictate how they act and react to each other and the world at large. Had they been able to set aside their 'sins' and forgive themselves for being human and making ill advised choices, then things might have gone better for them all.



# Styles

## Point of View

The point of view, in the novel, *Home*, by Marilynne Robinson, is told from the third person point of view, but it is primarily situated around Glory and her perspective. The reader is not offered as close an interior glimpse into the characters of Jack or the Reverend. The reader sees things unfold through Glory's perception and through her need to make sense of the ongoing dynamic between her brother and father. She also comes to terms with her own skeletons and the reader gets to view the process by which she reasons her way through the situations she's been through and the events that currently take place.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in the novel is situated around the types of idioms and sayings that would have been prevalent during the late 1950s and 60s. There are radio shows, music, politicians, and other iconic offerings that the reader may be unfamiliar with, but that would offer a broader depth of understanding if researched. This is particularly true of the race riots and civil rights demonstrations that were taking place during that time.

The Lexicon of most vocabulary words used is on the 11-12th grade range, often utilizing upper taxonomies. The text can be utilized with most grades; however, much of the language would need to be discussed, as would terms common to that era.

## Structure

The book offers only one chapter for its entire length. The reader is left to create their own chapter headings from the capitalized headers offered after a break in the text. From this the reader comes to feel as if they are reading from a diary, or a freeform type of journal entry. Most of the work is shown from Glory's viewpoint, and as such, gives great insight into the unfolding storyline. Almost all of the action takes place at the Boughton House, with brief excursions away. The novel is structured much the same way, following only a loosely constructed version of chapter titles.

One or more themes are demonstrated in each chapter, beginning with the theme of family and ending with the same theme.



## Quotes

Home. What kinder place could there be on earth, and why did it seem to them all like exile?

-- Glory (Chapter 15 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** This is something that Glory is thinking about when she realizes that Jack is going to be leaving, once again. She is disappointed with the church and how they hurt Jack.

How to announce the return of comfort and well-being except by cooking something fragrant. That is what her mother always did. After every calamity of any significance she would fill the atmosphere of the house with the smell of cinnamon rolls or brownies, or with chicken and dumplings, and it would mean, This house has a soul that loves us all, no matter what.

-- Glory (Chapter 15 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Glory is cooking a grand meal for Ames and his family to come over. She wants the home to smell nice because it evokes memories for everyone, especially her father. To all of them it means comfort and belonging.

The colored people," his father said, "appear to me to be creating problems and obstacles for themselves with all this— commotion. There's no reason for all this trouble. They bring it on themselves.

-- Reverend Boughton (Chapter 13 paragraph 51)

**Importance:** This is an important quote because it typifies what many rural whites thought about the racial unrest in America at the time. It also shows that the Reverend is flawed and influenced by the culture rather than by the Bible.

I have never found comfort in confession, either. It just unleashes every bad consequence you might have avoided by keeping your transgressions to yourself.

-- Jack (Chapter 11 paragraph 35)

**Importance:** Jack is telling Glory about his attendance at church over the years. It also lets the reader know how Jack views religion.

It is possible to know the great truths without feeling the truth of them. That's where the problem lies. In my case.

-- Jack (Chapter 5 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** This shows Jack's dilemma for the rest of the novel. He has been raised to know right from wrong, but life is not simply black and white for him.

Weary or bitter or bewildered as we may be, God is faithful. He lets us wander so we will know what it means to come home.



-- The Reverend (Chapter 4 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** The Reverend says this just after Jack arrives. He is trying to make Jack feel all right for having been gone for so many years, to give purpose and meaning behind his distance.

If you forgive, he would say, you may indeed still not understand, but you will be ready to understand, and that is the posture of grace.

-- Reverend (Chapter 3 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** The Reverend is trying to help Jack understand that it is never too late to make a fresh start, to turn one's life around.

Their father said if they could see as God can, in geological time, they would see it leap out of the ground and turn in the sun and spread its arms and bask in the joys of being an oak tree in Iowa.

-- Glory (Chapter 3 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This is when Glory is thinking about her father and how wise he is, and how often she'd wondered at the depth of his faith and wished that hers was as strong.

Experience had taught them that truth had sharp edges and hard corners, and could be seriously at odds with kindness.

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This quote talks about the girl who Jack got pregnant and deserted. The family was very bitter.

What an embarrassment that was, being somewhere because there was nowhere else for you to be.

-- Glory (Chapter 2 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** This was what Glory thought to herself when she first arrived at her father's home.

When her father spoke to the Lord he spoke in earnest— out of the depths, as he said sometimes. Out of a grief so generous it embraced them all.

-- Glory (Chapter 1 paragraph 17)

**Importance:** At the beginning of the novel, the author establishes the Reverend's depth of emotion in regards to his son, Jack.

There is a saying that to understand is to forgive, but that is an error, so Papa used to say. You must forgive in order to understand. Until you forgive, you defend yourself against the possibility of understanding.

-- Glory (Chapter 1 paragraph 23)

**Importance:** This particular quote demonstrates one of the novel's major themes, which is that of forgiveness.