

# **In the Castle of My Skin Study Guide**

**In the Castle of My Skin by George Lamming**

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# Contents

<a href="#">In the Castle of My Skin Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1-2.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 3-4.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 5-6.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 7-8.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 9-10.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 11-12.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13-14.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>



# Plot Summary

In *The Castle of My Skin* is an autobiographical account of author George Lamming's childhood growing up in Barbados. The narrative takes place from the time the narrator, G, is nine to when he is seventeen. The novel begins on the narrator's ninth birthday, which is marked by heavy rains that cause severe flooding. The narrator's mother states that these waters are a 'blessing,' but the narrator remains unsure.

The novel chronicles the changes that sweep over the island of Barbados within the nine years the novel encompasses. The changes occur when Mr. Slime, one of the schoolteachers, rises to political power. Instead of initiating positive social change, as he promises, the power corrupts Mr. Slime and he reneges on his promise to make the village people of Barbados landowners.

The social hierarchy plays a prominent role in the novel. On the top of the hierarchy, in his castle on the hill, is Mr. Creighton, the white landlord. He owns the land that the villagers live on; they pay him rent to live there. Following Mr. Creighton are the black overseers. They work for the landlord and help keep order in the village. The villagers are at the bottom of this social hierarchy. They have little freedom and live in severe poverty.

While the villagers exist at the bottom of the hierarchy, they do not see themselves as enslaved. Instead, the villagers have a sense of freedom that comes from their allegiance to the English Empire. However, their lack of resources and agency leaves the villagers at the whims of both man and nature.

The social hierarchy is enforced through those in power. In the beginning, Mr. Creighton holds the power. This man has a conflicted sense of responsibility. On one hand, Mr. Creighton wants to do what is right for the native people. On the other hand, he remains shackled to an economic system that places monetary value above human worth. The ex-school teacher-turned politician, Mr. Slime, overthrows Mr. Creighton's power. When Mr. Slime accedes to power, he promises to make the native people landowners of their island. However, greed and power lead to Mr. Slime's corruption. Ultimately, he succeeds Mr. Creighton as landowner, but does not bless the people of Barbados with their land. Instead, he greedily hordes the land, evicts some of the natives, and charges the rest exuberant amounts of interest on their rented property.

This hierarchy marks rigid boundaries within the novel, which G. attempts to transcend by attending high school and gaining an education. While his education allows him to leave the island, he does not gain the sense of identity necessary for obtaining one's freedom. The narrator's friend, Trumper, returns from America at the end of the novel. He explains that, in order to achieve identity, the narrator must break himself from Barbados and seek an understanding of his race.

The novel ends with the hope that the narrator will leave Barbados and search for his identity, though with the sobering knowledge that the remainder of the villagers will

remain confined to the social boundaries that mark their lives. They will not transcend the hierarchy that enslaves them.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

Chapter 1. The novel opens as the narrator turns nine years old. Instead of sunshine, rain falls on his birthday, which his mother regards as “showers of blessings.” There is an overarching fear of flooding, which has been known to come over the village and wipe away entire houses. In this chapter, the narrator relates that he is an only child and he lives with his mother. His father is not mentioned.

The same day, the narrator’s mother finds out that one of the other village families, the Fosters, had their home swept away by the flood. The father had clung to the house as if floated down the river. Additionally, the narrator’s mother looks for an elderly couple that everyone refers to as “Pa and Ma.” At the close of the chapter, the mother warns the son not to drink the rainwater as the school inspector is coming tomorrow. He feels remorse that his birthday drifted by in a fog of blackness with the rain.

Chapter 2. The chapter begins as the narrator’s mother is giving him a bath outside. Peeping over the fence is a group of young vagabonds, trying to look on to the spectacle of the bath. The children put too much weight on the fence, so it sways back and forth and ultimately snaps the mother’s pumpkin vine. One of the young children, Bob, climbs back up on the fence and his weight topples the entire structure. Bob’s mother threatens him with corporal punishment, so he hides in the narrator’s house.

While Bob’s mother and the narrator’s mother look for Bob, Mrs. Foster comes by. She tells the story of Gordon--Bess’ grandson--and the rooster. Mrs. Foster relates that Gordon, a young child, was taking the rooster to the market to be sold. On his way, he passed a white man at the bus stop. The white man was dressed in a suit, ready for work, but Gordon approached him anyway. Gordon attempts to sell the white man the rooster, but the white man declines. As Gordon is trying to persuade the man to buy the rooster, it defecates on the white man’s face and on his suit. The women are awestruck and then move on to discuss Mrs. Foster’s bad fortune in having her home swept away by the flood.

The narrator then tells readers more about his life. He lives on the Island of Barbados, which is an English colony. He discusses the hierarchal structure of power on the island; the landlords, who are white, hold the most power. They do not communicate with the villagers. Instead, the landlords hire village overseers as foremen who watch over the villagers, both at work and in their domestic lives. For example, the narrator explains the bathhouses, which are set up for older boys and men. Even here, in their private affairs, the overseers are in control. They decide how long each shower will be. The narrator tells a story about a group of young boys who attempt to urinate while bathing. They are caught by the overseer and banished from the bathhouse. On another side of domesticity, the narrator tells about a game that the village boys play. The young boys put pins on the railroad ties and wait for the train to come by and sharpen their pins into



knives. The older boys place nails on the ties, which are sharpened into bigger knives. The narrator explains that the young boys are too afraid to use nails because it is rumored that they might make the train derail.

The chapter ends with a narration of Mrs. Foster approaching Mr. Creighton, a landlord, to discuss the loss of her home. She is overwhelmed with joy when Mr. Creighton gives her sixty cents and tells her to pray.

## Analysis

The opening scenes paint a vivid picture of the hierarchal structure that exists in this small village in Barbados. First, the young narrator illustrates the hierarchy of needs that exists within this frame. The villagers are consumed with trying to get by on a daily basis. Their lives are controlled by the floods, which threaten to consume their homes without warning. In this sense, the flood becomes personified, devouring everything that stands in its way. This is directly related to the hierarchy of social power in the village that consists of landlords, village overseers, and villagers. Whereas the landlords live in expensive mansions, the villagers live in severe poverty. Their homes are small huts, made from the Earth. They must attend public bathing houses and wash with disinfectant to help suppress the spread of disease. However, even here in the bathing houses, their lives are governed. The overseers watch each movement and regulate when to step in and out of the showers. In contrast, the landlords have servants, and incredibly expensive belongings.

Although the narrator is a child, readers sense that he is beyond his years in experience. He understands the hierarchal structure that governs the city and works inside of its boundaries. The child is also bound by the laws of his mother, who regulates his actions and seeks to make him behave. At one point, the narrator's mother, Bob's mother, and Mrs. Foster have a conversation in regards to how children are more boisterous now and misbehave more often. These comments illustrate the elders desire to uphold the structure, where those in power reign and others submit. They seek to bring this model to their homes as well.

Control becomes an overarching theme in these early episodes. The villagers have no control over their lives, which are dictated by God, the landlords and, more directly, by the overseers. God controls nature, which seeks to destroy, as seen in the flood. Additionally, in chapter two, the mother's pumpkin vine is also ruined. This is the one thing she could grow. The neighbors scoff her for attempting and the young village children thwart her efforts. Thus, the mother has no control over nature. Additionally, the villagers' lives are governed by the overseers who supervise both in the fields at work and even at home, as seen in the bathhouses.

## Vocabulary

mahogany, departure, consolation, blessing, laden, shingles, converged, antipathy, precisely, communicative, purge, phial, jeering, skillet, obediently, plunged, pitiful,



surrendered, barricade, indignant, horrified, episode, brazen, suffusion, penetrated, agricultural, absentee owners, mahogany, calamity



# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

Chapter 3. Chapter three begins on May 24, Queen Victoria's birthday. The narration shifts to a third person omniscient point of view. The reader is taken to Groddick's boys' school, where there are approximately 1000 male students. The school inspector, who visits the school twice a year to check attendance and administer intelligence tests, arrives at the school. He lectures the young boys, saying that they may have heard about the war in Abyssinia and seen pictures of the "King of Ethiopia." However, he reminds them that the British Empire is always on the side of peace. The boys then do a number of musical performances for the inspector where they recite what they have learned. The inspector announces that three of the boys are going on to high school, which is an enormous achievement. He gives each of those boys three pennies each. He then administers two pennies to each older boy and one penny each to the younger boys. Before he leaves, the head teacher announces that Victoria was a real queen. At this, several of the boys giggle.

When the inspector is gone, the head teacher demands to know why they laughed. He is irate that they would laugh and make jokes "in the presence of respectable people" such as the inspector. One boy stands up to explain, but is immediately intimidated by the head teacher. The teacher demands that four other boys hold him down. The head teacher whips him numerous times--the narrator loses count--and when the beating is over, the boy is incapable of standing and lost control of his bowels.

After the beating, the boys who held down the victim help him clean himself up. The narration shifts again here. The point of view is taken up between four boys. The victim tells the other boys that another boy made a joke that caused everyone to laugh. The joke asked if the Queen's bloomers were red, white, and blue.

The four boys debate what to do next. At first, they decide that it is best to tell a father about the beating, because they are the only people who have the authority to deal with a teacher. However, they conclude that a father might get even more upset, thinking that the boy was really bad and that the teacher didn't beat the victim enough. The boys then decide it would be better to tell a mother, because mothers have more feeling. Ultimately, they conclude that mothers are stupid because they can't keep a father around and would probably end up telling the father anyway. The boys then decide it would be best to stone the teacher after he leaves the school.

They discuss how much power the head teacher has in the village because everyone respects him. They state that they would be making history if they stone him. The boys discuss hierarchies in more detail, stating that there is a supervising minister and an inspector at the elementary school whereas the high school does not have any supervisors. They contemplate that a high school teacher can get a student pregnant without repercussions whereas an elementary school teacher cannot. They ultimately





decide not to stone the teacher because no one would be on their side. The victim reveals that his mother works for the head teacher and knows all that goes on in his house. One time, the head teacher got too drunk and lost the money to buy his wife's tobacco. The victim wonders if the head teacher resents his family for knowing too much and this is why he was beaten so dramatically.

The narrative shifts here and takes on the perspective of the boys who remain in the school room. The boys examine their pennies and wonder how each penny is made. Additionally, they theorize why the king was never seen and romanticize the notion of a "shadow king" who never does anything out in the open. They also contemplate Queen Victoria, who is known as a good queen because she frees the people of Barbados. The boys are not sure what this means, although they think it may be related to prison or slavery. They know very little about slavery and do not think it has anything to do with villagers in Barbados. They cannot image any man in any part of the world owning a man or woman from Barbados; they are free.

The point of view moves again and shows the teacher in class four fidgeting with an envelope that is intended for the teacher of class five. When the teachers attempt to exchange the envelope, it drops between them. A student picks the envelope up. Eventually, the student delivers the unopened envelope to the head teacher. The perspective of narrative shifts now to the head teacher, who opens the envelope. Enclosed are two pictures. One picture shows the head teacher's wife in a sexually intimate position with another man. The second picture is of a naked white couple. There is also a note that reads, "As we were last evening, Stephen." The head teacher is beyond confusion. He cannot make out the man in the photograph, but believes it to be the teacher of class 5, Mr. Slime. The head teacher wonders what he should do. He thinks about telling the inspector, but then decides that the entire situation would harm his family and the other teacher's family more than necessary. He wonders if he might confront the teacher and his wife quietly, without anyone else knowing.

The narrative jumps here to a reflection on slavery, which is compared to the Garden of Eden. When God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden, we are told, he started slavery. On Earth, the people couldn't think of anything except the Garden. Some tried to go back, but God wouldn't have them unless they repented, thus making them slaves. They all agreed to go back to the Garden, but they were ashamed because they didn't want to repent, they just didn't want to be alone. This is related to the Queen, who freed some who started to think about the empire more than the Garden to the point where nothing mattered except the English empire. It is concluded that there is a difference between slavery and imprisonment; slaves are free. It is decided that it is good to belong to the empire because the empire provides flowers, flags, and pennies. Thus, instead of real freedom, they choose the empire and the Garden.

The end of the chapter focuses on the head teacher once again. The students are dismissed and the teacher of class 5, Mr. Slime, is left alone with the head teacher.

Chapter 4. This chapter shifts to a discussion between the characters Ma and Pa. The two elderly people discuss changes that are coming to Barbados. Pa states that ever



since they got the news about the schoolmaster, Mr. Slime, he has felt a change happening. While it isn't clear what happened, it is clear that Mr. Slime no longer works at the school. Instead, he has become a revolutionary image. Mr. Slime opened the 'Friendly Society' and a 'Penny Bank' for the good of the villagers. Ma and Pa reflect that everyone in Creighton's village is a member of the Friendly Society and has been putting their money away in the Penny Bank. The two elderly people compare Mr. Slime to Moses, who helped his people cross into Egypt. Mr. Slime has talked about taking back Barbados and giving it to the native people. Ma and Pa speculate about what will happen to the landlord, Mr. Creighton. They wonder which man, Mr. Slime or Mr. Creighton, would be right in the eyes of the Lord.

Pa states that Mr. Slime has been talking about emigration to America, which he perceives as a land of prosperity. Pa compares America to Panama, where he worked in his younger days and made a small fortune. Ma reminds him that money comes and goes, like all material objects. She argues that she will not put her faith in anything on Earth, but will instead give herself to God, who can offer her salvation. She posits that, while Mr. Slime might offer salvation to many, he too will pass away. She states that she won't store any riches on Earth when flood, famine, and pestilence can take them away at any time. Pa says that Mr. Slime does offer salvation; he shows the villagers that they have just as much claim, if not more, to the land as Mr. Creighton and that it is safe to own land without worrying that it will be taken away. The chapter closes as Pa tells Ma that he touched a dead man in Panama. It frightened him and he wondered how he was alive and had all of his senses. They end by talking about being afraid to die.

## Analysis

Chapter three is the most important narrative moment we have come to so far in the novel. In chapter three, the reader is introduced to Lamming's narrative style, which fluctuates between characters. In this non-linear mode, Lamming allows readers to see from a variety of perspectives. In chapter three, the reader is given the perspectives of the beating victim, the children inside the schoolroom, and the head teacher. Additionally, there are moments with a third person omniscient narrator swoops in to give slightly more detail to help further the plot.

Chapter three also includes a discussion about slavery and freedom. The small boys converse about the topic while they examine their pennies. The boys are ignorant in this area and only have the knowledge that is given to them at school, which is highly one-sided. They are taught to love and admire the English Empire above all else. The boys cannot image someone from Barbados being a slave. However, they don't realize that the Empire has already enslaved them all and stripped the villagers of their freedoms.

The biblical allusions in this chapter demonstrate the tension that occurs between man and master. This is particularly evident when the boys invoke the Garden of Eden. Here, they see Eden as a form of slavery because God forces man to repent before he can be allowed to return to the Garden. Through this allusion, the boys fuse the Garden with the Empire; they see them as two sides of the same coin. Thus, they somewhat



recognize they are enslaved, but see this slavery not as imprisonment, but instead as a benign form of slavery that is meant to protect the people.

In chapter four, the theme of earthly temporality arises through the character of Ma. Unlike Pa, who believes in gaining wealth and prosperity in one's earthly life, Ma refuses to attempt to hold on to anything but her spiritual knowledge. She references the floods and how all can be swept away and brought to naught in an instant. Ma argues that episodes like these are beyond man's control. In her wisdom, she also sees Mr. Slime as a man who will pass; he is no different than anyone else who has risen to power. Ma predicts that Mr. Slime will be corrupted and his goals will only do harm to the villagers of Barbados. We must interpret Ma's visionary impulse as a warning; she is an elderly woman who has lived a great while and seen many things in her life. Her pleas to live for God rather than for man are lost on Pa, who is concerned with the here and now.

On the other hand, Pa represents the people of Barbados who are hopeful of change. He sees Mr. Slime as a man who can help the common villagers rise up and seize what is rightfully theirs. Pa refuses to dwell on the temporality of Earth and, instead, thinks about moving forward on the social hierarchy through acquiring land and goods. Thus, for Pa, emigration to America holds limitless possibilities.

## Vocabulary

dotish, accession, satisfied, convicts, austere, fidgeting, flamboyant, vulgar, alighted, cagily, entitled, scheming, impotence, predicament, consolation, leniently, drastically, repented, deliberate, wondrous, hoisted, obedience, linger



# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

Chapter 5. The chapter opens as the local villagers gather around Savory's food cart. Bob's father, Mr. Foster, and the overseer's brother engage in a discussion about Mr. Slime. They don't know the circumstances surrounding Mr. Slime's resignation but they trust Mr. Slime. Mr. Slime, who is organizing a shipping strike, is currently away negotiating wages with the authorities and the villagers are waiting for him to return. The men joke that the landlord, Creighton, will give out small sums of money to those in need, but is not readily willing to pay for larger projects, such as fixing the roads after the flood.

The men call Mr. Slime, "chief," and talk about how he won his seat in the general election the year after he left the school. They all agree that times are changing. The men briefly reflect on the uprising in Trinidad before discussing the importance of education.

At the conclusion of the chapter, two women, Baby Parker and Sheila get into a fight when Sheila calls Baby unclean. A constable appears and breaks up the fight. Afterward, Mr. Slime drives up and assures the people that the conclusion of the strike is satisfactory. He claims to have met with Mr. Creighton and reconciled a revision of wages in a fortnight. The men will be paid the new wage from the day of the strike. The men are a little disappointed at this lack of action.

Chapter 6. The narrative shifts back to the narrator, G, and his friend Bob. The boys are going to the beach and decide to take two different routes to see which one is faster. On his way, G witnesses a fight between two older boys. He meets up with Bob, but Bob runs away. G wonders what has happened between them. G thinks that maybe Bob is angry with him. Earlier that week, G's mother chastised him for hanging at the corner with Bob. His mother believes that the corner is a wicked place where the gang hangs out. She tells G to choose; he can serve the boys at the corner or her, but not both. G thinks that Bob overheard and might resent him for this incident. At the beach, G can see the larger boys swimming for coins that the white tourists have tossed out. The white men are entertained as the boys fight over the coins.

The narrative shifts to a game being played between Bob, Trumper, and Boy Blue. They are standing on the beach. As the waves come in, Bob yells for the sea to come no further. The boys play the game and talk about King Canute, who is a king in their history book.

Trumper and Boy Blue talk about a man named Jon, who promised to marry two women, Susie and Jen. However, on the wedding day, Jon ran away to the cemetery where he could see both churches, one where Susie was waiting and one where Jen was waiting. Some of the villagers went to look for him, but no one could find him.



The boys discuss the blackness of their skin. Boy Blue is darkest. They reflect that no black boy wants to be white; but no black boy wants to be black either. They think that the best looking girls on the island are those who are mulatto. However, there are few on the island who are not simply black.

The boys then converse about Bots, Bambi, and Bambina. The story is similar to Jon's, but Bambi gets married. He was living with two women at the same time, Bots and Bambina, and had children with both women. The women were best friends and they raised all the children like brother and sister. Bambi didn't love either woman more or less than the other. One day, a white woman came to town and told Bambi he was living in sin and needed to marry one of the women. Bambi arbitrarily chose to marry Bots. Bambina does not care one way or the other. Bambi and Bots are married, but life goes on as before. However, six months in, Bambi changes. He begins drinking and beating both women. The women turn on each other and fight over Bambi. One day, he has a heart attack and dies. The boys decide that marriage is at the heart of all social problems, and that it only causes fights.

Boy Blue decides to try to catch some crabs, which he has done on numerous occasions before. As he is attempting to get a hold of a crab, a wave comes up and washes Boy Blue away. Trumper and G scream and a fisherman appears and saves Boy Blue.

After the near-drowning incident, the boys discuss the ships they see. They note that the red, white, and blue flags symbolize that the ships are from England. They recall that England settled Barbados and America.

## Analysis

Chapter five provides a more comprehensive view of how the villagers view Mr. Slime, who they regard as their chief. While the villagers do not understand much about wages or strikes, they trust Mr. Slime to work things out for them. The villagers rely on a leader who can act as a liaison between the white landlords and the workers. Mr. Slime has the education and charisma to fulfill this role.

Education is also discussed throughout these chapters. The villagers view education as essential to moving up the social hierarchy. A man must be educated if he is to become anything. This is one reason the villagers respect Mr. Slime and the head teacher. In chapter six, we can see the division between education and ignorance in the boys' discussion. While the boys attend school, the education they are given is limited. For example, they discuss England in vague terms, uncertain of the English role in Barbados. This is similar to how the children discuss slavery in chapter three. The students have a limited understanding of slavery and cannot imagine that anyone from Barbados would ever have been a slave or could ever be a slave.

In chapter six, the boys discuss the story of Bambi, Bots, and Bambina. This story illustrates the division between the whites and the natives. In the story, the white woman



has no understanding of how the natives live. She judges their behavior by rules that, while may be applicable to English people, cannot govern the people of Barbados. For example, the white woman explains to Bambi that he must get married if he ever wants to hold a respectable job; no one respectable will hire him if he is living with two women. She doesn't understand that this practice is acceptable on the island. In fact, once Bambi and Bots are married, the family's happiness disintegrates. The marriage, and more specifically, the white institution, destroys this once peaceful family.

## Vocabulary

petered, indistinguishable, occupying, encircled, authoritative, resigned, wavered, conceive, ridiculous, homage, sauntered, converted, fused, monotony, collapsed, fugitive, constitution, flabbergasted, , snarled, impotent, unbearable, absolute, assurance, undermined, glowered



# Chapters 7-8

## Summary

Chapter 7. The narrator, G, attends a worship service with his friends, Trumper and Boy Blue. They arrive early with the intention of leaving before too many people arrive. They are curious about the ceremony. Trumper warns that the boys should move further away because the worshippers have a habit of getting into the spirit, meaning that they speak in tongues and want to “ave people. During the service, the preacher approaches a small boy. The boy attempts to get away, but cannot; he is led up to the front of the congregation to be saved. At this point, Boy Blue tells the others they should leave. Eventually, Boy Blue and Trumper leave. G is about to leave, but the preacher approaches him. Anxiously, G walks away.

After leaving the worship service, Boy Blue tells the others that Mr. Slime says nothing in the village will change until they stop getting saved. He refers to Mr. Slime as the captain and calls him a black Jesus. He states that, according to Mr. Slime, America is the Promised Land. Trumper is in awe of this discussion and clearly wants to go to America. Boy Blue is more hesitant.

Soon after, Trumper leads Boy Blue and G on an adventure to the landlord’s house. The landlord is having a party and there are a number of sailors and women. The boys watch them dance and walk together. They wish they could be that close to a woman. Trumper reveals that he found out about the party because an overseer came to his house that morning to see his father because the two are brothers. While he was there, the overseer started talking to Cutsie, a girl who was also there waiting for Trumper’s father. The overseer told Cutsie about the party and gave her a key to meet him in the wood by the gate. Cutsie was not about to attend the party and left the key in Trumper’s house. He stole the key and led the boys to the landlord’s house to watch the spectacle.

While they are watching the party, Boy Blue relates that Mr. Slime believes there is no reason why everyone shouldn’t live like the landlords. As the boys are contemplating this idea, they hear someone nearby. The boys crawl closer trying to see who it is and decide if they have been seen. It turns out to be a man attempting to seduce a woman. All of the sudden, they realize they are lying on an ant’s nest. The boys scream out, startled and are noticed by the couple and everyone else at the party. The boys run for their lives and narrowly escape. However, they are followed by the overseer. The boys dash back into the worship service and attempt to hide in the crowd. The overseer looks at the boys and motions to come forward. Instead of being caught by the overseer, the boys approach the preacher in a motion to be saved. They are followed by many other people from the congregation, who also kneel before the preacher to be saved. The overseer has no choice but to retreat.

Chapter 8. This section is devoted to another exchange between Ma and Pa. Ma contemplates how she should tell Pa about a conversation she had earlier that day with





the landlord, Mr. Creighton. Ma finally tells him the story. She saw the landlord that day and he walked with her for a moment. Ma was very pleased and felt proud. However, the landlord began asking Ma about the uprising and if she knew why the village had changed so much. He told her that he has lived in the village for over thirty years, but that the changes that occurred in the last decade were more than he could imagine. The landlord confessed to Ma his confusion and strife. He said that he felt disrespected. He told Ma a story that makes her sick. The landlord tells Ma a story that happened on a night he had a party with a group of sailors. He tells her that three young vagabonds broke into his party and attempted to assault his daughter. No one knows how the vagabonds got through the wall, but it seemed they had it planned for a while. According to the landlord, it was a good thing that one of the sailors was there to save his daughter, or the vagabonds would have torn her apart. When Ma tells Pa this story, he too is outraged by the vagabonds who assaulted the landlord's daughter. Pa sees this, too, as a change. Ma worries because Mr. Creighton swore that if the slightest thing happened to unsettle him, he would get rid of the land. He is frustrated with the flood, the strike, and the vagabonds. He feels as if an evil has settled over the land. The landlord told Ma that he has friends who would be happy to buy the land and the villagers would notice the difference.

## Analysis

Chapters seven and eight work together to illustrate how knowledge can be distorted and transformed. In chapter seven, the reader witnesses the preacher attempting to save his congregation from sin. Here, the preacher offers his people a form of knowledge that will allow them to obtain life after death. The narrator and his friends flee from this scene, afraid of the type of knowledge the preacher offers. The boys do not have an interest in spiritual knowledge and salvation. They are more concerned with temporal living and what is affecting them in the here and now.

Later, while running from the overseer, they return to the preacher. In a symbolic act of salvation, the boys embrace his word and approach salvation. However, while the preacher interprets this as spiritual salvation, the boys are only seeking temporal salvation once again. The preacher offers tangible sanctuary against the overseer, who seeks to punish them.

In chapter eight, the reader is given a differing version of this story. According to the landlord, the boys had come upon his party to rape his daughter. These 'vagabonds' had been planning the attack for some time. The landlord's interpretation represents his fears of change. He displaces these fears on the young vagabonds, who are innocent. There is a form of misogyny happening here, where the landlord fears that his white castle has been penetrated by the black other. In an attempt to regain control, the landlord threatens to sell the land to someone who would be harsher than he. He uses guilt to persuade Ma of his own innocence, thus upholding the standing traditional hierarchy that has always existed on the island of Barbados.



## Vocabulary

remote, tenants, penitent, galvanized, wavered, engrossed, congregation, intoning, transfix, profane, caroled, mahogany, solemn, foreseen, concession, privilege, assaulted, vagabond, mortar, pestle



# Chapters 9-10

## Summary

Chapter 9. The chapter opens with news that there has been fighting in the city. No one knows what started the fighting or why it is taking place. The children have been dismissed from school and all the local shops have been closed. The villagers are told to go into their homes and close their doors. A deep fear runs through the village.

Pa emerges from his house and urges the men to speak with Mr. Slime, who might know something about the fighting. The men are too frightened and tell Pa to go home. Shortly after, Bob runs up the street shouting that someone is coming. Before he can elaborate, he faints. Trumper is close behind, and he asks if Bob has made it home. Trumper explains that the boys had walked down the train line that leads into the city. Before they knew it, they had been swept into a crowd and were fighting. They were handed weapons and sat with the men, waiting for the police to advance. When the police attacked, Bob and Trumper were separated.

The village men attempt to piece together what has happened. They knew that a strike had started on the waterfront the night before. Mr. Slime had attended a mass meeting in the city about the strike. At the meeting, listeners were reminded of what had been happening in Trinidad and they were worried that the same might come to Barbados. Some of the people in the audience wanted to fight but others thought peace was a better solution. At the end of the meeting, the politicians, including Mr. Slime, dispersed and thought the matter was over.

The old woman who gets drunk every Saturday night totters across the street. The villagers attempt to help her, but she shakes them off. She tells them that she has just come from the city and that her son, Po King, has been killed by the police. She warns the villagers that it won't be long before the fighting comes to the village. She also fills the villagers in on the remainder of the details. Apparently, early that morning, a crowd of waterfront workers assembled in the public square. A small delegation of politicians, including Mr. Slime, had gone to the Governor's House to get the Governor's advice on calling off the strike. However, the sentry refused them entry. A fight broke out in the square and the police were taken by surprise. A riot broke out in the city. The authorities declared martial law and the rioters were forced to retreat into the villages.

Soon after, a few rioters are noticed in the village. They are joined by more and more, some with weapons. The villagers shut their doors and windows afraid of what might ensue. It seems to the villagers that the rioters must be waiting for the overseer to advance up the road, so that they can stone him. However, the landlord, Mr. Creighton, appears instead. Mr. Creighton's appearance is deplorable and he seems to await his fate. The rioters, however, do not cast their stones. They follow him to the gate to his castle on the hill but do not kill him. Mr. Slime appears and thanks them for not murdering Mr. Creighton. The rioters drop their weapons and disperse.



Chapter 10. Years have passed. There have been no more riots. Mr. Creighton is still the landlord. Ma sits alone and contemplates a sudden awareness that nothing had changed. She takes a vial and rubs its contents on her body. She lies on a chair and waits for the pain to be relieved. She listens to Pa talking in his sleep. He speaks, with a theoretical air, about Columbus' mistake on stumbling upon Barbados. He resolves that he does not know the fate of the islands, but realizes there are two worlds: a man will live like a god or like a dog. Pa repeats that for men there are two darknesses and only one light. Ma repeats that this light is the Lord Jesus. Pa states, still sleeping, that death and life are the same thing to which Ma replies that it is all in the master's hands. She suddenly dies and falls onto her husband.

## Analysis

The riots are symbolic of change in chapter nine. The villagers fear this change, as they do not know what it means, so they board up their homes and wait. However, when the rioters venture into the village, instead of eliciting change through murdering Mr. Creighton, they do nothing. Mr. Slime applauds their humanity. The following chapter jumps to several years later. Nothing has changed. The hegemonic order still exists, as strong as it did thirty years prior. Ma and Pa find themselves constrained under the same oppressive system. Pa's dream symbolizes their stationery status; they are trapped in the darkness. Ma sees the light as the Lord Jesus, who will deliver her from the physical and emotional pain and suffering of the temporal world. The two darknesses in Pa's dream can also symbolize those in power: Mr. Creighton and Mr. Slime, who are compared as being similar throughout the novel. Mr. Slime has not elicited change. In fact, his presence has only worked to strengthen the social bonds.

While the riots may have been a beginning of a new world, their method was ineffective. The villagers note that if Mr. Creighton was to be overthrown, it had to come from the villagers, not from the city rioters. The villagers, however, refuse to recognize their slavery. In their ignorance, they remain shackled to the social hierarchy.

## Vocabulary

perturbed, loitering, abrupt, calamity, dispersed, incoherently, partition, pried, ravenous, indescribable, intolerable, penitent, protruding, interrupt, pressing, phial, partition



# Chapters 11-12

## Summary

Chapter 11. The narrator receives two letters, which cause him great anxiety. He recounts the last six years of his life. He was accepted to the high school and was, at the beginning, very excited for this change. His feelings began to change, however, when his books arrived. The books were enormous and written in languages he did not understand; he felt overwhelmed.

Upon attending high school, the narrator does not immediately fit in. He is lectured and almost expelled his first year. However, he finds a mentor. While studying a foreign language, the narrator meets the first assistant, who gives him hope for the future. Also, while the narrator is attending school, WWI breaks out. The people of Barbados worry that the Germans will attack. Many of the students join the military to fight for England.

In addition to this turmoil, high school begins to separate the narrator from his friends: Trumper, Boy Blue and Bob. He goes to the high school during the day and comes home to the village at night. However, the men in the village regard him with disdain and he is ostracized from their personal circles. This is solidified when Trumper emigrates to America and Boy Blue and Bob are recruited into the police force. All four of the boys have chosen very different futures. Trumper's future is uncertain. However, the narrator notes that all men are changed once they go to America. Boy Blue and Bob will remain in the village. The narrator's future will take him away from the village and place him in a higher social standing, creating an infinite distance between himself and his friends. At the close of the chapter, it is revealed what was in the letters. The first letter states that the narrator will teach on a neighboring island in a small boarding school of South Americans from Venezuela and two other republics. The second letter is from Trumper. It states that he has learned more than imaginable and that he is coming home soon.

Chapter 12. The narrator visits Pa who discusses the changes that have been wrought on the village. Pa can't imagine what Ma would have made of these changes. Pa chastises the narrator and his friends for leaving the village. Pa talks about how the war has changed everything. The trees have been felled and the railroad ties taken up and sold. Many people believe that this is assign that the landlord, Mr. Creighton will leave. However, Pa knows that the Creightons will not leave.

Pa also speaks about the social hierarchy. Mr. Slime and Mr. Creighton have become one and the same. The villagers cannot bring up one without mentioning the other. Pa talks about how when one overseer is gone, another will take his place. He compares this to the landlord; when he is gone, another will preside. Pa resigns himself to this hierarchy. At the end of the chapter, the narrator asks Pa to tell him about his dreams.



## Analysis

These chapters are important in distinguishing the different types of change that Lamming discusses in his novel. The most important form of change is social change. In the beginning of the novel, this is seen through Mr. Slime who advocates for workers' rights and the abolishment of the social hierarchy. Mr. Slime believes that everyone should be free to own land and create his own wealth. He speaks of America as the land of milk and honey. Mr. Slime attempts to create real change on a level that the people of Barbados have never before witnessed.

Chapters eleven and twelve argue that this form of change is impossible. Revolutionary figures, such as Mr. Slime, are consumed by the hegemonic structure. Instead of eliciting social change, Mr. Slime is corrupted by power. Thus, to fulfill Slime's promise of change the people of Barbados must witness the raping of their land; the trees are felled and the railroads taken apart in the name of industry. The elderly, such as Pa, worry most about this form of change because it has happened so rapidly and disturbed the land they once knew. However, they also recognize that while these changes are taking place, nothing has really been altered in the social order. Those on bottom are still dwelling next to the earth, while the landlords live like kings in their castles on the hill.

## Vocabulary

anchored, compulsion, refreshed, unsparing, jovial, callous, imposing, consoled, rigid, cadet, acquired, altered, jocular, respective, felled, tribulation



# Chapters 13-14

## Summary

Chapter 13. The chapter is divided into three sections: morning, noon and evening. In the morning section, a strange man visits the shoemaker and tells him that he must vacate his shop within three weeks. The strange man claims that he now owns the land and will do with it what he pleases. In the noon section, another strange man visits Mr. Foster and delivers the same message. Mr. Foster refuses to believe it is true. The man comes back with an overseer to deliver the message, which Mr. Foster refuses as false again. Ultimately, a notice is posted that states that the land no longer belongs to Mr. Creighton and certain areas have already been disposed of. It states that, for further information, the villagers should see Mr. Slime.

In the evening section, the head teacher visits Pa in his home. The head teacher tells Pa that his land has been sold and he has seen Mr. Creighton about putting Pa in the Alms House. Pa seems unmoved by this notion. The Alms House is the final point of human degradation. Pa demands that the teacher answer a few questions. First, Pa wants to know why Mr. Slime resigned. The head teacher does not directly answer this question, only affirms that Mr. Slime was going forward to teach bigger things. Second, Pa wants to know why Mr. Creighton sold the land to Mr. Slime. Here, the reader comes to understand that Mr. Slime bought the land with money he received from the Bank and the Society. He also had a number of partners, who were given first choice in land plots. This is why some people are losing their land. Pa reflects that Mr. Slime did what he said he would do: he bought the land. However, instead of making the villagers owners, he has become Mr. Creighton. but without Creighton's sense of responsibility. Mr. Slime is willing to steal land from his people. The chapter ends as Pa cries endlessly and the head teacher leaves.

Chapter 14. The chapter opens with a series of the narrator's diary entries that he is attempting to read while his mother tries to engage him in a conversation while cooking dinner. The diary entries detail the changes occurring in the village. In one entry, the narrator is having a drink in town when he notices the head teacher, Mr. Slime, and a few other men at a table near him. He overhears them talking about the land and Pa. The narrator is appalled to hear that Pa is being sent to the Alms House. He also hears the guild in the head teacher's speech, which is overpowered by the other men. They are discussing the sale of the remainder of the land. They decide to sell it to the villagers, who they know cannot afford the land. They think about making extra money off the interest because the villagers cannot pay off their debts.

While the narrator reads this entry, his mother makes him a dinner of fried fish. She becomes angry that he seems to ignore her, but they are soon reconciled. His mother helps him pack for Trinidad. While they are packing, Trumper arrives. He is dressed in fine clothes and looks very well off. He tells them about America. He explains that a man can make a lot of money in America, but says that he will not go back as an



emigrant. Trumper explains that he was constrained through emigration; he wants to go back as a free man. The narrator doesn't understand Trumper's meaning. He believes them all to be free.

Trumper and the narrator walk around the village and have a drink together. Trumper explains that America taught him about his race and what it means to be a Negro. He tells the narrator that he has found his race and hopes that the narrator will, one day, be able to do the same. Trumper explains that in order to find oneself, it is necessary to leave Barbados. He urges the narrator to go farther than Trinidad and gain real world experience. Then, he will be able to find his race and understand the nature of freedom.

As the two walk home, they see a group of men attempting to move the shoemaker's shop. It cannot be moved and is dropped and destroyed. Pa hears the commotion and comes out to see what is happening. He has an exchange with Trumper and the narrator. Pa explains that both he and the narrator are setting off tomorrow; the narrator to Trinidad and Pa to his last resting place.

At this point, the narrative comes around full circle to the opening flood scene. Pa recalls the flood and asks the narrator if he remembers it. The narrator replies that he does. At this, he says farewell to the land.

## Analysis

As the novel closes, the reader sees a rebirth, or baptism, occurring. In the opening scene, the floodwaters offered a blessing. However, in the nine years that pass through the novel, there is little blessing. The baptism offered by the flood waters is vexing and elicits no positive change. The circumstances at the end of the novel remain the same, if not worse, than at the beginning. The villagers are still controlled by the authorities. In the end, the authorities are more vehemently taking advantage of the commoners as well.

However, the end of the novel acts as a new baptism, as symbolized by the foreshadowing of Pa's death. The narrator is venturing to start a new life in Trinidad, which is viewed as positive. Trumper's experience allows readers to see that the narrator will gain a more comprehensive knowledge of freedom and race the farther he goes from Barbados.

The narrator acknowledges this need to leave Barbados in chapter fourteen, when he states that no one can know his true identity, which is hidden in the castle of his skin. In other words, his inner self is concealed. Referring to this inner self as a castle invokes a sense of hierarchy, showing that the inner self is valued over the outer being. With Trumper's visit in mind, the reader acknowledges that the narrator will strengthen his inner being by leaving Barbados. Trumper has developed his castle by immigrating to America, where he developed a sense of identity, discovered the definition of freedom, and gained a race. The end of the novel is hopeful that the narrator can also fulfill this longing.

## Vocabulary

disastrous, concede, immensely, nomadic, intransigent, estate, disposed, askance, gauge, alms, dissolute, sentries, jovially, intercepted, chastise, ochres, calabash





# Characters

## The Narrator, G

The narrator remains with us throughout the novel. In one instance, in chapter two, the narrator is referred to as G. Other than this single instance, he is not named. This signifier is meant to stand in for George as this work is an autobiographical account of the author's life in Barbados. The truncated signifier works because, in the narrative, the narrator's identity is not fulfilled. At the end of the narrative, we see that Trumper gained an identity in America. The narrator has yet to achieve this goal. His movement to Trinidad may satisfy this need and provide him with a full name.

The narrative begins with the narrator turning nine and ends when he is seventeen. He is a boisterous youth who is often unwieldy and gives into his desires rather than planning for his future. Although he is intelligent, and is one of very few to be selected to go on to high school, the narrator lacks worldly knowledge.

In school, the narrator learns book smarts, but he has yet to apply them. He sees his world changing, but does not take action. At the end of the novel, the narrator is leaving for Trinidad to become a teacher. This is viewed as his major action and there is hope that this action will lead him to worldly knowledge and fulfillment of identity.

## The Narrator's Mother

The narrator's mother is strict with his schooling, but gives him liberties in other ways. She hires a private tutor to help him pass the high school entrance exams. However, she knows she cannot control his life, especially outside the schoolhouse. She worries that he will fall in with the wrong crowd and become part of a gang. Thus, she employs guilt to help keep the narrator on the right track. She explains all the sacrifices she has made for his future in hopes that he will do his best in school and make something of himself.

## Mr. and Mrs. Foster

A village couple, Mr. and Mrs. Foster have a number of children. Their home is swept away at the beginning in the flood. However, Mr. Foster, in an act of lunacy, attaches himself to the roof of the house and will not let it go. At the end of the narrative, their house is usurped by Mr. Slime.



## Bob

Bob is one of the narrator's best friends. We are first introduced to Bob when he knocks over the narrator's fence and flees from his mother. Ultimately, Bob is recruited into the police force.

## Boy Blue

Boy Blue is another of the narrator's best friends. Boy Blue makes the joke about Queen Victoria that provokes the head teacher to whip Trumper. Like Bob, Boy Blue is recruited into the police force.

## Trumper

Readers are first introduced to Trumper when he is whipped by the head teacher after the inspector comes to the school. Readers later learn that Trumper's uncle is an overseer. Trumper dreams of immigrating to America, which he does. He returns to Barbados talking about freedom and race. Trumper is the one character who is positively changed within the course of the novel. He acts as an antithesis to Mr. Slime, who is changed through corruption. Trumper's change occurs because he gains a new perspective on his life by leaving Barbados. Trumper learns that the people of Barbados are enslaved; the way out of this slavery is to discover your race. He urges the narrator to find his race by also leaving.

## Head Teacher

We are first introduced to the head teacher when he beats Trumper to the point where he cannot walk. Later, readers learn that his wife had an affair with Mr. Slime. The head teacher reappears at the end of the narrative, as an ally of Mr. Slime.

## Mr. Slime

Mr. Slime first enters the narrative as the lover of the head teacher's wife. Readers later learn that Mr. Slime resigned from his teaching job. The villagers believe this was to take up politics. He becomes an active political figure that promises to work for the village people. He speaks of freedom, America, and owning their own land. He sets up the Penny Bank and the Society as a means to bring the people together.

Ultimately, Mr. Slime is corrupted. He becomes a more severe image of Mr. Creighton, the landlord. Mr. Slime uses the money from the Penny Bank and the Society to buy the land from Mr. Creighton. Mr. Slime also has a series of partners. They evict the villagers off their land and agree to charge them exuberant amounts of interest on property. At



first, the villagers cannot believe that Mr. Slime is capable of harming them. However, they come to realize that he is not the same man who promised them freedom.

## **Pa**

Pa made his fortune in Panama. He sees Mr. Slime as a visionary who will bring about positive change for the villagers. He is optimistic about emigration and the riches that America can offer. He is not as pious as his wife, but does believe in God. However, Pa believes in storing his riches on Earth and trying to accumulate wealth in his lifetime. At the end of the narrative, Pa is committed to the Alms House. He prophesies his own death on the last pages of the novel.

## **Ma**

She is married to Pa. She is hesitant to accept Mr. Slime as a leader. She doesn't believe that he will bring about change because worldly wealth comes and goes. Ma believes that God's love and salvation is the only thing that the villagers can truly count on. Ma ultimately dies before the complete corruption of Mr. Slime.

## **Mr. Creighton**

This is the white landlord. While he controls the land and oppresses the villagers, readers cannot help but feel pangs of sympathy throughout the narrative for this man. He is also burdened under this system, which enslaves both slave and master. He clearly feels a responsibility to the villagers, but does not understand how to act on that responsibility. Thus, Creighton is plagued by economic value. He measures all on a scale of monetary worth, which does not allow him to fulfill his role of protector to the people of Barbados. Ultimately, Creighton sells the land to Mr. Slime in an attempt to let go of his responsibility.



# Objects/Places

## Creighton's Village

This is where the majority of the novel takes place. It is a rural village on the island of Barbados. The villagers live in severe poverty and are governed by Mr. Creighton. There is a strong sense of community within the villagers. However, this sense of community is disrupted by the white man's law.

## America

This is the New World that is seen as the land of milk and honey. America is compared to Egypt and the people of Barbados compared to the Israelites being freed from their bondage and entering the chosen land. America allows Trumper to gain freedom by helping him discover his race.

## Panama

This is considered the Old World where many men were able to make their fortune. Pa calls America the New Panama, meaning that the people of Barbados can use the land and resources to gain wealth and power. However, there is a dark side to this vision. In chapter four, Pa discusses a dead man he saw in Panama; this represents the relationship between power and destruction. While many men were becoming rich, they also witnessed horrific deeds and the deaths of their friends. Thus, the struggle for power and wealth cannot exist without destruction.

## England

England is the mother country. Barbados is commonly referred to as little England. There is a strong tie between the people of Barbados and England. The villagers are taught to be patriotic and believe that England acts as their guardian. They do not see the motherland as the oppressor.

## Trinidad

The narrator leaves for Trinidad at the end of the novel.



## Letters

The first letter informs the head teacher that his wife has been having an affair. This sets up a chain of events that leads to Mr. Slime's resignation from the school and his ultimate political corruption and transformation.

The second set of letters are received by the narrator. One tells him that he has been placed at a school in Trinidad. The other letter explains that Trumper will be coming home from America soon. Both of these letters also set up a chain of events. The first letter offers the narrator a new beginning. The second letter alludes to the change Trumper experiences in America.

## Coins

Coins are important for a number of reasons in the novel. First, they symbolize economics. The desire for wealth is a prominent motivator for the characters, thus the coin gives the people a tangible item for which to strive and struggle. On a metaphoric level, the coin represents the binaries in the novel. The two sides of the coin are symbolic of the villagers and the landlords, slavery and freedom, and wealth and destruction.

# Themes

## Flood

The flood, and water in general, is symbolic of baptism and rebirth. In the beginning of the narrative, the flood offers a blessing. However, this blessing turns out to curse the villagers, granting them a life that is less changed or altered than they would desire.

## Education

Education separates the narrator from his friends. When he attends the high school, he can no longer relate to his friends because they believe he has risen in social class. However, Trumper reveals that this high school education has changed the narrator little. A worldly education is necessary for a full transformation of identity.

## Slavery

A discussion of slavery begins in chapter three, when the children are confused as to the meaning. The people of Barbados refuse to see themselves as slaves. They have a strong sense of freedom. However, the reader acknowledges the bonds that hold the villagers in a state of constant poverty. Additionally, Mr. Creighton is enslaved by his conflicting sense of responsibility to the villagers and to the economic market. Thus, all groups are enslaved by the system of order.

Trumper's return from America illustrates how one might overcome this slavery. He argues that gaining a true sense of identity, through acknowledging one's race, allows the individual to break the bonds of slavery.

# Style

## Point of View

This non-linear narrative shifts point of view throughout the piece. The novel begins from the narrator's point of view. However, the point of view is given to a third person omniscient narrator throughout the story, as in the beginning of chapter three. At other times, other characters take on the point of view, such as when Trumper, Boy Blue and the narrator discuss the whipping or when Pa and Ma are talking. Toward the end of the narrative, the point of view is almost solely occupied by the narrator or Ma and Pa.

## Setting

The entire novel is set in Creighton Village on the Barbados Island.

## Language and Meaning

Parts of the narrative are written in dialect that is meant to mimic the speech of the villagers of Barbados. This occurs when dialogue is incorporated into the narrative.

## Structure

The narrative is highly non-linear. The narrative shifts point of view without warning and also moves around in the space of time. Some pieces take place in the present while other components are set in the past.



## Quotes

All the voices were hushed, the puddles deserted, the gurgle of the wrestling flood submerged. My birthday making its black departure from the land had been blessed with showers whose consolation was my blessing. (chapter 1)

Suddenly, the whole aspect of the morning had changed. Something, it seemed, had emerged to call a halt in preparation for a new beginning. (chapter 2)

You never know what comin' to you, in this worl'. you down today, you up tomorrow. (chapter 2)

I know what it is, one boy was saying, I know what it is. He spoke very well. The old woman isn't a fool. She knew what she was saying. She was a slave. We're all slaves. The queen freed some of us, but most of us are still slaves. (chapter 3)

Tis the same story, old yet ever new the way life go on, whatever they says. Time wus I had my arms with strength, but now fumble I must like rats in the ledge, an' 'twill be so with the young ones what come after. (chapter 4)

The sea, many though, was God's reminder of his power. Everyone guessed why these two faces of the sea were so different, and there were many guesses, but none differed about the danger they saw in the riotous waves. (chapter 6)

I tell you repeatedly, once, twice, three times, I tell you to choose. Either you go with the gang at the corner, obey them, do as they tell you to do and live as they live and don't let me waste my time, or you do what I say. You can't serve two masters. (Chapter 6) We all get a feelin' inside that certain things got to be, an' it make no difference what is, or what's not, that particular thing gotta be. (chapter 6)

'When you up here,' said Trumper, 'on a night like tonight you see how it is nothin' could change in the village. Everything's sort of in order. Big life one side an' small life a next side, an' you get a kin' o' feelin' of you in your small corner an' in mine. Everything's kind of correct.' (chapter 7)

The only certainty these islands inherit was that sailor's mistake, and it's gone on and on from father to son 'mongst the rich and the poor: in Slime and Creighton, landlord and politician, those who play at ruling and those at being ruled, and those who are neither one nor the other: the mob that is always good but will never understand the face of the devil nor the equal smile of the blue sea The fate of these islands I do not know, but man must live like a god or a dog, or be a stone that is neither dead nor alive, a pool no wind will ever wrinkle. (chapter 10)

I promised that I would start afresh, a new man among other men. (chapter 11)





Whatever they endured the Creightons remained. It was as though the village were a disease which they couldn't be rid of. They couldn't leave it any more than the shoemaker of Mr. Foster or Pa himself. It held them as it held the villagers. (chapter 12)

It's perfectly legal, and that's all that matters, the law. (chapter 13)

This land ain't the sort of land that can be for buy or sell, said Miss Foster. Twas always an' always be land for we people to live on. (chapter 13)

They won't know the you that's hidden somewhere in the castle of your skin. (chapter 14)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Discuss the relationship between Mr. Creighton and Mr. Slime. At a number of points in the book they are compared, even though they seem to hate each other. Ultimately, Mr. Creighton sells the land to Mr. Slime, so that in a sense we can say that Mr. Slime becomes Mr. Creighton. How are these characters related? Why are they described as being the same person? Explain.

## Topic 2

What does the head teacher do to Trumper after the inspector has left? How is this provoked? How is this singular incident significant to the larger narrative?

## Topic 3

There are times in the narrative when readers are given conflicting 'truths.' For example, readers are given two accounts of the landlord's party. First, the narrator suggests that he and his friends accidentally witness a man and a woman about to engage in sexual relations at the landlord's party. However, when the overseer retells this story, the three boys are viewed as assailants who attempt to rape the landlord's daughter and the pirate is viewed as a hero. What narrative are we to believe? Also, how does the retelling of this story change based on the hierarchy of power within the narrative?

## Topic 4

Discuss slavery. What characters are seen as slaves? Does slavery transcend the boundaries of race and class in this novel?

## Topic 5

Examining the character of Trumper, what is the significance of identity in the novel? Why does Trumper have to leave Barbados in order to find his identity?