

A Mercy Study Guide

A Mercy by Toni Morrison

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Plot Summary

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* is the story of a young slave girl named Florens. Florens is 16 years old and living on the D'Ortega, a plantation. The reader learns that the D'Ortegas spent four years in Angola, a place where the Portuguese were extremely cruel to their slaves. Among the slaves on the tobacco plantation are Minha mae and her children. The D'Ortegas have fallen on difficult times. Jacob Vaark, a trader, arrives at the plantation to collect a debt owed by D'Ortega.

It is clear that Vaark dislikes D'Ortega and practically everything he stands for from his cruel ways to politics, arrogance, and religious beliefs. Vaark can barely stand to be at the D'Ortega house at all and is glad to be able to leave. D'Ortega admits that he cannot pay the debt but offers one of his slaves as partial payment. Vaark presents himself as a more moral man than D'Ortega which impresses Minha mae. Minha mae decides to convince Vaark to take Florens as payment. Florens thinks she is being cast aside by her mother whose only goal is to protect her adolescent daughter.

Florens is sent to live on the Vaark farm with Jacob and Rebekka Vaark plus other slaves and servants. Life on the farm is surprisingly good compared to Florens' life at the D'Ortega plantation.

The story focuses on Florens but also gives the backgrounds on Lina, another slave, Jacob Vaark, Rebekka Vaark and Sorrow, another slave. Each has had trials and tribulations but when brought together form a type of family that is rare in that day and age.

Things change drastically when Vaark becomes ill. He becomes ornery and sullen, too weak to do anything but sleep. Vaark dies and sends the household into a frenzy. The panic increases with Rebekka's illness. The slaves like Rebekka and try to help as much as possible. Florens and Lina are sent off the property to find the blacksmith. Florens is thrilled to be the one going since she has developed an obsession for the man. Florens' opinion soon changes with the behaviors of the people on the outside. No one offers help, even those who know Lina. When help arrives it does so in the form of the seven Ney brothers, who clearly have ill intentions.

Florens spends a great deal of time making her way through the wilderness. At long last, Florens reaches the blacksmith and he goes to cure Rebekka. By this time, Rebekka is on the road to recovery. Upon arriving at the blacksmith's house, Florens receives a shock. The blacksmith is unmarried yet he seems to have created his own family, although it is supposedly temporary. The blacksmith has taken in a foundling, a young boy named Malaik. Florens and Malaik scuffle and the boy is injured. The blacksmith returns and there is a brutal battle between him and Florens. Florens is sent away.

Florens becomes despondent. Willard and Scully, the white indentured servants, make note of all the changes and wonder what will happen to their little family.

Florens begins to come to terms with her life, including past and present. The final chapter is written by Minha mae, who explains her actions and how above all she wanted her daughter to receive mercy.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

Chapter 1:

The chapter opens with Florens, a 16 year old slave girl confessing to an unknown person.

"Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark—weeping perhaps or occasionally seeing the blood once more—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth." Chapter 1, p. 3

The girl says that so many things have happened to her that she is unsure what a great deal of it meant at the time. There are still things Florens does not understand.

"Other signs need more time to understand. Often there are too many signs, or a bright omen clouds up too fast. I sort them and try to recall, yet I know I am missing much, like not reading the garden snake crawling up to the door saddle to die. Let me start with what I know for certain." Chap. 1, p. 3

Florens lives on a plantation with her mother, referred to as *minha mãe*, which is Portuguese for "my mother." While Florens' *minha mãe* is American born, she is raised by the Portuguese plantation owners. There is also a baby boy.

Florens hates to be barefoot. *Minha mãe* is always shunning Florens for wanting to wear shoes. *Minha mãe* says that no slave owner will want a slave with calloused hands and the feet of a Portuguese lady. Florens does not care about that and will wear any shoes that she can find.

Florens speaks of other slaves on the plantation, namely Lina and Sorrow. Lina believes that Florens was about eight years old when she came to the plantation and since that time they have boiled plums eight times. It is predicted that Florens is 16 years old.

Reverend Father, the slaves' minister, teaches Florens and the others how to read and write one day a week. It is illegal for the slaves to read and write by plantation standards. Reverend Father can be punished severely or even killed for this action but he perseveres. Before long, Florens can write out the Nicene Creed from the Bible and also write on the slate provided by Reverend Father.

Senhor, the plantation owner, decides to give Florens and *minha mãe* to another slave owner to pay off a debt. *Minha mãe* immediately objects, saying that her baby boy needs her because she is still breastfeeding. Senhor and the other slave owner make a deal and Florens is sent away. Florens is eight years old.

Chapter 2:



Jacob Vaark lands in Virginia and heads toward the plantation. Vaark thinks about the dangers that could possibly lie ahead, especially since new laws had been put into place to protect the white man from all others. Vaark does not agree with the way things are being operated in Virginia these days and fears there may be an uprising.

"Any social ease between gentry and laborers, forged before and during that rebellion, crumbled beneath a hammer wielded in the interests of the gentry's profits. In Jacob Vaark's view, these were lawless laws encouraging cruelty in exchange for common cause, if not common virtue." Chap. 2, pp. 19-20

Vaark has made his living as a trader in the north and does not agree that the southerners - or anyone - should be making their fortunes by exploiting free slave labor.

Vaark meets with D'Ortega, the plantation owner, and collects Florens. Vaark feels as if he has made a good deal even though he has only received partial payment for the debt. Florens will most likely take better care of Florens or at least exhibit less cruelty than D'Ortega. Vaark also has other slaves he has "rescued" including Lina, a Native American woman, and Sorrow, a girl that was raised on the sea.

Vaark's afternoon with the D'Ortegas is described with great detail from the dress of the family to the meal served in the afternoon. D'Ortega's wife, the Senhora, talks non-stop, which annoys Vaark. Vaark believes that the Senhora thinks her opinions are as good as a man's on everything, including politics.

Vaark makes it a point to say that he has no intention of selling Florens, that his trade does not involve flesh.

There is discussion of the way trade operates in various parts of the colonies and the politics that are tied to each sector and how they affect the livelihoods of men like Vaark.

Chapter 3 starts out with Florens lamenting the absence of her lover.

"Since your leaving with no goodbye, summer passes, then autumn, and with the waning of winter the sickness comes back." Chap. 3, p. 46

Florens details events of the household, as if she wants to be sure that her lover knows everything that happens in her daily life. It is learned that the lover is a free black man, one who has never endured slavery. Florens admires the work the man has done on the front gates of the home and describes them in great, loving detail.

Vaark becomes violently ill and weak. Vaark's entire demeanor changes as the illness progresses. Vaark is confused by the illness since he has purposely chosen to buy slaves who have survived the measles. It is determined that Vaark has contracted smallpox. Vaark eventually dies. Rebekkah, Vaark's wife, notices two sores inside her mouth and knows that she has also been infected. Immediately, the house is under quarantine. Florens is sent to retrieve the blacksmith because he has some experience with medicine and may be able to help Rebekkah.



Lina and Florens go and wait for a long period of time before someone will give them a ride into town to see the blacksmith. The brothers Ney pick up the women and offer them a ride.

The wagon stops at a tavern. Men come out of the tavern and Florens knows that she and Lina are in danger. Drunken men have ill intentions toward the slaves. If Florens stays she will be raped and most likely killed. Florens manages to escape. It is only one or two days' walk to get to the blacksmith. Lina hides in the woods to wait out the night.

"I hide from everything of creep and slouch. I know sleep will not claim me because I have too much fear. The branches creak and bend. My plan for this night is not good. I need Lina to say how to shelter in wilderness." Chap. 3, p. 52

Chapter 4:

Chapter 4 focuses on Lina. She thinks about the houses built by Vaark. The newest is the third on the compound. Lina disapproves of the fact that Vaark had to kill fifty trees to build the house which, in Lina's mind, is completely unnecessary. Lina thinks that Vaark, now dead, will haunt its rooms forever.

Lina thinks about the early days on the farm. Her opinion of Vaark changes as he turns from a trader to a farmer. Everyone on the farm, from the slaves to Rebekka, seems almost giddy with the way things are going. Lina recounts the first time Florens spotted the blacksmith. Lina knows that there will be trouble because the blacksmith is a free man with privileges while Florens is a slave.

Lina thinks of her youth and how many people died terrible and untimely deaths. Lina regrets that she could not save them but she was too young and had no medical knowledge. Soldiers rescued Lina and her brothers. Lina did not know where the brothers had gone but she had been sent to Vaark.

Lina and Rebekka develop a friendship and the Vaarks tell Lina that they appreciate her hard work. Soon Sorrow comes to live on the farm, as do Willy and Scully. Lina keeps to herself.

"Solitude would have crushed her had she not fallen into hermit skills and become one more thing that moved in the natural world. She cawed with birds, chatted with plants, spoke to squirrels, sang to the cow and opened her mouth to rain. The shame of having survived the destruction of her families shrank with her vow never to betray or abandon anyone she cherished." Chap. 4, pp. 58-59

Lina mourns the death of Vaark and worries about Rebekka's health. Lina begins to wonder if Florens will return.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Chapter 1:



The time lines in the first chapter are slightly confusing as the story is written when Florens is 16 years old. However, she only lived with minha mãe until she was 8 years old when she was traded to the new slave owner in partial payment for a debt.

Florens says she prefers to talk than write as she is doing in this chapter, because it is easier to remember things. However, when she is first sent away to her new owner, Florens does not speak. Another slave, Lina, speaks but Florens does not understand her.

Florens wishes she could understand her mother's reasons for sending her away. Florens seems to have created a new family with the other slaves including Lina and Sorrow.

Chapter 2:

It is clear that Vaark dislikes D'Ortega and practically everything he stands for from his cruel ways to politics, arrogance, and religious beliefs. Vaark can barely stand to be at the D'Ortega house at all and is glad to be able to leave. Vaark presents himself as a more moral man than D'Ortega.

The reader learns that the D'Ortegas spent four years in Angola, a place where the Portuguese were extremely cruel to their slaves. It is also learned that D'Ortega has suffered great misfortune but will do anything in his power to regain his status even if he does it in unscrupulous ways.

Chapter 3:

Things change drastically when Vaark becomes ill. He becomes ornery and sullen, too weak to do anything but sleep. Vaark dies and sends the household into a frenzy. The panic increases with Rebekka's illness. The slaves like Rebekka and try to help as much as possible. Florens and Lina are sent off the property to find the blacksmith. Florens is thrilled to be the one going since she has developed an obsession for the man. Florens' opinion soon changes with the behaviors of the people on the outside. No one offers help, even those who know Lina. When help arrives it does so in the form of the seven Ney brothers, who clearly have ill intentions.

Florens is extremely naïve in many ways. However, it becomes clear at the tavern that Florens must escape or die at the hands of the men inside.

Chapter 4:

The reader learns about Lina's youth. Lina is a smart woman who is observant and cautious. Lina tries to learn as much as possible about the world and embraces her culture while managing to fit in at the farm. The friendship between Lina and Rebekka is somewhat unusual but welcome.

Lina assesses the farm and those who live there. Lina worries about Florens' youthful and impetuous ways. At the end of the chapter, Lina wonders if Florens will return to honor her mistress.



Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary

Chapter 5:

Florens cannot sleep and is uncomfortable. She climbs down out of the tree and makes a bed on the damp ground from branches and pine needles. There is a fear of snakes and other creatures but Florens works hard to think of her lover and take her mind off the current situation.

"You are telling me about the making of iron things. How happy you are to find easy ore so close to the surface of the earth. The glory of shaping metal. Your father doing it and his father before him back and back for a thousand years. With furnaces from termite mounds. And you know the ancestors approve when two owls appear at the very instant you say their names so you understand they are showing themselves to bless you."

Chap. 5, p. 78

Florens is very thirsty but works to think of other things. She thinks about the Mistress and the things she had learned from Lina and the Reverend Father. At this point Florens does not know if she will survive the trip.

"Lina says there are some spirits who look after warriors and hunters and there are others who guard virgins and mothers. I am none of those. Reverend Father says communion is the best hope, prayer the next." Chap. 5, p. 78

Florens thinks about the ill treatment she and Sorrow receive at the hands of the villagers. Rebekka works hard to protect the women. Florens says Rebekka has a sweeter heart than the others. There are times, however, when Rebekka will speak harshly or slap one of the slaves, although it is clearly for their protection.

Florens thinks about the time Rebekka was confronted by a moose. Rebekka had just finished bathing and was naked. It was clear that Rebekka was frightened. Florens does not understand the scene until now. Florens wants to run to the blacksmith as Rebekka ran to Vaark.

Chapter 6:

Chapter 6 reveals the failing state of Rebekka. Rebekka is in bed and has begun to hallucinate. She remembers people from her past, including her daughter. When Lina approaches the bed, Rebekka does not recognize her at first.

"Other familiar faces sometimes hovered, then went away: her daughter; the sailor who helped carry her boxes and tighten their straps; a man on the gallows. No. This face was real. She recognized the dark anxious eyes, the tawny skin. How could she not know the single friend she had?" Chap. 6, p. 83



Rebekka speaks of her youth and how she set out into the world at age 16. Rebekka's father would have given her to any man who would have clothed and fed her. Fortunately for Rebekka, she ended up with Vaark, who treated her well.

Life on the sea was not good for Rebekka. Rebekka had a hard time adjusting to life on the water. Rebekka thinks about the wonder of arriving in Virginia for the first time.

That is when Rebekka met Lina. Lina had been waiting at the cabin Vaark had built for his new bride.

Rebekka thinks about the religious people and how she did not understand them. Rebekka tended to avoid such people as well as those who would act like savages, fighting in the streets. Rebekka had chosen to take refuge in her new home.

"She had never seen birds like these, or tasted fresh water that ran over visible white stones. There was adventure in learning to cook game she'd never heard of and acquiring a taste for roast swan. Well, yes, there were monstrous storms here with snow piled higher than the sill of a shutter. And summer insects swarmed with song louder than chiming steeple bells. Yet the thought of what her life would have been had she stayed crushed into those reeking streets, spat on by lords and prostitutes, curtsying, curtsying, curtsying, still repelled her." Chap. 6, pp. 87-88

Rebekka was confused by the locals, particularly those at the various churches, because she did not know how to pray.

"It would have embarrassed her to mention personal sorrow in prayer; to be other than stalwart in grief; to let God know she was less than thankful for His watch." Chap. 6, p. 89

Rebekka's faith lay in nature although that was considered paganism. Still, it was more satisfying than blind faith and waiting for something that may never occur.

Rebekka thinks back to her early days as Jacob's wife, including all of the adjustments that had to be made in her personality and demeanor although Jacob had not been nearly as demanding as many, including Rebekka's own mother. Some years were hard when Jacob had to leave home to travel and trade so that they could make a good living.

Rebekka thinks of the children she had who did not survive and learns to deal with the loneliness that accompanies a motherless child, particularly when Jacob had been away.

Chapter 7:

Chapter 7 returns to Florens. She is still in the woods and awakes from a strange dream. She begins to walk. Boys on horses approach Florens who is afraid. The boys laugh and make gestures that Florens does not understand. One boy approaches Florens. Florens sinks to the ground. The boy offers his canteen to Florens but she is



too afraid to take it despite feeling faint from thirst. The boy pours water into Florens' mouth. The boy gives Florens a strip of leather to chew on. The boys ride away. Florens is not sure what to make of the exchange.

While Florens walks she thinks of a conversation she had with Lina two years before. Lina had warned Florens that men can be loving but also cruel. Just before Lina had been purchased by Vaark, she had been savagely beaten by her lover.

Florens walks on until she finds two cottages. She sees a church in the distance and thinks that the people must be at evening prayer. Florens walks on until she sees a house with a light and knocks on the door. A woman answers and questions Florens about her arrival and journey. Florens explains. The woman, Widow Ealing, allows Florens to enter. The widow feeds Florens. Florens notices the woman's daughter, Jane, who has been injured. The family seems strange to Florens. Florens spends the night at the Ealing house. In the morning, a group of people comes to the widow's house. When the people see Florens, some of them become hysterical. The man is accusatory. Florens shows them the letter from Rebekka. The man takes the letter. The group examines Florens carefully and the girl is violated. The Widow Ealing goes for the sheriff. Jane takes Florens to a dry river bed and tells her how to get to her destination.

Florens arrives at the blacksmith's home and is filled with joy. Florens thinks she is home.

Chapters 5-7 Analysis

Chapter 5:

Florens has a lot of time to think about her situation. Florens tries to distract herself by thinking of the blacksmith with whom she has fallen in love. It is unclear if the blacksmith returns her affections. When those thoughts fail to comfort Florens, she thinks about prayer and communion.

Florens is still rather naïve although she has learned a great deal on the farm and from Lina. Florens had come to respect and appreciate the behavior she had experienced at the farm and is still shocked when she is treated harshly, or worse, as a savage.

Chapter 6: The reader learns a great deal about Rebekka in this chapter from her youth to the present day. Rebekka had been extremely naïve and shy when brought to Virginia. The sick woman reveals the steps she took to get used to being married, being with a man, and running a farm, particularly in the absence of Jacob. Rebekka discusses religion and her adverse reaction to many of the people in the area who claim to be religious but do not behave in what Rebekka would consider to be a Christian fashion. Rebekka relies heavily on Lina for support. The reader may surmise that it will be Lina who will either save or bury Rebekka.

Chapter 7:



Florens continues on her journey. Many things occur that confuse Florens. The behavior of various people surprises the young girl. When she expects people to be mean and cruel, several are kind. The Widow Ealing takes Florens in with little explanation and cares for the girl, offering food and shelter.

The people who arrive the following morning treat Florens like an animal. Florens has brought trouble to the widow and Jane. Jane is a strange creature and tells Florens she is a demon although it is clearly untrue. Florens makes her way to the blacksmith. Seeing her love seems to wash away all of the horrors that befell her on the journey from the Vaark home.



Chapters 8-10

Chapters 8-10 Summary

Chapter 8:

Chapter 9 begins with the story of Sorrow. Sorrow is on board a ship. She is the captain's daughter. Sorrow awakes to find that she is one of the only survivors aboard the ship. She had been anesthetized with opium before a surgery, which had kept her out of harm's way. Sorrow is carried off of the ship and onto land where she has her first experiences outside living at sea.

Sorrow does not particularly like her name but tolerates it. Sorrow's imaginary friend, Twin, still calls her by her given name, so Sorrow is satisfied with that.

Sorrow is found by a sawyer's wife who takes her in. Sorrow lives with family and eventually becomes pregnant by the sawyer's son. The sawyer's wife, upon realizing Sorrow's state, quickly passes her off to Jacob Vaark.

Vaark takes Sorrow to the farm. Along the way, Sorrow is frequently ill. Lina observes Sorrow's behavior and tells the girl that she is pregnant. Sorrow did not know. The baby is delivered prematurely and does not live. Lina takes the baby and puts it into the water. It is not long before Sorrow becomes pregnant again, this time seduced by a local deacon. Sorrow contracts small pox and nearly dies. The blacksmith applies a treatment to Sorrow who eventually recovers. It is about this time that Rebekka contracts smallpox as well and sends for the blacksmith.

Sorrow exhibits strange behavior toward the baby girl. Lina takes over the care of the child. Whenever Sorrow approaches, Lina sends her away.

Sorrow thinks about the occurrences at the farm from Florens' arrival to visits by the blacksmith. Sorrow is cautious of the smithy.

The blacksmith goes to Rebekka. Rebekka asks if she is dying. The blacksmith says that the illness is dead but Rebekka is not.

Sorrow comments on the fact that the farm is falling into disrepair. Lina is busy with Florens and the baby, Sorrow is toward the end of her pregnancy and unable to do much work; and Rebekka has been extremely ill.

The blacksmith is able to cure Rebekka. Sorrow comments that it is fortunate the blacksmith was available to cure her. Rebekka calls Sorrow a ninny and says that only God can cure someone.

During this time Twin vanishes. Florens has not returned and Lina is worried.



The chapter ends with Will and Scully delivering the baby. The baby is healthy. Sorrow decides to name her baby "Complete."

Chapter 9:

Florens arrives at the blacksmith's cottage. She is filled with joy at the sight of him and suddenly, the long journey begins to fade into memory. The blacksmith is pleased to see Florens until he learns the reason for her arrival. The blacksmith prepares to leave for the Vaark farm immediately. The blacksmith tells Florens that he can travel faster without her and that she must stay behind. In addition, the blacksmith has taken in a foundling, a young boy named Malaik. Malaik was found alongside an overturned wagon, its driver dead. The driver was assumed to be Malaik's father although there are doubts. The blacksmith agreed to take in Malaik until the boy could be placed with a townsperson or a family that might raise him into adulthood.

It is apparent that Florens is ill-equipped to raise a child. The boy will not look at or speak to Florens. The blacksmith rides off, leaving Florens and Malaik alone. Despite Florens' best efforts, the boy stays away from her as if she is part devil. Florens thinks about Jane Ealing. Florens tries hard to take care of the boy but in the end settles for simply keeping an eye on him from afar.

Florens has strange dreams. When she awakes, she notices that her boots are gone. She knows Malaik has taken them.

Malaik refuses to eat or drink. The boy clutches a cornhusk doll that someone had given to him. When he will not cooperate, Florens takes the doll away. The boy screams relentlessly and eventually Florens leaves to escape the noise. When she returns to the cottage, Florens finds the doll in the corner of the room. The stool has been tipped over and the porridge drips onto the floor. Malaik begins to scream again. Florens grabs the boy's arm to get him to quiet down. She hears a snapping sound. The boy falls and his mouth begins to bleed. Just then the blacksmith returns. He sees what has happened. Without explanation, the blacksmith goes to the boy. He strikes Florens across the face and tells her to get out. The blacksmith is suddenly cruel. He tells Florens that she does not belong to him that she is nothing more than a slave.

Chapter 10:

The chapter begins with Willard and Scully observing Jacob Vaark rising from the dead. The men believe that Vaark has chosen to return to his newly built and unoccupied mansion.

"It was still the grandest house in the whole region and why not spend eternity there?"
Chap. 10, p. 153

The men observe Vaark from a distance. They think that it is fitting for Vaark to remain on the farm since it is the place where he was the happiest. When Vaark had died the men were told to stay far away but they felt they owed it to Vaark to give him a decent



burial, so they dug their owner's grave. Vaark never appears to anyone but Willard and Scully.

"For years the neighboring farm population made up the closest either man would know of family. A goodhearted couple (parents), and three female servants (sisters, say) and them helpful sons. Each member dependent on them, none cruel, all kind." Chap. 10, p. 154

The men could have escaped after Vaark died but they felt that it was their duty to stay and help Rebekka.

The men notice a great number of changes at the farm. First Vaark dies and Rebekka falls ill. The farm begins to fall into disrepair. Lina is withdrawn and sullen. It is a shock to see Florens when she returns from the blacksmith's house, covered in blood. Florens' demeanor has changed.

"Strangest was Florens. The docile creature they knew had turned feral." Chap. 10, p. 156

Oddly enough, Sorrow begins to behave in a more adult fashion. However, her attention to Complete means that many chores are postponed or not finished.

The men surmise that Rebekka will remarry soon or else it is certain that she would lose the farm.

One of the men's hunting expeditions is recounted as well as their encounter with an unfriendly bear. Willard is the eldest of the men while Scully is only 22 years old. Both men are indentured servants. Scully only has three years left of his servitude and he dreams of being a free man. After Vaark dies, Rebekka begins to pay Willard and Scully rather than treat them as servants. Scully has almost enough money to carry out his future plans.

After Rebekka recovers from her illness, things begin to change. Rebekka beats Sorrow and takes down Lina's hammock. Lina goes about her work quietly. Rebekka puts Florens up for sale. Scully takes down the advertisements in the village but misses one which means Florens will most likely be sold.

The men lament their current situation but know that they must ride it out. The men have developed a close, homosexual relationship. Scully wonders what will become of their little "family" now that Vaark has died and Rebekka will certainly remarry.

"They once thought they were a kind of family because together they had carved companionship out of isolation. But the family they imagined they had become was false. Whatever each one loved, sought or escaped, their futures were separate and anyone's guess." Chap. 10, pp. 165-166



Chapters 8-10 Analysis

Chapter 8:

Chapter 8 reveals a great deal about Sorrow's life. The girl does not seem to be very bright and may be suffering from some sort of mental illness that only worsens with the addition of the babies. Lina knows enough to keep Sorrow separate. Life has become much harder for Lina since Jacob is dead, the mistress is sick, and Florens is gone. The future of the farm looks bleak at this time. It is uncertain if Rebekka will have the ability to keep the farm running or if it will be lost.

Sorrow's concerns about the blacksmith may be unfounded but it is not yet clear. It may be that Sorrow has a reason to distrust the blacksmith yet it is more likely that she is fearful of most people, particularly men. Sorrow is still extremely naïve.

Part of Sorrow's issue is that she was raised, for the most part, in a very sheltered environment. She had never lived on land until she was shipwrecked and everyone, including her father, was killed. The birth of "Twin," Sorrow's imaginary companion may have originally been borne out of loneliness but as time went on Twin's presence seemed to mean much more. At times Twin seems to be a product of Sorrow's unstable mental state as if she has some form of multiple personality disorder. Added to that is Sorrow's post partum depression, naiveté, and childishness. These things do not serve Sorrow well. It is unclear why Twin disappeared or what Sorrow makes of her situation.

Chapter 9:

This chapter marks a turning point in Florens' life. Florens is excited to arrive at the blacksmith's house. In a way, the blacksmith is Florens' pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. However, things turn out to be much different than Florens had ever dreamed. It is suspected that Malaik is in fact the blacksmith's son, not a foundling. Florens is ill-equipped to take care of the child. It is unclear why the child is so difficult.

The blacksmith's return could not have come at a more unfortunate time. He never asks Florens what happened as it was obvious what had taken place. The blacksmith's rage shocks Florens. Florens wants nothing more than to live happily ever after with the blacksmith. The blacksmith tells Florens that she does not use her mind; instead she has a wild body. It is clear that Florens is nothing more than a slave. When Florens argues with the blacksmith, he says that she is a slave unto herself, not simply because someone owns her.

Chapter 10:

The reader gets a new perspective on the farm through the eyes of the indentured servants, Willard and Scully. Things have begun to change and the men, especially Scully, are not sure what to make of it. For the time being they will simply do as they are told and hope for the best.

Rebekka's change in behavior is certainly due to stress. First, Rebekka lost Jacob and now the future of the farm is at risk.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

Chapter 11:

This chapter returns to Florens who walks through the night without her boots. She thinks about the episode with the blacksmith and talks to him as if he is with her.

"What I read or cipher is useless now. Heads of dogs, garden snakes, all that is pointless. But my way is clear after losing you who I am thinking always as my life and my security from harm, from any who look closely at me only to throw me away. From all those who believe they have claim and rule over me. I am nothing to you." Chap. 11, p. 167

Florens reveals what happened at the blacksmith's cottage. Florens had picked up the hammer but when she tried to strike him, her strength vanished. A fight ensues. They wrestle. Florens hits her lover with the tongs and he bleeds. Florens flees. She begins to walk home although Florens feels as if she has no home, that her future and her life are over.

It has been three months since Florens left the cottage. It is autumn. In the night Florens leaves Lina's room and goes to another room where she writes her story. She writes with the hope that her lover will someday read her story. Florens apologizes for the sloppy penmanship and the fact that she has to scrawl on boards with a nail. Florens sleeps in those rooms. In the morning she goes outside to do the chores. Nothing seems to make sense to Florens now and Rebekka besieges her and Lina with strange rules and requests. Florens writes that although Rebekka is healthy, she is not well. Rebekka no longer smiles and spends most of her time in prayer.

Rebekka will not allow them to sleep outside in nice weather because sleeping outside is for savages. Sorrow is not permitted to use a fireplace even though it is cold because Rebekka does not like the baby. Rebekka beats Sorrow. Florens learns that Rebekka wants to sell her. She also wants to give Sorrow away but no one will take her. Sorrow has changed her name and plans to run away. Sorrow asks Florens to go with her but Florens says she has something to finish.

Florens has a great deal to say and soon the floor is covered with her words so that she must begin to write on the walls.

"There is no more room in this room. These words cover the floor. From now you will stand to hear me. The walls make trouble because lamplight is too small to see by. I am holding light in one hand and carving letters with the other. My arms ache but I have need to tell you this. I cannot tell it to anyone but you." Chap. 11, p. 170



Florens realizes that her writing is pointless because the blacksmith cannot read. Perhaps one day he will learn. Florens says that if he does not read her words then surely no one will.

Florens thinks about her mother and the fact that she is never able to understand what her mother is telling her. Florens says her mother must be happy because now her feet are as hard as cypress.

Chapter 12:

Chapter 12 is told from the point of view of Minha mãe, Florens' mother. Minha mãe explains that she gave Florens away because no one would want her baby brother. However, Florens will be in demand because she is a budding young woman. Even if Minha mãe would have offered Florens to one of the boys in the quarter, no good would have come from it. Minha mãe had consulted with the mother of the boy that would make the best candidate and the woman agreed. In Minha mãe's eyes, there was no other way to protect Florens.

Minha mãe says: "Understand me. There was no protection and nothing in the catechism to tell them no. I tried to tell Reverend Father. I hoped if we could learn letters somehow someday you could make your way. Reverend Father was full of kindness and bravery and said it was what God wanted no matter if they fined him, imprisoned him or hunted him down with gunfire for it as they did other priests who taught we to read. He believed we would love God more if we knew the letters to read by."

Minha mãe was doing the best she could for her daughter as was the Reverend Father.

Minha mãe recounts the arrival of Jacob Vaark. Minha mãe could see that Vaark had no respect for the D'Ortegas or their sons. Unlike most men, Vaark had a good heart and no lust for the slaves. Minha mãe thought Florens would be safe.

Minha mãe confesses that she does not know the identity of Florens' father because it was dark. There was a group of men who took three women to a shed and had sex with them.

Minha mãe speaks about being sold and being confused because the men selling them had been black. Some people wept; some fought; some sang. Minha mãe speaks of the voyage from Africa by way of Barbados and how she would have preferred to be eaten by sharks but the sharks would not have her. Minha mãe even pretended to be dead so that she would be thrown overboard, to no avail.

Minha mãe was sold to D'Ortega to work in the tobacco fields. After Minha mãe and the others were raped, the men apologized and explained that they had been ordered to "break in" the women. Minha mãe felt great shame and tried to confess to Reverend Father. The Reverend Father told Minha mãe to love god and Jesus with her entire heart and to pray for deliverance.



Minha mãe tried hard to keep the D'Ortegas or others from noticing Florens. Florens had been punished for wanting to wear shoes, to be different. Florens persisted and was soon noticed by others. Minha mãe lived in fear of what might happen to Florens.

Then Jacob Vaark came. Minha mãe saw Vaark as a chance for protection for Florens. Perhaps Vaark would treat Florens as a human. Minha mãe says:

"Because I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes. It was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy." Chap. 12, p. 178

Minha mãe had offered herself to the man, knowing that D'Ortega would never permit it. Minha mãe hoped that he would take Florens instead, which he did. Minha mãe swore she would try to make Florens understand some day.

"In the dust where my heart will remain each night and every day until you understand what I know and long to tell you: to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing." Chap. 12, p. 178

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Chapter 11:

Florens longs to tell her story. Things are not going well at the farm and there is no way to tell what will happen in the future. Florens uses her writing skills to spill out everything inside her from her arrival at the Vaarks to her love of the blacksmith. Even when Florens realizes that the blacksmith cannot read, she refuses to stop. Writing is a salve for Florens.

Rebekka's demeanor puts many things in danger from the future of the farm to the lives of the slaves and servants. Rebekka has turned to prayer which is a strange turn from her previous lack of belief in organized religion. Still, Florens believes that Rebekka's cruelty comes from her own mind and not the meetinghouse.

Florens still longs to know what her mother is trying to tell her through dreams.

Chapter 12:

Minha mãe's story concludes the book. The reader learns how Minha mãe was taken from Africa, sent to Barbados and, eventually, to the D'Ortegas. Minha mãe's treatment was based solely on the color of her skin, not her worth as a worker or as a woman.

Minha mãe knew the way things would be if she did not do something to protect Florens. While Florens assumed that Minha mãe gave her away to save her son, in fact, it was just the opposite. Minha mãe gave Florens away to save her from the cruelty and

rape that would certainly occur if she had stayed with the D'Ortegas. Minha mãe's last regret seems to be that she was never able to tell Florens.



Characters

Minha mãe

Minha mãe is Florens' mother. The entire story stems from Minha mãe and her attempts to save Florens from being abused, punished, raped and beaten at the hands of the D'Ortegas and others.

The author shares Minha mãe's history. Minha mãe speaks about being sold and being confused because the men selling them are black. Some people wept; some fought; some sang. Minha mãe speaks of the voyage from Africa by way of Barbados and how she would have preferred to be eaten by sharks but the sharks would not have her. Minha mãe even pretended to be dead so that she would be thrown overboard, to no avail.

Minha mãe had been sold to D'Ortega to work in the tobacco fields. After Minha mãe and the others had been raped, the men apologized and explained that they had been ordered to "break in" the women.

Throughout the story Florens feels betrayed by her mother, believing that she chose Florens' baby brother and cast her aside while exactly the opposite was true. Florens has recurring dreams that feature her mother trying to tell her something. At the end of the story, Minha mãe says to Florens:

"In the dust where my heart will remain each night and every day until you understand what I know and long to tell you: to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing." Chap. 12, p. 178

Florens

Florens is a sixteen year old girl who is sold to Jacob Vaark as a slave. Florens' story begins when she was about 8 years old. Florens' lives on the D'Ortega plantation with her mother, Minha mãe, and her baby brother. The D'Ortegas are cruel people and Minha mãe often fears for Florens' life, trying to ensure that her daughter is not noticed by the boys in the quarter. Florens does not understand her mother's motives or behaviors. This misunderstanding and the eventual sale of Florens to Vaark create the basis for Florens' self-esteem issues and sense of self worth which also leads to erratic and dangerous behavior.

Things change dramatically for Florens when she goes to the Vaark farm. There she meets Lina, an older, wiser slave. Unfortunately for Florens, she pays little attention to Lina's advice. Florens does not fully realize how easy she has it at the farm and how her life would have been totally different if she had stayed with the D'Ortegas.



Florens falls in love with a blacksmith. There is trouble because the blacksmith is a free man. Florens is determined to live with the blacksmith forever until there is a huge argument over Florens' treatment of the foundling Malaik. The couple fights. The blacksmith mocks Florens and sends her away. The blacksmith tells Florens that she is no more than a slave. Florens is not a slave because someone owns her but a slave unto herself.

Jacob Vaark

Jacob Vaark is a former sailor turned gentleman farmer. Vaark had spent years at sea before deciding to settle down. Vaark is unlike other slave owners in that he is kind and appreciates hard work.

Rebekka Vaark

Rebekka Vaark is Jacob Vaark's naive wife. Rebekka is a kind woman who was raised in an oppressive atmosphere. Rebekka completely changes after Jacob dies.

Lina

Lina, also known as Messalina, is a slave at the Vaark Farm. Lina is a good friend to Rebekka.

Sorrow

Sorrow is the name given to the young female slave who was rescued from a shipwreck and taken to the Vaark farm.

Blacksmith

The blacksmith is a highly skilled free black man with whom Florens falls in love.

D'Ortegas

The D'Ortegas are the owners of Minha mae and Florens. The family is known to be cruel and ruthless.

Willard

Willard is an indentured servant who works on the Vaark farm. Willard is older but his age is not mentioned. Willard is in a relationship with Scully.

Scully

Scully is an indentured servant who works on the Vaark farm. Scully is 22 years old. Scully is in a relationship with Willard.



Objects/Places

Slavery

Slavery is one of the main themes in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. The majority of the characters, including Florens, are slaves.

The story takes place in 1690 in Virginia where the majority of the characters are "natives." The term "natives" is never clearly explained since at times it refers to Native Americans while at times it refers to African Americans or interracial people.

Slaves are put into two categories: slaves and indentured servants. Whereas slaves are bought and sold, indentured servants are created when people commit to a certain number of years' work in exchange for a loan or other favor which usually entails passage to America.

The main slaves in the story include Minha mãe, Florens, Lina, and Sorrow. The indentured servants on the Vaark farm are Willard and Scully.

Slaves are often treated as savages and in many cases, worse than animals. The best example of this treatment is when Florens and Lina go to the village to find a ride to the blacksmith. While waiting outside a tavern, the women find themselves in grave danger of being raped and killed by drunks. It is common for slaves to be beaten and killed for little, if any, infraction.

More examples of ill treatment can be seen at the D'Ortega plantation. The D'Ortegas are vicious and cruel people who believe slaves are disposable and should not be treated as people.

Vaark Farm

Jacob and Rebekka Vaark are the owners of a large farm in Virginia. Also living on the farm are Lina, Florens, Sorrow, Willard, and Scully. For a short time the Vaarks' daughter, Patrician, lives on the farm until she dies at age 5. Sorrow's daughter, Complete, is born later in the story.

Jacob Vaark is a former sailor turned gentleman farmer. Vaark had spent years at sea before deciding to settle down.

Vaark meets Rebekka and takes her to Virginia where he has built a cabin. Vaark devotes himself to operating a farm with the hopes of making a living. Unfortunately, the farm proves to be sustainable but not profitable. By this time Vaark falls ill and dies.

The farm is run by Vaark and the slaves and servants. All are happy on the farm and the slaves know that the Vaarks will treat them as real people, not as savages. Lina is



especially vital to the running of the farm and is in charge of others. Lina is also a good friend to Rebekka.

Vaark insists on building a mansion on the property before he gets sick. Rebekka questions the need for the mansion. Vaark claims that the mansion is a statement piece.

Overall the farm is a serene and private place containing a river, stream and woodlands.

After Vaark dies the farm falls into disrepair. Rebekka has become a recluse and will not allow people to clean the house or come inside except for specific areas. Willard says that the farm will surely be taken over by someone else. Willard predicts Rebekka will remarry soon to save the farm.

Village

There is an unnamed village nearby where Rebekka and the others go to buy and sell wares. The villagers are not altogether friendly and the people on the farm avoid going to the village as much as possible.

D'Ortega Plantation

The D'Ortega Plantation is home to Florens and her family. The D'Ortegas are cruel people who have no problem beating or killing slaves. The plantation is lush and profitable as a tobacco plantation.

Angola

Angola is the native land to the D'Ortegas. The family learned their cruelty from the region and choose to carry over traditions to the plantation in Virginia.

Blacksmith's Cottage

Florens is sent to the blacksmith's cottage to ask him to return to the Vaark farm. Florens stays at the small cottage to take care of Malaik while the blacksmith goes to the farm. It is the sight of the fight between Florens and the blacksmith.

Meetinghouse

The meetinghouse is the main gathering place in the village and where religious services are held.



Bible

Rebekka turns to her Bible for comfort after Vaark dies.

Barbados

Minha mãe is taken from Africa to Barbados before being sold to the D'Ortegas in Virginia.

Ship

Sorrow spends her entire life aboard a ship with her father before being shipwrecked and sold to the Vaarks.



Themes

Slavery

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More examples of ill treatment can be seen at the D'Ortega plantation. The D'Ortegas are vicious and cruel people who believe slaves are disposable and should not be treated as people.

Religion

Religion is a main theme in the story. Rebekka is raised by a zealot father who instills a fear of God in his daughter. Rebekka does not subscribe to her father's beliefs although she works hard to fit in at the village. Jacob has many less concerns about religion which is a relief to Rebekka. Rebekka's final break with religion comes when the locals refuse to baptize Patrician. Rebekka also has trouble with the concept that people from other religions will not go to heaven.

Rebekka is confused by the locals, particularly those at the various churches. Rebekka claims she not know how to pray.

"It would have embarrassed her to mention personal sorrow in prayer; to be other than stalwart in grief; to let God know she was less than thankful for His watch." Chap. 6, p. 89



Rebekka's faith lies in nature although that is considered paganism. Still, it is more satisfying than blind faith and waiting for something that may never occur.

Rebekka changes dramatically after Jacob dies. She turns to her Bible and reads incessantly and also attends services at the meeting house. Florens decides that Rebekka's negative change in demeanor has nothing to do with religion or the things the Mistress has learned at the meeting house.

Religious persecution is present in the case of Jane Ealing. It is believed that Jane is a witch and a demon. The only way the locals are appeased is to see that Jane has wounds that bleed. Demons do not bleed.

Family relationships

Family relationships are a main theme in the story. There are many types of family, both family of origin and family of choice. Florens lives with her biological family until she is sent to the Vaarks. Once at the farm, Florens creates a new family with the other slaves including Lina and Sorrow. Florens also hopes that the blacksmith will become her family.

The blacksmith is unmarried yet he seems to have created his own family, although it is supposedly temporary. The blacksmith has taken in a foundling, a young boy named Malaik. Malaik had been found alongside an overturned wagon, its driver dead. The driver is assumed to have been Malaik's father although there are doubts. The blacksmith agrees to take in Malaik until the boy can be placed with a towns person or a family that might raise him into adulthood.

Willard and Scully may be the two people who seem to have the best grasp on the concept of family of choice. The men, white homosexual indentured servants, have cultivated a family at the Vaark farm.

"For years the neighboring farm population made up the closest either man would know of family. A goodhearted couple (parents), and three female servants (sisters, say) and them helpful sons. Each member dependent on them, none cruel, all kind." Chap. 10, p. 154

Style

Point of View

A majority of the chapters are presented in third person omniscient. This is particularly accurate when setting and an overall explanation of the times are of great importance to the story. Third person allows Morrison to give the reader great insight into the sights and sounds of the time and to develop a sense of personality and vision regarding each character.

There are several instances of first person point of view. These apply to Florens and Minha mae. It is vital for these chapters to be written in first person since the reader must be able to grasp the individual thoughts of mother and daughter; thoughts that would not be revealed in third person.

There are some cases in which the third person is the only plausible choice. This is particularly true when explaining the backgrounds of the slaves as well as the Vaarks, Willard and Scully. There are many differing opinions of the life and times of those in the story yet Morrison manages to give the reader a solid picture of the times.

Setting

Jacob and Rebekka Vaark are the owners of a large farm in Virginia. Also living on the farm are Lina, Florens, Sorrow, Willard, and Scully. For a short time the Vaarks' daughter, Patrician, lives on the farm until she dies at age 5. Sorrow's daughter, Complete, is born later in the story.

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Language and Meaning

The language and meaning used throughout *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison reflects on the times in a number of ways. It is clear that the people in the stories live in the 1600s, since they speak of particular events and fashions of the time as well as the newness of arriving and settling in America. It is clear that the country is still very young and dependent on England. Morrison does not use a great deal of slang or any language that would date the work in a negative way. There are many examples of the immigrants peppering their speech with slang from their native tongue, including the D'Ortegas' use of Portuguese that filters down to Florens. There are many examples of formal language of the time that are used in every day speech. In regards to the slaves, the formal speech sounds strange when mixed with their own language yet the use is accurate.

Morrison is a master of language and is not afraid to exercise her vocabulary. While the times are brutal in regards to slaves, there is a marked absence of sex, violence, and vulgarity throughout the stories and it is rare to see any use of profanity.

It is easy to see the progression of the work, both in structure and language. The language is more formal in the beginning of the collection and becomes looser toward the end.

Structure

A Mercy by Toni Morrison is a work of fiction. The book is 178 pages in length and is comprised of 12 chapters. The shortest chapter is 4 pages in length; the longest chapter is 29 pages in length. The average length of a chapter is 15 pages.

The story is written mostly in chronological order with some flashbacks and background information on various characters including Florens, Minha mae, Jacob Vaark, Rebekka Vaark, and Scully

Chapter 1 is written by Florens to her lover, the blacksmith, telling him of her deepest feelings for him.

Chapter 2 gives the backstory for Jacob Vaark, trader turned farmer and slave owner.

Chapter 3 returns to Florens recounting the illness and demise of Jacob Vaark.

Chapter 4 is the story told from the point of view of Lina.



Chapter 5 tells Florens' tale as she makes her way through the wilderness to fetch the blacksmith so that he might cure Rebekka.

Chapter 6 details Rebekka's current state including her illness, delusions and hallucinations.

Chapter 7 details Florens' journey to the blacksmith's house.

Chapter 8 is the story of Sorrow including her background and life on the Vaark farm.

Chapter 9 notes the arrival of Florens at the blacksmith's house and the unfortunate events that soon follow.

Chapter 10 recounts the appearance of Jacob Vaark's ghost. It also details the lives of Willard and Scully, the indentured servants.

Chapter 11 details Florens' return to the farm, her drastic change in behavior, and the story she writes for the blacksmith.

Chapter 12 is the final chapter. It is written by Minha mae and explains why she gave Florens away and how Vaark's acceptance of Florens as payment was truly a mercy.



Quotes

"Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark—weeping perhaps or occasionally seeing the blood once more—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth."

Chapter 1, p. 3

"Other signs need more time to understand. Often there are too many signs, or a bright omen clouds up too fast. I sort them and try to recall, yet I know I am missing much, like not reading the garden snake crawling up to the door saddle to die. Let me start with what I know for certain."

Chap. 1, p. 3

"Any social ease between gentry and laborers, forged before and during that rebellion, crumbled beneath a hammer wielded in the interests of the gentry's profits. In Jacob Vaark's view, these were lawless laws encouraging cruelty in exchange for common cause, if not common virtue."

Chap. 2, pp. 19-20

"Since your leaving with no goodbye, summer passes, then autumn, and with the waning of winter the sickness comes back."

Chap. 3, p. 46

"I hide from everything of creep and slouch. I know sleep will not claim me because I have too much fear. The branches creak and bend. My plan for this night is not good. I need Lina to say how to shelter in wilderness."

Chap. 3, p. 52

"Solitude would have crushed her had she not fallen into hermit skills and become one more thing that moved in the natural world. She cawed with birds, chatted with plants, spoke to squirrels, sang to the cow and opened her mouth to rain. The shame of having survived the destruction of her families shrank with her vow never to betray or abandon anyone she cherished."

Chap. 4, pp. 58-59

"You are telling me about the making of iron things. How happy you are to find easy ore so close to the surface of the earth. The glory of shaping metal. Your father doing it and his father before him back and back for a thousand years. With furnaces from termite mounds. And you know the ancestors approve when two owls appear at the very instant you say their names so you understand they are showing themselves to bless you."

Chap. 5, p. 78



"Lina says there are some spirits who look after warriors and hunters and there are others who guard virgins and mothers. I am none of those. Reverend Father says communion is the best hope, prayer the next."

Chap. 5, p. 78

"Other familiar faces sometimes hovered, then went away: her daughter; the sailor who helped carry her boxes and tighten their straps; a man on the gallows. No. This face was real. She recognized the dark anxious eyes, the tawny skin. How could she not know the single friend she had?"

Chap. 6, p. 83

"She had never seen birds like these, or tasted fresh water that ran over visible white stones. There was adventure in learning to cook game she'd never heard of and acquiring a taste for roast swan. Well, yes, there were monstrous storms here with snow piled higher than the sill of a shutter. And summer insects swarmed with song louder than chiming steeple bells. Yet the thought of what her life would have been had she stayed crushed into those reeking streets, spat on by lords and prostitutes, curtsying, curtsying, curtsying, still repelled her."

Chap. 6, pp. 87-88

"It was still the grandest house in the whole region and why not spend eternity there?"

Chap. 10, p. 153

"They once thought they were a kind of family because together they had carved companionship out of isolation. But the family they imagined they had become was false. Whatever each one loved, sought or escaped, their futures were separate and anyone's guess."

Chap. 10, pp. 165-166

"What I read or cipher is useless now. Heads of dogs, garden snakes, all that is pointless. But my way is clear after losing you who I am thinking always as my life and my security from harm, from any who look closely at me only to throw me away. From all those who believe they have claim and rule over me. I am nothing to you."

Chap. 11, p. 167

"There is no more room in this room. These words cover the floor. From now you will stand to hear me. The walls make trouble because lamplight is too small to see by. I am holding light in one hand and carving letters with the other. My arms ache but I have need to tell you this. I cannot tell it to anyone but you."

Chap. 11, p. 170



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Florens and Lina. Which is most stable? Which offers the most to the Vaarks? Who has the most to learn? What is their relationship?

Discuss indentured servitude. Discuss the relationship between Willard, Scully and the Vaarks.

Explain why Minha mae believed that Vaark's acceptance of Florens was not a miracle from God but in fact, a mercy. What does Minha mae mean by mercy? Do you think Florens will ever understand her mother's actions?

Explain the relationship between Florens and the blacksmith. How does the relationship begin? Is the relationship one-sided? What happens to end the relationship? Do you think Florens will ever see him again?

Discuss Rebekka's future. Why do you think Rebekka changes so drastically? Do you think the illness is responsible? How is Rebekka's life changed by Jacob's death? What will become of Rebekka and the farm?

Examine Sorrow's character. Where was she born and raised? What tragedy strikes Sorrow? How does she end up at the Vaark farm? What do you think will happen to Sorrow?

Discuss slavery as it is described in the book. Do you think the portrayal of slavery in the late 1600s is accurate? Do you feel that Morrison's characterization is accurate? Discuss the overall tone of the novel.