The Women of Brewster Place Study Guide

The Women of Brewster Place by Gloria Naylor

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Women of Brewster Place depicts seven courageous black women struggling to survive life's harsh realities. Since the book was first published in 1982, critics have praised Gloria Naylor's characters. They contend that her vivid portrayal of the women, their relationships, and their battles represents the same intense struggle all human beings face in their quest for long, happy lives. For example, in a review published in *Freedomways,* Loyle Hairston says that the characters" ... throb with vitality amid the shattering of their hopes and dreams." Many commentators have noted the same deft touch with the novel's supporting characters; in fact, Hairston also notes, "Other characters are ... equally well-drawn."

Most critics consider Naylor one of America's most talented contemporary African-American authors. Her success probably stems from her exploration of the African-American experience, and her desire to "... help us celebrate voraciously that which is ours," as she tells Bellinelli in the interview series, *In Black and White.* She stresses that African Americans must maintain their identity in a world dominated by whites. Hairston, however, believes Naylor sidesteps the real racial issues. In his *Freedomways* review, he says of *The Women of Brewster Place:* "Naylor's first effort seems to fall in with most of the fiction being published today, which bypasses provocative social themes to play, instead, in the shallower waters of isolated personal relationships."

Author Biography

The oldest of three girls, Naylor was born in New York City on January 25, 1950. Her family moved several times during her childhood, living at different times in a housing project in upper Bronx, a Harlem apartment building, and in Queens. When Naylor graduated from high school in 1968, she became a minister for the Jehovah's Witnesses. To fund her work as a minister, she lived with her parents and worked as a switchboard operator. In 1974, Naylor moved first to North Carolina and then to Florida to practice full-time ministry, but had to work in fast-food restaurants and as a telephone operator to help support her religious work. She left the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1975 and moved back home; shortly after returning to New York, she suffered a nervous breakdown.

Later that year, Naylor began to study nursing at Medgar Evers College, then transferred to Brooklyn College of CUNY to study English. Two years later, she read Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye;* it was the first time she had read a novel written by a black woman. Dismayed to learn that there were very few books written by black women about black women, she began to believe that her education in northern integrated schools had deprived her of learning about the long tradition of black history and literature. She resolved to write about her heritage-the black woman in America. She completed *The Women of Brewster Place* in 1981, the same year she received her Bachelor of Arts degree.

Naylor earned a Master of Arts degree in Afro-American Studies from Yale University in 1983. That same year, she received the American Book Award for Best First Novel, served as writer-in-residence at Cummington Community of the Arts, and was a visiting lecturer at George Washington University. Since 1983, Naylor has continued to write, lecture, and receive awards for her writing.

Naylor attributes the success of *The Women of Brewster Place* as well as her other novels to her ability to infuse her work with personal experience. While Naylor's characters are fictional, they immortalize the spirit of her own grandmother, great aunt, and mother.

Plot Summary

Mattie Michael

Mattie's journey to Brewster Place begins in rural Tennessee, but when she becomes pregnant she leaves town to avoid her father's wrath. For a while she manages to earn just enough money to pay rent on the room she shares with her baby, Basil. One night a rat bites the baby while they are sleeping and Mattie begins to search for a better place to live. Just as she is about to give up, she meets Eva Turner, an old woman who lives with her granddaughter, Ciel. Eva invites Mattie in for dinner and offers her a place to stay. Years later when the old woman dies, Mattie has saved enough money to buy the house. Ciel's parents take her away, but Mattie stays on with Basil. She refuses to see any faults in him, and when he gets in trouble with the law she puts up her house to bail him out of jail. When he jumps bail, she loses the house she had worked thirty years to own, and her long journey from Tennessee finally ends in a small apartment on Brewster Place.

Etta Mae Johnson

Though Etta' s journey starts in the same small town as Mattie's, the path she takes to Brewster Place is very different. Discovering early on that America is not yet ready for a bold, confident, intelligent black woman, she learns to survive by attaching herself "to any promising rising black star, and when he burnt out, she found another." She joins Mattie on Brewster Place after leaving the last in a long series of men. Attending church with Mattie, she stares enviously at the "respectable" wives of the deacons and wishes that she had taken a different path. Eyeing the attractive visiting preacher, she wonders if it is not still possible for her to change her lot in life. When Reverend Woods clearly returns her interest, Etta gladly accepts his invitation to go out for coffee, though Mattie expresses her concerns about his intentions. By the end of the evening Etta realizes that Mattie was right, and she walks up Brewster Street with a broken spirit. As she climbs the stairs to the apartment, however, she hears Mattie playing Etta's "loose life" records. With pleasure she realizes that someone is waiting up for her.

Kiswana Browne

Kiswana is a young woman from a middleclass black family. Idealistic and yearning to help others, she dropped out of college and moved onto Brewster Place to live amongst other African-American people. She resents her conservative parents and their middle-class values and feels that her family has rejected their black heritage. When her mother comes to visit her they quarrel over Kiswana's choice of neighborhood and over her decision to leave school. Kiswana thinks that she is nothing like her mother, but when her mother's temper flares Kiswana has to admit that she admires her mother and that they are more alike that she had realized.

Lucielia Louise Turner

Ciel, the grandchild of Eva Turner, also ends up on Brewster Place. Her chapter begins with the return of the boyfriend who had left her eleven months before when their baby, Serena, was only a month old. She is relieved to have him back, and she is still in love with him, so she tries to ignore his irresponsible behavior and mean temper. When she becomes pregnant again, however, it becomes harder to deny the problems. He complains that he will never be able to get ahead with her and two babies to care for, and although she does not want to do it, she gets an abortion. When he leaves her anyway, she finally sees him for what he is, and only regrets that she had not had this realization before the abortion. As she is thinking this, they hear a scream from Serena, who had stuck a fork in an electrical outlet. After the child's death, Ciel nearly dies from grief. She stops eating and refuses to take care of herself, but Mattie will not let her die and finally gets Ciel to face her grief.

Cora Lee

Cora Lee began life as a little girl who loved playing with new baby dolls. As a grown woman she continues to love the feel and smell of new babies, but once they grow into children she is frustrated with how difficult they are. She stops even trying to keep anyone man around; she prefers the "shadows" who come in the night. With these anonymous men, she gets pregnant, but doesn't have to endure the beatings or disappointment intimacy might bring. To pacify Kiswana, Cora Lee agrees to take her children to a Shakespeare play in the local park. As she watches the actors on stage and her children in the audience she is filled with remorse for not having been a more responsible parent. She vows that she will start helping them with homework and walking them to school. She comes home that night filled with good intentions. She will encourage her children, and they can grow up to be important, talented people, like the actors on the stage. But when she finds another "shadow" in her bedroom, she sighs, and lets her cloths drop to the floor.

The Two

When Lorraine and Teresa first move onto Brewster street, the other women are relieved that they seem like nice girls who will not be after their husbands. But soon the neighbors start to notice the loving looks that pass between the two women, and soon the other women in the neighborhood reject Lorraine's gestures of friendship. Teresa, the bolder of the two, doesn't care what the neighbors think of them, and she doesn't understand why Lorraine does care. Feeling rejected both by her neighbors and by Teresa, Lorraine finds comfort in talking to Ben, the old alcoholic handyman of Brewster Place. Lorraine reminds Ben of his estranged daughter, and Lorraine finds in Ben a new father to replace the one who kicked her out when she refused to lie about being a lesbian. One night after an argument with Teresa, Lorraine decides to go visit Ben. As she passes through the alley near the wall, she is attacked by C.C. Baker and his friends, the teenage boys who terrorize Brewster Place. All six of the boys rape her,

leaving her near death. In her delirium and pain she sees movement at the end of the alley, and she picks up a brick to protect herself from what she perceives as a possible threat She beats the drunken and oblivious Ben to death before Mattie can reach her and stop her.

The Block Party

For a week after Ben's death it rains continuously, and although they will not admit it to each other, all the women dream of Lorraine that week. The sun comes out for the block party that Kiswana has been organizing to raise money to take the landlord to court. The party seems joyful and successful, and Ciel even returns to see Mattie. But even Ciel, who doesn't know what has happened by the wall, reports that she has been dreaming of Ben and Lorraine. The rain begins to fall again and Kiswana tries to get people to pack up, but they seem desperate to continue the party. Then Cora Lee notices that there is still blood on the bricks In a frenzy the women begin tearing down the wall. Then suddenly Mattie awakes. It is morning and the sun is still shining; the wall is still standing, and everyone is getting ready for the block party:

Opening Poem

Opening Poem Summary

"What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore – and then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over like syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode?" – Langston Hughes

Opening Poem Analysis

The book opens with a poem by Langston Hughes. Gloria Naylor, the author, uses poetry and song lyrics throughout her book as a vehicle to help the reader understand what she is trying to convey about the various women. The opening poem tells us the book will be about dreams unrealized and challenges us to answer the question as we encounter each woman's story.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Brewster Place is a series of tenement apartments, built from the political bargaining table of the city councilmen and mayor of a city with segregated multi-racial populations - Irish, Mediterraneans, and soon to be others. It is built in a poor, worthless section of the city and left unpaved for years. The community, unaware of the political background of the project, turns out for the "baptism" of the new buildings - a smiling alderman smashing a champagne bottle on the side of one of the buildings. Initial hopes for the community lay with the new atmosphere of prosperous growth that the city was beginning to experience.

Just north of the street is a growing new business district on a boulevard. In order to control traffic the boulevard is walled off from the streets leading to Brewster Place, isolating the poorer neighborhood of Brewster Place from the new growth area of the city. The neighborhood is filling now with Mediterranean ethnic people who speak a different language and bring new foods and cooking smells to the community. "So the wall came up and Brewster Place became a dead end street." Its next "baptism" came unnoticed at 3:00 am one morning with Mrs. Colligan's son vomiting on the new bricks.

Brewster Place had less to offer its second generation of children. The street was finally paved and the project was purchased by a new company. Walled off from the rest of the city the neighborhood developed a personality of its own. Children were growing up and moving away; some went to war and never returned. Those left behind, like Mrs. Fuelli, either refused or were unable to leave.

Integration came to Brewster Place with Ben the maintenance man. He also lived in one of the basement apartments and was the go between for the absentee landlord and the tenants when the radiators leaked or the sink backed up. It was convenient for the residents to accept this dark skinned man with stale liquor on his breath.

Ben lived and worked among the neighbors, occasionally announcing a drinking binge with strains of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," telling the neighbors it was useless to try to get him to fix anything at that point. No one ever asked Ben why he drank and they were confused by his mumbling about an unfaithful wife and a lame daughter. The neighbors just accepted him until he became a fixture just like the wall.

Eventually, the remaining Mediterraneans moved away from the neighborhood to be replaced by multi-colored "Afric" children; the third generation. They worked hard, as well, and had their own smells, foods and codes. Many, having migrated from the South looking for a better life, "clung to the street with a desperate acceptance."

Brewster Place was especially fond of its colored daughters. They were hard-edged, soft-centered, brutally demanding and easily pleased. They came, went and grew old beyond their years.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Brewster Place is introduced to us as a poor neighborhood, born from political posturing and back scratching. It is a place deliberately created to isolate the poor and disenfranchised of the racially diverse city. The city could be anywhere in the northern states - it is never given a name. Its existence spans a time from before World War II through the 1970s.

All we know is Brewster Place is more than a setting for the stories. Brewster Place is the first character we are introduced to and becomes the quiet background that never changes through all the generations that come and go. It is a quiet grandmother, never judging, always allowing those who live within her to be - whatever that brings. Here there is no security but only infertile ground where the lives the women we are about to meet will grow, grow up, leave, come back, grow old, and die all within the world of Brewster Place.

We see early in the story a theme of baptism with the opening of Brewster Place with champagne wishing it good luck. Next, we have the dividing brick wall with its baptism of vomit from a young man's over indulgence in liquor, the first foreshadowing of what is to become of the men of Brewster Place.

With the arrival of old Ben, a wino maintenance man, we have Brewster Place's first African American resident. The fact he is a tormented black man, covering his sorrows with alcohol is a foreshadowing of the ineffectiveness of the black men in our story. The women, by contrast, are described as 'hard-edged, soft-centered, brutally demanding and easily pleased.' We are given a snap shot of what to expect of both the men and the women we encounter living in the micro-society of Brewster Place.

Chapter 2, Part 1

Chapter 2, Part 1 Summary

A moving van pulls up to one of the grey buildings on Brewster. It is winter and Mattie Michael is moving in. She notices her apartment will not have much sun and she thinks about all the houseplants she has brought with her from her last house where she has lived for the past thirty years. Entering the building, she catches a cooking odor that reminds her at first of freshly cut sugar cane. The smell takes her back to Tennessee and a memory, her beginning - Papa, Basil and Butch, and eventually her journey to Brewster Place.

Mattie is a young girl outside in the yard feeding the chickens. Butch Fuller is hanging around flirting with her trying to get her to laugh. Mattie knows her father thinks Butch is a "no-'count ditch hound." Her father has repeatedly warned her not to talk to him; no decent woman would be seen talking to him. Her parents are gone for the day and Mattie is tempted.

Mattie admires his looks - brown contours with red highlights, like sparks of fire. He invites her to go with him to pick herbs and sugar cane down by Morgan's sugar cane field. The harvest is over but you can still find good left over canes. Mattie loves freshly made cane molasses and decides to defy Butch's taunts of her being afraid what her daddy might say and goes with him.

His voice is smooth and coaxing and he seems to know just how to amuse her with his tales. She is enjoying the walk to the field, swinging her machete as she walks. After awhile they are approached by the deacon of the church riding down the road in a mule drawn wagon. Mattie is embarrassed to be caught walking with Butch but Butch covers well for them. The deacon asks her to bring him a pint of the cane molasses when he sees her at church Sunday.

Butch teases her about not having anyone courting her and she tells him she keeps company with Fred Wilson - the only boy her father will allow near her. Fred is quite a dullard and Butch knows it too and tells her to watch how slow he blinks.

They arrive at the cane field and Butch cuts a dozen canes. Carrying a bundle under each arm, he asks Mattie to take his kerchief from his overall top and wipe the sweat from his brow. The closeness arouses her in a new way by which she is confused. Butch leads her to the clearing in the woods where the herbs grow and they sit down together. Butch begins to explain himself and his reputation. It is not that he runs after many women, it is that he does not stay long enough for the good times to turn sour. The way he tells it, later in life when all those girls are stuck with cheating, beating husbands who ignore them, they still have a sweet memory of Butch - "maybe it was a short time but it sure felt good."

Mattie explains her last name, Michael. Her grandfather was a little boy when the emancipation came and the census taker asked what his name was. Well, her grandfather had been hard of hearing and everyone on the plantation had to call his name twice to get his attention - Michael- Michael. The dumb Yankee put that down and their family has been Michael ever since.

Butch is patient, waiting until she has finished with her story. Then he takes her on a seductive lesson in eating fresh sugar cane. "The trick is to spit it out when the wedge is still firm, and that last bit of juice . . . the sweetest of the whole mouthful - just escapes the tongue."

Chapter 2, Part 1 Analysis

Part I introduces us to Mattie Michael. She is about to move into Brewster Place and recalls memories of the three men in her life spanning the past thirty years: her father, her son, and his father. Her memories start with Butch, a "no-'count ditch hound," a ladies man with whom who no decent woman goes out. Mattie is a decent young woman, protected by her loving father who only lets her keep company with a very boring and slow boy from their church. Butch is fun and smooth talking. Mattie is tempted by his smile and good looks. He evokes something within her that she is too young and inexperienced to define. Like all young girls on the eve of womanhood, she yearns for her own independence. Defying her father's orders to stay away from Butch is her only avenue at testing that independence. She thinks she is smart enough to handle this crafty young man but she does not realize the power of her own emerging womanhood.

Butch explains his behavior with women in a way that is a foreshadowing for all the lives of all the women in this story. Butch somehow knows the hopeless fate life brings to these poor women. They will have a brief period of dreams, love and excitement with their men but soon the babies will come and the poverty will settle in heavy and their men will not be able to withstand the weight. The men will become despondent and turn to infidelities, or heavy drinking, or beatings and other abuse. Moreover, the women will be left with nothing sweet from their once young dreams. The women will have tried to hang on to that last sweet dream too long until it has turned to straw - like chewing sugar cane. The trick is to spit it out before the last drop of sweet is gone. It is hard to do but if you do not you are left with tasteless straw sticking in your mouth. Butch is that last sweet drop, before it turns. He is that last sweet drop that stays in the memory long past all the disappointment. He becomes the one sweet dream they will have left in the face of it all.

Chapter 2, Part 2

Chapter 2, Part 2 Summary

Mattie's father has not spoken to her since finding out she is pregnant. Mattie is his pride and joy and nothing has ever come between them. Once when she had scarlet fever he sat with her 24 hours a day for a week, neglecting his farm. His love for her was a legend in those parts.

However, he was taking this hard. He blames himself and finally speaks to her about what he is going to do about it. He assumes it is Fred's baby and he is going to speak with Fred about marrying her, doing right by her. Mattie has barely enough courage to tell him it is not Fred's baby. However, she will not tell him who the father is. He starts beating her for the name and works himself into such a beating frenzy her mother has to stop him with a shotgun blast as a warning. Coming out of his trance he finds his daughter balled up in spasms on the floor and he weeps.

Chapter 2, Part 2 Analysis

Mattie's father lays a foundation for Mattie's character. He has given her love and stability her whole life. He loves her with the unselfish, unconditional love of a parent and we see shades of him reflected in Mattie through the rest of the story. He alludes to mistakes he has made in his life and wants to help Mattie get past this mistake. However, her defiant refusal to tell him the name of the father of her baby is too much for him to stand and he cracks under the weight of his guilt and her shame. Despite the anger and the beating, his is the example Mattie lives by through the rest of the story. Mattie will show us she is just like her father but she develops the quiet patience that goes beyond her father's reserves. We will see her develop wise control in addition to her unconditional love for those in her life.

Mattie's father's character is in direct contrast to Ben, and all the other men we meet in the story. He is a family man who loves and protects his child, his family. Later we will find that Mattie is the one solid foundation in the lives of the women of Brewster Place. She becomes the matriarch and her character is the result of a solid foundation at home in her early life. We see what character can be produced when our youth are raised in a loving, secure environment. Mattie's rebellion and eventual out-of-wedlock pregnancy is a passing episode in a woman's long life. We see it is what you do with the foundation you have been given, when applied to life's challenges, that makes the difference.

Chapter 2, Part 3

Chapter 2, Part 3 Summary

A week later Mattie takes a Greyhound bus to her friend Etta in Asheville, North Carolina. She thinks only of the feel of summer, the taste of sugar cane and the smell of wild herbs. She will name her son, when he is born five months later, Basil.

Mattie's friend Etta is a wild spirit all her own. She loves handsome men and moves from one to the other as she likes. She is planning to move soon to Harlem, and tries to talk Mattie into going with her. Mattie warns Etta she will not find what she is looking for moving from town to town. Mattie is content with Basil and will stay put with what God gave her.

Mattie stays on in the boardinghouse room. She works at a bookbindery on the assembly line. She barely makes ends meet and thinks about going home. However, Basil is looking just like his father Butch and she knows how that will affect her father. She will not put her baby through the pain of growing up with that. Therefore, they will stay where they are. "Mama loves you and accepts you - no matter how you got here."

One night a rat entered their room while they slept. Looking for something sweet, the rat found the baby bottle and then the sweet saliva from Basil's little mouth. Mattie awoke to Basil's scream as the rat bit into his cheek. She moved them out the next morning. Walking for hours with the baby on one hip and carrying the suitcase, she tries unsuccessfully to find another room to rent. She finds only rejection with either "we don't take children" or "where's your husband." Tired and hungry, Mattie eventually comes to a house with an elderly woman, Miss Eva, who kindly invites them to move in with her. She is a grandmother and is raising the last of her grandchildren, Lucielia, all by herself.

Mattie offers to pay for her room. Eva has to think about what she will charge her and let her know later. Miss Eva immediately takes to both of them, helping Mattie feed Basil. While they sit over dinner, Miss Eva tells Mattie about herself. She has had five husbands - "you ain't missing much." She is partial to all types of men - dark skinned men, brown-skinned men - they just do not agree with her - like fried onions.

Chapter 2, Part 3 Analysis

Part three introduces us to Mattie's friend Etta Mae Johnson. Mattie goes to live with her after the beating her father gives her. Her friend welcomes her in and stays in town longer than she wanted in order to be there for her friend to have her baby. She does leave shortly after Basil is born but offers to bring her friend with her. Even though Mattie is younger and much more inexperienced in life, she shows us maturity and motherly concern for her friend who always seems to be searching for something she may never find. We see Mattie realizing the value of being happy with what she has, her baby Basil, and not willing to go chasing after dreams.

We also realize in this chapter that going back home is not an option for Mattie. On the one hand, she does not want to upset her father further - she saw what it has done to him already. In addition, she is determined to protect Basil at all costs. She takes the responsibility of Basil's life seriously and her decision to raise him alone is a brave one, aimed at his protection at the expense of her own comfort. This sets the theme for her relationship with Basil and we will later see what cost it has on his development.

This chapter also introduces us to Miss Eva. She is a grandmother who becomes Mattie's friend and mother figure for the next several years. Her five husbands contrast Mattie's none. Miss Eva is very worldly in the ways of men; Mattie is still very inexperienced. Miss Eva gently supports Mattie in her growth as a woman.

Chapter 2, Part 4

Chapter 2, Part 4 Summary

Basil and Ciel are fighting in the kitchen while Miss Eva makes breakfast. Basil is five years old and Ms. Eva is scolding Mattie for not going out looking for a husband by now. Mattie is happy with her life, her son, her job and her church. Miss Eva scolds her for letting Basil still sleep in her bed and taunts her that she is afraid of what she is missing. Mattie secretly wonders why she does not miss a man in her bed. She admits to herself she has hungered for the love of a man but always turns to her motherhood for her comfort. She is angry that Miss Eva has made her feel ashamed of loving her son so much. However, that old woman has shared too much of Mattie not to know her so well; helped her with Basil while she worked, befriended her, wept with her over the death of her parents. Still Mattie is angry and wants to spit in the old woman's freakish blue eyes.

Mattie strikes out at Miss Eva by threatening to pay her the rent she owes and move out. It has been five years and Miss Eva still has not told her what her rent will be. Nevertheless, Mattie has put "rent" money aside every month in a savings account. Miss Eva retorts that Mattie can use the money for new clothes to wear to her funeral. This has the desired affect; Mattie does not want to face the loss of another mother.

Time passes and Miss Eva dies. Her children take what they want from the home and Mattie buys the house from them with the money she has saved all these years. Mattie works two jobs to pay the mortgage so Basil will have a nice home to bring his friends around, and a yard to play in.

More time passes and Basil has grown to a thirty-year-old man still living with his mother. He is petulant and neglectful of his mother's needs. She needs his help now around the house and for yard work but he usually skips out on helping her. He has lost his job and borrows money from her for gas for his car. She placates him to get him to stay and finish eating his breakfast. He tells her he will look for a job tomorrow. "I'm not the kind of guy to hang around and let a woman support him. . . . But I would make a good pimp." Mattie thinks he does look like his father Butch, good looking in a sullen way.

Mattie ponders what happened to her little boy, now replaced by this stranger, leaving her with no one and so alone. She finally accepts that he just grew up, that is all; but when did she get so old? Later than evening, she realizes he is not coming home for dinner as promised and she knows he is irresponsible. She demanded nothing from him all these years, just believing he would be there for her when she needed him. Her undemanding acceptance of him is what kept him returning home repeatedly over the past thirty years. Now her grass grows wild and ragged and she painfully climbs the stairs alone.

Chapter 2, Part 4 Analysis

Miss Eva recognizes the stubborn streak of independence in Mattie and knows how to nudge and prod her in ways to help her develop strength of character. She teases Mattie into developing a savings account that later will enable her to buy Miss Eva's house. She goads Mattie into self-analysis making her face her own fears of being alone, without a man in her life. She also knows that Mattie is too protective of Basil and that this will not help him in the end develop into a self-reliant person. Miss Eva also provides Mattie a role model of character and undemanding love that we will see Mattie emulate for others later in the story.

As foreseen through Miss Eva's warnings, Basil grows into a spoiled, selfish man. It is sad to see how much Mattie sacrificed to give him a good home and a place where he could bring his friends. She wonders where it all went wrong; she never sees his friends, and he does not stay home to help her. He takes her for granted and we are angered at his selfishness. Basil is a type of the men we encounter later in the story. The men of the women of Brewster Place are also self-centered, weak and unfaithful.

Maybe we also are angered at Mattie's willingness to be used by Basil in such a way. By now, we feel a little protective of Mattie ourselves. However, we have to remember that all she ever wanted was to be able to give Basil all the love she could, and it was an unselfish love. She did not have to raise him alone. Miss Eva scolded her often about not making good use of her youth to find a husband (Miss Eva had five). We start to learn to look deeper into the heart of Mattie to find answers to our judgments, and this is a foreshadowing of what the reader will be forced to do in deeper and more painful detail later in the story with the other women we meet. We will learn that it is not as simple as "love is all you need." We will also see that "getting a man" is also not necessarily the answer. The story starts to teach us early, through Mattie, Miss Eva, and what little we have seen at this point of Etta, that our lives are complicated bouquets of what we have known, the choices we have made to accept love and give love and how conditional we make it.

Chapter 2, Part 5

Chapter 2, Part 5 Summary

Mattie is awakened in the middle of the night by a call from Basil from jail. He has killed a man in an argument over a woman in a bar. He demands she come and get him out. The police have beaten him up and he starts to cry. That is all she needs to hear and she rushes to his aid.

At the police station, she is told Basil was arrested because a man was killed by Basil in an argument in a bar. Basil broke the wrist of a police office while resisting arrest. Basil whines and tells her about the filthy conditions, poor food, and that he heard rats under his bed at night. She tries to encourage him and tells him she will bail him out. Their visiting time is not over, yet that is all Basil wants from her and he cruelly tells her so by way of dismissal.

Mattie hires an attorney, not wanting a public defender for her son. The attorney assures her that since it appears the man was killed in self-defense Basil will be acquitted. At his hearing, his trial is set for two weeks off and he tries to talk her out of posting bail for him for such a short time. He reminds her she will lose her house if he skips bail and alludes that "with some people its better . . ." to leave them in jail and not take the risk. She posts it anyway.

Basil spends the next two weeks at home with Mattie helping her and giving her a son's love -- for a change. As the trial nears, he tells her he cannot face going to jail. Later that day when Mattie gets home from work he is not home. She stubbornly refuses to face the facts that he has skipped bail and makes dinner for him anyway. Hours later, she finally accepts he is not coming home.

Called back from her memories, Mattie finds herself back at Brewster Place with the moving men asking for her directions.

Chapter 2, Part 5 Analysis

Part V ends with Basil arrested for killing a man in a bar in an argument over a woman. Mattie knows nothing of this side of Basil. She has refused to see what has been in front of her all along, but remembers instead the little boy who used to delight in snowflakes on his tongue. Basil is cruel in his selfishness, punishing Mattie with his graphic descriptions of jail, telling her there are rats under his bed reminding Mattie of her early terror with Basil as a baby. She knows he is being cruel and wishes he had just hit her instead of twisting and torturing her with her emotions and memories.

She has raised the type of man we see involved in the lives of many of the women in the story. Instead of wondering how a culture can turn out men capable of such infidelity to the loving women in their lives, we begin to understand that the human spirit does not

grow healthy with only the sweet. Strong human character is developed through hardship. What does not kill us makes us strong. We see this stark contrast between Mattie's character and Basil's character. Mattie has had to struggle and work and sacrifice and she is strong of character for the effort. Basil was handed everything, protected from struggles, and developed a character devoid of any strength or decency. The result for Mattie is she loses her home to the bail bondsman, and loses her son. The story brings this strong character to live in Brewster Place and we will see she is the unbreakable thread that meshes with the character that is Brewster Place and she will help the next women we see through their trials.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

"I love my man; I'm a lie if I say I don't . . . But I'll quit my man; I'm a lie if I say I won't . . ." Etta Mae Johnson never forgot the words to this song. Songs seemed to speak of her life. "But I'm going to do just what I want to, anyway . . . Ain' nobody's business if I do . . ." That is Etta Mae and she arrives at Brewster Place in an apple green Cadillac with a while vinyl roof and Florida plates. She carries a half dozen albums in her arms right passed all the staring eyes and gawking children straight to Mattie's door. Mattie is sitting in an old frayed armchair by the window and watches her arrival. Their friendship goes "way back," claiming all the important knowledge of all the events in their lives. She is surprised to see Etta driving and more surprised to find out Etta stole the car from a married man who promised her air fare then did not come through. Funnier still that the man's wife's father is the sheriff of that county. She plans to sell the car. They both enjoy a good, long laugh. ". . . But God bless the child . . . That's got his own . . ."

Mattie's nickname for Etta is "Tut" from when she was a little girl acting like the wife of King Tut. The name stuck because she never lost the walk, like a bantam. Etta had spent her teenage years in trouble. She had a spirit that challenged all the rules. However, even though there was rebellion in her eyes it was eventually recognized that she was not being an "uppity nigger" but was just being herself.

"Southern trees bear strange fruit . . . Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze . . . Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." Etta's independent nature soon found herself leaving her hometown early one day before dawn. Mattie told her the authorities waited two days in ambush for her on the county line, and then burned down her father's barn. Memphis, Detroit, Chicago, New York - her independence followed her from town to town. She moved from one promising rising black star to another while her youth ebbed away. Eventually she would not have noticed if the universe had expanded enough for her to shine alone.

Etta and Mattie had taken very different roads and both ended up on Brewster Place. Etta has no plans beyond selling the car to give her some time until the next 'business opportunity' comes along. Mattie chides her it is time she gets a regular job because the 'business opportunities' are getting fewer. However, Etta whines she has no experience to speak of and cannot get a job. What she needs is a good man to settle down with for her old age. Mattie reminds Etta she met a few promising ones in the past but Etta only jokes - "all the good men are either dead or waiting to be born."

Mattie invites Etta to church that evening at the Canaan Baptist Church. It is a poor congregation made up of a thirty-block area around Brewster Place. Loud singing comes from the church, an ancient song full of the origin of their misery - ". . . Oppressed so hard, they could not stand . . . Let my people go." Tonight they have a

visiting minister to preach, Rev. Moreland T. Woods. Etta and Mattie arrive a little late. Uncomfortable, Etta climbs out the back window of her mind and dreams she is one of the deacon's wives sitting in the front pew "wearing on her back a hundred pairs of respectful eyes." She asks herself is it too late? The visiting preacher is a handsome man and he catches her eye right away. She can tell he is well off and she recognizes his talent is much like what she learned from poolrooms, nightclubs and on a dozen street corners. She recognizes his jungle-sharpened instincts that she dreams could move her up to the front of the church, ahead of the deacon's wives, and off Brewster Place for good. She starts to scheme, asking Mattie for an introduction.

Rev. Woods spots Etta immediately when she and Mattie arrive at the church, and he plans how to get an introduction to her as well. Mattie makes the introductions and she stands by while Etta and Rev. Woods flirt with each other and eventually make a date for after the service. Mattie is exasperated with Etta, scolding her. Can she not see he has only one thing on his mind? Etta accuses her of not thinking she is good enough for the man. Etta knows very well that she is getting older; more lines in her face every day, and she is running out of time. She wants to bank her dreams on getting just this one man, and when she does, she will shut the mouth of all those "slack-mouthed gossips" on Brewster Place.

Mattie heads home alone and Etta waits for Rev. Woods to pick her up. Mattie cannot believe Etta refuses to see that Rev. Woods has no intentions of marriage. She is right. Rev. Woods already sees the desperation in Etta. He knows she will gamble a good game but he is counting on the fact that she does not know that he knows the game is on. This will be his upper hand and he plans to win.

It plays his way. Etta knows the scene too well - the details of the hotel room from anywhere she has ever been. She braces herself for "the locking doors she knew would be in his eyes." Later he drives her back to Brewster Place and drops her off a block away. He is relieved she does not make him play the game further as he watches her from his rear view mirror, slumped profile of her body against the streetlight.

Etta is thinking, "If I walk into this street . . . I'll never get out." Then she sees the light on in Mattie's window and she can hear her records playing. Mattie is playing Etta's records. Someone is waiting up for her who will deny fiercely there was any concern for Etta's well being; it is only indigestion that keeps Mattie up. Etta smiles as she goes in to the love and comfort that awaits her.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Etta and Mattie are opposite characters in many ways though they have always been the closest of friends. Etta has taken her independence and made a career of it. Unfortunately, as Mattie chides, she has very little to show for it except an armful of records of singers' ballads and blues. Mattie, on the other hand, made one stab at independence and Basil was her prize. That this prize let her down in the end is immaterial. Mattie is smart enough to realize that life is what you make of it and she

made herself content with what life gave her. This theme carries through the story with Mattie the example/standard for the other women. That is a strong measure of freedom. Etta has never found that truth and still roams from town to town, man to man, looking for someone, somewhere, to be her happiness. She lives a hopeless dream, never to be realized.

Etta's life is very like the songs she loves: woman loves a man, man mistreats his woman, man leaves his woman, woman kills her man. It does not really matter; the pathos of her life is the same whatever the song ending. The songs of the blues evoke for Etta a mirror of her own life. Instead of her life mirroring the songs because of events beyond her control, it seems, rather, that Etta has deliberately made her life in their image. Living out the songs gives her life an edge of glamour that the reality could never hope to achieve. She sings and dresses glamorously, carrying the image of a star, like the singers in her albums.

Early in our glimpse of Etta and Mattie's relationship Etta makes a statement about men: "all the good men are either dead or waiting to be born." This is a foreshadowing of what we will find the women of Brewster Place find in their men. It echoes the analysis we saw earlier with Butch who suggests a theme of men with wasted lives, ineffective and harmful to their women and children. We will find the men in this story might as well be dead for all the good they bring to guiding and raising their families. It also starts the theme of babies being the hope for the future that also carries through this story.

The women from Brewster Place judge Etta harshly and never really let her become one of them. Etta sets herself apart from them, yet at the same time longs to be accepted. They do not see how she can fit in with them; she represents the wild edge they all wish they could live. She is not tied down by children and poverty. She escapes men as the need arises; they cannot. However, they do not see how unhappy she is. This freedom has not brought her happiness or contentment, just restlessness and loneliness. In that regard, she is the same as they are. She tried a different escape route yet with the same dismal result.

Here Etta finds herself back with Mattie, running from another failed love affair. The fact Etta has gambled once again on a married man shows how futile her quest for happiness has sunk. She is still looking for that one man who will lift her up and out of the hopelessness she finds in Brewster Place; indeed everywhere she has roamed.

This time, with Rev. Wood, Etta places all her hopes on a brief dream she concocts while daydreaming in church. She longs for respectability. She wants to have the approval of the women sitting in the front pews of the church, the deacons' wives. She wants to show up those judging women sitting on their stoops of poverty and discontent back at Brewster Place. Therefore, she plans a valiant attempt to snare the visiting preacher Rev. Woods. However, you cannot con a con and Etta has lost the game before it has begun. She knows it, and not because Mattie has tried to shake the truth into her. She knows it because she has played this game before, too many times. This time she is playing from a place of desperation, with a man who knows he cannot lose.

Sadly, she finds herself feeling degraded once again, the sexual encounter over in a cheap hotel room. Etta, lying in the hotel bed, tries to keep her eyes closed just a few minutes longer to hold onto the last glimmer of the dream before she has to open them to her loss. To her credit, she maintains her pride enough not to force the man into transparent excuses or promises of anything past that night. The image of her standing under the street light, slumped in defeat, forced to face Brewster Place a loser once again, makes the reader fear she has been pushed too far from her dreams to go on living. However, it is Mattie's love and care that brings her back just enough to give life another day, another dream.

The contrast here is that Mattie is content and happy with none of the effort Etta or the other women have tried. She does not have any man in her life. Her baby grew up, left her alone, and his infidelity lost her home of thirty years. Mattie has lost a lot, but she is content with the choices she made in her life. The beauty of the friendship she has with Etta is that she so fully understands Etta and loves her unconditionally. Unconditional love is another theme running through the story and Mattie is the first to master it and share it with the others in the story. Mattie really does know a better way; she just cannot convince Etta to try it. All she can do is be her friend, and give her unconditional love. Etta has never had that from anyone else and is not so much a fool not to recognize this when she sees it.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Kiswana Browne lives in a sixth-floor studio apartment in Brewster Place. From her window, she can see the busy avenue just north and watches the people. A pigeon flies by and she places her dreams on its back, watching it glide in the air until it lands awkwardly on the fire escape on the opposite building. This brings her back to earth, but only for a moment. Her imagination takes off again as she creates a fantasy from what she imagines as pigeon droppings on the fire escapes and people slipping and falling from them trying to escape a fire. She has her hand in creating banners for their imagined march on the mayor's office in protest.

She comes back to reality this time with the hard realization that her mother is crossing the street heading for her apartment building. She is relieved that Ben, the old wino, is not sitting in his usual place; or that there are no teenagers hanging around smoking reefers. Her mother's imagination would immediately jump to the conclusion the whole place was seething with dope factories and winos. She is glad her mother has to walk up the six flights to her apartment; it will give her time.

Hurrying to straighten her apartment, Kiswana hides the tell tale signs of her boyfriend in her bottom drawer, confident her mother's snooping will not get that far. She takes a minute to daydream about her toe nail polish and how her boyfriend always starts his lovemaking from her feet up.

Her mother arrives with all the usual motherly scoldings. She is especially exasperated about Kiswana not having a phone. Kiswana cannot afford one yet. Kiswana is out of work and her mother questions her on her job hunting. Her mother thinks she has been spending her days daydreaming instead of seriously looking for a job. Her mother asks her if she has noticed she can see the trees on her parent's street from her window. Kiswana pretends she has not noticed, trying not to admit that she does stare at the trees and think of home. Her mother insists on calling her Melanie, her birth name, rather than her new African-pride name, Kiswana.

Her mother catches her up on what has been going on at home since she and her brother moved out. She mentions her brother came by for a visit and Kiswana thinks he must have told that she had to borrow $20.00 from him to get her winter coat out of lay-away. Kiswana thinks about how different her brother is from the other students at school. The students are all discovering their blackness and protesting on campus; he never takes part and will not even wear an Afro. Kiswana does not have the kind of hair that would easily form an Afro but she lacquers it up until she looks like an electrocuted chicken. Her mother questions her about moving a graphic nude statue from her table as too suggestive if male friends were to come by.

Her mother offers to loan her the money for the deposit for the phone but Kiswana turns her down. Kiswana tells her that her brother makes her pay him back when she borrows money from him but her mother does not. Her parents live in an exclusive area and make a five-figure income from selling real estate. Her mother looks down her nose at the "those people" who live in Brewster Place, poor people and Kiswana is not "poor." Kiswana jumps to their defense; "they're my people and yours too, Mama." They get into an argument over Kiswana dropping out of college and her defense of the "revolution." Kiswana defends her ideals and says her place is in the streets fighting with her people for equality and a better community. Her mother has a very practical come back telling her all their revolution achieved "was a fist full of new federal laws and a country still full of obstacles for black people to fight . . . there was no revolution." She challenges Kiswana that she will be no help to these poor people while she herself is on welfare and uneducated, waiting for a revolution that will never come.

Kiswana accuses her mother and father of selling out to "white brainwashing." Her mother tells her you do not have to live in a slum to be concerned about social conditions and defends their support all these years of the NAACP and all the progress that organization has done. She accuses Kiswana of living in a fantasy world, always going to extremes. Life is about "accepting what is and working from that" and not putting lacquer on your hair trying to be something you are not.

This is too harsh for Kiswana and she angrily lashes out at her mother accusing her of being a "white man's nigger who's ashamed of being black!"

Her mother gives her a lecture on her own lineage: grandmother full-blooded Iroquois, grandfather a free black from Bajan who came to the country as a cabin boy. She tells her that it was because of these proud people that their family is alive today. They never begged or apologized for what they were; they worked hard to be allowed to be. "Black isn't beautiful and it isn't ugly - black is!" It broke her mother's heart when she changed her name from Melanie, her grandmother's name; a woman who raised nine children, educated them all, and held off six white men trying to jail one of her sons for "not knowing his place." Her mother swore she would keep the tradition and prepare her own children to meet the world on *their* own terms, no matter what they looked like.

Kiswana is ashamed of her outburst and her mother knows it and gives her a kiss. They change the energy by focusing on her mother's new shoes and Kiswana finds out her mother is polishing her toenails now too. Her mother suggests her father likes them that way. Kiswana realizes she is breaking no new trails as she stares at the woman she will become. Her mother has trod the same universe that she herself was now traveling.

After her mother leaves, Kiswana discovers a check for her phone deposit behind one of the cushions.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter has brought us up to modern times at Brewster Place, approximately the early 1970s. Kiswana has dropped out of college to join the revolution for black awareness and rights. She comes from a well-to-do black middle class family; a family that achieved their wealth by hard work starting way back with their hard working grandmother who scraped by to educate her nine children. They have risen out of the poverty of color and are proud of their accomplishments. Her brother is a lawyer and Kiswana is naive and disdainful of all her family's achievements because it was not accomplished through a "revolution." Kiswana's dreams fly on the back of a pigeon; they are airy and without any grounding in hard reality. Kiswana is just beginning to learn which dreams are worth the effort and which are just a fantasy.

Kiswana's brother is a male figure that is ignoring the "fads" of the day with regard to being "African." He is a self-assured black man pursuing his career. This image is in direct contrast to the men of Brewster Place Kiswana will soon encounter, and the wake of hopelessness that follows.

Kiswana is a daydreamer and naive about the realities of being a black woman. Her mother tries to teach her not to chase after platitudes and false images, like "the revolution," "power to the people" and false African hairdos. She tells her to be proud of who she is and work to become the essence of what you strive for. In her family that meant striving for education and a strong family, not turning your back on all your family history for some nebulous movement theme. She also shows her the love of a mother by caring enough to speak truth to her daughter.

In the face of it all, Kiswana accepts this education and finds she and her mother have so much in common. They both are dreamers; Kiswana is just a younger version of her mother. Her mother has the years and the wisdom of experience that has tempered her daydreams and brought prospective to her life.

The theme of learning to be happy with what you have is illustrated here in another way. In Kiswana's story, it does not refer to material things or relationships, but to heritage. Kiswana has a strong heritage as her foundation. She does not need to run after dreams of another "African" heritage with slogans and contrived hair dos; she has the real thing. Her mother is trying to get her to add education to this foundation. There is where their family has always found freedom from the conditions of poverty.

Kiswana's mother and Mattie are kindred spirits. They are both strong, practical women. They both profess "accepting what is and working from that." Kiswana is lucky she has the history of strength that the other women of Brewster Place do not.

Through the arguments and anger Kiswana does come to realize she is just like her mother, and with time will grow up to be like her. She realizes that her mother has trod the same universe as she, herself, is now traveling. Different times, different methods, but the same goals and her mother has succeeded. Kiswana sees this is a snapshot of the essence of who her mother is and a promise of who she herself can become. She is

finally able to see not just how they are different, but more importantly, how alike they are, and this gives her hope. Both are passionate women who are passionate about their beliefs. Kiswana is just learning what dreams to place value on. She has just learned a very important one; do not underestimate the strong woman her mother is; she may seem worlds apart different on the surface, but inside she is all that Kiswana yearns to become.

Therefore, with this heritage of strength, we find Kiswana trying to bring revitalization to Brewster Place that probably is too far gone to decay to benefit from the effort. However, Kiswana valiantly tries. We also have to keep in mind that Kiswana is not "one of them" and this will affect how effective she is in her attempts.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Ben sits on a garbage can outside one of the buildings. It is early morning and he opens his brown bag with his "morning sun," a cheap red wine. It is a cold morning and Ben does not want to freeze to death; his wine provides more than just warmth.

Eugene, a young man, comes over to visit and tells him the funeral is that day, asking if Ben is planning to attend. Ben excuses he does not have the clothes to wear and it will be too sad because the funeral is for a baby. Eugene tells him he is going because people expect it since she was his child. He tells Ben he tried to visit Ciel in the hospital after the death. He grouses that Mattie "that fat black bitch" was there and made him feel like a germ or something. He left without seeing Ciel complaining about not being treated with respect. He thinks he should be sitting with Ciel in the limo on the way to the funeral but everyone has been telling him it was his fault. He ends up talking himself out of going to the funeral.

Looking back, Eugene lives with Ciel. He has left her before, leaving her with a month-old baby, and Ciel thinks about the unexplainable love and explainable hate in their relationship. She thinks about the judgment in the caseworkers who chide her for being able to find him "to have it" but cannot find him to take care of it. This time Eugene comes back and Ciel feels relief.

Mattie, who rarely speaks more than two sentences but when she does, always with the precision of a diamond cutter's drill, makes the statement, "So, he's back." This sets off a defensiveness in Ciel running through all her excuses about how he has changed and has a new job on the docks; and Serena needs a daddy. Ciel silently prays that he will stay.

Thinking back, Ciel tries to figure out where it started to go bad; maybe something she said or did. It could not have been when she got pregnant for the second time. Things are different now; she is not as sick as she was with Serena and he is working. No, it could not be the baby. Now each day, Eugene comes home and picks a fight. Ciel retreats to her baby sleeping in the bedroom and realizes she is the only thing she has ever loved without pain.

Eugene tells her he lost his job and rages at her, blaming the babies and bills. Ciel asks him what he wants her to do about it; she will get a job if he will let Mattie watch Serena. Eugene thinks Mattie hates him, so he refuses that idea. Ciel remembers Mattie telling her she does not hate Eugene; she just loves Ciel too much. Eugene rages at her he will have nothing for himself with a baby coming.

Ciel is at the abortion place. The doctor there is telling her there is nothing to worry about, not much bleeding. She hears a sterile kindness in his practiced monologue. Ciel

tries to completely isolate herself from what she is about to do, as if she is another woman. Afterward, over the next few days, Ciel cannot keep herself connected to the world, experiencing a disembodied kind of awareness. Her neighbors are puzzled by her behavior and Eugene calls her a "moody bitch." Ciel becomes terribly possessive of Serena, checking on her several times during her naps to make sure she is still breathing.

Ciel and Mattie are visiting in the apartment when Eugene comes home. Eugene is defensive about Mattie's offer to take Serena downstairs for ice cream. Mattie senses trouble and hopes to give Ciel and Eugene a little space to hash it out. However, Eugene is too filled with his own anger to recognize the offer for what it is. Mattie leaves and Eugene starts packing his things. Ciel places Serena in the living room with her blocks while she goes to Eugene to try to keep him from leaving. Eugene makes up a story about going to Maine to work the docks there. He will send for them when he is settled. However, Ciel catches him in a lie about where he is going. In desperation, she tells him he cannot go - she loves him. His response is "that ain't good enough."

At this point Ciel feels the scent of Eugene's body draw out of her own and the veil fall from her eyes as she sees him as he really is. She promises herself she will hate him one day. She knows she will never forgive herself for not having done it sooner and saved her baby. "Oh, dear God, my baby." Eugene thinks the tears are for him. However, Ciel is allowing herself a brief mourning for something she cannot quite identify. She feels the overpowering need to be with someone who loves her and thinks of Serena - just as she hears her scream from the kitchen. Serena has placed a fork in an electrical outlet in the wall and electrocuted herself.

Ciel completely withdraws within herself, no tears, no reality, no God - all those blank days in the hospital. She stops eating, drinking water and bathing. Everyone thinks she is in shock. However, Ciel is not grieving for Serena; she is simply tired of hurting.

Ciel finally breaks down, moaning, and Mattie is there to hold her. In addition, she holds her tightly and rocks her. She rocks her into her childhood and lets her see her murdered dreams. She rocks her back into the womb and finds a tiny silver splinter embedded just below the surface of her skin. Mattie rocks and pulls until the splinter gives way, but the roots are massive and tear up flesh, and fat and muscle tissue leaving a huge hole. However, Mattie knows this hole will heal now.

Ciel begins to retch up all the ugly evilness of pain until there is nothing left to heave up but air. Mattie brings her water in her cupped hands and Ciel drinks and cleanses her mouth. Then Mattie draws a tub of hot water, slowly undresses Ciel and lowers her into the water - "like a dried brown autumn leaf hitting the surface of a puddle." Slowly, Mattie bathes Ciel, carefully, gently and thoroughly, like a newborn. Then she dries her just as gently and Ceil stands there naked feeling the cool air and the sensation of fresh mint. The fire is gone now. Her tears are no longer killing her internal organs with their steam; Ciel begins to cry there on the bathroom floor.

Mattie cleans the bathtub and bathroom, and then moves Ciel to a chair in the bedroom. Ciel is still crying copious tears so she cannot see, tears running down her face onto her stomach and into her pubic hair. Then Mattie changes her bed linens making them fresh and new, beats the pillows into a virgin plumpness and dresses them in white cases — all the while Ciel cries. The tears still roll down her body and she puts her tongue out and begins to drink their saltiness. The first tears are gone. The new tears that come are hot and stinging. Mattie leads her to bed and Ciel lies down and cries. However, Mattie knows she will heal and the morning will come.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Ciel is Miss Eva's granddaughter. Mattie raised her son Basil with Ciel. They have a mother/daughter relationship and Mattie knows her very well.

Ciel has placed her hopes and dreams on a man who can only fail her. She does not ask much from him and has learned to take all the blame for his faults and failings as a man, father, and lover. He comes and goes in her life when it gets too hard for him. He has never a care for Ciel and how hard it is for her raising a baby alone, his baby. Ciel has placed her dreams and hopes on the wrong man. She has Serena, her baby girl, who she loves very much, but she is still looking for the love and support of her man and will not let herself be secure in just herself and Serena's love. Therefore, she lets Eugene come back into their lives and she desperately tries to make him happy so he will stay this time. She does not know that you cannot make someone happy if they do not have it in them to begin with.

There is a theme of mentoring women and facing personal truth in this book. Mattie started with her own mother who supported Mattie in having her baby even though not married and so taught her the value of each new life that comes into the world. Mattie understands the commitment that goes with caring for a life and raising a child even though she herself was still a very young girl when she became pregnant with Basil. Like all young mothers, Mattie needed time to grow into the responsibility. Her friend Miss Eva gave her that safe place to grow and shared her wisdom with Mattie challenging her to face herself honestly.

Kiswana has her mother and has discovered they are very much alike as women. Her mother tries to ground her in truth by facing her family history with pride and being realistic about what she can do to help relieve the poverty in her black community.

Etta is too independent to openly receive mentoring from any woman, but Mattie in her unfailing friendship provides a safe harbor for Etta to continue with her internal struggle for acceptance and the freedom to be who she is. If not for Mattie's unconditional love Etta might have drowned with the effort to keep facing the future each day at a time.

Now we have Ciel's story. Her conflict is the same as what Mattie went through. The fears and struggles are the same for both women. Mattie developed her strength and contentment through the guidance of her friend Miss Eva who gave Mattie the safe

place to develop this strength. Ciel has Mattie for her mentor and Mattie clearly understands how important Serena is to Ciel, just as Basil was to Mattie. Mattie, too, faced the fear of being alone, no man to share her bed or all the joys and sorrows of life. However, Mattie used her love for Basil to anchor herself to reality. Mattie knows that Eugene will never be a supportive part of Ciel's life, and Ciel should not expect this from him. Mattie accepted Basil's father would never be a part of their lives and this acceptance is part of why she survived. It appears from looking at Ciel's life that the key is to accepting this realization early, before too much damage. Mattie tries to tell Ciel to be prepared for this.

The recurring theme of babies and the hope they bring to each generation of life is strongly portrayed in Ciel's story. Here she has Serena, who thrives under Ciel's love. Eugene does not want Ciel's love and tells her so. However, Eugene has given Ciel two babies, Serena and her yet unborn baby, and Ciel senses how closely her own sanity and survival is connected to nurturing these two lives. Out of desperation, Ciel submits to having an abortion in an effort to keep Eugene from leaving her again. She does not discuss this with Mattie and we get the impression she cannot admit even to herself the horrible sacrifice she has made. Her sanity starts to collapse right after the abortion as her soul goes through terrible guilt and pain. Two lives have been harmed here - one has been killed and the other is starting to die slowly.

Ciel's only lifeline now is Serena, who she holds onto with a fierce possession. No one knows what she has recently gone through, except Eugene who prepares to leave her anyway. He is so caught up in himself he thinks her tears over her lost baby are for him. However, Ciel has come face to face with reality too late to save her unborn baby, and possibly too late to save her own sanity. Her anger, hatred for Eugene, and her own self-loathing for her actions are starting their destructive path. Serena's electrocution death is the catalyst that drops Ciel into the abyss where the soulless go. Still no one knows what has happened. They think she is just grieving from the loss of Serena. They do not know about the abortion of her unborn baby. They do not know about the price Ciel has paid in the harm to her own soul, or the self-imposed hell into which she is falling. They do not know she sacrificed two lives and lost the third to an accident trying to hold onto one worthless dream.

Mattie does not know the details either, but she does see the depth of Ciel's despair and reaches out to her when no one else could reach her. Mattie finds the 'tiny silver splinter' embedded under Ciel's skin. This represents the beginnings of a dream, now unrealized. It is tiny and has not matured into something good. Instead, it is the cause for the festering in Ciel's soul. It has created an infection that has oozed through her entire system threatening her death. Its smallness is deceptive when we see how large a hole it leaves when removed. We see how hard and deeply Ciel hung on to that wasted dream. However, once it is removed, and the poison drained out, she begins to heal.

Mattie brings about a healing and cleansing of the soul and body for Ciel. She holds her so tightly and rocks her so sweetly that Ciel finds that safe space she needs to start her healing. First, she undergoes three baptisms, one of water, one of tears and one of fire.

Mattie brings the first of two baptisms to Ciel's broken soul. The first comes when Mattie helps Ciel into the bathtub of water. It is compared to a dry autumn leaf hitting the surface of a puddle. The first water is shallow but that is all the dried leaf needs to start the reconstitution. Ciel's whole body and soul at this point are dry and devoid of the life force, which water represents. Just as a dry leaf would float on the surface of a puddle, so Ciel's psyche floats, barely in this world. She is gradually grounded by the waters of this first baptism. Eventually the power of the water seeps into the cells of the dried membranes of the leaf. Slowly Ciel's psyche is regenerated by the waters administered by the loving hands of Mattie.

Ciel begins to cry and her tears are so copious they course down her cheeks and onto her stomach and run into her pubic hair and into her private parts. This is her second baptism, one of tears. The first baptism was external, the healing waters of life. The second is of Ciel's own body's water, her tears. Water and salt, the mixture of tears, are both healing compounds. Ciel's tears flow over her stomach where her babies are grown, where she just lost a baby that was growing. They flow over her pubic hair the first outward symbol of a girl's maturing into a woman. Her young womanhood, made up of so many dreams and hopes, has been betrayed by her own falsehoods; the lies she tells herself. And the tears flow down into her private areas where Ciel has sold her soul to a momentary desire; the deep musky scent reminding her of the ghosts of her Tennessee childhood; the feel of sooty flesh that has penetrated her skin and become one with her being. Therefore, the waters of her tears wash her intimately in only the way that her own cellular knowledge can reach.

Ciel's third baptism is one of fire. The first tears are gone, replaced by new tears, hot and stinging. They cauterize her pain and seal off the open wounds of her own betrayal. The wound of her self-loathing and hate for Eugene will eventually scab over and new tissue will grow, bringing a new, but different, Ciel with it.

"What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore and then run?" Ciel's unrealized dream did fester and nearly killed her. The effort changed her forever. Ciel has dried up like a raisin in the sun. Mattie's hand has given her the water to plump the raisin again and give it back some of its vitality. A raisin that has soaked and plumped will never be quite as it was before it dried. As it was, two lives were lost in the process. Therefore, Ciel will heal too but she will emerge different, never able to re-live the dreams of her youth.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

"...I talk of dreams which are the children of an idle brain . . ." Cora Lee loved new baby dolls. They were so perfect and small; she inhaled in its new aroma. Her parents laughed at her delight each Christmas as she opened her new baby doll. Cora Lee was easy to please; a new baby doll was all she wanted for Christmas each year. They had to be baby dolls too. Her parents tried to introduce her to Barbie dolls as she grew, and even invested in expensive porcelain dolls from different countries, only to find them later under her bed with smashed heads and dismembered bodies. That was when her father began to worry; not so her mother, who always thought Cora Lee was different from other children.

By her thirteenth birthday, her father put his foot down and declared no more dolls of any kind. They bought her expensive presents that year but Cora Lee only fingered them listlessly. Her mother tried to comfort her by reminding her she had many other baby dolls. "But they don't smell and feel the same as the new ones."

Not long later, Cora Lee's younger sister tattled on her that she and the Murphy boy were doing the nasty behind the back porch. It was not nasty, Mother . . . he had just promised to show her that thing that felt good in the dark. It did feel good. Her mother tried to have the talk with Cora Lee about not doing those things because now her body could make babies and she was not old enough to be a mother. Cora Lee breathed in wonder - a real baby?

Cora Lee lives in Brewster Place and is a single mother with seven children, one a new baby. Her first baby came when she was a sophomore in high school. The neighbors have been complaining about her wild children and one of her sons, Brucie, fell and broke his arm. Therefore, she is keeping them cooped up in the apartment. While they race around the apartment, Cora Lee tries to watch her soap operas. She yells at the kids to settle down and asks if anyone has any homework. She only threatens to make them do homework when they have pushed her to the end of her patience. She wonders why no one ever has any homework. When she was in school, she got homework. Her kids have been left back in school but she wonders why her oldest daughter, who liked school, was now getting the truant notices. Cora Lee had to stop taking her to the library because the little ones marked and ripped the pages and then she had to pay for them.

She turns back to examine the new bruise on the side of the baby's head from the recently thrown ball. "Why couldn't they stay like this - so soft and easy to care for?" She loves them this way, the dimpled cheeks, the sweet smell of mineral oil and talc. She wishes they would stay like this and be fed from her body; they stayed where you put them and were so easy to clean. She spends hours washing, pressing and folding the baby clothes, blankets and sheets. She dusts and mops the crib religiously,

constantly alert for germs. She loves the soft baby hair but does not like the older rough and kinky hair. She hates having to comb their hair later and dreads the fights as she yanks the comb through their matted hair. If she did not she would have to face the teachers, neighbors and relatives complaining about the condition of her children's hair.

Cora Lee thinks back to when she was in school and how she had to leave when she got pregnant in her sophomore year. She had intended to go back to school after the baby was born, but the babies just kept coming. They were always welcome until they changed, then she did not understand them. She thinks about the scoldings from the caseworkers for having babies year after year, all but the first two with different daddies. "What's wrong with you?"

Cora Lee thinks, 'what's wrong with the children.' If they acted better people would not be on her back all the time. Maybe Sammy and Maybelline's father would have stayed longer if the children acted right. She recalls his odd ways, glass eye, gold-capped teeth, violent temper giving her a fractured jaw for burned rice, loose tooth for a wet bathroom floor, scar under her left eye from a baby crying. However, babies cry and you cannot stop that so that father had to go. Then there was Brucie's father who had promised to marry her but left to get a carton of milk and never returned. Then after that came 'the shadows' who came in the night and showed her the thing that felt good in the dark They left before the children awakened which was good. Sometimes the thing in the dark brought new babies. She did not want to know anything about the shadows, their names, whether they had wives or jobs. She was glad they did not have time to give her fractured jaws in the time before the children awakened.

class=Section2>

Cora Lee answers the knock at the door to find Kiswana bringing Sammy home. She tells Cora Lee she found him eating out of the garbage cans and thought Cora Lee might want to know he was probably hungry. Cora Lee tells her she knows he does that and just figures if he gets sick from the filthy habit he will stop it. Cora Lee gets defensive and lies, telling her she is making dinner now and that she feeds her children. She goes on to say that she had to stop all the candy because Sammy's gums became infected and she did not want that spreading to the baby.

Kiswana tells Cora Lee she lives on the sixth floor and is starting a tenants' association on the block of Brewster Place. They want to try to get it fixed up, maybe stage a rent strike for repairs. She wants a list of what is wrong in her apartment and invites her to a Shakespeare play in the park, A Midsummer Night's Dream, put on by her boyfriend. Cora Lee reluctantly agrees to go to the play and bring the children.

Later Cora Lee pulls out her photo albums of her babies. She thinks she has to get the baby's picture taken before it is too late. Babies grow up. She thinks of the others and wonders why they do not go to school. She herself had liked school and she remembers the line from a play - "We are such stuff as dreams are made on . . ."

Cora Lee scrubs all seven children and dresses them for the play. It is a tremendous effort to match all their clothes and she realizes trouser legs are too high, dresses are ripped from the waist, socks are missing toes or heels. When had all this happened? Kiswana arrives and they go to the park for the Shakespeare play.

They pass Mattie on the way. Cora Lee likes Mattie because she never judges other people's lives. Mattie chides her lightly that she will have to stop making all the babies soon. Cora Lee asks her rhetorically how is she going to stop? Mattie tells her 'the same way you started, only in reverse.' Cora Lee tells Sammy to help Mattie up the steps with her cart but Mattie does not want Sammy walking alone in the alley later because it is getting dark and because C.C. Baker and those low-lifes will be hanging around smoking dope.

Coral Lee, Kiswana and the children make their way to the park and find their seats. At first, Cora Lee cannot understand the words but eventually gets into the rhythm of the play and starts to enjoy it. The children like it too. Cora Lee imagines the fairy queen looks like her daughter Maybelline and dreams she might go to college too. Brucie whispers and asks Cora Lee if that is what a 'dumb ass' looks like. He is looking at a character from the play with a donkey's head on. She tells him, 'no baby, mama won't let you look like that.'

The next scene blurs before her eyes as she wonders why Maybelline stopped liking school, thinking of the truant notices and torn library books. She begins to cry and decides to put a stop to the truant stuff if she has to walk them to school herself, and summer school too. In addition, she would check their homework each night and attend the PTA meetings; Sonya, the baby will not be little forever. None of them will stay little forever - on to Junior high, then high school, then college, good jobs in insurance, the post office, even doctors or lawyers. "I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream . . ." The play ends and the children want to join everyone on stage dancing but Cora Lee keeps them back not wanting their patched clothes to be seen in the bright lights.

Cora Lee and the children loved the whole experience. Walking home, Cora Lee recalls having beaten Sammy for writing rhymes on the bathroom walls. Back home Cora Lee puts her children to bed, folds and puts their clothes away. In her bedroom, she finds a shadow in her bed having let himself in with his key. This had been a night of wonders and Cora Lee folds her evening like gold and lavender gauze deep within the creases of her dreams.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Cora Lee loves babies; she has always loved babies. Moreover, just like Mattie, Lucielia and the other women we have met so far, babies are actually the grounding life forces that give their lives meaning. However, Cora Lee's need for them takes on a very unhealthy twist and we do not really know why, just that she cannot grow herself past an emotional babyhood as her children can and eventually do.

We know Cora Lee came from a two parent family who gave her a stable life, cared enough for her to give her baby dolls and later, in an attempt to nudge her into growing out of them, more expensive gifts. We know she liked school and was a good student. However, her story illustrates that sometimes our surroundings are not the catalyst for our neurosis. Cora Lee had a need from her earliest years to hold babies, and only babies, close to her heart. That she rebelled violently when denied her annual Christmas gift of a new baby doll should have been a clue that Cora Lee's need for these "baby dolls" went deeper into an area no one could go or touch but her babies. Her father's mistake in denying her any more of these dolls on her thirteenth birthday only opened up desperation in Cora Lee that lasted into her adulthood. When she discovered that 'the thing that felt good in the dark' could make her own body give her babies of her very own she lost herself to her deep dark need.

Unlike Lucielia who mistakenly and desperately thought she had to have a man in her life, Cora Lee has no emotional need for a man. To her, men were shadows, things that come up when the lights are turned out. Her mind has so reduced men to such a nothing that she believes her life is actually better with it that way. She has no desire for a father for her children, something they very much need. She very matter of factly states she has no husband and so what. She has her annual baby doll that she gets from allowing these shadows into her bed, and once they are done and gone, she is content to be alone again with her baby doll; the rest of her children she relegates to as far from her consciousness as possible.

Here in the story we find Cora Lee with too many children for her to manage. She has slipped into a neglectful place with them. She watches soap operas instead of cooking meals for them. She does not watch them at play and lets them get in harms way. She puts no effort into their education except to threaten them with homework when they irritate her to much. She has collected her baby dolls which grow up, and once that happens she has no more interest in them.

Somehow, she has allowed herself to continue to indulge her childish need for these babies year after year, and not one of her children has been able to pull her back into the real world. She thinks from time to time of her daughter Maybelline, her second child. We get the impression she made an effort with her in early years, taking notice of her liking school, and taking her to the library to encourage her education. However, she gave up on her when it became too difficult to manage with the other children. She slipped into neglecting her, too, and now she wonders why her daughter now skips out on school and brings the truant slips home. The pattern time and again is that once the next new baby comes along, the other older children become more of a burden. Sammy's gums became infected from too much candy and Cora Lee only stops letting him have candy when she becomes afraid the infection might transfer to the baby.

Her life to this point is motivated by the babies. They are the only ones in her life she really cares for. She meticulously cleans the baby crib and washed and irons the baby clothes daily, while the rest of her children are left ratty haired, dressed in rags and scrounging from garbage cans.

Her newborn babies represent her dream of a new beginning - each time one is born. However, as they grow and change, Cora Lee's fear of facing a hopeless future takes over and she puts them aside from her life.

Cora Lee's behavior is so out of reality in her obsession for babies, and so lacking in compassion for her other children that we are surprised anything can get through to her. However, a Shakespeare play is the catalyst to snap her out of her baby doll dream.

The play has a story line of awakening from fairy dreams and along with the play, Cora Lee has a vision. It is as if the fairy magic has cleared her eyes and awakened her from her long dream where she has been imprisoned by her dolls. We see her starting to dream for her daughter Maybelline. We see her feeling regret for beating Sammy for writing rhymes on the bathroom wall. We see her make a personal commitment to support their education in the future. She vows she will see them to school and summer school. She dreams they will have a future and an education that will bring them good jobs. Now she wants to be a part of their lives. Somehow, her pride has been awakened and she has emerged from the shell that has kept her from growing up.

The shadows are still there but she is not alone on Brewster Place. She has Kiswana to help mentor her and help her keep her vows.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

They seemed like such nice girls. They had quietly moved into Brewster Place and it was not until they were noticed leaving in the morning and coming home in the evening that it settled in that they had moved in. Brewster Place waited to accept them; waited until it was plain there would be no wild parties or drunken friends; none of their husbands was encouraged to hang around their apartment to run errands for them. They did their own shopping and took the bus each morning and Brewster Place heaved a sigh of relief.

The women of Brewster Place easily accepted the taller, skinny one, but the shorter one was too pretty and had too much behind. However, eventually they noted their husband's roving eyes were not encouraged by the girl and they relaxed. Nice girls.

Then the rumor started, probably with Sophie. However, a rumor needs no parent, just a willing carrier. One day the taller one tripped and the shorter one caught her arm and said, 'don't wanna lose you now.' and so the first sour odor started. First, the women sniffed at the odor, then tried to recall where they had seen it before - they had seen *that* - done *that* - with their own husbands! Therefore, the smell began 'lining the mouths and whitening the lips of everyone as they wrinkled up their noses at its pervading smell.'

Therefore, it got around that those two in 312 were *that* way. Sophie's apartment window faced theirs from across the airshaft and she became the official watchman for the block. Sophie took her position seriously and constantly watched for any tell tale signs she could report to the others. Any arguments to the contrary were quickly argued down.

Once Sophie tried to get old Ben to tell her what he saw while inside the girls' apartment. He chided her with his sarcasm, 'it was terrible . . . worst broken faucet . . .' But Sophie did not need facts; she was able enough to report innuendos and suspicions.

Lorraine, the taller one, was the first to notice the neighbors were not as friendly to her as before. She always spoke to them in a friendly way but now some averted their eyes when she approached and others only reluctantly answered her greeting.

One day, Lorraine passes Sophie on the steps and she tries to snoop into her grocery bag. Later, Lorraine tries to talk to Theresa about it. Theresa does not care what people think about her. However, Lorraine is worried they know about them. Theresa is aggravated about Lorraine's paranoia and reminds her they have had to give up two very good apartments because of her fears and here they are in this dump because of her fears about what *they* might be thinking. Theresa is also annoyed that Lorraine

never fights back, not even with her when they fight. Lorraine is soft to her very middle and bends at the slightest pressure, trying to please everyone else. Theresa is tired of being clung to. Theresa did not want a child, she wanted someone willing to face her and stand up for herself. Theresa is very blunt about who she is - a lesbian - and pretending it to be different will not make it so. However, Lorraine is worried about losing her job as a first grade teacher if they find out. She also does not feel any different from the other blacks in her apartment complex; they are all in the same boat and if they do not row together, they will sink together.

The Brewster Place Block Association is meeting in Kiswana's apartment. No one can agree on anything and arguing breaks out. Sophia tells everyone they should be concerned about that "bad element" in their building. Mattie thinks she is talking about C.C. Baker and his gang smoking reefers and robbing people. Sophie corrects her and tells her it is those two girls living across from her apartment. Etta tells Mattie it is those two girls who mind their own business and never have a bad word to say about anybody. Sophie gets all riled up and starts quoting the Bible about what is right and not, and then Mattie is placed in the seat of the Christian woman judge. Mattie brings out her Bible quote that says not to be a busybody in other people's affairs. And then Etta jumps back into the ruckus yelling at Sophie about how glad she should be those girls are *that way* because it means one less bed her husband will be trying to jump into.

Mattie asks for an explanation of how they got that way and Etta tells her they love each other. Mattie thinks about it and recounts the women she has loved, Miss Eva, Ciel, Etta; and she has loved some women deeper that she ever loved any man. Moreover, some women loved her more and did more for her than any man ever did. She suggests to Etta that maybe it is not so different after all and that is why some women get so riled up about it.

Lorraine arrives at the meeting just as the other tenants have chosen sides on an argument over who is going to be secretary, and involving threats to throw the potted plant. Old Ben fills her in and tells her they originally were talking about holding a block party to raise money for a housing lawyer. Lorraine volunteers to take the minutes but Sophie gets ugly again. Etta lunges after Sophie with the heel of her spiked shoe and the insults start flying. Sophie starts yelling at Lorraine that she is not wanted in their apartment block. Lorraine leaves the apartment and almost gets sick in the hall. Old Ben helps her down to his apartment to settle down before going home.

Old Ben and Lorraine start talking as he makes tea for her. She tells him about how her father kicked her out of the house when he found a letter from one of her girlfriends and realized the truth about her. She worked in a night bakery to put herself through college. She sent her father a birthday card each year but he always returned them. After awhile she stopped putting the return address on the envelope so he could not return them. She hopes that one year before he dies he will open them. She asks Ben where his daughter lives. His response: 'just like you - livin' in a world with no address.'

Ben recalls his daughter and the story that keeps him drinking. He recalls a life with a wife and young daughter with a twisted foot. Ben swigs on his wine bottle praying for

relief before the memories overwhelm him and he starts his internal scream in the form of the spiritual *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. He recalls the scene of his daughter returning from her weekly overnight stay with the owner of their rented farmland. However, the cost is too dear for Ben, no matter what his wife refuses to believe about what happens in the big house when their daughter is sent there to clean house. Ben knows it's not right that she stays overnight and it's not right to ignore what their daughter told them happens to her there. His wife refuses to believe her daughter and calls her a liar. However, Ben believes her and hates himself for his own weakness that will not let him stand up to the man and keep his daughter safe. One day his daughter left home leaving only a note telling them she loved them very much but she knew she was a burden on them. However, if she had to keep working at the big house in that way, she might as well move to Memphis and make better money. Ben's wife eventually left him for another man and he moved to Brewster Place, where he drinks to this day. The memories are too hard and the song too deep, and sometimes the booze doesn't catch it soon enough and the neighborhood hears once again the trembling melody passing through his greasy windows - *Swing Low* . . .

Theresa has noticed a subtle change in Lorraine lately. She is speaking up more, not deferring to Theresa and not apologizing for seeing things differently from Theresa. Theresa is bothered by the change and the new independence. Actually, she is quite annoyed when she realizes the change has come from Lorraine spending so much time with old Ben. They have nothing in common; what could he possibly have to say to her to bring about the change she herself had been trying to make for five years?

Theresa comes upon a child on the street who has hurt herself on her skates. She helps her up and turns her over to her mother who acts very cautiously regarding Theresa. Further annoyed, Theresa goes into her apartment and starts dinner. Noticing a pair of squinty eyes looking through the window across the airshaft Theresa explodes with pent up frustration at Sophia's snooping. She begins yelling at Sophia - 'you wanna see what I'm doing?' She begins to throw the ingredients for her meatloaf out the window at Sophia, the onions, the chopped peppers, the eggs, the olives. Lorraine stops her about to throw the ground sirloin, protecting the expensive meat. At this, Theresa starts to laugh and then begins to cry. Lorraine comforts her, enjoying being the comforter for a change.

The next day Lorraine runs into Kiswana, who apologizes for what happened in her apartment at the meeting. She tells Lorraine that she is now enrolled at the community college taking black history and science of revolution classes. This should make her mother happy. While they are talking C.C. Baker and his gang start giving them a hard time, first to Kiswana for talking to a "dyke" and then to Lorraine. Kiswana tells Lorraine to yell back and not take that from them. Kiswana throws out a particularly good jab at C.C Baker, which gets his gang laughing, and makes C.C. vary angry. He and his gang continue hurling insults and challenges, ending with a threat to Lorraine.

Theresa tells Lorraine they are invited to a party at the club. Lorraine declines to go; she hates those parties telling Theresa she has always hated them. They argue and Theresa finally asks her what she and Ben do down in his apartment. They talk, she

says; she and Theresa do not talk; Theresa talks and Lorraine listens. Lorraine has resented how Theresa says she wants her to be independent but in reality, she wants her to look to Theresa on how she should feel about herself, and how different she is from everyone else. When she is with Ben, she does not feel any different from anybody else in the world. Theresa is adamant they *are* different and scolds Lorraine for not accepting that truth.

Lorraine unloads her heart and tells her she just wants to be a human being, somebody's daughter, or somebody's friend, not some freak like Theresa makes her feel. She is not different and shows Theresa her proof - a beige bra and oatmeal. The day before she fell in love with a woman she wore a beige bra, ate oatmeal for breakfast and went to school. The day after, she put on a beige bra and ate oatmeal, no different one day to the next. Theresa cannot accept this and continues to challenge her to admit she knew she was different because she did not pass around a picture of the great love in her life, or take her to the senior prom. Lorraine says they would not understand and starts to cry. Later she tells Theresa she will go to the party; Theresa, pouting, is not going now. Lorraine tells her she will go alone because she has to try to hold onto something of the love she has for Theresa. "If I can't walk out of this house without you tonight, there'll be nothing left in me to love you."

Lorraine leaves the party at the club and walks home. She runs into C.C. Baker and his gang smoking reefer. C.C. Baker accosts her and begins to beat her up. Then he brutally rapes her and is followed by the rest of his gang who stuff a paper bag in her mouth and continue to rape her until she is almost unconscious. When they are all done they leave her limp body lying in the alley. Lorraine lies there all night until Ben comes outside in the morning, hazy from his burgundy binge, and starts rummaging in the garbage. This movement rouses her, though she can barely see, and she crawls along the alley toward the movement. Mattie notices Lorraine outside her window and hurries to put a coat on over her nightgown. Lorraine's hand finds a loose brick and she begins to smash the source of the movement, Ben. There is movement everywhere, Mattie screaming, as Lorraine claws at the motions coming from every direction, crying, "Please, please...."

Chapter 7 Analysis

Brewster Place holds women of all kinds and all types of "goodness." The story continually contrasts unconditional love and judgment. Mattie, of course, is our best example of goodness at Brewster Place, and she stands in contrast to Sophie, the busybody. Mattie is unconditionally loving and non-judgmental. The women she loves know they have been loved deeply. Mattie reaches deep into her soul when she gives love. She also has a wisdom that guides her to know just how the women she loves need to be cared for. She gives them the space to make their own mistakes and when they do, she is there for them to chide them gently back from their falls. In the case of Ciel, Mattie is the only one with enough pure love, that cleansing fire love, to reach into Ciel's darkest place and help bring about the beginnings of her rebirth. With Etta Mae, Mattie has been the one constant, her home base, where Etta always lands after each

fall. And though they are both so completely different in how they live their lives, Etta knows that Mattie can see into her essence and loves her for what she sees there, not what she sees on her outside.

Therefore, when the discussion of what is good and right is violently thrown around by Sophie at the tenants' meeting Mattie, alone in the group, is the voice of true righteousness. She cannot see the difference between types of love. Degrees of love, yes; but not types. Lesbian love has no evil connotation for her. In fact, she does not even see "lesbian" love; she only sees "love." She wants to know how that love differs from her own experience of loving the women in her life. She knows how deeply she has loved the women in her life and the sacrifice it takes to love unconditionally. She also knows it can be such an intimate experience that it surpasses any relationship she can imagine between men and women. Look at how almost cellularly intimate Mattie had to get to reach Ciel in her moment of despair.

The women of Brewster Place have faced all types of challenges, sadness and sorrows in their lives. These separate but similar experiences bind them together in ways they do not yet understand. Many of them are still looking to blame others for their problems or find fault in others to make themselves feel less oppressed. Sophie is just such a woman. Her husband cheats on her and she cannot keep her nose out of other people's business. The news of Lorraine and Theresa being lesbians is just the juicy gossip she needs to make her life shine a little more than someone else's. Standing up for her version of righteousness gives her just that much of an edge over those others she likes to judge. Sophie represents that element in each of us that likes to play the judge over others. Usually that what we are most appalled by is, in reality, a mirror of our own inadequacies.

Etta resents Sophie and others like her. Etta has been the object of their biting tongues and gossip. She welcomes a chance to attack Sophie over her position on Lorraine and Theresa as lesbians. She stands up for them - those two girls who mind their own business and never have a bad word to say about anybody. They are living righteousness in relation to their neighbors; and Sophie's actions are just the opposite. Etta wants to beat Sophie up for everything she and every other judgmental woman at Brewster Place have said about her. Their treatment of Lorraine and Theresa gives her the opportunity to vent her anger.

Etta tries to explain to Mattie about "lesbian love" and how it is "different." However, note she does not argue with Mattie's analysis. Etta and the others know Mattie has the wisdom they do not.

In this chapter, we are introduced to Lorraine and Theresa, two lesbians who have had to move from one apartment to another because of Lorraine's fear of being found out to be a lesbian. We find that Theresa claims not to be ashamed of her lesbian sexuality and tries to make Lorraine stand up and acknowledge to the world her lesbian self. However, contrary to Theresa's outward hardness and strength, we begin to see that Theresa is every bit as insecure as Lorraine. Lorraine admits her fears of non-acceptance and the Theresa-imposed feelings that she is "different" from other women.

Theresa is constantly trying to get Lorraine to admit she is different from other women. However, for five years Lorraine has crumbled in the face of Theresa's methods to change her. She balks at being made to feel a freak about her sexuality and she is confused by Theresa's onslaught. Lorraine knows something is not right about the basis for Theresa's argument but for too long she has tried to acquiesce to keep the peace. The result is she has created in herself a weak identity that cannot stand up to Theresa. Theresa makes her feel so inadequate and weak she does not really know what she stands for. Lorraine will need to distance herself from Theresa to be able to make a change.

Theresa, however, in her angry and defiant defense of her own sexuality, creates an almost grotesque image of her own inadequacies. Like Sophie, in comparison, Theresa seeks to make Lorraine feel inferior in order to bolster her own self-image. Later in the story, Theresa is threatened when Lorraine starts to develop a stronger self-image. She cannot understand how old Ben could bring about the change she has been trying to force on Lorraine for five years. However, it is old Ben giving Lorraine a safe non-judgmental place to begin to open up that creates the environment for her growth. Ben does not try to make her change and she does not try to make him change. Lorraine can finally sort out why she is not a freak , as Theresa wants her to believe. Lorraine just wants the same thing everyone else wants. She wants to be loved and accepted. She wants to be some one's daughter, someone's friend. She gets dressed in the morning and eats oatmeal like every other person. Her humanness is what ties her to every other woman. The fact she is capable of love and desires to give love to friends, family, children and her lover makes her intrinsically the same basic human as the other women in Brewster Place. Mattie knows this is the litmus test for a good human being and Lorraine finds she passes this test in the safety of old Ben's friendship.

Old Ben's personal hell that keeps him drinking to ward off the recurring nightmare of his regrets, houses two women who are also residents of Brewster Place in an unspoken way. Their existence is a hidden mystery that Ben keeps private, only revealed to Lorraine. These other two women are his ex-wife and his daughter. His memory of them, and drinking to stave off that memory, is what creates his outward image that he portrays to the other residents of Brewster Place. They do not know that they are still very real to Ben and are behind who he is today. They do not know why he drinks; only that he is an old wino. They hear him wailing out the old spiritual *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* and know he is embarking on one of his wine binges. Nobody cares to ask him why he drinks or sings that plaintive song - a song begging for absolution, salvation and freedom from the burdens of this life.

Ben's ex-wife was domineering and ambitious. She berated Ben as being less of a man than she wanted him to be. She bullies him into silence when he tries to defend their daughter from being molested by their landlord. However, his wife is greedy and knows that to stand up to this man will mean they will lose their lease on the land. She chooses to call her daughter a liar when confronted with the facts of the molestations. She bullies Ben in to silence when he tells her there is no excuse why their daughter has to spend the night on the days she cleans house for the man. His wife eventually leaves Ben for another, more promising husband. Ben would be better off if it were not for the fact he

lost his daughter in the process. He should have had the courage to stand up for his daughter in the face of losing his wife. He knows now his wife was not worth losing his daughter. Worse, in the process he lost himself.

His daughter is very like Lorraine. She is different in one way from other girls in that she has a twisted foot and walks with a limp. However, inside she is the same as all girls. She needs to be loved and protected. However, she has been abandoned by her parents to the horrors of weekly molestations by the landowner. She has an ineffective father and a selfish and punishing mother. In spite of this, she still loves them and tells them so when she runs away from home. Neither really deserves the love she gives them. Note that she gives them her love, which is unconditional. She does not give them absolution for their behavior regarding her. This is what tortures Ben so, and drives him to sing his song calling for mercy - ". . . coming forth to carry me home . . . swing low . . ."

Lorraine and Ben relate well together. Ben knows what its like to be made to feel worthless, with a diminished self worth. The first, his wife gave him; the second, he gave himself. He and Lorraine can relate on that level quite easily. Theresa and the others in her past - her father, people in other apartment houses, and now Sophie and those in Brewster Place - have judged her and set up their standards for her worth and then make her feel she is less than their standard. Lorraine beats herself into low self-esteem over it. Lorraine eventually finds her way into a healthier self-image with Ben's help. She pleads with Theresa, and everyone else in her life, to understand and just let her be without the labels and judgments.

Kiswana attempts to rectify the rudeness Lorraine experienced in her apartment during the meeting by making an apology. Kiswana is trying to sort out the complexities of dramas she is encountering living in Brewster Place. Her mother had told her "you're not one of them," yet Kiswana is trying to bridge that gap. Her boyfriend is working to bring art and culture to the people in the ghetto and Kiswana has a certain place of respect in the neighborhood because of it. C.C. Baker and his gang are afraid of Kiswana's boyfriend and clearly will not molest her for fear of him. However, she shows a naïveté in her dealings with them. It is not wise to challenge the likes of C.C. Baker. Mattie has been warning the neighborhood and calling the police about him, but to no avail. The police do not come and the men of Brewster Place ignore the problem. Kiswana still lives in a filtered reality thinking verbal put downs in front of his gang boys is going to do her or Lorraine any good in the future. As it turns out, embarrassing C.C. Baker causes him to retaliate on Lorraine, who has no protector.

The rape scene in the story is ugly and very difficult to witness from the reader's perspective. The worst of every male depicted so far in the story comes out in the person of C. C. Baker. Weak, a bully, self-centered, fearful, a braggart, violent, stupid, a drug addict - are all aspects of his persona. His gang mirrors his behavior. They mirror the very worst in almost all the males we have encountered in the story. That they brutally destroy a human being is of no consequence to them.

C.C. Baker and his gang fear only the threat of returned brute force; they have no respect for the law. The represent the worst Brewster Place has produced. They foreshadow the future for generations of male youth if left with only the likes of them as role models. Where are the fathers and husbands in this neighborhood creating a safe environment for their children? Just as Ben represents the impotent male in this story of the poverty of humanity, unable to summon the courage to protect his child from the molester, so the absence of potent fathers and husbands stand out in the face of the existence of the ugliness represented by C.C. Baker and his gang.

C.C. Baker and his gang have no respect for women or for the peace in their own neighborhoods, where we presume their very own mothers and sisters live. They create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that many of the women in Brewster Place have experienced already in the men in their personal lives. Etta Mae, Ciel, Cora Lee, Sophie and the other wives of unfaithful husbands in Brewster Place, have all experienced fear and intimidation from their men, physically and emotionally. Their children have all been abandoned by the fathers, and the women have been left alone to face the difficulties of a life of poverty without the help of a husband or partner in life. The women have all faced the fear of being alone and none of them expresses any hope for the future of the men in their world. They band together instead to support each other as best they can. Truly, none of them has succeeded with a relationship with any man in the story.

Mattie is the only one who did not expect anything from the father of her son; and she came to accept that she could not expect any support from her son as well. She was used by both of them in extremely selfish ways, as were all the women in our story. Ciel's man abandoned her with a newborn baby then he forced her to have an abortion with her second baby, and then callously abandoned her again. Cora Lee has only known brutality or indifference from the men "shadows" in her life. She constantly chases after unconditional love that she only gets from infants and does not even recognize what a healthy relationship with a man looks like. Etta tried to play the men's game of take what you can get, love 'em and leave 'em. However, her delicate soul could not stay indifferent to the pain and loneliness, which finally drove her back home to her friend Mattie for comfort and security. Even Theresa, a self–proclaimed lesbian, recalled her first experiences being used by men as a child and then later of the men she had encountered who she wished would die a slow death for the way they treated her. Lorraine is the only one who did not have prior experiences with men - until she was beaten and raped by the gang epitomizing the very worst aspects of of a human male's capability.

We see at the end of this chapter that Brewster Place has deteriorated completely. The hopeful community originally alive at the beginning of Brewster Place's history is gone. What is left is failing fast. We see the women scrambling to keep some semblance of their lives together. We find the infants, representing hope, loved and clung to by all the women in our story. However, the images of the children are ones of hopelessness and futility, as seen through Cora Lee's numerous children - unruly, unclean and uncared for. The moral society of the neighborhood is not protected and drug addicts and gangs intimidate and rob the residents. The women have started to turn on each other trying to

destroy with judgment and ostracism. The men are gone, irresponsible and not protective. The walls are starting to crumble.

That Lorraine finds a loose brick from the wall in her blindness and moment of insanity after being beaten, raped and left for dead is a foreshadowing of the entire societal structure of Brewster Place falling apart. She uses the brick to strike out against the one male representing the impotent father or husband figure who has abandoned or failed all the women - unable to protect or create a safe home or community in which to live and raise children. His impotence has caused the decay of the society in Brewster Place.

Lorraine, the one woman untouched by the wretched excuses for men in the story, is finally destroyed by them. She lashes out for all the women in the story with her solitary brick from the wall of Brewster Place, smashing the head of that which is at fault for all the misery and fear. Old Ben, her catalyst for her blossoming freedom from self-fear, her friend, is sadly the victim. He does not deserve death; he is just a pathetic character who is unable to help himself past his next wine bottle. Is this also the state of the future of the men in this world?

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Rain began the afternoon of Ben's death and continued for an entire week so the people of Brewster Place could not congregate at the wall to go over the whys and hows of his dying. They met in twos and threes, confined to their own homes. Children became listless; men stay away longer at night; the bars are doing a good business. By midweek, the hopes of the block party start to disappear.

Only a few women admit they have dreamed about the tall woman in the bloody green and black dress. Little girls wake up screaming and mothers have no good answers. Even Mattie's sleep is fitful.

The block party is happening. A teenage boy asks Etta Johnson to dance and she accepts. Mattie chides her to act her age. Bantering back Etta tells her she is thirty-five; Mattie says Etta has regrets older than that!

Ciel shows up at the block party, just back in town with her suitcase still in her hand. Ciel goes up to Mattie and apologizes for not writing or keeping in touch. She tells Mattie she had to get away from Brewster Place, as far away as she could, and found herself in San Francisco. She tells Mattie she was going to write when she got over her scars, but that day never came. Ciel finally realized that day never would come, and so here she is. Mattie is grateful she is back and welcomes her home. They talk about Miss Eva, Ciel's grandmother, and Mattie's old friend. Their memories surround a piece of angel food cake that had been her grandmother's recipe. Ciel asks about Basil and Mattie tells her she never hears from him. "Ain't run out of highway to stop and make him think."

Ciel has been living in San Francisco working for an insurance company. She has met a man she has fallen in love with and tells Mattie he is very good to her.

She tells Mattie she had a dream last week and had the feeling she should be here today. Therefore, she took off a few days from work and came back for a visit. Mattie and Etta avoid looking at each other when Mattie asks Ciel what kind of dream. She says it had something to do with the wall and Ben and a woman who was supposed to be her; she felt it *was* her inside. The woman was tall and skinny with a green dress with black trim and red flowers or something on the front. Something bad happened to her by the wall, and something involving Ben. She shuddered with the memory.

Mattie and Etta avoid facing this dream and offer Ciel some of the ribs Mattie has been cooking. Ciel asks after Ben and they tell her he died last Saturday.

Kiswana is playing with Cora Lee's children. Cora Lee is heavy with her current pregnancy and is complaining about her weird dreams. They are all watching the sky

hoping it will not rain. Kiswana is happy they have raised over one hundred dollars so far. While they talk, they see Theresa preparing to move out of the apartment.

The weather starts to change quickly and threatens winds and rain. People start to leave but Mattie refuses to put the food away. The music continues playing and the only people left dancing are those from Brewster Place. Kiswana is trying to urge everyone to pack up and go inside before the rain starts but they are not listening. Mattie and Etta refuse to face the impending rain. Ciel, however, sees it coming.

The first rain and wind hit Kiswana on her arms. Cora Lee is looking for Sonya and finds her by the sagging brick wall scraping the bricks with a Popsicle stick. Cora Lee sees there is still blood on the bricks. "Blood ain't got no right still being here." Cora Lee digs at the base of the wall and yanks the brick out. The men grab the children and huddle under the eves of the building.

Cora Lee runs to Mattie's table and shows her the brick with the blood still on it. "Get that thing out of here!" and she passes it to Etta who takes it to the next table and on to the next woman from hand to hand, table to table until the brick flew out of Brewster Place and onto the avenue.

Mattie wants to make sure that's the only one and she and Cora Lee go back to the wall and start digging at another stained brick. Cora Lee finds another and Mattie calls for help, "It's spreading all over." Women attack the wall chipping away with knives, plastic forks, shoe heels, bare hands. The rainwater is pouring over them and the bricks are piling up behind them and are flung out of Brewster Place. Kiswana looks like she has entered a nightmare yelling that there is no blood on the bricks – it is just rain. Ciel answers, does it really matter? Kiswana looks down at the brick in her hand and sees the rain turn to *her* blood on the brick.

Theresa comes out of her apartment and tries to get into the cab but the driver speeds away, afraid of the riot taking place. Cora Lee gives her a brick to throw and Theresa yells for more. The rain explodes in a downpour as police sirens can be heard in the distance. It beats on their heads in unison with the beating of their hearts.

Mattie wakes up from sleep. After a week of continuous rain, Brewster Place is bathed in sunlight. The people are setting up for the block party. Mattie thinks it is a miracle the rain stopped on that day of their party. She takes no notice of the storm clouds that formed on the horizon and were silently moving towards Brewster Place.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 is the climax of the story with all the characters present at the block party. We see at the end of the chapter that the prior events of block party have all been a dream of Mattie's.

The rain began on the day of Ben's funeral and continued for a week. Our recurring theme of baptism continues and foreshadows what is to come later in Mattie's dream.

The rain washes away the sins of Ben bringing him that absolution he so longed for. For those still living in Brewster Place, the continuous rain begins the process of cleansing. The crust of decay and wasted dreams is thick and it takes a full week to soak and start to wash away.

During this time, the women and young girls of Brewster Place begin to dream. They dream of Lorraine's death as if it is their own story. The women in our story all began their journeys of trials when young girls, many of their first sexual experiences with men and following pregnancies started when they were still children. The young girls wake from these dreams screaming because they are too young to understand the history the older women have lived. They cannot understand the picture of what the future holds in store for them. They do not know yet the hopelessness they face; they are innocents and the dreams terrify them. Their mothers are also terrified by what they see because they do know what it is about. They do not have any good answers for their young girls because they do not know how to speak of the hopelessness that Brewster Place has come to represent. They sense that Brewster Place is in the final stages of its death and that a climax is impending.

During this initial week of washing, the men of Brewster Place are being washed out of their homes and into the bars. Instead of a cleansing, they are seeking the anesthetizing fog of alcohol. They, like Ben, have no other way to endure the pain of their ineffective past. They also sense their part in the decline of their micro-society but are too weak with their own hopelessness to strike out against it. Therefore, they begin their retreat; getting out of the way of the women. Mattie's sleep is fitful and so begins the dream world death throes of Brewster Place.

Etta is dancing with a teenager, telling him she is only thirty-five. Etta is still holding onto her youth; still trying to fool herself about the passage of time and all it has brought. Mattie reminds her she has regrets older than thirty-five and this speaks for all the women of Brewster Place.

Mattie alludes to regrets - the question asked from the very beginning of the story in the poem, "What happens to a dream deferred?"

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore – and then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over like syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode?" – Langston Hughes

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Mattie's dreams dried up. What was once young and plump, wisely dried up and became something more lasting. Mattie's wisdom has made her a lasting, surviving soul.

Or fester like a sore – and then run? Ciel's dreams failed as she placed her hopes on a man who was unable to rise to them. This cost her both of her babies and almost destroyed her soul as the failed dream festered. Eventually she vomited all the poison out of her system as Mattie helped her move through her cleansing and first steps towards her healing.

Does it stink like rotten meat? The men in Brewster Place are the mirror opposites of the women and have broken dreams. However, they allow their pain to rot. In addition, like rotten meat the smell permeates all around them and becomes so ingrained in the fabric of the lives around them that the residents of Brewster Place no longer notice its overt smell. They live the decay it fosters.

Or crust and sugar over like syrupy sweet? Cora Lee lives a continual effort to cover over the pain of the passage of time and all it brings. She tries to live in a syrupy sweet reality by giving birth to baby after baby, continually living in the hope and sweetness that babies are.

Maybe it just sags like a heavy load? Etta Mae has carried her broken dreams around with her for so long, gathering them and never discarding. The load is too heavy but Etta Mae is strong and the load sags more and more with the passage of time. The load is heavy but she has not broken.

Or does it explode? All the deferred and broken dreams of the women of Brewster Place did explode in Lorraine's last effort to smash away the tormentors who bring fear and hopelessness to Brewster Place.

That explosion leaves the blood of all the women behind on the bricks of the wall at Brewster Place - a wall that has served to separate them from the rest of the living world. The wall that created the small community that is now in its last days is no longer able to maintain any life beyond the broken dreams.

All the women gather for this last block party. This party was to raise money for their rebirth and the effort to take back some of their power over their poverty. Instead, it serves to bring the women together for their final cleansing, a baptism of blood and water.

Ciel has been brought back to Brewster Place by a dream where she is Lorraine. Indeed she is; Lorraine is every woman in the story with dreams of just being happy and allowed to live her life surrounded by love. Whether it is with children, husbands, lovers, fathers - they all want love. Ciel brings the spirit of her grandmother, Miss Eva, to the party as she remembers her through the angel food cake. Miss Eva was a testament to survival and helped Mattie in her growth to become a wise woman, healthy and able to love unconditionally.

Cora Lee is pregnant yet again, still trying to cover over her pain with the unconditional love she gets from her babies. With each new birth her hopes begin again - it could be different this time. She has seen hope for her children and has begun to dream for them a good future. She just needs the weight of Brewster Place cleansed from her. As the rain begins, the cleansing begins.

Cora Lee finds her young daughter digging loose the bricks of the wall using a child's tool, a Popsicle stick. The brick has blood on it and they show it to Mattie. Mattie, the matriarch of Brewster Place, recognizes the blood on the brick. It is the blood of all the women and young girls of Brewster Place; their blood oozing from the brick wall as the

wall releases its hold on the women residents in its final throes of death. The women attack the wall, tear it apart brick by brick and throw the bricks out of Brewster Place.

Kiswana only sees rainwater on the bricks. Her mother has correctly identified that Kiswana is not the same as these women. She has come from a long history of strong women who rise above the fear. They have faced the same challenges as the women of Brewster Place but have risen above the hopelessness. Kiswana's mother reminded her of the heritage of hers and that this will be her future as well. Her past and future is built on hope and so she does not see the blood. However, she wants to help these neighbors of hers and has worked hard to help them better their situation. Like Mattie, Kiswana tries to love unconditionally and tries to make a change in their lives. Therefore, Ciel challenges Kiswana: 'does it really matter that she can't see the blood?' Therefore, Kiswana joins in the demolition of the wall and helps to hasten the death of Brewster Place. This is in contrast to the purpose of Kiswana's tenants' association and the block party which goal was to better the conditions of Brewster Place.

Theresa, running away from the nightmare she has lived here at Brewster Place, is pulled into the riot by Cora Lee who begs her with 'please, please ....' Lorraine's last words ringing in Theresa's head shocks her into action and she joins in the demolition. Maybe she finally realizes that rather than being different, she is not so different from the other women of Brewster Place. She, too, has dreams deferred and has suffered so many private fears and losses. Smashing these blood stained bricks releases them from their bonds, held in limbo all this time by the brick wall at Brewster Place.

Mattie wakes from her dream to sunshine after a week of rain. The rain has washed Brewster Place clean, the dreams are over, and the block party is about to begin. Off in the distance are the dark storm clouds of Mattie's dream. The death of Brewster Place is imminent and the women of Brewster Place will bring about its demise.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

"No one cries when a street dies." It dies when the odors of hope, despair, lust and caring are wiped away by the winds when the spirit is trapped and fading in someone's memory. Brewster Place saw its last generation of children torn away by eviction notices and court orders; by no heat, frozen water pipes, crumbling plaster, vermin infested garbage. Brewster Place had given all it had to its children and could only watch as they packed up their dreams and left.

However, the women of Brewster Place, though spread over the canvas of time, still pin their dreams to the wet laundry, and a pinch of salt to a pot of soup, and their diapered babies. They ebb and flow but never disappear. Therefore, Brewster Place still waits to die.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Hope, despair, lust and caring – all factors in every woman's life. Her unrealized dreams become memories. Her children grow and the hopes pinned to their young lives either mature and become fruitful, or dry up and decay. No one cries when a street dies, but what about when a dream dies? We have seen the sadness and hopelessness it can bring. We have seen that our lives are complicated bouquets of what we have known, the choices we have made, our willingness to accept love and give love, and how conditional we make it.

We have seen the answer – find a way to be happy with what you have. In addition, we have seen it is what you do with the foundations you have been given, when applied to life's challenges that makes the difference.

Brewster Place may be dying, but the women of Brewster Place will move on to another neighborhood. They will continue to live the dramas of our lives. They will continue to pin their hopes on their babies. In addition, they will continue to struggle to find happiness with what they truly have.

As to the foundations – the women cannot build healthy foundations alone. The future for the children depends on the strength of the men to become examples to grow from.

Do they learn not to place hopes on deferred dreams? It is unlikely. Mattie's wisdom was in allowing the process to happen – all the mistakes, and then rising to happiness from that point. It is a rare woman who can do this and we hope for the future generations to raise strong women and men who can build a healthy heritage for their babies.

Characters

Ben

Ben belongs to Brewster Place even before the seven women do. The first black on Brewster Place, he arrived in 1953, just prior to the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Topeka decision. The Mediterranean families knew mm as the man who would quietly do repairs with alcohol on his breath. He bothered no one and was noticed only when he sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

As black families move onto the street, Ben remains on Brewster Place. He befriends Lorraine when no one else will. She reminds him of his daughter, and this friendship assuages the guilt he feels over his daughter's fate. When he sharecropped in the South, his crippled daughter was sexually abused by a white landowner, and Ben felt powerless to do anything about it. He lives With this pain until Lorraine mistakenly kills him in her pain and confusion after being raped

Kiswana Browne

Kiswana grew up in Linden Hills, a "rich" neighborhood not far from Brewster Place. She leaves her middle-class family, turning her back on an upbringing that, she feels, ignored her heritage.

Light-skinned, with smooth hair, Kiswana wants desperately to feel a part of the black community and to help her fellow African Americans better their lives After dropping out of college, Kiswana moves to Brewster Place to be a part of a predominantly African-American community. She becomes friends with Cora Lee and succeeds, for one night, in showing her a different life. In a ironic turn, Kiswana believes that her mother denies her heritage; during a confrontation, she is surprised when she learns that the two share a great deal.

Melanie Browne

See Kiswana Browne

Butch Fuller

Butch Fuller exudes charm. Built strong by his years as a field hand, and Cinnamon skinned, Mattie finds him irresistible. Mattie's father, Samuel, despises him. He believes that Butch is worthless and warns Mattie to stay away from him. Butch succeeds in seducing Mattie and, unbeknownst to him, is the father of the baby she carries when she leaves Rock Vale, Tennessee.

Etta Mae Johnson

Etta Mae Johnson and Mattie Michael grew up together in Rock Vale, Tennessee. While they are complete opposites, they have remained friends throughout the years, providing comfort to one another at difficult times in their lives.

Etta Mae Johnson arrives at Brewster Place with style. Driving an apple-green Cadillac with a white vinyl top and Florida plates, Etta Mae causes quite a commotion when she arrives at Brewster Place. The children gather around the car, and the adults wait to see who will step out of it. She disappoints no one in her tight Willow-green sundress and her large two-toned sunglasses.

Etta Mae has always lived a life very different from that of Mattie Michael. As a black girl growing up in a still-segregated South, Etta Mae broke all the rules. She did not believe in being submissive to whites, and she did not want to marry, be a mother, and remain with the same man for the rest of her life. She is a woman who knows her own mind. While the rest of her friends attended church, dated, and married the kinds of men they were expected to, Etta Mae kept Rock Vale in an uproar. "Rock Vale had no place for a black woman who was not only unwilling to play by the rules, but whose spirit challenged the very right of the game to exist." Etta Mae was always looking for something that was just out of her reach, attaching herself to "... any promising rising black star, and when he burnt out, she found another." As a result, Etta Mae spends her life moving *from* .one man to the next, living a life about which her beloved Billie Holiday, a blues musician, sings.

Cora Lee

Cara Lee laves making and having babies, even though she does not really like men. Her story starts with a description .of her happy childhood. An obedient child, Cara Lee made good grades in school and laved playing with baby dolls. When Cara Lee turned thirteen, however, her parents felt that she was *too* old far baby dolls and gave her a Barbie. When she discovers that sex produces babies, she starts to have sex in order to get pregnant. Cora Lee has several young children when Kiswana discovers her and decides to help Cara Lee change her life. Only when Kiswana says that "babies grow up" does Cara Lee begin to question her life; she realizes that while she does like babies, she does not know what to do With children when they grow up. Far .one evening, Cara Lee envisions a new life far herself and her children. Yet, when she returns to her apartment, she climbs into bed with another man.

Lorraine

See The Two

Basil Michael

Mattie names her san, Basil, far the pleasant memory .of the afternoon he was conceived in a fragrant basil patch. Unfortunately, he causes Mattie nothing but heartache. He seldom works. He never helps his mother around the house. He associates with the wrong people. Much to his Mattie's dismay, he ends up in trouble and in jail. When he jumps bail, Mattie loses her house. Basil leaves Mattie without saying goodbye.

Fannie Michael

Fannie Michael is Mattie's mother. Fannie speaks her mind and .often stands up to her husband, Samuel. She assures Mattie that carrying a baby is nothing to be ashamed about. She tries to protect Mattie from the brutal beating Samuel Michael gives her when she refuses to name her baby's father. Unable to stop him in any .other way, Fannie cocks the shotgun against her husband's chest.

Mattie Michael

Mattie is the matriarch of Brewster Place; throughout the navel, she plays a motherly role far all .of the characters. While the novel opens with Mattie as a woman in her 60s, it quickly flashes back to Mattie's teen years in Rack Vale, Tennessee, where Mattie lives a sheltered life with her aver-protective father, Samuel, and her mother, Fannie. Mattie allows herself to be seduced by Butch Fuller, wham Samuel thinks is worthless. When Samuel discovers that Mattie is pregnant by Fuller, he *goes* into a rage and beats her. Ta escape her father, Mattie leaves Tennessee to stay with her friend, Etta Mae Johnson, in Asheville, North Carolina. Mattie's san, Basil, is barn five months later. Etta Mae soon departs far New York, leaving Mattie to fend far herself. After a frightening episode With a rat in her apartment, Mattie looks far new housing She meets Eva Turner and her granddaughter, Lucielia (Ciel), and moves in with them. Later, when Turner passes away, Mattie buys Turner's house but loses it when she *pasts* bail far her derelict san. Mattie is moving into Brewster Place when the novel opens. She renews ties here with bath Etta Mae and Ciel. All of the Brewster Place women respect Mattie's strength, truthfulness, and morals as well as her ability to survive the abuse, lass, and betrayal she has suffered. Critic Jill Motus, in *Black American Literature Forum,* describes Mattie as "the community's best voice and sharpest eye."

Samuel Michael

Samuel Michael, a Gad-fearing man, is Mattie's father. Having her in his later years and already set in his ways, he tolerates little foolishness and no disobedience. He laves Mattie very much and blames himself far her pregnancy, until she tells him that the baby is not Fred Watson's-the man he had chosen far her He loses control and beats Mattie in an attempt to get her to name the baby's father.

The Two

"The Two" are unique amongst the Brewster Place women because .of their sexual relationship, as well as their relationship with their female neighbors. The other women do not view Theresa and Larraine as separate individuals, but refer to them as "The Two." As lesbians, Larraine and Theresa represent everything foreign to the other women. Larraine feels the women's hostility and longs to be accepted. Theresa, on the other hand, makes no apologies far her lifestyle and gets angry with Larraine far wanting to fit in with the women. Theresa wants Lorraine to toughen up-to accept who she is and not try to please other people. Larraine turns to the janitor, Ben, far friendship. Ben relates to her because she reminds him of his daughter. Later in the novel, a street gang rapes Lorraine, and she kills Ben, mistaking him for her attackers. She dies, and Theresa regrets her final words to her.

Theresa

See The Two

Ciel Turner

Ciel first appears in the story as Eva Turner's granddaughter. Early on, she lives with Turner and Mattie in North Carolina. When Mattie moves to Brewster Place, Ciel has grown up and has a child of her own. Ciel loves her husband, Eugene, even though he abuses her verbally and threatens physical harm. Her life revolves around her relationship with her husband and her desperate attempts to please him. After she aborts the child she knows Eugene does not want, she feels remorse and begins to understand the kind of person Eugene really is. Unfortunately, the realization comes too late for Ciel. She goes into a deep depression after her daughter's death, but Mattie succeeds in helping her recover.

Miss Eva Turner

Miss Eva opens her home to Mattie and her infant son, Basil. She shares her wisdom with Mattie, resulting from years of experience with men and children. Miss Eva warns Mattie to be stricter with Basil, believing that he will take advantage of her. She also encourages Mattie to save her money. When Miss Eva dies, her spirit lives on in the house that Mattie is able to buy from Miss Eva's estate.

Lucielia Turner

See Ciel Turner

Themes

Community

According to Webster, in *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language,* the word "community" means "the state of being held in common; common possession, enjoyment, liability, etc." Naylor uses Brewster Place to provide one commonality among the women who live there. The women all share the experience of living on the dead end street that the rest of the world has forgotten. It is on Brewster Place that the women encounter everyday problems, joys, and sorrows. In her interview with Carabi, Naylor maintains that community influences one's identity. While the women were not literally born within the community of Brewster Place, the community provides the backdrop for their lives.

Female Bonding

Naylor captures the strength of ties among women. While these ties have always existed, the women's movement has brought them more recognition. According to Annie Gottlieb in *Women Together,* a review of *The Women of Brewster Place,* "... all our lives those relationships had been the backdrop, while the sexy, angry fireworks with men were the show... the bonds between women are the abiding ones. Most men are incalculable hunters who come and go." Throughout *The Women of Brewster Place,* the women support one another, counteracting the violence of their fathers, boyfriends, husbands, and sons. For example, while Mattie Michael loses her home as a result of her son's irresponsibility, the strength she gains enables her to care for the women whom she has known either since childhood and early adulthood or through her connection to Brewster Place. She provides shelter and a sense of freedom to her old friend, Etta Mae; also, she comes to the aid of Ciel when Ciel loses her desire to live. It is the bond among the women that supports the continuity of life on Brewster Place.

Violence Against Women

The novel begins with a flashback to Mattie's life as a typical young woman. But this ordinary life is brought to an abrupt halt by her father's brutal attack on her for refusing to divulge the name of her baby's father. From that episode on, Naylor portrays men as people who take advantage of others. The men in the story exhibit cowardice, alcoholism, violence, laziness, and dishonesty. The final act of violence, the gang rape of Lorraine, underscores men's violent tendencies, emphasizing the differences between the sexes.

Alienation and Loneliness

Victims of ignorance, violence, and prejudice, all of the women in the novel are alienated from their families, other people, and God. For example, when Mattie leaves her home after her father beats her, she never again sees her parents. Then her son, for whom she gave up her life, leaves without saying goodbye. Throughout the story, Naylor creates situations that stress the loneliness of the characters. Especially poignant is Lorraine's relationship with Ben. Having been rejected by people they love or want to love, Lorraine and Ben become friends. Lorraine's horrifying murder of Ben serves only to deepen the chasm of hopelessness felt at different times by all the characters in the story.

African-American Heritage

Naylor wants people to understand the richness of the black heritage. She uses the community of women she has created in *The Women of Brewster Place* to demonstrate the love, trust, and hope that have always been the strong spirit of African-American women. Based on women Naylor has known in her life, the characters convincingly portray the struggle for survival that black women have shared throughout history. Like those before them, the women who live on Brewster Place overcome their difficulties through the support and wisdom of friends who have experienced their struggles. This bond is complex and lasting; for example, when Kiswana Browne and her mother specifically discuss their heritage, they find that while they may demonstrate their beliefs differently, they share the same pride in their race. As she explains to Bellinelli in an interview, Naylor strives in *The Women of Brewster Place* to "help us celebrate voraciously that which is ours."

Female Sexuality

Naylor uses each woman's sexuality to help define her character. Mattie's entire life changes when she allows her desire to overcome her better judgement, resulting in pregnancy. She spends her life loving and caring for her son and denies herself adult love. Etta Mae spends her life moving from one man to the next, searching for acceptance. She believes she must have a man to be happy. Ciel keeps taking Eugene back, even though he is verbally abusive and threatens her with physical abuse. She cannot admit that she craves his physical touch as a reminder of home. Cora Lee does not necessarily like men, but she likes having sex and the babies that result. Lorraine and Theresa love each other, and their homosexuality separates them from the other women.

Style

Structure

Critics agree that one of Naylor's strongest accomplishments in *The Women of Brewster Place* is her use of the setting to frame the structure of the novel, and often compare it to Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio.* Naylor sets the story within Brewster Place so that she can focus on telling each woman's story in relationship to her ties to the community. According to Fowler in *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary,* Naylor believes that "individual identity is shaped within the matrix of a community." Thus, living in Brewster Place partly defines who the women are and becomes an important part of each woman's personal history.

Point of View

Naylor created seven female characters with seven individual voices. Naylor tells each woman's story through the woman's own voice. That is, Naylor writes from the first-person point of view, but she writes from the perspective of the character on whom the story is focusing at the time. In Bonetti's, *An Interview with Gloria Naylor,* Naylor said "one character, one female protagonist, could not even attempt to represent the riches and diversity of the black female experience." This technique works for Naylor because she has used the setting to provide the unity underlying the story. Brewster Place provides the connection among the seven very unique women with stories of their own to tell.

Personification

Naylor gives Brewster Place human characteristics, using a literary technique known as personification. In this case, Brewster Place undergoes life processes. Brewster Place is born, in Naylor's words, a "bastard child," mothers three generations, and "waits to die," having "watched its last generation of children tom away from it by court orders and eviction notices... too tired and sick to help them." Naylor tells the women's stories within the framework of the street's life-between its birth and its death.

Allegory

The extended comparison between the street's "life" and the women's lives make the work an "allegory." All of the women, like the street, fully experience life with its high and low points. At the end of the story, the women continue to take care of one another and to hope for a better future, just as Brewster Place, in its final days, tries to sustain its final generations.

Symbolism

Naylor uses many symbols in *The Women of Brewster Place.* Both literally and figuratively, Brewster Place is a dead end street-that is, the street itself leads nowhere and the women who live there are trapped by their histories, hopes, and dreams. The brick wall symbolizes the differences between the residents of Brewster Place and their rich neighbors on the other side of the wall. It also stands for the oppression the women have endured in the forms of prejudice, violence, racism, shame, and sexism. Representing the drug-dealing street gangs who rape and kill without remorse, garbage litters the alley. A final symbol, in the form of toenail polish, stands for the deeper similarities that Kiswana and her mother discover.

Climax

Naylor creates two climaxes in *The Women of Brewster Place.* The first climax occurs when Mattie succeeds in her struggle to bring Ciel back to life after the death of her daughter. The scene evokes a sense of healing and rebirth, and reinforces the sense of community among the women. The second climax, as violent as Maggie's beating in the beginning of the novel, happens when Lorraine is raped. The women again pull together, overcoming their outrage over the destruction of one of their own.

Flashback

Soon after Naylor introduces each of the women in their current situations at Brewster Place, she provides more information on them through the literary technique known as "flashback." In other words, she takes the characters back in time to show their backgrounds. For example, when the novel opens, Maggie smells something cooking, and it reminds her of sugar cane. At that point, Naylor returns Maggie to her teen years in Rock Vale, Tennessee, where Butch Fuller seduced her after sharing sugar cane with her.

Historical Context

The Northern States after World War II

While Naylor sets the birth of Brewster Place right after the end of World War I, she continues the story of Brewster for approximately thirty years. Many immigrants and Southern blacks arrived in New York after the War, searching for jobs. Like many of those people, Naylor's parents, Alberta McAlpin and Roosevelt Naylor, migrated to New York in 1949. Members of poor, sharecropping families, Alberta and Roosevelt felt that New York would provide their children with better opportunities than they had had as children growing up in a still-segregated South. The Naylors were disappointed to learn that segregation also existed in the North, although it was much less obvious. They did find, though, that their children could attend schools and had access to libraries, opportunities the Naylors had not enjoyed as black children.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s

The year the Naylors moved into their home in Queens stands as a significant year in the memories of most Americans. It was 1963, a turbulent year at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Most Americans remember it as the year that Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy were assassinated. That year; also marked the August March on Washington as well as the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Later in the decade, Martin Luther King was assassinated, the culmination of ten years of violence against blacks. Critics say that Naylor may have fashioned Kiswana's character after activists from the 60s, particularly those associated with the Black Power Movement. According to Bellinelli in *A Conversation with Gloria Naylor,* Naylor became aware of racism during the 60s: "That's when I first began to understand that I was different and that that difference meant something negative."

The Jehovah's Witnesses

Naylor was baptized into the Jehovah's Witnesses when she was eighteen years old. At that point in her life, she believed that after the turmoil of the 1960s, there was no hope for the world. Women and people of color comprise the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses, perhaps because, according to Harrison in *Visions of Glory: A History and a Memory of Jehovah's Witnesses,* "Their religion allows their voices... to emerge... People listen to them; they are valuable, bearers of a life-giving message." Jehovah's Witnesses spread their message through face-to-face contact with people, but more importantly, through written publications. Naylor's writing reflects her experiences With the Jehovah's Witnesses, according to Virginia Fowler in *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary. The Women of Brewster Place* portrays a close-knit community of women, bound in sisterhood as a defense against a corrupt world. As the Jehovah's Witnesses preach destruction of the evil world, so, too, does Naylor with vivid portrayals of

apocalyptic events. Two examples from *The Women of Brewster Place* are Lorraine's rape and the rains that come after it. When Naylor speaks of her first novel, she says that the work served to "exorcise ... demons," according to Angels Carabi in *Belles Lettres* 7.

Critical Overview

Critics have praised Naylor's style since *The Women of Brewster Place* was published in 1982. They agree that Naylor's clear, yet often brash, language creates images both believable and consistent. The story's seven main characters speak to one another with undisguised affection through their humor and even their insults. Naylor places her characters in situations that evoke strong feelings, and she succeeds in making her characters come alive with realistic emotions, actions, and words. For example, Deirdre Donahue, a reviewer for the *Washington Post,* says of Naylor, "Naylor is not afraid to grapple with life's big subjects: sex, birth, love, death, grief. Her women feel deeply, and she unflinchingly transcribes their emotions... Naylor's potency wells up from her language. With prose as rich as poetry, a passage will suddenly take off and sing like a spiritual ... Vibrating with undisguised emotion, *The Women of Brewster Place* springs from the same roots that produced the blues. Like them, her books sing of sorrows proudly borne by black women in America."

Critics also recognize Naylor's ability to make history come alive. She sets the beginning of *The Women of Brewster Place* at the end of World War I and brings it forward thirty years. The story traces the development of the civil rights movement, from a time when segregation was the norm through the beginnings of integration. The changing ethnicity of the neighborhood reflects the changing demographics of society. The women who have settled on Brewster Place exist as products of their Southern rural upbringing. Their ability to transform their lives and to stand strong against the difficulties that face them in their new environment and circumstances rings true with the spirit of black women in American today. Linda Labin asserts in *Masterpieces of Women 's Literature,* "In many ways, *The Women of Brewster Place* may prove to be as significant in its way as Southern writer William Faulkner's mythic Yoknapatawpha County or Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio.* It provides a realistic vision of black urban women's lives and inspires readers with the courage and spirit of black women in America."

Critic Loyle Hairston readily agrees with the favorable analysis of Naylor's language, characterization, and story-telling. Yet, he remains more critical of her ability to make historical connections-to explore the depths of the human experience. In other words, he contends in a review in *Freedomways* that Naylor limits the concerns of Brewster Place to the "warts and cankers of individual personality, neglecting to delineate the origins of those social conditions which so strongly affect personality and behavior." Furthermore, he contends that he would have liked to see her provide some insight into those conditions that would enable the characters to envision hope of better tunes.

Hairston says that none of the characters, except for Kiswana Browne, can see beyond their current despair to brighter futures. He Implies that the story has a hopeless ending. Yet other critics applaud the ending for its very reassurance that the characters will not only survive but prosper. Christine H. King asserts in *Identities and Issues in Literature,* "The ambiguity of the ending gives the story a mythic quality by stressing the continual possibility of dreams and the results of their deferral." Referring to Mattie's dream of

tearing the wall down together with the women of Brewster Place, Linda Labin contends in *Masterpieces of Women's Literature:* "It is this remarkable, hope-filled ending that impresses the majority of scholars." In *Magill's Literary Annual,* Rae Stoll concurs: "Ultimately then, *The Women of Brewster Place* is an optimistic work, offering the hope for a redemptive community of love as a counterforce to isolation and violence."

While critics may have differing opinions regarding Naylor's intentions for her characters' future circumstances, they agree that Naylor successfully presents the themes of *The Women of Brewster Place.* The "community among women" stands out as the book's most obvious theme. Each of the women in the story unconditionally loves at least one other woman. This selfless love carries the women through betrayal, loss, and violence. For example, when one of the women faces the loss of a child, the others join together to offer themselves in any way that they can. This unmovable and soothing will represents the historically strong communal spirit among all women, but especially African-American women. The second theme, violence that men enact on women, connects with and strengthens the first. The men Naylor depicts in her novel are mean, cowardly, and lawless. As a result of their offenses toward the women in the story, the women are drawn together. Many male critics complain about the negative images of black men in the story.

In summary, the general consensus of critics is that Naylor possesses a talent that is seldom seen in new writers. Critics like her style and appreciate her efforts to deal with societal issues and psychological themes. According to Stoll in *Magill's Literary Annual,* "Gloria Naylor... is already numbered ... among the freshest and most vital voices in contemporary American literature."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Woodford is a doctoral candidate at Washington University and has written for a wide variety of academic journals and educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses how the dream motif in The Women of Brewster Place *connects the seven stones, forming them into a coherent novel.*

Gloria Naylor's novel, *The Women of Brewster Place,* is, as its subtitle suggests, "a. novel in seven stories"; but these stories are unified by more than the street on which the characters live. The interactions of the characters and the similar struggles they live through connect the stories, as do the recurring themes and motifs. Of these unifying elements, the most notable is the dream motif, for though these women are living a nightmarish existence, they are united by their common dreams.

The novel begins With Langston Hughes's poem, "Harlem," which asks "what happens to a dream deferred?" And Just as the poem suggests many answers to that question, so the novel explores many stories of deferred dreams. Each woman in the book has her own dream.

As a young, single mother, Mattie places all of her dreams on her son. She leaves her boarding house room after a rat bites him because she cannot stay "another night in that place without nightmares about things that would creep out of the walls to attack her child." She continues to protect him from harm and nightmares until he jumps ball and abandons her to her own nightmare.

Etta Mae dreams of a man who can "move her off of Brewster Place for good," but she, too, has her dream deferred each time that a man disappoints her.

Kiswana, an outsider on Brewster Place, is constantly dreaming of ways in which she can organize the residents and enact social reform. Even as she looks out her window at the wall that separates Brewster Place from the heart of the city, she is daydreaming: "she placed her dreams on the back of the bird and fantasized that it would glide forever in transparent silver circles until it ascended to the center of the universe and was swallowed up." But just as the pigeon she watches fails to ascend gracefully and instead lands on a fire escape "with awkward, frantic movements," so Kiswana's dreams of a revolution will be frustrated by the grim realities of Brewster Place and the awkward, frantic movements of people who are busy merely trying to survive.

Ciel dreams of love, from her boyfriend and from her daughter and unborn child, but an unwanted abortion, the death of her daughter, and the abandonment by her boyfriend cruelly frustrates these hopes. She is left dreaming only of death, a suicidal nightmare from which only Mattie's nurturing love can awaken her.

Lorraine dreams of acceptance and a place where she doesn't "feel any different from anybody else in the world." She finds this place, temporarily, with Ben, and he finds in her a reminder of the lost daughter who haunts his own dreams. But their dreams will be

ended brutally with her rape and his death, and the image of Lorraine will later haunt the dreams of all the women on Brewster Place. But perhaps the most revealing stories about dreams are those told in "Cora Lee" and "The Block Party."

Cora Lee's story opens with a quotation from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream:* "True, I talk of dreams, / Which are the children of an idle brain / begot of nothing but vain fantasy." The quotation is appropriate to Cora Lee's story not only because Cora and her children will attend the play but also because Cora's chapter will explore the connection between the begetting of children and the begetting of dreams. It will also examine the point at which dreams become "vain fantasy."

As a child Cora dreams of new baby dolls. When her parents refuse to give her another for her thirteenth Christmas, she is heartbroken. Her mother tries to console her by telling her that she still has all her old dolls, but Cora plaintively says, "But they don't smell and feel the same as the new ones." As an adult, she continues to prefer the smell and feel of her new babies to the trials and hassles of her growing children. Her babies 'just seemed to keep coming-always welcome until they changed, and then she just didn't understand them." Once they grow beyond infancy she finds them "wild and disgusting" and she makes little attempt to understand or parent them. They no longer fit into her dream of a sweet, dependent baby who needs no one but her.

Kiswana finds one of these wild children eating out of a dumpster, and soon Kiswana and Cora become friends. Confiding to Cora, Kiswana talks about her dreams of reform and revolution. Excitedly she tells Cora, "if we really pull together, we can put pressure on [the landlord] to start fixing this place up." She is similarly convinced that it will be easy to change Cora's relationship With her children, and she eagerly invites them to her boyfriend's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Cora is skeptical, but to pacify Kiswana she agrees to go.

It is at the performance of Shakespeare's play where the dreams of the two women temporarily merge. The production, sponsored by a grant from the city, does indeed inspire Cora to dream for her older children. She imagines that her daughter Maybelline "could be doing something like this some day-standing on a stage, wearing pretty clothes and saying fine things Maybelline could go to college-she liked school." When she remembers with guilt that her children no longer like school and are often truant, she resolves to change her behavior in order to ensure them brighter futures:

"Junior high, high school; college-none of them stayed little forever. And then on to good jobs in insurance companies and the post office, even doctors and lawyers Yes, that's what would happen to her babies."

Her new dream of maternal devotion continues as they arrive home and prepare for bed She tucks them in and the children do not question her unusual attention because it has been "a night for wonders."

At this point it seems that Cora's story is out of place in the novel, a mistake by an otherwise meticulous author. Amid Naylor's painfully accurate depictions of real women

and their real struggles, Cora's instant transformation into a devoted and responsible mother seems a "vain fantasy."

In the last paragraph of Cora's story, however, we find that the fantasy has been Cora's. After kissing her children good night, she returns to her bedroom and finds one of her shadow-like lovers waiting in her bed, and she folds "her evening like gold and lavender gauze deep Within the creases of her dreams" and lets her clothes drop to the floor. She will not change her actions and become a devoted mother, and her dreams for her children will be deferred. They were, after all, only fantasies, and real dreams take more than one night to achieve.

"The Block Party" tells the story of another deferred dream, this one literally dreamt by Mattie the night before the real Block Party. The chapter begins with a mention of the troubling dreams that haunt all the women and girls of Brewster Place during the week after Ben's death and Lorraine's rape. They will not talk about these dreams; only a few of them will even admit to having them, but every one of them dreams of Lorraine, finally recognizing the bond they share with the woman they had shunned as "different." Sadly, Lorraine's dream of not being "any different from anybody else in the world" is only fulfilled when her rape forces the other women to recognize the victimization and vulnerability that they share with her.

In Mattie's dream of the block party, even Ciel, who knows nothing of Lorraine, admits that she has dreamed of "a woman who was supposed to be me ... She didn't look exactly like me, but inside I felt it was me."

In a novel full of unfulfilled and constantly deferred dreams, the only the dream that is fully realized is Lorraine's dream of being recognized as "a lousy human being who's somebody's daughter or somebody's friend or even somebody's enemy." In dreaming of Lorraine the women acknowledge that she represents every one of them: she is their daughter, their friend, their enemy, and her brutal rape is the fulfillment of their own nightmares.

Mattie's dream presents an empowering response to this nightmare of disempowerment. When she dreams of the women joining together to tear down the wall that has separated them from the rest of the city, she is dreaming of a way for all of them to achieve Lorraine's dream of acceptance. They will tear down that which has separated them and made them "different" from the other inhabitants of the city. They will tear down the wall which is stained with blood, and which has come to symbolize their dead end existence on Brewster Place. As Jill Matus notes in "Dream, Deferral, and Closure in *The Women of Brewster Place,"* "Tearing at the very bricks of Brewster's walls is an act of resistance against the conditions that prevail within It."

But the group effort at tearing down the wall is only a dream-Mattie's dream-and just as the rain is pouring down, baptizing the women and their dream work, the dream ends. Mattie awakes to discover that it is still morning, the wall is still standing, and the block party still looms in the future.

Nevertheless, this is not the same sort of disappointing deferral as in Cora Lee's story. Though Mattie's dream has not yet been fulfilled, there are hints that it will be. She awakes to find the sun shining for the first time in a week, just like in her dream. They are still "gonna have a party," and the rain in Mattie's dream foreshadows the "the stormy clouds that had formed on the horizon and were silently moving toward Brewster Place." Mattie's dream has not been fulfilled yet, but neither is it folded and put away like Cora's; a storm is head ing toward Brewster Place, and the women are "gonna have a party."

The book ends with one final mention of dreams. In the epilogue we are told that Brewster Place is abandoned, but does not die, because the dreams of the women keep it alive:

But the colored daughters of Brewster, spread over the canvas of time, still wake up with their dreams misted on the edge of a yawn. They get up and pin those dreams to wet laundry hung out to dry, they're mixed with a pinch of salt and thrown into pots of soup, and they're diapered around babies.

Brewster Place lives on because the women whose dreams it has been a part of live on and continue to dream. Their dreams, even those that are continually deferred, are what keep them alive, continuing to sleep, cook, and care for their children. Dreams keep the street alive as well, if only in the minds of its former inhabitants whose stories the dream motif unites into a coherent novel.

Source: Donna Woodford, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Matus discusses the final chapter of The Women of Brewster Place *and the effect of deferring or postponing closure.*

After presenting a loose community of six stories, each focusing on a particular character, Gloria Naylor constructs a seventh, ostensibly designed to draw discrete elements together, to "round off' the collection. As its name suggests, "The Block Party" is a vision of community effort, everyone's story. We discover after a first reading, however, that the narrative of the party is in fact Mattie's dream vision, from which she awakens perspiring in her bed. The "real" party for which Etta is rousing her has yet to take place, and we never get to hear how it turns out. Authorial sleight of hand in offering Mattie's dream as reality is quite deliberate, since the narrative counts on the reader's credulity and encourages the reader to take as narrative "presence" the "elsewhere" of dream, thereby calling into question the apparently choric and unifying status of the last chapter. The displacement of reality into dream defers closure, even though the chapter appears shaped to make an end. Far from having had it, the last words remind us that we are still "gonna have a party."

The inconclusive last chapter opens into an epilogue that too teases the reader with the sense of an ending by appearing to be talking about the death of the street, Brewster Place. The epilogue itself is not unexpected, since the novel opens with a prologue describing the birth of the street. So why not a last word on how it died? Again, expectations are subverted and closure is subtly deferred. Although the epilogue begins with a meditation on how a street dies and tells us that Brewster Place is waiting to die, *waiting* is a present participle that never becomes past. "Dawn" (the prologue) is coupled neither with death nor darkness, but with "dusk," a condition whose half-light underscores the half-life of the street. Despite the fact that in the epilogue Brewster Place is abandoned, its daughters still get up elsewhere and go about their daily activities. In a reiteration of the domestic routines that are always carefully at tended to in the novel-the making of soup, the hanging of laundry, the diapering of babies-, Brewster's death is forestalled and postponed. More Importantly, the narrator emphasizes that the dreams of Brewster's inhabitants are what keep them alive. *"They get up and pm those dreams to wet laundry hung out to dry, they're mixed with a pinch of salt and thrown into pots of soup, and they're diapered around babies. They ebb and flow, ebb and flow, but never disappear." They* refers initially to the "colored daughters" but thereafter repeatedly to the dreams. The end of the novel raises questions about the relation of dreams to the persistence of life, since the capacity of Brewster's women to dream on is identified as their capacity to live on. The street continues to exist marginally, on the edge of death; It is the "end of the line" for most of its inhabitants Like the street, the novel hovers, moving toward the end of its line, but deferring. What prolongs both the text and the lives of Brewster's inhabitants is dream; in the same way that Mattie's dream of destruction postpones the end of the novel, the narrator's last words identify dream as that which affirms and perpetuates the life of the street.

If the epilogue recalls the prologue, so the final emphasis on dreams postponed yet persistent recalls the poem by Langston Hughes with which Naylor begins the book: *"What happens to a dream deferred?* " In a catalog of similes, Hughes evokes the fate of dreams unfulfilled: They dry up like raisins in the sun, fester like sores, stink like rotten meat, crust over like syrupy sweets: They become burdensome, or possibly explosive. The poem suggests that to defer one's dreams, desires, hopes is life-denying. Images of shriveling, putrefaction, and hardening dominate the poem Despair and destruction are the alternatives to decay. My interest here is to look at the way in which Naylor rethinks the poem in her novel's attention to dreams and desires and deferral...

The dream of the last chapter is a way of deferring closure, but this deferral is not evidence of the author's self-indulgent reluctance to make an end. Rather, it is an enactment of the novel's revision of Hughes's poem. Yet the substance of the dream Itself and the significance of the dreamer raise some further questions. Why is the anger and frustration that the women feel after the rape of Lorraine displaced into dream? There are many readers who feel cheated and betrayed to discover that the apocalyptic destruction of Brewster's wall never takes place. Are we to take It that Ciel never really returns from San Francisco and Cora is not taking an interest in the community effort to raise funds for tenants' rights? All that the dream has promised is undercut, it seems. And yet, the placement of explosion and destruction in the realm of fantasy or dream that is a "false" ending marks Naylor's suggestion that there are many ways to dream and alternative interpretations of what happens to the dream deferred... .

The chapter begins with a description of the continuous rain that follows the death of Ben. Stultifying and confining, the rain prevents the inhabitants of Brewster's community from meeting to talk about the tragedy; instead they are faced with clogged gutters, debris, trapped odors in their apartments, and listless children. Men stay away from home, become aggressive, and drink too much. In their separate spaces the women dream of a tall yellow woman in a bloody green and black dress Lorraine. Mattie's dream expresses the communal guilt, complicity, and anger that the women of Brewster Place feel about Lorraine. Ciel is present in Mattie's dream because she herself has dreamed about the ghastly rape and mutilation with such Identification and urgency that she obeys the impulse to return to Brewster Place: "'And she had on a green dress with like black trimming, and there were red designs or red flowers or something on the front.' Ciel's eyes began to cloud' And something bad had happened to me by the wall-I mean her-something bad had happened to her'." The presence of Ciel in Mattie's dream expresses the elder woman's wish that Ciel be returned to her and the desire that Ciel's wounds and flight be redeemed. Mattie's son Basil, who has also fled from Brewster Place, is contrastingly absent. He is beyond hope, and Mattie does not dream of his return. For many of the women who have lived there, Brewster Place is an anchor as well as a confinement and a burden; It is the social network that, like a web, both sustains and entraps. Mattie's dream scripts Important changes for Ciel: She works for an insurance company (good pay, independence, and status above the domestic), is ready to start another family, and is now connected to a good man. Ciel hesitantly acknowledges that he is not black. Middle-class status and a white husband offer one alternative in the vision of escape from Brewster Place; the novel does not criticize

Ciel's choices so much as suggest, by implication, the difficulty of envisioning alternatives to Brewster's black world of poverty, insecurity, and male inadequacy. Yet Ciel's dream identifies her with Lorraine, whom she has never met and of whose rape she knows nothing. It is a sign that she is tied to Brewster Place, carries it within her, and shares its tragedies.. ..

Everyone in the community knows that this block party is significant and important because it is a way of moving forward after the terrible tragedy of Lorraine and Ben. As it begins to rain, the women continue desperately to solicit community involvement. A man who is going to buy a sandwich turns away; it is more important that he stay and eat the sandwich than that he pay for it. As the rain comes down, hopes for a community effort are scotched and frustration reaches an intolerable level. The dream of the collective party explodes in nightmarish destruction. Poking at a blood-stained brick with a popsicle stick, Cora says, "'Blood ain't got no right still being here'." Like the blood that runs down the palace walls in Blake's "London," this reminder of Ben and Lorraine blights the block party. Tearing at the very bricks of Brewster's walls is an act of resistance against the conditions that prevail within it. The more strongly each woman feels about her past in

Brewster Place, the more determinedly the bricks are hurled. Ciel, for example, is not unwilling to cast the first brick and urges the rational Kiswana to join this "destruction of the temple." Kiswana cannot see the blood; there is only rain. "Does it matter?" asks Ciel. "Does it really matter?" Frustrated with perpetual pregnancy and the burdens of poverty and single parenting, Cora joins in readily, and Theresa, about to quit Brewster Place in a cab, vents her pain at the fate of her lover and her fury with the submissiveness that breeds victimization. The women have different reasons, each her own story, but they unite in hurling bricks and breaking down boundaries. The dismal, incessant rain becomes cleansing, and the water is described as beating down in unison with the beating of the women's hearts. Despite the inclination toward overwriting here, Naylor captures the cathartic and purgative aspects of resistance and aggression. Demonic imagery, which accompanies the venting of desire that exceeds known limits, becomes apocalyptic. As the dream ends, we are left to wonder what sort of register the "actual" block party would occupy. The sun is shining when Mattie gets up: It is as if she has done the work of collective destruction in her dream, and now a sunny party can take place. But perhaps the mode of the party about to take place will be neither demonic nor apocalyptic. The close of the novel turns away from the intensity of the dream, and the satisfaction of violent protest, insisting rather on prolonged yearning and dreaming amid conditions which do not magically transform. The collective dream of the last chapter constitutes a "symbolic act" which, as Frederic Jameson puts it, enables "real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, [to] find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm." ...

Not only does Langston Hughes's poem speak generally about the nature of deferral and dreams unsatisfied, but in the historical context that Naylor evokes it also calls attention implicitly to the sixties' dream of racial equality and the "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King, Jr....

The sermon's movement is ... from disappointment, through a recognition of deferral and persistence, to a reiteration of vision and hope:

Yes, I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hopes, but in spite of that I close today by saying I still have a dream, because, you know, you can't give up in life. If you lose hope, somehow you lose that vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you to go on in spite of all. And so today I still have a dream.

The remainder of the sermon goes on to celebrate the resurrection of the dream-"I still have a dream" is repeated some eight times in the next paragraph. Naylor's novel is not exhortatory or rousing in the same way; her response to the fracture of the collective dream is an affirmation of persistence rather than a song of culmination and apocalypse. King's sermon culminates in the language of apocalypse, a register which, as I have already suggested, Naylor's epilogue avoids: "I still have a dream today that one day every valley shall be exalted and, every mountain and hill will be made low.. , and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed " Hughes's poem and King's sermon can thus be seen as two poles between which Naylor steers. The novel recognizes the precise political and social consequences of the cracked dream in the community it deals with, but asserts the Vitality and life that persist even when faith in a particular dream has been disrupted. Although remarkably similar to Dr. King's sermon in the recognition of blasted hopes and dreams deferred, *The Women of Brewster Place* does not reassert its faith in the dream of harmony and equality: It stops short of apocalypse in its affirmation of persistence. Further, Naylor suggests that the shape and content of the dream should be capable of flexibility and may change in response to changing needs and times. What the women of Brewster Place dream is not so important as that they dream....

Brewster's women live within the failure of the sixties' dreams, and there is no doubt a dimension of the novel that reflects on the shortfall. But its reflection is subtle, achieved through the novel's concern with specific women and an individualized neighborhood and the way in which fiction, with its attention focused on the particular, can be made to reveal the play of large historical determinants and forces. There is an attempt on Naylor's part to invoke the wide context of Brewster's particular moment in time and to blend this with her focus on the individual dreams and psychologies of the women in the stories. Perhaps because her emphasis is on the timeless nature of dreams and the private mythology of each "ebony phoenix," the specifics of history are not foregrounded. Even though the link between this neighborhood and the particular social, economic, and political realities of the sixties is muted rather than emphatic, defining characteristics are discernible. In Brewster Place there is no upward mobility; and by conventional evaluation there are no stable family structures. Brewster is a place for women who have no realistic expectations of revising their marginality, most of whom have "come down" in the world. The exception is Kiswana, from Linden Hills, who is deliberately downwardly mobile....

As presented, Brewster Place is largely a community of women; men are mostly absent or itinerant, drifting in and out of their women's lives, and leaving behind them

pregnancies and unpaid bills. It would be simple to make a case for the unflattering portrayal of men in this novel; in fact Naylor was concerned that her work would be seen as deliberately slighting of men:

... there was something that I was very self-conscious about with my first novel; I bent over backwards not to have a negative message come through about the men My emotional energy was spent in creating a woman's world, telling her side of It because I knew it hadn't been done enough in literature. But I worried about whether or not the problems that were being caused by the men in the women's lives would be interpreted as some bitter statement I had to make about black men ("Conversation")

Bearing in mind the kind of hostile criticism that Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* evoked, one can understand Naylor's concern, since male sins in her novel are not insignificant. Mattie is a resident of Brewster partly because of the failings of the men in her life. the shiftless Butch, who is sexually irresistible; her father, whose outraged assault on her prompts his wife to pull a gun on him; and her son, whom she has spoiled to the extent that he one day Jumps bail on her money, costing her her home and sending her to Brewster Place. There is also the damning portrait of a minister on the make in Etta Mae's story, the abandonment of Ciel by Eugene, and the scathing presentation of the young male rapists in "The Two."

"The enemy wasn't Black men," Joyce Ladner contends, "'but oppressive forces in the larger society"' [When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America, 1984], and Naylor's presentation of men implies agreement. But while she is aware that there is nothing enviable about the pressures, incapacities, and frustrations men absorb in a system they can neither beat nor truly join, her interest lies in evoking the lives of women, not men. Their aggression, part-time presence, avoidance of commitment, and sense of dislocation renders them alien and other in the community of Brewster Place. Basil and Eugene are forever on the run; other men in the stories (Kiswana's boyfriend Abshu, Cora Lee's shadowy lovers) are narrative ciphers. Mostly marginal and spectral in Brewster Place, the men reflect the nightmarish world they inhabit by appearing as if they were characters in a dream....

"The Block Party" is a crucial chapter of the book because it explores the attempts to experience a version of community and neighborhood. People know each other in Brewster Place, and as imperfect and damaging as their involvement with each other may be, they still represent a community. As the title suggests, this is a novel about women and place. Brewster Place names the women, houses them, and defines their underprivileged status. Although they come to it by very different routes, Brewster is a reality that they are "obliged to share" [as Smith States in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," *Conditions,* 1977.] *Obliged* comes from the political, social, and economic realities of post-sixties' America-a world in which the women are largely disentitled. *Share* directs emphasis to what they have in common: They are women, they are black, and they are almost invariably poor. Among the women there is both commonality and difference: *"Like an ebony phoenix, each in her own time and with her own season had a story.* "

Naylor's novel does not offer itself as a definitive treatment of black women or community, but it reflects a reality that a great many black women share; it is at the same time an indictment of oppressive social forces and a celebration of courage and persistence. By considering the nature of personal and collective dreams within a context of specific social, political, and economic determinants, Naylor inscribes an ideology that affirms deferral; the capacity to defer and to dream is endorsed as life-availing. Like Martin Luther King, Naylor resists a history that seeks to impose closure on black American dreams, recording also in her deferred ending a reluctance to see "community" as a static or finished work. There are countless slum streets like Brewster; streets will continue to be condemned and to die, but there will be other streets to whose decay the women of Brewster will cling. The image of the ebony phoenix developed in the introduction to the novel is instructive: The women rise, as from the ashes, and continue to live. Although the idea of miraculous transformation associated with the phoenix is undercut by the starkness of slum and the perpetuation of poverty, the notion of regeneration also associated with the phoenix is supported by the quiet persistence of women who continue to dream on. While acknowledging the shriveling, death-bound images of Hughes's poem, Naylor invests with value the essence of deferral-it resists finality.

Source: Jill L Matus, "Dream, Deferral, and Closure in *The Women of Brewster Place"* in *Black American Literature Forum,* spring, 1990, pp. 49-64.

Critical Essay #3

Tanner examines the reader as voyeur and participant in the rape scene at the end of The Women of Brewster Place.

The rape scene in *The Women of Brewster Place* occurs in "The Two," one of the seven short stories that make up the novel. This story explores the relationship between Theresa and Lorraine, two lesbians who move into the run-down complex of apartments that make up "Brewster Place." Lorraine's decision to return home through the shortcut of an alley late one night leads her into an ambush in which the anger of seven teenage boys erupts into violence:

Lorraine saw a pair of suede sneakers flying down behind the face in front of hers and they hit the cement with a dead thump [C C and the boys] had been hiding up on the wall, watching her come up that back street, and they had waited. The face pushed itself so close to hers that she could look into the flared nostrils and smell the decomposing food in its teeth ..
[C.C.] slammed his kneecap into her spine and her body arched up, causing his nails to cut into the side of her mouth to stifle her cry. He pushed her arched body down onto the cement Two of the boys pinned her arms, two wrenched open her legs, while C C knelt between them and pushed up her dress and tore at the top of her pantyhose. Lorraine's body was twisting in convulsions of fear that they mistook for resistance, and C.C. brought his fist down into her stomach
Better lay the fuck still, cunt, or I'll rip open your guts.
The impact of his fist forced air into her constricted throat, and she worked her sore mouth, trying to form the one word that had been clawing inside of her "Please." It squeezed through her paralyzed vocal cords and fell lifelessly at their feet Lorraine clamped her eyes shut and, using all of the strength left within her, willed it to rise again, Please.
The sixth boy took a dirty paper bag lying on the ground and stuffed it into her mouth. She felt a weight drop on her spread body. Then she opened her eyes and they screamed and screamed into the face above hers-the face that was pushing this tearing pain inside of her body.

In Naylor's representation of rape, the victim ceases to be an erotic object subjected to the control of the reader's gaze. Instead, that gaze, like Lorraine's, is directed outward; it is the violator upon whom the reader focuses, the violator's body that becomes detached and objectified before the reader's eyes as It is reduced to "a pair of suede sneakers," a "face" with "decomposing food in its teeth" As the look of the audience ceases to perpetuate the victimizing stance of the rapists, the subject/object locations of violator and victim are reversed. Although the reader's gaze is directed at a body that is, in Mulvey's terms, "stylised and fragmented by close-ups," the body that is dissected by that gaze is the body of the violator and not his victim.

The limitations of narrative render any disruption of the violator/spectator affiliation difficult to achieve; while sadism, in Mulvey's words, "demands a story," pain destroys

narrative, shatters referential realities, and challenges the very power of language. The attempt to translate violence into narrative, therefore, very easily lapses into a choreography of bodily positions and angles of assault that serves as a transcription of the violator's story. In the case of rape, where a violator frequently co-opts not only the victim's physical form but her power of speech, the external manifestations that make up a visual narrative of violence are anything but objective. To provide an "external" perspective on rape is to represent the story that the violator has created, to ignore the resistance of the victim whose body has been appropriated within the rapist's rhythms and whose enforced silence disguises the enormity of her pain. In *The Accused,* a 1988 film in which Jody Foster gives an Oscar winning performance as a rape Victim, the problematics of transforming the victim's experience into visualizable form are addressed, at least in part, through the use of flashback; the rape on which the film centers is represented only at the end of the film, *after* the viewer has followed the trail of the victim's humiliation and pain. Because the victim's story cannot be told in the representation itself, it is told first; in the representation that follows, that story lingers in the viewer's mind, qualifying the victim's inability to express herself and providing, in essence, a counter-text to the story of violation that the camera provides.

While Naylor's novel portrays the victim's silence in its narrative of rape, it, too, probes beneath the surface of the violator's story to reveal the struggle beneath that enforced silence. Naylor represents Lorraine's silence not as a passive absence of speech but as a desperate struggle to regain the voice stolen from her through violence. "Power and violence," in Hannah Arendt's words, "are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent" *[On Violence,* 1970]. The nicety of the polite word of social discourse that Lorraine frantically attempts to articulate-"please"--emphasizes the brute terrorism of the boys' act of rape and exposes the desperate means by which they rule. "Woman," Mulvey observes, "stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic control by Imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning." In Naylor's description of Lorraine's rape "the silent image of woman" is haunted by the power of a thousand suppressed screams; that image comes to testify not to the woman's feeble acquiescence to male signification but to the brute force of the violence required to "tie" the woman to her place as "bearer of meaning."...

Rather than watching a distant action unfold from the anonymity of the darkened theater or reading about an illicit act from the safety of an armchair, Naylor's audience is thrust into the middle of a rape the representation of which subverts the very "sense of separation" upon which voyeurism depends. The "imagised, eroticized concept of the world that... makes a mockery of empirical objectivity" is here replaced by the discomforting proximity of two human faces locked in violent struggle and defined not by eroticism but by the pain inflicted by one and borne by the other:

Then she opened her eyes and they screamed and screamed into the face above hers-the face that was pushing this tearing pain inside of her body. The screams tried to break through her corneas out into the air, but the tough rubbery flesh sent them vibrating back into her brain, first shaking lifeless the cells that nurtured her memory

Then the cells went that contained her powers of taste and smell. The last that were screamed to death were those that supplied her with the ability to love-or hate

The gaze that in Mulvey reduces woman to erotic object is here centered within that woman herself and projected outward. The reader is locked into the victim's body, positioned *behind* Lorraine's corneas along with the screams that try to break out into the air. By manipulating the reader's placement Within the scene of violence, Naylor subverts the objectifying power of the gaze; as the gaze is trapped within the erotic object, the necessary distance between the voyeur and the object of voyeuristic pleasure is collapsed. The detachment that authorizes the process of imaginative identification with the rapist is withdrawn, forcing the reader within the confines of the *victim's* world.

Situated within the margins of the violator's story of rape, the reader is able to read beneath the bodily configurations that make up its text, to experience the world-destroying violence required to appropriate the victim's body as a sign of the violator's power. Lurking beneath the image of woman as passive signifier is the fact of a body turned traitor against the consciousness that no longer rules it, a body made, by sheer virtue of physiology, to encircle and in a sense embrace its violator. In Naylor's representation, Lorraine's pain and not the rapist's body becomes the agent of violation, the force of her own destruction: "The screams tried to break through her corneas out into the air, but the tough rubbery flesh sent them vibrating back into her brain, first shaking lifeless the cells that nurtured her memory." Lorraine's inability to express her own pain forces her to absorb not only the shock of bodily violation but the sudden rupture of her mental and psychological autonomy. As the body of the victim is forced to tell the rapist's story, that body turns against Lorraine's consciousness and begins to destroy itself, cell by cell. In all physical pain, Elaine Scarry observes, "suicide and murder converge, for one feels acted upon, annihilated, by inside and outside alike." Naylor succeeds in communicating the victim's experience of rape exactly because her representation documents not only the violation of Lorraine's body from without but the resulting assault on her consciousness from within.

In order to capture the victim's pain in words, to contain it within a narrative unable to account for its intangibility, Naylor turns referentiality against itself. In her representation of violence, the victim's pain is defined only through negation, her agony experienced only in the reader's imagination:

Lorraine was no longer conscious of the pain in her spine or stomach. She couldn't feel the skin that was rubbing off of her anus from being pressed against the rough cement What was left of her mind was centered around the pounding motion that was ripping her insides apart She couldn't tell when they changed places and the second weight, then the third and fourth, dropped on her-it was all one continuous hacksawing of torment that kept her eyes screaming the only word she was fated to utter again and again for the rest of her life please.
Her thighs and stomach had become so slimy from her blood and their semen that the

last two boys didn't want to touch her, so they turned her over, propped her head and shoulders against the wall, and took her from behind. When they had finished and stopped holding her up, her body fell over like an unstringed puppet. She didn't feel her split rectum or the patches in her skull where her hair had been torn off by grating against the bricks Lorraine lay in that alley only screaming at the moving pain inside of her that refused to come to rest.

Recognizing that pain defies representation, Naylor invokes a referential system that focuses on the bodily manifestations of pain-skinned arms, a split rectum, a bloody skull-only to reject it as ineffective. Lorraine, we are told, "was no longer conscious of the pain in her spine or stomach. She couldn't feel the skin that was rubbing off of her arms. She couldn't tell when they changed places. She didn't feel her split rectum or the patches in her skull where her hair had been torn off." Naylor piles pain upon pain-each one an experience of agony that the reader may compare to his or her own experience-only to define the total of all these experiences as insignificant, incomparable to the "pounding motion that was ripping [Lorraine's] insides apart." Naylor ... brings the reader to the edge of experience only to abandon him or her to the power of the imagination; in this case, however, the structured blanks that the novel asks the reader to fill in demand the imaginative construction of the victim's pain rather than the violator's pleasure....

As Naylor disentangles the reader from the victim's consciousness at the end of her representation, the radical dynamics of a female-gendered reader are thrown into relief by the momentary reintroduction of a distanced perspective on violence: "Lorraine lay pushed up against the wall on the cold ground with her eyes staring straight up into the sky. When the sun began to warm the air and the horizon brightened, she still lay there, her mouth crammed with paper bag, her dress pushed up under her breasts, her bloody pantyhose hanging from her thighs." In this one sentence, Naylor pushes the reader back into the safety of a world of artistic mediation and restores the reader's freedom to navigate safely through the details of the text. Under the pressure of the reader's controlling gaze, Lorraine is immediately reduced to the status of an object-part mouth, part breasts, part thighs-subject to the viewer's scrutiny. In the last sentence of the chapter, as in this culminating description of the rape, Naylor deliberately jerks the reader back into the distanced perspective that authorizes scopophilia; the final image that she leaves us with is an image not of Lorraine's pain but of "a tall yellow woman in a bloody green and black dress, scraping at the air, crying, 'Please. Please.'" This sudden shift of perspective unveils the connection between the scopophilic gaze and the objectifying force of violence. The power of the gaze to master and control is forced to its inevitable culmination as the body that was the object of erotic pleasure becomes the object of violence. By framing her own representation of rape with an "objective" description that promotes the violator's story of rape, Naylor exposes not only the connection between violation and objectification but the ease with which the reader may be persuaded to accept both.

As the object of the reader's gaze is suddenly shifted, that reader is thrust into an understanding of the way in which his or her own look may perpetuate the violence of rape.

In that violence, the erotic object is not only transformed into the object of violence but is made to testify to the suitability of the object status projected upon it. Co-opted by the rapist's story, the victim's body-violated, damaged and discarded is introduced as authorization for the very brutality that has destroyed it. The sudden interjection of an "objective" perspective into Naylor's representation traces that process of authorization as the narrative pulls back from the subtext of the victim's pain to focus the reader's gaze on the "object" status of the victim's body. Empowered by the distanced dynamics of a gaze that authorizes not only scopophilia but its inevitable culmination in violence, the reader who responds uncritically to the violator's story of rape comes to see the victim not as a human being, not as an object of violence, but as *the object* itself.

The "objective" picture of a battered woman scraping at the air in a bloody green and black dress is shocking exactly because It seems to have so little to do with the woman whose pain the reader has just experienced. Having recognized Lorraine as a human being who becomes a victim of violence, the reader recoils from the unfamiliar picture of a creature who seems less human than animal, less subject than object As Naylor's representation retreats for even a moment to the distanced perspective... the objectifying pressure of the reader's gaze allows that reader to see not the brutality of the act of violation but the brute-like characteristics of its victim. To see Lorraine scraping at the air in her bloody garment is to see not only the horror of what happened to her but the horror that *is* her. The violation of her personhood that is initiated with the rapist's objectifying look becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy borne out by the literal destruction of her body; rape reduces its victim to the status of an animal and then flaunts as authorization the very body that It has mutilated. Insofar as the reader's gaze perpetuates the process of objectification, the reader, too, becomes a violator.

Naylor's temporary restoration of the objectifying gaze only emphasizes the extent to which *her* representation of violence subverts the conventional dynamics of the reading and viewing processes. By denying the reader the freedom to observe the victim of violence from behind the wall of aesthetic convention, to manipulate that victim as an object of imaginative play, Naylor disrupts the connection between violator and viewer that Mulvey emphasizes in her discussion of cinematic convention inviting the viewer to enter the world of violence that lurks just beyond the wall of art, Naylor traps the reader behind that wall. As the reader's gaze is centered within the victim's body, the reader, .. is stripped of the safety of aesthetic distance and the freedom of artistic response. In Naylor's representation of rape, the power of the gaze is turned against itself; the aesthetic observer is forced to watch powerlessly as the violator steps up to the wall to stare with detached pleasure at an exhibit in which the reader, as well as the victim of violence, is on display.

Source: Laura E. Tanner, *"Reading Rape:* Sanctuary *and* The Women of Brewster Place" in *American Literature,* Vol 62, No.4, December, 1990, pp. 559-82.

Adaptations

King Phoenix Entertainment produced *The Women of Brewster Place* as a made-for-TV drama in 1989 Directed by Donna Deitch, the movie starred Oprah Winfrey and Cicely Tyson

The Women of Brewster Place ran as a 30minute weekly TV series during May and June of 1990. Oprah Winfrey starred as Mattie Michael and was the only cast member included from the original TV movie. The series was produced by Winfrey, Earl Hamner, and Donald Sipes.

The Women of Brewster Place made-for-TV drama is available on home video distributed by J2 Communications.

Topics for Further Study

In the book, *Gloria Naylor: In Search Of Sanctuary,* author Virginia Fowler contends that Naylor structured *Mama Day* after Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying.* Confirm or contradict this assertion with a detailed explanation supported by examples.

One critic has said that the protagonist of *The Women of Brewster Place* is actually the street itself. The street undergoes birth, maturation, aging, and death. Create a visual that depicts the street as the protagonist. Be prepared to explain your visual, relating the specific ways that it represents the entire story.

Research the music of Billie Holiday. Review the lyrics of several of her songs. Why do you think Etta Mae Johnson liked her music? Support your answer with details about Etta Mae's character as well as specific lyrics from three or more songs.

Kiswana (Melanie) Browne denounces her parents' middle-class lifestyle, adopts an African name, drops out of college, and moves to Brewster Place to be close to those to whom she refers as "my people." One critic has said that her character may be modeled after adherents of the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Research the era to discover what the movement was, who was involved, and what the goals and achievements were.

After Ciel underwent an abortion, she had difficulty returning to the daily routine of her life. Although eventually she did mend physically, there were signs that she had not come to terms with her feelings about the abortion. Give evidence from the story that supports thIs notion. Research the psychological effects of abortion, and relate the evidence from the story to the information you have discovered.

When Naylor read Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in 1977, she was appalled to find that there were few other books Written by black women about black women. See how many books you can find that were available at that time, and create a bibliography for these books. Then, locate as many as you can find that are available now, and create a second bibliography.

Why are there now more books Written by black females about black females than there were twenty years ago? Explain. Provide detailed support for your answer drawing from various perspectives, including historical or sociological.

Why were Lorraine and Theresa, "The Two," such a threat to the women who resided at Brewster Place? Give reasons. Support your reasons with evidence from the story.

What Do I Read Next?

Naylor's second novel, *Linden Hills,* takes place in Linden Hills, a wealthy and privileged neighborhood; it is familiar because it is the place Kiswana Browne-a character from *The Women of Brewster Place-left.* Published by Ticknor in 1985, *Linden Hills* reminds some critics of Dante's *Inferno.* The story revolves around two young men and their observations of the effects of black aspirations in contemporary America.

Mama Day is Naylor's third novel. The setting is far removed from those in the first two stories. Willow Springs, an all-black Island community off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, is home to Cocoa and Mama Day, char acters that appeared briefly in *Linden Hills.* Descendants of an African slave and sorceress, Cocoa and Mama Day lead disparate lives until Cocoa becomes desperately ill. Ticknor published *Mama Day* in 1988.

Naylor depicts the lives of 1940s blacks living in New York City in her next novel, *Bailey's Cafe,* published by Harcourt in 1992. Set in a Brooklyn diner, the story relates the lives of the diner's varied and interesting patrons who overcome hardship to survive.

The focus on the relationships among women in *The Women of Brewster Place* presents feminist ideals similar to those about which Amy Tan writes in *The Joy Luck Club.* Published by G. Putnam's Sons in 1989, *The Joy Luck Club* features the bonds between mothers and daughters and the strength that women share in good times and in bad.

While love and politics link the lives of the two women in *Blood Sisters: An Examination of Conscience,* the stronger tie between them is the bond joining grandmother, mothers, and daughters. Published by St. Martin's Press, and written by Valerie Miner, this story portrays three generations of an Irish clan and the struggles among its men and women.

Critics have compared the theme of familial and African-American women in *The Women of Brewster Place* to the same theme in *The Color Purple,* published in 1992 by Harcourt and Brace. Author Alice Walker writes a story of two sisters that vividly portrays the bonds between black women.

Further Study

Michael Awkward, "Authorial Dreams of Wholeness: (Dis)Unity, (Literary) Parentage, and *The Women of Brewster Place,"* in *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present,* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr and K.A, Appiah, Amistad Press, 1993, pp. 37-70.

Discusses Naylor's literary heritage and her use of and divergence from her literary roots.

Julia Boyd, *In the Company of My Sisters: Black Women and Self Esteem,* Plume, 1997.

Explores interracial relationships, bi-and gay sexuality in the black community, and black women's lives through a study of the roles played by both black and white families Boyd offers guidelines for growth in a difficult world

Children of the Night, The Best Short Stones by Black Writers, 1967 to the Present, edited by Gloria Naylor and Bill Phillips, Little Brown, 1997.

An anthology of stories that relate to the black experience, The four sections cover such subjects as slavery, changing times, family, faith, "them and ns," and the future.

The Critical Response to Gloria Naylor (Critical Responses in Arts and Letters, No, 29), edited by Sharon Felton and Michelle C. Loris, Greenwood, 1997.

A comprehensive compilation of critical responses to Naylor's works, including: sections devoted to her novels, essays and seminal articles relating feminist perspectives, and comparisons of Naylor's novels to classical authors.

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying,* Cape and Smith, 1930.

This is a story that depicts a family's struggle with grieving and community as they prepare to bury their dead mother, Faulkner uses fifteen different voices to tell the story.

Virginia C, Fowler, "'Ebony Phoenixes': *The Women of Brewster Place,"* in *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary,* edited by Frank Day, Twayne Publishers, 1996, pp, 21-58.

Offers a general analysis of the structure, characters, and themes of the novel.

-, *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary,* Twayne, 1996.

Biographical and critical study Fowler tries to place Naylor's work within the context of African-American female writers since the 1960s.

Annie Gottlieb, a review in *The New York Times Book Review,* August 22, 1982, p. 11.

Praises Naylor's treatment of women and relationships.

Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, edited by Barbara Smith, Naiad, 1989.

A collection of works by noted authors such as Alice Walker, June Jordan, and others Essays, poetry, and prose on the black feminist experience.

Bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,* South End, 1981.

A nonfiction theoretical work concerning the rights of black women and the need to work for change relating to the Issues of racism, sexism, and societal oppression

Kate Rushin, *Black Back-ups,* Firebrand Books, 1993, The author captures the faces, voices, feelings, words, and stories of an African-American family in the neighborhood and town where she grew up.

Sapphire, *American Dreams,* Vintage, 1996.

Through prose and poetry, the author addresses issues of family violence, urban decay, spiritual renewal, and others, yet rises above the grim realism to find hope and inspiration.

Dorothy Wickenden, a review in *The New Republic,* September 6, 1982, p. 37.

Observes that Naylor's "knowing portrayal" of Mattie unites the seven stories that form the novel.

Bibliography

Bellinelli, director, RTSJ-Swiss Television, producer, A *Conversation with Gloria Naylor* on *In Black and White. Six Profiles of African American Authors,* (videotape), California Newsreel, 1992 http//www.newsreel.org/filins/inblack htm

Kay Bonetti, "An Interview With Gloria Naylor" (audiotape), American Prose Library, 1988.

Angels Carabi, in an interview with Gloria Naylor, *Belles Lettres* 7, spring, 1992, pp 36-42.

Anne Gottlieb, "Women Together," *The New York Times,* August 22, 1982, p. 11.

Loy1e Hairston, a review in *Freedomways,* Vol. 23, No.4, 1983, pp. 282-85.

Barbara Harrison, *Visions of Glory' A History and a Memory of Jehovah's Witnesses,* Simon & Schuster, 1975.

Joel Hughes, "Naylor Discusses Race Myths and Life," *Yale Dally News,* March 2, 1995. http./Iwww.cis.yale.edu/ ydn/paper.

Christine King, *Identities and Issues in Literature,* Vol. 3, edited by David Peck and Eric Howard, Salem Press, 1997, pp 1004-5.

Linda Labin, *Masterpieces of Women* 's *Literature,* edited by Frank Magill, HarperCollins, 1996, pp, 571-73.

The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, The English Language Institute of America, 1975.

Jill Matus, "Dream, Deferral, and Closure in *The Women of Brewster Place," Black American Literature Forum,* Vol. 24, No I, spring, 1990, pp. 49-64.

Gloria Naylor, *The Women of Brewster Place,* Penguin, 1983.

Rae Stoll, *Magill's Literary Annual,* Vol. Two, edited by Frank Madill, Salem Press, 1983, pp. 918-22.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535