



Cinema Studies for Literature Learning

Places in the Heart

Starring Sally Field
Directed by Robert Benton



Study Guide by Sabrina Justison

Cinema Studies for Literature Learning

Places in the Heart

Starring Sally Field
Directed by Robert Benton

Study Guide by Sabrina Justison



Copyright 2017 Sabrina Justison. Published by 7 Sisters IHH, LLC. All rights reserved.

Please be respectful of copyrighted material.

Purchase of this title from 7Sisters Innovative Homeschool Helps, LLC entitles purchaser to print one or more copies of the curriculum title or to save on multiple devices within their own homeschool. Copyright prohibits sharing printed or digital copies of this title with anyone outside of the purchaser's household. For example, do not share with co-op, friends, etc.

Thank you for honoring copyright. If you have any questions, email info@7SistersHomeschool.com. If you plan to print your curriculum at a local print shop, be aware that they may require you to show your purchase receipt as proof of purchase.

For additional information, please see terms of use and privacy policy.

Places in the Heart

Study Guide by Sabrina Justison

In order to obtain the maximum benefit from this study guide, you will need to watch the movie twice. You would be wise to read over the questions **before** beginning. Please **answer the questions in this study guide the FIRST time you watch** the movie. You may find that for some questions you want to pause the film and answer as you watch, but for others you may decide to wait to write your answer until the final credits roll.

You are not required to answer with **complete sentences**. Instead, use this space to make notes that will help you with the writing assignment you will complete after your SECOND viewing of the movie. Be sure to take **really good notes** and use complete sentences if doing so will help you to more clearly articulate your thoughts.

How to Use Your Downloads

You should have received two PDF documents with this purchase. Please check that you have both downloads. The Answer Key section is for you, the parent. The other section is for your student. The question section of this study guide is editable. This means that your student can type his answers right onto the page - you can choose whether or not the page should be printed for you to check the answers. (Students using this guide as part of a class or co-op will probably have to print the appropriate pages each week.) Longer writing prompts, such as summaries and essays, are NOT editable. They should be typed on a word processor or neatly hand-written.

Places in the Heart was written and directed by Robert Benton who called it “**an homage to 1935 Waxahachie, TX**” (his boyhood hometown) and a story with a “**tapestry of characters.**”

When you define those two vocabulary words below (homage and tapestry), think about what he meant by them when describing his film. **Your “definition” should say something about those two words used in reference to the creation of this movie.** In other words, what might it mean to create an homage to your boyhood town? What might it mean to think of story characters in a tapestry?

Vocabulary:

Paraphrasing is an important skill (especially for research writing) and practicing here is an easy way to build your proficiency.

For each vocabulary word, look up the definition appropriate in the context of the movie and write a paraphrase, or use the word in an original phrase or sentence.

homage

tapestry

victrola

cotton gin

Here's our Focus, just so you know!

Pairs of Events

Dramatic Foils

Symbols

Theme: Conquering Seemingly Insurmountable Obstacles

Questions

Opening Scene/Credits:

1. What music is playing during the opening credits/opening shots of this movie?
2. What sound is heard when the family prays before their Sunday dinner?
3. What does the man take from the closet before he leaves the house?
4. Did Wylie (the black boy who was drinking down by the train tracks) intend to cause a tragedy? How did this terrible thing happen?
5. Briefly describe the differences between the two funerals.
6. What do you think of Mose when he leaves Edna Spalding's farm after she is unwilling to give him work?

7. Why do you think Edna chooses to give Mose work when he is brought back to her door?

8. Mose moves into the barn, and Frank (Edna's son) seems eager for his attention, even though Mose is not very friendly to him initially. Why do you think Frank is eager for Mose's attention?

9. What do you think of Mr. Denby (the banker) and his attitude toward Edna when she visits the bank? When he brings Mr. Will to her house as a boarder?

10. Two couples' marriages are in trouble. Wayne and Margaret (Edna's sister who owns the beauty shop) have been friends for a long time with Bud and Viola (the school teacher). But Wayne and Viola are having an affair — unfaithful to their spouses. How does this part of the story make you even MORE sympathetic to Edna who is recently widowed?

11. Why is Mr. Will's victrola so important to him?

12. Why do you think the writer had Edna taking a bath when Mr. Will comes in to complain about the scratched record?
13. If we think of this story in chapters, Chapter 1 was the tragedy in which two men ended up dead. Chapter 2 set the challenge of life as a widow before Edna Spalding. Chapter 3 reveals Edna's plan to survive as a single parent and the team she builds around her to fight against seemingly insurmountable obstacles. What is her plan for survival? Who is on her "team"? What are the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that are against her success?
14. What unexpected tragedy impacts the whole town of Waxahachie one afternoon?
15. Who shows himself to be an unlikely hero at Edna's home during this tragedy? What does he do?
16. When things are quiet and everyone comes out of the cellar, Mose says, "Everything's a little bent, but it's still here." In what way might he be talking about MORE than the physical house that survived the physical storm?

17. When it is time to harvest the cotton, the camera shows us what appears to be endless acres of plants stretching as far as the eye can see. All of those acres mean the chance to earn a big pay-off when it is sold. Why do these shots create an unpleasant, overwhelming mood for the audience rather than one of joyful expectation?
18. During the scenes of picking cotton, what is often the only sound?
19. Why do you think Edna dreams of dancing with her dead husband, Royce?
20. On the last night, who are all the people picking cotton on Edna's farm? List them here. If you do not know a name, describe the person somehow.
21. Which characters do you think deserve real credit for the cotton harvest? List at least 4 and explain how each contributed in his/her own way.
22. What does Mr. Will ask Edna when she is repairing Frank's shoe at the kitchen table? Why do you think Mr. Will wants to know?

23. What does Mr. Will do that unexpectedly changes everything when Mose is in great danger in the barn at night?

24. Another dance is held as the movie draws to a close. What is it about the dances in this movie that seem to be important? Are they perhaps MORE than just a gathering of people and music? Do they show us something important about the people who attend them?

25. The final scene of this movie is very unusual. On the front row, a married couple sits together and the wife has cuts on her hands. Who are they? Why is it particularly moving to see them there?

26. Communion is observed, and as the wine is passed from person to person, what does each say to the next?

27. Some very unexpected characters sit in the pews and share in communion. Which characters were you very surprised to see? Why?

Pairs of Events

Pairing events that are similar but have important distinctions between them is a powerful storytelling device. For example, the two funerals near the beginning of the movie show the universal tragedy of accidental death but they also point out the gross inequality of life for white and black citizens of Waxahachie. What are some other paired events that you noticed in the movie? (*Note: The two similar events may be separated by quite a bit of time in the story; they don't necessarily happen simultaneously as the two funerals did.*)

Dramatic Foils

Dramatic foils are pairs of CHARACTERS in a story who have similarities but whose **differences** primarily help us learn more about each as an individual. Think for a moment about Mr. Will and Mose, two men who become boarders at Edna's farm in her time of need as a new widow. In what ways are the men similar? In what important ways are they different? How does Mr. Will reveal important things about MOSE as a character? How does Mose help reveal important things about MR. WILL as a character?

Symbols and Motifs

A **symbol** is a concrete object (something we can see, or touch, or otherwise experience with our senses) that reminds us of something abstract (an idea, a person, a relationship, an event, etc.). There are many symbols in this movie. The seemingly endless acres of cotton are a symbol of the overwhelming odds against Edna in her desperate plan to save her home.

A **motif** is a repeated symbol, a literary device by which the storyteller repeatedly introduces the same symbol in different situations to draw our attention to an important idea. In *Places in the Heart*, for example, guns create a motif as a symbol of power. In the opening scene, Royce takes his gun belt out of the closet before leaving Sunday dinner because he is the sheriff, the man with the power to use force if necessary to correct a situation. Wylie loses control of his gun at the train yard and starts a devastating chain of events. Mr. Will fires a gun near the end of the movie, bringing to a halt the events that are about to end Mose's life.

Can you think of any other symbols or motifs in *Places in the Heart*? List any you can think of and briefly explain what idea we are being encouraged to notice by that symbol or motif. (If you can't think of any, try looking back at the questions in this study guide for hints!)

Writing Assignment (to be completed after you watch the film a second time) -

Choose one

Essay:

Write a 3-paragraph essay in which you explain how *Places in the Heart* shows us a “tapestry of characters”. Rather than simply presenting multiple characters, the storyteller weaves their individual stories together to make a much larger, much richer movie than could have been achieved if any of them had been left out.

Personal Response:

Examine the theme “conquering seemingly insurmountable obstacles”. Certainly, Edna’s personal triumph over her financial need reveals this theme to us, but there are other elements of the story that reveal the theme as well. Pick one or more of these and write a 3-paragraph personal response paper in which you share the ways in which these story elements moved you to believe in the possibility of humans conquering insurmountable obstacles.

- RACIAL PREJUDICE AND INEQUALITY IN A SMALL TX TOWN IN 1935
- THE LIMITATIONS ON A PERSON WHO HAS LOST HIS SIGHT
- UNFORGIVENESS AFTER TRAGEDY — CAN VICTIMS BE RECONCILED TO THOSE WHO VICTIMIZED THEM?

For instructions on writing a personal response essay, see the next page.

Directions for writing a personal response essay:

As you write a Personal Response Essay, your goal is more than just to share your opinion or emotional reaction to the movie. Rather, in response to the question or writing prompt, you will create a thoughtfully reasoned thesis (main idea captured in one sentence) which you will then support with 1) specific examples FROM THE STORY and 2) examples FROM YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

General Format for the Personal Response Essay:

INTRODUCTION

Your introductory paragraph will contain *three or more* sentences, one of which will be the thesis statement. **The thesis statement for this personal response paper will be based on the prompts in this guide.**

SUPPORTING PARAGRAPHS

Plan *three* supporting paragraphs. Each paragraph will focus on one specific example of inspiring content in the movie.

- Choose a moment from the movie that demonstrates your thesis to be reasonable.
- Relate this moment to your own life: “This moment made me think of this incident in my own life when I faced a similar situation” or “This incident stirred this particular emotion as I watched”.

CONCLUSION

End your paper with a concluding paragraph in which you sum up your feelings about the movie and remind your reader of your thesis statement (re-worded slightly) so there is no doubt that this film inspired or moved you.