

Parent Information & Answer Key

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 THH, 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?

The hymn "Blessed Assurance" is playing.

2. What sound is heard when the family prays before their Sunday dinner?

A gunshot is heard.

3. What does the man take from the closet before he leaves the house?

He takes his gun.

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?

Wylie did not intend for this tragedy to happen. He was drunk and shooting off the remaining rounds in his gun. He thought the chamber was empty when the gun went off a final time and killed Royce.

5. Briefly describe the differences between the two funerals.

The sheriff's funeral is crowded with all the white people in the town; everyone has brought food and is trying to support Edna. The burial service is in the whites-only cemetery.

Wylie's friends and family must cut his body down from the tree on which he was lynched before they can have his funeral. The funeral itself is a simple burial outdoors in the blacks-only cemetery.

6. What do you think of Mose when he leaves Edna Spalding's farm after she is unwilling to give him work?

Answers will vary; this is a personal opinion question.

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

Answers will vary but may include the idea that she has decided to try to plant cotton and knows she will need his help.

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?

Frank is missing his father and needs a man's influence in his life.

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?

Answers will vary; this is a personal opinion question.

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?

Two couples who still have each other are squandering the blessing of partnership while Edna has no choice but to handle life alone.

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

Listening to his recordings for the blind allows him learning and entertainment that he could not otherwise experience.

12. Why do you think the writer had Edna taking a bath when Mr. Will comes in to complain about the scratched record?

Edna is vulnerable in the bath, but Mr. Will does not realize she is bathing. When he realizes her vulnerability, he reins in his anger and shows her respect by leaving the room.

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?

She will plant cotton and harvest in time to win the prize for the first crop brought to the gin. Mose and Mr. Will are on her team. There are so many other farmers with more experience and more hands; it seems impossible for her to achieve her goal.

14. What unexpected tragedy impacts the whole town of Waxahachie one afternoon?

A tornado strikes the town.

15. Who shows himself to be an unlikely hero at Edna's home during this tragedy? What does he do?

Mr. Will finds Possum and keeps her safe in spite of his inability to see.

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?

The Spaldings' life since they lost Royce has "weathered storms", but they are still working together and hoping to triumph over adversity.

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?

There are not enough hands to pick that much cotton. All their hard work to this point may well be in vain.

18. During the scenes of picking cotton, what is often the only sound?

We often hear only the birds and the insects.

19. Why do you think Edna dreams of dancing with her dead husband, Royce?

She is desperately lonely for his love and partnership as she struggles to bear the load of work to harvest the cotton. Dancing with her husband reminds her of her love for him, her femininity, and her former life.

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.

The hired pickers, Edna and Mose, Mr. Will, Frank and Possum, Margaret (Edna's sister) and her husband Wayne.

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.

Answers will vary as many characters sacrificed greatly to reach the goal. Viewers will experience an emotional connection to different characters on a personal level.

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?

He asks Edna what she looks like. He has come to have a relationship with her and wants to have an image in his mind of the woman he has come to respect and care for.

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

He recognizes their voices and calls by name the men in the party who think they are anonymous because Mr. Will cannot see them.

24. Another dance is held as the movie draws to a close. What is it about the dances in this movie that seems 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?
The dances show a setting in which the people of the town can interact and relate in totally different ways - without the rivalries, without work. They can join in some of the simple joy of life together after spending so much energy trying to survive the trials of life.
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?
Margaret and Wayne sit together. Their marriage is overcoming the bitter trial of Wayne's infidelity.
26. Communion is observed, and as the wine is passed from person to person, what does each say to the next?
"Peace of God."
27. Some very unexpected characters sit in the pews and share in communion. Which characters were you very surprised to see? Why?
Mose - a black man in the white church is surprising.
Royce and Wylie - the men who died at the beginning of this movie are present.

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.*)

There are two couples struggling to deal with infidelity.

There are two visits between Edna and the bank manager, Mr. Denby.

There are two church services, one that opens the movie and one that closes it.

There are two lynch mobs, one that kills Wylie and one that tried to kill Mose.

There are three dances...a pair, plus one!

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?

Mose is black, and Mr. Will is white.

Mose is able-bodied, and Mr. Will is blind.

Initially, Mose wants to be there; Mr. Will resents needing to be there.

Both men form respectful, caring relationships with Edna, Frank, and Possum.

Mr. Will helps to reveal Mose's enormous capability; he is good at many things, wise, but unable to openly use many of his abilities because of his color.

Mose helps to reveal Mr. Will's depth of caring; while Mr. Will appears to be rather prickly early on, he comes to exhibit great loyalty to the family.

The tornado scene places one man in a protective role with part of the family and the other in a protective role with Possum.

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 introducing 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 sherriff, 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. Briefly explain what idea we are being encouraged to notice by that symbol or motif. (Try looking back at the questions in this study guide for hints.)

Answers will vary greatly. There are many symbols and motifs in this movie, and any answer is acceptable as long as it can be supported by an example.

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?