

4. In Chapter 8, the main storyline is not connected to the previous stories, or "vignettes." In what ways does the author link it to the previous stories?

Chapter Nine

1. Do you know anyone like Clyde Whiteman? Is he really just unlucky? Discuss.
2. Why does Harlen get so upset with Clyde? What does this reveal about Harlen's character?
3. What connects the two stories Will tells in this chapter?
4. Why does Harlen connect Will with Clyde?
5. Who is Howard Webster?

6. Below is an example of a thematic statement (theme) for the Clyde character in Chapter Nine. Using this example as references, write your own thematic statement for three (3) of the first eight chapters (Chapters 1-8). DO NOT INCLUDE SPECIFICS from the story, but instead state what you consider to be the story's central idea about life. There is no single "right answer" for each chapter.

THEMATIC STATEMENT EXAMPLE FOR CLYDE WHITEMAN IN CHAPTER 9:

Some people have a hard time living up to the expectations of others. They fear disappointing those they admire and deliberately sabotage their accomplishments to relieve this pressure.

Chapter Ten

1. Who is Granny Martha Oldcrow? Why does Harlen take Will to see her? What is her specialty?
2. Unlike previous chapters, Will only tells one story in Chapter Ten. Discuss how this story connects to Will's life and the other stories told about his past.
3. Discuss Harlen and Bertha's behavior throughout this chapter.

Chapter Eleven

1. At the start of the chapter, we hear a bit more about James. The description Will provides about James is quite ambiguous, where do you think James has been all this time? What has he been up to? Why has he been away so long?
2. Explain the symbolism of the *Chinook* as it relates to Harlen's brother Joe.
3. In Chapter Eleven, Joe Bigbear's character contrasts with Harlen's, bringing out some of Harlen's traits. For example, Joe shakes Will's hand crushingly and whispers loudly, "You shake hands like a damn Indian." Harlen would never deliberately make someone physically or emotionally uncomfortable. What are three other things that Joe does in this chapter that Harlen would never do?
4. Chapter Eleven is another chapter where Will tells only one story. However, a theme does emerge as he tells the story about Joe and Harlen. Discuss what connects the content of this chapter to Will's past.
5. The friendship between Will and Harlen blossoms at the end of this chapter. What do they do for each other that demonstrates that they truly are very good friends?

Chapter Twelve

1. Who is Lionel James and what do we know about him?
2. Harlen and Lionel share many similarities. Compare these two characters using specific examples from the text.
3. Harlen brings Lionel to ask Will about credit cards. What happened to Lionel that made him think he needs a credit card? What was the result of the visit?
4. As the narrator, Will uses humor to characterize Lionel James in a sympathetic way. Give one example of humor that Lionel brings into one of his stories.
5. Lionel James tells Will: "But those people in Germany and Japan and France and Ottawa don't want to hear those stories. They want to hear about how Indians used to be. I got some real good stories, funny ones about how things are now, but these people say, 'no, tell us about the old days', so I do."

a. With this quote in mind, who would you say is the protagonist in the main storyline of Chapter Twelve?

b. Who or what is the antagonist?

c. What kind of conflict is this? Explain your choice.

6. The English language identifies three main forms of irony: verbal irony, dramatic irony, and situational irony. There is something quite ironic about Lionel, both in what he says about audiences and his own approach to living in the present. Lionel wants his listeners to hear about how things are now, but he isn't ready to get a credit card yet. "It's a crazy world," Lionel said. "Them people living in the past like that."
Lionel's experience with the boy at the hotel reception computer is especially ironic. Lionel was told he couldn't get a room unless he had a credit card. He says, "you know, I told him I had cash, and he said cash wasn't any good." What kind of irony is this? Explain your choice.

Chapter Thirteen

1. In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King says that a "return to the Native story can involve a sorting out, and ordering of relationships, memories, and possibilities, an attempt to come to term with the past, and an attempt to find a future" (117). In *Medicine River*, what memories does Will sort out in his attempt to find his future? List as many as you can for full marks.

2. A 'figure of speech' is where a word or words are used to create an effect, often where they do not have their original or literal meaning. If someone says that they are 'starving,' they do not mean that they are in fact dying of hunger, but that they are very hungry. This is a simple example of a figure of speech, where the word is used to heighten or increase the state that they are describing. A metaphor, simile, or hyperbole are three of the most common figures of speech.

To do justice to Bertha's personality, Will uses figures of speech. Identify an example of each of the following figures of speech found on the first page of Chapter Thirteen:

- a. Metaphor
- b. Simile

c. Hyperbole

3. After Will tells Bertha what Harlen had said about her, she says, "you tell him to keep them opinions to himself." Bertha then goes on to ask, "what else did he say about me?" What type of irony is this? Explain your answer.
4. Agree or disagree with the following statement and explain your answer:
 "The truth of the matter, she told me, was that marriage was always more of a burden on women than on men, that women always had to take on extra weight, while men just fell into marriage as if they were falling into bed."

Chapter Fourteen

1. Who is David Plume and what do we know about him?
 2. "A person should do something important with their life. You should think about that." Why does David say this to Will? What is he talking about?
 3. The underlying theme of this chapter is inclusion/exclusion. The relocation of Will and his family from his home community is an example of exclusion and it is only in Will's return home, that he is beginning to feel like he belongs somewhere. Like Will, David Plume has a deep desire to feel like he is included in something important.
- In your opinion, has David Plume's experience at Wounded Knee resulted in him being accepted (included) by the community of Medicine River? Why or why not?
4. An example of how you could be "part of something important" in David Plume's sense of that concept is to protest for better student grants at the provincial legislature. Will has a very different concept of what it means to be a part of something important.
 - a. Identify one thing that Will would consider important from the book.
 - b. Identify a real life example of how you could be a part of something important using both David's and Will's concept of being a part of something important.

Chapter Fifteen

1. "Run a family portrait special," Harlen said. "Something like that will bring in a lot of people from the reserve. Family is an important thing." Using at least two examples, discuss the concept of family and community in Medicine River.
2. While holding up the photos of Joyce's family and Rose's, Harlen says, "You and James look like someone sprayed you up and down with starch," because no one in the photo is smiling. Later, after tacking the two families up on the wall, Will examines the recent photo and tells us, "I was smiling in that picture, and you couldn't see the sweat." What is the significance of this contrast?
3. In this chapter, Will fixes up the old family photo that his mother had tacked up in the kitchen and sends a copy to his brother James. What is the significance of Will's restoration and later tacking up of the photo on his wall?
4. Will then says, "Right next to it, I stuck a picture of us all down at the river." What is the symbolic significance of his action?
5. When Lionel James talks to Will in this chapter, he's pointing Will in directions that can take his quest (to be an accepted part of the community) further. Can you identify at least one of the ways in which that's happening?
6. Although subtle, the climax of the novel occurs in this chapter, can you identify it?

Chapter Sixteen

1. What does Harlen mean when he says that Louise is formidable?
2. In this chapter, King chooses to slow down Will's maturation in the main storyline. However, Will does experience personal growth in this chapter. Explain how it occurs.
3. Louise tries three times to get Will to respond to the question that she eventually spells out as, "I'm serious. You ever think of us living together?" How is Will's response ironic? Which kind of irony is used?

4. You may have asked yourself, "What about the darkroom? If Louise were serious about living together with Will, wouldn't she have left the darkroom in the downstairs bathroom? After all, Will implies how he's thinking when he comments, "A darkroom at home would be nice." On the other hand, Will may not really want the darkroom. Why might we think that?
5. Louise may not be signaling anything (other than her intention to make her own decisions about her own house) by removing the darkroom. Why might we think that?

Chapter Seventeen

1. Humour contributes to the mood of Chapter 17. What is one example of that humour? (Besides the example itself, include the page number and any brief explanation that would be useful).
2. There is more symbolism in Chapter 17. For example, it involves the two boats: the canoe in the main storyline and the rowboat in the counterpoint. They're so significant that thinking about what they mean can lead to a statement about the chapter's theme. State the theme that unites the two storylines in this chapter.
3. We gain more insight into the Rose character in this chapter and come to realize that she shares a number of similarities with both Harlen and Louise. Discuss what Rose and Louise have in common.
4. In what ways are Rose and Louise different?
5. Bonus Question: Although it is never overtly mentioned, (King does provide hints throughout the book), what is Will's Last name? Why is it fitting that Will has that name?

Chapter Eighteen

1. Louise comments about the David-and-Ray episode to Will: "All that over a jacket!" However, the symbolism of the red AIM jacket makes it much more than just a jacket. Describe what it symbolizes.

2. Now that you have described the significance of the AIM jacket, take a look back at Chapter 14, and describe the symbolism associated with the photograph that David asks Will to restore.
3. As you know, the main storyline in this chapter is about David Plume and Ray Little Buffalo. Before we consider the counterpoint further, think about the relationship between the two storylines. How are they similar and different?
4. The musical top is another *Medicine River* Symbol that says a lot in a few words in Chapter 18. Let's recall its early role and current role in the story. Why is the musical top significant to the growth experienced by Will at the end of the novel?
5. Re-read the last paragraph of the novel. What is significant about this passage?
6. Restoration and balance are two very important developments in almost every chapter. For example, a problem or conflict occurs and then a solution usually follows. For Will, the restoring of balance often occurs with the involvement of the "TRICKSTER," the helping and bumping Harlen, although Will restores balance without him in the end. Will does that with the musical top for South Wing, who has always been symbolic, an embodiment of both the goodwill of the community and Will's growing capacity for personal commitment. What signs of restoration of balance do you notice as you read about the gift on the final two pages of the novel?
7. Is Harlen really the embodiment of the "TRICKSTER," agree or disagree using at least two examples from the novel.