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Reading and Writing Questions to Consider
Plot, Character, Setting and Theme

In answering the following questions, please identify and cite specific passages and quotations from the text of the story under consideration:

“The Lesson”

Sylvia, the narrator, speaks in a dialect throughout “The Lesson.” What does her way of speaking reveal about her character’s socio-economic background and education level? How does this help you to understand Sylvia’s circumstances in the story?

Sylvia describes her neighborhood (Setting 1) in graphic terms. What does this description reveal about the place she lives and the other families who live there?

What is the nature of the conflict between Sylvia and Miss Moore? What lesson does Miss Moore intend to teach Sylvia and her friends? How do her choices help to reveal her purpose?

How do Sylvia and her friends respond to visiting Fifth Avenue & F.A.O. Schwarz (Setting 2)? What do these responses reveal about their circumstances and expectations?

Where do the climax and resolution take place? Where and how is the theme articulated in the story? What “lesson” does Sylvia learn from her experience?

“Two Kinds”

Describe the relationship between Suyuan and Jing-Mei. How do their backgrounds differ, and what do these differences contribute to the conflict in the story?

What is Suyuan’s plan for her daughter Jing-Mei? What are the motivations behind it? What does this reveal about her character?

What is Jing-Mei’s reaction to her mother’s wishes? How do her feelings change throughout the story? What does this reveal about her character?

What is the significance of the story’s title? Where does it appear in the story? What does it suggest about the story’s theme?

What incidents comprise the story’s resolution? What insight does Jing-Mei gain from those incidents? How do they reveal the story’s theme?

“Everyday Use”

Who is the narrator of the story? How does the narration reveal her character and the setting of the story?

How does Mama feel about her two daughters based on her descriptions of Maggie and Dee? What does this reveal about her values and priorities?

What is the nature of the story’s conflict? Is it external, internal, or both? How do the events in the story help to illuminate and resolve the conflict?

What does the climax to the story involve? What do the quilts symbolize? How does the story's title clarify the significance of the quilts to each character?

What is the resolution to the story? Is the resolution satisfying to all three characters? Why or why not? What does this suggest about the story's theme?

"The Two"

Who is Sophie and what is her role in the story? How does her role help to establish the story's theme?

What is Brewster Place? What kind of people live there? How did Lorraine and Theresa come to reside in Brewster Place?

What is the nature of Lorraine and Theresa's relationship? How does their relationship make them the object of Sophie's interest?

What is the conflict between Lorraine and Theresa? What does each want from the other and from life? How does their relationship impact those expectations?

How is the conflict between "the two" resolved? What metaphor helps to achieve this resolution? What does this suggest about the story's theme?



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