

# ***Mother of Rain***

## **Chapter Questions for Public School Teachers**

### **BEFORE YOU READ**

\*Review the resources available at <http://www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/zacharias/links> to learn more about Karen Spears Zacharias and her works.

\*One of the main characters in the novel, Burdy Luttrell, is Melungeon. Visit <http://melungeon.org/frequently-asked-questions-about-melungeons/> to learn more about this group of people, their history, and some of the discrimination they faced.

\*Review the glossary at the back of the book to familiarize yourself with some of the language used in the book.

### **WHILE YOU READ**

\*As you read, keep a list of colloquialisms found in the novel.

#### Chapter 1

1. Storytelling is an integral part of Appalachian culture. How is Auntie Tay emblematic of the classic storyteller? Be sure to include specific textual evidence to support your answer.
2. Auntie Tay says that people "like dancing with the Devil" (4). What does she mean by this, and do you agree with her? Explain your answer.
3. Aside from death by hanging, how is the death of the elephant similar to a typical lynching of an African American in the mid-late 1800s? (You may have to do some additional research to answer this question.)
4. How does the opening story of the killing of an elephant set the tone for the rest of the novel?

#### Chapter 2

1. Why did Maizee read to her mother?
2. What does Maizee's mother call her husband? Why?
3. How would you describe the relationship of Maizee's parents?
4. How did Maizee react to her mother's death?
5. How does the graphic nature of her mother's death affect the way we view Maizee?

#### Chapter 3

1. Why doesn't Maizee cry when her father says that she will be living with her aunt & uncle? What does this reveal about her personality?
2. Which of her mother's items did Maizee want to keep? Why?
3. Opinion: Do you think Maizee's father should have tried to raise her? Explain your reasoning.
4. What simile is used on page 23? How is this an effective comparison?
5. How does Maizee put a lot of pressure on herself, especially as a young girl who just lost her mother?

#### Chapter 4

1. Why does Doc, Leela-Ma's husband, believe Maizee didn't cry much about her mother?
2. What do we learn about Nan's pregnancy with Maizee?
3. Why does Leela-Ma fear she is partly to blame for Nan's death?

#### Chapter 5

1. Explain Maizee's conflicted feelings toward her father.
2. Maizee begins to have flashbacks about her mother's death. What disorder is she most likely suffering from? How will this affect her in the future?
3. Why do you think Leela-Ma tells Maizee the story of Nan and W. B. Lyons getting locked in the closet?
4. Prediction: Why do you think Maizee keeps hearing someone calling her name?

#### Chapter 6

1. Opinion: What do you think of Burdy based off of the opening description of her?
2. How would you describe Wheedin's relationship with her mother?
3. How does Wheedin and Maizee's relationship get off to a bad start?
4. Maizee says that Wheedin looked at her in "the Doubting Thomas way" (43). Explain this allusion.

#### Chapter 7

1. What are Zeb's first thoughts about Maizee?
2. List each of the similes used to describe Maizee.
3. Opinion: Zeb says his father compared romance to whittling. Do you agree with this statement and his reasoning? Explain your answer.

#### Chapter 8

1. Why do you think Maizee scares so easily?
2. How has Maizee's relationship with her uncle grown? Give specific examples to support your answer.
3. How was Maizee's first kiss with Zeb reflective of their relationship as a whole?

#### Chapter 9

1. How do we see a playfulness in Maizee and Zeb's relationship?
2. Nature has a transcendent power in Appalachian culture. How is this reflected in this chapter?

#### Chapter 10

1. Why do you think the author chose to have Leela-Ma reveal Maizee's pregnancy instead of having Maizee reveal it herself?
2. Why did Maizee have to get married at the courthouse and not a church?
3. Leela-Ma notes that Maizee and Zeb got married on the same day that the Germans surrounded Dunkirk. Why would this be worthy of noting? (You may need to do some additional research in order to fully answer this question.)

## Chapter 11

1. Why did Maizee cry on her wedding day?
2. List specific examples of foreshadowing seen in this chapter.

## Chapter 12

1. What is strange about Maizee's behavior at the start of this chapter?
2. Why did Wheedin leave Christian Bend?
3. Explain the meaning of the following quotation: "People with good sense don't step in front of freight trains when the engines are churning" (68).

## Chapter 13

1. What does she mean when Burdy says "a lie has short legs" (73)?
2. Why does Burdy believe she was marked for healing?
3. How is Burdy's gift both a blessing and a curse?
4. How do we see the issues of racism reflected in this chapter?
5. How did Burdy's husband, Tibbis, die?
6. Burdy visits Tibbi's burial site and tells him about her concerns for Maizee. What does he "say" to her, and what does it mean?

## Chapter 14

1. Why do you think Maizee is hearing voices?
2. How did Burdy help Maizee find some relief?

## Chapter 15

1. Why do Zeb and Maizee choose to name their baby Rain?
2. What is his middle name, and why is important? (Remember—names are always important!)

## Chapter 16

1. How has water—which was once such a positive, healing symbol for Maizee—become an ominous symbol of something to be feared?
2. Why was Maizee looking for Hitty, her childhood doll?

## Chapter 17

1. How does Leela-Ma feel about Burdy? Why?

## Chapter 18

1. Why does Zeb go to Burdy's so late at night?
2. How have Maizee's strange behaviors intensified?
3. What does Burdy do when Maizee slaps her? What does this reveal about her personality?

## Chapter 19

1. How is Maizee acting at this point in the novel?
2. What does Burdy use to help Rain?
3. What does Burdy reveal is wrong with Rain?

## Chapter 20

1. What near-accident occurs at Rain's first birthday party?
2. How does Burdy know Rain is deaf?
3. Explain the story with the spider that Burdy sees.
4. What warning is presented about Maizee's future?

## Chapter 21

1. Which major war is now taking place?
2. Explain the following quotation: "We didn't speak any more of Zeb's leaving that day, but the knowing of it weighed on us like guilt on a saint" (126).
3. Maizee notes that the only way she knows to deal with difficult times is with silence. Do you think this has helped or hurt her? Explain your answer.
4. Why did Maizee cry when she was at home alone and not when she said goodbye to Zeb?
5. Why does Maizee continue to hear someone shouting her name? When else did this happen?

## Chapter 22

1. Why is Dunkirk mentioned again?

## Chapter 23

1. How much time has passed? How do we know?

## Chapter 24

1. What happens in Zeb's nightmare?
2. Why do you think Burdy wrote to Zeb?

## Chapter 25

1. What are Zeb's feelings about Kade?
2. How has Kade become a more sympathetic character by the end of this chapter?

## Chapter 26

1. Describe the mood on the night of the jump.
2. Why does Zeb feel like it is his duty to serve during the war?
3. How do we see another reference to an arrow at the end of this chapter? Why do you think it is mentioned in this particular moment?

## Chapter 27

1. Death seemed like an unavoidable outcome as the result of this mission. Based on what we know about Zeb, do you think he believes his death was worth it? Explain your answer.

## Chapter 28

1. Several characters have made their distrust of Kade very clear; however, Maizee believes Kade is harmless and has actually been helpful. Do you think he can be trusted? Why or why not?
2. Kade said the voices will stop when Zeb comes back home safely. Do you agree? Explain your answer.

## Chapter 29

1. At first Maizee is just told that Zeb is missing. After some time, word returns that he is dead. How is this worse than just getting news of his death?
2. How does Maizee “deal” with Zeb's death?
3. Why do you think Maizee has gone from hearing voices to now also hallucinating?
4. Why did Maizee cut herself?
5. What is Maizee's great fear?

## Chapter 30

1. Why is this short chapter included?

## Chapter 31

1. What is the effect/purpose of the horrific imagery used in this chapter?

## Chapter 32

1. Why does Maizee say she needs Leela-Ma to watch Rain? What does she have to do?
2. Why is Doc late in getting home? How does Leela-Ma know something is wrong?

## Chapter 33

1. While talking to Kade, why does Maizee keep repeating “What's the worth of a child?” (first on 188)?
2. How would you describe Maizee's demeanor before she committed suicide?
3. Why is it important to note that Jesus placed a crown of pearls on Maizee's head? When else does Maizee talk about pearls?

## Chapter 34

1. On 193, Maizee references a blood halo around her head, and on the following page, Leela-Ma references a mud halo around Maizee when Doc found her. What do you think is the significance of these two images?

## Chapter 35

1. How is Leela-Ma dealing with Maizee's death?
2. Although it seems like a lot of time has passed, Leela-Ma reminds us that Maizee was only twenty-one. Does this reminder of her age matter? Why or why not?

## Chapter 36

1. Who comes to help Leela-Ma?
2. How do we know Leela-Ma is really struggling with Maizee's death?

## Chapter 37

1. Why does Leela-Ma become so angry?
2. Why do you think Leela-Ma is struggling with her faith at this point?

## Chapter 38

1. What does Leela-Ma learn about Kade? Why does this matter?
2. Why does Leela-Ma find relief in kissing Doc at the end of the chapter?

### Chapter 39

1. How does Burdy find out about Maizee? What is her reaction?
2. What is Wheedin's reaction to Maizee's death? Why won't she come back to Christian Bend for the funeral?

### Chapter 40

1. Why is Leela-Ma shocked when she walked into Maizee's house?
2. What letter does Leela-Ma find? Why is this important?

### Chapter 41

1. How do Leela-Ma and Doc tell Rain about Maizee and Zeb? What is his reaction?
2. Why is it significant that Rain put Hitty up to his ear and then did the same to Leela-Ma?
3. How do we know that Rain understands the word "momma"?

### **AFTER YOU READ**

Essay Questions: Choose one of the following prompts to respond to in a well-developed essay. Be sure to include textual evidence to support your assertion.

- The chestnut tree, water, and arrows all serve as important symbols throughout the novel. Select one of these symbols and analyze its use and significance over the course of the novel.
- Are the voices that Maizee hears a result of a mental illness, demons/ghosts, or something else? Be sure to include specific textual evidence to support your claim.
- The concept of "senseless killing" is a recurring motif throughout the novel. How does this support the overall theme of the novel?
- How do Burdy, Leela-Ma, and Maizee represent variations of the same faith?
- How is the role of absent fathers, and their importance, reflected in the novel?