

Forrest Carter's  
*The Education of  
Little Tree:*  
A Discussion Guide

By David Bruce

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**Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*:  
A Discussion Guide**

**by David Bruce**

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## Preface

The purpose of this book is educational. I enjoy reading Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*, and I believe that it is an excellent book for young adults (and for middle-aged adults such as myself) to read.

This book contains many questions about Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree* and their answers. I hope that teachers of young adults will find it useful as a guide for discussions. It can also be used for short writing assignments. Students can answer selected questions from this little guide orally or in one or more paragraphs.

I hope to encourage teachers to teach Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*, and I hope to lessen the time needed for teachers to prepare to teach this book.

Apparently, Forrest Carter's real name is Asa Earl Carter, and he died on June 7, 1979. Asa was a segregationist. Nevertheless, his book *The Education of Little Tree* is a work of art that is filled with humanity. Even a segregationist can be redeemed.

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## Chapter 1: Little Tree

### **Why do Little Tree's kinfolk put up a fuss when Little Tree wants to go live with Granpa?**

We can only guess here, but probably it's because of prejudice against Indians, aka Native Americans. Throughout *The Education of Little Tree*, we will find prejudice against Indians. Today, in many parts of the country, Indians are an "in" minority, but *The Education of Little Tree* is set in the 1930s, when there was still a lot of prejudice against Indians. Even today, many whites out West consider Indians to be drunken, lazy bums. Granpa is half Cherokee, while Granma is a full-blooded Cherokee.

Little Tree himself chooses to go with Granpa. He hugs Granpa's leg and refuses to let go, even though his kinfolk try to take him away from Granpa.

### **What kind of a narrator is Little Tree?**

Little Tree is a naive narrator. As a little boy, he frequently doesn't understand what is happening around him. Thus, when the white adults are acting in a racist way, he doesn't understand what they are doing.

We see this in the scene on the bus back to Granpa and Granma's home. The bus driver raises his hand and says "How!" This causes everybody on the bus to laugh, and Little Tree is relieved because he thinks that this means all the people on the bus are friendly.

Little Tree is also naive when he sees a woman on the bus and thinks that she is ill because her eyes are black around their edges and her lips are blood-red. Of course, the woman is wearing makeup, but Little Tree doesn't realize that. When

the woman hollers “Wa ... hoo!” and laughs, Little Tree thinks that the pain of her illness has passed.

### **What kind of a person is Granpa?**

It is possible that Granpa is illiterate. It is Granma who reads the destinations posted on the fronts of the buses. Granpa comments that “Granma could read fancy as anybody” (2). This shows that Granpa considers Granma’s reading worthy of comment, possibly because he himself can’t read.

We will learn that Granpa and Granma are not vegetarians. They eat meat, and Granpa is a hunter.

Granpa is a kind, considerate man, as we will learn in his interactions with Little Tree. When Granma tells him that Little Tree is growing tired, Granpa slows his pace. Little Tree, who as we know is naive, thinks that this means that Granpa is also growing tired.

Granpa is also patient. Although the people on the bus are racist, Granpa turns the other cheek. He doesn’t act angry; he simply ignores the racists.

### **What kind of a house does this family live in?**

The house is made of logs. It is divided into two sections; in between the two sections is an open area in which the dogs can roam. On one side of the cabin is a large living area for cooking, eating, and sitting; on the other side are two small bedrooms, one for Little Tree and one for Granma and Granpa.

## Chapter 2: The Way

### What do we learn about Granpa in this chapter?

Once again, we learn about the considerate way in which Granpa treats Little Tree. He tells Little Tree that he can go with him on the high trail, but only if he wakes up by himself. However, although Granpa does not wake Little Tree, he gives Little Tree lots of help in getting up by being especially noisy that morning, bumping against Little Tree's wall and talking loudly to Granma. Granpa is "surprised" when he finds Little Tree has gotten up by himself.

We also learn just how good a hunter Granpa is. He knows much about animal life. We certainly see that in the way that he traps turkeys. Granpa also gives names to the birds and animals. The names are apparently Cherokee names.

### What is the Way?

Granpa does have a philosophy that justifies his hunting and puts it in harmony with Nature. After all, Granpa is like the hawk, a natural predator which kills a quail. Granpa sees the great circle of life. The hawk kills the slow quail, which keeps the slow quail from breeding and passing its genes on to the next generation. This helps the quail species to stay quick, although it doesn't do any good for the slow quail. The hawk also helps the quail in other ways. By killing ground rats, which eat quail eggs—whether they are the eggs of fast or slow quail does not matter—the hawk helps the quail species to survive.

Similarly, Granpa is careful in his hunting to take only the weak and the slow. By killing (and eating) the weak members of a species, Granpa helps to ensure that the species will survive harsh winters, thus perpetuating the species so that Granpa can continue to eat during the next year. If Granpa

were to kill the strongest members of a species, the species may not survive the winter.

Contrast this to white people. Most white hunters, if they are hunting deer and see a big deer and a little deer in a clearing, will shoot the big deer.

This is how Granpa describes the Way:

“Take only what ye need. When ye take the deer, do not take the best. Take the smaller and the slower and then the deer will grow stronger and always give you meat. Pa-koh, the panther, knows and so must ye.”  
(9)

Granpa knows how to learn from nature.

In addition, Granpa does not take more than he needs. He takes only what he needs, and that is all. He does not store up treasures on this Earth. According to Granpa, if you take more than you need, soon someone will come along and take what you have away from you, the way the bear and the Cherokee take honey away from bees. If you don't have more than you need, you can better avoid this problem.

Granpa is also a fine teacher; he teaches by allowing the student to do. He allows Little Tree to choose which three of the six turkeys they have caught to keep to eat. Little Tree chooses the three smallest—Granpa then lets the other turkeys go. Granpa also shows that he is pleased with Little Tree by saying, “If ye was not Little Tree ... I would call ye Little Hawk” (11).

## Chapter 3: Shadows on a Cabin Wall

### How literate are Granpa and Granma?

Granpa is illiterate; however, Granma is very literate. The family borrows books from a public library. (They haven't enough money to buy their own books; indeed, the family is quite poor when it comes to having money.) Granma and the family are quite fond of William Shakespeare, but the family doesn't read modern authors. Mr. Shakespeare is always on the list that Granma writes for the librarian. The librarian ends up keeping a list of books that the family has read, because Granpa is illiterate and doesn't remember the stories that Granma has already read to the family. The librarian is quite nice; she sends books that the family may like, even though Granma doesn't know the names of the authors (Shelley, Byron).

### How open is the family about sex?

Sex is a part of life, and it is accepted. Granpa believes that the trouble in *Macbeth* happened because Macbeth was unable to keep Lady Macbeth satisfied in bed. If he had, she would not have caused the trouble.

### What culture does Granpa have?

Granpa is both a Cherokee Indian and a mountain man. He is an Appalachian. All of us should ask ourselves whether we would like Granpa if we were to meet him. After reading this book, of course we like Granpa, but if we were to meet him without knowing who he is, there is a very good chance that we would dismiss him as an illiterate hillbilly.

Granpa is suspicious of the government. He runs a still, and he avoids paying taxes on his whiskey. (The still is very important in keeping the family financially sound.)

When Granma read about George Washington, she censored the book. She skipped the parts about George Washington fighting the Indians, and she unfortunately read about George Washington and the whiskey tax before she could catch herself. President Washington started a whiskey tax even though Thomas Jefferson advised him not to. This upset Granpa greatly.

## Chapter 4: Fox and Hounds

### What kind of recreation does the family indulge in?

Poor people have fun, too, although some of us may not be aware of that. One benefit of being Indian and of living in the mountains is that you have an appreciation of nature. In addition, despite working hard, you occasionally have time for fun and recreation. One of the things that Granpa does for fun is to send the dogs after a fox. He doesn't kill the fox; he merely watches the hunt.

### What does Granpa think of self-esteem?

Granpa is a good person. He believes that "if a hound or anybody else has got no feeling of worth, then it's a bad thing" (22). We can agree with Granpa. Self-esteem is important, but it has to be gotten legitimately. You shouldn't be able to get self-esteem easily; you should actually have to do something to get it. (Our modern culture seems to give praise much too easily, even to mediocrity.) One of Granpa's hounds has no sense of smell, but does have keen hearing and eyesight, and is able to help guard the corn patch, thus making her (Maud) feel of worth.

The great 19<sup>th</sup>-century actor Sir Henry Irving understood this principle. He hired a number of old people who needed money to survive but who were incapable of doing much work. In doing this, he was careful not to take their pride away. He told one aged actor to whom he was paying a salary much more abundant than was justified by any acting the old man did, "Now, my boy, what I want you to do is *very* important—humph!—*very* important. This is a critical moment in the play. You come on—come *right* on; you see what is happening; you say (to yourself, of course) 'My God!' You see?"

*My God! And then—ah—you go slowly off. ... Most important.”*<sup>1</sup>

### **Does Granpa have self-esteem?**

Yes, he does. He is almost 70 years old, but he does good work. His whiskey (as we will see later) is regarded well by his neighbors, and his hunting skills are widely admired. Granpa is regarded as a “master woodsman” (23).

### **What is the name of the fox, and how intelligent is he??**

Ol’ Slick is a very intelligent fox. He plays a lot of tricks on the hounds. One thing he does is to step on stones on a creek in an attempt to make the hounds think that he has crossed to the other side. According to Granpa, the fox made sure that his scent was fresh on the stones so that the hounds would be overcome by excitement and let emotions rule their heads. The trick worked with some of the hounds, but not with all. According to Granpa, some human beings also let their emotions rule their heads.

### **How free are Indian children?**

Nowadays we are very careful with our children. We are afraid of strangers. However, Little Tree does have a lot of freedom. He is allowed to stay up all night for the foxhunt. The Cherokee don’t criticize their children for playing in the woods.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Edward Wagenknecht, *Merely Players*, p. 176.

## Chapter 5: “I Kin Ye, Bonnie Bee”

### **What do we learn about Granpa’s education in this chapter?**

Granma has been reading so many books to Granpa and Little Tree that Granpa is getting some of the people mixed up. For example, he thinks that Alexander the Great lived at the time of the Continental Congress. Therefore, he borrows the Alexander the Great book from the librarian so he can learn more about Alexander the Great (and to find out whether he or Granma is correct about Alexander the Great).

### **What do we learn about Granpa in the scene in which a lady asks for directions?**

There is a cultural difference between Granpa and the lady. The lady asks Granpa for directions, and Granpa follows his manners. The lady, of course, is looking for a quick answer to her question (Which way is Chattanooga?), but Granpa takes his time, asking her how she is and listening to her very carefully. Of course, the lady and the people in the car think Granpa is an ignorant Appalachian. Also, Granpa doesn’t drive, so he doesn’t know the roads and so tells the lady where Chattanooga is as the crow flies.

### **What do we learn from the story about Uncle Enoch?**

Uncle Enoch is a free liver. He goes to Chattanooga and winds up in bed with two women, and a huge man complains that the women are his wife and his sister. (Apparently, Uncle Enoch has been set up; the women want him to pay the man some money.) Instead, Uncle Enoch jumps out a second-story window, is cut up, winds up in jail, escapes, and walks all the way home. Both Granpa and Little Tree decide that they don’t want to see Chattanooga (which is in Tennessee).

### **What do Granma and Granpa know about love?**

When Granpa (Wales) says “I kin ye” to Granma (Bonnie Bee), he means both “I understand you” and “I love you.” To understand a person is to love that person. These two people understand and love each other.

According to Granpa, the word “kin” has gotten messed up. “Kin” used to mean people whom you understood. Nowadays, the meaning has been restricted to blood relatives, which is too narrow a meaning.

Understanding other people is important in this book. The story about Coon Jack shows that. Coon Jack was a fighter. He fought for the South in the Civil War because he was fighting the union that had harmed the Cherokee nation. He fought all his life. Finally, all he had to take pride in was a key to a box that held a church songbook. He acted important about it, but Granpa’s Pa understood Coon Jack and praised him for taking care of the key.

## Chapter 6: To Know the Past

### What is the theme of this chapter?

This chapter is about the history of the Cherokee. The white men stole their land from them with a treaty. The treaty was supposed to keep the white men out of the Cherokee land, but in fact the treaty said that the white men had bought the Cherokee land and that the Cherokee would have to move west.

This is a historical fact. The Cherokee are famous for the Trail of Tears. When they were moved from the Carolinas to Oklahoma, they walked, and many, many Cherokee died during the walk. This chapter tells that the Cherokee refused to ride in the wagons provided by the white men, instead preferring to walk, and later, to carry their dead. Of course, some Cherokee hid in the woods and refused to go west.

Granpa and Granma tell Little Tree this so he understands his heritage.

Today the Cherokee nation is divided. A Cherokee reservation is in North Carolina, and a Cherokee reservation is in Oklahoma.

Humorist Will Rogers of Oklahoma was part Cherokee. Another famous Cherokee is Sequoia, who developed a written language for the Cherokee. Although the Indians were illiterate when the white men first landed in America, Sequoia recognized the importance of written language and developed a written language for the Cherokee. Very quickly the Cherokee became literate and started a Cherokee newspaper.

### **What was Granpa's Pa like?**

Of course, part of a person's history is the history of his grandparents and other ancestors. Granpa's Pa (hereafter referred to as Pa) met his wife after discovering that she and family were hiding in the woods (having refused to join the Trail of Tears). He left them a haunch of deer meat and so met them through the gift.

Pa had been a member of Morgan's Raiders, traveling through Ohio and other states to make war on the Union. There Pa had been wounded, although in the excitement of the battle, he didn't realize it. He realized that he had been wounded only after dismounting from his horse and having his leg collapse under him, with his boot filled with blood. Eventually, many years later, a bullet that had been left in his body killed him. His friends attempted to cut the bullet out of him, without anesthesia (but with whiskey), but he died while being held down spread-eagled in the process.

### **What is Cherokee divorce like?**

It is easy to get divorced if you are a Cherokee. When you are married, you have a marriage stick. During your marriage, you cut notches in the stick to remind you of important events that you and your mate share together. If you want to get divorced, you simply break the stick. The marriage stick of Granpa's parents was never broken.

## Chapter 7: Pine Billy

### **What does it take to be a mountain person?**

If you are a mountain person, you have to be very alert. You also have to have knowledge. Granma understands herbs and home remedies. When the family is carrying leaves to fertilize their little corn patch, they are often distracted by other things, such as herbs which Granma collects, or by hickory nuts or other forms of food which must be gathered. One advantage of this is that carrying leaves is boring work, and gathering herbs and nuts brings some welcome relief from the work.

### **Why doesn't Little Tree plow much when Granma is around?**

Granpa does cuss because he is a man, and Little Tree cusses, too, when Granma can't hear him. When plowing, the mule has gotten used to hearing cuss words and so, for example, the mule won't turn right until he hears all of the command "Gee! Gee! GEE! DAMMITOHELL! GEE!" (z49). Granma doesn't want Little Tree to cuss, and so Little Tree can't plow when Granma is around.

### **What kind of a person is Pine Billy?**

Pine Billy is an interesting character. He plays music (a fiddle), and this makes him welcome. In addition, he brings news to the family. He is also a little greedy. He gives some sweet potatoes to Granma, who makes sweet potato pie, but it is Pine Billy who eats almost all of the pie—except for one piece that Little Tree eats.

Mountain courtesy is interesting. Pine Billy tells the family that he was just passing by, but of course the family lives way

up in the mountains and Pine Billy had to walk a long way to see them.

We learn a little bit about the ignorance of the mountain people. Pine Billy sees what he thinks is a big-city criminal. The criminal says that he is from Chicago, but Pine Billy sees that the license plates on the criminal's car are from Illinois, and so of course the criminal has been lying and is taken off to jail.

Also interesting is Pine Billy's idea for making money. He hopes to win some money by entering an endorsement-writing contest for snuff. In writing his endorsement, he wrote that he would never use any other snuff than Red Eagle—that way, the company would think that they would get their money back if they gave it to Pine Billy.

## Chapter 8: The Secret Place

### **Why is this chapter important? What do we learn about Cherokee traditions?**

This chapter tells us some important things about the Cherokee way of life. For example, Little Tree spends some time playing in the woods, where he collects some musk bugs, which smell good. He takes them to Granma, so that she can enjoy their smell, too. Both Granpa and Granma say that they had never been aware of the musk bugs before (which is probably not true; they are letting Little Tree have the pleasure of thinking that he has introduced them to the musk bugs' smell).

Also, we read,

Granma said I had done right, for when you come on something that is good, first thing to do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out to where no telling it will go. Which is right. (57)

Also, we learn that although Little Tree gets pretty wet in the woods, he is not criticized for it: "Cherokees never scolded their children for having anything to do with the woods" (57).

Like other cultures, the Cherokee learn from observing nature. Little Tree learns about persistence by watching a spider build a large web across a stream. The spider jumps up and down on a leaf to get enough spring to carry a string across the stream and is very happy when it discovers this idea.

In addition, Little Tree finds his secret place in the woods. All Cherokees have a secret place. (Both Granpa and Granma have one.) Little Tree's is a little ways up the mountain, and

there is an old sweet gum tree there. The secret place is where a Cherokee can go to be alone.

We also learn about the two minds that the Cherokee say that all people have. One mind is concerned with the practical details of everyday—like how to stay alive by providing food, shelter, and clothing for yourself and your family. The other mind is the spirit mind, which is much different from the body-living mind.

You have to be careful not to let your body-living mind kill your spirit-living mind. If you become greedy and are always concerned with the body, then your spirit-mind can shrink up to the size of a hickory nut (59). This is very bad. According to the Cherokee, we are reincarnated. The way you are reincarnated has to do with how you lived your past life. If you have a hickory nut-sized spirit-mind, it can shrink up to the size of a pea in your next life and then you will become a dead person.

According to Granma, it is easy to spot dead people:

She said dead people when they looked at a woman saw nothing but dirty; when they looked at other people they saw nothing but bad; when they looked at a tree they saw nothing but lumber and profit; never beauty. Granma said they was dead people waking around. (60)

One thing that we can learn from nature is how to understand nature and the environment. The Cherokee believe that trees have spirits. If you are in tune with nature, you can understand what the tree spirits are saying. Once Granma's Pa got worried because the oak tree spirits were worried. It turned out that the white men were coming to chop down the trees for lumber. The Cherokees were able to stop them by digging up the loggers' road at night. Also, a tree helped by

falling on a wagon, even though it was a perfectly healthy tree.

These oak trees were strong in spirit because they weren't selfish; they left enough room for other vegetation to grow (61).

After rescuing the oaks, the Cherokees held a celebration, even singing a death song for the healthy oak that had sacrificed its life for the other trees.

## Chapter 9: Granpa's Trade

### Where does Granpa get his money?

Granpa's trade is making and selling whiskey. He lives on a mountain, which means that there is very little flat land for growing crops. The little flat land he has he uses to grow Indian corn, from which he makes whiskey (which has a reddish tint) with his still. Without the still, the family would not be able to survive. (Thomas Jefferson was correct in his advice to George Washington.)

One characteristic of Granpa is his freedom. Never in his life has he held a job from which he made a salary—never has he ever been in “public hire.” Granpa is a free man.

However, Granpa does believe in having a trade; his trade—which he learned from his Pa—is whiskey making.

Granpa does make good sense about judging a trade. Making whiskey was given a bad name by big-city criminals (during Prohibition), who would make whiskey that could kill a man. However, does it make sense to judge an entire trade by the worst of the people who engage in it? If you deal with one bad librarian, does that mean that libraries are bad?

Not only is Little Tree naive, but sometimes Granpa is, too. For example, take aging whiskey. Granpa has heard that aging whiskey can improve its flavor, so he tried it once. He let some whiskey age an entire week before tasting it, but it tasted the same as all the other whiskey he had made. (Of course, we know that aging whiskey means letting it age for 10 or more years.)

Granpa made one run of whiskey a month, and he always got 11 gallons of whiskey from his run. He sold 9 gallons to Mr. Jenkins, who ran “the store at the crossroads” (66). The

money he received bought necessities for the family (and some emergency money). The two gallons he kept he drank, by himself and with company, and Granma used some in her cough medicine.

One thing Little Tree learns is that making whiskey is hard work. As he says,

As I say, it was hard work and I never could figure how some folks would say that lazy, good-for-nothings made whiskey. Whoever says that without a doubt has never made any. (68)

While making whiskey in late winter, they had a run-in with the law. Fortunately, the family was prepared. Whenever the law came around, Granma would let one of the dogs loose. The dog would go to Granpa and Little Tree, and so they knew there was law around. When it happened this time, Granpa stayed to hide the still (if the law had busted it up, it would have seriously hurt the family finances, and at Granpa's age, it would be hard to get another still).

In this chapter, the law was coming toward the still, so Granma set all the dogs lose. As the law was nearing Little Tree, whom Granpa had sent back to the cabin, the dogs jumped on the law. Little Tree took off, running up the mountain, above the heads of the law. (The Cherokee run up a mountain not by going straight up, but by running sideways, putting your feet above shrubs so you get a good foothold.) In doing so, Little Tree showed remarkable presence of mind. He got away from the law and hid in the woods until the dogs, which had been sent by Granpa and Granma, found him.

Throughout this book, we find prejudice against the Indians. For a long time, there was prejudice against the Indians, just as there was prejudice against African-Americans. Even to-

day, out west some people can't say "Indian" without saying "lazy, good-for-nothing" in front of it. The law talk about "a damn Indian kid" when they see Little Tree.

## Chapter 10: Trading With a Christian

### What main event happens in this chapter?

In this chapter, the main event is that Little Tree gets cheated in a trade by a man who calls himself a Christian.

### What happens to Ol' Ringer?

Ol' Ringer is a dog that had helped to take care of the law officers who were after the still. After the excitement, Granpa and Granma sent the dogs out to find Little Tree, but Ol' Ringer, who is blind, apparently ran into a tree and is seriously wounded. Granpa and Little Tree and the dogs find Ol' Ringer, but he dies as they carry him home.

In this chapter, the readers should do some comparison and contrast to the man who cheats Little Tree. Ol' Ringer is much better than the "Christian." So is the storekeeper. In this chapter, Granpa talks about words. That also relates to the man who calls himself a Christian.

According to Granpa, "... ol' Ringer died like all good mountains hounds want to die: doing for their folks and in the woods" (77). Ol' Ringer shows a lot of faithfulness.

Although there is sadness in Ol' Ringer's death, Granpa points out the good part. For one thing, the sadness comes about because of the love they feel for Ol' Ringer and because of the faithfulness Ol' Ringer had shown. If Ol' Ringer had not gone hunting for Little Tree, perhaps they wouldn't care about them so much. Also, if you love someone, you will be sorry when that someone dies. The only way to get rid of that feeling of sadness is to not love anyone, but that is bad. Little Tree says,

... Granpa said everything you lost which you had loved give that feeling [of emptiness]. He said the only way round it was not to love anything, which was worse because you would feel empty all the time.  
(78)

Another thing is that when you remember someone you love, you remember only the good stuff and not the bad.

### **Why do we have the emphasis on language in this chapter?**

Granpa is wary of words. He knows that they can mislead people, as when red blackberries are called green blackberries. Also, Granpa knows that people can use words to lie, as we see with both the “Christian” and the politician.

### **How good a person is Mr. Jenkins, the storekeeper?**

Very good. He buys Granpa’s whiskey, and is kind to Little Tree. He always asks Little Tree to collect some wood chips for his stove. When he first asked Little Tree to do that, he offered Little Tree some candy, but Little Tree refused because picking up wood chips was easy work, so Mr. Jenkins always gave him a piece of candy that was about to go bad. Of course, we know that candy won’t spoil (the sugar sucks the moisture out of bacteria), so Mr. Jenkins was simply being kind to Little Tree. This shows once again that Little Tree is a naive narrator.

### **What do we learn from the scene with the politician?**

Politicians come in for some heavy criticism in this book. The politician has a chauffeur (public servants tend to have a lot of servants). His wife smokes ready-made cigarettes. The politician does not shake Granpa’s and Little Tree’s hands (they are Indians and don’t vote).

In addition, the politician is anti-Catholic and tells many lies about them, including that priests and nuns mate and when they have a child they feed it to the dogs. Later, Granpa talks to Little Tree. He doesn't worry about the mating habits of Catholics because he figures that's their business. In addition, he doesn't believe the politician about Catholics' feeding their children to the dogs because no mother, whether human or animal, would do that. Finally, Granpa saw a Catholic once, and he was a peaceable man, although Granpa figured he was drunk because his collar was twisted around in a funny way.

The politician is, of course, manipulating the voters with hatred—of Catholics. According to the politician, nothing will prevent the Catholics from putting the Pope in the White House unless the voters send the politician to Washington, D.C.

However, there are some inconsistencies in the politician's story. For example, he seems very worried about the Catholics and about Washington, D.C., but if you look at his campaign literature, he is smiling as if there's nothing to worry about.

### **What do we learn from the trade with the “Christian”?**

One thing we learn is not to be taken in by the words of other people. This man says he is a Christian, but of course he doesn't act like a Christian should act. The man says, “I'm a Christian” and he says that it's his “Christian duty” to trade with Little Tree (84). We shouldn't think that the book is anti-Christian; after all, it is not anti-Catholic.

Another thing we learn is that the man is taking candy from a baby. Little Tree has worked hard for his fifty cents, and he wants to buy a box of candy for Granma for Christmas, but he loses his money to the “Christian.”

### **Why didn't Granpa stop the trade?**

Granpa says,

Ye see, Little Tree, ain't no way of learning, except by letting ye do. Iff'n I had stopped ye from buying the calf, ye'd have always thought ye'd ought to had it. Iff'n I'd told ye to buy it, ye'd blame me fer the calf dying. Ye'll have to learn as ye go.

(87)

When Little Tree is asked what he learned from the trade, he answered, "I reckon I learned not to trade with Christians" (88). Fortunately, Granma restates what Little Tree has learned:

What ye mean, Little Tree, is that ye'll be likely to have caution at the next feller who tells you how good and what a fine feller he is. (88)

## Chapter 11: At the Crossroads Store

### What do we learn about Granpa and words in this chapter?

We learn once again that Granpa is suspicious of words. He is anti-intellectual and sometimes doesn't understand words. For example, in this chapter, Little Tree learns the word "abhor" and Granpa thinks that Little Tree has learned about a whore. Granpa tells Little Tree not to bother about learning that word.

### What do we learn about mountain life in this chapter?

We have a scene at the crossroads store, which is interesting. This story is set during the Depression, something that doesn't affect the family much (they are already poor). People who lived on farms during the Depression had it easier than many people in the city. Farmers at least could grow food to eat.

At the store, we learn about Old Man Barnett, who is a dentist of sorts. Unfortunately, poor people don't get much medical care, including dental care. However, Old Man Barnett can at least pull teeth—without anesthetic, it seems. He uses a hot wire, a nail, and a hammer. He calls pulling teeth "jumping" teeth—apparently he makes the tooth jump out of a person's mouth.

There is a little bit of humor here. After Little Tree watches an unsuccessful attempt at pulling a tooth, Little Tree thinks,

I made up my mind right then that I was not ever going to have a bad tooth. Or if I did, I wasn't going to tell Old Man Barnett about it. (92)

### **What do we learn from the incident with the little sharecropper girl?**

With any luck, students should learn something about the lives of poor people. The sharecroppers are taken advantage of, continually. They grow crops on a farmer's land, for which they get a half or a third of the crop. However, after harvest, they usually get next to nothing, except what they have eaten. Sharecroppers have a poverty-stricken life, and they have large families so that the children can help pick the cotton. (Also, children often died back then, so that is another reason to have large families: to help ensure that some children live to adulthood.)

The sharecroppers are Christians, and they get the Holy Ghost at meetings. This is a great pleasure to them.

The little girl is about Little Tree's age, and he shares a stick of candy with her. She licks quite a bit of the candy. Even though she is so little, she can pick 100 pounds of cotton a day. Her Pa can pick 500 pounds, if he works into the night. The little girl is barefoot and has bad teeth, and she wants to have a store-bought doll, which has been promised to her when times are better (which they probably won't be).

We see a little bit of charity in this chapter. Granma makes a pair of calfskin moccasins (with red beads) for the little girl. The little girl likes the moccasins, but her sharecropper father is too proud to accept charity—especially from an Indian. When he finds out that she got the moccasins from Little Tree, he cuts a switch and whips her with it, then he takes the moccasins back to Little Tree, saying,

We'uns don't take no charity ... from nobody ... and especially heathen savages! (97)

Granpa doesn't bear the sharecropper any ill will. The sharecropper's pride is "misplaced" (97), but pride is all the sharecropper has. He figures that the sharecropper knows that he can't afford nice things for his children, so he whips them so that they won't want nice things.

Once, Granpa saw a sharecropper who discovered two of his daughters looking at a Sears Roebuck catalog (97):

Granpa said that feller took a switch and whipped them young'uns 'till the blood run out of their legs. He said he watched, and the feller took the Sears Roebuck catalog and he went out behind the barn. He burned up the catalog, tore it all up first, like he hated that catalog. Granpa said then that the feller set down against the barn, where nobody could see him, and he cried. Granpa said he seen that and so he knowed.

Granpa takes the time to understand most folk (I personally don't think that all politicians are evil). Other people don't, and so they think that poor people are lazy.

Poor people can make mistakes, like other people. The sharecropper thinks that Indians are heathens, but Granpa and his family go to church.

## Chapter 12: A Dangerous Adventure

### What do we learn in this chapter?

The mountain is life giving, but there are also dangers. You can gather food from the mountain; however, beware of the rattlesnakes that live on the mountain.

### What is good about mountain life?

The mountain will give you food. The first part of this chapter is about gathering food. Little Tree, Granma, and Granpa pick Indian violets, from which Granma makes a tonic. They also gather evergreen needles in the winter, which Granma steeps in hot water for them to drink. In addition, they gather acorns, which Granma grinds up and makes into acorn fritters.

Occasionally, Granma will “accidentally” spill some sugar into the acorn meal, and then Little Tree gets an extra acorn fritter. Both Granpa and Little Tree like acorn fritters real well.

In addition, they gather dandelions for greens. The dandelions are mixed with other greens, such as nettles, which sting when you pick them, but which make good greens. Often, Granpa and Little Tree “failed to notice” (100) a nettle patch, but Granma was real good at finding them. Like other things, greens have their good and bad points:

Granpa said he had never knowed anything in life that, being pleasurable, didn't have a damn catch to it—somerheres. Which is right. (100)

We also learn a little about Cherokee philosophy/religion in this chapter. The Earth is a mother, called Mon'a'lah. The Earth brings to birth all life that is found on her. The Earth

also cleared away the deadwood as needed—for example, with a storm.

One thing that we can learn from Indians is their way of living with Nature. I personally am not willing to give up my computer, but I wish that we were closer to Nature, as are many Indians. For example:

The white farmers gathered out of their gardens in late summer, but the Indian gathers from early spring, when the first greens start growing, all through the summer and fall, gathering acorns and nuts. Granpa said the woods would feed you, if you lived with the woods, instead of tearing them up. (103)

Still, it does take work.

Little Tree is very good at gathering berries. We see that flatlanders can also be naive. When a flatlander sees Little Tree's berry-stained mouth, he thinks that Little Tree is ill.

The Indians are also what we call superstitious. They believe in bird signs, as did the ancient Greeks. Different birds have different meanings. For example, a red cardinal means that money will come to you.

Birds can also be funny. For example, they can overeat ripe cherries and become drunk.

### **What kind of fishing do Indians do?**

Indians never fish for sport; they fish for food (107):

Granpa said it was the silliest damn thing in the world to go around killing for sport.

My friend Harry Thomas, a Winnebago Indian who lived for many years on the Appalachian Trail, once killed a large fish by dropping a rock on it; he ate the fish.

Indians can hand fish, because they are patient.

### **What happens in the episode with the rattlesnake?**

We learn just how brave Granpa is and how much Granpa loves Little Tree and Granma loves Granpa. While Little Tree is hand fishing, a rattlesnake attempts to bite him. Granpa puts his hand between the rattlesnake and Little Tree's face, knowing that the rattlesnake will bite Little Tree's face if Granpa moves his hand. Granpa is willing to be bitten in the place of Little Tree.

After strangling the rattlesnake, Granpa says, "Helldamnfire!" and "We showed that son of a bitch, didn't we?" (110). But Little Tree admits that he himself didn't have anything to do with the showing.

Fortunately, Granma's knowledge is able to save Granpa's life. After a bad night, he is OK, but weak, in the morning.

At first, Little Tree blames himself for not being more alert, but Granma says that the accident was nobody's fault, not even the rattlesnake's:

She said we wasn't to place fault ner gain on anything that just happened. Which made me feel some better, but not much. (113)

Fortunately, Granpa is OK again soon.

## Chapter 13: The Farm in the Clearing

### What do we learn about Granpa's history?

When a rattlesnake bites Granpa, he becomes delirious in the night, and he remembers when he was a boy. We find out some facts about Granpa's boyhood in this chapter, and we learn that in 1867, Granpa was 9 years old.

In this chapter we learn about a farm in the clearing. Of course, in 1867, the Civil War has been over for just two years, and this chapter tells a story about some people who fought for the South and some people who fought for the North.

The farm in the clearing is hardscrabble. Working it is a man in a Johnny Reb uniform who has only one leg. His wife is worn out with poverty and work. They have two daughters, and there is a very old black man working with them. The black man is apparently an ex-slave who has stayed with the family who owned him.

As a Cherokee boy, Granpa wandered freely in the woods, and on one of his wanderings, he found the farm in the clearing. For a while, no one lived in the decrepit house, but after a while he noticed that someone was living there.

This family is so poor that the man and woman harness themselves to a plow and attempt to plow the field while the old black man tries to guide the plow. Obviously, this is hard work.

A number of Union soldiers see the people working in the field, watch them, and then leave. Later, the big Union patrol leader comes back and brings a poor, broken-down mule, which he drives into the field where the people are working. The patrol leader on one side of the field and Granpa on the

other side keep the mule from running away into the woods. The people working in the field don't notice them, and think that God sent them the mule, which of course they badly need.

What we are seeing here, of course, is charity. Some people are badly down on their luck, and a few other people try to help them. Granpa catches fish, and leaves them for the people to find. The Union soldier comes by and drops off a bag of seed corn. Eventually, the Union soldier starts working with the people in the clearing. He even brings a private, who plants apple trees around the plowed field.

However, *The Education of Little Tree* is anti-government, and the chapter ends with the Regulators taking over the farm. They ride in and put up a red flag. Perhaps the people in the field are squatters, or perhaps they haven't paid their taxes, but the Regulators are going to take over the farm.

The Union sergeant is shot when he gets between the one-legged man and the Regulators, and the one-legged man and the old black man are also killed.

The politicians say that there was an uprising at the farm, which fortunately the Regulators quelled. It's no wonder that Granpa distrusts the government and politicians. Some of this distrust probably stems in part because of Reconstruction and the carpetbaggers.

The people in the clearing, and the Union soldiers who helped that family loved the land, but the people who took over the farm loved money. The apple trees were plowed under because they wouldn't make much money. The sergeant died with a little earth in his hand. The skinny private deserted.

## Chapter 14: A Night on the Mountain

### **What ancestry is Granpa?**

Granpa is part Cherokee (on his mother's side) and part Scotch (on his father's side). However, Little Tree says that Granpa thinks Indian.

### **How do Indians give gifts?**

If an Indian wants for you to have a gift, he or she will simply leave it for you to find. Giving a gift is no big deal.

### **What happens to the big-city criminals?**

This book is set during the time of Prohibition. A couple of big-city criminals have the bright idea of having "hicks" such as Granpa make whiskey for them. They will set Granpa up with a large still and will buy his whiskey from him. However, the criminals are not respectful of the hicks, and they do not realize how independent Granpa is.

Much of this chapter shows that the woods can a dangerous place if you don't know what you're doing in them. Of course, Little Tree and Granpa understand the woods, but the criminals don't.

When Granpa hears that the criminals are looking for him, he immediately thinks they are "tax-law" (124), but Mr. Jenkins the storeowner says they aren't.

The two criminals' names are Mr. Slick and Mr. Chunk—nicknames, apparently.

Granma is suspicious of the criminals, and doesn't answer them, making them think she doesn't understand English. (Granpa is away, hiding the still better.) The family's suspi-

cion of the criminals is interesting, because the criminals' crime is their crime: bootlegging. However, the criminals deserve what they get, because of their disrespect for the family.

When the criminals arrive at the family's house, they say things like "Screw the old squaw" and make fun of Little Tree for saying "reckin." Granma lets a dog loose to warn Granpa that the criminals have arrived.

Little Tree, of course, is a naive narrator. He doesn't understand when the criminals make fun of them, but of course Granpa and Granma do, and they get revenge against the criminals.

The criminals offer Little Tree a dollar to take them to Granpa. Little Tree is intelligent, and so he doesn't take them directly to Granpa (and the still); instead, he leads them on the high trail. Along the way, the two men do such stupid stuff as rest in a bed of poison ivy and get lost in a hollow.

They also show some disrespect to Little Tree by asking if he remembers his Pa. He doesn't, so Mr. Slick says, "That would make you a bastard, wouldn't it, kid?" (126). Little Tree agrees, although he hasn't gotten to the B's in the dictionary and so doesn't know the word means.

Granpa is smart. When the two criminals go down in the hollow, Granpa yells, and the two criminals keep firing their guns until they are out of ammunition. Granpa and Little Tree eat, and they leave the two criminals in the hollow until morning.

The next morning, Granpa sends Little Tree to Granma to fix breakfast. The food for Little Tree and Granpa is to be put in a paper sack and the food for the criminals is to be put in a tow sack. Granpa also tells Little Tree to tell Granma what the criminals have said about Little Tree (that he's a bastard).

When Little Tree tells Granma what the criminals had said, Granma puts some root powders in the criminals' food that she never had put in food before. Little Tree doesn't know what she's doing (he's naive), but the readers learn that she has fixed the food so that it will give the men diarrhea (they end up wiping their bums with poison ivy leaves).

Finally, the two criminals leave, and they give the family's home a wide berth. Granpa says that Little Tree has earned his dollar, as the two criminals could have met him if they had wanted to, but apparently they are no longer interested in meeting him.

## Chapter 15: Willow John

### What is this chapter mostly about?

This chapter is mostly about Willow Tree, but it is in part about Granpa and nature. Granpa seems to be a little suspicious, but maybe not. He knows various “signs” for telling the best time to plant; however, Granpa also likes to fish, and so Granma thinks that some of the signs saying, don’t plant, may just be Granpa wanting to go fishing instead.

We learn a little about the Cherokee method of planting. In the area of the field that is level, Granpa and Little Tree use a mule and a plow; however, on the sides of the mountain, Granpa uses a Cherokee planting stick. It is simply a stick that you push into the ground; into the little hole that it makes, you drop a seed.

We learn a little about watermelons, too. It’s very hard to tell when a watermelon is ripe, and Granpa and Little Tree make quite a production out of the testing process. In evaluating a watermelon, you strike it and listen to the sound it makes:

- 1) think: green
- 2) thank: green but getting riper
- 3) thunk: good eating

As you can see, it’s two to one against finding a ripe watermelon; Granpa says that all life is two to one against. This watermelon turns out to be good eating.

According to the Cherokee, you don’t just have a birth-day—you have a birth-season. Little Tree’s birth-season is summer, which means that he celebrates his birthday all summer. During his birth-season, Little Tree—as is the Cherokee custom—is told of his birthplace, and of his father and mother (143).

On p. 144, we learn that Little Tree is now six years old. As always, Little Tree is naive. Part of the gift that was given to him was an understanding of Nature. Because of that understanding, Little Tree announces that he is no longer afraid of the dark in the hollows.

We always learn that Little Tree is now up to learning the B's in the dictionary, but that one of the pages has been torn out. Because of that, the family buys the dictionary from the library for 75 cents—a fortune to this family. We can guess why the page has been torn out—it is probably the page that defines the word “bastard.”

We also hear from Pine Billy again. Because it is watermelon season—and Pine Billy likes watermelon—he starts coming around more often. Little Tree knows that Pine Billy is not stuck up because he never mentions the money he won from the slogan-writing contest and from helping capture the big-city criminal. Of course, we can guess that nothing ever came of Pine Billy's money-making schemes.

Pine Billy is an interesting character. His particular sin is fornicating, but he still wants to go to heaven. Therefore, he decides to become a primitive Baptist. They believe that once you are saved, you will always be saved, even if you backslide into a little fornicating every once in a while.

*The Education of Little Tree* is not totally against religion, although it is satiric on the subject of religion. Later, we will see that the author of this book has respect for a Jewish man who goes by the name of Mr. Wine.

Granpa is a little suspicious of church, but Granma enjoys it, and Granpa enjoys seeing Granma in her Sunday dress. However, Granpa thinks that some people, if they aren't careful, can start worshipping the preacher instead of God.

**Write a short character analysis of Willow John.**

Glad you asked. Willow John is a lot like Granpa, but older. He is very tall, and he has been hurt in his life. Once, he left the mountain for three years to travel to the Nations—Oklahoma—but when he came back, he wouldn't talk about the Nations, except to say that there was no Nation. Apparently, he traveled to the Cherokee reservation in Oklahoma, but found only misery and poverty.

Willow Tree has eyes like another famous Indian—the Apache Geronimo. Both have eyes that have seen an awful lot of misery.

Little Tree is good for Willow John because Little Tree can make him forget some of his misery. Willow John gives Little Tree a present in the Indian way. He simply leaves the gift—a knife—where Little Tree can find it. Therefore, Little Tree gives Willow John a gift in the Indian way. He puts a nickel and a big bullfrog in Willow John's pocket at church. When the preacher says "Lord" (148), the bullfrog makes a noise and most people think something supernatural is going on, but Willow John first laughs, then cries—for a long time.

Willow John is an original—he doesn't bow his head for prayer, he doesn't take off his hat in church, and he ignores the collection plate. Also, he ignores the preacher when the preacher preaches about him.

## Chapter 16: Church-going

### What is the main theme of this chapter?

The main theme of this chapter is religion. Often, Forrest Carter satirizes a certain kind of religion, as he does here. In this chapter, a certain kind of Christianity is criticized.

Granpa criticizes preachers as being stuck-up sometimes, as if they—and not God—decided who gets into Heaven. At the small church the family attend are many kinds of Protestants. Because the area is so sparsely populated, not every denomination can have its own church, so they all meet together in one church. This causes some disputes, as you can imagine. Some people believe in baptism by sprinkling, while others believe in total immersion. Some think you should call the preacher “Reverend,” while others think you should not. Both sides use the Bible to prove that their way is the best way, and that anyone who does it the other way is in danger of damnation.

Granpa’s opinion is right, I think. He says that if God is as “narra-headed” (153) as these people make Him out to be, then Heaven won’t be worth going to. Granpa in general doesn’t worry about such matters.

The preacher does not seem to be very good. There is only one rich family in the parish—the family that puts a dollar in the collection plate every Sunday—and the preacher cozies up to that rich family. He opens the car door for them, and when he preaches and makes a point, he says, “Ain’t that right, Mr. Johnson?” (154). Of course, it doesn’t matter whether Mr. Johnson thinks it is right; it matters only whether God thinks it is right.

Granpa is naive when it comes to church. He hears the preacher carry on about the Pharisees and the Philistines, and

Granpa thinks they are alive. He doesn't like it when the preacher says that Granpa knows what the Pharisees are up to—as if Granpa has had dealings with the Pharisees. This causes Granpa to look hard at the preacher.

There are some good things and some bad things about the church. The public confession of sins is a bad thing. Sometimes a person will confess that he has done something bad to a feller, but the feller didn't know anything about it previous to hearing it in church. This causes hard feelings. Once a woman stands out and says that she is guilty of fornicating, and a man yells "Tell it all" (156). (The man never publicly confesses his sins.) The woman identifies the men she has fornicated with—one man leaves, and a couple of other men (perhaps her husband and his brother) quietly follow him. (After the public confession of sins, sometimes people get shot.) After the woman has done confessing her sins publicly, the men shun her (Granpa says that a man would have to be drunk to fornicate with her after today), but the women congratulate her.

A good thing about the church is charity. At the church people publicly identify other people who need help. Everybody pitches in to help these people; for example, sometimes a sharecropper may need help. Often, vegetables (in summer) or meat (in winter) are brought. Once, Granpa made a hickory limb chair and gave it to a family (157-158)—and he took the man aside to explain how to make the chair.

According to Granpa,

Granpa said that if you showed a feller how to do, it was a lot better than giving him something. He said if you learnt a man to make for hisself, then he would be all right; but if you just give him something and didn't learn him anything, then you would be continually giving to the man the rest of your natural life.

Granpa said you would be doing the man a disservice, for if he became dependent on you, you taken away his character and had stole it from him. (158)

Granpa does teach Little Tree about Moses, but the account is kind of confused—like Moses didn't know where he was going in the desert for those 40 years. Like Little Tree writes, he and Granpa didn't know much about the Bible.

## Chapter 17: Mr. Wine

### Is this book anti-religious?

No, it is not, as we can see from Mr. Wine. Mr. Wine is a very sympathetic character, and he is Jewish. We know that in a few ways. For one, “He had a little round cap that set on the back of his head” (161). Also, we learn that “Wine” is not his whole name. His name begins with “Wine” (162), but there is a whole lot more to it than that. Like some Indian names, Mr. Wine’s real name is so long and complicated that it makes sense sometimes to use a shorter version.

Mr. Wine is a good human being and grateful for life. He always brings Little Tree a present—usually an apple or an orange—but he always pretends to forget that he has a present. Fortunately, Little Tree reminds him when Mr. Wine says that there is something which he should remember but which he can’t remember.

Mr. Wine is also an educator. He teaches Little Tree how to tell time, and he teaches Little Tree math. He also passes on his ideas about money. For example, Mr. Wine gives Little Tree a pencil (163), and teaches him the right way to sharpen it—the thrifty way, which is not a miserly (stingy) way. There is a right way to treat money and possessions. You should treat them thriftily, not miserly. If you treat money thriftily, then you don’t waste your money, but you do spend your money for the things you ought to spend it on. If you treat your money miserly, then you won’t spend it on the things you should.

According to Mr. Wine, the way you treat money can affect your entire life, according to Little Tree’s summation of Mr. Wine’s ideas about money (164):

“If you are loose with your money, then you would get loose with your time, loose with your thinking and practical everything else. If a whole people got loose, then politicians seen they could get control. They would take over loose people and before long you had a dictator. Mr. Wine said no thrifty people was ever taken in by a dictator.”

Mr. Wine does teach Little Tree about math, but he says that some things are more important than math. According to Mr. Wine, education can be divided up into two parts: technical and valuing (164-165). The technical helps you move ahead in life, but the valuing part is more important. On p. 165, we read:

Mr. Wine said that if you learnt to place a value on being honest and thrifty, on doing your best, and on caring for folks; this was more important than anything. He said that if you was not taught these values, then no matter how modern you got about the technical part, you was not going to get anywheres atall.

Mr. Wine is good at charity. He brings a very nice coat—in Little Tree’s size—and says that he had made it for a relative, but that he had made it too small. According to Mr. Wine, “it was a sin to throw something away that could be used by somebody” (167). Fortunately, Little Tree volunteers to wear the coat.

Of course, maybe this isn’t charity, but instead it is a gift. On the other hand, a gift can be a good kind of charity.

One thing to notice is that this book is multicultural. Not only do we learn from the culture of the Cherokee Indians, but also we (and the Cherokee Indians) learn from the culture of the Jews.

Mr. Wine doesn't have any family here, but he says his prayers at the same time his family overseas say their prayers. He and his family light a candle for prayers. That way, they are together. One night while Mr. Wine is saying his prayers, Little Tree hears him thank God for a little boy that has brought him such happiness. He means Little Tree, of course, but Little Tree thinks Mr. Wine is referring to one of his relatives.

This is the last time Little Tree sees Mr. Wine, who is very old. Little Tree shouts his thanks for the coat as Mr. Wine leaves, but Mr. Wine doesn't hear him.

## Chapter 18: Down from the Mountain

### What happens in this chapter?

The main thing that happens in this chapter is that Little Tree is taken from his family and sent to an orphanage. This is foreshadowed by the change of seasons. Summer is over, and winter is coming on. The good times are over, and bad times are coming on. (But in Nature, even winter serves a purpose.)

During fall, many things work hard—those things that do not want to die during the winter. During this time, the blue jays are hard at work and not playing, and Granpa and Little Tree are busy chopping wood for the winter. On the other hand, butterflies know that they will die, and they take it easy. According to Granpa, the butterfly

was wiser than a lot of people. He didn't fret about it. He knew he had served his purpose, and now his purpose was to die. (171)

The people who serve Granpa with the law order are what Little Tree calls “politicians” (171). Certainly, they are government bureaucrats. The law order says that the law will send Little Tree to an orphanage, unless the family contests the order within three days. The bureaucrats discount Mr. Wine, who understands mountain people much better than they do.

Among the things written in the law order is a statement that Granpa has a “bad reputation” (172). Of course, Granpa is a whiskey bootlegger, and we learn later that he spent time in jail once for that crime.

Much of what is said in the law order is false. For example, it says that Granpa and Granma are selfish and are using Little Tree for their own purposes—to make their retirement easier.

Of course, we know that there is real love in the family, and we remember the time Granpa was bitten by the rattlesnake and saved Little Tree's life.

Little Tree reacts by talking a lot and rocking fast in his rocking chair. He knows that the paper is incorrect.

Granpa needs further information and so sets off to town to see Mr. Wine. Unfortunately, Mr. Wine has died. He lived above a feed store, and the fat man who runs the feed store calls Mr. Wine "a damn Jew" (175).

Mr. Wine was thrifty to the end. He knew that he was going to die, and he left tags on all his possessions, telling who would get what. He even left a tag around his body, saying where his body should be shipped. Mr. Wine also left enough money for the shipment of his body—he knew the exact amount, and he left the exact amount. In addition, he leaves some things for Wales—that is, Granpa.

Granpa defends Mr. Wine. The fat man who runs the feed store runs Mr. Wine down, but Granpa makes the point that Mr. Wine always paid his obligations.

When Mr. Wine died, there was a candle—perhaps of religious significance—burning by his side, so perhaps in a way he wasn't alone when he died. On p. 169, re read,

Mr. Wine said all his folks was acrost the big water. He said there was not but one way he could be with them. He said he only lit the candle at certain times, and they lit a candle at the same time, and that they was together when they did this because their thoughts was together. Which sounds reasonable.

Since Mr. Wine has died, Granpa can't get advice from him, so he goes to a lawyer. The lawyer is honest, and says that he

could take Granpa's money, but it wouldn't help. Government bureaucrats don't understand mountain people. Granpa leaves a dollar behind when he leaves.

Mr. Wine knows the family well. For Granma, he leaves sewing supplies. For Granpa, he leaves tools. For Little Tree, he leaves an apple. And for Willow John, he leaves a candle.

Little Tree cries that night, but the family makes the most of the next three days. Granma spills sugar almost every time she cooks for the next three days, and Granma went everywhere with Granpa and Little Tree (178). Little Tree buys candy for Granma and Granpa, hiding it for them where they will find it after he leaves.

Granma also tells Little Tree to remember the Dog Star (179). Whenever Little Tree looks at it, he should remember that Granpa and Granma are also looking at it. (Little Tree also wants Willow John to look at the Dog Star.) This is similar to Mr. Wine's candle. (We also see this in the movie *An American Tail*.)

Granma also wants Little Tree to know that the Cherokees married his parents—so we learn that Little Tree is *not* a bastard (180).

At the bus station, the woman government bureaucrat ties a tag on Little Tree; the tag tells where Little Tree is going, just like Mr. Wine's tag told where his body should be sent. It's like Little Tree is dead.

As Little Tree goes away, he looks back at Granpa and notices that Granpa looks old (182).

## Chapter 19: The Dog Star

### What happens in this chapter?

In this chapter, we learn about Little Tree's life in the orphanage. Little Tree rides the bus to the orphanage, which is run by a minister. As always, organized religion comes under criticism in this book (as does government). The Reverend who runs the orphanage is not a good man. The Reverend expects Little Tree to be silent unless he is asked a question, and the Reverend criticizes Little Tree when he does not obey his orders. In addition, the Reverend calls Little Tree a bastard, although we know that his parents were married in a Cherokee ceremony. According to the Reverend, what the Cherokees did doesn't count (185). Also, the Reverend interprets the Bible as saying that bastards can't be saved. Therefore, Little Tree doesn't have to go to church, but if he does, he must be silent. In addition, although times are hard, the Reverend does not sharpen his pencil in a thrifty way.

### Who is Wilburn?

Wilburn is an orphan. We can contrast the way Wilburn is brought up to the way Little Tree has been brought up. ("Wilburn" is an interesting name—Wilburn may burn in hell, or he may burn down the orphanage someday.) Wilburn has a clubfoot. Because of it, perhaps, Wilburn will not be adopted (handicapped children find it harder to be adopted). Wilburn doesn't play with the other children; Wilburn can't run, and his personality may prevent him from becoming friends with most other children. However, he is Little Tree's friend.

Little Tree's religion is different from Christianity. There is a sense of communion with and communicating with nature. Little Tree believes that trees communicate with each other. When he arrives at the orphanage, he believes that the trees

have been told that he was coming. Wilburn doesn't know that Little Tree talks to the trees.

Wilburn desperately wants to be adopted, although he says that he doesn't care about being adopted. When visitors arrive to look at and possibly adopt the children, Wilburn hides his clubfoot behind his other foot. After the visitors reject him, Wilburn pees on his bed (188). At night, Wilburn cries.

Wilburn does have goals in life. When he grows up, he wants to "rob banks and orphanages" (189). On the other hand, Little Tree wants to be an Indian.

### **What role does the Dog Star play in this chapter?**

Little Tree watches the Dog Star at night, because he knows that Granpa and Granma are also watching the Dog Star. Little Tree believes that the Dog Star can communicate messages between himself and Granpa and Granma. He believes that Granpa and Granma use the Dog Star to tell him what is happening to them, and he uses the Dog Star to send them the message that he wants to go home. Little Tree also knows that Willow John is watching the Dog Star.

### **Why does Little Tree get beaten?**

Little Tree is pretty smart. At the school, he already knows the math that is being taught. However, once Little Tree is beaten at the orphanage for telling the truth. His teacher holds up a picture of deer and asks what is happening in the picture. She thinks the correct answer is that the deer are hurrying to get across the cold creek. However, Little Tree notices that the bucks are jumping the does, and he knows by the "bushes and trees that it was the time of the year when they done their mating" (190). This angers the woman and she sends him to the Reverend, who beats Little Tree badly,

making his back bloody and scarring it. The Reverend tries to make Little Tree cry out, but he refuses.

We learn about the Indian way of bearing pain (192). The Cherokee believe that there is a spirit mind and a body mind. The body mind feels the pain of the body, but the spirit mind is concerned only with things with things of the spirit. When in pain, the Indian uses his or her spirit mind.

Once, the switch knocks Little Tree off his feet, but he gets up again because “Granpa said if ye could stay on yer feet, more than likely, ye would be all right” (192).

After the beating, every evening Little Tree tells Granpa and Granma and Willow John—through the Dog Star—that he wants to come home. Once, he sees a tall figure that he thinks is Granpa, but the figure doesn’t turn toward him when he yells “Granpa!” (193). Later we learn that the figure is Willow John.

### **What is Christmas like at the orphanage?**

Poor. For one thing, visitors bring in a Christmas tree, but Little Tree thinks that there is no reason to kill this living tree. A woman gives Little Tree an orange, and makes him eat it. Later, she apparently goes to get him another orange, but she never returns. Little Tree is sorry that she made him eat the orange because he could have traded a piece of the orange to Wilburn for a piece of his apple—Little Tree likes apples. The gifts the children receive aren’t very good. Little Tree’s toy is broken. It is supposed to make a sound like a lion, but after Little Tree fixes the broken string he thinks it sounds more like a bullfrog.

**How does Little Tree go home again?**

Granpa visits that Christmas. He hugs Little Tree, then leaves him. Little Tree follows him to the bus stop and says that he wants to go home. Granpa takes him home with him on the bus. There is more to the story that we find out about in the next chapter.

## Chapter 20: Home Again

### What is the homecoming like?

It is a time of joy. Little Tree and Granpa throw their shoes back at civilization and feel free after having rejected civilization. The dogs are ecstatic to see Little Tree again. And they have such a good time that when they see Granma, they fall into the creek.

Little Tree spends some time in his secret place—a long time. This restores his spirit:

Through that short winter day, I lay in my secret place. And my spirit didn't hurt anymore. I was washed clean by the feeling song of the wind and the trees and the spring branch and the birds. (203)

In this chapter, we learn the story of Little Tree's return. As Granpa and Granma watched the Dog Star, they began to have "bad feelings" (204). Then Willow John showed up, stayed the night, and then disappeared (he was on his way to the orphanage). At church, they find a message belt from Willow John saying that he was fine and would be back soon. What happened is that Willow John went to the orphanage, followed the Reverend for two days, then spoke to him and said that Little Tree must be returned to the mountain. This so unnerved the Reverend that he agreed. When Granpa came to pick up Little Tree, he wasn't sure if Little Tree wanted to return to the mountain, so he let Little Tree decide. Fortunately, Little Tree followed Granpa to the bus stop.

We never hear about Wilburn again. Granma sends him a deer shirt, and Granpa wants to send him a long knife, but Little Tree stops him, saying that Wilburn would probably stab the Reverend with it (205).

## Chapter 21: The Passing Song

### What happens in this chapter?

In this chapter, several major characters die: Granpa, Granma, Willow John, and a couple of hounds: Blue Boy and Little Red.

The winter is difficult, and the family has to work hard to chop enough wood to get warm. After all, Granpa is quite old now. However, Granpa points out that an occasional hard winter is necessary:

Granpa said hard winters was necessary occasional. It was nature's way of cleaning things up and making things grow better. The ice broke off the weak limbs of the trees, so only the strong ones come through. It cleaned out the soft acorns and chinkapins, chestnuts and walnuts, and made for a hardier food crop in the mountains. (206)

It is the depth of the Great Depression, and according to Mr. Jenkins, everything is down except for the whiskey trade. He believes that "a feller had to drink more whiskey to fergit how bad off he was" (206).

During this summer, Little Tree becomes seven years old. At this time, he is given the marriage stick of his parents. Because they died young, there aren't many notches on the stick. The Cherokees would make a notch to remember an important time; the deeper the notch, the happier the event.

Willow John is the first to die. One time, he doesn't show up for church, so Granpa and Little Tree go off to find him. They find him in his lodge, dying. He asks to be taken outdoors (it is cold), where he sings his passing song to announce to the spirits that he is coming.

This anecdote may shed light on why Willow John wishes to die outside: Navy nurse Steven H. Brant once cared for a dying Native American who worried that his soul would not be able to rise to the afterlife unless he died in the open air. As you would expect, dying in an air-conditioned hospital with the windows shut tight terrified him. However, as the Native American was taking his last few breaths, Mr. Brant and some other nurses quickly pushed his wheeled bed down the hallway and outside in the open air. Mr. Brant says about the Native American, “He died in peace, knowing that his spirit would be released.”<sup>2</sup>

Willow John also tells Granpa and Little Tree that he wants to be buried under an old fir-pine so that it can get nourishment from his body and so live longer. Stones are heaped over his corpse so that the tree—and not the coons—will get the food.

The Cherokee believe in immortality. When you die, you are reincarnated. They also believe in karma. The way that you live this life will determine the kind of life you live next time. One thing that is constant in the deaths of Willow John, Granpa, and Granma is that all of them believe that their next life will be better.

When Willow John dies, he tells Granpa that he will wait for Granpa and Granma, and Granpa says that they will come (209). Then Willow John sings his death song.

For two more years, Little Tree, Granpa, and Granma live together. Then Granpa slips and falls on the high trail. Following his fall, Granpa is delirious for part of the time—which Little Tree says is being in his spirit mind. Little Tree

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Linda Gambée Henry and James Douglas Henry, *The Soul of the Caring Nurse*, p. 15.

knows that Granpa will die, so he goes to Mr. Jenkins for help. Mr. Jenkins is too old and ill to walk, so he sends his son with Little Tree. They build Granpa's coffin and carry him to his secret place on the high trail to bury him. In Granpa's later years, Little Tree was doing much of the work, but he never said anything because he knew that Granpa wanted to feel useful (211). Pine Billy, being artistic, cries quite a lot when Granpa dies.

Granma is next to die. Little Tree comes back home at the end of the day and realizes that she has died. She is wearing her good dress, and she has left a note for Little Tree:

Little Tree, I must go. Like you feel the trees, feel for us when you are listening. We will wait for you. Next time will be better. All is well. Granma. (214)

Pine Billy helps at her funeral. Little Tree sees Granpa and Granma's marriage stick—at the end of the stick are deep notches that they made for the happiness that Little Tree had brought them (214).

Little Tree takes off for the Nations, working at farms whenever he can—and whenever they allow him to keep his hounds with him. However, when Little Tree reaches the Nations, he finds that there is no Nation.

Finally, the two hounds die—Blue Boy last of all. Little Tree finds a mountain (more like a hill) for him to die at. The book ends with Little Tree saying that with Blue Boy's "nose sense, I figgered more than likely Blue Boy was already halfway to the mountains. He'd have no trouble atall catching up with Granpa" (216).

So the book ends with a mention of immortality. All the dead characters are together in immortality.

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## Paper Topics

- Multiculturalists believe in examining other cultures for what we can learn from them. What can we learn from the Cherokee culture, as depicted in *The Education of Little Tree*?
- According to Mr. Wine, education can be divided up into two parts: technical, and valuing (164-165). The technical helps you move ahead in life, but the valuing part is more important. What are the values that Little Tree is taught as he grows up?
- Discuss the theme of language in *The Education of Little Tree*.
- Discuss the theme of education in *The Education of Little Tree*.
- Discuss the theme of religion in *The Education of Little Tree*.
- Discuss the theme of government in *The Education of Little Tree*.

## Appendix: Short Reaction Memos

The questions in this short guide can be used in discussions; however, they can also be used for short reaction memos. For example, I do this at Ohio University. See below for the assignment and sample short reaction memos.

### *How Do I Complete the Reaction Memo Assignments?*

During the quarter, you will have to write a series of short memos in which you write about the readings you have been assigned.

Each memo should be at least 250 words, not counting long quotations from the work of literature. Include a word count for each memo, although that is not normally part of the memo format.

Following the memo heading (To, From, Re, Date, Words), write the question you are answering and the part of the book that the question applies to.

You may answer one question or more than one question. I will supply you with a list of questions that you may answer

Note that a Works Cited list is needed if you use quotations.

For examples from my Great Books courses at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, see the following pages.

**To:** David Bruce  
**From:** Jane Student  
**Re:** *Odyssey*, Book 12 Reaction Memo  
**Date:** Put Today's Date Here  
**Words:** 323

### ***Odyssey*, Book 12: Is Odysseus a bad leader?**

This is an important question in the *Odyssey*. After all, Odysseus leads 12 ships and many men to Troy, but the ships are all destroyed and all of his men die and he returns home to Ithaca alone. Who is responsible for the deaths of Odysseus' men? Is Odysseus responsible for their deaths, or do the men bear some responsibility for their own deaths? Many readers prefer Odysseus, the great individualist, to Aeneas, the man who founds the Roman people, but then they realize that all of Odysseus' men died, while Aeneas succeeded in bringing many Trojans to Italy. When readers think of that, they begin to have a greater respect for Aeneas.

From the beginning of the *Odyssey*, this has been an issue. The bard says that the men perished because of the "recklessness of their own ways" (1.8). However, we notice that Odysseus is asleep at odd times. In Book 10, Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag in which the contrary winds have been tied up. This allows Odysseus to sail to Ithaca safely. However, they reach the island and see smoke rising from the fires, Odysseus goes to sleep and his men open the bag, letting the contrary winds escape, and the ship is blown back to King Aeolus' island. Similarly, in Book 12, on the island of the Sun-god, Odysseus is asleep when his men sacrifice the Sun-god's cattle.

It does seem that Odysseus does not bear the blame for his men's death. In many cases, they do perish through their own stupidity. In other cases, of course, they die during war or during adventures, but in those times, Odysseus was with them, and he could have died, too.

One other thing to think about is that Odysseus is telling his own story. Could he be lying? After all, some of the adventures he relates are pretty incredible. (Probably not. The gods vouch for some of what he says.)

#### Works Cited

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Books, 1996.

**To:** David Bruce  
**From:** Jane Student  
**Re:** *Inferno*, Canto 1 Reaction Memo  
**Date:** Put Today's Date Here  
**Words:** 263

### ***Inferno*, Canto 1**

#### • What do you need to be a member of the Afterlife in Dante's *Inferno*?

To be a member of the afterlife in Hell, you must meet a number of criteria:

- 1) You must be dead.
- 2) You must be an unrepentant sinner.
- 3) You must be a dead, unrepentant sinner by 1300.

Of course, only dead people—with a few exceptions such as Dante the Pilgrim—can be found in the *Inferno*.

Only unrepentant sinners can be found in the *Inferno*. Everyone has sinned, but sinners who repented their sins are found in Purgatory or Paradise, not in the *Inferno*.

Dante set his *Divine Comedy* in 1300, so the characters who appear in it are dead in 1300.

### ***Inferno*, Canto 1**

#### • What does it mean to repent?

A sinner who repents regrets having committed the sin. The repentant sinner vows not to commit the sin again, and he or she does his or her best not to commit the sin again.

***Inferno*, Canto 1**

- What is the geography of Hell? In *The Divine Comedy*, where is Hell located?

Hell is located straight down. We will find out later that when Lucifer was thrown out of Paradise, he fell to the Earth, ending up at the center of the Earth. The center of the Earth is the lowest part of Hell. On the other side of the earth away from the spot that Lucifer hit the Earth is the Mountain of Purgatory. Lucifer created the Mountain of Purgatory when he hit the Earth.

**To:** David Bruce  
**From:** Jane Student  
**Re:** *Candide*, Ch. 26-30  
**Date:** Today's Date  
**Words:** 368

**Ch. 30: Write a brief character analysis of the old man and his family.**

When Candide and his friends meet the old man, the old man is “sitting in front of his door beneath an arbor of orange trees, enjoying the fresh air” (119). The old man basically ignores politics that he cannot influence. Some people have recently been killed in Constantinople, and the old man does not even know their names. However, the old man does enjoy some material things, including good food, and he enjoys hospitality.

The old man invites Candide and his friends to enjoy some refreshments inside his house. They are served with “several kinds of fruit-favored drinks” and “boiled cream with pieces of candied citron in it, oranges, lemons, limes, pineapples, pistachio nuts, and mocha coffee” (119). The old man and his family have an abundance of food, but although Candide wonders if the old man has an enormous farm, the old man tells him, “I have only twenty acres of land, which my children and I cultivate. Our work keeps us free of three great evils: boredom, vice, and poverty” (119).

From this brief encounter, we learn several things:

- The old man and his family are content—even happy.
- The old man and his family ignore the wars and murders and crimes that happen elsewhere.
- The old man and his family have enough. They work hard on their little farm, and they have plenty of food and good things to eat.

- The old man and his family have only 20 acres, but 20 acres are enough.

Candide and his friends decide to emulate the old man and his family. Each of them begins to work hard on their little farm. Cunegonde learns to make pastry, Paquette begins to embroider, and the old woman does the laundry and repairs the linen. Brother Giroflée becomes a carpenter, and Candide and the others grow “abundant crops” (120). At the end of the short novel, the group of friends seem to have come the closest they can to happiness in a world filled with evil, but it does take an effort on their part. As Candide says in the short novel’s last words, “... we must cultivate our garden” (120).

#### Works Cited

Voltaire. *Candide*. Trans. Lowell Bair. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

**To:** David Bruce  
**From:** Jane Student  
**Re:** *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*,  
 Ch. 1-4 Reaction Memo  
**Date:** Put Today's Date Here  
**Words:**286

### **CHAPTER 3: "KNIGHTS OF THE TABLE ROUND"**

**• What hints do we have of the relationship between Queen Guenever and Sir Launcelot?**

Some hanky-panky is going on between Sir Launcelot and King Arthur's wife, Queen Guenever. Some six or eight prisoners address her, and they tell her that they have been captured by Sir Kay the Seneschal. Immediately, surprise and astonishment are felt by everybody present. The queen looks disappointed because she had hoped that the prisoners were captured by Sir Launcelot.

As it turns out, they were. Sir Launcelot first rescued Sir Kay from some attackers, then he took Sir Kay's armor and horse and captured more knights. All of these prisoners were actually captured by Sir Launcelot, not by Sir Kay at all.

Two passages let us know that something is going on between Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenever:

1. The first is subtle; she looks disappointed when Sir Kay says that he captured the knights: "Surprise and astonishment flashed from face to face all over the house; the queen's gratified smile faded out at the name of Sir Kay, and she looked disappointed ..." (503).

2. The other is much more overt and occurs after Guenever learns that the knight who really captured the prisoners was

Sir Launcelot: “Well, it was touching to see the queen blush and smile, and look embarrassed and happy, and fling furtive glances at Sir Launcelot that would have got him shot in Arkansas, to a dead certainty” (503).

#### Works Cited

Twain, Mark. *Four Complete Novels*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1982.

## About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy—me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine’s brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka “The Joker,” decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name—David—ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn’t been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don’t often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for “sounds like” and “two words,” then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn’t let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor’s degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a master’s degree in English and a master’s degree in Philosophy. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled “Wise Up!” for *The Athens News* and I am an English instructor at Ohio U.

### Shameless Commerce

Visit David Bruce’s storefront at

<http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=552168>

or

<http://stores.lulu.com/bruceb>

By the way, this storefront offers free downloads of collections of my students’ autobiographical essays. For example, one such collection is titled *Love and Friendship: Stories About Growing Up*.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)