

***Native Son* by Richard Wright Novel Questions**

The following questions/comments for discussion should be answered completely. Where possible, page references are given in parentheses. Prepare these before the class when each section of the book is due.

PART I. FEAR

1. What effect does Wright create with his opening scene: a family (mother, daughter, two sons) in one room, especially with the women dressing? How does he add or enhance the effect by adding the rat? (7-12)
2. They felt that it was much easier and safer to rob their own people, for they knew that white policemen never really searched diligently for Negroes who committed crimes against other Negroes" (17). What's the real point shown here? Does a similar attitude exist today? Why do so many young black men kill each other?
3. Bigger's dream is to fly planes (19-20). Is Wright using this dream in a symbolic way? Explain.
4. Comment on the scene on pages 21-23 in which they "play white".
5. The scene in the theatre on pages 32-36 was deleted from earlier, censored versions of *Native Son*. Why does Wright include the scene?
6. What may account for the difference in the perception that poor whites treat blacks worse than rich whites do?
7. Why do Doc, G.H, and Jack keep laughing while Bigger abuses Gus? (40-41)
8. Comment on Bigger's thoughts ~ "He was going among white people so he would take his knife and his gun; it would make him feel that he was the equal of them, give him a sense of completeness" (44).
9. How would you feel if you were Bigger, about to start this job--\$5.00 a week for himself? He barely has a quarter a day now. Twenty dollars will go to his mom to pay rent.
10. Discuss how Bigger feels after meeting Jan and he and Mary start to close in on him (75-79).
11. Was Mary's death an accident or murder? Does Bigger act "smart" in how he conceals the crime? How else could he have gotten out of it?
12. In what way was Mary responsible for her own death?

PART II. FLIGHT

13. Peggy comes down to check on the fire saying it got very hot last night but was low this morning (111) This is a great example of suspense. Explain how.
14. At this point in the book, how do you feel about Bigger? Hate him? Sympathize? Want to protect him? Want him to get caught? Explain.
15. Comment on the treatment Bessie receives from Bigger. Is what he does to Bessie worse than what he does to Mary? Why? Will he be tried for his crimes against Bessie? Why or why not?

PART III. FATE

16. (277) "In all of his life these two murders were the most meaningful things that had ever happened to him. He was living, truly and deeply, no matter what others might think, looking at him with their blind eyes." Explain what Wright means.
17. Are criminals born or do they develop?
18. React to the treatment Bigger and his case receive in the press. Fair? Unprejudiced?
19. Why is Bigger smart to pin it all on Jan?
20. It is assumed Bigger raped Mary. Why?
21. React to the preacher's attempts to bring Bigger to God. Why does he fail?
22. Why does Mr. Max choose the defense that he does? What are his goals?
23. Does it appear that "they" hate Communists more than they hate Negroes? Explain
24. How does Mr. Max try to implicate Mr. Dalton as a contributor to Bigger's crime?
25. Does Bigger receive a fair trial? Explain.
26. Does the book end like you thought it would? How might it have realistically ended differently?

27. According to Wright, who's to blame most for Bigger's crimes? Why? (Read "How 'Bigger' Was Born")
28. Wright has divided his novel into three books—Fear, Flight, and Fate. What is the central idea of each book? Is the novel's structure effective in conveying Wright's theme? Explain