

*Black Boy* (Richard Wright)  
Chapters 9 and 10 Discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Per. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Richard's friend, Griggs, says, "...For God's sake, learn how to live in the South!" (183) What does life look like for an African-American man in the 1920s? What specific actions would this entail? Why hasn't Richard learned this, yet? (See Richard's reflection on his life at the bottom of page 183 for some insight.)
2. Describe the dilemma that Reynolds and Pease use to trap Richard into quitting his job at the optical company. Mr. Crane, a Northerner, tries to treat Richard with respect. Why won't this work in the South, as seen with the episode with Reynolds and Pease?
3. Please respond to this passage on pages 196 and 197. Richard is working as a "hallboy" in a hotel, mopping halls at night. He says,

All the boys were Negroes and I was happy; at least I could talk, joke, laugh, sing, say what I pleased. I began to marvel at how smoothly the black boys acted out the roles that the white race had mapped out for them. Most of them were not conscious of living a special, separate, stunted way of life. Yet I know that in some period of their growing up—a period that they had no doubt forgotten—there had been developed in them a delicate, sensitive controlling mechanism that shut off their minds and emotions from all that the white race had said was taboo. Although they lived in an American where in theory there existed equality of opportunity, they knew unerringly what to aspire to and what not to aspire to.

Richard seems critical of his friends, peers, co-workers. How so? What's his objection to them, their behavior, or their attitudes?

4. Chapter 10 seems to center on Richard's attitude toward crime, especially stealing. "My objections to stealing were not moral. I did not approve of it because I knew that, in the long run, it was futile, that it was not an effective way to alter one's relationship to one's environment?" (200) What does Richard mean by this?

5. On page 201 Richard says, "A new anxiety was created in me by my desire to leave quickly. I had now seen at close quarters the haughty white men who made the laws; I had seen how they acted, how they regarded black people, how they regarded me; and I no longer felt bound by the laws which white and black were supposed to obey in common. I was outside those laws; the white people had told me so. Now when I thought of ways to escape from my environment I no longer felt the inner restraint that would have made stealing impossible, and this new freedom made me lonely and afraid."

What is Richard's attitude toward the law and toward stealing? Why is this his attitude? Why would this make him lonely and afraid?

6. On page 205 Richard says, "Crime means suffering." On 207 he says, "In that moment I understood the pain that accompanied crime and I hoped that I would never have to feel it again. I never did feel it again, for I never stole again; and what kept me from it was the knowledge that, for me, crime carried its own punishment."
- What does he mean? What is the punishment?