

*The Bean Trees* Discussion Questions Ch. 4-8

1. In chapter four, the narrator says this about Angel, “he knew the power of mothers and grandmothers” (54). In this instance, it’s meant somewhat negatively. How so? What evidence in the book do you see that shows this is really one of Kingsolver’s positive messages?
2. How have Lou Ann’s relationships with her family impacted her own relationship and her behavior as an adult?
3. Billy Bingo, the man that sells vegetables out of his truck, says to Lou Ann “whatever you want the most, it’s going to be the worst thing for you” (62). What do you think he means? How does this apply to characters in the novel?
4. How do Lou Ann and Taylor instantly bond? In what ways are they already helping each other grow? What lessons can they teach each other?
5. Why do you think Taylor reacts so strongly to Lou Ann taking on the conventional role of “mother” or “caretaker” and her unintentionally taking the conventional role as “father” or “breadwinner”? Do you think Taylor really means it or is she reacting to something else? Explain.
6. This book was published in 1988. Why do you think Kingsolver felt the need to write a book about women finding strength in one another and asserting their independence while emphasizing men’s shortcomings? Is it still a valuable message? Why/why not? What sort of men have we encountered thus far in the book? Do you think this will be a continuing trend or will it change at some point?
7. How has the story changed now that Estevan and Esperanza have entered into it? What changes about Taylor’s character? Why?
8. Taylor tells us that neither she nor Mattie could figure out the significance of Turtle’s first word. What is the significance?
9. What perspective on immigration does Virgie Mae Parsons offer? What are we supposed to think about this perspective?
10. At this point in the story, it is clear that Mattie is breaking the law. How would you describe her moral code? Is what she doing right? Why or why not?
11. Summarize the story that Estevan tells about heaven and hell. Why does he focus on Mrs. Parsons as he’s telling it? What’s the message behind the story?
12. When Taylor finds out her mother is going to get married, Lou Ann accuses her of being jealous. What does she mean? Do you agree with what she says? Why is the marriage so troubling to Taylor?
13. Given what you know about Taylor, discuss the positives and negatives of her crush on Estevan.
14. When Taylor apologizes to Estevan for what Mrs. Parsons said about immigrants and drug dealers, his response surprises her: “This is how Americans think. You believe that if something terrible happens to someone, they must have deserved it.” She responds with, “I guess it makes us feel safe.” (117). Give an example from history or current events where you see evidence of this. Overall, do you agree with him? Why would it make us feel safe knowing that people “deserve it”?
15. How have Taylor’s relationships with Mattie, Estevan, Esperanza, and Turtle changed her worldview?
16. Do you agree with Taylor’s strategy when talking to Lou Ann about Angel? Have you had experiences where you gave friends relationship advice and then regretted it? What’s your “policy”?