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Study Guide

for

The House of Dies Drear

by Virginia Hamilton



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New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Virginia Hamilton



In The House of Dies Drear I tried to pay back all those wonderful relatives who gave me so much in the past.

—Virginia Hamilton

Virginia Hamilton has won many awards and honors as a writer of fiction and nonfiction and a reteller of folktales. She is the first author to receive the Newbery Medal and the National Book Award for the same book—her 1974 novel for young people *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. The Newbery Medal is awarded annually to the author of the most distinguished children’s book of the year.

Hamilton was born on March 12, 1936, in Yellow Springs, Ohio, a town similar to the one she created for Thomas Small and his family in *The House of Dies Drear*. Like many other writers, she credits her family for inspiring her creativity. Hamilton remembers the family stories that were passed from person to person. She says:

I grew up within the warmth of loving aunts and uncles, all reluctant farmers but great storytellers. I remember the tales best of all. My own father . . . was the finest of the storytellers besides being an exceptional mandolinist. Mother, too,

could take a slice of fiction floating around the family and polish it into a saga.

Hamilton grew up quite aware of her African American heritage. She knew that many of the old houses in her hometown had once been safe havens for enslaved people escaping from the South to the North and to Canada. Her own ancestors escaped slavery in the 1800s.

Hamilton has been interested in writing since she was a young girl. She notes, “I learned to think and to manage feelings in terms of stories.”

She began writing seriously at Antioch College in her hometown in Ohio. She attended the school on a scholarship, majored in writing, and composed her first short stories. Before finishing college, she moved to New York City, where she continued writing and worked different jobs to support herself.

In 1960 Hamilton married Arnold Adoff, a poet. As newlyweds, the couple traveled to Spain and to northern Africa. Visiting Africa had been a long-time dream of Hamilton’s, and the country made a strong impression on her. This trip would eventually influence her first novel, *Zeely*, which was published in 1967.

After fifteen years in New York City, Hamilton returned to her home state of Ohio. Today she lives with her husband on land that belonged to her family. Hamilton has two grown children who live in New York. She writes full time, always trying to improve her work and reach out to young people. She is particularly drawn to creating young African American characters who have a great deal of drive and inner strength. Of Hamilton’s writing, Ethel L. Heins wrote in the review journal *Horn Book*:

Few writers of fiction for young people are as daring, inventive, and challenging to read—or to review—as Virginia Hamilton. Frankly making demands on her readers, she nevertheless expresses herself in a style essentially simple and concise.

Introducing the Novel

Thomas liked the house. But the chill he had felt on seeing it from the highway was still with him. Now he knew why.

It's not the gray day, he thought. It's not mist and damp that sets it off. There are things beyond weather. The house has secrets!

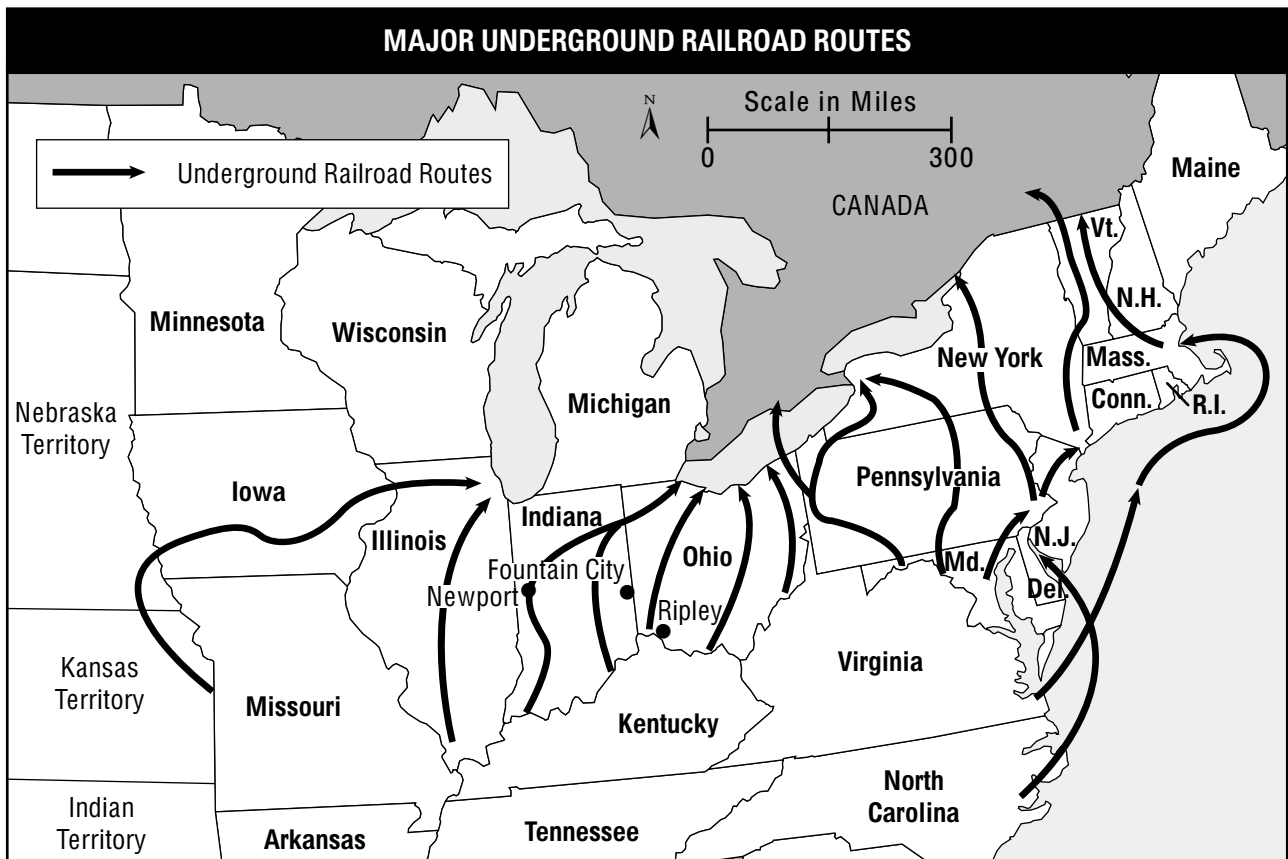
—*The House of Dies Drear* (Chapter 3)

In *The House of Dies Drear*, Thomas Small learns that his new home in Ohio played a part in African American history. Its original owner, Dies Drear, was an abolitionist—a person who worked to end the enslavement of African Americans in the United States. His home was a station on the Underground Railroad. In the years before the Civil War, the Underground Railroad was a secret network that helped enslaved people to escape to northern free states and to Canada, where slavery was illegal.

Most of Hamilton's books are related to the African American experience in history. In *The House of Dies Drear*, Hamilton also focuses on other favorite themes: family, self-discovery and self-acceptance, and friendship. As you read, try to discover how Hamilton addresses these themes.

The House of Dies Drear combines three types of stories. It is a traditional mystery story with suspense, eerie legends, and dangers. It is a story of moving to a new house and beginning a new life. The characters' interest in the Underground Railroad also makes the book a lesson in U.S. history. These three types of stories are skillfully interwoven to create a reading experience that is exciting, moving, and informative.

The main story of the novel focuses on Thomas's exploration of the oddly built house,



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which has hidden doors and secret passages. The house, almost a character itself, reflects some of the qualities of the novel's characters and the tangled web of problems within the Smalls' new community. It also echoes with memories of enslaved people escaping to freedom and an eccentric man who devoted his life to their cause. As one critic put it:

The story itself has a curious, almost-architectural resemblance to the house it describes: large, dark, rambling, rather frightening, and leading off in strange directions.

In addition to exploring the house, Thomas explores his new community and the

lives of his ancestors. Like many of Hamilton's other characters, Thomas is a sensitive, complex person with a great deal of strength.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The House of Dies Drear is set in the 1960s in a small Ohio town. More than one hundred years earlier, the town was a stopping point for enslaved people traveling north on the Underground Railroad to Canada.

The free state of Ohio was important to the Underground Railroad system. As many as 60,000 enslaved people passed through the state between 1812 and 1850.

Did You Know?

Slavery was introduced in the North American colonies in the 1600s. By the next century, a system of farming called the plantation system began to prosper in the Southern colonies. Plantation owners needed inexpensive labor to raise their crops of tobacco, rice, sugarcane, and cotton. Men and women were imported, against their will, from Africa and the Caribbean islands.

Many Northerners felt that slavery was wrong, and Northern lawmakers passed laws that made slavery illegal in their states. These states became known as free states. Canada, too, declared that it would no longer allow slavery. Southerners, who considered slaves their property, passed laws against helping enslaved people escape to free states. In 1793 the U.S. Congress passed the first of the fugitive slave laws that made helping runaways a crime. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required Northerners to return escaped slaves to their holders. To escape the federal laws, the fugitives had to go

beyond the northern free states and on to Canada or Mexico. Tensions between the free states and the slave states had been growing. As settlers on the frontier asked that their territories be admitted to the Union as states, a decision had to be made about whether to allow slavery in each new state. When Missouri applied for statehood, a long and angry debate took place in Congress. The conflict was resolved in 1820 with the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Missouri admission as a slave state but banned slavery north of the 36th parallel.

Many Northerners wanted to end slavery throughout the United States, not just in the North. Southern planters argued that doing away with slavery would cause the plantation system, the backbone of the Southern economy, to collapse. It was this disagreement that caused Southern states to eventually break from the United States and form their own government. This action in turn led to the Civil War, which began in 1861.

Before You Read

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 1–7

FOCUS ACTIVITY

If you were to write a mystery story, how would you begin it?

Quickwrite

Write a few opening sentences for a mystery story.

Setting a Purpose

Read to learn how the Small family's move to an old house draws the family into a mystery.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

According to legend, the Underground Railroad got its name in 1831 when Tice Davids, an enslaved person, ran away from Kentucky to the antislavery town of Ripley, Ohio. The slaveholder saw Davids jump into the Ohio River, reach the opposite shore, and disappear. The slaveholder told people that Davids seemed to escape on an underground road of some kind. The story spread, and the “underground road” became the “underground railroad.” Although a real underground railroad never existed, the term is used to describe the secret and often dangerous system that helped enslaved people escape to the North. Fugitives, or enslaved people who had run away, were known as passengers. People who helped them were called conductors. Conductors included both whites, like Dies Drear, and free blacks. Safe homes along the escape routes were called stations or depots. Some enslaved people, after escaping, returned to the South to help their families and other slaves to escape along the Underground Railroad.

Harriet Tubman: Famous Conductor on the Underground Railroad

One of the most famous figures of the Underground Railroad was Harriet Tubman, known as the Moses of her people. Moses was a Biblical figure who freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Tubman was an energetic and dedicated conductor on the Underground Railroad. Between 1850 and 1857, she made nineteen trips to the South and led more than 300 African Americans away from slavery. Slave hunters offered a large reward for her capture. During the Civil War, Tubman also served as a spy and a nurse for the Union army—the army of the Northern states.

Thomas Small, the main character of *The House of Dies Drear*, wonders if women as well as men went to the South to help free fellow African Americans. Harriet Tubman and other women showed courage in doing just that. In fact, Tubman is the person most often mentioned when the Underground Railroad of the 1800s is discussed.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

agitated [aj'ə tāt'əd] *adj.* uneasy; upset

calamity [kə lam'ə tē] *n.* disaster

lapse [laps] *v.* to fall; to slip

pathetic [pə thet'ik] *adj.* sorrowful; inviting pity

percolating [pur'kə lāt'ing] *adj.* seeping; filtering

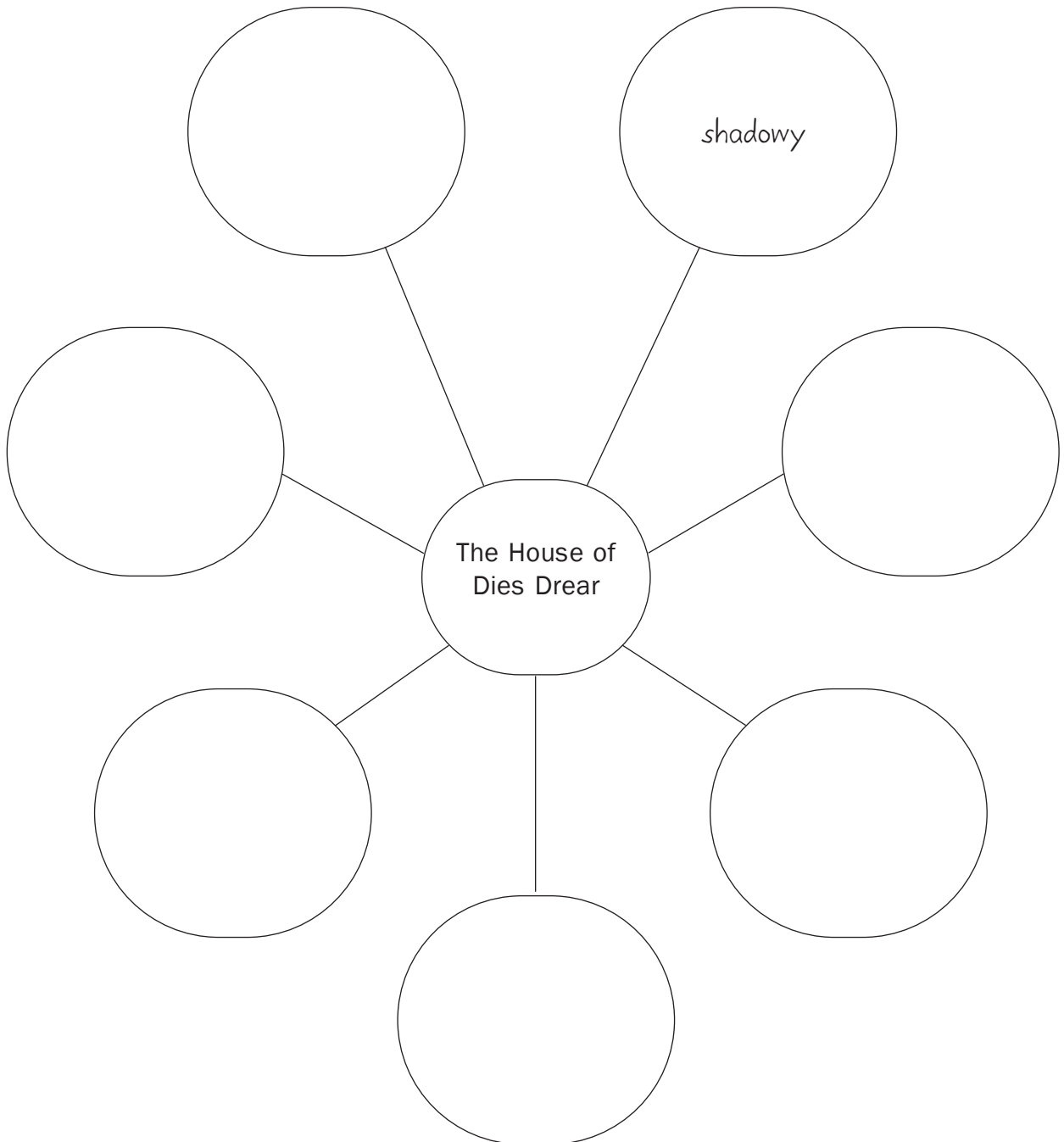
plunder [plun'dər] *v.* to rob and destroy

specter [spek'tər] *n.* ghost; spirit

Active Reading

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 1–7

Setting is the time, place, and atmosphere, or mood, of a story. In some stories, setting plays a very important role. *The House of Dies Drear* is one of those stories. The house establishes mood and gives readers the feeling that danger is lurking. In the graphic organizer below, list important details and phrases that describe the house of Dies Drear and the area that surrounds it.



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Responding

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 1–7

Personal Response

What images from this opening section raise questions in your mind? Record them.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What information does Thomas gather about his new home before he arrives? How might this information have influenced his feelings about the house?

2. Who is Mr. Pluto? Why is Thomas angry that Mr. Pluto arranged the family's furniture?

3. Describe Thomas's experience in the hidden passageway. How does his experience add to the mystery of the story?

Responding

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 1–7

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How do you think Hamilton wants readers to view Pluto? Why?

5. Based on what you know about the old house, would you want to live in it? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Character

If you could use only one or two words to describe Thomas’s personality, what would they be? Carefully review Chapters 1 through 7, taking notes on what Thomas says, thinks, and does. Use your notes to sum up Thomas’s personality in a word or two. Then explain which details in the novel made you choose these words to describe Thomas.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Foreshadowing is a literary technique that a writer uses to hint at events to come. In your groups, review the first scene of the first chapter, in which Thomas’s dream is described. How does the dream foreshadow events that occur in Chapter 2? Chapter 4? How does foreshadowing contribute to the story’s mood? Review your responses to the **Focus Activity** on page 12. In what ways are they similar to the opening of the novel? In what ways are they different?

Geography and History Connection

During the 1860s, which U.S. states allowed slavery? Which did not? Find the answers to these questions in a history book, in an encyclopedia, or on the Internet. Then copy or draw a map of the United States as it looked just before the Civil War, and indicate which states were “slave” and which were “free.” You might also research the path to freedom traveled by a famous enslaved person, such as Harriett Tubman or Frederick Douglass, and draw the path on your map. Use the map on page 10 as a model.

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Before You Read

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 8–13

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Recall a time when you felt uneasy or unwelcome in a particular place. Think about this feeling and how you responded to your situation.

Journal

In your journal, write about your experience. What in your surroundings caused you to feel uneasy? How did you respond?

Setting a Purpose

Read to understand how strange happenings and unfriendly townspeople affect the Small family.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In this section, Thomas and his family attend an African American church in their new community. They also discuss the role such churches played in the Underground Railroad. Historically, the major African American religious organizations, or denominations, have been independent of white denominations, even though the names were often similar. Individual churches in these denominations were completely under the control of their African American members. In these churches, African Americans could have independence within their community, inspire members of their community, and draw strength from one another.

Suspense

Suspense is a feeling of fearful expectation. Like most mystery stories, *The House of Dies Drear* is filled with suspense. Writers create suspense by raising questions in the minds of their readers. Writers also create suspense by using descriptive details that produce feelings of fear, excitement, and tension. For example, think back to the first section of the novel. Hamilton draws readers into her story with a suspenseful scene at the beginning of Chapter 1—when Thomas dreams he walks through a forest and meets a man who leaps from a mile-high spruce tree. Descriptive details of the sinking stilts and Thomas's fall help readers to feel tension and understand Thomas's fear. This scene also raises questions such as What does the dream mean? Does Thomas want to avoid the move? What experiences await Thomas when he and his family arrive in Ohio? Hamilton creates moments of suspense throughout the novel, as the mystery of the house of Dies Drear unfolds. As you read the second section, notice moments of suspense that raise questions in your mind.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

aloofness [ə lōōf' nəs] *n.* indifference; lack of interest

bemused [bi mūzd'] *adj.* preoccupied

brooding [brōōd' ing] *adj.* gloomy

conceal [kən sēl'] *v.* to hide

cumbersome [kum' bər səm] *adj.* awkward

gauge [gāj] *v.* to measure

malice [mal' is] *n.* ill will

ornate [ôr nāt'] *adj.* flashy; decorated

shrewd [shrōōd] *adj.* quick; sly

Active Reading

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 8–13

Hamilton creates moments of suspense throughout this section. She tries to create tension in the story and encourage readers to ask questions about strange events. The graphic organizer below contains four rows of boxes. In each row, record one suspenseful detail, explain what questions the detail raises in your mind, and then make a prediction about what meaning this detail might have to the story as a whole.

Detail	Question(s) raised	Prediction
<p>(A) the silver triangles</p>	<p>(B) Who left the triangles? What do they mean?</p>	<p>(C) Pluto or a ghost left the triangles. The triangles suggest danger.</p>

<p>(A)</p>	<p>(B)</p>	<p>(C)</p>
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<p>(A)</p>	<p>(B)</p>	<p>(C)</p>
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<p>(A)</p>	<p>(B)</p>	<p>(C)</p>
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Responding

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 8–13

Personal Response

If you were a member of the Small family, would you want to remain in the Dies Drear house and in the community? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Mr. Small explain Pluto's odd behavior and appearance? In your opinion, are Mr. Small's explanations believable? Explain.

2. How does Thomas feel about his new community after attending a church service? Why does he feel this way?

3. Why do Mr. Small and Thomas go through the tunnel in search of Pluto at the end of this section? How do they feel about Pluto at this point?

Responding

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 8–13

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. What is your opinion of the triangles the Smalls find? Do you agree with their ideas about them?

5. Do you believe the house is truly haunted, or do you think someone is playing pranks? Explain why.

Literature and Writing

Critic's Review

Write a review of the novel so far. As a reviewer, evaluate Hamilton's use of plot, setting, and characters. Do you think she makes the extraordinary believable? Do you think her characters are real and interesting? Does she include enough details to give readers a sense of place and mood?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Many strange people and events intrude on the Small family in this section. Imagine your group is a team of investigators whom the Smalls have hired to look into these mysterious happenings. Make a list of the most troubling events. Then prepare questions to ask the Smalls and other townspeople as you try to get to the bottom of things. Work as a group to develop a theory about how the Smalls could handle their situation.

Internet Connection

There are historians all over the country who, like Mr. Small, try to preserve pieces of African American history in museums and reports. Go online to research African American history during the time of slavery and the Underground Railroad. Use keywords such as "Underground Railroad," "African American history," "slavery," or "abolitionists." Locate museums or old homes that shed light on this period of history. Also try to find other sources of information online. These sources might include photographs, songs, and writings. Then prepare a directory of what you found.



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Before You Read

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 14–19

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Why do people study history? What can events of the past teach us?

Think-Pair-Share

Think about one event in history that you believe people should always remember. Pair up with a partner, and share your ideas. Discuss why the event each of you chose is important and worth remembering.

Setting a Purpose

In this section, Thomas and his father discover items that provide a link to the past. As you read, think about why these items are valuable.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In this section, Pluto angrily refers to the auction blocks at which his ancestors were bought and sold as property. The slave auction was one of the cruelest aspects of the slave industry. At these auctions, people were chained, examined, and bought and sold like livestock. Another painful aspect of the auctions was a sale that resulted in the splitting apart of families. Husbands were often sold away from their wives, and children were taken from their parents. Members of one family sold to different plantations might never see one another again.

Theme

A theme is the central idea or message of a literary work. Novels often have more than one theme. In **Introducing the Novel** on page 10, you were told that *The House of Dies Drear* develops several themes such as the importance of African American history, of family, of self-discovery, and of friendship. You can find themes yourself by looking to see what details, people, and actions the author repeatedly mentions. For example, the importance of heritage to the writer is obvious in the first section of the novel, when Mr. Small shares information about the house and the Underground Railroad with Thomas. Their conversation in this section also shows the importance of family. As you finish the novel, notice how Hamilton brings each of her important themes to a dramatic close.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

curator [kyoo rā'tər] *n.* person in charge of an exhibit

fanatical [fə nat'ikəl] *adj.* extreme

inkling [ɪŋk'liŋ] *n.* hint

painstakingly [pānz'tā'kiŋli] *adv.* in a manner showing care

peevd [pēvd] *adj.* annoyed

premonition [prē'mənish'ən] *n.* warning

rampart [ram'pärt'] *adj.* barrier

steadfastness [sted'fast'nəs] *n.* firmness

stupendous [stōō pen'dəs] *adj.* astounding

Active Reading

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 14–19

The major turning point, or the climax, of the novel occurs in the first few pages of this section. After the climax, a series of events that make up the story's falling action lead to a conclusion. In the graphic organizer below, identify the story's climax, the events that make up the falling action, and the novel's conclusion. Describe the climax and the conclusion in boxes at the top and bottom of the staircase. Write the events of the falling action on lines just below each step.

Climax

Event

They try to decide
where the treasure
should go.

Event

Event

Event

Conclusion

Responding

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 14–19

Personal Response

Were you satisfied with the ending of the novel? Why or why not? Record your ideas.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What do Mr. Small and Thomas find in the cavern? How does Pluto respond to their being there?

2. Who is Mayhew, and what has he been doing to trick people? What is his reason for fooling people?

3. What frightens Pluto most about the Darrows? Why was the “performance” involving Mr. Small, Thomas, Mayhew, and Pluto an effective way to deal with them?

Responding

The House of Dies Drear Chapters 14–19

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why might Hamilton have decided to end the book with a scene that includes Thomas and Pesty? What does the author mean when she says, “And they didn’t mind the waiting, not this day nor the days to come”?

5. What is your view of Pluto at the end of the book? Is it different from the view you had of him at the beginning of the book? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Letter to Grandmother

By the end of the novel, Thomas has learned a great deal about his heritage and about the good and bad sides of human nature. Imagine you are Thomas, and write a friendly letter to his grandmother. In the letter, describe some important, exciting things that have happened since the move. Tell her about the lessons you have learned from your new experiences.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In this section, readers can see the conflict between Pluto and his son Mayhew over the treasure in the cavern. Mayhew resents Pluto’s interest in preserving his heritage. Pluto wants people to understand why heritage is important. In your groups, stage a debate in which some group members take Mayhew’s side and others take Pluto’s side. Before you begin your debate, review Chapter 15, in which the father and son disagree. Students on both sides should support their arguments with details from the text. Each student can review his or her response to the **Focus Activity** on page 20. Students defending Pluto’s stance might find these responses helpful.

Learning for Life

Imagine that you live in the Ohio community described in the book. What do you believe should become of the treasures? Do you think they should stay in the cavern, go to a museum, or be sold? Write a persuasive memo in which you take a position and then defend it with solid facts and ideas. Imagine you are trying to convince people to see things your way.



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Responding

The House of Dies Drear

Personal Response

What have you learned from any of the characters or events in the novel? Which characters and events affected you the most and why?

Writing About the Novel

Dorothy Sterling in *The New York Times Book Review* (October 13, 1968) wrote, “*The House of Dies Drear* is written with poetic precision. Miss Hamilton polishes her sentences with care, develops her characters with imagination and love. Thomas is a sensitive boy, self-sufficient, sometimes lonely” On a separate sheet of paper, respond to this quotation using details from the novel to support your ideas. Think about where Hamilton uses the most poetic language. Decide which of her characters are most imaginatively drawn and which characters you admired or felt sympathy for as you read. Remember details that demonstrate the sensitive, self-sufficient, and sometimes lonely sides of Thomas’s character. End your response with your own statement about the novel as a whole.



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from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass Frederick Douglass

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are some of the rights and freedoms you are guaranteed as a citizen of the United States? Which of these do you value most?

Background

Frederick Douglass was born in Maryland in 1817. He grew up enslaved but eventually escaped and began speaking and writing about the evils of slavery. His firsthand accounts moved people to oppose slavery, and he became a well-known abolitionist. His autobiographical writings have become American classics. In this selection, Douglass recalls in vivid detail the hardships he and others endured on a southern plantation.

Responding to the Reading

1. Describe the relationship between Douglass and his mother. What does their relationship tell you about the slaveholder's attitude toward enslaved parents and children?

2. According to Douglass, how were enslaved people on the plantation fed, clothed, and housed?

3. How does Mr. Severe treat the people he oversees? Why might Douglass have included Severe in the narrative?

4. According to Douglass, why do enslaved people sing? What do the Northerners mistake the singing to mean?

5. Making Connections Frederick Douglass's autobiography tells about the realities of slavery. In *The House of Dies Drear*, Pluto displays records of "the day by day barter of black people." He says, "They show how mean folks had to be to buy and sell our people." How does Douglass's narrative help to explain Pluto's feelings toward Dies Drear?

Performing

Douglass was a powerful speaker who moved audiences to take action. Select a portion of his narrative to read aloud to the class. As you prepare your oral reading, think about tone of voice, emphasis, and the pace at which you speak. Also consider what body movements or hand gestures would be effective to use when giving your reading.

Write This Down

Jacqueline Tobin

Follow the Drinking Gourd folk song

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think of a time when you had to struggle to overcome an obstacle. What did you learn from the struggle? How might obstacles bring out strength, creativity, and determination in people?

Background

For the Underground Railroad to be successful, escape routes had to be carefully planned and cloaked in secrecy. In the first selection, Jacqueline Tobin explains how she discovered the role handmade quilts played in the Underground Railroad. The second selection is an African American folk song that contained a secret message for escaping slaves. In this song, the “drinking gourd” is the Big Dipper constellation, and the “great big river” is the Ohio River. The Ohio River separated the slave states of Virginia and Kentucky from the free state of Ohio.

Responding to the Readings

1. A strong tradition of secrecy surrounded the Underground Railroad. Why did people keep information to themselves? How might this secrecy affect historians' ability to write a detailed account of the Underground Railroad?

2. According to Tobin, what was the purpose of the quilt codes? What type of information did they provide?

3. “Follow the Drinking Gourd” gave enslaved people clues for planning their escape. What do you think is meant by the phrase “The riverbank makes a very good road”?

4. Slaves could hide information in religious songs because phrases such as “finding freedom” could be interpreted as finding heaven. Find another line in this song which could have two meanings—one religious and one related to escaping.

5. Making Connections Secrecy was an important part of operating an Underground Railroad station, or safe house. What part does secrecy play in the plot of *The House of Dies Drear*? in the house itself?

Art Connection

Work with a partner to make a quilt out of squares of paper or fabric. Your quilt should communicate a message about your life, your school, or your community. Have each square express one idea that relates to your overall message.

from Reminiscences

Levi Coffin

Before You Read

Focus Question

If a group of students in your school were being treated cruelly or unfairly, would you put your own safety and reputation on the line to help them? Do you think it is important for people to stand up against injustice, even if the injustice does not affect them directly? Why or why not?

Background

Levi Coffin, a white abolitionist, was born in North Carolina in 1799. In 1826 he moved to a Quaker settlement in Indiana, where he ran a store. Coffin's home eventually became an important stop on the Underground Railroad. Over time, three lines of the secret network came together at Coffin's house. He is sometimes referred to as the president of the Underground Railroad. In this selection, Coffin describes what it was like to assist escaping slaves.

Responding to the Reading

1. What role did Coffin and his wife play in helping enslaved people to escape?

2. What measures did Coffin take to hide what he was doing from slave hunters and others?

3. Although enslaved people were active in arranging their own escapes and in running the Underground Railroad, white abolitionists also helped. In what ways might the involvement of people like Coffin be especially helpful?

4. Making Connections Dies Drear is an important character in *The House of Dies Drear*, yet the author gives little background information about him. From the information you do have, explain how his life was similar to the life of Levi Coffin. What do you think drove these two men to open their homes as stations on the Underground Railroad? Explain.

Learning for Life

The writings of abolitionists helped persuade Americans to do away with slavery. Use your writing skills to persuade people to take action on an issue that is important to you. On a separate sheet of paper, write a brief editorial about an issue that concerns you, such as the environment, the treatment of animals, or the importance of education. In your editorial, explain why your issue is important and what can be done to raise awareness of it.

Harriet Tubman and the Underground Rebellion

Patricia C. McKissack and Fredrick L. McKissack

Before You Read

Focus Question

Is freedom so important to you that you might risk your safety to obtain it or keep it?

Background

The McKissacks are the award-winning authors of more than twenty books for young readers. Most of their books explore the history of African Americans. In this chapter of *Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts*, the authors tell the story of Harriet Tubman, one of the most famous conductors of the Underground Railroad.

Responding to the Reading

1. How did not being able to learn to weave help Harriet Tubman in her future?

2. How did Henry Brown arrive in Philadelphia, gaining his freedom?

3. What were the outcomes of the Fugitive Slave Act?

4. Making Connections From reading a report on the history of the Dies Drear house, Thomas learns that not all of the enslaved people hiding in the secret tunnels were running away from the slave states. Where were they going? How were they like Harriet Tubman and Josiah Henson?

Creating Dialogue

Like Harriet Tubman, many of the people who escaped to freedom in the North later dedicated their lives to helping others escape from slavery. Imagine that Harriet Tubman and Henry Brown meet for the first time at the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee. On a separate sheet of paper, write a dialogue of what the two may have said to each other. Remember to use correct punctuation as you write.

The Lawyer and the Ghost

Charles Dickens

Before You Read

Focus Question

If you were to write a mystery story, where would you have the action take place? Why?

Background

Charles Dickens, known as one of the greatest British novelists, had a passion for writing ghost stories. His most famous novel, *A Christmas Carol*, is, in fact, a long ghost story. This selection, one of his shorter pieces, is about a lawyer who encounters a mysterious visitor in a lonely room.

Responding to the Reading

1. In what kind of room does the lawyer stay? Describe the appearance of the ghost who visits him.

2. What advice does the lawyer give to his ghost and to all ghosts? In what way is this story making fun of traditional ghost stories?

3. Making Connections An important part of most ghost stories and mystery stories is the mood, or atmosphere, established by the writer. What specific details and images establish a frightening mood in this story and in *The House of Dies Drear*? In what way is each a traditional ghost story?

Creative Writing

Work with a partner to write an original ghost story or a mystery. If you would like, you can write your piece in the form of a short skit. To get started, think about other stories of this type that you have enjoyed. Think about how you will use language to bring your readers into your story and create feelings of fear, tension, and curiosity. Use a separate sheet of paper.