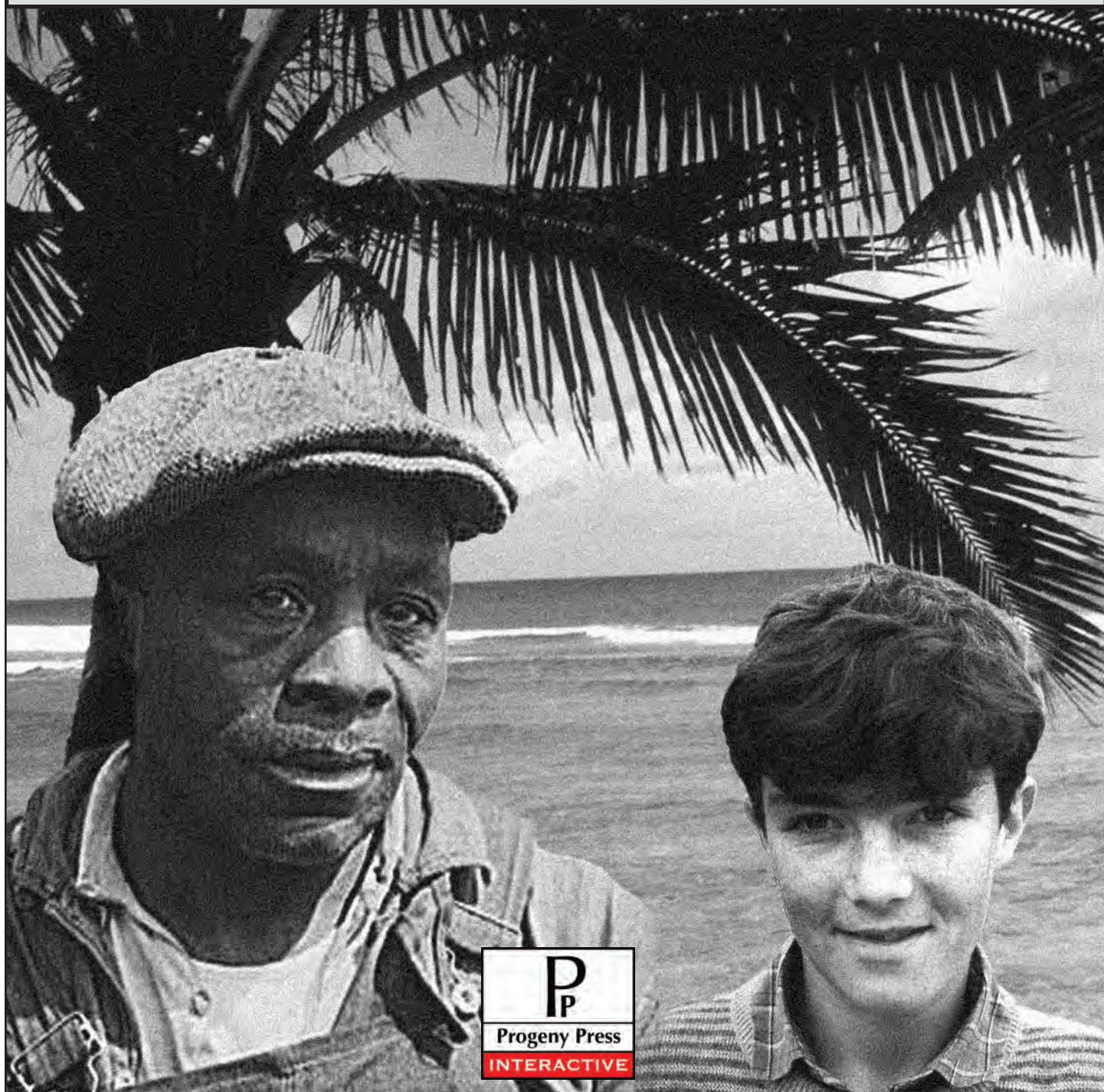


The Cay Study Guide

by Lisa Tiffin

For the novel by Theodore Taylor



The Cay Study Guide

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The Cay Study Guide

A Progeny Press Study Guide

by Lisa Tiffin

edited by Michael Gilleland

cover design by Michael Gilleland

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Synopsis

The Cay, by Theodore Taylor, follows the story of Phillip Enright, an 11-year-old American boy living in Curaçao with his parents during the start of the Second World War. When German submarines begin torpedoing oil transport ships near the island, Phillip's mother decides she and Phillip will sail back to America to be safe.

Unfortunately, their boat is torpedoed before it leaves the Caribbean, and Phillip is stranded on a raft with a black deckhand named Timothy. Before long, Phillip goes blind from an injury suffered during the shipwreck and must rely on Timothy, a man Phillip has been taught to distrust because he is black.

When the pair finds a small island to wait out their rescue, Phillip learns that what is on a man's inside is much more important than the color of his skin.

Chapters 18 & 19

Vocabulary:

Part One:

Use the context clues in the following sentences to determine the meanings of the underlined words. Compare your definitions with the dictionary definitions.

1. I knew how the breeze sounded when it crossed the sea grape. It fluttered the small leaves.

Meaning:

Dictionary Definition:

2. The smoke would rise from the cay in a fat, black column to lead the planes up the Devil's Mouth.

Meaning:

Dictionary Definition:

3. It began to pop and crackle as the flames got to the natural oil in the branches.

Meaning:

Dictionary Definition:

4. Worse, I knew that the smoke might have blotted out the lines of rocks that spelled help.

Meaning:

Dictionary Definition:

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5. In early April, I returned to Willemstad with my mother, and we took up life where it had been left off the previous April.

Meaning:

Dictionary Definition:

Part Two:

For each of the words below, write the definition and use the word in a sentence of your own.

6. occasional

Definition:

Sentence:

7. tended

Definition:

Sentence:

8. sobbed

Definition:

Sentence:

8. idling

Definition:

Sentence:

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10. badgering

Definition:

Sentence:

11. priority

Definition:

Sentence:

Questions:

1. How has Phillip learned to compensate for his blindness?
2. What happens the first time Phillip hears an airplane in these chapters?
3. Why do you think Phillip says he feels “no shame” in sobbing in Chapter 18?
4. What does Phillip figure out about the signal smoke and how does he fix the problem?
5. List three things about Phillip that surprise the rescuers.

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6. Why do you think the rescuers want Phillip to see a doctor? Why is Phillip surprised that they want him to see a doctor?

7. How is life different for Phillip when he returns to Willemstad—how have his relationships with the people changed?

8. Phillip says he will someday charter a boat to find the island. Why do you think he wants to do this?

Thinking About the Story:

9. When Phillip is first rescued, he tells the captain of the ship his story. Why does Phillip think the Captain does not fully believe his story?

10. In Chapter 19, Phillip tries to tell his story to his parents:

I tried to tell them all about Timothy and the cay. But it was very difficult. They listened, of course, but I had the feeling that neither of them really understood what had happened on our cay.

Do you think it is the events that had happened to him that Phillip's parents do not understand or the changes that have occurred inside of him? Why might they not understand?

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11. How has Phillip's mother changed since he saw her last?

Dig Deeper:

12. In Chapter 18, after each airplane leaves, Phillip seems to despair. Read 1 Kings 19:1–10. In two or three sentences, explain what has happened to Elijah and what he is feeling. How are Phillip's feelings similar to Elijah's feelings?
13. Read 1 Kings 19:10–18. What does God tell Elijah about himself, other people, and Elijah's role in these verses?
14. How is Phillip's experience after the second plane leaves similar to Elijah's?

Answer Key

Chapters 1 & 2

Vocabulary:

Part One:

1. eager to learn or know about something; 2. agitated or stirred; 3. uneasy or fearful; 4. lacking courage; 5. trembled, shaken with a slight rapid motion

Part Two:

6. c; 7. e; 8. d; 9. a; 10. b

Questions:

1. German submarines bombed Aruba, Curaçao's sister island.
2. No. He is too excited and wants to see the enemy U-boats and can't imagine a torpedo could pick him to hit out of everything else on the island.
3. No, he thinks it will be up to the United States to protect them because the Germans had defeated the Netherlands and her navy was scattered.
4. Phillip's father was an expert in refineries and gasoline production, and he was helping to run the refinery in Willemstad.
5. Any of the following are acceptable: She was homesick for Virginia; she missed her nice yard and home in Virginia; she didn't feel safe in Curaçao; she hated the smell of oil and gas; she didn't like living so close to so many black people.
6. That even though he says he is not afraid, he is beginning to understand the seriousness of the war and is beginning to feel some fear about his situation.
7. They were afraid they would get torpedoed by the Germans. They demanded a naval escort.
8. He calls his mother a coward, but she doesn't change her mind. He thinks he might hide, but realizes the island is too small and that it would just cause his father more trouble. He tries to speak to his father, but refuses to go against his mother.

Thinking About the Story:

9. The first sentence of the book reads, "Like silent, hungry sharks that swim in the darkness of the sea, the German submarines arrived in the middle of the night." The author is comparing German submarines to "silent, hungry sharks." Answers may vary. The imagery is very striking and vivid. Immediately we sense the danger and potential danger hidden in the book. Already it is exciting.
10. Phillip Enright is the narrator of *The Cay*. He is a first-person narrator.
11. Answers will vary. Advantages: We get to learn more about how Phillip feels. We get to know exactly what he is thinking. It keeps the story exciting because we learn things as Phillip does and it can make us feel a part of the story. We can identify with the narrator. Disadvantages: We have to decide whether Phillip is telling us the truth about everything, especially his feelings. We have to decide if he understands what is going on or what he is telling us. We only know what Phillip knows and see what he sees.
12. *The Cay* is set in 1942, during World War II, in the Caribbean.
13. Answers will vary. Mr. Enright: patient—he answers all of Phillip's questions, even when he is tired after a long day of work; he is patient with Phillip's mother as she tries to get them all to leave together; calm—he is not anxious about the ships not moving in and out of the island, even when the fresh supplies were getting low; he is willing to work on the ships; does not want to leave; honest—tells Phillip the truth; understanding—he understands why people are afraid and why sailors will not go with the ships. Mrs. Enright: fearful—she often worries about Phillip's safety; she wants to leave the island as soon as possible when the Germans are close; she is afraid to fly; angry—similar to fearful in some of the examples, she gets angry when she is afraid; impatient—she doesn't want Phillip to ask questions; bigoted or racist—she doesn't like being around black people; manipulative—when Phillip or his father talk about staying on Curaçao, she says they don't love her.
14. Phillip's opinion of the war changes when he sees the Germans blow up the *Empire Tern* right after he and his father had watched it refuel and leave. Answers may vary, but should have an awareness that Phillip had just been on the ship with all its men, so he was very aware of the fact that people were killed and who those people were. Death became real to him, not abstract.

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Dig Deeper:

15. Answers may vary. Phillip should not have ignored his mother's orders. Phillip assumes that he fully understands the situation and the dangers and his mother does not, but he does not see the real danger. The fact that the officer backs up his mother's warning confirms this. We cannot *assume* that we know all the circumstances of a situation and so can make better decisions than those in authority over us. For example, Phillip's mother and the officer understood that the torpedo could come without warning and could cause a great deal of damage, death, and injuries. Phillip only pictured that it would come for him and did not understand that simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time could be dangerous or deadly. (See also Job 38:1–42:6 for God's answer to Job about who should be the primary authority and why.)

16. These verses tell us we should honor and obey God above all else, our parents, and earthly authorities, which includes governmental authorities, teachers, pastors, etc. Note that God counts it as good that we obey authorities above us primarily because it brings honor to him, and he has set those people in that position. It does not guarantee that they are always right—they are sinful and sometimes wicked—but God has put them in that position. Clearly, however, we honor God above all if there is a conflict between what someone tells us to do and what God tells us to do. Since God is the one who put them in authority, he is the supreme authority.

17. Answers may vary, but the two decisions she makes that appear to be most influenced by her fears are the decision to leave the island and return to the United States and her decision to travel by ship and not by airplane. Answers may vary about whether her decisions based on fear are good, but the answer should be no, they are not good. Phillip's father points out that the Germans probably will not attack the island itself; they are more interested in sinking the ships that come and go, and the safest way to travel would be by plane. But she decides to leave anyway and take the most vulnerable method of transport.

18. Answers may vary. No, fear is not always a bad thing, sometime it can be a very healthy response to dangerous things or situations. We should be afraid of a strange dog growling at us, but we do not need to be afraid of all dogs. We should be afraid of fire when a house is burning, but we do not need to fear fire in a stove. Fear is bad when it affects all of our decisions or when we let it be the main element of our decisions instead of using all the facts in a situation. For example, it would be bad if a person refused to ever use a stove because the fire could burn down the house. However, it would be stupid to put gasoline into a lit stove—that would be a healthy fear. Sometimes we use the word *fear* for a realistic respect of the danger or power in something, but we do not act *afraid* of it. So if there is dangerous weather, we take shelter, but we don't necessarily cower in fear; we understand the danger and act accordingly. That is a good thing and a healthy response.

19. The verses tell us we should not fear people or anything else because God is for us; nothing can separate us from God. On the other hand the verses tell us we should fear God.

20. The paradox is that Matthew 10:28 tells us we should be afraid of God because he can destroy both soul and body, but then verse 31 tells us not to be afraid because God cares even about the death of sparrows, and we are worth more to him than sparrows. Though the verses appear to be contradictory because they tell us to be afraid, then tell us to not be afraid, the point of the verses is that, though God deserves our fear and respect, he loves us, and if we honor and give ourselves to him, he cares for us. As Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Chapters 3 & 4

Vocabulary:

Part One:

1. c; 2. b; 3. a; 4. b.; 5. c

Part Two:

6. b; 7. i; 8. a; 9. j; 10. g; 11. e; 12. h; 13. f; 14. d; 15. c

Questions:

1. The ship is struck by a torpedo and sinks.

2. As Phillip and his mother are being lowered to the water in the lifeboat, the boat shifts and he falls into the water. Something strikes Phillip on the head, and he awakens much later on the raft with Timothy.

3. To protect them from the sun.

4. Timothy wants to make their food and water last as long as possible in case it takes a long time to be rescued, so he rations the water and suggests they eat raw fish. He understands that they may need to do things they don't like just to keep themselves alive. Phillip does not understand the full danger they are in and so thinks Timothy is being mean or selfish. He begins to hate Timothy; he is disgusted that Timothy will eat raw fish; he begins to think his mother is right about how different black people are.