



1. How do the details of the backdrop of World War II, including rationing for war and the polio epidemic, enhance your experience of the story?
2. What kind of tone do you think the prologue sets for the rest of the novel? Did it succeed in making you want to read further? Why or why not?
3. Compare and contrast Tess's upbringing in Little Italy and Henry's upbringing as a wealthy member of Southern society. How do their backgrounds influence the decisions they make and how they navigate the world?
4. What do you think the significance is of Tess and her mother reading *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*? Why do you think that story in particular resonated with Tess?
5. On page 138, Tess writes to Gina that she is still planning on becoming a nurse, despite her new family's disapproval, saying, "I've worked hard for this and I'm going to get that license!" Why do you think Tess clings to this dream and works so hard to make it happen?
6. Most of the letters in the novel are from Tess to Gina, and readers only get to see a few of Gina's responses. How do you think only having access to half of the conversation affected your reading experience? Did you feel like you were missing anything?
7. What do you think of Reverend Sam? Can he truly speak to the dead or is he simply trying to comfort Tess? Does it matter whether or not his "powers" are authentic?

Discussion Questions



8. On page 237, Adora says, "Everybody always 'spected Hank'd marry Violet and that would of been a terrible thing. Maybe you saved him from something terrible, Miss Tess. You think of it that way, all right?" Do you agree with her? Did Tess "save" Henry in the end?
9. Why do you think that when Tess was finally allowed to use her nursing abilities she suddenly became much more confident and able to stand up to her husband and Ruth?
10. Near the end of the book, Henry compares his experience of being "trapped" by society to Tess' experience of being "trapped" in marriage. Do you think this is a fair comparison for him to make? Why or why not?