

Cold Sassy Tree by Olive Ann Burns

Directions - After reading the novel, use specific examples from the story to answer the following questions.

Answer the questions in complete sentences.

- The questions are due Wednesday, August 8th.
- Bring your novel to class on that day. We will use the novel for several assignments during the first week of school.

1. How would you describe Rucker? Do you consider him a shallow human being? What possess him to marry Miss Love so soon after burying Mattie Lou?
2. Do the reactions of family and friends toward Rucker's new marriage seem genuine to you...or do they ring hollow? What was your initial reaction...did it change over the course of the novel?
3. What is your attitude toward Miss Love? Do you find her, a Yankee living in the South, sympathetic?
4. How would you describe the relationship between Rucker and Miss Love? Do they love one another...at first...eventually...never?
5. The story is seen through the eyes of Will Tweedy. Why would the author have chosen a bare adolescent as narrator? Is Will's voice believable?
6. How would you describe life in Cold Sassy...especially the relationships among its citizens? Do you find small-town living, as described in the novel, appealing, even enviable...or judgmental and claustrophobic?
7. Do small towns, like Cold Sassy, exist today...is it possible given the speed, ubiquity, and distractions of modern telecommunications and travel?
8. Which episodes do you find most humorous...the Christmas play? What else?
9. What do you think of Burns's use of dialect? Does it enhance the novel's sense of place for you? Or do you find it distracting and irritating?

10. How does Burns present Christianity as practiced in a small town in Georgia at the beginning of the 20th century? What do you think of Grandpa Rucker's sermon from his sick-bed?
11. *Cold Sassy Tree* is generally viewed as a coming-of-age story? What does Will come to learn, about the adult world and his place in it, by the end of the novel? In what way does he change? Do any other characters change?
12. What is the relationship between blacks and whites in *Cold Sassy*? Does Burns present African-Americans as fully developed characters...or stereotypes? Talk specifically about Queenie.
13. How is Rucker's behavior in his marriage with Mattie Lou different from his behavior in his marriage to Miss Love Simpson?
14. How does Rucker's decision to hire Hosie Roach affect Will? Is Rucker's decision to hire Hosie generous to Hosie or inconsiderate to Will?
15. *Cold Sassy Tree* concludes with Will listing the objects he has saved from his childhood. How do these objects relate to the story he has just told?
16. Are the female characters in *Cold Sassy Tree* relevant to contemporary ideas of womanhood, or can they be read only as figures from a bygone era?
17. Why is Rucker initially so resistant to technology, both inside and outside of the home? What makes him change his mind?
18. At any point, is the marriage of Miss Love or Rucker in serious jeopardy? What causes the problems that threaten the marriage, or what prevents them?
19. How do you think we are supposed to feel about the modernization of *Cold Sassy*? Overall, is it a change for better or worse?
20. One of Burns' strengths is her ability to transport us into another time and place. What about the early days of the automobile, women's fashions, funeral rituals, or work outside the home was a surprise to you? Of special interest to you?