

The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate

For each set of chapters, there are some questions. Many sections also have a writing piece and a computer piece.

Chapters 1 – 4

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Callie is a typical girl from her time period (1899)? Why or why not?
2. At first, Callie’s grandfather seems scary and mysterious. What do you think about how his library is described? Does it make him seem more or less scary? Which places in the book would support your answer?
3. Why does Callie find it satisfying to watch the possum wars? Find a quotation to support your view.

Writing Activity

Using the graphic organizer on the next page, compare and contrast the characters of Mother and Viola. While both of them help run the house and the farm, they are very different. Once we have explored how they are similar and different, you will write a paragraph on the next page in which you explain those similarities and differences.

Computer Activity

Many of the characters in this book have interesting names. The first time Calpurnia and Granddaddy go to the riverbank together, Calpurnia learns that she shares her name with “Pliny the Younger’s fourth wife, the one he married for love. ... There’s also the natal acacia tree, genus *Calpurnia*, a useful laburnum mainly confined to the African continent. Then there’s Julius Caesar’s wife, mentioned in Shakespeare” (p. 27).

Choose one or two other individuals (either people or animals) and look up the meaning of the name(s). One website you might use is:

<http://www.thinkbabynames.com/>

The name (s) I chose:

The explanation of the name(s):

Chapters 5 – 8

1. What kind of piano teacher is Miss Brown? Do you think she is the kind of teacher from whom students would enjoy learning?
2. How does Harry’s family learn about his girlfriend? How do they react to her? Do you have any ideas about why they react the way that they do?
3. How would you describe Calpurnia’s relationship with Granddaddy and how it has changed since the beginning of the book?

Chapters 5 – 8 — Writing Exercise

“Sometimes a little knowledge could ruin your whole day, or at least take off some of the shine.”

What do you think this sentence means? How does this sentence relate to Calpurnia’s scientific explorations? Do you agree with the idea of this sentence? Why or why not?

Chapters 9 – 11

- 1. Why do you think Callie finds more satisfaction in piano than in doing needlework? Are there places in the text which support your view?
- 2. How do Callie’s and Lula’s taste in literature compare and contrast? Whose taste is most like yours?
- 3. Do you think Callie’s relationship with Granddaddy has evolved? How has it changed since the beginning of the book? How do you think it might change in the rest of the book?

Computer Activity

The author has chosen to use quotations from Charles Darwin’s [The Origin of Species](#) to introduce each chapter. Let’s learn more about Darwin.

- 1. Here are a few links to read and some videos to watch:

<http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/scientists/charlesdarwin.html>
<http://darwin200.christs.cam.ac.uk/node/36>
[American Museum of Natural History](#)
[Evolution and Darwin for Kids on YouTube](#)

- 2. Write a short summary about Darwin, his life, and contributions.

Chapters 12 – 15

1. How would you describe the Tate family’s reaction to Granddaddy’s announcement that he may have found a new species of plant?
2. Granddaddy tells Callie that important questions cannot be answered without “the best scholarship you can get your hands on.” What does he mean? Do you agree with him?
3. Why do you think Callie’s Granddaddy is so respected in the community? In his family? By Callie?

Computer Activity

A popular saying claims that to understand another person, we need to walk in his or her shoes. Instead, we are going to take a look at some of the clothing a girl like Callie and women like her mother might have worn.

Look at the clothes on these sites:

[Wikipedia – 1890s in fashion](#)

[NYPL Digital Gallery](#)

What kind of observations can you make about these clothes? Do they look comfortable or uncomfortable? Would they be easy to move in? Would you want to wear them?

Chapters 12 -15 — Writing Exercise

Compare and contrast the characters of Callie and her mother. Are they more alike or unlike? Do you think that Callie is the kind of daughter that Mrs.Tate knows how to parent? Why or why not?

Chapters 16 - 18

1. Why does Granddaddy say that the old century is dying? What changes might he be thinking of?
2. When Callie asks her mother why she has to learn to sew and cook, why is her mother unable to answer her question?
3. Would Callie be as dissatisfied with her life as a girl if she lived today instead of in her own time period? Why or why not?

Computer Activity

The time period of this story is the beginning of what historians call the “Progressive Era.”

Go to http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/progress/jb_progress_subj.html

Read two or three articles about things that happened in this era.

Which articles did you read?

How did what you read relate to the changes that Granddaddy is thinking of?

Chapters 19 –22

1. How would you describe Callie’s relationship with her brothers? Why?
2. Why does Harry think it unlikely that Callie could be a scientist? What reasons does he give? Why does Callie disagree with him?
3. Compare and contrast Harry’s behavior toward Callie during his relationship with Miss Goodacre and Miss Spitty.

Chapters 19 –22 — Writing Exercise

During one of his failed experiments, Granddaddy says, “The lesson for today is this: It is better to travel with hope in one’s heart than to arrive in safety” (p. 233). What does this quotation mean? How does it fit with what happens in the story? Do you agree with this statement?

Chapters 23 – 28

1. Why might Mother find Callie frightening? Why doesn't Granddaddy?
2. Both Mother and Granddaddy give Callie books during the novel? How does she react to these gifts? Why does she react in the ways that she does?
3. Now that you are finished with the novel, how would describe this book to other people? Would you recommend it? Why or why not?