Big Read 2011
UNIV 110
Study Guide
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MODEL ANSWERS TO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Prefatory Elements
Part One: Life
Part Two: Death
Part Three: Immortality

GRADING RUBRIC

SAMPLE (filled-in) Rubric
Relating the Rubric to FYE Goals/Objectives
Relevance
Development/Accuracy
Written Expression
Rubrics (to photocopy)
To the instructor:

We are pleased to offer this study guide to help you as you plan and teach your UNIV 110—First Year Experience course. The purpose of this study guide is to help you help your students engage deeply with the 2011 Big Read book, Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. For each chapter in the book, there are at least four objective comprehension questions and two open-ended discussion questions. We have also included comprehension and discussion questions on the prefatory elements that come before the body chapters in the book.

This study guide is based on two simple but important principles:

- The most important educational goals of the Big Read cannot be accomplished unless students first read and understand the text. The comprehension questions encourage students to read the text carefully and help them read for understanding.
- Open-ended discussion questions help students to apply critical thinking and creative skills to the text and encourage students to see reading as a generative activity and not simply as a means of extracting static information from a text.

While the study guide can be used in a variety of ways, it is important to note that we are not suggesting that you should ask your students to write answers to each and every question. Doing so would merely amount to an exercise in academic drudgery and would defeat a major purpose of the Big Read: encouraging our students not only to enjoy reading but to see reading as a productive academic pursuit with tangible benefits on a number of levels.

We recommend that you use the study guide in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Requiring the students to turn in handwritten or typed responses to the comprehension and/or discussion question for selected chapters. The number of chapters and the specific chapters are up to you as the instructor, but we would recommend requiring written responses to no more than five or six chapters during the semester. (Grading rubrics for both the comprehension and discussion questions are included as appendices to this study guide if you choose to use them. However, you may choose to grade the questions according to your own rubric and/or points scale.)
- Using the comprehension questions as written or oral quiz questions in class.
- Using the comprehension questions as ungraded oral review questions to gauge the students’ reading and/or to prepare for an in-class activity or discussion relating to topics in the book.
• Asking the discussion questions orally in class as a way of generating in-depth discussion of selected chapters or topics in the book.
• Using selected comprehension questions as the basis of a “trivia contest” in class.
• Breaking the class into groups to work on selected discussion questions. The groups’ responses to these questions could be presented in writing or in oral presentations.
• Using one or more discussion group questions as the basis of an in-class debate featuring pro/con arguments on selected issues.
• Requiring students to write their own additional comprehension or discussion questions on aspects of the chapter not already addressed by the questions in the study guide.
• Conducting mini-essay contests with students writing answers to selected discussion question. The teacher might judge the contest, or a student panel could be used for the purpose of judging.

Other creative ideas are also encouraged.

Our goal in creating the study guide and offering it to UNIV 110 instructors is not to dictate teaching styles or to require certain class activities or approaches grading. Instead, the study guide is intended as a tool that will encourage deep, semester-long engagement with the Big Read text.

If you have comments or suggestions about the study guide, please feel free to contact either of us. Above all, we want to thank you for your continuing support of the Big Read, and we hope this study guide makes it easier for you to incorporate the book into your FYE courses.

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Comprehension and Discussion Questions
I. Prefatory Materials

- *A Few Words About This Book*
- Prologue: The Woman in the Photograph
- Deborah’s Voice
**A Few Words About This Book**

Comprehension Questions:

1. Rebecca Skloot begins her book with “This is a work of nonfiction.” What is a nonfiction work? How is non-fiction different from fiction?
2. What kinds of research did Skloot do while writing the book?
3. What does the term *HeLa* mean? How was this term created?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Skloot chooses to “capture the language” of the Lacks family as they really speak rather than “pretty it up”? Do you think it is better to record their speech accurately, or should the author have kept the meaning while “fixing” their language? Why?
2. Skloot says that there are “issues regarding science, ethics, race, and class” in her book and that she will “leave it for scholars and experts in the field to address” many of these issues. Let’s consider one of those ethical issues. Is it acceptable for doctors to take someone’s cells and use them in research? Before reading the book, what is your opinion on this issue? For example, if you had a minor surgery and the doctors took some of your cells from that surgery for testing and research, would you be upset? Would you consider it ethical for them to take those cells? What if the research on those cells led to medical breakthroughs that saved lives and generated millions or billions of dollars for the medical industry? As you read the book, notice if your opinions on this issue change or develop.
Prologue:  
The Woman in the Photograph

Comprehension Questions:

1. Name at least three ways in which the HeLa cells have been used.
2. How many HeLa cells are there in the world?
3. How and when did Rebecca Skloot first learn of the HeLa cells?
4. How and when did Henrietta Lacks die?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did the story of the HeLa cells interest Rebecca Skloot so much? What was it about them that made her devote so much time to studying about them and telling the story of the cells and the Lacks family?
2. Skloot says she was not an ideal high school student before learning about the story of the cells. In fact, she says she “failed freshman year at the regular public high school.” However, she went on to attend college and graduate school, teach writing, and publish an award-winning book. What does this say about the value of grades? Does this mean that high school grades are not important? Should you not worry about your grades because you’ll probably be a big success anyway—just like Rebecca Skloot—without doing well in school?
3. In what ways are Rebecca Skloot and Deborah Lacks different? Despite their difference, Skloot says that they “form[ed] a deep personal bond.” What do you think brought them together? How difficult is it for people whose backgrounds are as different as Rebecca’s and Deborah’s to develop this kind of bond? Why?
Deborah’s Voice

Comprehension Questions:

1. Rebecca Skloot says she decided not to “pretty up” the speech of the Lacks family. Find at least two examples in this brief segment of Deborah’s Lacks’s speech that aren’t “prettied up” but could have been if Skloot had chosen to.

2. In this section, what does Deborah reveal that she is upset about?

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think about Skloot’s decision not to “pretty up” the speech of the Lacks family in her book? Do you think this decision adds an important element of authenticity to her book? Or do you think it is unnecessary for readers to hear the speech of the Lacks family in its original version? Why? Be specific as you defend your answer.

2. We often form opinions of people very quickly based on how they speak and what they say. Based on this short segment from “Deborah’s voice,” what kind of impression do you have of her? Be specific. You can comment on personality, education, beliefs, or any other aspect of her personality that you wish to comment on. Do you think it is fair for people to form impressions of others based on how they speak? Why or why not?
II. Part 1: Life

Chapters—

1. The Exam
2. Clover
3. Diagnosis and Treatment
4. The Birth of HeLa
5. “Blackness Be Spreadin All Inside”
6. “Lady’s on the Phone”
7. The Death and Life of Cell Culture
8. “A Miserable Specimen”
9. Turner Station
10. The Other Side of the Tracks
11. “The Devil of Pain Itself”
Part 1, Chapter 1: The Exam

Comprehension Questions:

1. What symptoms did Henrietta Lacks have before she went to the doctor for testing?
2. What did Henrietta’s family members tell her about her symptoms?
3. How were black patients treated at Johns Hopkins?
4. What was unusual or surprising to the doctors about the tumor growing inside Henrietta?

Discussion Questions:

1. Skloot says that Henrietta Lacks went to Johns Hopkins during “the era of Jim Crow.” Have you ever heard of Jim Crow? What or who is Jim Crow? In what way was her medical treatment different because this was the “era of Jim Crow”? If you can’t answer these questions, please look up the term Jim Crow in a history book or on the internet and then try to answer.
2. How does it make you feel when you read about the differences between the treatment of white and black patients during this era? Why?
Part 1, Chapter 2: Clover

Comprehension Questions:

1. How did Henrietta (Loretta Pleasant at the time) and David both come to live with their grandfather (Tommy Lacks)?
2. What kind of work did Henrietta do as a child?
3. What did trips to South Boston mean for Henrietta and her family?
4. How and when did Henrietta give birth to her first two children?
5. Who is “Crazy Joe,” and how did he feel about Henrietta?
6. Describe the birth of Lucille Elsie Pleasant. What was special about her?
7. Why did Henrietta leave Clover? What inspired her to do so?

Discussion Questions:

1. How difficult do you think life was for Henrietta when she was growing up? What were the hardest parts of that life? Do you think she was ever happy? What things do you think made her happy?
2. In this chapter, we read about cousins Henrietta and David having children and getting married. Most of us would think of these as impossibilities for ourselves because there is now a strong taboo against the coupling of cousins. How does it make you feel to read of these cousins marrying and starting a family? Why?
Part 1, Chapter 3: Diagnosis and Treatment

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is cervical carcinoma in situ? How is it different from invasive cervical carcinoma?

2. What was Dr. Richard Telinde’s new theory about cervical carcinoma in situ?

3. What is a Pap smear, and when was it developed? What does a Pap smear detect? Why is it important for women?

4. Who is George Gey? Why did he attempt to grow Henrietta’s cells?

5. How did the doctors treat Henrietta’s invasive cancer?

Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Telinde attempted to prove other experts were wrong about the relationship between carcinoma in situ and invasive cancer. His ideas were eventually proven to be correct. Dr. Telinde’s story is a common one in the history of science: a radical new idea comes along and is at first rejected, only to be proven correct later on. Can you think of any other such stories from history? From science? Have you ever “known” you were right when others thought you were wrong? How did you react? How did Dr. Telinde react? What can we learn from Dr. Telinde’s example? Does his example mean that all radical ideas are correct?

2. In this chapter, Henrietta’s cells are taken to Dr. Gey, who is ultimately able to preserve and grow them. Now that you have read about Henrietta’s early life, marriage, family, and illness, do you have an opinion about whether it was ethical to take her cells without telling her what might be done with them? How could a reader’s knowledge of the facts of her life affect his or her response to this question? Should it?
Part 1, Chapter 4: The Birth of HeLa

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe Dr. Gey’s attempts at making the perfect medium for growing cells in culture.
2. Mary Kubicek was a very important employee in Dr. Gey’s lab. Explain what she did and why these jobs were so important.
3. What contributions did Margaret Gey make in the developments that led to the HeLa cells?
4. Dr. Gey would probably be described as multi-talented and self-reliant. Why? Give examples from this chapter to show why he would be described this way.
5. In this chapter, how did Henrietta appear to be responding to the radium treatment?

Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Gey was obviously a very talented and intelligent person, but he did not accomplish the HeLa breakthrough alone. He had significant help from his lab assistants and others. Think of a person you know whose accomplishments are impressive. Did this person make these accomplishments alone or with some important help from others? Who helped this person and how? Think of a famous person whose work you admire. What kind of help would you imagine this person had?

2. Henrietta’s treatment with radium may seem unusual, painful, or even cruel by our standards today, but it would probably have been considered excellent medical care at the time of her treatment. Medical treatment often improves over time and becomes less painful or invasive. Can you think of medical treatments that are performed today that might one day be considered too painful or cruel? Do you know of anyone who has benefitted from a medical treatment that was painful or unusual?
Part 1, Chapter 5: “Blackness Be Spreadin All Inside”

Comprehension Questions:

1. How did Henrietta respond to the radium treatments she underwent?
2. Describe the changes in Henrietta’s medical condition in this chapter.
3. Who is Elsie? What happened to her? Why?
4. Describe Henrietta’s relationship with Sadie. Describe her relationship with Ethel. Why did Ethel feel jealous of Henrietta?
5. When and how did Henrietta find out that her treatments had rendered her infertile? How did she react when she learned of this effect of the surgery?

Discussion Questions:

1. It could be claimed that Henrietta received some “good” medical treatments from the hospital at Johns Hopkins. However, her overall care would probably not be considered “good” by our standards today. In this chapter and others, what aspects of her treatment raise concerns for you? What concerns? Why? Also, do you think Henrietta’s family was positively involved in her care? Why or why not? Explain.

2. Henrietta’s daughter was taken to the former “Hospital for the Negro Insane.” Henrietta herself was treated in a hospital ward primarily intended for poor black patients. Obviously, the world has changed a great deal since the era of segregation that this part of the book focuses on. How do you feel when you read about segregation and “separate-but-equal” services in this book? How much progress toward true racial integration do you think we have made in this country? Do any forms of segregation still exist? Where? How?
Part 1, Chapter 6: “Lady’s on the Phone”

Comprehension Questions:

1. Who is Ronald Patillo, and what role did he play in Skloot’s research into the Lacks family?

2. What is the “Tuskegee syphilis study”? What are “Mississippi Appendectomies”? Why does Skloot talk to Ronald Patillo about these topics?

3. Describe the difference between Skloot’s first phone call to Deborah Lacks and her second one. Why did Deborah’s attitude change?

4. How does David Lacks react when Skloot first calls him?

Discussion Questions:

1. The Lacks family does not seem eager to speak with Rebecca Skloot about Henrietta or the HeLa cells. Why not? What reasons would they have for not trusting or embracing this researcher who wants to tell the story of the woman and her cells?

2. Skloot perseveres in her efforts to speak to the Lacks family and research the history of the HeLa cells. One lesson from the book is that success takes time and persistence. Think of something you have succeeded at. What obstacles stood between you and success? How did you overcome them? Think of someone you know (or have read about/seen a movie about, etc.) who achieved success by being persistent and not giving up too soon. Who? What did this person do? What obstacles to success did this person overcome?
Part 1, Chapter 7:
The Death and Life of Cell Culture

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe George Guy’s methods for shipping HeLa cells around the world in the early days.
2. Who is Alexis Carrel? What did he claim to accomplish?
3. Skloot describes Carrel as a “eugenicist”? What does it mean to be a “eugenicist”?
4. Carrel was at one time a very well-respected scientist who won a Nobel Prize, but his legacy was ultimately tarnished. Why?
5. Skloot claims that by 1951, the general public’s opinions about cell culturing had changed? In what ways? Why?

Discussion Questions:

1. Skloot seems to suggest that people were not only suspicious of the news of immortal cell cultures but wary of the potential uses and misuses of such cell cultures. Can you think of any other scientific breakthroughs that frighten the public? Which ones? Why?

2. When scientists make discoveries or developments such as the one made by Dr. George Gey, do you think they are primarily concerned with helping others? Advancing knowledge in their field? Getting personally rewarded? What is their primary motivation for the work that they do?
Part 1, Chapter 8: “A Miserable Specimen”

Comprehension Questions:

1. What did the doctors tell Henrietta when she returned to the hospital complaining of discomfort?
2. What is “benevolent deception,” and why did doctors believe in it at the time of Henrietta’s treatment?
3. When did the doctors finally realize that Henrietta’s cancer had returned?
4. Describe the various medicines and methods the doctors used to ease her pain.

Discussion Questions:

1. Skloot claims that black patients—especially those in public wards such as the one Henrietta visited—often received sub-standard care that was less effective than white patients received. After reading this chapter, do you believe the doctors at Johns Hopkins were doing everything they could to help Henrietta and give her a chance to beat the cancer that ultimately killed her? Why or why not?

2. Henrietta seems to have fought as strongly as she could for as long as she could against cancer. Would you describe her fight as “brave”? What other words would you use to describe her attempts to deal with her illness? Have you ever known anyone who has battled cancer or another serious illness? How would you describe that person’s response to his or her illness?
Part 1, Chapter 9: Turner Station

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why does Skloot visit Turner Station? What or who is she looking for?
2. Describe Speed’s Grocery.
3. What happened to Turner Station in the years since Henrietta’s death?
4. How is it that Courtney Speed has so many “children”?
5. What happened when Courtney Speed tried to establish a Henrietta Lacks museum?

Discussion Questions:

1. In Turner Station, Skloot obviously does not find what she came for. What is she looking for when she comes? What does she find instead? Would you describe her trip there as useless or unproductive? Why or why not? What new information does she uncover? How? What new contacts does she make? Why might these be valuable in her efforts to research the Henrietta Lacks story?

2. Skloot’s research into the Henrietta Lacks story takes her on many paths, not all of which are immediately productive. Researching anything can be similar in that some searches (for library materials or interview subjects or for answers to a question, etc.) can be “dead ends.” However, some dead ends are ultimately productive. For example, you might find a library source that doesn’t help you to answer your original question but leads to better or different questions. Has this situation ever happened to you? When? Have you ever been involved in a difficult research project such as a research paper or science project? Can you remember any dead ends that you ran into during your project? What happened when you reached the dead end? What should a student do when he or she reaches a dead end while researching?
Part 1, Chapter 10: The Other Side of the Tracks

Comprehension Questions:

1. In a few sentences, describe the town of Clover when Skloot visited. Describe Lacks Town as Skloot first saw it in a few sentences.
2. What is Cootie’s real name? How and when did Cootie get his nickname?
3. What kind of house does Cootie live in? What is special or unusual about the building of this house?
4. Why does Cootie believe that Henrietta’s cancer was unusual? Cootie has two theories about what caused Henrietta’s cancer. What are they?

Discussion Questions:

1. Skloot describes Clover and Lacks Town very objectively and matter-of-factly without indicating what her reaction to these places was. How do you think she felt about these places? How do you think she reacted to them? Why? Be specific. Why do you think she chooses to omit her reactions to these places and instead simply describes them objectively? Do you think this is a good decision for her as a writer? What effect does this decision have? How would it have affected the chapter if Skloot had instead written directly about her feelings toward or reactions to Clover and Lacks Town?

2. Very quickly, Skloot and Cootie develop a relationship that allows Skloot to gather some good information from Cootie. How would you describe their interactions? Why do you think Cootie was so willing to speak with Skloot while other people she had met and talked to were not?
Part 1, Chapter 11: The Devil of Pain Itself

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe Henrietta’s medical condition in September of 1951.
2. Where does the title of this chapter come from?
3. Why did Emmett Lacks and several other men decide to donate blood?
4. What was Henrietta’s final request? When and to whom did she make this request? Was the request honored?

Discussion Questions:

1. This chapter on the death of Henrietta Lacks is very brief and does not include a description of Henrietta’s actual death scene. Why do you think Skloot decided to make this chapter so brief? Why do you think she chose not to describe the final moments of Henrietta’s life? What effect do you think these choices have on this chapter?

2. As you read this chapter, how did you feel about Henrietta’s treatment by the hospital? Why? What about her treatment by her family and friends? Why?
III. Part 2: Death

Chapters—

12. The Storm
13. The HeLa Factory
14. Helen Lane
15. “Too Young to Remember”
16. “Spending Eternity in the Same Place”
17. Illegal, Immoral, and Deplorable
18. “Strangest Hybrid”
20. The HeLa Bomb
21. Night Doctors
22. “The Fame She So Richly Deserves”
Part 2, Chapter 12: The Storm

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why did the doctors need permission to take samples from Henrietta’s body after she had died?
2. Describe the condition of Henrietta’s body (especially internally) during the autopsy.
3. In this chapter, two people react to seeing Henrietta’s painted toenails. Who are they? What are their reactions?
4. What happened immediately after Henrietta’s funeral? What is her cousin Peter’s opinion of this event?

Discussion Questions:

1. Most of us have been to one or more funerals. Compare your experiences at funerals to the description of the funeral for Henrietta Lacks in this chapter. In what ways are they different? In what ways similar?
2. It may seem unusual that this book does not end with the death of Henrietta Lacks. In fact, her death come roughly a third of the way through the book. Why do you think she chose not to close the book with the story of Henrietta’s death and funeral?
3. Skloot skips around in time in her book. Why do you think she does this? How does the time skipping affect you as a reader? If you find it somewhat confusing, what can you do to help yourself follow the book despite the time jumps?
Part 2, Chapter 13: The HeLa Factory

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why were the HeLa cells exactly what polio researchers needed? (Be specific.)
2. Describe the “HeLa Factory” at the Tuskegee Institute.
3. What are the advantages of being able to freeze the HeLa cells without harming them?
4. What kind of business did Sam Reader develop? Why was this business important for cell researchers?
5. What was Dr. Gey’s reaction to the enormous scientific interest in the HeLa cells?

Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Gey’s reaction to the success of the HeLa cell line might seem odd. Can you offer any explanation for his feelings about the HeLa cells from this chapter? Do you think his feelings are justified? Reasonable? Why or why not?
2. Sam Reader and his company profited greatly from the HeLa cells. His and others’ profits from the cells lead to an important ethical question at the heart of this book. At this point (not having finished the book), what is your opinion? Do you think it is ethical for businesses such as Reader’s to profit from biological materials such as the HeLa cells? Why or why not?
3. Even if you think it is fine for them to make a profit in this way, imagine that you are on a debate team that must argue it is unethical to make a profit off of biological materials such as the HeLa cells. What argument can you think of at this point for why this sort of profit-making would be unethical?
Part 2, Chapter 14: Helen Lane

Comprehension Questions:

1. The name of the patient who donated the HeLa cells was reported incorrectly in the press. In a few sentences, explain how Henrietta may have come to be known by names such as Helen Lane and Henrietta Lakes.

2. Why did the authors of two articles want to include Henrietta’s name in the articles?

3. What is the NFIP? Why would George Gey have been more likely to release Henrietta’s name to the writer from that organization than to the other writer?

4. What was Gey’s position on releasing Henrietta’s name?

Discussion Questions:

1. Skloot walks a fine line in this chapter. She never argues specifically that Henrietta’s name should not have been released to the press. However, she does seem to question the ethics of the newspaper that originally released her name, albeit in a slightly incorrect form. She points out that there was no standard policy requiring confidentiality at the time but doesn’t say whether she thinks there should have been. Why do you think Skloot chooses not to make her own opinion on this matter known?

2. In this chapter, George Gey faces a fairly difficult dilemma. As the foremost expert on cell culturing, he might welcome more publicity for his work. However, he seems to have an honest conviction that the name should not be released. Thus, he is caught between these two conflicting motivations. What do you think he should have done? Why?

3. We all face ethical dilemmas from time to time. Write a paragraph in which you explain an ethical dilemma you have faced and explain the choice that you ultimately made.
Part 2, Chapter 15: “Too Young to Remember”

Comprehension Questions:

1. How did the Lacks children contract tuberculosis?
2. After Henrietta died, Ethel and Galen moved in with David Lacks and the children. What did Ethel say her reasons were for moving in with the Lackses? What other reasons might there have been?
3. Describe the children’s treatment by Ethel. (Be specific.)
4. Deborah Lacks was abused by Galen. Explain how. How did Deborah react to this abuse? (Be specific.)
5. Joe Lacks is described as the “meanest, angriest child” anyone in the Lacks family had ever known. What kinds of things did he do as a child? What possible explanations does this chapter give for his problem behaviors?

Discussion Questions:

1. Deborah and the other Lacks children obviously had a difficult life when they were growing up. Most of us have never experienced a life like theirs. How does it make you feel to read about the things that happened to them? Sad? Angry? Lucky not to have had to endure this sort of life? Explain.
2. In this chapter, the book obviously shifts the focus away from the HeLa cells and Henrietta Lacks. Skloot’s book is as much the story of the family as it is the story of the cells. Why do you think she chose to focus so much attention on the Lacks family and not exclusively on the story of the HeLa cells themselves? Do you think this decision was a good one? Why or why not? Would the book be more or less valuable for college-level readers if it had focused exclusively on the story of the cells themselves rather than on the Lacks family?
Part 2, Chapter 16: “Spending Eternity in the Same Place”

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe the house that Henrietta’s cousin Cliff lives in and the “home-house” that Cliff takes Skloot to see (the one that Henrietta lived in).

2. Skloot takes the title of this chapter from something Cliff said to her. What was his point in that comment?

3. According to this chapter, what is the most likely explanation for how the “white Lackses” and “black Lackses” related? How did these two related families come to live in separate parts of town? Are there any other explanations for why there are two branches of the Lacks family?

4. Henrietta’s sister Lillian “converted to Puerto Rican.” Why and how did she do this?

Discussion Questions:

1. The two sides of the Lacks family—black and white—apparently live separate lives with very little interaction. The older white couple in this chapter claim to be unaware that they are related to the “black Lackses.” Both sides seem to have agreed to live separately and perhaps even to deny that they were related. Why do you think they chose to do this? What effect do you think this separation had on the Lacks, especially the “black Lackses”?

2. In this and many of the other chapters in this book, Skloot herself is a character in her own book. She could have left herself out of the book, but she decided to include herself. Why do you think she chose to put herself in the book by recording conversations and experiences she had during the research process? What effect do you think this decision makes on the book? Do you think this was a wise decision or not? Why or why not?
Part 2, Chapter 17: Illegal, Immoral, and Deplorable

Comprehension Questions:

1. What kinds of experiments did Dr. Chester Southam perform with HeLa cells? What did he learn through this research? Why would this research be considered unethical today?

2. What happened at the war tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany? What is the “Nuremberg Code”? Why does Skloot bring up the topic of the Nuremberg code in this chapter?

3. What, if anything, happened to Dr. Southam as a result of his unethical research practices?

4. What did the NIH do in response to the Southam case?

Discussion Questions:

1. Most of us would probably agree that Dr. Southam’s failure to tell subjects he was injecting them with cancer cells is a clear example of unethical behavior. However, he apparently did inform the prisoners in Ohio that he was injecting them with cancer cells. Some people would say this experiment was still not ethical because the prisoners’ consent was likely to have been coerced rather than freely given. Clearly state your opinion on the following questions (and give your reasons, of course): Was Southam’s research on the prisoners also unethical? Why or why not? Do you think it is ethical to do this kind of research on prisoners? Why or why not? Would it be ethical to offer prisoners time off of their sentences for their willingness to participate in potentially dangerous medical experiments?

2. Skloot often writes in first person (I) perspective in this book and tells of her experiences during the research process for the book, but she is noticeably absent from this chapter. She doesn’t even state her opinion of the Southam case. Why do you think she chose not to write in first person perspective in this chapter? What effect does this perspective choice have on the chapter?
Part 2, Chapter 18: “Strangest Hybrid”

Comprehension Questions:

1. This chapter is, in part, about the public’s fears about a particular kind of scientific research. What kind of research? What was the public afraid of?

2. Lewis Coriell had some deep concerns about the future of cell culture research. What were those concerns? (Be specific.)

3. Describe George Hyatt’s experiment with skin cells. What was he trying to discover in his test?

4. What is cell sex or somatic cell fusion? Who discovered it? Why was the discovery of this phenomenon so important for later researchers?

Discussion Questions:

1. In this chapter, we learn that many people were frightened when they learned about the kinds of scientific research Skloot describes. Today, many people worry about scientific research involving cloning, stem cell research, gene splicing, etc. Why do you think some kinds of scientific progress frighten people? What kinds of scientific work do you think people are most wary of? Are there any topics you think scientists shouldn’t work on or that we just shouldn’t inquire about? Which ones? Why?

2. How would you characterize Skloot’s attitude toward the issues raised by this chapter? For example, how does she portray those who were afraid of this new realm of science? Does she try to show that their fears were unfounded or based in ignorance? Or does she understand and sympathize with their fears? Does she “take the scientists’ side” in their constant desire to know more? Or does she seem to share the fears that many people had of this kind of research?
Part 2, Chapter 19:  
“The Most Critical Time on This Earth is Now”

Comprehension Questions:

1. How did Bobbette help Deborah when Deborah became pregnant?
2. Describe Joe’s military experience in a few sentences.
3. Summarize the murder and subsequent events that led to Joe turning himself into the police for the murder of Ivy.
4. What transformation did Joe go through while he was in prison?
5. Why and when did Deborah leave Cheetah? (Be specific.)

Discussion Questions:

1. There is a good bit of violence in this chapter. As a reader, how did you feel when you encountered this material? Were you shocked? Saddened? What exactly was your emotional reaction to reading about the extreme violence in the Lack family history? Why? What would you say is the root cause or causes of the kinds of violence we find in this chapter? Why did this kind of thing happen in and to the Lacks family? Were they just unlucky, or is there some cause we could point to? If so, what do you think it is?

2. With this chapter, Skloot follows up a chapter on scientific developments with a chapter on the lives of the Lacks family. This kind of skipping around is typical of the book. Why do you think Skloot chose to change topics and to skip around in time the way she does? What effect does this writing strategy have on you as a reader?
Part 2, Chapter 20: The HeLa Bomb

Comprehension Questions:

1. What did Stanley Gartler reveal at the Second Decennial Review Conference on Cell Tissue and Organ Culture? Why was this devastating news for the scientists who heard his talk?

2. What specific qualities in the HeLa cells allowed them to contaminate other cell cultures so easily?

3. How did the other scientists react to Gartler’s revelations? Give specific examples.

4. What is G6PD-A? Why was it important in confirming what Gartler had told the audience?

Discussion Questions:

1. The scientists at the conference were surprised by what Gartler told them. Some didn’t believe it. Some may even have been angry. Why would they not have wanted to believe him?

2. Sometimes people don’t want to believe something that they know or suspect is true. For example, some children suspect for years that Santa Claus is not real, but they don’t want to give up on their belief in him. Has something like this ever happened to you? If you feel comfortable telling the story, explain what you learned and why you didn’t want to believe it. Do you think it is possible to convince yourself that something is not true even though you “know” it probably is? Have you ever seen an example of this? If so, what was it?
Part 2, Chapter 21: Night Doctors

Comprehension Questions:

1. In this chapter, we learn that some members of the Lacks family mistrust doctors and hospitals. Specifically, which Lacks family members have this kind of mistrust? What do they say about their mistrust of doctors and hospitals?

2. What are “night doctors”? What did they supposedly do? Why does Skloot bring up this term in this chapter?

3. Who established the Johns Hopkins hospital? When? Why?

4. What is the Lacks family angry about in this chapter?

Discussion Questions:

1. Imagine that you wanted to restore the Lacks family’s trust in doctors and medical institutions. What would you say to the members of the Lacks family? Write a short but well-developed paragraph in which you argue persuasively that they should not lose faith in the entire medical industry due to their mother’s experience. Make your reasons as persuasive as possible for this group of readers.

2. The Lacks family decides to work with Skloot despite their general mistrust of outsiders who want to inquire about the HeLa story. Why do you think they chose to trust her and work with her? Is there something about her style or approach that worked particularly well with the Lacks family? What do you think it is?
Part 2, Chapter 22: “The Fame She So Richly Deserves”

Comprehension Questions:

1. When and how did George Gey die? What did he die of? What specific requests did he make after he was diagnosed with the disease that killed him?

2. How and when was Henrietta’s name released to the general public? Explain in detail.

3. What was the National Cancer Act, and what was its goal? What happened as a result of the NCA?

4. In this chapter, what do we learn about the “HeLa Bomb” assertions made by Stanley Gartler? (See chapter 20 for more information on the “HeLa Bomb.”)

Discussion Questions:

1. This chapter concludes the “Death” section of the book. Why do you think Skloot chose to use “Death” as the title for this section? Do you think this is an effective title choice? Why or why not? If you were asked to think of another title for this section using no more than five words, what title would you choose? Why?

2. Dr. George Gey dies in this chapter. He is a well-respected scientist who received much praise for his work. What is your opinion of him and his work with regard to the following issues:

   - The ethics of his “taking” the cells of Henrietta and other patients?
   - His decisions regarding the release of Henrietta’s identity?
   - His requests and actions after his diagnosis and before his death?
IV. Part 3: Immortality

Chapters—

23. “It’s Alive”
24. “Least They Can Do”
26. Breach of Privacy
27. The Secret of Immortality
28. After London
29. A Village of Henriettas
30. Zakariyya
31. Hela, Goddess of Death
32. “All That’s My Mother”
33. The Hospital for the Negro Insane
34. The Medical Records
35. Soul Cleansing
36. Heavenly Bodies
37. “Nothing to Be Scared About”
38. The Long Road to Clover
**Part 3, Chapter 23: “It’s Alive”**

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. What did Bobbette learn in 1973? How did she learn it, and who did she learn it from?
2. How did the Lacks family react when Bobbette told them what she had learned?
3. Why did the researchers want to draw blood from Henrietta’s surviving family members?
4. What did the Lacks family members believe the blood tests were for?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In this chapter, we find two conflicting stories about what the Lacks family was told or not told when the researchers began taking their blood. They obviously can’t both be true. What are these two sides to the story? After reading this chapter, which version of the story do you find more believable? Why? Explain.

2. Regulations would now require that the Lacks family be given more detailed information about the blood test they submitted to and that they be given an opportunity to sign informed consent forms. Do you agree that the researchers owed them more information and that they should have been given a chance to refuse to sign informed consent forms?
Part 3, Chapter 24: “Least They Can Do”

Comprehension Questions:

1. HeLa cells have been sold for large profits for many years. Who has profited from the HeLa cells? George Guy? Johns Hopkins? Be specific.

2. Describe George Guy’s attempts (or lack thereof) of profiting from his work with the HeLa cells and from other aspects of his scientific work.

3. The Lacks family learned a key piece of important information in Rogers’s *Rolling Stone* article that made them much more interested in the HeLa story. What was it?

4. Describe Henrietta’s reactions when she learned of specific experiments performed on the HeLa cells.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you explain and justify the experiments done on the HeLa cells to Deborah Lacks. What would you tell her to make her feel better about this situation? Imagine that you are the President of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Board. Write a brief (one page or less) letter to Deborah Lacks in which you attempt to explain the purpose of and experiments on the HeLa cells.

2. Imagine yourself in Deborah’s situation. Now, write a brief (one page or less) letter to the President of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Board in which you express your concerns and ask important questions about the work done on your mother’s cells.
**Part 3, Chapter 25:**
“Who Told You You Could Sell My Spleen?”

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. Who is John Moore? What kind of job did he do? What kind of illness did John Moore have? Describe his condition in detail.

2. Who is David Golde and what did he do for John Moore? How did Golde plan to profit from his work with John Moore?

3. Who is Ananda Mohan Chacrabarty? What kind of work did he do? What legal precedent was set by the Chacrabarty case?

4. What medical condition did Ted Slavin suffer from? How did he contract this illness? How did he plan to profit from his medical condition?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Imagine that you have a rare illness. You recover from the illness with the help of an experimental treatment. Now, the doctor wants to use the antibodies in your cells to develop a medicine for the disease that will generate millions of dollars in revenue. Would you give the cells away? Would you try to negotiate a deal that gives you millions of dollars for them? What would you do? Why? Explain what you would do and give your reasons.

2. Skloot has not explicitly revealed her opinions about any of the cases she writes about, including the HeLa case. However, you can probably guess at her opinions. Write a paragraph in which you explain what you think Skloot would say about the cases in this chapter.
Part 3, Chapter 26:
Breach of Privacy

Comprehension Questions:

1. When did Deborah marry her second husband? Who was he? According to this chapter, how did he make Deborah feel? What did they do together?
2. Describe Zakariyya’s life after he was released from prison. What problems did he have, and how did he try to solve them? Be specific.
3. What kinds of legal trouble does Deborah’s son Alfred have in this chapter? How does Deborah attempt to deal with his various problems? Be specific.
4. How did Deborah react after reading passages from Michael Gold’s book?

Discussion Questions:

1. Today, it would be illegal to publish the kind of information Gold did without permission. However, at the time, it was not illegal. Considering that it was not illegal to do so at the time, what do you think he should have done? Why?
2. Put yourself in Deborah’s situation with Alfred. How do you think you would deal with a son who had the kinds of problem behaviors that Alfred had?
Part 3, Chapter 27: The Secret of Immortality

Comprehension Questions:

2. Describe the theories Henrietta’s family had about the cause of her cancer.
3. What strange idea did Leigh Van Halen and other scientists propose with regard to the HeLa cells? How did the scientific community react to this idea?
4. What is the Hayflick limit? Why were Henrietta’s cells not subject to the Hayflick limit?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Jeremy Rifkin object to the scientific work done by Richard Axel? Do you agree or disagree with Rifkin? Explain in a well-developed paragraph.
2. Henrietta’s family members obviously have some “non-scientific” explanations for her cancer. Imagine that you are Rebecca Skloot, the author. How would you explain to them the more scientific explanations for her cancer without sounding as if you are “talking down” to them. Write a letter to the family in which you politely explain to them politely that there are “more rational” or “more scientific” explanations for her cancer.
Part 3, Chapter 28: After London

Comprehension Questions:

1. Who is Adam Curtis, and what did he do in 1996?
2. Who is Ronald Patillo? What is his connection to the HeLa story and the Lacks family? What event did he organize in 1996? What role did Henrietta and the other Lacks family members play in this event?
3. Who is Mary Kubicek? Describe the event that she spoke at. What was the purpose of the event? How did the people in the audience feel? What kinds of things did they say to Kubicek? Be specific.
4. Who is Keenan Kester Cofield? What did he promise to do for the Lacks family? Did he deliver on his promise? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions:

1. Deborah Lacks has an intense physical reaction to several stressful events in this chapter. The link between stress and various illnesses is well established. College can be a very stressful experience, too. Write a paragraph in which you explain a few strategies you use to deal with the stresses of college life. Do you think any of these strategies could have prevented the bad physical reactions that Deborah experienced?
2. Many people would describe Keenan Kester Cofield as a con man who was trying to “use” the Lacks family’s misfortunes for his own benefit. Do you think there is any chance that he was honestly trying to help the family? Why or why not? How would you compare his and Courtney Speed’s attempts to help the Lacks family? Do you see her as an opportunist trying to benefit from their misfortunes? Why or why not?
Part 3, Chapter 29:
A Village of Henriettas

Comprehension Questions:

1. In this chapter, Rebecca Skloot says that for Deborah, “the line between sci-fi and reality had blurred.” What does Skloot mean by this statement? Why was the line blurred for Deborah? Give two examples from the chapter to illustrate Skloot’s point.

2. When Deborah finally began meeting with and talking to Skloot, what did Deborah want to find out and to accomplish in their research together?

3. What did Skloot and Deborah do together when they began meeting to discuss the HeLa story? Give several examples to show how they spent their time together.

4. Skloot describes Deborah’s personality in this chapter. In a few sentences, summarize what Skloot says about her personality.

5. Near the end of the chapter, Deborah becomes angry and walks away from Skloot. What happened? Why was Deborah angry? How does Skloot react?

Discussion Questions:

1. Rebecca Skloot is very determined to succeed with her book about HeLa. What do you think drives her to complete this research project? Be specific. What will she get out of the project? What do you think she hopes for in telling the HeLa story?

2. Put yourself in Deborah’s situation. If you were her, would you want to work with Skloot on her book project or not? Why or why not? Be specific. If you would choose to work with her, why? What would you want to get out of the relationship or accomplish with the project? If you would choose not to work with her, why not? Be specific.
**Part 3, Chapter 30: Zakariyya**

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. Describe Zakariyya’s personality in a few sentences. Use specific examples from the chapter to develop your description of his personality.

2. Why is Zakariyya angry? Who is he angry at? What does he say are the reasons for his anger? Why does he say he has spent so much of his life fighting?

3. How does Deborah try to protect Skloot from Zakariyya? Be specific. Give at least two examples.

4. At the end of the chapter, something happens that changes Zakariyya’s mood drastically. What is it, and how does his mood change?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. When Skloot goes to meet Zakariyya, she is afraid, but she still goes. It has been said that courage is not the lack of fear. Courage is instead doing something even though you fear it. What have you done that shows the kind of courage that Skloot shows in this chapter? Have you ever faced a fear bravely? If so, briefly tell the story. If you have never faced a fear head-on like Skloot does in this chapter, identify a fear that you have and describe how you could face that fear. Do you think it is always a good idea to face up to fears in the way Skloot does in this chapter?

2. Imagine that you are in the same position; you are a researcher who must talk to Zakariyya about the HeLa cells. What would you say to him to help him trust you and work with you? How would you approach talking to a person who is as hostile as he seems to be?
Part 3, Chapter 31:
Hela, Goddess of Death

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe the changes in attitude toward Skloot that Deborah often experiences. Be specific. Give examples.

2. After Skloot taught Deborah to use the internet and to do basic research with Google, what kinds of information did Deborah look for? What did she find? Give several specific examples.

3. What event is Deborah asked to speak at in this chapter?

4. What does this title of this chapter refer to? Be specific.

5. What were Deborah’s “dummy pills”? Why were they called that? What happened to her when she took these pills? Be specific.

6. What happens to Deborah’s son Alfred in this chapter?

Discussion Questions:

1. Deborah finds it difficult to trust others. Why do you think this is? Be specific. What strategies does Skloot use to try to gain Deborah’s trust? How well are these strategies working? What would you do to gain Deborah’s trust? Would you do anything different than Skloot has done? What, for example?

2. Why do you think Skloot chose Deborah as the focal point for the book rather than one of the other children of Henriett Lacks? Is her story more compelling or sympathetic than the stories of her siblings? Why?
Comprehension Questions:

1. What do Deborah and Zakariyya hope to see when they go to the lab? What do they actually see when they go there? Be specific.
2. Describe what happens at the Jesus statue in this chapter. Be specific. Make sure to refer in your answer all three of the people who meet at the statue.
3. What is Christoph’s opinion about the money generated from the sale of HeLa cells?
4. Why don’t Lawrence and Day come to the lab with Deborah and Zakariyya?

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with Christoph’s ideas about the money from the HeLa cells? Why or why not?
2. At the end of the chapter, Deborah tells Skloot, “Girl, you just witnessed a miracle.” What miracle do you think she is referring to? Do you think this is a “miracle”? Explain your answer in detail.
Part 3, Chapter 33:  
The Hospital for the Negro Insane

Comprehension Questions:

1. In this chapter, what are Deborah and Skloot looking for?
2. Describe the conditions at the hospital when Elise would have lived there.  Be specific.
3. Who is Paul Lurz? How does he react to Deborah and her attempt to find out what happened to Elsie? What information does he give to Deborah?
4. What kind of medical experiment was Elsie likely made to participate in? Describe it in detail. Why was this experiment traumatic for patients? Be specific.

Discussion Questions:

1. Throughout the book, Skloot has struggled to gain Deborah’s trust. In this chapter, what evidence do we have that she has gained Deborah’s trust? What evidence do we have that she doesn’t completely trust Skloot? Be specific. If you were Deborah, would you trust her? Why or why not?
2. Deborah is looking for information that may be upsetting to her, but she still wants to find it. Why do you think she wants to find this information so badly? Will it help her to know more? Why or why not? If you were in her situation, do you think you would want to have this potentially upsetting information or not? Why or why not?
Comprehension Questions:

1. What do Skloot and Deborah work on together in this chapter? Where and how do they do their work?

2. Why does Deborah become angry in this chapter? How does Skloot attempt to calm her down?

3. Deborah’s behavior in this chapter would perhaps best be described as erratic. Why? Explain and give examples.

4. Deborah learns some things that upset her in the medical records. What are they? Give at least two good examples.

Discussion Questions:

1. Skloot is very patient with Deborah throughout the process of researching the book. However, Deborah tests her patience in this chapter. Would you be able to work with someone like Deborah? Why or why not? If you had been in the hotel room with Deborah on that night, what would you have said to her?

2. In this chapter, Deborah shows that she is clearly having trouble completely trusting Skloot. Why? Explain in detail.
Part 3, Chapter 35: Soul Cleansing

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe Henrietta’s sister Gladys and her house.
2. What are Deborah’s reactions—physical and emotional—to the news she has learned about her sister and mother? Be specific.
3. Why is Gary called “The Disciple”? What happened to him that led him to become “The Disciple”?

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think Rebecca Skloot was thinking when she saw what happened between Gary and Deborah in this chapter? Imagine that you are in Skloot’s position. Write a paragraph in which you describe your thoughts as you witnessed this scene.
2. Toward the end of the chapter, Skloot says that she felt responsible for what happened to Deborah. Do you think Skloot is really at fault? Why or why not? Would you feel that you were at fault if you had been in her situation? Do you think Skloot really believes that she is at fault?
Part 3, Chapter 36: Heavenly Bodies

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe Deborah’s physical condition on the morning after reading through the medical records with Skloot.

2. What does Gary give to Skloot in this chapter? Why does he give it to her?

3. What do we learn about Skloot’s religious beliefs in this chapter?

4. Summarize what Gary believes about the immortality of the HeLa cells.

Discussion Questions:

1. This is a very short chapter. It could have been added to the previous chapter, but Skloot has decided to present it as its own separate chapter. Why do you think she chose to do this? What effect does she achieve by presenting this as a separate and very short chapter? Do you think she has achieved the effect she intends? Why or why not?

1. Skloot says she now understands what the Lacks family believes about the immortality of the HeLa cells. She seems to want to convince her readers that she respects this family even though she is obviously much better educated than they are. Do you believe her? Do you think she respects them as much as she tries to make it seem? Why or why not?
Part 3, Chapter 37: “Nothing to Be Scared About”

Comprehension Questions:

1. What medical emergency happens to Deborah in this chapter? Where and when does this event occur? Does she recover? How? How well?
3. What are Deborah’s educational plans? Why is she unable to follow through on these plans?
4. What church event do Deborah and Skloot attend? What does Skloot do at this event?

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the relationship that has built up between Rebecca Skloot and Deborah Lacks? Are they friends? Are they more like siblings? Do they trust each other? Do they love each other? Is Deborah a mother figure to Skloot? Is Skloot a teacher figure for Deborah? Write a paragraph in which you define and describe their relationship as well as you can.
2. What emotions do you think Skloot was having in the church that day? Write a paragraph in which you describe the emotions you think she was having that day and why. Be specific.
Part 3, Chapter 38: The Long Road to Clover

Comprehension Questions:

2. What happens to the town of Clover in this chapter?
3. How many Lacks family members die in this chapter? How do they die? Be specific.
4. What two movies did Deborah watch with Skloot in this chapter? What similarities did she find between the two?
5. How long is the time gap between Chapter 37 and Chapter 38?

Discussion Questions:

1. As a reader, were you prepared for Deborah’s death in this chapter? Did you expect it to happen? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Skloot left such a long time gap between the last two chapters? Do you think this is a good decision? Why or why not? What is the effect of such a long time gap? Be specific.
Instructor’s Answer Key to Comprehension Questions in the Study Guide
PREFATORY MATERIALS

• A Few Words About This Book
  1. A non-fiction book is one that tells a “true story” rather than one that is created by the author as in a novel or short story (works of fiction).
  2. Skloot interviewed family members and friends of Henrietta Lacks as well as lawyers, scientists, and journalists who have knowledge of the case. She also researched archival photographs and documents, read articles and books on science and history topics related to the Lacks case, and read the personal journals of Deborah Lack, Henrietta’s daughter.
  3. HeLa is the acronym for the cell line derived from Henrietta Lacks’s cells. It combines the first two letters of her first name and the first two letters of her last name.

• Prologue: The Woman in the Photograph
  1. The cells have:
     • Been sent to space to research the effect of zero gravity on human cells
     • Helped lead to advances in medicine such as the polio vaccine, chemotherapy, and in-vitro fertilization
     • Been used for many other purposes as well.
  2. There is no clear estimate of how many HeLa cells there are in the world today, but certainly the number is very high (as in many trillions of them). It has been estimated that they might weigh more than 50 million metric tons if they were all gathered together. Laid end to end, they would probably stretch around the world at least three times.
  3. Skloot learned about the HeLa cells in 1988 in a community college biology class taught by Donald Defler.

• Deborah’s Voice
  1. There are a number of possible examples of speech that has not been “prettied up.” Here are a few:
     • “…people always be askin”
     • “…my mother name was Henrietta Lacks”
     • “But they don’t never explain”
     • “I don’t got it in me no more to fight.”
2. Deborah is upset that her family never received any of the money made with the help of her mother’s cells. She also seems to be upset about the fact that her mother is only remembered for her cells, not as a person.
PART I: LIFE

Chapter 1--The Exam
1. When Henrietta went to the doctors, she told them, “I got a knot on my womb.” The knot had been there for over a year. She examined herself in the tub and found a lump on her cervix. When she asked her husband to take her to the hospital, she told him she had been bleeding even though it was not her time of the month to bleed.

2. Henrietta’s family members asked her if she was pregnant. Sadie wondered if Henrietta could be pregnant “outside” her womb. When Henrietta was found to be pregnant, the family members figured her symptoms were all related to the pregnancy.

3. Unlike some hospitals at the time, Johns Hopkins had a public ward that treated black patients. However, they were segregated into “colored wards” and made to drink from segregated fountains. While Henrietta did get treatment here, it felt like a very foreign and frightening place.

4. The purple color and shiny surface texture of Henrietta’s tumor were unusual. It also bled more easily than normal, and it seemed unusual to her doctor that the tumor had not been discovered during her recent full-term pregnancy.

Chapter 2—Clover
1. After Henrietta’s mother died during the birth of her tenth child, Henrietta’s father (Johnny Pleasant) did not have the patience it took to raise his ten children. He took them to Clover, where they were divided among the family members there. Henrietta was taken in by her grandfather (Tommy Lacks).

2. As a child, Henrietta did farm work such as feeding livestock and tending to a garden. She also worked in the tobacco fields and in her grandfather’s tobacco curing barns.

3. South Boston was where the Lacks family took their tobacco crops to be auctioned. Monthly trips to South Boston during the harvest months meant riding in a horse-drawn wagon to town and then helping with the tobacco sale before sleeping under tobacco leaves in the basement of the tobacco warehouse.

4. Henrietta had her first child (Lawrence) at the age of 14. She had been sleeping in a bed with her cousin Day since she was four years old, so no one was surprised when they started having babies. She gave birth to her second child (Lucile Elsie Pleasant) four years later.
5. Crazy Joe Grinman was another of Henrietta’s cousins. He was apparently so in love with Henrietta that he tried to kill himself on more than one occasion when Henrietta rejected him.

6. Lucille Elsie Pleasant was born four years after Lawrence. She was born on the floor of the “home-house” where Henrietta lived. She was known as “simple” then, but today her condition might be diagnosed properly as epilepsy or retardation.

7. As World War II got started and the country needed steel for the war effort, Day left for work in the steel industry in Turner Station. He told Henrietta he would send for her and the children when he had saved enough money for a house for them. When his cousin Fred Garrett gave him his savings before leaving for the army, Day asked Henrietta and the children to join him in Turner Station.

Chapter 3--Diagnosis and Treatment

1. Cervical carcinoma in situ, also known as “sugar-icing carcinoma,” refers to cancer that has not penetrated the surface of the cervix. Invasive cervical carcinoma has penetrated the surface of the cervix.

2. Dr. Telinde’s new theory about carcinoma in situ was that this type of cancer can spread and become invasive. Most doctors in 1951 did not believe this kind of spreading was possible.

3. The Pap smear is a test developed in 1941 by Dr. George Papanicolaou. The Greek researcher developed this method for scraping cells from the cervix to examine them under a microscope for pre-cancerous changes.

4. Dr. George Guy was a cancer researcher who had been attempting for decades to grow an immortal cell line in order to help find the cause of and cure for cancer. He tried to grow Henrietta’s cells after Dr. Telinde offered him cervical cancer cells for his research.

5. Doctors inserted glass tubes filled with radium into Henrietta’s cervix in order to treat her cancer. The tubes were places into hand-sewn canvas pouches called “Brack plaques” that were stitched to Henrietta’s cervix for the duration of her treatment.

Chapter 4--The Birth of HeLa

1. George Gey had been attempting to create the perfect culture medium for many years. He experimented with many different combinations of bizarre-sounding ingredients such as chicken plasma, pureed calf fetuses, and blood from human umbilical cords. He asked one of his lab assistants to collect umbilical cord blood from the maternity ward at John Hopkins. He himself
visited slaughterhouses on a weekly basis to collect cow fetuses and chicken blood.

2. Mary Kubicek was a very important employee in George Gey’s lab. She was hired for the delicate lab work required in cell culturing. She is the one who prepared all of the cell samples to be cultured. Her meticulous work and attention to detail in keeping the lab sterile enough for the work that Dr. Gey was doing helped make the HeLa cells possible.

3. Margaret Gey developed, among other procedures, the “Gey Chicken Bleeding Technique” used in the preparation of the culture medium used in the lab. She also taught Dr. Gey the importance of maintaining a perfectly sterile environment in the lab. Her choice of soap (Gold Dust Twins brand) may also have been important for the success of the cell culturing project because it helped keep the lab clean enough for the work going on there.

4. Dr. George Gey was talented in many ways, not just in the science he was trained in. For example, the chapter mentions that he made the lab’s sinks by hand from stones he had collected. He also came up with the culture medium recipe himself. In addition, the chapter mentions that he was a skilled carpenter and mason, skills which allowed him to build his own first lab. During medical school, he once modified a microscope so that it could take time-lapse photographs of live cells.

5. Henrietta’s doctors wrote in her chart that she seemed to be doing well ("no evident distress," “morale is good”) and that she was ready to go home before coming back for a second treatment in two and half weeks.

Chapter 5—“Blackness Be Spreadin All Inside”

1. At first, Henrietta seemed to be responding well to the radium treatments. The tumor appeared to have completely shrunk away, and doctors were giving her ongoing radiation treatments to kill any remaining cancer cells. However, her progress was short-lived.

2. Henrietta found it harder and harder to make the walk from the hospital after each treatment until she wound up taking cabs to Margaret’s house instead of walking. Three weeks after beginning her x-ray treatments, she began feeling pain during urination—pain that was caused by an acute gonorrhea infection given to her by her husband. The radiation treatments scarred the skin on her abdomen a deep black.

3. Elsie was Henrietta’s “special needs” daughter. She was eventually taken away to live in a state facility known as the Crownsville State Hospital (formerly called the Hospital for the Negro insane) because she became too difficult for Henrietta to handle when she got older and Henrietta had other children to care for.
4. Sadie and Henrietta were very close. They often went out at night to dance when the children were asleep. When they could not go out, they entertained the children at home together. Everyone seemed to like Henrietta except for Ethel, who was very jealous of Henrietta because her husband Galen spent too much time at Henrietta’s house. Galen was apparently in love with Henrietta.

5. Henrietta found out only after her hysterectomy that the surgery had made her incapable of bearing children. Hospital policy required the doctors to inform her of this fact before the surgery, but for some reason, it appears that Henrietta was not informed of this fact until after she had had the surgery. She said she would have reconsidered and possibly not had the surgery if she had known if would render her infertile.

Chapter 6--“Lady’s on the Phone”

1. Ronald Patillo is a professor of gynecology at the Morehouse School of Medicine. An African-American, he had been of George Gey’s students. He knew quite a bit about the story of the HeLa cells, so he put together a symposium on the topic of HeLa. Skloot contacted him in the hoped that he would put her in contact with the remaining members of the Lacks family.

2. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study was a notorious study begun in the 1930s and conducted at the Tuskegee Institute by the U.S. Public Health Service. In the study, black men with syphilis were monitored for years to observe the course of the disease as it killed the men despite the fact that the deaths were preventable. A “Mississippi appendectomy” is an unnecessary hysterectomy performed usually on a poor black woman to 1) prevent her from reproducing and 2) give a medical student an opportunity to practice the procedure. Skloot discusses these topics with Dr. Patillo in order to show him the she is aware of the kinds of unethical medical practices that black men and women have sometimes endured and to gain his trust so that he will put her in contact with the Lacks family.

3. During the first phone call, Deborah Lacks seems very eager to talk to Skloot and to help the author with the book project. However, by the time of the second call, she has apparently changed her mind about cooperating with the book project. She will not speak with Skloot and tells her that she must get permission of the men in the Lacks family in order to pursue interviews with any of them.

4. David Lacks is unwilling to speak with Skloot about the HeLa cells when she calls him. He hangs up on her.
Chapter 7—The Death and Life of Cell Culture

1. Dr. Gey began sending HeLa cells around the country soon after he started growing them. He sent them by airplane in tubes filled with enough culture medium to keep the cells alive. Sometimes crew members would hold the tubes in their pockets to provide the heat they needed to stay alive. At other times, the tubes would be placed into holes carved into blocks of ice to prevent them from overheating.

2. Alexis Carrell was a French scientist who claimed to have created an immortal chicken heart in his lab. After his death, it was discovered that his “immortal chicken heart” was not really immortal after all and perhaps even a hoax by the scientist.

3. A eugenicist is one who believes in the concept of eugenics. Eugenics is the idea that, through controlled breeding of “superior people” (usually superior races), the human species can be improved. A eugenicist is usually one who believes in higher and lower races. Alexis Carrell believed in the superiority of the white race.

4. Carrel’s reputation was tarnished for a number of reasons. One, he was a eugenicist whose racial theories were rejected. Two, his chicken heart breakthrough was discredited after his death. Three, the public’s attitude to cell culturing changed. People became afraid of the possibilities of this new field of science that Carrel had been at the forefront of. Finally, he was put on trial for alleged collaboration with the Nazis during World War II.

5. By 1951, when the HeLa cells were first produced, many in the public were afraid of what cell culturing might lead to. A 1930s radio show called Lights Out had scared people into believing that cell cultures could grow until they consumed everything around them. Also, the public had been hearing for years that cell culturing could lead to great advancements in medicine and healing, but so far, none had been achieved. Many people began to think of cell culturing as a kind of “snake oil.”

Chapter 8—“A Miserable Specimen”

1. When Henrietta returned to the hospital and complained of pain in her abdomen, the doctors told her that they found no evidence that the cancer was still active. She felt that the cancer was spreading inside her, but the doctor’s note in her chart says, “No evidence of recurrence. Return in one month.”

2. Benevolent deception is the practice of doctors withholding upsetting or negative information from their patients. They believed in this kind of deception at the time of Henrietta’s treatment because they felt it was
unnecessary and unwise to burden patients with information that they could not fully understand and that could only upset them.

3. Two and a half weeks after being told that her cancer had not returned, Henrietta went back to the hospital because her abdomen hurt and she could barely urinate. The doctors passed a catheter into her to help her urinate and then discovered that she now had an “inoperable” tumor and that she was in “chronic” condition.

4. After trying Demerol and morphine with no success, a doctor found that Dromoran helped to ease Henrietta’s pain for a brief period. However, this drug did not last for long. Then, he tried injecting alcohol directly into her spine, an experiment that also failed. In the end, nothing seemed to be able to alleviate her suffering.

Chapter 9--Turner Station

1. Skloot visits Turner Station because she wants to interview members of the Lacks family. Her contact is Sonny Lacks, David’s son, but she ultimately hopes to be able to contact Deborah Lacks.

2. Speed’s Grocery is actually a rust-stained mobile home that serves as a grocery store for the remaining residents of Turner Station. It is owned by Courtney Speed, a woman who is seen as a mother figure by many of the young men in the town. The shelves are stocked with very simple items such as bread, rice, and toilet paper. Cardboard covers the floors where foot traffic has worn the floors out. The windows have broken out so many times in burglary attempts that the owner has stopped replacing the glass in them.

3. Since Henrietta’s death, Turner Station has nearly disappeared. It had been a booming industrial town in Henrietta’s day. Since her death, the industry has disappeared and the town has withered. It used to be a safe place for the people who lived there. Now it is home to drug dealers and gangs. Still, it is home to more than ten churches despite having a population of only about 1000 people.

4. Courtney Speed has dozens of young men who refer to her as their “Mama.” However, only six of these are actually her biological children. She “adopted” the rest. Actually, these young men are not even legally adopted, but they feel a close enough bond to her to refer to her as “Mama.” They are her “spiritual sons.”

5. Speed was unable to generate the funds and the interest necessary to make the Henrietta Lacks museum a reality. The intense renewed interest in the HeLa cells had put so much stress on Deborah Lacks that Speed abandoned her plans for the museum because she thought the process of creating the museum would be unhealthy for Deborah.
Chapter 10--The Other Side of the Tracks

1. Clover is nearly deserted when Skloot first visits. Many of the stores had closed and the population had dwindled to 198 in 1998. In short, it looks like a ghost town with only a few churches and some beauty parlors and other stores open. Lacks Town is on “the other side of the tracks” from Clover. The entire town consists of a one-mile stretch of road. There are a few dozen poorly-maintained houses on this road.

2. Cootie’s real name is Hector Henry. Cootie says he is not sure how he got his name, but he knows that people started calling him by his nickname when he contracted polio at the age of 9.

3. Cootie lives in a house he built and then rebuilt by himself. The house is unusual not only because the owner built it himself but because nothing in it seems to have been built correctly. Nothing seems to be square, but Cootie says he put so many nails in it that he’s sure it won’t fall down. In addition to building it himself, Cootie was forced to rebuild it twice—once when he realized he had forgotten to put insulation in it and once after it nearly burned down.

4. Cootie believes Henrietta’s cancer was “no regular cancer” because it continued to live even after she died. He believes this strong cancer must have been “man-made” or caused by a “spirit.” If it was manmade, he believes it was caused either by doctors who experimented on her or by people using voodoo. It the cancer was not man-made, then Cootie is convinced that a bad “spirit” visited Henrietta and caused her cancer.

Chapter 11--“The Devil of Pain Itself”

1. In September of 1951, Henrietta was in very serious medical condition and was in a great deal of pain. Her body was filled with cancerous tumors, including tumors on her bladder, diaphragm, and lungs. The tumors had blocked her intestines and made her swell considerably. Also, she had had many blood transfusions because her kidneys were unable to filter toxins out of her blood. She wailed in pain while in the bed and, in general, did not seem like the same person.

2. The phrase “the devil of pain itself” that serves as the title of this chapter comes from Henrietta’s cousin, Emmett Lacks. He visited the hospital when she was close to death in order to offer a blood donation for her. When Skloot was researching the book, she found Emmett, who used this term to describe the pain that Henrietta was in.

3. The hospital said that Henrietta was in debt to the blood bank after requiring so many transfusions during her treatment. She was denied more blood until family members such as Emmett visited the hospital to donate.
4. When she was very near death, Henrietta asked her sister Gladys to make sure that Day Lacks protected their children after her death. Gladys called Day after leaving Henrietta alive but dying in the hospital to give him Henrietta’s message.
PART II: DEATH

Chapter 12—The Storm
1. The doctors needed to have permission to take any samples from Henrietta after she had died because the law prohibited autopsies or tissue removal from a corpse without permission. (However, it was not illegal to take her cells while she was alive.)
2. Henrietta’s body was filled with baseball-sized tumors that had almost taken the place of several of her organs. Other organs were covered in small white tumors that looked almost like pearls.
3. Two people reacted to seeing Henrietta’s painted toenails after her death. Mary Kubicek, Dr. Gey’s lab assistant, saw the toenails and immediately began to think of Henrietta as a person, not just a patient or a body on the table. Seeing the toenails, she thought of Henrietta painting them at home. When Henrietta’s cousin Sadie saw the chipped toenails, she cried because she knew that Henrietta would not have wanted to appear in public with her toenails in that condition. She had always taken great care with her nails.
4. Immediately after Henrietta’s funeral, a violent storm came through Lacks Town. Her cousin Peter feels that this storm was an attempt by Henrietta to communicate with her survivors.

Chapter 13—The HeLa Factory
1. The HeLa cells were exactly what polio researchers had been looking for for several reasons. First, they were very susceptible to the polio virus, so the researchers could study the effects of the polio vaccine on the cells. Second, the cells were much easier to mass produce than the other best option, monkey cells. Finally, the ability of the cells to live through freezing meant that shipping the cells would be simple.
2. The “HeLa Factory” at the Tuskegee employed many African-American scientists and technicians and included facilities for mass-producing and shipping the HeLa cells in huge quantities.
3. Since the cells could be frozen and thawed out for later use, the shipping of the cells turned out to be very convenient because there was already an established method for shipping frozen materials such as the cells. Also, freezing the cells meant that the cells could be “frozen” in the middle of a biological process and examined closely at any specific stage. Researchers felt that they might be able to pinpoint the exact moment that cancer begins in this way.
4. Sam Reader developed the first cell producing and distributing business. This business was essential to researchers because it allowed them to buy mass quantities of cells conveniently.

5. Dr. Gey seemed “annoyed” by their success because he had developed other cell lines that he was equally interested in but which other scientists were not as interested in working with. Also, he wanted to restrict the ways in which the cells could be used, but because he had been the one to release them to the scientific community, he was unable to restrict their use in the ways he wanted to.

Chapter 14—Helen Lane

1. Henrietta’s name was leaked by someone to the Minneapolis Star newspaper, who published it incorrectly as “Henrietta Lakes.” Gey never revealed that this name was a slight mistake. Then, Collier’s published the name incorrectly as “Helen L.,” possibly after being given a pseudonym by Dr. Gey. With no correct name in the press—and with two possibilities having been published—her real name was obscured for years. Most of the time, she was known as Helen Lane, but sometimes as Helen Larson. No one knows exactly why these incorrect last names were attached to the “Helen L.” in the Collier’s article.

2. Two authors asked Gey for permission to use Henrietta’s name in their articles. Both of the authors mentioned the need for a “human interest” angle to the story in their attempts to persuade Gey to release the name.

3. The NFIP is the acronym of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. Gey may have been somewhat more likely to release Henrietta’s name to the author from this organization because the NFIP funded much of Gey’s research.

4. Gey appears to have been firmly against releasing the name. He seemed to be willing to discuss the issue, but he never released the real name to either of the writers working on stories about HeLa and in fact may have provided a false name to protect the Lacks family from the press.

Chapter 15—“Too Young to Remember”

1. Someone who attended Henrietta’s funeral had TB and spread it to the Lacks children. No one is sure who brought the disease to the funeral.

2. Ethel said she was moving in with the Lacks family to help David with the children after Henrietta died. It is also possible that Ethel was still angry with Henrietta even after her death. She may have been acting out of anger by “moving in” on David, Henrietta’s husband, and by mistreating her children. She was apparently involved sexually with David Lacks.
3. The children were very badly mistreated by Ethel. They were forced to work all day with little or no food and water. She also beat them regularly and, in general, showed them very little affection. She once whipped Sonny so severely with an extension cord that he had to go to the hospital. She sometimes forced Joe to stand on one foot in the corner of the basement for hours at a time and would beat him if he put his foot down.

4. Galen sexually abused Deborah, even after Deborah and the other children had moved in with Lawrence and Bobbette. He would grope her in the car and often tried to have sex with her. Deborah was abused by Galen, but at first she was afraid to report or fight back against this abuse because she also felt that Galen was one of the few people who did nice things for her. Eventually, Deborah fought back against this abuse and seems to have put a stop to it.

5. Joe Lacks seems to have been a very troubled child, perhaps because he was abused so badly. Lacks family members speculated that he was troubled because he had grown alongside the cancer when Henrietta was pregnant. He is said to have “felt only rage” after his mother’s death and his abuse by Ethel. Police would sometimes have to take him off the roof when he used to his BB gun to shoot strangers. He said he was practicing to be a sniper when he grew up.

Chapter 16—“Spending Eternity in the Same Place”

1. Henrietta’s cousin Cliff lives in a bad state of disrepair. He had patched the ceilings with newspaper and duct tape and sealed up the second floor to keep air from escaping through the broken windows. Henrietta’s “home-house” was a very small cinderblock and pressboard house that was only about 300 square feet on the inside.

2. Skloot took the title of this chapter from Cliff’s comment that “They [members of both the black and white Lacks families] spending eternity in the same place.” In this comment, Cliff notes that the white and black families are united in death and that their differences aren’t important after death.

3. The black and white Lacks families are most likely related because two white brothers named Albert and Benjamin Lacks had children with black women who were slaves or former slaves. The families came to live in separate parts of town because the brothers left land to the children they fathered with these women. The plots of land were in different locations than where the “white Lackses” lived. Not everyone believes this is the explanation for the two branches of the family. Carlton and Ruby Lacks—members of the white branch of the Lacks family—contend that the “black
Lackses” merely took the last name of the plantation owner where they had lived when they were slaves.

4. Henrietta’s youngest sister Lillian, who was somewhat lighter skinned than the rest of the family, decided to “pass” for Puerto Rican when she married a man from Puerto Rico. She “disowned her blackness” and fell out of touch with the rest of the family.

Chapter 17—Illegal, Immoral, and Deplorable

1. Chester Southam injected patients—some with cancer already and some who were cancer-free—with HeLa cells to determine if cancer could be spread in this way. He learned that patients with cancer could not reject the HeLa cells whereas the immune systems in cancer-free patients would normally fight off the HeLa cells. This kind of research would be considered unethical because he did not get the patients’ consent when he injected them with the cells. Even when he did get consent from inmates in the Ohio prison system, the kind of consent could be considered coerced and therefore not true or informed consent.

2. At the Nuremberg trials, seven Nazi doctors were sentences to death by hanging for the cruel and unethical experiments they had performed on Jews without their consent. The Nuremberg Code was established by the tribunal. It is a set of ten rules for ethical practice in human research, the first of which states that all research must be done with the consent of the human subject. Skloot brings up the Nuremberg trial and Code to show that the experiments done by Southam were unethical by already-accepted standards of ethical conduct at the time they were done.

3. Southam was investigated by the Board of Regents of New York and found to be guilty of unprofessional and unethical behavior. His medical license was initially suspended for a year, but the penalty was reduced to a one-year probation period.

4. After Southam’s experiments were exposed, the NIH investigated all of the research sites that the organization had funded for the purpose of human research. They found that most of the sites did not offer adequate protections for human subject and that many did not require subjects to sign informed consent forms before participating in the research.

Chapter 18—“Strangest Hybrid”

1. Many in the public were afraid of the “hybrid” creations made by cell culture scientists in labs. For instance, people had read about experiments such as the New York University “human-mouse hybrid” cells that lost their human chromosomes. In people’s minds, these hybrids at the cellular level
were little different than developing an actual human-mouse creature. Newspapers played a large part in encouraging these fears because their reporting of the scientific issues was intended to shock their readers.

2. Alexis Coriell was concerned that HeLa cells might have contaminated the cells that many scientists were working on in their labs.

3. George Hyatt intentionally wounded the skin of a young Navy officer and then attempted to treat the wound by applying new skin cells to the wound in the hope that they would survive and grow to replace the damaged skin on the officer’s arm. The skin cells did grow, but they soon became malignant and Hyatt removed them to prevent the cancer from spreading.

4. Cell sex, also known as somatic cell fusion, is the process of fusing the genetic material of two cells. It was first discovered by French researchers in 1960, who found that when viruses entered human cells, their genetic material fused. Later researchers began fusing the genetic material in other cells, including human and mouse cells. Doing so allowed them to do genetic testing on human cells that would have otherwise been impractical or impossible.

Chapter 19—“The Most Critical Time on Earth is Now”

1. When Deborah found out she was pregnant at the age of sixteen, Bobbette more or less forced her to continue to go to school. She made her enter a special school where other young mothers-to-be were enrolled.

2. Joe did not adjust well at all to military life. In fact, he spent much of his time in solitary confinement in “the hole” due to his inability to accept authority and stay out of fights. Due to his inability to fit in in the military, he was discharged from the Air Force in only nine months.

3. Joe was harassed severely by Ivy on one occasion and beaten bloody by him on another. After the beating, Joe took a carving knife from Deborah’s house to defend himself. He spent the next day drinking and then confronted Ivy and killed him with the knife at the end of the day. He fled to Clover briefly and then to Washington, D.C., before returning to Baltimore to confess to the murder of Ivy.

4. While he was in prison, Joe converted to Islam and changed his name to Zakariyya.

5. Deborah left Cheetah because he became increasingly violent toward her and dealt drugs from their house. After a vicious fight during which Deborah nearly killed Cheetah, she left him because she could not take the violence and abuse any longer.
Chapter 20—The HeLa Bomb
1. Gartler tells the crowd that the cell lines they have been working on have almost certainly been contaminated by HeLa cells. This news was very disappointing for the scientists who heard it because up until then, they had been convinced that they were working on separate cell lines. Instead, many of them were working with the same cell line. This fact invalidated much of their research on those cell lines.
2. The HeLa cells presented an especially strong danger of contamination for other cell lines essentially because they were so good at surviving and replicating. They even traveled through the air on particles of dust or rode on the coats or shoes of lab researchers. In addition to being good travelers, they were extremely strong. Even one HeLa cell had the power to contaminate an entire cell culture.
3. All of the scientists were stunned when they heard Gartler’s revelations. Some of them did not seem to want to believe that he was correct, for example Robert Chang and Leonard Hayflick. However, many of the scientists, including T.C. Hsu and Robert Stevenson, saw that Gartler’s accusations were very important and needed to be investigated.
4. G6PD-A is an enzyme that is only found in a small percentage of the cells of African-Americans. It is not found in Caucasians. The presence of this enzyme in many of the cell lines meant that the cells must have come from a black donor. Since many of the cell donors were white and since the HeLa cells did contain this enzyme, it seemed highly likely to Gartler that the cell lines had been contaminated by HeLa.

Chapter 21—Night Doctors
1. When Skloot meets the Lacks family, she finds out very early on that they tend to mistrust doctors and hospitals. Their mistrust is so strong, in fact, that some of them refuse to be treated for health problems. For example, David Lacks will not allow doctors to amputate his toes despite the fact that he has been diagnosed with gangrene and cannot wear shoes. Sonny Lacks has been told that he should have angioplasty to treat his heart disease, but he refuses.
2. “Night doctors” are supposedly doctors who abduct black patients during the night for the purposes of medical research. While the stories about them are probably exaggerated, Skloot says that there are “disturbing truths behind those stories.” Some members of the Lacks family believe that night doctors are still active and that doctors from Johns Hopkins have been guilty of such abductions.
3. Johns Hopkins himself established the hospital in 1873 as a charity hospital for the poor of all races in the city of Baltimore.
4. The Lacks family reveals their anger about Henrietta’s cells being taken from her and used without their knowledge. Bobbette is angry that the cells are often referred to as having been “donated,” but she says they were, in fact, taken without her permission. They are also angry about the fact that a great deal of money has been made from the HeLa cells while the Lacks family themselves have often been unable to keep health insurance coverage.

Chapter 22—“The Fame She So Richly Deserves”
1. George Gey died of cancer at the age of 71. Before he died, he asked that a sample be taken from his tumor. He told Mary Kubicek that Henrietta’s name could be released after his death, but she chose not to release it. He also participated in a number of experimental treatments for pancreatic cancer before his death, which came three months after he had been diagnosed with cancer.
2. Henrietta’s correct name was first published in 1971 in a small professional journal called Obstetrics and Gynecology. Even after that article, her name continued to be incorrectly reported as Helen Lane, among other pseudonyms. In 1973, the journal Nature published a letter that asked if the real name could be verified. In response to that letter, Douglas published a follow-up to that letter in which her announced that the correct name was definitely Henrietta Lacks. Soon afterward, the journal Science also set the record straight about Henrietta’s true identity.
3. The National Cancer Act was a law that established the “War on Cancer,” an attempt to find the true cause of and cure for cancer. President Nixon had promised that scientists would cure cancer in five years and the American and Russian scientists would work together on the research required to do so. The NCA law provided $1.5 billion dollars in funding for cancer research over three years.
4. This chapter reveals that Gartler’s assertions at the Washington, D.C. meeting were correct. In fact, the HeLa cells had even shown up in a Russian lab. The problem of the HeLa bomb appears to have been getting worse, but many scientists still denied that Gartler’s claims were correct.
PART III: IMMORTALITY

Chapter 23—“It’s Alive”
1. In 1973, Bobbette was visiting her friend Gardenia when Gardenia’s brother-in-law told her that he worked with the HeLa cells in his job at the National Cancer Institute.
2. The Lacks family was shocked to learn that part of Henrietta was “still alive.” They didn’t know exactly what to think about this, but they had heard of the Tuskegee study, so they worried that Henrietta had been the victim of a similar experiment. Lawrence calls Johns Hopkins to find out if Henrietta was still somewhere in the hospital.
3. The researchers wanted to obtain blood samples from Henrietta’s immediate family so that they could develop a test that would determine whether or not other cell lines had been contaminated by the HeLa cells.
4. The Lacks family members believed that the blood samples were actually cancer tests. Deborah called the hospital several times to inquire about the results of her cancer tests, but they did not know what she was talking about.

Chapter 24—“Least They Can Do”
1. Many private biological-supply companies have profited from the sales of HeLa cells, for example Microbiological Associates. Also, the American Type Culture Collection—technically a non-profit—has sold HeLa cells for as much as $256 per vial. However, the Johns Hopkins Hospital and George Gey himself did not sell the HeLa cells. They only gave them away to other researchers.
2. Dr. Gey was not concerned with making a large profit from the HeLa cells. In fact, he never sold them or patented them. He seemed to be mostly uninterested in profiting from his science. He never patented his most important developments, and he often spent his own money to upgrade his lab.
3. When the Rolling Stone article appeared in 1976, the Lacks family learned for the first time that the HeLa cells were highly profitable.
4. Deborah learned about experiments done on the HeLa cells such as a HeLa/Tobacco hybrid and experiments involving the Ebola and AIDS viruses, Deborah imagined that her mother was actually suffering from these diseases, including the pain involved with these diseases.
Chapter 25—“Who Told You You Could Sell My Spleen?”

1. John Moore was a surveyor on the Alaska pipeline project. He thought his job was killing him, but actually he was suffering from a severe case of spleen cancer. When he had it removed, it weighed 22 pounds, but a normal spleen would weigh less than one pound.

2. David Golde was a doctor who removed John Moore’s diseased spleen. In follow-up visits after the spleen surgery, Golde agreed to donate bone marrow, blood, and semen. Golde used Moore’s cells to develop valuable proteins that he patented.

3. Ananda Mohan Chacrabarty was a General Electric scientist who became the first person to patent a biologically-engineered organism when he developed an oil-eating bacteria.

4. Ted Slavin suffered from Hemophilia. After years of blood transfusions, he contracted hepatitis-B. Because he had developed valuable antibodies to hepatitis-B, he began selling his blood to pharmaceutical companies.

Chapter 26—Breach of Privacy

1. Deborah married James Pullum in 1981. He was a mechanic who worked at a local steel mill. He made Deborah feel safe, partly because he often carried a knife or a gun. He and Deborah opened a church together.

2. After being released from prison, Zakariyya had a difficult time supporting himself with his job as an air conditioner technician. To help pay the rent, he offered himself to Johns Hopkins for various medical experiments.

3. When Alfred’s legal problems began, Deborah would initially bail him out of jail immediately. Then, she would allow him to remain in jail for longer periods of time to teach him a lesson. When he went AWOL after joining the military, Deborah made him turn himself in to the military police. After he left the military and began using drugs at home, she told him she didn’t want him to stay at home any longer.

4. When Deborah read the details of her mother’s illness, treatment, and autopsy, she became very depressed and could not sleep.

Chapter 27—The Secret of Immortality

1. In 1984, Harald zur Hausen discovered that Human Papiloma Virus 18 (HPV-18) causes cervical cancer. This is the type of cancer Henrietta had, and her cells tested positive for HPV-18. Therefore, it is highly likely that this virus caused her cancer.

2. Henrietta’s family had some distinctly non-scientific explanations for her cancer. Her sister Gladys thought the cancer was punishment for Henrietta having left her father behind when she went to Baltimore. Her
cousin Cootie thought it was the result of disease-causing spirits. Her cousin Sadie even thought that the cancer cells might have had an extra-terrestrial origin because obviously something got inside Henrietta, but since she never swam or went without panties, it seemed impossible to her that anything could have gotten inside her.

3. Leigh Van Halen and other scientists proposed that the HeLa cells might have mutated into a new, non-human species. Most scientists seemed to discount this idea, however.

4. The Hayflick limit is the biological rule that restricts most cells to a limit of roughly 50 reproductions. Henrietta’s cancer cells were not subject to this limitation because they contained an enzyme known as telomerase that allowed an unlimited number of reproductions.

Chapter 28—After London
1. Adam Curtis was a producer for the BBC who began making a documentary about the HeLa story in 1996.
2. Ronald Patillo is the scientist who introduced Skloot to the Lacks family. As a graduate student, he had worked under George Gey, so he knew the HeLa story. He also knew the Lacks family personally. He organized the HeLa Cancer Control Symposium in 1996 and invited the Lacks family to participate. They spoke to the crowd and served as the “celebrities” of the event. They were asked to sign autographs and were generally treated with respect.
3. Mary Kubicek was a lab assistant who had worked directly with the HeLa cells in George Gey’s lab. She spoke at an event in Turner Station that was organized by Courtney Speed, the woman who was trying to establish a Henrietta Lacks museum. The crowd asked her questions about who had made money from the HeLa cells and generally seemed hostile toward her.
4. Keenan Kester Cofield was a man who claimed to be a distant relative of the Lackses. He also claimed to be a lawyer and a doctor and said that he could sue Johns Hopkins for the Lacks family. However, he was actually neither a doctor nor a lawyer; he was a former convict who had been involved in a large number of “nuisance” lawsuits and who has been referred to as a con man. The Lacks family broke off contact with him after being advised to by Richard Kidwell, an attorney for Johns Hopkins.

Chapter 29—A Village of Henriettas
1. For Deborah, there is a blurry line between science fiction and reality because many things—such as cloning and immortal cells—that seem like the stuff of science fiction have turned out to be true. Therefore, when she
sees a movie like *Jurassic Park* or *The Clone*, she doesn’t think of these stories as any more impossible than the other seemingly impossible things she has learned are realities. She is frightened that the scientific ideas in them might actually be true even though she knows the stories themselves are fiction. When her step-mother told her she had seen human-sized rabbits in cages at Johns Hopkins, Deborah didn’t think of this story as an impossibility or as a figment of the step-mother’s imagination. She thought it was genuinely possible.

2. When Deborah finally began working with Skloot, she said she wanted the world to know that the real name behind the HeLa cells was Henrietta Lacks, not Helen Lane. She wanted the world to know something about the woman behind the cells, and she herself also wanted to learn more about her own mother. Deborah was also interested in learning more about the sister that had been sent to the special hospital, and she wanted to the world to know that there were five Lacks children, not four as was often reported.

3. In addition to meeting in the hotel room to talk about the HeLa story and about the Lacks family, Deborah and the author would engage in various activities together that would be described as tourist or entertainment activities and seemed to be generally having a good time together. They ate meals together and rode water taxis together and toured the city together looking for sites related to Henrietta’s life.

4. Skloot describes Deborah as a very friendly and outgoing person who would talk to strangers on the street. She was very energetic and eager to work on the book with Skloot once she began to trust the author. She also seemed to be a “germ freak” because she carried a bottle of Lysol with her everywhere she went.

5. At the end of the chapter, Deborah becomes angry and walks away from Skloot when Skloot reaches for a folder that may contain Henrietta’s medical records. Deborah is not ready to look at the records with the author yet. Skloot apologizes to Deborah and tries to soothe her feelings and get her to return to the hotel room, but the damage has already been done.

Chapter 30

1. In general, Zakariyya is an angry and bitter man who feels that the world has benefitted from his mother’s cells while the Lacks family has not. His behavior seems to be unpredictable and erratic, and he is even capable of violence and aggression. Instead of welcoming his great-nephews when they visit, he says he wishes they had not come and even turns down his hearing aids so that he can’t hear them. When Skloot tries to talk to him, he refuses
to speak with her until he has read her entire magazine article. He becomes angry with Skloot when he finds an erroneous photo caption in the article that identifies Sonny as the youngest of the Lacks children.

2. Zakriyya is angry at the medical research community for taking his mother’s cells without her permission and benefitting from them—even though the cells have led to breakthroughs in medical treatments that have benefitted others. He is also angry about his very poor treatment when he was a child by Ethel and about the fact that his father did not intervene to stop the abuse. He blames his angry behavior and his fighting on the fact that, as a fetus, he had to fight for life alongside the cancer growing inside his mother. He also blames his behavior on the poor treatment he suffered as a child.

3. Deborah tries to protect Skloot from Zakariyya in two ways. First, she prepares her to meet him by warning her about Zakariyya’s potential for anger and aggression. For example, she tells Skloot to be sure not to mispronounce Zakariyya’s name. Second, she monitors the meeting between the two and promises to intervene if Zakariyya shows signs of any aggressive behavior.

4. Toward the end of the chapter, Zakariyya’s mood changes drastically when Deborah gives him the picture of Henrietta’s DNA. The picture had been given to Skloot by a Johns Hopkins researcher who wanted to her to take it to Deborah. However, Deborah felt that Zakariyya should be the one to have the picture because he had been the one most affected by the cancer cells living in his mother. After receiving the picture, Zakariyya became much more willing to work with Skloot on the project.

Chapter 31—Hela, Goddess of Death

1. Deborah fluctuated between two poles when interacting the Rebecca Skloot. Sometimes, she seemed to trust Skloot very much and would offer to spend time working on the book with her. She even called Skloot very late at night on at least one occasion to discuss information she had learned that frightened her. She also trusted Skloot for advice, as when she asked Skloot her opinion of the “cancer club” (the National Foundation for Cancer Research) that had requested her appearance at an upcoming event. At other times—usually when someone would warn her to stay away from white people, who only wanted to use her for their own ends—Deborah would attempt to distance herself from Skloot. For example, she would sometimes demand that Skloot promise money in exchange for her cooperation in researching the HeLa story. When she did have one of these mistrustful moments, she would usually change back to a more trusting attitude her quickly.
2. Skloot taught Deborah to use her computer to do Google searches so that she could do some of her own HeLa research. Deborah used this new skill to search various HeLa- or Henrietta-related topics. These searches led her to sites related to the country of Sri Lanka (also known as the Hela nation), a Marvel comics character named Hela, and cloning research involving HeLa cells.

3. In 2001, Franking Salisbury, Jr., President of the National Foundation for Cancer Research, called and invited Deborah to speak at an upcoming event honoring Henrietta Lacks.

4. The title “Hela, Goddess of Death” refers to the Norse goddess of death who lived in a state of limbo between the earth and hell. This mythical goddess was the basis for the Marvel comic book character of the same name.

5. Deborah was prescribed Ambien, a sleep-aid medication. When she took this medication, she began behaving strangely, for example wandering the house and talking nonsense to herself. Her grandson gave this name to the medication because of its strange effects on Deborah, who would often fall asleep at her computer while on this medication.

6. At the end of this chapter, Deborah’s son Alfred is arrested for robbing at least five liquor stores.

Chapter 32

1. Deborah and Zakariyya go to the lab to see their mother’s cells. They don’t know exactly what it means to see their mother’s cells. In fact, Zakariyya is surprised when the cells are not black because he expects that cells from black people would look black and cells from white people would look white. In the lab, they see many frozen vials of HeLa cells. They also see the cells on video monitor and through a microscope. They are lucky enough, in fact, to see the moment a cell divides into two cells.

2. Rebecca Skloot is the first one to arrive at the Jesus statue. She arrives at the statue and notices that a doctor is praying. She reads some of the prayers that visitors have written in a book. She puts her own hand on the statue’s toe and says that this act is the closest she has ever come to praying. Deborah walks up behind her and says, “I hope He’s got our back on this one.” Closely behind her is Zakariyya, who says, “He can’t do nothin to help you now.”

3. Christoph believes that the Lacks family are owed at least a portion of the proceeds from the sale of HeLa cells.

4. Lawrence and Day do not come to the lab with Deborah and Zakariyya. Day is quite old and not well. He has various several medical conditions, including diabetes and heart disease, and he has recently lost a leg.
Lawrence would not have wanted to come because he had become convinced that Johns Hopkins had stolen millions or even billions of dollars from the Lacks family. He had decided not to cooperate with Skloot and had advised Deborah not to, either.

Chapter 33
1. Deborah and Rebecca Skloot are looking for medical records from Elsie’s time at the Hospital for the Negro Insane in Crownsville.
2. The hospital was badly overcrowded and, in general, was not a very good place for treating or housing the people who had to live there. Patients slept two to a bed in twin beds. Genders were not separated, and patients with different conditions were housed together. Pedophiles were not even separated from the rest of the population. It was a violent and filthy place that was not equipped to deal with the number or types patients that were sent there.
3. Paul Lurz was the hospital’s director of performance and improvement, and he had been an employee at the hospital since 1964. He is quite helpful to Deborah and sympathetic to her desire to know more about what happened to Elsie. He provides not only the autopsy but a picture of Elsie.
4. It is likely that Elise would have undergone a procedure called pneumoencephalography. This painful procedure involves draining all of the spinal fluid from the skull and replacing it with air or helium. The spinal fluid interferes with X-rays, so the goal of this procedure was to produce crisp X-ray pictures of the brain. However, patients undergoing pneumoencephalography experiences sickness, headaches, and vomiting until the skull refilled with spinal fluid, a process that takes several months.

Chapter 34
1. Skloot and Deborah spend much of the night reading the medical records together. They lie on Skloot’s hotel room bed together and begin sorting through the records. Deborah asks Skloot to read various sections to her and to help her interpret them.
2. Deborah becomes angry basically because she does not trust Skloot. After Skloot smiles—perhaps inappropriately and at the wrong time—Deborah believes that Skloot may be working for Johns Hopkins or that she is trying to exploit her like Cofield did. Skloot loses her patience with Deborah and tells her to be quiet and calm down. She then reassures Deborah that she is not funded by Johns Hopkins and that she won’t reveal anything in the book that Deborah does not want revealed.
3. Deborah’s behavior in this chapter is erratic. She is very excited about reading through the medical records with Skloot, but she is also very afraid to find out what is in them. She goes between the two extremes of wanting to work closely with Skloot to find out the truth and trying to shut Skloot out and prevent her from working with the records. She even becomes physically aggressive toward Skloot but then a few minutes later uses a term of endearment (“Boo”) to refer to her.

4. In this chapter, Deborah learns some upsetting things from the medical records she and Skloot are reviewing. For example, she learns that Ethel was diagnosed with “idiocy,” a term that she does not understand was at one time a catch-all diagnosis for many forms of mental impairment. She also finds a word in the medical records that she makes Skloot promise she will never reveal. The word is not included in the book because Skloot agrees not to reveal it, but the author says the word was not one she would have been likely to use anyway.

Chapter 35

1. In this chapter, Gladys is a very old and frail woman. She keeps her small cabin very warm with a wood-burning stove even though it is fairly warm outside. When Skloot and Deborah visit, she is only wearing a thin housecoat that his ridden up above her waist. However, she suffers so badly from arthritis that she can’t move quickly enough to cover herself up when visitors enter the house. Her husband is just days away from dying in the next room.

2. Deborah is emotionally and physically affected by the news she has recently learned about her mother and sister. Physically, she suffers badly from hives, which she treats herself for by drinking Benadryl. Emotionally, she is hyperactive and unfocused. She can barely sit still.

3. Deborah’s cousin Gary is called “The Disciple” because he often channels the Lord and says that God speaks through him at times. He had been a drinker and a womanizer in his earlier life, but after having several heart attacks and bypass operations, he was changed and began preaching.

4. This chapter is called “Soul Cleansing” because Deborah’s soul is “cleansed” in it. Gary can see that working on the HeLa story and learning about her mother and sister have affected Deborah negatively. She cannot bear this burden any longer, he thinks, so he asks God to lift this burden from her and relieve her. He says that Skloot has obviously been sent by God to take on the burden so that Deborah will not have to. Deborah thanks Gary for helping her in this way and says she wants to return for more “soul cleansing.”
Chapter 36

1. After waking up on the morning after reading the medical records, Deborah’s physical condition has improved slightly, but her eyes are still swollen from the hives that she had broken out in on the previous day.

2. Gary gives Skloot a bible in this chapter because he thinks she is on the verge of a religious conversion. He believes the Bible will help her to make it.

3. We learn not only that Skloot is not a Christian but that she feels it is unlikely she would ever convert to Christianity. We don’t know from this chapter if she is an atheist/agnostic or if she is a member of another religion, but we do know that she is not a Christian because Gary says he thinks she is ready to “convert.” However, she tells him that she is not likely to convert.

4. Gary believes that Henrietta’s cells were made “immortal” by God. Essentially, he thinks of the cells as angels doing the work of God.

Chapter 37

1. Five days after 9/11, Deborah attended church. She wanted to pray for her son Alfred, who was facing serious legal charges. After an hour, she realized that she was going numb on one side. She couldn’t speak to let anyone know what was happening to her, but her grandson Davon noticed that something was unusual. She was rushed to emergency medical workers and then to the hospital, and she was able to recover almost fully. The emergency medical technicians said that part of the explanation for her good recovery was that her grandson had repeatedly slapped her to keep her awake during her ride to the fire station.

2. Both Deborah and Skloot were planning to attend the conference of the National Foundation for Cancer research when the events of 9/11 occurred. The conference was cancelled with no plans to be rescheduled, and Deborah worried that another conference might not be held for ten years or more.

3. Deborah wanted to go to reading classes at a local community center to improve her reading skills to a tenth-grade level so that she could attend college to learn to be a dental assistant or radiology technician. However, she was unable to fulfill these dreams because she did not have enough money to enter school. She tried to think of ways to raise money for her education, but she gave up and concluded that the dream of an education was meant for future generations of Henrietta’s descendents, not for hers.

4. Deborah Lacks and Rebecca Skloot attend the baptism of Sonny Lacks’s granddaughter. At the ceremony, the preacher—Henrietta’s husband, James Pullum—forces Skloot to come to the stage to tell the story of her and
Deborah’s research on the HeLa story. The congregation is enthusiastic and responds with calls of “Hallelujah” and “Amen!”

Chapter 38
1. Deborah dies in this chapter of what is described as a heart attack. She died in her sleep, and Sonny found her the next morning with her arms folded and smiling. Skloot found out when she tried to call Deborah to tell her what had happened to Clover.
2. Clover disappears in this chapter. Skloot drives there and finds that the entire town had been bulldozed.
4. Deborah and Skloot watch *Roots* and the animated movie *Spirit*. Deborah liked them both because they are about characters who fight for their freedom.
5. Chapter 37 ends in late 2001, and Chapter 38 picks up the story in early 2009. There is more than a seven-year gap in this story.
GRADING RUBRIC
BIG READ 2011—Study Guide
Comprehension and Discussion Questions
Grading Rubric and Instructions

SAMPLE RUBRIC:

STUDENT’S NAME: ____________________ Chapter: ____________________________

Comprehension-Questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #</th>
<th>Relevance (0-3 pts.)</th>
<th>Development and Accuracy (0-7 pts.)</th>
<th>Written Expression (0-5 pts.)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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| COMP. QUEST. TOTAL | 60 |

Discussion-Questions:

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<th>Question #</th>
<th>Relevance (0-5 pts.)</th>
<th>Development and Accuracy (0-10 pts.)</th>
<th>Written Expression (0-5 pts.)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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| DISC. QUEST. TOTAL | 40 |

GRAND TOTAL: ______ 100
Relating the rubrics to FYE objectives and student learning outcomes:

The following sections on Relevance, Development/Accuracy, and Written Expression explain the grading scale for each of the three graded elements in the rubric. In addition, each element is introduced by a brief discussion of how that element relates to specific goals or student learning objectives of the FYE course.

Before proceeding to these specific elements and explanations, it is worthwhile to point out that all three elements of the rubric (Relevance, Development/Accuracy, and Written Expression) are clearly related to a key statement in the model syllabus for the FYE course which states that the course is aimed at helping students “improve oral and written communication, active listening skills, researching skills, and study skills.”

Responding in writing to discussion questions such as these obviously represents excellent practice in written communication. Also, a student who is able to respond appropriately to these kinds of questions is gaining practice in perhaps the most important “study skill” of all: reading. That skill (reading) is also a key “researching skill,” and certainly it could be argued that each question of this type is a research project in miniature in that the questions require students to synthesize material from a source (the Big Read book) with other material (personal experiences, other readings, material from other classes, etc.) to make a coherent statement. If these written discussion questions lead to follow-up class discussions (which seems highly likely, if not inevitable), then certainly these questions relate to the outcome of “improve[d] oral communication” and “active listening skills.”

While the above justifications alone would seem adequate for establishing the relevance of these discussion question with regard to FYE goals and student learning outcomes, further justifications for each element in the rubric are included below.
Relevance:

This section of the rubric assesses the student’s ability to write an answer that clearly relates to and answers the question asked. Some students have a difficult time understanding what exactly a question is asking. Instead of responding directly to the question, their answers will talk around the question. A college-level student must have the ability to interpret a question accurately and respond accordingly. This ability is references or strongly implied in several goals and student learning outcomes from the Coastal Carolina University FYE website and from the model syllabus for the FYE course.

For example, the FYE website mentions under “Purpose” [goals] that the FYE course will help to “facilitate a successful transition from high school to university.” Related to that essential transition is the bullet item under the “Outcomes” [student learning outcomes] section that states that an FYE student is expected to “Become a co-operative, yet independent, learner.” In high school and earlier, discussion questions such as these might be covered in detail in class with the teacher facilitating a class discussion and redirecting the conversation when necessary to make sure that each student understands what the question asks for. However, college students are often not afforded the luxury of this kind of detailed preparation before being asked to respond in writing to detailed and complex questions. The rubric, then, assesses whether the student is able to respond independently to the question in an appropriate and relevant way.

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<tr>
<th>POINTS</th>
<th>Comp.</th>
<th>Disc.</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 pts.</td>
<td>0 pts.</td>
<td>This response is either blank or not on the topic at all.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1-2 pts.</td>
<td>1-2 pts.</td>
<td>Responses in this category attempt to address the topic in some way but may:</td>
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<td>• Drift seriously from the topic of the question</td>
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<td>• Only address a very limited portion of the topic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Answer the question in a way that indicates the student may not have fully understood the question</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3 pts.</td>
<td>3 pts.</td>
<td>Responses in this category address the topic and answer the question directly but may:</td>
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<td>• Ignore certain aspects of the question completely</td>
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<td>• Respond more fully to minor aspects of the question than to the main question or questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 pts.</td>
<td>4 pts.</td>
<td>Responses in this category demonstrate a clear understanding of the question and answer (or attempt to answer) all aspects of the question. There may be some unevenness in the student’s attention to all parts of the question at this level, but in general, these answers are on topic.</td>
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Development/Accuracy:

“Development/Accuracy” refers to the student’s ability not only to make a statement that relates to the question but to defend and support that statement with accurate specifics and details from the primary source (the book) and/or from other sources. One of the key differences between the expectations for high school and college students is that college work requires the student to expand and explain his or her points, most often in writing.

This element in the rubric relates clearly to several goals and student learning objectives for the course. For example, a goal statement from the FYE website states that students will “[develop] creative and critical thinking strategies” in the course. A key creative strategy for any college-level writer is the ability and willingness to expand on points and develop them with adequate detail. This creative strategy is also evidence of “critical thinking,” and both creativity and critical thinking can be, of course, encouraged by writing assignments and measured at least in part by the level of development in that writing.

The FYE website also states that the course is “dedicated to inquiry and productive student learning.” Writing assignments are perhaps the best way to measure a student’s level of genuine inquiry into a text such as the Big Read. These discussion questions require students not only to mine the reading for facts but to engage the reading for “productive … learning.” While the student may have inquired deeply as he or she was reading the book, a teacher can only gauge the depth of that inquiry by measuring how much development the student has offered in a written or oral response to the book.

Finally, a student learning outcome from the FYE model syllabus states that the course will help students to “improve critical thinking skills and apply those skills to the study of current issues in the world.” Every Big Read book examines “current issues,” and perhaps the best way to measure the student’s engagement with those issues is to assess the level of development in a written assignment.

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<td></td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>0-3 pts.</td>
<td>Responses in this category are either blank or so underdeveloped that they lack the detail required to assess the student’s understanding of and/or engagement with the question.</td>
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<td>3-4</td>
<td>4-6 pts.</td>
<td>Responses in this category are developed in some detail but inadequately in that:</td>
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<td>- A portion or portions of the question have not been developed with examples or details to illustrate the student’s idea(s).</td>
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<td>- The details or examples are often not concrete and specific but general. For example, a student might offer something like “people who fail to follow the rules are often not punished” instead of a more specific statement such as “I have known three students who have cheated on tests without being caught.”</td>
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<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-9 pts.</td>
<td>Responses in this category answer the question in good detail but may show some weakness in the relevance of some of the supporting material or may be somewhat uneven in their attention to all aspects of the question.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10 pts.</td>
<td>This answer is fully developed and accurate in response to all aspects of the question.</td>
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**Written Expression:**

This element in the rubric assesses the student’s writing relative to the expectations for well-edited written English at the college level. While other elements in the rubric address the relevance to the question of and the level of development in the student’s writing, this element assesses the student’s ability to write English prose that rises to college-level expectations for Edited American English. Issues of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage are important here, of course, but this rubric element also addresses paragraphing issues (coherence and unity, transitions) as well as style, word choice/diction, and tone. The simple question asked by this rubric element is this: How well does this write? The question asked here is not whether the ideas are sound but whether the writing is “good” college-level writing.

In addition to this rubric element’s obvious relevance with regard to the student learning objective of improving oral and written communication, the element addresses the item from the model syllabus that states the course “provide[s] a framework for professionalism and objectivity in your approach to college and life.” One very important aspect of “professionalism” is a student’s attention to detail in his or her writing. Often, students are capable of better writing than they produce. They simply choose not to commit to the effort it takes to write at a college level for each assignment. This rubric element encourages the commitment required to do so.

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|        | 0-1   | 0-1 pts. | Responses in this category are either blank or include serious and distracting* errors in one or more of the following areas:  
+ Sentence structure  
+ Spelling, grammar, usage, and/or punctuation  
+ Paragraph coherence and unity  
+ Word choice  
  * The key word here is **distracting**. Responses at this level not only contain errors, but either due to the number or severity of the errors, the student’s writing may be difficult to read or may be noticeably deficient when compared to the standards for Edited American English written in an academic context. |
<p>|        | 2-3   | 2-3 pts. | Responses in this category are not completely free from errors and may contain some distracting errors in the areas listed above. However, the writing here is readable and represents an acceptable (though clearly imperfect and in need of editing) attempt at academic writing. |
|        | 4     | 4-5 pts. | Responses in this category contain some weaknesses in the above areas but no patterns of error and few, if any, serious or distracting errors. Writing at this level would be described as not only acceptable but above-average academic writing for a student at this level. |
|        | 5     | 6 pts.  | This response is not only error-free (or very nearly so), but represents a particularly successful attempt at academic writing. Writing at this level is polished and mature--far above the average for students at this level. |</p>
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**Comprehension-QUEST. TOTAL**

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