Black Boy by Richard Wright  
Section by Section  
Vocabulary & Discussion Questions

Separate the vocabulary from the questions and turn them in as two documents.  

**Vocabulary:** Number your vocabulary. There are 57 words. Some chapters will not have vocabulary words. Expect a test over these words within the first week of school.  

a) Write the sentence from the book that contains the word. Underline the word.  

b) Write the definition of the word as it is used in the context of the novel.  

**Discussion Questions:** Write answers using complete sentences on separate paper from this document. Answer all parts of the questions. There will be an essay or passages exam within the first week of school.

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**Chapter 1, Pages 3-35** 

**Vocabulary**
- cryptic (7)  
- infinite (7)  
- languor (8)  
- injunction (13)  
- doggerel (24)  
- copiously (27)

**Discussion Questions**
1. Discuss the impact of Richard’s first memory. What is he doing? Why has he been warned? Why does Richard “play with fire”? What are the results? What does the punishment tell you about the family’s approach to discipline? Does Richard feel the discipline is unfair?  
2. Explain how and why Richard first triumphs over his father. How does this adversely affect Richard?  
3. How and why does Richard’s life change shortly after the cat incident? How does Richard’s mother teach him to defend himself?  
4. What first places the seeds of discontent in Richard’s heart toward white people?  
5. How does Richard entertain himself while his mother works? What are the repercussions from this? How does his mother handle the situation?  
6. Discuss Richard’s early education.  
7. What events further deteriorate Richard’s relationship with his father? What happens to the family?

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**Chapter 2, Pages 36-77** 

**Vocabulary**
- intangible (37)  
- surreptitiously (50)  
- asafetida (72)  
- emulate (73)

**Discussion Questions**
1. Explain how Richard’s life changes when he is taken from the orphan home. Where does he live? What happens to him there?  
2. What is unusual about Granny? Why is this confusing to Richard?  
3. How does the train trip to Arkansas reveal to Richard the clearly drawn lines between black people and white people? In Arkansas, what strengthens Richard’s knowledge of this distinction?
4. Explain the significance of Richard’s encounter with the two groups of black men: soldiers and chain gang.
5. Why does Richard’s mother decide to leave Granny’s? What new experiences does Richard encounter because of this move.

Chapter 3, Pages 78-101
Vocabulary
   grapple(81)       morose(86)       elicited(92)       predilection(100)
Discussion Questions
1. What is the “touchstone of fraternity” that binds the black boys together? How do Richard and the other boys demonstrate this?
2. Explain the importance of church life to the family.
3. What happens to Richard’s mother and how does this affect the family?
4. Explain the effect of the move on Richard.
5. What happens to Ella after Richard returns to Granny’s? Explain its impact on Richard.

Chapter 4, Pages 102-121
Discussion Questions
1. Describe the regimen of life in Granny’s home.
2. Describe Richard’s experiences at the Seventh-Day Adventist school and his relationship with the teacher, Aunt Addie.
3. Examine Richard’s religious paradox and its effect on others in his life.

Chapter 5, pages 122-144
Vocabulary
   solicitude (122)      palatial (128)      palled (133)
Discussion Questions
1. Why do Aunt Addie and Granny change toward Richard? How does this alienation affect him?
2. What does Granny do that isolates Richard from his peers? What job does this lead him to take?
3. What leads to Richard’s second knife confrontation with Aunt Addie.
4. After Richard quits selling papers, what job does he take and how does this affect the family?
5. Explain Grandpa’s bitterness toward the government.
6. What does Richard do that establishes his independence from Granny? Why is his mother pleased with him?

Chapter 6, Pages 145-160
Vocabulary
   invectives (149)      boon (150)      sonorously (155)
   nominal (156)         impudent (157)
Discussion Questions
1. What types of white people does Richard encounter in his work for them?
2. Why does Richard finally consent to baptism?
3. What two events cause changes in Richard’s home life?

Chapter 7, Pages 161-169
Vocabulary
florid (163)

Discussion Questions
1. Explain the conflict within Richard concerning his future.
2. Discuss Richard’s job at the brickyard.
3. How does Richard first have a story published? What is the effect?

Chapter 8, Pages 170-178
Vocabulary
impetus (173)

Discussion Questions
1. What is the “white death”? How does this affect Richard?
2. What discovery in his home alters the course of his life?
3. Explain the events that culminate Richard’s last year of school.

Chapter 9, Pages 179-193
Vocabulary
dissimble (184) breech (191)

Discussion Questions
1. Discuss Richard’s first job after graduation from the ninth grade.
2. Explain Grigg’s advice to Richard.
3. Discuss Richard’s job at the optical company.

Chapter 10, Pages 194-207
Vocabulary
subservience (196) repugnant (199)

Discussion Questions
1. How does the loss of his job at the optical company affect Richard? What does he conclude to be his basic problem?
2. Although Richard has never stolen anything, what ultimately drives him to do so? How does he react to his success as a thief?

Chapter 11, Pages 208-222
Discussion Questions
1. What is Richard’s first stop on his journey north? What happens to him there?

Chapter 12, Pages 223-243
Discussion Questions
1. Discuss Richard’s job with an optical company in Memphis.
2. What happens to his relationship with Mrs. Moss and Bess?

Chapter 13, Pages 244-253
Discussion Questions
1. How does Richard become acquainted with the writings of H.L. Mencken? How does he pursue his desire to read more of Mencken’s works?
2. What effect does Richard’s love for reading have on his life?

Chapter 14, 254-257
1. Explain Richard and his family’s plan to go north. What excuse does he offer his boss for leaving?
2. Analyze the last sentences of the last paragraph in Chapter 14: This was the culture from which I sprang. This was the terror from which I fled.

Chapter 15, Pages 261-283
Vocabulary
translucently (261)   feudalism (265)   tawdry (271)   travail (273)
tense (278)   libations (282)

Discussion Questions
1. What is the most important thing Richard finds when he arrives in Chicago?
2. After arriving at Aunt Cleo’s, what disturbs Richard?
3. Discuss Richard’s first job in Chicago.
4. Explain Richard’s view of racial discrimination
5. What experiences in Richard’s job as a dishwasher clearly differentiate between the treatment of Negroes of the North and the South?
6. What happens to Richard in his search for success and self-identity?

Chapter 16, Pages 284-299
Vocabulary
cynical (285)   oblique (286)   succumbed (288)   malinger (293)
eschewing (295)

Discussion Questions
1. Explain the Wright’s improved way of life. What happens to once again plunge them into poverty?
2. Explain Richard’s involvement with “gangs” and groups.
3. Explain Richard’s job as an insurance agent.
4. What effect do the Negro Communists have on Richard? How do they contradict his feelings about his people?

Chapter 17, Pages 300-314
Vocabulary
anarchy (301)   insurgent (302)   obviate (307)   taciturn (313)
Discussion Questions
1. When Richard goes to the relief station for food, what does he sense happening among the Negro people? How does this change him?
2. What effect does Richard’s job at the medical research institute have?
3. Explain the results of the fight between Brand and Cooke.

Chapter 18, Pages 315-328
Vocabulary
condescension (317) tenets (322)
Discussion Questions
1. What is Richard’s initial involvement with the Communist party? How does his mother react?
2. Why is Communism the antithesis of Richard’s mother’s ideal?
3. What is Richard’s goal as a writer for Communist publications?
4. What leads to Richard’s election as executive secretary of the John Reed Club? What is the result of his election?
5. Why does the incident involving Young’s charges against Swann trouble Richard?

Chapter 19, Pages 329-375
Vocabulary
bourgeois (331) inherent (332) incipient (351) Fascism (355)
ideological (360) recrimination (361) aesthetic (364) erstwhile (367)
incipient (351) inherent (332) recrimination (361) aesthetic (364) erstwhile (367)
1. How is Richard accepted by the Negroes in the Communist unit in the Black Belt of the South Side? How does Richard react to them?
2. Who is Ross and how does Richard’s involvement with him further alienate Richard from the Communist party?
3. Where does Richard find relief from his political problems?
4. Explain Richard’s involvement in the demise of the Chicago John Reed Club.
5. Discuss Richard’s trip to New York to attend a Communist writers’ conference.
6. Identify Buddy Nealson and explain his relationship with Richard.
7. Explain Richard’s job with the Federal Negro Theater.

Chapter 20, Pages 376-384
proletarian (377) sundered (382)
1. Explain how Richard’s job at the Federal Writers’ Project becomes a retaliation tool used against him by the Communist party. How does he react?
2. Explain the communist party’s final blow to Richard’s self-esteem.
3. Explain Richard’s final decision.