

**Recitatif** Discussion Questions

The title refers to the French form of “recitative,” a style of delivery sometimes used in operas when a performer sings ordinary speech, often during interludes. This refers to the episodic nature of the story that brings together the two characters—Twyla and Roberta—in five “moments, all narrated by Twyla.

Toni Morrison disclosed this as a story that has removed “all racial codes . . . about two characters of different races for whom racial identity is crucial.”

I.

*What details are provided as readers come to know Twyla and Roberta? Their initial impressions of each other as eight-year-olds? Their mothers and the reasons the girls are at St. Bonny?*

Cite specific passages that address race directly or indirectly at their initial meeting.

*What is the importance of Maggie in the story?*

*What do we learn from their mothers’ visit? How are they described, and how do any of their characteristics involve clues or stereotypes regarding race? How does the lunch each woman brought inform your beliefs about them? What additional clues regarding race occur during this lunch?*

II.

*Describe the second meeting of Twyla and Roberta as teenagers at the Howard Johnson’s. What additional information about each is provided, and how do these details inform your idea of their races?*

III.

*At their meeting in the grocery store 20 years later, how have they changed? New information/clues?*

IV.

*The next meeting occurs during a demonstration over school bussing. The exchange between Twyla and Roberta further muddles our ability to determine their respective races. Point to words/phrases used by both to describe their thoughts on bussing.*

*How does Twyla make sense of the incident with Maggie all these years later?*

V.

In this final scene, why is the topic still Maggie?

How, if at all, did you assign race to Twyla and Roberta?