

Name: _____
English 10H

THE GRASS DANCER

by Susan Power

All questions should be completed on loose-leaf as you read each chapter. When possible, use direct quotations from the book to support your answer. Cite quotations with page numbers.

CHAPTER 1 Grass Dancers

Questions pp. 1- 25

1. From your initial reading, what do you suppose is the significance of the title? Why is the powwow so important to the Sioux tribes?
2. Who is Mercury Thunder? How did she get her name?
3. Characterize Pumpkin. What makes her unique?
4. On p.16, Pumpkin says, “I stand outside of [the world].” What does she mean by this?
5. Describe Harley. How have the deaths of his father and brother affected him?

Questions pp.25-53

6. What is the significance of Pumpkin’s scar? What does it symbolize?
7. Describe Charlene’s relationship with Mercury. How does Charlene view her grandmother?
8. Why do Harley and Pumpkin connect so well?
9. What do you suppose is the significance of Harley’s vision of the ghost?
10. What happens to Pumpkin? What is the significance of Harley’s statement, “I would give you back if it would help. I would give you back”?
11. What does Charlene come to believe after her dream (p.51)?
12. On p. 53 Herod says, “Now they’re the true kind of grass dancers... Now they really know how to prepare the way.” Explain what he means by this.

As you continue to read, pay close attention to images. What images or lines stand out? Jot them down. Pay special attention to images of animals and the land. What can you infer from the text about the Sioux’s relationship with the environment around them?

CHAPTER 2 Christianity Comes To the Sioux

1. Characterize Jeannette McVay. How would you describe her classroom? How is she “*unšika*” or pitiful, as Harley calls her?
2. Why is Harley reluctant to tell his family’s stories in class?
3. Who is Ghost Horse? Why does Harley decide to imitate him?
4. What is the effect of Harley’s visit to the Missouri River? What imagery does Power use to describe the river?

CHAPTER 3 The Medicine Hole

1. Explain Archie’s dream. Why is it significant?
2. Describe Herod’s relationship with his wife Alberta. What has strained their marriage?
3. What can be inferred about social mores regarding sex in the Dakota culture? What practical applications did these customs have?
4. Who is Clara Miller? Explain the significance of her union with Herod. Why do they connect? What does Clara mean when she says, “I forgive you”?
5. Explain the symbolism of the abandoned house.
6. What is the “medicine hole”? What does it symbolize for the Dakota people? What does the warrior mean when he says, “You are the medicine hole”? How might this foreshadow events to come?

CHAPTER 4 Moonwalk

1. Why does Margaret need to tell her life story?
2. What does Margaret rediscover on her deathbed? What does she fear? (See p. 100-101)
3. What is the significance of Margaret’s grandmother’s dress? What does it represent symbolically?
4. According to Margaret, why can’t she eat her daughters’ food? (p.111)
5. On p. 115, Margaret says, “It’s all history.” What does she mean?
6. Explain the source of conflict between Evie and Lydia. How do Evie and Lydia view their mother’s death differently? What does this suggest about their different personalities?
7. What does Harley see on TV after his grandmother dies? What is significant about this?
8. On p.122 Margaret finds “Wanagi Tancanku,” the Spirit Road. What does this mean?

CHAPTER 5 Morse Code

1. Who is Crystal Thunder? Describe her.
2. Who is Martin Lundstrom? Describe him.
3. Describe the relationship between Crystal and her mother using specific examples. How would you feel about having Crystal's mother as your own?
4. Who is Clive Broken Rope? How do you suppose he died?
5. How does Crystal break free of her mother's control? Is this a good or a bad choice? What would you have done in her situation?
6. What is the significance of the turtle amulet?
7. How is Anna like the grass? How is Crystal different? Where does Charlene fit into this picture? Is she more like Anna or her mother? Explain why.

CHAPTER 6 A Hole In The Sheets

1. Discuss Jeannette McVeigh and her motivations for living on the reservation. How does she view the Dakota? Use specific examples.
2. Why does Herod Small War send Jeannette to Anna (a.k.a. Mercury) Thunder? How does McVeigh describe Herod (p.163)? Are her opinions justified?
3. What does Anna think of Jeannette? How does Anna's view of Jeannette change?
4. Explain the source of conflict between Anna and Crystal.
5. On p. 176, Anna announces, "I am going to right a wrong of history." What is she referring to?

CHAPTER 7 Honor Song

1. Describe the relationship between Evie and Lydia.
2. Analyze the role of religion in this chapter. How are traditional Dakota ways both similar to and different from Christianity? How do the various characters negotiate the two religions? What do you think of the various ways each character deals with the issue of religion?
3. Who is Red Dress? According to legend, where is she now?
4. There are many clear references to white prejudice against Native Americans in this chapter. Herod and Calvin are particularly wary of white men. What are their respective feelings and what has caused them to feel this way?
5. Explain the triangle between Evie, Lydia, and Calvin. How does this come to be?

6. Why does Lydia feel responsible for the deaths of Calvin and Duane?

CHAPTER 8 Red Moccasins

1. Who does Anna marry? What causes the rivalry between Anna and her cousin?
2. What makes Anna bitter?
3. Where does she get her magic and what does she do with it?
4. Consider the multiple references to dancing in this chapter. What is Power trying to achieve through these images? How is dancing symbolic in the novel thus far?

CHAPTER 9 Snakes

1. Describe the relationship between Red Dress and Father La Frambois. How does Father LaFrambois feel about the Dakota? How do you know?
2. Ghost Horse is *hey'oka*. Give examples of his behavior to explain the meaning of this.
3. How is Red Dress's tribe different than the other neighboring tribes?
4. How is Red Dress's life "altered by a dream"?
5. Explain the significance of the twin stones. Why are they called her "sisters"?
6. Compare and contrast Reverend Pyke to Father La Frambois.
7. Describe the complex relationship between Fanny and Red Dress.
8. On p.269, Red Dress says, "I am at war." Explain the significance of this statement. What does she mean? With whom is she at war?
9. Why does the author shift verb tenses in this chapter? (p.246, 248, 267, 269) What purpose does this serve?
10. How is Red Dress "a bride in death"? What is the significance of the plum pit?
11. How does Red Dress account for the fact that she and Ghost Horse are never reunited in death?
12. On p.282, Red Dress says, "I am memory." Explain this statement. Is her ghost despondent or hopeful? How do you know?
13. Images of grass play a very significant role in this chapter. Find *at least* three references to grass and explain their significance to the meaning of the story.

CHAPTER 10 Swallowing the Birds

1. What is the significance of Charlene's dream?
2. How does Charlene give in to her grandmother's way of life? What makes her change her mind about this way of living?
3. Who do you suppose left the newspaper clipping for Charlene? Why?
4. Why doesn't Charlene blame her mother? Find the quote that explains this.
5. What is Charlene's vision of Pumpkin as the bus pulls away? Explain the significance of this scene.
6. When Charlene repeats to herself, "*It wasn't your fault,*" what do you suppose she is referring to?

CHAPTER 11 The Vision Pit

1. What has become of Mercury? How is this symbolic?
2. What important advice does Herod give Jeannette about raising her daughter?
3. Who is Aljoe? Why has he embraced Christianity?
4. What is Frank's response to Aljoe's decision to become a Christian?
5. What is your opinion of Aljoe's and Frank's analogies regarding Christianity?
6. What is Harley's response to Aljoe's decision to become Christian?
7. Describe Lydia's new Powwow outfit and its symbolism.
8. Lydia says, "Now I am ready" (p.322). What is she ready for?
9. How does Harley disappoint his mother?
10. What does Herod tell Harley he must do (p.325-326)?
11. Describe Harley's vision quest. Who does he meet and what do they say?
12. What is the significance of the last paragraph? Is this an appropriate ending? Why or why not?