

Guiding Questions for Kindred

Prologue

1. What do you think happened to Dana's arm?
2. How would you react if you were the police officer investigating the case? What would you think?
3. How does the prologue set your expectations for the rest of the book?

The River

1. How old is Dana? When and where does the story begin?
2. How would most people react in 1976 to a black woman being married to a white man?
3. What/how does Dana feel right before she "travels"?
4. What do the woman's long dress and Southern accent suggest about where Dana has traveled to?

The Fire

1. How has Rufus changed since the last trip?
2. How has the first trip changed Dana?
3. Why does Dana refuse to leave the house after her first "trip"? How would you feel in her situation?
4. What causes Dana's trips? Why do they happen?
5. What kind of "unlikeable" marks does the environment leave on Rufus?
6. How does Rufus' home differ from the slaves' homes? From Dana's? From yours?
7. Why does Alice's mother agree to help Dana, only to block the doorway when the patroller returns?

8. How can Dana protect herself in Rufus' time? How does she try? How does she change in order to survive?
9. How does this trip change Dana?

The Fall

1. How has Rufus changed since the last trip?
2. Think about how the temporary labor agency compares to slavery. How is it similar? How is it, as Dana says, "just the opposite"?
3. How do Dana & Kevin first meet? What do they have in common that connects them?
4. What kind of protection is Kevin here for Dana?
5. Why does Dana say, "Well, Daddy hadn't changed", on page 60?
6. How have things changed from Rufus' time to the 1970s socially? Culturally? Geographically?
7. How must Dana change her behavior/attitude in the 1800's?
8. Why does Luke, Nigel's dad, warn Dana about Tom and Rufus on page 68? What does this say about Rufus?
9. Why don't the children understand they're slaves? How/when do you think this will change?
10. How is Kevin's experience in the 1800's different from Dana's? How is she afraid it will change him?
11. Why is it important that Rufus learn to read well?
12. How does this trip change Dana?
13. Why do both Rufus and Kevin tell Dana to be careful?
14. "Don't matter what ought to be. Matters what is." What does Sarah mean? How does this theme carry throughout the book?
15. Why is Dana disturbed by how easy she and Kevin "acclimatize" to life in the 1800's?
16. Is it possible to change history, or is Kevin right? (pg. 100)

The Fight (1-8)

1. How has Rufus changed since the last trip?
2. Why do you think it's important that we know about Dana & Kevin's life together? Why are these pieces included in the story?
3. Why do their relatives react poorly to their marriage?
4. How does Dana prepare for her next trip? Why does she do these things?
5. Why is Dana disoriented by the different times/places?
6. How much time has passed between the last trip and this one? What has changed?
7. Why do you think Kevin left the Weylin plantation?
8. Why does Rufus keep defending his actions, the way he treated Alice? How does he feel about Alice? How do you know?
9. What kind of "retaliation" does Dana have toward Rufus? Rufus towards Dana?
10. Why must Dana remind herself that the Weylin plantation isn't "home"?
11. Why has Margaret Weylin left? Where did she go?
12. Why does Tom Weylin allow Nigel and Carrie to marry? Why does Rufus pay for a preacher?
13. Is Tom Weylin a "fair" man, as Rufus says on page 134?
14. Why do people hope that Dana will stay around for a while? How does this conflict with Dana's own hopes?
15. Why do you think Rufus says, "I don't think so", when Dana asks him if he'd ever sell slaves?
(pg. 139)
16. "...history. It happened whether it offends you or not." What does Dana mean? (pg. 140)
17. What does Rufus' relationship with Nigel say about him and his attitude towards black people?
18. What does it mean that Sarah has done the "safe" thing? (page 145)
19. Why is it worse for slaves in the deep South than it is in Maryland?
20. Why is Dana upset about the way Rufus has "gotten" Alice? Think about the contrast between her marriage to Kevin being illegal in the 1800's, and Rufus' actions toward Alice being legal.

The Fight (9-16)

1. Why does Sarah warn Dana that Rufus may not have mailed her letter?
2. What kinds of diseases and infections is Dana worried that Alice might get?
3. Why doesn't Dana want to make Alice remember her past? Why does she try to delay Alice's memory of recent events?
4. What does Dana mean on page 159 when she says that her job is to "ease troubles"? Whose troubles?
5. Why does Tom Weylin give Nigel gifts to commemorate the birth of his son Jude?
6. Why is Tom Weylin angry about the letter?
7. Rufus compares his relationship with Alice to Dana's relationship with Kevin. How are the two relationships similar? How are they different?
8. Why does Rufus try to make Dana doubt that Kevin is coming back?
9. Why does Rufus tell Dana to try to convince Alice to come to him willingly? Why does she agree?
10. Why does Dana let Alice treat her so meanly? Why does Alice do it?
11. What finally convinces Alice to go to Rufus willingly?
12. How does Rufus control Dana? Where did he learn this from?
13. What makes Dana finally decide to run away? Why is she caught so quickly?
14. Why doesn't the beating send Dana home?
15. "See how easily slaves are made?" What does this mean? (pg. 177)
16. What really happened to Liza, the sewing woman? How did she get hurt?
17. Why does Dana keep forgiving Rufus? Why doesn't she hate him?
18. Why does Tom Weylin contact Kevin?
19. Why does Rufus try to keep Dana and Kevin from leaving, first with hospitality, and then with violence?

20. How has this trip changed Dana?
21. How has this trip changed Rufus?

The Storm

1. What does Kevin have trouble with back in the 1970's? Why does he have a hard time adjusting? How has he changed?
2. Why don't Dana & Kevin feel like they're home? Why do you think the past feels more like home for them right now?
3. Why does Tom Weylin want to talk to Dana? Why does he accuse her of lying? What does she do to make him angry?
4. Why isn't the doctor called to treat Rufus? How does Dana treat his sickness?
5. What makes Tom Weylin so confident that Dana can make Rufus well again?
6. Why is Dana so upset that Hagar hasn't been born yet? Who is Hagar?
7. Why does Dana try to save Tom Weylin, even though she hates him?
8. Why does Rufus send Dana to work in the fields? Why does Fowler drive her so hard?
9. What makes Rufus so afraid about the possibility of Dana leaving?
10. Why does Rufus let Dana go read instead of working for the rest of the day? (pg. 217)
11. How do we see that Dana is similar to Margaret Weylin in her attitude toward Rufus?
12. How has Margaret Weylin changed since we last saw her? Why does she feel lonely?
13. Why does Rufus sell Tess and the other two slaves? Why does this upset Dana?
14. Why is Carrie so afraid after Dana says she wishes she'd let Rufus die? What is she afraid of?
15. Why does Kevin want Dana to write his letters for him? List two reasons.
16. How are Dana and Alice "really only one woman" in Rufus' mind?
17. Why does Dana keep her journal in shorthand?
18. What makes Rufus start to take an interest in his son, Joe? How does his attitude toward the boy change?

19. Why does Alice still want to run away with her children? Why does she insist that Rufus will never free any of them?
20. Why does Rufus sell Sam Jones?
21. Why is hitting Dana a mistake? What agreement is Rufus breaking here?
22. How does Dana get home (1976) this time? How has this trip changed her?
23. How has Rufus changed during this trip?

The Rope

1. Why would Dana have to go to a mental institution? Why would she have to lie if she were put in one?
2. What does Kevin think is an “easy” decision for Dana? Why isn’t as easy as he thinks it is?
3. What’s the symbolism of Dana being called back to Rufus on July 4th? What holiday is that?
4. What is Kevin afraid that Rufus has done to Dana? Do you think he’s jealous?
5. What has happened to Alice? Why?
6. Why did Rufus pretend to sell his children? What makes Rufus finally decide to free his children?
7. What is significant about Joe calling Rufus “Daddy”?
8. Why does Rufus say that he’d have to be crazy to free all of the slaves in his will and then tell Dana about it?
9. What happens in Rufus’ nightmares?
10. What does Rufus mean this time when he says that Dana and Alice are the same person? What does he want Dana to do now?
11. Why does Dana finally stab Rufus?
12. Why do you think Dana’s arm gets stuck in the wall? What’s holding her back?

Epilogue

1. How has the last trip changed Dana?
2. Why do Dana and Kevin travel back to Baltimore and Easton?