

The Bean Trees Quote ID Quiz Answers

Please note that since several editions of *The Bean Trees* have been published, the page numbers given below may not correspond to your edition.

1. “I love your names. They’re about the only thing you came here with that you’ve still got left.” p. 207 (Chapter 15: “Lake o’ the Cherokees”)

Speaker: Taylor

Person Spoken To: Estevan and Esperanza

Context: As they prepare to stay on the Cherokee reservation, Estevan and Esperanza are planning to go by the names Steven and Hope to protect their identities. (“Here” is the United States.)

Significance: Their names have symbolic meaning in terms of their identity, their history, and everything they’ve lost—they’re symbolically putting their old lives behind them. One of the most important motifs of the novel is loss and adaptation to that loss. The symbolic importance of names is also a recurring motif in the novel.

2. “You talk different. I knowed you was going to put on airs.” p. 57 (Chapter 4: “Tug Fork Water”)

Speaker: Lou Ann’s grandmother (“Granny Logan”)

Person Spoken To: Lou Ann

Context: Lou Ann’s speech patterns may have changed slightly since moving to Arizona, and her grandmother interprets this as a rejection of her roots resulting from an attitude of superiority (to “put on airs” is to act as if one is superior).

Significance: Lou Ann’s life in Arizona is very different, and her grandmother, especially, has a hard time accepting these changes. She wants Lou Ann to hold on to her roots, including her religion and her attachment to the place where she grew up in Kentucky. This sensitivity, and the behavior of some of the older characters and the characters from rural areas, reflects the motifs of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and xenophobia. Identity is also a major motif: Lou Ann’s is determined partly by her upbringing in Kentucky, but she is also trying to create a new, independent identity.

3. “Why not, my daddy’d been calling me a slut practically since I was thirteen, so why the hell not? Newt was just who it happened to be. You know the way it is.” p. 9 (Chapter 1: “The One to Get Away”)

Speaker: Jolene Shanks

Person Spoken To: Taylor

Context: Her husband (Newt Hardbine) has just shot her and killed himself, and she’s explaining to Taylor why she married him.

Significance: Her experiences and her attitude reflect two major motifs in the novel: male abuse of women and passive acceptance of what one sees as fate. Because Jolene’s father has made her believe that she and her life aren’t worth much, she is casual about her own fate. He called her a “slut” so much that she became one.

4. “Before you know it the whole world will be here jibbering and jabbering till we won’t know it’s America.” p. 106 (Chapter 7: “How They Eat in Heaven”)

Speaker: Virginia Parsons (“Virgie Mae”)

Person Spoken To: the people at dinner (Edna, Taylor, Lou Ann, Estevan, Esperanza)

Context: Virginia is reacting to the TV report and the discussion about the issue of giving asylum to immigrants facing danger in their home countries.

Significance: Her comments reflect the xenophobic, unsympathetic attitude of many Americans that the novel strongly criticizes. America is supposed to be a country that values the principles of compassion and equality and should thus help those in need; it is also supposed to be a diverse place that welcomes and is able to assimilate people from different cultural backgrounds—there is no one

language, culture, or race that completely defines America. (Ironically, Estevan speaks better English than most native speakers.)

5. “But nothing on this earth’s guaranteed, when you get right down to it, **you** know? I’ve been thinking about that. About how your kids aren’t really *yours*, they’re just people that you try to keep an eye on, and hope you’ll all grow up someday to like each other and still be in one piece. What I mean is, everything you ever get is really just on loan.” p. 231 (Chapter 17: “Rhizobia”)

Speaker: Lou Ann

Person Spoken To: Taylor

Context: Taylor calls Lou Ann while she’s in Oklahoma, and Lou Ann reflects on how important it is to treasure the close relationships you have with family and friends.

Significance: Her words suggest the motif of fate and the theme that there are many things in life over which we have no control—therefore, we should value whatever good fortune we have and not take it for granted. Ironically, though Lou Ann is constantly worried through most of the novel about everything that might possibly go wrong, she seems to have learned to accept the fact that “nothing on this earth’s guaranteed.” People should appreciate what they have in life and make the best of it, knowing that it won’t last forever and that there is much about their lives that is ultimately beyond their control. This conversation between Taylor and Lou Ann reverses their usual roles: now, Lou Ann is the one dispensing wisdom and emotional support—Taylor had been worried that Lou Ann was going to move out, but she accepts and affirms Lou Ann’s feeling that they are family. (Taylor and Lou Ann are both keenly aware of the tragedy and suffering in the world, but Lou Ann is primarily concerned with random, unlikely dangers, while Taylor sees the suffering in the world primarily as the result of human cruelty or indifference—see quotation #7.)

6. “The way I see it, a person isn’t nothing more than a scarecrow. **You**, me, Earl Wickentot, the President of the United States, and even God Almighty, as far as I can see. The only difference between one that stands up good and one that blows over is what kind of a stick they’re stuck up there on.” p. 5 (Chapter 1: “The One to Get Away”)

Speaker: Mama

Person Spoken To: Taylor

Context: She is discussing the hospital volunteer situation with Taylor (Taylor is unsure whether to volunteer to take the hospital job that her teacher’s wife has offered) and encouraging Taylor to have confidence in herself—she’s suggesting that Taylor is “stuck up on a good stick.”

Significance: One of the themes of the novel is that because the world is sometimes so cruel, we must have courage and fortitude to deal with whatever misfortune we have. Some people have a greater natural capacity for that than others, and Mama has helped Taylor develop hers. A number of events and characters in the novel suggest that one’s upbringing and the support of others have a lot to do with the strength of one’s character. (The image of the scarecrow also suggests, perhaps, that individual human beings have little real power against the dangers of the world other than this fortitude; they can only seek to ward off threats by giving the appearance of more substance and strength than they really have.)

7. “There’s just so damn much ugliness. Everywhere you look, some big guy kicking some little person when they’re down[...]To hell with them, people say, let them die, it was their fault in the first place for being poor or in trouble, or for not being white, or whatever, how dare they try to come to this country.” p. 170 (Chapter 12: “Into the Terrible Night”)

Speaker: Taylor

Person Spoken To: Lou Ann

Context: In the aftermath of the attempted abduction/abuse of Turtle in the park, Taylor is plagued by despair about the cruelty inherent in human nature and by doubts about her ability to protect Turtle and be a good mother.

Significance: This quotation reflects the motifs of the arbitrarily tragic nature of fate and the suffering caused by human cruelty, prejudice, and indifference. The biggest example of prejudice and indifference in the novel is the attitude of Americans toward foreigners—in particular, white male Americans. Those who have the most power and privilege tend to be the least sympathetic. The novel suggests that the proper response to these facts about human life is not to give up in despair, but to confront it through perseverance, compassion, and cooperation.

8. “I could picture **these beans** marching right over the Pacific Ocean, starting from somebody’s garden in China and ending up right here.” p. 46 (Chapter 3: “Jesus Is Lord Used Tires”)

Speaker: Taylor (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: “These beans” are the purple wisteria vines, the “bean trees,” that Taylor has just seen for the first time.

Significance: The wisteria vines, which are originally from Asia, relate to a number of motifs and themes in the novel. In this scene they primarily relate to the motif of displacement or transplantation, the ability of living things to adapt in order to survive (and even thrive) in harsh environments that they may not originally have been suited for or native to. Like the bean trees, a number of characters in the novel have been transplanted to a new environment that they must adapt to.

9. “**You** talk about men like they’re a hangnail. To hear you tell it, you’d think man was only put on this earth to keep urinals from going to waste.” p. 112 (Chapter 8: “The Miracle of Dog Doo Park”)

Speaker: Lou Ann

Person Spoken To: Taylor

Context: Taylor has just learned that her mother is planning to get married again, and she is having a difficult time accepting that her mother, who has been independent for so long, would want to do such a thing.

Significance: Given the novel’s emphasis on people’s need for love and mutual support and that Taylor is no longer there to provide her mother with those things, her mother’s decision makes sense. But because of Taylor’s experiences and observations of men’s selfishness, cruelty, and treatment of women, her view of men is quite cynical and pessimistic; she thinks they have no value and are merely a burden that women are better off avoiding. The novel shows that those qualities are not universal among men, however.

10. “You see a room just like **the first one**, the same table, the same pot of stew, the same spoons as long as a sponge mop. But **these people** are all happy and fat.” p. 108 (Chapter 7: “How They Eat in Heaven”)

Speaker: Estevan

Person Spoken To: the people at dinner (Edna, Taylor, Lou Ann, Estevan, Esperanza)—but primarily Virgie Mae

Context: Estevan is telling a traditional Native American (“Indian”) story about the nature of heaven and hell in response to Virgie Mae’s prejudiced, xenophobic, and unsympathetic comments. “The first one” refers to the story’s presentation of hell: a room full of people who are starving because they are unable to feed themselves with their long spoons. “These people” are the people in heaven, which is a room just like the first one in which the people feed each other.

Significance: This story reflects a number of motifs in the novel, primarily the need for people to help each other. The theme it suggests is that the proper response to adversity is cooperation; those who cooperate and show each other compassion and kindness will thrive and have happy lives. Since the people in heaven and hell are faced with exactly the same situation, it is their *response* to their circumstances, not the circumstances themselves, that determines their fate.

11. “It’s shift work. **He’s** just got to go in when they tell him to, and that’s that. And he’s not a heathen. He was born right here in America, same as the rest of us.” p. 58 (Chapter 4: “Tug Fork Water”)

Speaker: Lou Ann

Person Spoken To: her mother and grandmother (Ivy and Granny Logan)

Context: Lou Ann is explaining Angel’s (“he” in the quote) absence—he’s working on a Sunday, a sin in the eyes of Granny Logan. Her grandmother disapproves of him in general, in large part because of her religiously intolerant, ignorant, narrow-minded, and racist views. Lou Ann wants her to accept that Angel’s Mexican and Catholic (“heathen”) background don’t make him any less of an American or a Christian.

Significance: This quotation reflects the motifs of narrow-mindedness, ignorance, xenophobia, and racism. These unjust attitudes do great harm to people who aren’t accepted by the more powerful majority, and those who have such attitudes cut themselves off from the things they have in common with the people they reject. Granny Logan’s attitude also reflects generational differences—older generations of white Americans tend to be more narrow-minded and insistent on tradition than younger generations.

12. “Nobody can protect a child from the world. That’s why it’s **the wrong thing to ask**, if you’re really trying to make a **decision**.” p. 178 (Chapter 13: “Night-Blooming Cereus”)

Speaker: Mattie

Person Spoken To: Taylor

Context: After the incident in the park in which April is attacked and almost abducted, Taylor is experiencing doubt about her ability to be a good parent to April, and she’s trying to decide whether or not to try to adopt her. (“The wrong thing to ask” is whether Taylor can guarantee April’s safety.)

Significance: Through a number of characters and events, the novel suggests that fate is arbitrary and that tragedy can occur to anyone at any time; the world is cruel and indifferent. We can’t avoid the possibility of tragedy altogether; we can only be loving, compassionate, and helpful, and face whatever adversity we have with courage and perseverance. As Mattie tells Taylor, being a good parent doesn’t mean that you can guarantee your child’s safety, but that you should provide your child with love and support and teach him or her the capacity to deal with adversity—just as Taylor’s mother did for her.