

“The Curse” by Andre Dubus: Study Questions

1. What is the nature of the “curse”? How is it different from curses as we generally think of them?
2. What moral question does the story present? (Hint: Think about why the author chose to make the rapists a group of five men rather than two or three.) Why is it such a difficult question to deal with? What do you think is its “answer”?
3. What does the story imply about the nature of people’s self-image—in what ways is it fragile and even illusory?
4. Identify and discuss some of the narrative details in the story that reveal Mitchell’s guilt.
5. What does the story suggest about the nature and causes of rape? Consider the circumstances under which the crime occurs.
6. Why do you think Dubus (the author) chose to present the story in the way he did? Consider the point of view and time frame of the story. Why are names of the rape victim and the perpetrators never given?
7. What do you think is the significance of Mitchell’s fatigue in the opening paragraph of the story?
8. Although the incident is presented in flashback, what elements of foreshadowing does the account contain?
9. What do you think is the symbolic significance of bathing in the story (middle of page 400)?
10. What do you think Mitchell is thinking when Joyce tells him he’ll be a good witness (middle of page 401)? How are his thoughts conveyed?
11. What is ironic about the reaction of bar patrons to him when he tells them the story again and again (bottom of page 401)?
12. Why do you think Mitchell wants to “kneel to receive [her curse]”?