THE SECRET OF MAGIC

Deborah Johnson

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Thurgood Marshall first hire Regina as a lawyer at the Legal Defense Fund? What does this say about his attitude toward equal rights in general and toward women in particular?
2. What were Joe Howard Wilson’s feelings toward the Calhoun family? What were his feelings toward his father, Willie Willie?
3. At one point, Mary Pickett mentions rumors of a romance between Willie Willie and Peach. Why did they remain friends but never marry after Luther was “disappeared”?
4. Regina pays a lot of attention to her clothes. Why does the author include this? What did you make of Mary Pickett’s changing her sweater once she sees Regina wearing the same one?
5. Do you think Mary Pickett truly didn’t notice that the teacup she gave Regina was chipped? Was it an honest mistake, or was she making a point?
6. Regina comes to feel that in many ways the South in 1946 is more integrated than the North. In what ways does she feel this? Do you agree with her?
7. Is Tom Raspberry an Uncle Tom, or is he a man who has realistically made his way forward in a world where the cards are stacked against him?
8. Why did Wynne Blodgett kill Joe Howard Wilson, and why did he think he could get away with it? Could this kind of thing still happen today?
9. Who “owned” the stories in M. P. Calhoun’s book *The Secret of Magic*? Was it Mary Pickett herself, or Willie Willie? Did Mary Pickett feel morally correct in publishing *The Secret of Magic*, or was she always at least a little ambivalent about what she had done? Why was she finally able to restart her writing career?
10. How is Mary Pickett Calhoun the stereotypical ideal of a southern white woman? How is she different from that? Can you draw comparisons to other figures in literature, such as Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*?
11. Who was the most courageous character in the book for you, and why? How do you measure courage?