

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the author uses French and Haitian Creole words throughout the text? What does the use of either or both languages suggest about class differences among the characters in the novel?
2. How is the use of the colors yellow, red, and blue significant in the novel? What do you think they mean?
3. In the first section of the book, Sophie is often seen pulling a sheet over her head. Why do you think she does that? How do those moments compare to her mother pulling the sheet over her body after she gives her the “test” for the first time?
4. What does Martine mean by “There are secrets you cannot keep.” How does Sophie interpret those words?
5. How would you interpret the story of the woman who “walked around with blood constantly spurting out of her unbroken skin.” How does that story relate to the lives of the Caco women?

6. What do you make of Atie and Monsieur Augustin's relationship? How does it compare to the relationship Atie later has with Louise?
7. Why does Martine finally return to Haiti after staying away for so long? Do you think it was a good idea for her to go?
8. The Caco women seem to mostly communicate through stories. Why do you think that is? What roles to maxims and proverbs play in the novel?
9. Towards the end of the book, Tante Atie says, "Young girls should be allowed to keep their pleasant stories." Do you agree? Should everyone be allowed to keep their pleasant stories, even surrounded by dark realities? Do the Caco women have any pleasant stories?
10. Sophie takes part in two kinds of therapy. Both seem rather untraditional. Her support group with the two other women seems almost like a new age church. Her "official" therapist basically gives Sophie orders and directions to follow. Do you think Sophie is getting the right kind of care in her situation?
11. Joseph is extremely understanding, both as a husband and as a father. Is he over idealized or is he just the kind of man Sophie needs in her life? Do you think things would have turned out differently for Martine if Marc were more like Joseph?

12. At the end of the novel, Sophie's grandmother asks her, "*Ou libere?* Are you free, my daughter?" She also tells her, "Now you will know how to answer." How do you think Sophie would answer? How would you?