

The Piano Lesson – Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Boy Willie and Berniece can't ever get along? Who do you sympathize with more? Wining Boy and Doaker seem to have a similar sort of rivalry. What do you make of that, and which of them do you understand better?
2. Do you think Berniece is justified in how she treats Boy Willie and Lymon? Is she right to be suspicious of the fact that Lymon has had trouble with the law?
3. What do you think of the songs that get sung throughout? What is their purpose? (pages 39, 47, 55, 101, 107)
4. What do you think of the stage directions, particularly when characters first appear on stage? Are the descriptions of them helpful, or just confusing? Do they seem more designed for readers, or for the stage?
5. Do you think Boy Willie might have actually pushed Sutter down the well? What about the other men who were killed by the ghosts of Yellow Dog? Why is Sutter calling for Boy Willie? Look at the puppy passage (page 88) and Boy Willie's lines about his hands (page 91). What might Sutter's ghost want?
6. What might be the purpose of the focus on transportation and technology early on? The characters discuss the railroad, the car, elevators, and planes, in relatively close succession (18-19, 23). Doaker has an interesting monologue about the railroad, pages 18-19.
7. How is religion treated? Do you think the characters come to any kind of a consensus on it towards the end? Are the stories about the ghosts of Yellow Dog equivalent to religion? How do race and religion interact in this play? What about gender and religion? Class and religion?
8. How are relationships treated? The stories regarding Cleotha, Coreen, Grace, Dolly, Avery, Crawley, Lymon's parents, and others are all interesting. Why does nobody ever seem to stay in a relationship long term?

9. How is gender treated in this play? Is Berniece right to think people underestimate her because she's a woman? I'm interested in the passage where she and Avery argue about marriage – pages 66-67.
10. What do you think of Wining Boy's explanation of the difference is between blacks and whites? (page 38)
11. What do you think of the names? Do they have any significance? I'm drawn to possible implications of Ophelia as a name.
12. What do you think about the story of how the piano came to exist? (pages 42-46) I'm also interested in the discussion of money and the value of the piano – pages 50-52.