

TAR BABY

Toni Morrison



RESOURCE GUIDE

Reading + Writing + Analysis

NO PREP

PRINT & GO

HIGH SCHOOL ELA

About the Text

Tar Baby tells the story of Jadine, a successful and educated woman, and Son, a man deeply connected to his cultural roots. When their lives intersect on a Caribbean island, their relationship reveals tensions between identity, culture, class, and belonging.

The novel explores how personal identity is shaped by culture, history, and environment. Through Jadine and Son, readers examine the challenges of balancing independence with connection to community and tradition.

KEY THEMES

- Identity and self-definition
- Culture and heritage
- Class and social status
- Love and conflict
- Belonging and displacement

BEFORE YOU READ

- How does culture shape identity?
- What does it mean to belong somewhere?
- Can people with different values maintain a relationship?
- How do class and background influence perspective?

Section Breakdown

Section 1: Chapters 1–3

Introduction to setting, characters, and early conflict

Section 2: Chapters 4–6

Jadine and Son's relationship develops

Section 3: Chapters 7–9

Cultural tension, identity conflict, and deeper struggles

Section 4: Chapters 10–12

Resolution, choices, and understanding

Comprehension Questions:

SECTION 1

1. Where is the novel set, and how is the setting described?
2. Who are the main characters introduced?
3. How is Jadine's identity presented?
4. How is Son introduced, and what makes him different?
5. What early conflicts are established?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

How does setting influence identity?

Comprehension Questions

SECTION 2

1. How does the relationship between Jadine and Son develop?
2. What differences between them become clear?
3. How do their backgrounds influence their perspectives?
4. What tensions begin to appear?
5. How do other characters respond to them?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

How do differences shape relationships?

Comprehension Questions

SECTION 3

1. What conflicts deepen between Jadine and Son?
2. How does culture play a role in their disagreements?
3. What choices do the characters make?
4. How do these choices affect their relationship?
5. What larger themes become clear?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

Why is identity sometimes a source of conflict?

Comprehension Questions

SECTION 4

1. How do the characters' perspectives change?

2. What final decisions are made?

3. How are earlier conflicts resolved or left unresolved?

4. What message does the ending suggest?

5. How have the characters changed?

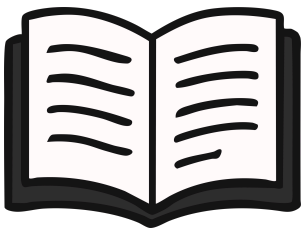
Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

*What does it mean to truly understand
yourself?*

Extension Activity

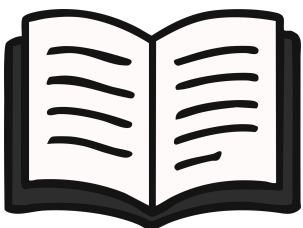
Choose one activity to complete.



- Compare Jadine and Son's perspectives



- Analyze how setting influences the story



- Create a character map showing relationships and conflicts

Understanding the Big Ideas

This story explores:

- **Identity is shaped by culture and experience**
- **Relationships reveal deeper values**
- **Belonging can be complex**
- **Personal choices define growth**

How does Toni Morrison explore the relationship between identity and culture in *Tar Baby*? Use specific examples from the text to support your response.

Final Project

- Character Analysis Essay

Explain how Jadine or Son develops throughout the novel

- Theme Analysis Presentation

Analyze a theme such as identity, culture, or belonging

- Comparison Project

Compare two characters and their perspectives on identity

Character Notes