

In the Heat of the Night Study Guide

Chapter 1:

Vocabulary: stagnant, beseeching, futile, monotony, surge, sweltering, inadequate, prejudice

1. What details has the author included to make clear that the setting of the story is a small town? Find at least 4 examples.
2. How would you describe the mood of the first chapter? What words help with this?
3. What do the following tell us about Sam Wood?
 - his opinion of his job
 - the killing of the dog
 - Delores Purdy
 - the conversation with Ralph
 - Sam's ability to cope with a crisis
4. What are the two unusual events that occurred to Sam during his patrol?

Chapter 2:

Vocabulary: tentatively, retorted, lurking, habitual, riffling, frail, tersely

1. Consider what the following statements mean or imply about Chief Bill Gillespie. What do they tell us about his character?
 - a) When told there is a first-class murder, Gillespie responds, "Tourist?"
 - b) Gillespie calls the station to ask, "Where is it?"
 - c) When he says, "You don't have to tell me my job, I'll tell you."
 - d) Colored couldn't make money like that, or keep it if they did and he (Gillespie) knew it.
4. How do the other police staff seem to feel about Chief Gillespie?
5. How did Virgil react to the questioning?

Chapters 3 & 4:

Vocabulary: strident, scrutinized, flouting, undisclosed, leer, retrospect, diplomacy, intimidate, superficial, ambidextrous, serrated, contemplated

1. During the 1960's, the American South was still deeply segregated. List examples of segregation in the novel.
2. Why does Gillespie ask Virgil to stay until evening?
3. Describe Gillespie's treatment of Harvey Oberst. What was his method of investigation?
4. What is Virgil's opinion of the interview with Harvey?
5. What point does Virgil make with his statement "They call me Mr. Tibbs."?
6. What details about Mantoli do we learn from George Endicott?
7. How does George Endicott react upon first meeting Virgil? How does his meeting differ with Sam's and Gillespie's?
8. How has sympathy been created for Sam Wood in this chapter?

Chapter 5:

Vocabulary: resolved, meddler, moderately, conspicuously, instantaneous, panorama

1. Why is Gillespie upset with Virgil at the beginning of the chapter?
2. Who is Frank Schubert?
3. How does Frank convince Gillespie to keep Virgil on the Mantoli case?
4. Virgil says his references are in San Quentin. What does he mean by this?
5. Who is Eric Kaufmann?
6. What impression does Duena make on Sam Wood?
7. Why is Sam Wood conflicted at the end of the chapter?

Chapters 6 - 8:

Vocabulary: scowled, sensible, prowling, neglecting, monopoly, precaution, blunder, precise, astonishing, inspiration, confided, presume, informality, disillusioned, corrupted, amends, astonishing, comparatively, deviation

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1. What does Pete think of Virgil?
2. What was the weapon used to kill Mantoli? How does Virgil know what the weapon is?
3. How will Reverend Whiteburn help Virgil with the Mantoli case?
4. Why is the town council upset about the article in Newsweek?
5. What do the councilors pressure Gillespie to do? How does Gillespie react to such pressure?
6. Define miasma.
7. How does Virgil know that the body had been moved?
8. How is Virgil's astuteness shown once again in the final scene?

Chapters 9-12:

Vocabulary: adequate, countermeasures, visualized, divert, courteously, presence, legacy, audibly, implement, impose, deprived, captivating, sadistic, resolved, impatience, alibi, composure, subdued, devastating, quivered, laconically, anonymous, gratification, prominent, indictment, inadvertent, enchanting, substandard, variation, conscientious, quota

1. Why does Duena visit with the mayor?
2. According to Frank, why was Bill Gillespie hired as police chief?
3. How is Sam coping in jail?
4. How did Virgil know that Sam had changed his route when driving?
5. Virgil says "I haven't finished my job. The world is full of a lot of people who never accomplished anything because they wouldn't see it through. I've got two things left to do here: to get you cleared and out of here, and to deliver a murderer to Gillespie. Then I can go home." Explain how Virgil accomplishes the first part of his mission by his interrogation of Sam.
6. Virgil describes Delores as an "exhibitionist". What does this mean? How is this girl's character relevant to the case with Sam Wood?
7. Where did Sam get the money to pay off his mortgage?

Chapters 13-14

Vocabulary: belligerent, parsonage, pathetically, acutely, whirled, inordinate, bungled, summons, enthusiasm, augmented, humility, presumably, deliberately, vengeance, inexcusable, frantically, predicament

1. Who has the the charges dropped against Virgil's attackers?
2. Who does Sam arrest in the diner?
3. Why did Ralph need to rob Mantoli?
4. Right to the end of their relationship, Gillespie maintains his prejudice toward Negroes. What are some of the proofs?