

Black-Eyed Susans – Reading Group Questions

- Tess is not always truthful, especially when she is younger. How reliable is she as a narrator? Did you completely trust her version of events?
- Discuss the ways in which Tess's relationship with her daughter is affected by her traumatic past and how it manifests itself in their day-to-day life. Are there ways in which she has been made a better mother because of this?
- Tessie pretends to be blind long after her eye-sight has returned. Discuss what sight and blindness represent in the novel.
- Though called Tessie as a teenager she switches to Tess as an adult. Discuss the reasons behind this change.
- As the years pass Tess still has a blank in her memory from the time surrounding the attack. Do you think that she could have accessed these memories if she had tried hard enough?
- Discuss the representations of friendship in the novel. Is there always an element of power play and how does that effect Tess and Lydia?
- In the aftermath of the 'event' the people around Tessie were doing all they could to help her. Do you think that they went about this in the right way? Was there anything more that could have been done?
- Tessie and Lydia make 'fake' drawings to show her therapist. Though she was consciously trying to deceive, do these drawings still say something about the workings of Tessie's mind? What does Lydia's drawing say about her?

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- Discuss the role of the 'Susans'. Are they a creation of Tess's mind and, if so, why does she do this? What do they represent?
- Though he never saw death row, the real Susans killer was still fatally punished for his crimes. What is the novel trying to say about the death penalty? Is the author taking one side of the debate or merely opening it up for questioning?
- Charlie's father is in the army and therefore can only occasionally visit. Is there significance in Tess's choice in men?
- Though Terrell is at risk of being put to death, it still takes Tess many years to own up to her doubts about his guilt. Is everyone in the novel guilty for some crime? Are there any truly good people here?