

Novel·Ties

# THE BEAN TREES

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## A Study Guide

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**LEARNING LINKS**

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## For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of instructional material to use in conjunction with the novel *The Bean Trees*. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

NOVEL-TIES are either for whole class instruction using a single title or for group instruction where each group uses a different novel appropriate to its reading level. Depending upon the amount of time allotted to it in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in two to four weeks.

The first step in using NOVEL-TIES is to distribute to each student a copy of the novel and a folder containing all of the duplicated worksheets. Begin instruction by selecting several pre-reading activities in order to set the stage for the reading ahead. Vocabulary exercises for each chapter always precede the reading so that new words will be reinforced in the context of the book. Use the questions on the chapter worksheets for class discussion or as written exercises.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

a nation. In 1990, Chief Wilma Mankiller ushered in a new era of self-government when she signed an agreement which allowed the Cherokee to manage government funding previously administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She has since worked tirelessly to improve the lot of her people.

Today, the Cherokee are organized into three separate communities, holding United States citizenship and at the same time having individual laws and services. Although leaders strive to secure the best possible education, jobs, and health care for their people, the Cherokee suffer many problems associated with life on the margins of society. They continue to struggle with poverty, health issues, and the kinds of problems faced by many minority groups. Whereas the older generations maintain their status as “reservation Indians,” it remains to be seen whether the young people will fully assimilate into mainstream culture, or follow the old ways of the Cherokee Nation.

### **Maya Civilization**

The Maya civilization is known for having the only fully developed written language in the pre-Columbian Americas. It is also known for its amazing art and monumental architecture, and its sophisticated mathematical and astronomical systems. Maya civilization extended throughout the northern Central American region, which includes present-day Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras, El Salvador, as well as part of southern Mexico.

Its most notable monuments are the pyramids they built in their religious centers and the accompanying palaces of their rulers. Although the reasons are not completely understood, Maya culture went into a decline in the 8th and 9th centuries. Warfare, disease, ecological depletion of croplands, and drought are some possible reasons for the decline. By the time of the Spanish arrival in 1519, the Maya culture was substantially less than it had been. Even so, it took over 170 years for the Spanish to gain control over all Maya lands.

### **The Sanctuary Movement**

The Sanctuary Movement was a religious and political movement of approximately 500 religious congregations of many different denominations in the U.S. that helped Central American refugees by sheltering them from Immigration and Naturalization Service authorities. The movement flourished between 1982 and 1992. The movement originated along the U.S./Mexico border in Arizona. In 1981, Rev. John Fife and Jim Corbett, among others, began smuggling Central American refugees into the United States. It was their wish to offer sanctuary from the political violence that was taking place in El Salvador and Guatemala. The Department of Justice indicted several activists in south Texas for aiding refugees. In 1985, sixteen activists in Arizona, including Fife and Corbett, were indicted; eleven went to trial and eight were convicted of alien smuggling and other charges. The defendants claimed their actions were justifiable to save lives of people who would be killed and had no other way to escape.

**Pre-Reading Activities and Discussion Questions (cont.)**

8. This novel explores nontraditional, or unusual, relationships. Characters are brought together by chance and gradually develop strong bonds of attachment. What kinds of family relationships have you heard of or experienced, other than those created by marriage or blood ties? Make a list of these relationships and reflect on them as you read *The Bean Trees*.
9. The characters in this novel often use colorful regional or “down home” sayings to dramatize a point or create humor. Make a list of sayings you have heard used in your family or community, and provide a translation for each. Add to this list as you read the book.
10. Look at the dedication “For Ismene . . .” at the beginning of the book. Who do you think the author is addressing? What does this dedication suggest to you about the contents of this book?
11. How would you define the role of women in society today? Do you think men and women have equal rights in all classes of society? As you read the book, determine how the author portrays women in lower and lower-middle class society.
12. As you read the book, take careful notice of all of the bird imagery. When does it appear and what messages does it convey?