

Curative Shorts Questions

A White Heron

By Sarah Orne Jewett

Notes About Answering Questions Curatively: *These questions are meant to deepen your understanding of the story and its curative aspects for you, others, and the world around you. Curative Reading goes beyond understanding a story from a literary perspective to a place where your imagination gets to reshape a meaning that supports you and inspires you to make a positive transition in your life. There are no right or wrong answers, only curiously curative ones.*

According to Oxford Languages the word curative is defined as “able to cure disease” or “a remedy”. Think of dis-ease in terms of being ill-at-ease with any situation you may be facing right now that feels challenging. Write a line or two about that situation and what kind of positive change you would like to see happen with it. Hold the situation in the back of your mind as you read this story.

“Sylvia had all the time there was, and very little use to make of it.” Can you recall a time in your own life when this sentence was true for you? If so, write a line or two about this and what you did with that time.

Sylvia lived a very different life before she came to stay with her grandmother. How did Sylvia’s life in the country with her grandmother compare to her life in her large family before?

Can you draw on any experiences from your childhood that remind you of Sylvia’s? If so, write a line or two about this.

Write down a line that stands out to you describing the beauty of the environment Sylvia and her grandmother live in and then write a sentence about why you selected this particular sentence or passage.

What are your thoughts about the boy who comes upon Sylvia in the woods? Do your feelings for him change as the story goes on or do they stay the same?

How does Sylvy take after her uncle Dan?

What is the history of the White Heron in the New England region at the time this story was written in 1889? Were they plentiful or rare?

“Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest.” What does this line mean to you?

“What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb?” Why did Sylvia change her mind and not tell the boy hunter where the white heron can be found?

At the end of the story Sarah Orne Jewett asks the woodlands and the summer-time to bring their gifts and graces and tell their secrets to the lonely Sylvia. Write about some of the gifts and graces and secrets you have discovered from spending time in the natural world.

How has reading this story been curative for you? Has it shed a new light on your challenging situation? If so, how?