“DESIREE’S BABY”

*The story's setting takes place in Louisiana before the Civil War. It is one of the few stories that Chopin set before the war.*

**Question Guide**

1. What is the name of Armand’s family plantation?
   - Armand’s plantation is named L’Abri.

2. Was Desiree really Madame Valmonde’s natural child? If not, who was she?
   - No, she wasn’t Madame Valmonde’s natural child. Her original family is unknown. She was found as a baby outside of Valmonde.

3. At the beginning, how did Armand feel about Desiree? How about their baby?
   - At the beginning, Armand was deeply in love with Desiree and loved his baby when he was born.

4. Why is Madame Valmonde shocked when she sees the baby?
   - Madame Valmonde is shocked when she sees the baby because his skin color is dark.

5. What happened that softened Armand’s arrogant nature?
   - Armond’s arrogant nature was softened when he married Desiree and they had a baby.

6. When does this softened nature change? Why do you think Armand has changed?
   - This softened nature changes when Desiree questions Armand about the meaning of their baby’s skin color. Armand changes because he believes the baby is mixed because Desiree is part black.

7. What does Desiree realize while the quadroon boy is fanning the baby?
   - When the quadroon boy is fanning the baby, she realizes that the quadroon boy and the baby have similar skin color; they resemble each other. (A quadroon is someone who is one-fourth Negro.)

8. What relationship is implied between Armand and LaBlanche?
   - It is implied that Armand (a slave owner) and LaBlanche (a slave of his) are having an affair.

9. What happens to Desiree and the baby in the end? How do you know?
   - In the end, Desiree drowns herself and her baby in the bayou. The pyre (a pile of wood for burning a dead body as a funeral rite) is our hint.

10. Explain what was going on during the “curious scene enacted at L’Abri” toward the end of the story.
    - During the “curious scene enacted at L’Abri” toward the end of the story, Armand burns the dead bodies of his wife and child, along with the baby’s cradle and clothes; Desiree’s silk gowns, bonnets, gloves and bridal outfit, and letters Desiree wrote to Armand during their engagement. He also burns a letter written long ago to his father from his now-deceased mother, revealing Armand’s true identity (his being half black).
**Literary Elements**

1. What are some characteristics of local color (regionalism) that Chopin added into the story?
   
   Words such as *cochon de lait, parish, live-oak branches, and bayou*, as well as the plantation homes, slaves and French names all add characteristics of local color to the story.

2. Why is the story’s ending an example of situational irony?
   
   The story’s ending is an example of situational irony because Armand is actually the one who is not a full-blooded white. He is the one responsible for the baby’s skin color, not Desiree. His behavior toward Desiree, assuming she was to blame, makes it ironic.

3. How does the title of the story foreshadow the story itself?
   
   The title of the story foreshadows the story itself because Armand ends up denying the baby as his when he realizes it is mixed. This echoes the extreme prejudice against mixed people during this time in Louisiana’s history.

4. What message, or theme, does Chopin convey about race in this story?
   
   The theme that Chopin conveys through Armand’s ignorance is that the concept of racism is created solely by humans.

5. What lesson, or theme, is learned by Armand at the end of the story?
   
   From Armand’s actions, the reader learns that nothing good can come from being quick to judge.