

Reading Guide to *My Name is Sally Little Song* by Brenda Woods

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Sally Harrison and her family are slaves on a plantation in Georgia. But when they learn that Master is planning to sell Sally and her brother, the family escapes to seek shelter with a tribe of Seminoles who are rumored to adopt runaway slaves. After a perilous journey, Sally's family finds and joins the tribe. But while her father and brother easily adjust to Indian ways, Sally can't seem to find her place. Combining the poetry of Sally's songs with the heart-racing tension of the family's escape, author Brenda woods delivers a breathtaking story of a girl caught between worlds.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Once upon a time in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, a happy girl was born – Brenda Woods. When she was six years old the family moved to Los Angeles, California. The girl was adventurous, sometimes shy, and always inquisitive. She liked reading, walking in the rain, gazing at the stars, and studying found objects with the microscope, wanting to know what things really looked like. Some said she was hard to figure out. Others made fun of her and called her weird. She often felt sad, different, and misunderstood. After high school, she dabbled in painting, photography, and graphic art but none of those really seemed to fit. Then one day an English Professor suggested that the girl had a way with words and might want to consider writing. Writing? It had never crossed the young lady's mind. The girl shook her head no and walked away but the wise teacher smiled, knowing a seed had been planted. The girl went on to graduate from college and became a Physical Therapist. She married, two lovely sons were born, and many years passed. Then one day as she sat outside in her car, a beat up red SAAB, waiting for her younger son to finish gymnastics practice, she picked up a notebook and pen and began to write. She hasn't stopped since. And the moral of the story is this...sometimes kids who feel different, weird, and misunderstood grow up to write books and such.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Sally and her family lived on a plantation where they picked cotton on a daily basis. This was very hard work. Do you think you could work all day in the heat picking cotton?
2. When they awoken to find it is raining they are delighted. Why were they happy and what did they hope to do on that rainy day?

3. Sally and her family live in a very primitive house. How does your house compare to where the Harrison family lived?
4. Even though they were slaves and had to work very hard, the family seemed happy together. If they could be happy with so little, why do you think we put so much emphasis on material things now?
5. Lucinda is a "house" slave. Why do you think she considered herself better than Sally who was a "field" slave?
6. While Sally is dusting Miss Beatrice's room she is "overcome with a weakness to open the drawers." Why do you think Sally is tempted to look at Beatrice's things?
7. Sally resisted temptation to open Ms. Beatrice's drawers but she does give in to temptation when she sees what?
8. Lucinda walked in on Sally as she was wondering at the letters in Miss Beatrice's book. What did Lucinda do to get Sally in serious trouble? Why do you think she did it?
9. How is Sally punished? What was the original punishment? Why was the punishment changed?
10. When the fields dry up enough to resume cotton picking Sally asks Delilah why Hannabelle is always singing about going to heaven. What does Delilah tell Sally and how does she describe heaven?
11. The foreman sees Delilah and Sally talking and he beats Delilah. Sally and Delilah say that he is "worse than the white foreman." Why do you think a black foreman would be crueler to slaves than a white foreman would? Is it the same reason that Lucinda set up Sally?
11. Names play an important role in the book. How are the children of the slaves named? Why do you think they are named this way?
12. When Sally's mother leaves her job to nurse Delilah Sally takes over her job of grinding corn. While grinding the corn she someone comes to visit. Who visits and what is her reputation on the plantation?
13. Sally sings while she picks cotton and grinds corn. When January July asks her why she sings what is Sally's response? Is there something you do while working that helps the time go by?

14. While grinding corn Sally and January July see something out the window. What did they see? When they discuss what might happen they don't seem overly concerned. Why?
15. What does the family learn that makes them plan to runaway?
16. To prepare for their journey the family makes preparations. What did they do? Do you think it was hard for Sally and Abraham to keep the plans a secret?
17. The family traveled at night using what to guide them? What do they name their guide?
18. Who suggested to the family where they should go when they decided to run away? How did that person know where to send them?
19. Abraham asks why they are headed south instead of north. What does his father tell him?
20. During their second night of traveling Sally hears something that frightens them. What did she hear and what did they do to avoid being found?
21. Sally offers to stay awake and watch for danger while the rest of the family rests but she falls asleep only to be awakened to danger. What is the danger and where does the family hide to try to avoid being discovered? What distracts the hounds and allows them to resume their travel?
22. Almost being discovered by slave hunters frightens the family into traveling before dark. They stop to rest when Sally becomes too tired to go further and when they resume traveling Sally's mother sees something. What did she see and what does it mean for the family?
23. How do they know they have finally reached the swamp? What dangers await them while traveling through the swamp?
24. Sally and her family are hoping to find Indians who will allow them to live with them. What tribe are they looking for?
25. The hard travel and constant fear of being caught and returned to the plantation puts lots of stress on the entire family. Sally's mother breaks down first and then what happens to Sally's father?
26. There are many new plants and animals in the swamp. There are also new foods the family has never eaten. What did Abraham find to eat that could have been dangerous? What food did they trap/spear to eat?

27. When Sally becomes ill what do they think the cause may be?
28. When they see a hawk circling over head they realize they are free as the hawk is. What does Sally realize about the changes in her body since they left the plantation?
29. As they are trudging through the swamp disaster strikes. What happened?
30. The family has no time to grieve their loss as they must continue their journey. Do you think you could find the personal strength to continue on?
31. When they are found by the Indians they discover the Indians don't speak English. How do they communicate?
32. When they arrive at the Indian village they are offered food around a fire. What do they discover about the woman who serves them? What does she tell them about other slaves who have come to live with the Indians?
33. Abraham has trouble dealing with his mother's death as does Sally but Sally has a way to help her keep her mind off her loss. What does she do and how is it related to the name the Indians give her?
34. When the family meets the Mekko (chief) what are his conditions for the family to stay with the tribe?
35. Who is the Breath Maker?
36. Who teaches Sally to make the deer hides soft and what do they use to make it soft? What is the Indian word for deer?
37. List some of the events that take place during the Green Corn Ceremony.
38. How does Sally feel when her father shows interest in Smiling Deer?
39. When the slave hunters encounter Sally, Abraham and their father what serious mistake does Abraham make that could endanger them and the tribe?
40. What happened when the slaves hunters arrived at the Indian village? What important lesson was learned?
41. How does Sally come to accept her Indian name of Sally Little Song and to accept that she is now a Black Seminole?

41. Sally and her family traveled many miles on foot to reach the swamp where they found refuge with the Seminole Indians. They faced many dangers during their travels. Would you have the courage to face dangers like these?

Slavery in America began in 1607 and continued until 1865 and many slaves did run away to live with the Florida Seminole Indians. For more information about this part of Florida's history please consult the following websites:

<http://www.johnhorse.com/black-seminoles/faq-black-seminoles.htm>

This website describes details about the Black Seminoles and their alliance with the Seminole Indians. The site provides detailed information about their heritage and a certain famous Black Seminole named John Horse.

<http://www.seminoletribe.com/index.shtml>

This website provides information on The Seminole Tribe of Florida. The site provides information about the history and culture of the tribe.