**“Black Boy” by Richard Wright**

Ch. 13 (pgs. 244-253) & Ch. 14 (pgs. 254-257)

Summary Ch.13 (pgs. 244-253)

Richard reads an editorial in a Memphis newspaper that attacks H.L. Mencken, the essayist and critic. Intrigued that a Southern newspaper would attack a white man, Richard resolves to read some of Mencken’s work. As blacks are not permitted to borrow books from the public library, Richard asks a white Irish Catholic coworker, Falk, if he can use Falk’s library card to check out books. Falk agrees but urges Richard to be careful. Richard forges a note from Falk to the librarian, asking that she give “this nigger boy” some Mencken books for him. The librarian is momentarily suspicious but gives Richard the books. Mencken’s boldness and verbal swordplay inspire Richard to become a voracious reader. The books bring him an exciting new understanding of life, and he hungers to do some writing of his own. Richard cautiously hides his books from his coworkers, who notice that he has become distant and dreamy. That winter, Richard’s mother and brother join him in Memphis. Alan gets a job, and the family anxiously saves money for the trip to Chicago.

Summary Ch. 14 (pgs. 254-257)

Soon after Richard’s mother and brother arrive, Maggie moves to Memphis because her husband, Matthews—the mysterious “Professor”—has abandoned her. Desiring to reach Chicago as quickly as possible, everyone decides that Richard and Maggie will go first and get a place for the four of them. The other two will follow once they have enough money. Southern whites do not like it when black people move to the North because it implies that the blacks do not like the treatment they receive in the South. To minimize this friction, Richard waits until only two days before his departure to tell his boss that he is leaving. Moreover, in order to minimize the appearance that he actively wants to leave the South, Richard says that he is leaving only to be near his mother. Richard’s white coworkers at the optical shop appear bewildered by the news and become slightly resentful. Falk, however, gives him a sly smile. Shorty is jealous that Richard is leaving and bids him a bittersweet farewell, as Richard leaves this “terror” behind.

Guide Questions

*Ch. 13*

1. What was the name of the book that Richard first read from Mencken?
2. What was the only thing that Mr. Falk wanted when Richard was through reading?

*Ch. 14*

1. What did Richard’s boss tell him not to do in Chicago?
2. Why did Shorty say he we would never leave the south?

Important Quotes – *answer in a minimum 3-4 sentences each*

**Explain the importance of the following quote to the overall theme of Chapter 13 (pg. 248)**

“He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. Then, maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon?”

**Explain the importance of the following quote to the overall theme of Chapter 14 (pg. 217)**

“I stepped from the elevator into the street, half expecting someone to call me back and tell me that it was all a dream, that I was not leaving.”

Follow Up Question

*Congratulations! You’ve completed Part 1 of “Black Boy”. You have one more follow up question to answer. Answer in at least 1 paragraph below.*

**Explain at least one way that you can personally relate to Richard and the things he went through, felt, and survived throughout his childhood.**