



Examining "The Bear"

As you read "The Bear," and as you begin to discuss it with the class afterwards, please use the following as suggestions to help you achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the text:

1. Give attention to the age of the boy at different junctures of his experiences in the wilderness and to his age in section four and five. Note that the narrative and theme are built around the maturing of Ike McCaslin from boy into manhood and from the retrospective view of age
2. Note the diversity of the main participants in the hunt: Major de Spain and General Compson; the boy, Ike McCaslin (all of the old "aristocracy"); also, Sam Fathers, part Indian, part African-American; Boon Hogganbeck, the half-savage hunter; Lion, the ferocious dog; the one-eyed mule; the Old Ben, the bear. What is the relationship of each to the wilderness?
3. What is Sam Fathers' role in relation to the boy, Ike McCaslin?
4. Note the statement in the second paragraph of section 2: "the wilderness the old bear ran was his (Ike McCaslin's) college and the old male bear itself....his alma mater" . What did Ike learn in his "college"?
5. When examining the story from a symbolic point of view, Old Ben, the bear, can be perceived as a symbol of the Old South. Consider ways you think the text supports this perception.
6. Explain the "epiphany" of Ike McCaslin as he reads the ledgers that he finds in the "square, galleried, wooden building." What decision, because of this "epiphany", does he make about his inheritance?
7. In the last section, the account of what has happened to the ritual of the hunt and the actions of Boon can be perceived as symbolic of the antebellum South. What statement emerges about the changes the Civil War has wrought?
8. Give careful attention to the graphics of each section. How and why does Faulkner alter the graphics, in various ways, in section four? What purpose do the italics serve in section five?
9. What words could be used to describe the rhythm of Faulkner's prose? What are some of the contributing factors in building this rhythm? (In particular, note the elaborated patterns of syntax and repetition.

Suggested writing topics:

- "Obsession" is a key thread that is played out in diverse ways within the narrative of Faulkner's *The Bear*. Build an essay in which you discuss one or more ways the concept of "obsession" shapes a segment(s) of the story. Be sure to document your analysis with specifics from the text.
- Draw specific evidence from the text to develop an overview of ways Faulkner manipulates time, alters graphics, and elaborates or fragments syntax to project the psychological "reality" of the narrator.