

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Please mark/annotate all Hindu festivals, rituals, and traditions in the text. Keep a list for each chapter with your reading questions.

Chapter 1

1. Describe Koly's family at the beginning of the novel. How old is Koly? Her brothers, etc. What is the family's economic status?
2. How does Koly spend her days? How do her brothers spend their days? Do they get to choose?
3. How does Koly's father make a living?
4. How does Koly's mom get money for the family? What goes into her work?
5. Explain the symbolic meaning of the lotus flowers that Koly's mother embroiders on her Sari.
6. What is a dowry? What does Koly construct for her own dowry? Why was this important for Koly?
7. Why does Koly's family need money?
8. Why was her marriage considered a good one? What would Koly's role be?
9. What did Koly take with her to her marriage?
10. How do they decide the date and time of the wedding? How does this fit with what you know about Hinduism?

11. How does Koly describe the Mehta's house?

12. How does Koly greet Mrs. Mehta? How do Hari's parents treat Koly and her parents? Why?

13. Why is Koly unable to meet her husband before the wedding? Why were her parents worried about postponing the wedding?

14. Describe what Koly and Hari wear at the wedding.

15. Describe the rituals and food at the wedding.

16. What does Koly call Mrs. Mehta now?

17. What does Koly do with her silver earrings? Why? Why are they significant to her?

18. How does Koly feel after her marriage? Why?

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Chapter 2 (22-34)

1. What does Mr. Mehta do for a living? What does Koly call him?
2. Describe the household tasks that Koly performs on a daily basis.
3. What do people bring Hari while he is sick?
4. Why is the family taking Hari to Varanasi? Why does Hari think he will be lucky if he dies there?
5. What does Chandra reveal about the family's motivations in allowing Hari to marry despite his sickness?
6. Why does Koly worry about becoming a widow?
7. How does Hari use his sickness as an advantage with his parents?
8. What does Hari want from Koly? How can she help him? Explain why killing a cow is a terrible act in India.
9. Why does the healer (bhagat) sprinkle leaves of the neem tree on Hari?

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Chapter 3 (34-47)

10. What was the train ride like?

11. Why does Koly think the many urns on the train were unlucky?

12. Why does Sassur give money to the beggars?

13. What does Koly notice about the streets in Varanasi?

14. Why is the water they give Hari significant?

15. What does Koly notice about the surroundings as they make their pilgrimage to the Golden temple?

16. What does Koly describe is happening along the water's edge? What was the feeling of the people there?

17. How does Hari's condition change after floating in the Ganges?

18. What did they do to Hari's body after death?

19. What does Sassur admit to Koly after Hari's death?

20. What do they believe the scattering of his ashes over the Ganges will do?

21. Why does Sass purchase a white cotton sari for Koly? How will her role change now?

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Chapter 4 (48-66)

1. How were things different at home after Hari's death? What was Sass' attitude towards Koly?
2. What does Sass tell Koly about the untouchables?
3. What does Koly begin to do in order to comfort herself? How does she justify it to Sass?
4. What was Holi? What do they do there?
5. How does Koly learn to read? Why does this need to be a secret?
6. Describe what Koly daydreams about.
7. What were some of the effects of the monsoons?
8. Who is Tagore?
9. How was Koly mischievous? Why would Koly make sure she never spilled salt?
10. What is Koly's favorite poem about? Why is this her favorite?

11. How does Chandra describe her mother? Why?

Chapter 5 (67-78)

12. What job does Chandra's future husband have?

13. How does Chandra respond when Koly asks her if she loves her future husband?

14. Why does Koly refuse to loan her earrings to Chandra?

15. What is a widow's pension? What was the family doing with Koly's pension?

16. How does Chandra explain her family's actions to Koly? What would you do?

17. What does Koly contribute to Chandra's dowry?

18. Why is Koly kept from helping Chandra prepare for her wedding day?

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Chapter 6 (79-87)

1. List some of the daily chores that Koly does now that Hari and Chandra are gone.
2. What was wrong with Sassur?
3. How did the dog and the bandicoot help Koly?
4. What does Koly find out about her pension?

Chapter 7 (88-104)

5. When Chandra returns home, what changes does Koly notice right away?
6. Describe some of the funeral customs for Sassur's funeral.
7. How has Chandra's life changed?
8. What was the situation at the house like after Sassur died?
9. Name the items Sass sold to the moneylender.
10. What caused Koly to give up her silver earrings? Why is this so significant?

11. Why was the letter from Sass's brother so important?

12. What "treat" did Sass have in mind for Koly on their way to Delhi?

13. How did Koly feel about leaving her "home?"

14. What was the train ride like? What does Sass offer to do for Koly?

15. Why was Sass's demand for the rickshaw driver to take them to the temple was absurd. Why?

16. Why were there so many widows in Vrindivan?

17. What happened to Sass?

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Chapter 8 (104-121)

1. How does the elderly woman help Koly? What does Koly learn about the woman's life?
2. Why does Koly resist contacting her family?
3. Why is Koly still unable to obtain her pension?
4. What do many of the widows do all day?
5. Why does she fear the man in the red shirt? How does she deal with him?
6. What does the rickshaw boy (Raji) tell Koly about his life?
7. Who is Maa Kamala? What kind of house does she have? Where does she get the money? Who lives in the house?
8. Why does Koly feel like a snake?

Chapter 9 (122-144)

9. How does Koly get a job? What is it?
10. Why is Mr. Govind upset when jasmine flowers are delivered?
11. How do Tamu and Koly get their own bangles? How does Koly feel about her work?

12. Why can't Raji read? Why is Koly's return favor to Raji so important?

13. How does Raji feel about the city?

14. Why is the temple called the "Hill of Govardham?"

15. How does the wealthy woman who visits treat the girls?

16. Why does Koly's embroidery skills come up again? How will it help her?

Chapter 10 (144-164)

17. What new experiences does Koly have while traveling with Mrs. Devi?

18. Describe the events that lead to Mrs. Devi funding a widow house?

19. Why does Koly decide to stitch a heron? What other things does she stitch?

20. Why does Maa Kamala tell Koly she cannot go to Mala's house? How does Koly arrange to go?

21. Why does Koly find Mala's house exciting? How does the excitement turn out?

Name: _____

Homeless Bird

Chapter 11 (165-186)

1. How had the city changed for Koly?
2. Why does Raji want to marry Koly? How does he picture his life with her?
3. Why does Koly believe she is an unworthy bride? Why is Koly torn between her life and a new life with Raji? How does she reply?
4. What kinds of things does Raji write to Koly about?
5. How does Koly feel as she moves out of Maa Kamala's house?
6. What happened to Mala? How did Koly feel about it?
7. What makes Koly agree to marry Raji?
8. What important things does Koly put on her fourth quilt?
9. Why does Koly plan to put a homeless bird on her sari for Mrs. Devi? How does the homeless bird relate to Koly's life?
10. Overall, what is your impression of Homeless Bird? Was it a good choice for your study of Hinduism? Why or why not?