Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_

**Six Feet of the Country**

**Reading Comprehension**

You know that in literature, conflict is the struggle between opposing forces that moves the plot forward. This story centers on a *culture conflict*, a clash between groups of people whose values, beliefs, and roles in society put them at odds with each other. The narrator of the story, a white South African, observes events from one side of this conflict. You’ll need to question the narrator’s statements carefully to get at the larger context.

Pay special attention to:

* details that describe the lives of whites and blacks
* the narrator’s attitudes toward black South Africans
* causes of the tensions between characters

**As you read “Six Feet of the Country” on page 1342 in your textbook, watch for clues that reveal how living in a divided society has influenced the narrator’s perceptions, and answer the questions in complete sentences onto your own sheet of paper!**

Online Textbook Log in (audio for the story available here)

Username: estudent1218

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Background

1. *Apartheid* means \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the Afrikaans language.
2. What type of system is *apartheid*?
3. What types of things did apartheid limit for non-whites?
4. What was the state allowed to do?
5. When did Gordimer, the author, write this story?

Six Feet of the Country

1. Why did the narrator and his wife move to a farm outside of Johannesburg?
2. What was the wife’s dream?
3. Reread lines 1-11. Consider what the narrator reveals about his marriage. Do you expect his relationship to grow stronger or weaker over the course of the story? Explain.
4. When does the husband visit the farm?
5. Why do the narrator’s friends think he’s lucky?
6. What do Johannesburg people mean when they say “tensions”? Cite evidence.
7. Reread lines 49-58. Note the narrator’s use of words and phrases like *farm-boys*, *piccanins*, and *poor devils*. What does this word choice suggest about the way he views black South Africans?
8. Why is the husband sleeping in a linen closet?
9. What has the man died of?
10. How is Petrus related to the dead man?
11. When the narrator firsts asks which boy is sick (line 72), how does Albert respond?
12. Why were the boys scared to talk to the narrator about the dead man?
13. For what reason aren’t Rhodesians allowed into the Union?
14. What was the Afrikaans general belief about employing illegal immigrants?
15. Reread lines 127-128. Note that the narrator assumes it is his right to control the body of the dead man. What problems might arise from his assumption? How do you think notifying the health authorities might change the story’s outcome?
16. Explain how the police sergeant looked at the narrator when he came into the station to notify them of the man’s death?
17. In what way does the police officer provide a contrast to the narrator and his wife?
18. What does Petrus ask of the narrator?
19. Reread lines 169-179. What clash of values has put Petrus and the narrator in conflict with each other? What power does the narrator have in this situation that Petrus does not?
20. What was needed to exhume the body?
21. Reread lines 205-217. Describe the narrator’s response to the servants’ sacrifice. What does he fail to understand about their motives?
22. Reread lines 218-237. What does the placement of the narrator at this scene lead you to expect?
23. What does the old man say about the coffin?
24. What does the old Rhodesian man, the dead man’s father, do with the coffin?
25. Who was in the coffin?
26. Explain the scene every time the narrator came home.
27. Reread lines 331-334. What does this passage convey about the value white society places on black South Africans?
28. What does Petrus ask the narrator?
29. Explain the meaning of the title “Six Feet of the Country”. Based on your interpretation of the title, what do you consider to be the message of the story?
30. South African poet Dennis Brutus once called Nadine Gordimer “the living example of how dehumanized South African society has become.” In his view, her work lacked warmth and feeling and her observations were so detached that they reflected “the coldness of a machine.” Based on your reading of this story, do you agree with this view? Support your answer with details from the story.